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The future of blackness in predominantly white milieus: how blackness found and lost its place in the academy.

Abstract

Using two studies both about the experiences and perceptions of black members of faculty on race and racism, in predominantly white academic milieus, the paper demonstrates that race is still a significant marker of privilege and despite the rhetoric of equity and redress; black faculty has continued to live in the fringes. The paper uses data from in-depth interviews conducted with black and white academic member of staff over a period of two years on two field sites. One, a predominantly white university and the other, predominantly black. Further data is also extracted from a continuing study on the experiences of black registrars at a predominantly white medical school. In debunking the phenomena of black alienation at these white milieus, the author employs Bourdieu's thesis of habitus, to understand the existing dominant culture at the predominantly white university and its relation to the peripheral black enclaves. With exception of the predominantly black university, the paper presents dire state of the black experience while at the same time acknowledging the pragmatic and practical ways in which black faculty have sought to cushion or eschew the effects of racism. Finally the paper argues that given the current socio-political context, wherein most dominant are the discourses of nation-building, non-racialism, and colour-blindness, it would be important that such experiences are brought to the fore through empirical studies so that existing power relations historically premised on the basis of race continue to remain in the nation's consciousness as it strives to build a common future.

Introduction

“The higher education sector in South Africa is highly stratified in terms of race and gender. The trend is that the greater the prestige, status and influence particular positions have, the greater the extent to which they are dominated by whites and men. Positions which on the other hand have a lower status and prestige, and which yield little influence, tend to be filled primarily by blacks and women. Most African staff are concentrated at the bottom of the employment ladder... These are disparities in the overall employment structure of universities and technikons increase with rank.”

(National Commission on Higher Education, 1996:38)

South African higher education has undergone a major facelift in the last ten years of the country's democracy, particularly on the policy front, Schoole (2005). Setting the pace of such change was, most notably, the National Plan on Higher Education (2001,¹ Education White Paper 3 (1997), and the Higher Education Act (1997). But these major policy shifts were not to be a sufficient panacea for all the major social ills that bedeviled the higher education sector as each wave of change was watered down by an attendant set of new limitations. Thus, as higher education policy analyst Schoole (2005) most eloquently argued in his account of higher education policy evolution, democratic reformist ideals espoused in the National Plan for Higher Education, for example, were intermittently constrained by global higher education trends (including increasing managerialism), and such noble ideals as nation building, the politics of consensus, and the building of capacity around policy formulation (and implementation).

I deliberately made a quick glance at the policy regime owing to its practical and symbolic significance, especially for most societies in their formative periods post-revolution such as ours. In the early years post-apartheid, expectations abound, particularly in those sections of society who have had to endure the evils of oppression, such as inequality on the basis of race. These pervasive social ills staggered and curiously

¹ In his executive summary for example, Professor Kader Asmal, the then Minister of Education mentioned, as key in the National Plan for Higher Education, the changing of the demographic composition of staff and thus calls for development of institutional equity plans, with clear targets for rectifying race and gender inequities. He further proposed a far reaching rationalisation plan that was to set in motion the reconfiguration of a new higher education landscape, exemplified mostly by the merger process.

found their way in higher education, with racism in the sector even much more pronounced with the promulgation of the notorious Extension of University Act of 1956 by the Nationalist Party government. It is however important to note that the Act did not herald anything new since even before this time, black participation and contribution in the academy overall had been minimal, if not absent. In the post 1994 period, despite vociferous calls for equity and redress, Gibbon and Kabaki (2002: 192) note that:

The intention behind the policy demand for equity in employment practices was to bring staff in closer alignment with student and national demographics. It led to some changes in recruitment and promotion strategies and challenged institutions to develop more strategic human resource policies and practices. In reality, these have not succeeded in producing significant changes in the staff profile of higher education institutions...

(Ibid)

For the purpose of this paper, this author intentionally elected not to glance through any of the current surveys on staff profile, particularly at predominantly white institutions since there was no reason to project any major shifts on the numbers front. The numbers of course do not tell the whole story. This author submits that they do not in themselves presuppose any definitive account of the real life experience of blacks in the academy they nevertheless can make an important contribution in fine tuning these same life experiences. This is to say that dominant cultures are a mirror image of those section(s) that wield power vis-à-vis those that occupy the fringes, and therefore a critical mass is important in this respect. It is therefore most opportune that one focuses this talk on the future of blackness as it continues to lack a critical mass at predominantly white academic institutions, hence its unrelenting marginalization. Independent researcher Mills Soko described the problem of the historically white university thus:

The cultural ethos of the historically English-speaking universities remains deeply embedded in white male Anglo Saxon values, norms, and traditions. It is a racist, sexist and conservative culture which – despite all the rhetoric of transformation - continues to permeate all spheres of the institutions. Apart from the fact that it is patronizing and alienating to black people and women, the cultural milieu which pervades these campuses is also largely responsible for the inability of these institutions to meaningfully transform themselves from educational centers which are still

steeped in colonial roots, into institutions that genuinely strive to address the educational needs and aspirations of the broader South African populace.

(Soko, 1995:17)

In pondering over the question whether or not blackness has a future in predominantly white academe, it would be most appropriate to first sketch the history of the university in general and that of black participation in particular from a global perspective.

Although learning and epistemology cannot in themselves be foreign to Africa (and there is compelling evidence in current literature of an existence of early academies² well before the Graco-Roman civilization), it might perhaps be appropriate to also concede that the modern South African academy, as we have come to know it, owes much of its heritage to its colonial parent, in Great Britain. Here, the European academy was to be exhumed as is, and implanted to further the political, economic, social, and cultural interests of the white English settler community from the very beginning in terms of its worldview and mission – a Eurocentric and mainly Christian protestant enclave endeavoring to give the ruling British colonists and their descendants tuition in the spirit and manner of Oxbridge. Nowhere had it been intended that the new South African academy to get inspiration from its mainly black African surroundings. Instead, from the very beginning, the academy was to draw sustenance and inspiration from the white European colonizing centre³. Just as the esteemed historian and scholar Du Bois (1903) once unflinchingly suggested that the foremost problem of the 20th century would be that of the colour line, South African universities, found themselves engaged in a racialising project, thus negating their presumed traditional role as ‘uninterested’, ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ observers’ of society.

² See for example, Seepe S and Makgoba M (eds) (2000) in their book entitled *Towards an African Identity inn Higher Education*. Both scholars assert matter-of-factly that “the notion of university is not new to Africa, neither was it introduced by western colonialists”. They cite examples of early academies such as Al-Azhar University in Cairo founded in 358 AD and the University of Timbuktu in Mali.

³ An illuminating historical account of the South African College, a forerunner of the University of Cape Town in Ritchie, W (1918) makes clear their (faculty’s) wishes of the new university; in essence, it had to bear every resemblance of those universities in the Empire, if to further both the cultural, political, and economic ambitions of the Crown.

Despite convincing evidence that locates earliest scholarship endeavors (predating the Graco-Roman civilization) in northern and sub-Saharan Africa, black participation and contribution to scholarship in predominantly white environs has been kept at an absolute minimum in the early stages of colonization project, with exception of those few identified by the colonists to be useful as functionaries in the administration of their fellow natives. It is noteworthy to mention that this has not only been a black experience unique to South African blackness. To add, there have been numerous empirical accounts (Solomon, 2000; Benjamin, 1998; McClure, 2006; and Singh and Stoloff, 2003) of similar black marginality in the academy in Great Britain and the United States. The former is singled out given her socio-historical significance as an ex colonial power under whose coattails and trusteeship racial discourse in general gained prominence in South Africa as Britain sought to extend and entrench herself in a landscape that hitherto was not hers. The United States of course has a singular distinction for its most overt discriminatory practices on the higher education front against minorities in general and blacks in particular. Harvard, America's oldest and most prestigious school, for example, had no black persons in its first 229 years in existence, Kennedy (1993). The ice was only broken in 1865 when prohibitive admission policies were revised and a first cohort of black students gained entry. The paltry numbers of students were to have an effect on the number of qualified black persons to join the ranks of faculty, although in the bigger scheme of things, black presence remained grossly insignificant. Renowned historian and sociologist W.E.B. du Bois is quoted to have protested about Harvard, "I was in Harvard, but not of it", (*Ibid.*, 1993:xxiii).

Before the advent of the medieval university of the Graco-Roman times and most belatedly, the Euro-American university, blackness had, on its own and in its own terms, made enormous strides to scholarship. Notwithstanding the early scholarly exploits in Timbuktu and in the Islamic madras of west Africa, Bongani Mayosi quipped in his inaugural lecture that, (quoting from Charles S Finch, an American scholar of ancient history and a medical doctor):

...the art and science of medicine emerged first in the Nile Valley of Africa, reaching its highest level of development – until modern times – in Egypt, land of the pharaohs. When Egyptian dynastic history begins, medicine is already an established, fully-formed science... From the beginning of her history, Egypt possessed a mature, well-validated system of medicine containing systematic pathology, a completely-formulated pharmacopoeia, a formal knowledge of anatomy and physiology, a large medical literature, a well-defined medical curriculum, and a skill in surgery that was hardly matched outside Africa until the modern times.... it is unthinkable that such knowledge, which is so sophisticated on a scientific level, could have emerged without a long period of anterior development. There is a 2400 year span from Hippocrates of Greece to modern medicine and the mature medical science that existed at the start of the dynastic period in Egypt would have had a pedigree at least as long...

(Mayosi, 2007:4)

Having aptly sketched out this history of ancient Egyptian scholarly achievement, Mayosi most confidently impressed this upon his captive audience at the lecture:

I submit, ladies and gentleman, that Hippocrates in no way merits the title ‘Father of Medicine’, either by virtue of his antiquity or the level of his scientific thought. If such a title belongs to anyone, it belongs to Imhotep the African⁴...

(*Ibid*, 2007:5)

While this need not detract necessarily from the early achievement by Africa in advancing civilization, Mayosi does however concede that much of Africa’s achievements throughout history remain difficult to be scientifically accounted for owing to the absence of surviving written records.

South Africa and the race question: a critical examination

In most analyses of the South African social structure, given our exceedingly ‘raced’ past, it is difficult not to put a heavy weighting on race owing to our legacy of

⁴Imhotep, lectured Mayosi (2007:4), “is the African physician is the world’s first universal genius and polymath. As chief counsellor to the pharaoh Djoser, he was a statesman of the first rank... as a gifted priest-physician, he was accorded that rarest of honours in ancient Egypt, that is deification as the god of healing”.

colonialism, in the first instance, and that of apartheid, most belatedly. This is not to say that 'race' does not intersect with other axis of inequality such as gender and class. This is not to say that other axes of inequality such as class are not relevant. Unlike in many other western capitalist societies, the class structure in South Africa is in some kind of a symbiotic relationship with 'race'; and the same logic could be extended to gender. In this respect, class and gender have always been interwoven with 'race'. The point being made here however is that the complexion of 'race' has always mirrored other axis of inequality such as class and gender. Therefore in our context, a focus on one axis of inequality need not presuppose a negation of the others, *per se*. In the South African context 'race' has always been the primary category of difference by which all social interactions have been negotiated and determined (Mindel, 2003:10). There still exists 'race' in the daily decision-making, and meaning making. In a study commissioned by the *South African Institute of Race Relations*, Kane-Berman (2006) demonstrates, for example, that the much spoken growing black middle class only constitutes a lowly 200 000 out of a total population of 29.9 million blacks. Most blacks⁵ were either in abject poverty or eking out a living in the second economy (in the informal sector). Any attempt to eschew 'race' in empirical work and in ordinary discourse might serve only one purpose – to hide the existing inequalities premised on grounds of 'race'.

In attempting to debunk the 'race' question, overall, there seems to be two contending schools of thought that have shaped 'race' discourse globally and here in South Africa. On the one hand, there exists (or existed) the naturalist neo-Social Darwinist framework out of which arose notions of white supremacy (and its converse, black inferiority). On the other however, most authors (Graves, 2002), (Higginbotham, 1992), (Stanfield, 2006) to name a few, have all advanced a view of race as a socio-historical construct, with no biological or scientific merit. The neo-Social Darwinist framework presents to us a positivist scientific typology of 'races.' In other words, it seeks to advance a particular view that 'types of races' do exist, and that these are natural and can be determined

⁵ In the paper, the author uses black and white as discursive categories rather than fixed as fixed and natural categories. Racial categories are used, in the main, to advance and evaluate the national project of redress, hence even the constitution of the Republic makes provision for fair discrimination. The use of racial categories is in no way intended to give credence to the essentialised notions of race as was the case under the apartheid system.

mechanically through various ‘scientific’ instruments. With no convincing ‘science’ on which to cling, the naturalist school has since withered away in influence globally, especially in the post second world war era. South Africa however presents a rather interesting case. The naturalist school in fact gained more momentum in the post second world war periods. Such momentum is most exemplified in the promulgation of apartheid as formal state policy with ascension to power by the Nationalist Party in 1947.

Such loss of traction alluded to earlier, need not presuppose, by any stretch of the imagination, a sudden death of the naturalist school as it continued to have its own adherents. To the contrary, the naturalist movement mutated and accordingly sought new ways of social engagement, most of which have been distinctly subtle. In the extreme however, the gross violations of black bodies on the one hand, and the universal sanctity of the white body on the other (particularly in ‘race’-centered societies like South Africa) may be a stark reminder that in everyday meaning-making, the naturalist (*scientific*) views on ‘race’ still hold sway. In this paper, ‘race’ is understood to be a social construct. This is to say that blackness and whiteness are in themselves not natural given entities but rather, socio-historical constructions, with the possibility of varying meanings forever contingent on the social function they are meant to serve at a particular time in history. To debunk ‘race’ in terms of its functionality is to say ‘race’ is ‘socially constructed, politically legitimized, culturally confirmed, and economically exploited human experience’, (Stanfield, 2006:388). This is to emphasize the malleability of ‘race’ at the hands of powerful societal forces with very specific interests to be served, be they cultural, political, economic or otherwise. Of significance to the paper, of course, is to get to the very basics of how ‘race’ actually works in practice in white academic milieus, in particular. It is to look at its functionality, and ‘contested representations of power between social [racial] categories’, (Higginbotham, 1992:253).

Blackness (and whiteness) and the phenomenon ‘racism’

In order to explicate the traditional interplay between blackness and whiteness, with specific reference to the phenomenon of racism, it may be worth our while to glance through the socio-historiography of the phenomenon of racism. The origin of racism is

often associated with the early European contact with the other, most significantly people of Africa, Asia and the Americas. However, as Maylam (2001) fittingly demonstrates, the question of European racism did not arise out of an early contact with the unfamiliar other, as there generally had been a favourable opinion and respect of the Ethiopians⁶ by the Greeks and the Romans of the classical period. Blackness, at least in the context of white racism against it was, as esteemed journalist Donald Woods put it (when recounting his childhood experiences in terms of the meaning of blackness):

...my contact with other white children reinforced the generally accepted white version of the black stereotype that blacks could never be the same as us; that they did not want to be the same as us; that they were created black because the almighty clearly intended that they be set apart and should stay different, with a different colour different smell, different language, different attitudes...

(Ibid., 1987:42)

Of course, much of this account of blackness drew from the naturalist school alluded to earlier of races as rigid, fixed, natural, discernible entities. Much of what blackness represented therefore had a particular ring of the “heart of darkness”. In his inaugural lecture, Njabulo Ndebele painted a sharp irony – making nonsense of this apparent “heart of darkness” as a heritable marker exclusively reserved for blackness. With gross abuses meted out at black bodies at the height of apartheid by fanatical racist security state agencies, he chides that:

suddenly, “the heart of darkness” [was] no longer the exclusive preserve of “blackness”; it [seemed] to have become the very condition of “whiteness” at the Southern corner of the African continent. Its expression will take various degrees of manifestation from the crude to the sophisticated. That is why such instances of the desecration of the black body have yet to evoke significant expressions of outrage from educational, religious, cultural, and business leadership of this country, caught in the culture of “whiteness” which they built...

(Ibid., 2000:5)

⁶ Ethiopians is the name the Greeks and the Romans used to denote all black people of Africa in the classical period. It need not be confused with the modern Ethiopian peoples.

In the main, most explanations of the origins of racism seem to hinge on either an idealist or materialist approach. Idealists, argues Maylam, “stress the psychological and cultural dimension of racism, claiming that the economic exploitation of people follow upon the development of racist attitudes and racial ideology”, (*Ibid.*,13). On the other hand, for the materialist, “racism tends to be no more than a form of ideology, trying to justify material interests”, (*Ibid.*,13). Taking into account the South African socio-political contexts, some scholars, most notably from the classical Marxist school of thought (Legassick 1974, Legassick 1975, Legassick and de Clercq 1984, and Keegan 1996) have all preferred to lay bare a very close association between white racism in South Africa and capitalism, with the history of the mining sector, among others, as the catalyst in this form of racism. On the continental front, this insidious relationship between white racism and capitalism is nowhere plainly put than in Walter Rodney’s classic, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Racism was thus used as a label for a historical complex, generated within capitalism, facilitating the exploitation of categories of people defined in racial terms”, (Banton, 1988:26). The contention in this paper however is that while both materialist and idealist schools hold sway in a number of respects, our approach should be multi-pronged. With universities as, in some respects, cultural enterprises⁷, it would be difficult to make any particular account of racism which leans on this kind of reductionism. For example, materialist explanations alone may not be adequate in explaining the phenomenon of racism in the academy. With academies being somewhat cultural enterprises, most importantly to consider, apart from the material could be the psychological and cultural dimension of racism – the idea that lay emphasis on beliefs, traditions, mores, ideas, attitudes in the course of constructing the *other* (Maylam, 2001).

But then, what is racism. During the symposium organized at the behest of the *Southern Education Foundation*, it was held that “racism describes beliefs and acts that deny fundamental equality to all human beings because of perceived differences in race or colour or appearance”, (2000:10). This is understood to involve racist practices (whether

⁷ The idea that universities are steep in tradition, have beliefs, mores and values, often reflective of the dominant social group therein.

covert or overt, namely, actions (whether intentional or unintentional) that serve to perpetuate already existing structural racial inequalities, (de Wet and Erasmus, 2005:5). From a more neo-Marxist account, racism can be understood to mean “a social dynamic of inequality and stratification for the purposes of exploitation”, (Marable, 2000:14). He further commented that “racial categories are used to preserve social hierarchy and sets of dominant and subordinate relations that foster and perpetuate privilege”, (*Ibid*). Even more so, is an:

an ideology through which domination or marginalization of certain racialised groups by another racialised group or groups is enacted and legitimated. It is a set of ideas and discursive and material practices aimed at (re)producing and justifying systematic inequalities between racialised groups.

(Duncan et al, 2000 cited in Raditlhalo, 2007:5)

In his most illuminating piece of work on the subject of racism in the academy, Dr Raditlhalo lifts the veil on the taboo subject of racism in the academy and asserts instead that, “transformation of universities will not happen until the issue of racial discrimination [which is racism in action] is consciously addressed at the predominantly white universities in South Africa”, (*Ibid.*, 3). In another study that looks at how women and black staff experience the institutional culture at one predominantly white medical school, researcher Salma Ismail demonstrates, in her follow-up study on institutional culture, that most women and black staff were somewhat positively inclined about the dominant white culture of the institution and future career prospects, unlike it was in the initial study, Ismail (2007). Institutional culture however is but one vehicle through which racism can be expressed and experienced. While the follow-up research by Salma Ismail shows some positive progression of the black experience from where it stood in her previous study of the same subjects, it is quite possible that such inclination may not wholly presuppose a state of total racial contentment. A possibility exists that perhaps blackness may have found other creative ways of mitigating against its state of permanent marginality. Salma Ismail, quotes, for example, one black respondent (who although has advanced her career since the initial study) whose views clearly demonstrates the feeling

that perceptions of racism still are a dominant feature in the lives of blacks in the academy:

People say...maybe it's because you are black that you were promoted, when you actually deserved it. So it does not go away, it just takes different forms...so maybe when people come in, the first thing that people [white people] is your race, and then to that another level gets added like language [English language – official medium of instruction], and another level gets added and this is how it happens...

(Black woman academic quoted in Ismail 2007:93)

Navigating on the same thought, esteemed literary theorist and author at the inaugural lecture in memory of the slain leader of the black consciousness movement Stephen Bantu Biko remarked thus of racism:

...with the disintegration of apartheid as a formal structure, white racism has reacted in a number of ways. In some cases it has simply died. In other cases, particularly where strong pockets of white power remain, such as in commerce, industry, and in higher education, it has either mutated and assumed the colour of change while retaining a core of self-interest, or has genuinely struggled with the agonies of embracing necessary change...

(Ndebele, 2000:7)

Given this complex of web within which racism could reside, Ndebele's incisive counsel on the phenomenon, is that if it is to be adequately addressed, society must guard against the temptation towards a singular approach, (*Ibid*). This then makes it most opportune to comment briefly on what could often be referred to as institutional (structural) forms of racism and individual forms of racism, and then the notion of "everyday racism". Here, the author deliberately elected to juxtapose institutional (structural) forms of racism to what is commonly referred to as individual forms of racism. This is intended to make plain the inherent fallacy of this divide. Individual forms of racism also infer a particular understanding of individualism which Park and LaRocque (1995) most appropriately charge as mythical and abstract. In individual forms of racism is inferred, for example:

...that human beings are essential isolated atoms whose individual attributes, needs, interests, abilities, and desires are given...and remain fundamentally unaltered by concrete social circumstances and relationships...

(Jagger 1983 cited in Park and LaRocque, 1995:36)

What Park and LeRoque demonstrate is the perennial temptation in ordinary discourse to seek to divorce individual forms of racism as purely arising of and wholly dependent on the individual. That is to say, we are generally more inclined to look at acts of racism by individuals as unrelated and therefore independent of the whole social system. As one eminent scholar commented, “it places the individual outside the institutional, thereby severing rules, regulations, and procedures from the people who make and enact them”, (Essed, 1991:36). In particular reference to public higher education institutions where there are social groups that predominate (and thus steer the direction of an institution) and there are those social groups that scavenge on the peripheries of institutional life, this is an important observation to make. Thus individuals and institutions are not to be superficially segmented as though institutions exist independent of those individuals within them. As Essed most eloquently argued “the term individual racism is a contradiction in itself because racism is by definition the expression or activation of group power “, (*Ibid.*, 37). The most common denominator of racism has been the historical binary of black and white ‘racial’ groups. In looking at racism and power through these subject positions, argued Essed, “we are able to conceptualize the relations between white and black individuals in terms of power relations, for they are representatives of groups with relatively more and relatively less power”, (*Ibid.*, 40). Perhaps it may be more appropriate to make an illustration of the phenomenon of race as power through a real life example; and the story goes:

One very close friend of mine related a rather hilarious but most telling story of his encounter with a frail old white beggar at a street intersection. He (this friend of mine) holds an executive position in advertising and marketing for a major

conglomerate and therefore could be, in Professor John Simpson's⁸ terms, referred to as a so-called "black diamond". He found himself having to abruptly stop his vehicle at the intersection as the traffic lights had just gone red. In no time, a rather flagrant old frail white beggar approached him and made the usual ask through the car window as he has all day with the other motorists that crossed his path. He, this friend of mine, showed very little interest in the beggar and this made the beggar to become even more indignant that he initially was. He raised his voice in a harsh and stern tone and lectured to my friend that whoever he is, or has, he must always put it in his mind that he will never be like him - he will never be white.

The above example brings to the fore the idea of racism as an expression of power. As the example demonstrate, even though under normal circumstances the white beggar may have reached the lowest point in that he is having to put his own dignity on the line to make a living, curiously, this act leaves his dignity and his positive sense of self unimpaired owing to "the consciously or unconsciously felt security of belonging to the group in power...[this] empowers individual members of the dominant group [irrespective of their class position] in their acts or beliefs against the dominated group, (*Ibid.*,40). The idea of group power challenges dominant notions, particularly prevalent in most liberal circles of individualized forms of racism. Thus racism is never just a pathology that befell a few errant individuals belonging to a dominant group, but rather, it is a pathology that gives a clue into the psyche of the dominant group as a whole, particularly in its relation to the dominated. Power, counseled Essed, is "never the property of the individual...therefore power pertains to the human ability not only to act but to act in concert", (*Ibid.*).

A final point to make in this section is to underscore what some authors (Essed, 1991) appropriately refer to as "everyday racism". The notion of "everyday racism" is, of course critically important, as an analytical tool, especially in a race-centered society

⁸ Professor John Simpson and his colleagues at the University of Cape Town Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing recently completed one of the most illuminating studies so far on the rise of the so-called black middle class or 'black diamonds'.

such as South Africa., where the centrality of race in the entire social system is indisputable. In such a situation therefore, given the preponderance of race in the life of these societies, racism becomes ingrained in the everyday. The notion of everyday racism is important as an analytical and conceptual tool in the study of black experience at predominantly white milieus as this provides some window of opportunity through which we can gaze at the beliefs, practices, assumptions, and actions of blacks and white about and on each other, as part of the day-to-day experience in the academy. In the course of everyday life ‘how do blacks negotiate their space in a social space that they may well consider not theirs’? The notion of everyday racism can be defined as:

a process by which socialized notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive and underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations.

(Essed, 1991:52)

The notion of everyday racism ties neatly with the theoretical framework of *habitus*, whose foremost promoter was Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist. It includes the “totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and other non-discursive knowledges that might be said to "go without saying" for a specific group -- in that way it can be said to operate beneath the level of ideology”,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitus>. For Bourdieu, habitus refers to socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions, (Scahill, 1993:3). In the main, these dispositions, schemas, and forms of knowledge (and competence) become so embodied and ingrained in the human person to the extent that their operations reverberate below the threshold of ordinary consciousness. As a classical neo-Marxist, Bourdieu understandably eschews the issue of race and instead uses class analysis in understanding how dominant social groups in society function, particularly in their relation to the dominated. Using class analysis, Bourdieu, for example made the following observation of the children of the elite as a social group vis-à-vis those from the lower middle and working class backgrounds:

Just as our dominant economic institutions are structured to favour those who already possess economic capital, so our educational institutions are structured to favour those who already possess cultural capital, in the form of the habitus of the dominant cultural faction. The schools take the habitus of the dominant group as the natural and only proper sort of habitus, and treats all children as if they had equal access to it.

(Bourdieu 1988 cited in Harker, 1990:87)

In the course of unwittingly, or otherwise, imposing such ways of thinking, of seeing, of perceiving, of feeling, the dominant group would tend to exclude those that are in the *other* bracket, unless of course, they themselves quickly endeavor to unlearn all regularities, schemas and so forth that are not considered *the norm* or not *norm-al* by the dominant group. In the context of most predominantly white and English medium universities, and in them deeply entrenched are the roots of the old colonial England – and with a higher education, and in particular, the traditions, symbols, mores, practices, speech codes, and even the curricula itself, are modelled along the Euro-American university for continued acceptance and recognition, the white English-speaking male has come to epitomise *the culture* of the institution, in Bourdieu' terms. Put differently, they are, in fact *the culture* of the institution. To use the concepts of Rosemary George, referred to earlier in this paper, they are 'at home' and 'in place'. It would, of course, in many ways, be odd of this author to even attempt to singularly present this as a problem. Surely, there cannot be anything inherently untoward about such a feeling of 'at home, and 'in place' of any particular group. What would be at issue however is if such strong sense of 'home', of rootedness, is necessarily dependent on one sector of the same community being perpetually in the margins.

In an academic environment such as ours, one has often heard academic members of staff speak of getting to know the *rules of the game*. In part what they mean are the schemas, dispositions, predispositions, manner of speech (language), regularities, in fact, unwritten codes of behaviour and of perceiving which, because they are so taken for granted, should simply come out naturally of everybody else. Here, we can illustrate with an example of a game – whatever it is. For example, take somebody who plays soccer,

rugby, cricket and so on, there comes a time when they are so absorbed into the game that they just simply play the game naturally, without thinking of how they pass the ball, how they should kick it, and to whom, at what direction. Although there is much skill, precision and accuracy required in the game, playing the actual is an unconscious thoughtless process in itself. The same obtains, for example, with a driver of a motor vehicle. As one drives to the office each morning, one gets here with no idea of the little turns one made along the way. It is almost an *unconscious* effort on one's part. All else simply just falls into place naturally, and effortlessly. For somebody who has not been predisposed to driving, and has just acquired their driving license, or somebody who actually thinks there are other efficient ways of arriving at the office other than having to drive, in other words, driving is not really the *norm*, being in that car might be a very daunting and traumatic experience. Not all else would follow naturally. They would be aware of every little turn they make. Thus, to use Rosemary George framework of analysis, as posited earlier, such a driver would not be 'at home' and 'in place' inside that car. Such could be the feeling of most black and in particular African academic members of staff.

There is of course a blemish side to every theoretical formulation and therefore Bourdieu's *habitus* is in no way different. Some of the concerns that could be raised about his theoretical formulation is that when applied in its purest sense, it has a particular deterministic ring to it; for example, it may in some respect, presuppose a state of permanent peripherality. Also, it puts little emphasis on human agency – with almost everything predestined by one's social and environmental circumstances that would have arisen out of no choice of the individual.

The concept of "home" in a university context

In his most illuminating work yet on 'institutional culture' Thaver (2006) presents to us two schools of thought that might be of useful in the study of the black experience and marginalization at predominantly white institutions. The first school of thought is encapsulated in his articulation of what he refers to the thesis of enchantment. In like manner, his second school of thought is that which attempts to advance the thesis of

disenchantment. This is drawn from George (1999) in her classical text, *The Politics of Home*. It is this enchantment that propelled the author to want to initiate this investigation on the institution's culture, and the extent of the disenchantment. In a nutshell, while the first thesis would seek to advance that affective aesthetic sense of being "at home", the second points us to the particular notion that, in fact, not all in well with "home". "Home" still remains quite a fiercely contested terrain. These sentiments are corroborated by Rosemary George in her work on this very intriguing subject of "home". In one of the most illuminating work on the subject of "home", she commented that:

When different groups or individuals jostle each other to establish a space as their own, as an exclusive manifestation of their subjecthood, this struggle can become as urgent as the keeping oneself alive. As a result, home becomes contested ground in times of political tumult either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage or at the interpersonal familial level.

(George, 1999:18)

Grounding her analysis on the disenchantment school, George goes at length to paint a rather bleak picture of what she considers a pattern that has sought to characterise the concept of 'home'. She makes the observation that most homes are not about inclusions and wide open arms. George is definitive about the extent of disenchantment with 'home', almost as if, among all else, such disenchantment is an inherent feature – in fact, one which 'home' cannot be without.

Expounding the above analogy to higher education, (as we ought to), it could be said that a higher education institution (although supposedly a neutral arbiter that independently reflects on society from without) is also a microcosm of that same society, carrying within it, on the one hand, the aesthetic joy of being at home and positively contributing to society, while on the other, shouldering the social ills of that same society as a contributing agent of such ills – hence of course, the disenchantment at one level.

Pettman quite succinctly captured this with the following:

Higher education institutions are a site for producing authorised or sometimes revisionist or oppositional knowledge. They are also an employer of people and a deliverer of education

(services). They are a key site in the reproduction of racism and sexism, and possibly for anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles.

(Pettman, .1992:129)

The above presents to us a very interesting paradox. In fact, it is this paradox that makes the relationship between higher education institutions and the state quite complex because like a 'home', for a state funded institution (unlike a business organization) there is a certain degree of claim the general public would reasonably have on a public entity such as an institution higher learning. By design, such an institution is a vehicle with which even the weakest of members in society can expect some reprieve. In other words, it is almost always expected that such an institution should be a 'home', but as George points out, this very supposed 'home' can be a site of an excruciating social and political strife, notwithstanding its romanticised side. In the next section, two case studies are presented, in attempting to explore the question whether blackness still has a future in the academy in general and in predominantly white academic milieus in particular.

Presentation of case study 1 – a predominantly white university

Introduction and methodology

Early in 2002, a group of researchers, this author included, was assembled to contribute to a research project whose brief it was to offer an account of the changing role of faculty, in particular, how faculty practices have shifted (or not) at the micro level given the structural racial legacy embedded in the South African university system. A further element of the research was to probe for factors that both hamper as well as facilitate integration of faculty at the micro-level, with particular reference to the extent to which such integration, lack or absence thereof, was mediated by race. In general, the purpose of the research was to contribute to understandings of the complexity of institutional factors on the black faculty experience, given that they are a conspicuous minority in most of the historically white universities. Further, the research was to look at efforts that sought to challenge the legacies of apartheid and the extent to which some of the legacies still persist, irrespective. Incidentally, but most importantly, such attempts were also to give the researchers some insights into how both black and white faculty perceive, and work with 'race'.

Context, background and research process

Five institutions across the country took part in the research. Our sample constituted three historically white universities, and two historically black. Of the three historically white universities, two were English medium while the third was an Afrikaans medium university. Although their origins took root at slightly different historical epochs, they all were conceived, inspired, and moulded along the colonial ideology premised on white privilege and white domination. Two historically black universities were also selected to participate in the study. A total of 61 in-depth interviews were conducted, and these were complimented by archival document search on all the five universities. Researchers have endeavoured, wherever possible, to maintain a balance of both black and white faculty respondents in the sample, particularly at the historically white universities. Data from the recorded interviews was transcribed and loaded onto the *Nud'ist* computer program, on rich text format, using the nodes system (this helped in the matching of the sub-questions of the interview with the transcription). Mini reports of each site were then generated, and on completion, these were followed by a more detailed analysis of the data. For the purpose of this paper however, this author chose to look at one historically white university in considering how race mediated the course of everyday life, including the perceptions both white and black faculty had on redress effort at the institution. In looking at redress, the author here chose two critical foci, first, the recruitment process (recruitment of new faculty), and second, general personal experiences of faculty and perceptions / and or feelings of 'at home' in both academic milieus, i.e. predominantly white and predominantly black. Since this research is work-in-progress, the author here elects to protect the identity of the institution concerned and thus shall only be called the *Western University*.

Western University is one of the oldest, not only in South Africa, but also in the Southern African region. It is an institution steeped in tradition, publicly brandishing signage, language, and other symbols reflective of its strong colonial heritage. Such colonial heritage is also manifest in its governance structures of the past era. For example, at that period there was a rather extensive involvement of family members of the British crown

in the affairs of the university in the early 20th century. The governance structures also mirror those of ancient British Empire, with such structures as the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Senate, and Council at the helm. Western University, in its formative years, recruited faculty offshore with most coming from either England or Scotland. While currently there has been a trickle of white women into Senate ranks, black persons have largely been absent in this most exclusive of club in the academy. On the positive side, black student enrolments in the post 1994 period have seen a steady appreciation. Current statistics are showing a near 50% split between black and white student enrolments. Surrounded by a leafy suburbia and a modern sprawling city, the university currently enrolls about 22 000 undergraduate and postgraduate students, with a total staffing complement of 4200, (in it included both faculty and admin staff). Western University boasts an expansive research infrastructure, built over many years from its privileged position. Currently, the university is among a few and elitist group of universities that boast the most concentration of South Africa's *National Research Foundation* A- rated researchers.

Some of the emerging themes

Recruitment of faculty skewed in favour of whites

Data showed that criteria for selection were known and clear. Most members of faculty have had some experience in serving on selection committees and have observed the process quite intimately at this level. With regards to the equity question, specifically on recruitment, white senior faculty often cited market forces as a barrier to attracting qualified and experienced black faculty. For example, many white members of faculty felt that academic salary scales are too low and most blacks, given the scarcity of skills situation (and demand and supply mechanism) are attracted elsewhere, most often, to industry. This was particularly expressed by academics in the fields of engineering and commerce.

With regards to participation in faculty selection processes, (of course, notwithstanding the rank of the academic post in question), there was feeling among respondents that attempts were often made to ensure that the committees were representative, that they

were fair. However, following criteria to the letter and ensuring that there was representativity, need not suggest necessarily, that there were no attendant problems with the process itself. For example, there is a suggestion from the data that the voices of the most senior persons in those selection committees carried greater weight, and those senior persons, in the main, are almost always, white and male. They would also hold key positions like professorships, deanships, departmental headships, and chairs. While there may be a black member of faculty also serving on such committees, they would almost always not be of commensurable seniority, and almost inevitably would play a marginal role; often only there so that policy guidelines on constitution of such committees are met so as to ward off any legitimacy questions that may arise as a result.

With regards to the selection criteria, there was a strong feeling among black faculty that these were not being consistently and uniformly applied. There was a perception that criteria and accompanying assessment tended to be stricter against a black candidate, while this would necessarily not be the case when a white candidate is presented before a committee.

Some of the personal experiences: feeling of 'at home'

While experiences of white faculty, by and large, were uniformly positive, such experiences were not necessarily replicable among black faculty at Western University. When asked to comment on how they experience the institutional climate, responses ranged from 'feeling very welcome', to, 'it is a very cold place', to, 'I used to be filled with fear when I arrived at the Recreational complex'⁹. Some connection was made of the host city to the university, in particular the polarising nature of its racial politics – with respondents hinting that such polarisation is manifest in the university milieu themselves.

White members of staff were generally very positive in answering the question regarding their personal experiences at the University; a much sharper with the black experience as noted above. One of the black respondents noted that the aspect of "feeling welcome is

⁹ The Recreational Complex is the first building you drive past en route to the main campus.

linked to use value as well as subservience”. The same respondent noted that “regardless of what value your knowledge base is, there continues to be the perceptions that black academics do not know much”. He remarked forcefully adding:

“I mean if you go to a senate meeting for example, you know who exactly is going to speak. You would hardly hear a black voice and yet there are black voices – people would speak about us as if we are not there...”

Respondents also mentioned that the feeling of home needed to be considered within the context and the peculiarity of the politics of the region in question. In that regard, it was stated emphasized that the “community influences how the university functions”. Thus, the university practices would be reflective of those of the immediate community around the institution.

On the contrary, there was mention made of improved white and black relations at the institution, such that other black respondents even suggested that issues of academic performance “have not got anything to do with race”. There were, in particular, two black respondents who intimated no predispositions towards race.

With the exception of the two respondents noted above, there was however, in general, a strong perception, especially among the black respondents that there is a silence around issues of race at the institution. It did appear that much of this silence was attributable to fear and anxiety. As was noted, “generally, any discussion of race immediately raises discomfort on the part of the white academics”.

There were a minority of black faculty who did not see race as a problem in their day-to-day living at the institution. With the exception of this minority however, black faculty felt that there was a strong silence around discussing issues of race at the institution. They attribute such silence to a culture of fear, as one respondent said, ‘generally, a discussion of race immediately raises discomfort on the part of the white academics’.

A case of a historically black university – Northeastern University

Context and background

The Northeastern University stands among some of the oldest universities, principally dedicated to black post-secondary education. Although it is situated approximately 140 kilometers from a major urban centre, its immediate surroundings are deeply rural. It is such rurality that has been the common-most feature of historically black universities, except of course, the now defunct *VISTA University*, which was created to serve the urban blacks, who dreaded the prospect of university education in unfamiliar rural surroundings. Government subsidies and student fees are its major sources of funding. Given the profile of its student body (mainly blacks from working class backgrounds), student fees as major source of income have their limitation; one being they cannot be hiked exorbitantly for the simple reason that students will find them unaffordable. Student fees here can be an emotive political issue, and in the mid nineties, the campus recorded one of the most violent student protests of the time, with fees being top in the list of students' letter of grievances. On the other hand, as government continue to contribute less and less financially, in real terms; a further strain on the income stream has become apparent in most of the historically black universities, not least, at the *Northeastern University*. Given decades of neglect by the apartheid state, coupled with the non-existing ties with industry (a major source of revenue on the research front for most historically white universities), these challenges pose serious questions around capacity – capacity of an institution to deliver on its mandate, entailing principally, teaching, research, and service. That said; the university is still among the most revered of black institutions in the country and in the Southern African region. Northeastern University has managed to keep a healthy balance sheet by simply living within its means. While some of the black universities have had to endure the indignity of being put under curatorship by the National Education Department, owing to gross acts of impropriety, such has not been the experience of Northeastern University.

Some of the emerging themes

Recruitment of faculty in favour of blacks

Here, the respondents were asked to comment about their role (if any) in the recruitment process – how the principle of equity was integrated (if at all) in the recruitment process,

and their perceptions about how selection criteria were applied in making faculty appointments.

Overall, there was a feeling that criteria were transparent. They expressed a view that concerted effort is often made in ensuring, for example, that selection committees are representative, with particular attention paid to, among others, rank, area of speciality, etc. One senior member commented as thus with regards to composition of such committees:

...It might be problematic [elsewhere] but here, all interviewing panels have all stakeholders represented – trade union, staff [meaning admin and support staff], everybody is represented across the campus in respect of that particular post...

Black male professor

Owing to the larger numbers of black persons applying for positions (and a drought in white applications), unlike at the Western University, equity questions at Northeastern are no longer interracial, but rather intra-racial. For example, most respondents cited, as among other criteria, whether a candidate is a black person from South Africa or whether they are a black person from elsewhere in the continent or the African diaspora. Although every effort was made to keep balance, most expressed the view that a South African black person will always be preferred, in the first instance, unless they do not have requisite experience and qualifications for the position at hand.

Although senior faculty painted a picture of an overly democratic and representative selection process, their experiences were however countered by junior faculty, who intimated that they have had no involvement at all in the actual recruitment process. They particularly saw this role as being an exclusive domain of senior faculty, most of whom hold deanships, directorships, and departmental headships. Interestingly though, junior faculty seemed not to begrudge the *status quo*. In fact, there was some contentment with the *status quo* – that things should be that way. One junior faculty member when asked about his experiences in a faculty selection committee, he commented:

...eh, I'm actually too junior for that. Our selection committee consists of heads of departments and other senior staff...

Again with regards to staffing equity, there seems to be a heightened level of consciousness at Northeastern. In other words, effort towards changing of the faculty profile in terms of 'race' is a taken-for-granted. It is something, which 'goes without saying'. It is an obvious point that a black person must be appointed (because it is a moral imperative to meet equity goals) and at the same time also, it goes without saying that a black person almost always will be appointed because after the white flight from the institution after the 1994 general election, whites have not made their way back ever since. In this scenario, race is a taken-for-granted; it becomes invisible even if it is forever present. As one lecturer commented, "...racial issues never really come up because almost [all] persons that had applied were black..."

Gender (although not the focus of the study but nonetheless an important category in the redress discourse) often gets subsumed in 'race' when faculty appointments are made at Northeastern, as one respondent with enormous university experience noted:

...the issue of gender never really came up! Amazing! We never really looked at gender...

Black female senior lecturer

Stronger sense of affection - a sense of rootedness, feeling 'at home'

Respondents were asked about their personal experiences of 'feeling at home', whether they felt included (or excluded) from day-to-day life of the university. In this regard, there was nothing in the data that indicated or hinted (in the least) feelings of marginalization, of displacement, and disenchantment. There was a greater sense or a feeling of owning the intellectual project. Conversely, there were however, strong perceptions by some respondents from other parts of the continent that they were being treated differently by black South African members of faculty, as one female junior lecturer protested:

My issue is a different one [it is not about racism]...I have experienced a lot of discrimination at Northeastern, but also in other kinds of professional networks. At Northeastern, I have experienced some kind of discrimination because I am not a South African citizen.

(Female black senior lecture)

The interviewer then asked a follow-up question: So you don't feel that welcomed? To which she then replied, 'unfortunately not'.

Discussion

The return of blackness

Preponderance of blackness at the historically black universities at faculty level brings with it opportunities, life experiences, perspectives, and the like, which white western rationality may have been oblivious to in its many years of dominance at this institution. There is no denying the fact that the influx of black persons into the ranks of faculty will bring to the centre stage those suppressed epistemologies, forms of knowledge, worldviews that may refuse to uncritically conform to western rationality given the university's specific context and location. This can only add more richness to the intellectual project. This is apart from the very profound political function that this new wave of blackness can serve. We will come to this point about its political functionality later. The aforementioned point about oppressed epistemologies stem from the view that academies by design are suppose to be protective spaces where divergent views are constellated and tested through rigorous conventions that the academy has inscribed for itself. Since knowledge is not neutral and is therefore shaped by the histories, cultural disposition, ideological orientation, and personal life experiences of the very agents involved in its construction, such hastened entry by black faculty can only serve the academy well in the construction of new forms of knowledge, new ways of seeing, of doing, and of being.

There is also an important political function that the preponderance of blackness might serve at the historically black university, as is certainly the case at Northeastern. It confers an important psychological advantage unto blackness – a sense of place, of being in control of one’s destiny. For blackness, this is surely a psychological advantage to jealously safe-keep, and unapologetically employ in making forays into the academy, which was once an exclusive habitat of whiteness.

Notwithstanding these apparent strengths, there are some cautionary tales to be told about the coming of age of blackness, more specifically, at the historically black universities. Of the most worrisome is that new black faculty is not coming at levels commensurable with those of white faculty that left during the political transition period. Here, young black faculty that were yet to acquire requisite qualifications and experience replaced some of the most qualified and experienced members of faculty at the time. Some effort has been made to ameliorate the situation by recruiting expatriates and scholars from elsewhere in the continent. The critical question that needs to be asked is thus: is the future of the intellectual project secure with the replacement of a western hegemonic worldview by another whose sole promoter is the new blackness? What makes us so comfortable that this new form of hegemony is noble, benign, and is pregnant with all the best intentions possible? How does this then speak of the nature of the academy as a constellation of divergent worldviews – with no one perspective holding monopoly of the truth? Clearly, these are some of the questions that would need further exploration as we consider new possibilities for blackness in predominantly white milieus. When blackness finally finds its place, should this presuppose mutation, or permanent replacement of anything that which exists that bears resemblance of past white English domination and Eurocentricity?

It is important to note that as these questions are considered, the case in point of white flight at the Northeastern generally did not seem to perturb black staff while at the same time, it is also important to observe that although they were evidently not perturbed, a close reading of the data did not suggest, even in the slightest, a systematic, conscious effort during political transition to relegate whiteness to the fringes, or in the most

extreme, to push it out. This raises important questions about South African whiteness, and the manner in which it has always sought to construct (and deconstruct) the self. At the risk of stating the obvious, the white flight phenomenon at the Northeastern University put bare the dominant hegemonic constructions of whiteness on the one hand, and the attendant agonies of having to acquaint itself to a positionality that bears no remnants of its historic dominance and privilege. Could it be that hegemony and privilege are necessary and sufficient conditions if whiteness is to feel any greater sense of rootedness, of belonging, of being 'at home'? As blackness would, at some point in the nation's history swell the ranks of the academy, especially at those places which hitherto remain white bastions of privilege, just what will become of whiteness? Should we predict yet another flight? And looking into the future, what could become of the South African academy?

Macro policy regime vis-à-vis micro (local) power base

A disjuncture between macro (national) and micro (local) power bases is self evident from the data just presented. Such disjuncture is even more pronounced in the case of the historically white Western University. As the state seeks to steer behaviour and practice towards what it calls national imperatives, e.g. meeting student and faculty equity targets, and while every effort is made such that the University is not found wanting on due process regarding standard employment procedures e.g. through making sure that its selection committees are representative and that the equity question, in general is discussed in the selection process, there exists nonetheless no convincing evidence of any such intent to attain the desired outcomes such as those expressed in the very macro policy framework of government, especially on staff equity and questions of redress in general. In the face of such a strong state, with unquestionable legitimacy (it was voted into power by an overwhelming majority of the populace), how then could it be that local power can remain so intact, with no apparent taint to its name, even against an omnipotent legitimate macro authority? What does this really tell one about the nature of the academy and its relationship with the state? The answer to these questions lie partly in the third strand of our discussion below.

The rise and rise of neo-liberalism

While historically, the university straddled between complicity and occasional open opposition (especially at historically white universities), it is fair to suggest that overall the academy was much less free a place than it is now. Such a culture of anxiety, and repression surely could not have been conducive to good robust scholarship. The apartheid authority therefore stood in quite a sharp contrast to the nature of the university (in the traditional sense); a place where divergent views are freely expressed and tested in public platforms. With the dawn of the new constitutional dispensation, there is a curious harmony between the extreme libertarianism, which universities (especially the historically white universities) now claim, and the overall ideological orientation of political officialdom at the macro level. These libertarian ideals such as freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought (academic freedom), and institutional autonomy have certainly dominated public discourse, in fact more so than corresponding obligations such as accountability, equity, and redress, whose champion it ought to be the state.

Feelings of 'at home' (and in place)

In the case of the Western University, given that the vast majority of faculty is white, it follows therefore that the institutional ethos, cultural codes, *norms*, and institutional practice will, in general, be reflective of white western rationality. This is not to deny that even within whiteness, there would be variations in the levels of feeling 'at home'; suffice to say however, that almost all white persons, in general, will have had some predisposition towards the forms of milieus embedded within Western University, with the university, in that vein, becoming their *habitus*. But it is precisely for this reason that black faculty should accept, (as given), the duty to fiercely contest one's place in this 'home', even from their presumed positionality of disadvantage. Feelings of home should not only be possible from a positionality of dominance, as it seems to be the case now with Northeastern; for if one's place in society is only determinable through dominance, and corresponding exclusion of the 'other' (as was the case under apartheid), we will have not advanced any further, as a human community, in addressing what Du Bois saw as the biggest challenge of the 20th century – that of the colour line.

Presentation of case study 2: a predominantly white medical school

Introduction and methodology

Problem for investigation

The study investigates supposed marginality of black professionals in a predominantly white medical school. It looks at not being 'at home', recognizing, of course, that homes can also be places of hope and nurture on the one hand, and on the other, places of fierce contests and disenchantment, (George, 1999).

Sub-questions

- How out-groups (Bourdieu,1988:27) and members of the host society are invited to the center, and how this center inducts and / or anoints members?
- Is center-periphery a fixed social and cultural space or could there possibly be an oscillation between both ends of the binary, this being intermittently dictated by social conditions and circumstances?
- Could this simple binary of center-periphery offer sufficient lenses through which we can understand black and white staff own reality at the medical school?
- Are there any specific cultural properties that staff on either end of the binary may relate to, and thus help bridge the gap between the white center and the black periphery?

Research population

Diagram I

Academic staff profile of a predominantly white medical school

Full time tenured staff: Blacks = 10 Whites = 89 Coloureds = 17 Indians = 13 Men = 64 Women = 67

Contract Staff: Blacks = 13 Whites = 113 Coloureds = 15 Indians = 11 Other = 16 Men = 60 Women = 108 Registrars: Blacks = 46 Whites: Coloured: Indian:

The research journey

The diagram above represents the reality as it was in the beginning of the research. Principally, the research set out to sift perceived black marginality in the medical school. At the beginning stages of the research, total number of black persons that held full tenured positions was very small in comparison to whites. In total, as indicated in the above diagram, the count stood at 23, with everybody included i.e. even those black members of faculty holding contract academic posts.

Given the small sample of fully tenured and contract black persons in the Faculty, the researcher took the view that if the black experience was to be fully unraveled, a more bigger sample was needed, hence the decision to include black registrars as part of the research population. Registrars are qualified medical practitioners, who, after a few years of internship, community service and some medical practice experience, apply for positions in the faculty to specialize in a field of their choice. Such specialist training can take a minimum of four years. During their training, registrars are both employees and students. They work as medical officers for the provincial health department and also are taken through apprenticeship-type learning by senior specialist academic staff. In some departments, it is expected that these registrars teach medical students who are still in their junior classes.

Data analysis

In total, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted with both black and white members of faculty. Accordingly, these were complemented by a total of 23 in-depth interviews conducted with black registrars. All interviews were recorded on tapes and subsequently transcribed verbatim. As a triangulation strategy, field notes as another source of data were employed. With triangulation, the general idea is that the use of two [or more] different instruments may increase the reliability (and perhaps the validity) of the findings, (Miller and Fredericks, 1996:28). In this particular case study, however, the author pretends not to present findings as this is still *work-in-progress* of a much bigger

project towards completion of a higher degree. As the researcher is only in the preliminary stages of analysis, involving mainly close reading of data as alluded to earlier, the intent here rather, in considering the broad question of the future of blackness, is to make sense of the spirit of the text (de Wet and Erasmus, 2005) as a point of departure. Out of this has arisen, what the researcher refers to as emerging narratives (or themes), on which the entire discussion of this section of the paper would lie.

Emerging themes (narratives)

Black and white tenured academic staff

I know not of race

Even at this early stage, conspicuously noticeable in the data has been the apparent silence of most white staff in how they see or use race in the academy. White staff were, forever ready to paint a picture of an academy that is, in the classical sense, neutral, ideology free and meritorious. While most staff, especially female, would be so readily comfortable, (and without any prompt) speak of the apparent gender disparities, there was a deafening silence on race as a mediating tool in human relations in the academy. In a few cases where they would speak about race, they needed to be prompted, even more so, they would make opinions with visible signs of irritation, as below:

I don't have glasses that tell me what the colour of the next person is. I never have it. It's always been for me a non-issue [race that is]. I am Jewish but I can't say all my best friends are Jewish. In fact I never ever make that expression – Jewish. It irritates me because that's nonsense. My friends are my friends. It does not matter what their religion is – it does not matter what their colour is – it does not matter what their culture is. They are my friends and colleagues. I actually don't care where they come from...So I have never had an issue about colour – short, tall, black, white...

(White female associate professor)

Below also is a sample of typical response from whites on the issue of race as a mediating tool in social relations at the medical school:

...then they [the blacks] must come on board – that's their own issue. That's nonsense. They must put that issue behind them and come on board. The doors are open today. There is no way that we can discriminate. We cannot discriminate and we don't want to discriminate. In the past, we did

discriminate a lot as you may be well aware. But, that is in the past and if we want to make a success of this country, we should not dwell too much in the past....

(White male professor and head of department)

There is, however, a minority of black staff that apparently also knew not of race, but interestingly work tirelessly to cushion the effects of past and present racial inequalities at the medical school, for example, by supporting and giving expert advice to black students' self help initiatives in enhancing their own (black students') academic performance, leadership development, and general life orientation.

Race is everything and everywhere

While most white staff would almost always avoid any direct reference to race, black staff (in majority of cases without being prompted) very often invoked race as a factor ingrained in their day-to-day life experiences in the academy and how these at times had a debilitating effect on the quality of life within the academy itself.

...there are people with a bias that black people cannot perform the same way as white people would...so at every stage, I have had to prove myself over and over again although I don't kind of like it... the first year I did that, the second year I did that. Now I think I have established myself. I don't have to prove anything to anybody. The results of my work are beginning to show...

(Black male senior lecturer)

The burden of blackness also, on occasion, involves having to prove to students one's worth:

...Well, students like me very much. Of course, it starts the same way. You go in there and they see a black face and they are uneasy and they are not expecting anything. But after a few lectures, they realize that they are going to have to shape up otherwise they are going to miss a lot of important stuff...I have had some nasty comments from white students but I make those comments right back at them. I don't care. I don't care...

(*Ibid*)

While some had chosen to deal with the demon of race directly, a few had conceded to what they saw as the status quo i.e. the insurmountable hegemonic position of whiteness in the academy and the permanent absence and / or invisibility of blackness:

I am the only black person in the meetings I attend. In essence I understand that I must give respect that is due to them and in return, I must expect the same. But sometimes one doesn't get it because there was a time when some colleagues were discussing me in a meeting not aware that I was there... this helped though because from then on, I knew where I stood...I am tired of this place...I lack the energy now...

(Black male lecturer)

Black registrars

I know not of race

A minority of black registrars expressed the view that they saw no race in their day-to-day life experiences as clinicians in the hospitals (during the course of doing clinical work) or in their disciplinary department, with which they are registered and at which much of the formal academic learning takes place. Almost without exception however, they would relate episodes of racism, as apparently told to them by acquaintances in other departments, (or even in odd cases), by close friends or family that had gone through the rigours of the same medical school system before.

Race is everything and everywhere

An overwhelming majority of black registrars (over two thirds of the research population) related incidents of racial discord in the course of going about their day-to-day work in the hospitals and in their respective academic departments as a typical comment below suggests:

...but then I said I will come to university X when they also offered me a registrar position because I thought there would not be much racial prejudice unlike at university y - I was wrong. There is so much racial prejudice here. The prejudice is more silent – more cruel – it can break your spirit. I find the English people the most cruel of all people. And at university x, the English people are ruling. You see the English people are the worst. I was never happy here...

(black male registrar no.1)

Prompted whether the racial discord might be a case of misplaced tension given the nature of the work that they do in that it is often a crisis – (where matters of life and death need to be decided upon) one respondent was emphatic that although the nature of the work has stressors of its own, these in themselves do not adequately account or better explain the pervasiveness of racism in the medical school:

...yes, I think it is to do with the nature of the profession, but also, it has to do with our past where the thinking is that whites will always know better and blacks are just not capable. It is there. I find this often. You know people will probe. They will ask you questions not because they need help or something but because they want to test you. Often when you give them answers and the correct ones about a case; they get puzzled. They like look at you and think ‘just who are you, are you good as you sound or this was just a fluke...

(black male registrar no.2)

Another typical response, following the same tread and vindicating blackness as the “heart of darkness” could be this tale told by a female black registrar of the ‘normal’ conversations, with racial overtones, that staff would have on issues of general public interest:

...I remember when we were voting in the elections, they worried that [the city] was to be taken over by the ANC and they were saying in this department that ‘they must not allow illiterate people in this city to vote’. I said to myself, but illiterate people in this city would mainly be blacks – so they are actually saying that blacks must not vote. If somebody can say that publicly in a room and be comfortable, she probably knows that everybody else shares the same views as her – she wouldn’t take the risk of being the only fool. So, these should be conversations that they normally have among themselves...

(black female registrar)

While the level of bitterness seemed extremely high, as shown below, black respondents were almost uniform in acknowledging the higher education standards in general and the high level of clinical training they continue to receive:

...I have not been happy – but I must say education is great. But there is so much disdain and meanness towards black people here. When you come in as a registrar from a traditionally black university, it's even worse. They would want you to feel inferior...

(black male registrar no.3)

Discussion: case study 2 (a predominantly white medical)

The first narrative where respondents *know not of race* could be understood within the current socio-political context of South Africa's young democracy, having just emerged out of a racist tyrannical past. In this era, what had seemed to dominate public discourse has been ideals like nation-building, national reconciliation, and non-racialism. Although the discourse of racial redress has also been a conspicuous part of the national agenda post-apartheid, its failures are apparent. One part that one could be positively inclined is the effective nature of its symbolism nonetheless. For example, although employment equity legislation was an important signal of our break from the past, faculty demographic profiles at most predominantly white universities has remained intact despite the rhetoric of equity and transformation.

The heavy weighting placed on ideals such as nation building and non-racialism had implications for white academic staff and black academic staff alike. There is a good case to be made in the usage of 'race' in discourse as an integral component of our day-to-day living, and meaning making. As various authors show (Todorov, 2000), (Winant, 2000) and (Steyn, 2001), it would be overly escapist not to acknowledge the existence of race, however constructed, in ordinary discourse. Of all the authors, Howard Winant's case is more compelling:

The longevity of the race concept and the enormous number of effects race thinking [and race acting] has produced guarantee that race will remain a feature of social reality across the globe...despite its lack of intrinsic scientific merit.

(*Ibid*, 2000:184)

Melissa Steyn's empirical work on South African whiteness also makes a case against expunging race in general, and in particular, whiteness from ordinary public discourse.

Insofar as whiteness dialectically relates to powers, whiteness is therefore a problematic whose functioning warrants critical assessment. She comments as thus in her treatise:

The construction of race has been used to skew this society over centuries. If we prematurely banish it from our analytical framework, we serve the narrow interests of those previously advantaged, by concealing the enduring need for redress. To deal with expressions of power, we have to call it by its name.

(*Ibid*, 2001:xxxii)

In an era of strong ‘non-racialism’, and ‘rainbow-ism’¹⁰ currents, open race-talk can become a taboo, while leaving the underlying power relations skewed along racial lines, virtually unchecked. This is perhaps a most glaring fallacy of the so-called colour-blind perspective. The colour-blinds perspective, which most South African whites so readily embrace, ‘threaten to remove from personal and public discussion any taint or suggestion of white supremacy or white guilt while legitimating the existing social, political, and economic arrangements which privilege whites’, (Gallagher, 2003). Thus, while I submit it is quite possible that white staff in their colour-blind quest may perhaps not be consciously aware of how they employ whiteness on a day-to-day basis to negotiate and mark their turf in the academy, this apparent state of blindness or unconsciousness need not presuppose any reduction in the significance of race in the white context.

On the other hand, the narrative *I know not of race* from some of the black academic members of staff and a handful of some registrars, this author would argue that this need to be understood partially in what one prefers to refer to as the *burden of blackness*. Peeved by the historical signifier of being the problematic, something that which needed to be guided and helped along, one way of dealing with the problematic blackness (as constructed through the white lenses) would be to disown it, at least partially. This is important given the nature of academic work, traditional ethos therein, and the prominence of such ideals as the pursuit of excellence, quality, and merit, all of which

¹⁰ This is a reference coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It refers to equality in diversity. In the extreme sense, it has been understood to mean a total annihilation of any consideration of race (in the purest libertarian sense) and merely judge people for only who they are. Glaringly, as with most colour-blind exponents, it is an idea that is oblivious to existing structural inequalities in society.

apparently know no colour, religion, gender, language, or creed. For blacks to fit into this straightjacket, it is important that they muster the game and that they play it well. In a related study of American faculty of colour, Benjamin (1998) illustrates most eloquently this very forced position of colour-blindness by black faculty.

The second narrative *race is everything and everywhere* shed light on what seem acts of racism and how these are internalized by those concerned, mainly black academic staff and registrars. Ingrained in the everyday, these accounts or incidents are repetitive, routinised and normalised. This is what Essed (1991) refers to as “everyday racism”. In this respect, there is a fine link between these routinised, repetitive, and systematic acts or incidents of racism to Bourdieu’s thesis on *habitus*. Here, that which exists outside the perimeters of the strictures of the dominant culture is considered unpalatable, undesirable. Arising out of a domineering English middle class tradition, for example, it is to be expected that much of the culture i.e. the way seeing, of doing, of perceiving, of expression, would tend to mirror those traditions on which the medical school was founded, developed, and sustained. Thus those social groups coming from milieus other than English and middle class have the choice to assimilate into the white English culture (which invariably has become the culture of the school). Alternatively, they can prepare for battle, or opt out.

Conclusion

It seems a rather rhetorical question to ask whether or not blackness has a future in predominantly white academic milieus. For a university that is located in Africa (though not of it), with its surrounds significantly black (at least 70% of the population is black), it seems almost inevitable that at some point, blackness would assume its rightful place in the academy. But, as Rosemary George intimated in her account of the politics of home, that homes are places of enchantment and disenchantment, any bid by blackness to exert its influence and begin to shape the ways of seeing, of doing, of perceiving, and in essence, ways of being, will, in the main, involve a protracted battle since the benefactors of the status quo are not about to grant to blackness a share of the stakes as a generous

gift bequeathed to [blacks], (Makgoba, 2007). In similar spirit as that of Rosemary George, Makgoba suggests that:

...the fact that postcolonial universities continue to bear the imprints of colonialism suggests that the forging of truly African universities would involve intellectual and ideological struggles. This process, which may be referred as the Africanisation of universities, is a function of, and is linked to, the affirmation of African aspirations that have been made possible by the new political dispensation. The Africanisation I propose is the one that repudiates and transcend racism. It heralds an African identity that is inclusive and not exclusive.

In the current socio-political context, as we strive to build a common future, there arises a grave danger that race as a continuing marker of inequality may be deliberately obliterated from public and academic discourse thus making it possible for current social inequalities premised on race to persist. What this paper aimed to do was to lay bare the continuing alienation of the black intelligentsia in the academy so that the spotlight on the nation's foremost shining lights (the academe) is forever present. Rather than sending us to delusional state of so-called colour-blindness, meritocracy, and the scientific pursuit of excellence (as if it were a wholly neutral and ideology-free project) empirical accounts of the continued fringe status of blackness in white academic milieus and the rampant levels of racism therein, help keep the focus on the nation's foremost demon. By acknowledging and seeing racism as constitutive part of day-to-day living, the academy is better positioned to deal with existing skewed power relations within its environs, historically premised on race.

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