



‘Race’ and Racism in Post-Millennial Post-Apartheid South Africa: Unmaking the Past, Making the Future

The persistence of racism more than two decades after the official abolition of apartheid ought not to surprise us. At the heart of this extended life of racism, of course, lies the contemporary currency of ‘race’ in everyday life in South Africa. Attempts in the late twentieth century, those early years of the post-apartheid period, to overcome the consequences of racism in South Africa have mostly been unsuccessful. The old terms have persisted, along with the old ideas, and these became dominant in public discourse, both political and interpersonal, and with them the old ideas about ‘race’ have been rearticulated in relation to contemporary dynamics in the political economy of post-millennial post-apartheid South Africa. Four thinkers respond to the challenge to write about ‘race’ and racism in contemporary South Africa: Desiree Lewis, a professor in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape; Rustum Kozain, a poet with decades of university research and teaching experience, who resides in Cape Town; Asanda Ngoasheng, a lecturer at a university in the Western Cape and public speaker; and Angelo Fick, the Director of Research at ASRI.

Speakers:



Desiree Lewis - Lecturer: University of the Western Cape

Desiree Lewis teaches in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape. She has written and taught extensively on cultural, fictional and scholarly understandings of gendered, sexualized and raced identities. Her writing, teaching and social engagement have also explored productive and creative imaginings of social and individual freedoms. Her recent research and writing interests include the epistemological implications of individual and social engagements with food; and ways of exploring personal and collective struggles beyond the constricting framework of neo-liberal governmentality.



Asanda Ngoasheng - Speaker, Academic, Transformation Expert and Lecturer

Asanda Ngoasheng is a speaker, academic and transformation expert. She lectures journalism at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Her work is with online and offline communities. Online – she is a community administrator of an online community that deals with race and its impact on our daily lives which currently has 4000 + active members. Offline, she has led and facilitated workshops/panels/speaking engagements on race, gender, transformation and decolonization at schools, universities, and companies. She has presented in South Africa and internationally at the Building Bridges in a Complex World Conference (Greece, Chania), and at the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue (Austria, Vienna). She is a thought leader whose opinion is regularly featured in interviews and columns across different platforms including eNCA, SABC News,702/Cape Talk, Umhlobo Wenene, News24, Cape Times and many others.



Rustum Kozain - Freelance Generalist

Rustum Kozain is a freelance generalist – copy-editor, poetry editor, and occasional reviewer, essayist, and teacher. He has published two volumes of poetry, *This Carting Life* (2005) and *Groundwork* (2012), garnering the Olive Schreiner Prize (2007, 2014), the Ingrid Jonker Prize (2006) and the Herman Charles Bosman Award (2013). Some of his poetry has been translated and published abroad in Dutch, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, and Spanish. He has also compiled and edited anthologies of short stories and of poetry for high schools, published by Oxford University Press, SA. He lives in Cape Town.



Angelo Fick - Director of Research: ASRI

Angelo Fick is the Director of Research at ASRI. He taught at universities in South Africa and Europe for twenty years, in various fields from English literary studies and Sociology through philosophy of science. His work remains vested in critical race theory, feminism, post-structuralism, and postcolonial theory. He worked in broadcast television for almost half a decade, doing both production and research, as well as on air analysis of South Africa's postmillennial post-apartheid political economy. Though no longer employed as a full-time academic, he continues to present lectures on colonial discourse and postcolonial culture in South Africa at a university in Gauteng. Mostly he spends his days reading.

The persistence of racism more than two decades after the official abolition of apartheid ought not to surprise us. Racism remains one of the many tasks that make up that ‘unfinished business’ (Bell & Ntsebeza) we have inherited from the past, and have failed to adequately address. Public and spectacular incidents of racism have drawn public outcries, and one such incident saw a landmark court judgment imprisoning the offender, Vicky Momberg. There are calls for the criminalisation of racism, and objections to such a manoeuvre from both the right and the left on the political spectrum. Objections are based on two fears, firstly those who feel they will be unfairly targeted because there will be a selective definition of racist hate speech aimed exclusively at the actions of white South Africans, not the actions of Black people, and secondly, those who feel that this will compromise a necessary commitment to freedom of expression if the definitions are too narrow.

At the heart of the question of racism, of course, lies the persistence of the currency of ‘race’ in everyday life in South Africa. We may well have come a long way from the definitions of the Population Registration Act of 1950, but those terms and the categories they constructed continue to haunt the South African public sphere. The raciological categories of the past have continued to be used, both by way of ascription and self-identification, for many South Africans. This is not unrelated to the continued material consequences that those terms have had, constructing racially exclusive communities and neighbourhoods, segregating almost every social institution from sport to religion, from education to marriage.

The attempts in the late twentieth century, those early years of the post-apartheid period, to overcome the consequences of racism in South Africa have mostly been unsuccessful. The concept of South Africa as a ‘rainbow nation’ was simply one aspect of such failed measures, simply reiterating in new guise the apartheid notion of the country as being ‘*veelvolkig*’ (made up of many nations), as J.M. Coetzee pointed out in his commentary on the figuration of identity in spectacle during the 1995

Rugby World Cup opening and closing ceremonies. Many of these attempts struggled to articulate a vision of 'non-racialism' engendered in the Freedom Charter in the 1950s, not taking into account the very different political economy, locally and globally, of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Many attempts, well-intentioned as they are, tend to remain invested in notions of 'race' and racialised difference which do not take into account the philosophical and scholarly interventions of critical 'race' theory over the last generation. That 'race' is a social construction has become widely accepted; that it holds no biological veridical status has yet to be fully accepted, even across several disciplines in the academy. The old terms have persisted, along with the old ideas, and these became dominant in public discourse, both political and interpersonal, partly because of the specific generation of men and women who emerged from decades of imprisonment, exile and isolation, and tended to remain caught in older terms and conceptions of 'race' in South Africa that were not necessarily steeped in the shifts that 'race' had undergone both here, because of the Black Consciousness Movement and the Mass Democratic Movement, but also globally, as a consequence of philosophical and scholarly paradigm shifts.

The persistence of the biologicistic and cultural conceptions of 'race' in South Africa continue to have significant consequences for citizens, but is it not time for all of us to 'catch up' and re-think our invested racial knowledge, as David Theo Goldberg has it? Ought we to move beyond what Ruth Frankenberg called 'colour evasion' and 'power evasion', towards 'race cognisance', in order to begin to work towards a truly anti-racist politics which will strive to engender a post-'race' polity, one in which the history of 'race' is not erased from significance, but in which the very real material and symbolic consequences of this phantasmatic fiction can be dealt with, and the twin ghosts of 'race' and racism can be exorcised from post-millennial, post-apartheid South Africa?

What have we and our politicians to learn from the past in order not to repeat its mistakes?

In contemporary South Africa, and in the Western Cape specifically, the return of terms from the past to currency in the present in everyday interactions between people, but also in the engagements of politicians and political organisations, must be accounted for. Why are terms such as ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’ or ‘Asian’ still used descriptively, as if they account for people and the world accurately and in a stable manner? What use are such terms put to and with what consequences in this moment? What political risks, if any accompany this (re)deployment of old terms?

Four thinkers reflect on these issues below.

Race and racism

Rustum Kozain

IDEALIST

Firstly, I write from an idealistic anti-racist position, rather than from a non-racial or non-racialist position. That is, I reject the notion of “race”. I do not believe that there is such a thing as race and I believe that countering racism should start from that standpoint, rather than from the non-racial view which accepts race as an actually existing category and concept, and which seeks to counter racism by somehow recognising race. I’m very much aware that my position is outside of the mainstream, that it is utopian, and that, in reality, people behave as if races exist. Racism is, of course, real. so I am very much aware that belief in this fiction has real world effects.

As an anti-racist, I am exhausted by how racism persists globally and especially in South Africa following the demise of apartheid. I am exhausted, more importantly, by the persistence of race in our language and thinking, by how we continue to grant race such primary and powerful explanatory power. Let me be clear and repeat: I am aware of, and almost every day experience, racism and, by extension, the power of racial thinking. This persistence I believe is due to the fact that, among other things, we

keep on using the language of race. The post-apartheid state and its citizens have simply taken up the old apartheid and colonial states' categories of administration – it is absurd. In its endeavours – successful or not – to right the racist injustices of apartheid, the post-apartheid state has entrenched in us, its citizens, the very cyphers by which the colonial and apartheid bureaucracies sought to mark us. It is a sour joke to remark that, after all, apartheid was successful because it has its language of race embedded in our psyches. Race is now an instinctual lens through which we look at almost everything we do, we say, we think. We explain and analyse behaviour of individuals and groups by the easy, quick and lazy shorthand that race licenses.

For the sake of bureaucratic ease, the post-apartheid state has taken up wholesale an apartheid bureaucratic discourse and made it its own. It is no wonder that we cannot escape the language and the thinking, as well as the behaviour, of the old apartheid state. It is easy simply to invert past hierarchies, but it is hardly transformation if we still rely on the very psychic foundations – the language of race and of its engendered racism – on which apartheid depended.

We should note the irony that, even as we ascribe much power to language and discourse in how social relations are shaped, and encourage and campaign for people to be aware of the psychic violence that language can carry, we continue to use the discourse of race to understand, describe and analyse the world. I'm not surprised that racism persists and is becoming more prevalent. I'm not implying that racism will magically disappear should our public and private languages be sanitised of race, but any fight against racism must start with the fact of the general acceptance as if it is real, of the fiction of race. As long as we see and accept the world as made up of distinct groups we call "races" – encouraged and propagated by state bureaucracies, educational institutions, and mainstream media – I have no hope that any drive against racism will achieve critical mass.

COLOURED

It is with an even bigger sense of irony – in the context of our times, where we have become sensitive to the valences of power that language carries and deploys – that I note how people have grown comfortable, and even proud, of the label “coloured”.

I reject this label with utter contempt. I reject it because it is an apartheid category, and I reject it inspired by Steve Biko. I reject it also because in its very constitution – in a deep, linguistic sense – the word “coloured” robs me of my agency. People laugh when I say that I reject the term because “coloured” is a past participle. (Let’s forget for now the absurdity of people with probably the widest variety of genotypes wanting to be recognised as a race.)

“Coloured” is a past participle, which is the form of a verb normally used in past tenses. Past participles are also used for sentences in passive voice: “The canvas was coloured [in] by the painter.” If we use other apartheid labels in the same sentence, we get a better idea of my contempt for this label:

The canvas was whitened by the painter.

The canvas was blackened by the painter.

Or, if we use the other apartheid labels re-constructed as past participles, we should get an idea of the absurdity of the label “coloured”:

He is coloured [by the painter].

They are whitened [by the painter].

She is blackened [by the painter].

Here the subject – he, they, she – becomes an object *acted on*, rather than a subject with agency, mimicking, in other words, exactly what apartheid sought to do – rob people of their agency.

Or think how absurd it would sound if our continuing racial classifications followed the form of the label “coloured”: “There have been clashes recently over housing between *coloured* people and *blackened* people. Given the historical preferential labour policies of the apartheid past, some *blackened* people have likened *coloured* people to *whitened* people.”

In the cruder forms our racialised discourse assumes when we leave out “people”:
“There have been clashes recently over housing between *coloureds* and *blackeneds*.
Given the historical preferential labour policies of the apartheid past, some *blackeneds*
have likened *coloureds* to *whiteneds*.”

There is something contemptuous in the very linguistic foundation of the term
“coloured”. If language and discourse are the powerful forces we believe shape us and
our reality, the term “coloured” is one that robs its referent of agency by mere
ascription already. Why celebrate and be proud of a term that robs you of your
agency? Thus, I reject this term, because I am an actor, an agent, in this world, not an
object passively waiting to be acted on.

Race and racism in the post- millennial, post- apartheid South Africa - Unmaking the Past, Making the Future

Asanda Ngoasheng

I think that for the first time South Africa is sitting in a beautiful moment – a time to unpack, to deconstruct, to question, to decolonise everything we thought we knew and everything we thought we understood.

In 1994 we got to a moment in time where we had to decide how to become a nation. That is how the failed rainbow experiment of attempting to be a rainbow nation came to be. Although the project of a rainbow nation failed, at least then people were thinking about nation- building. We now see an attempt to move away from race and not in a healthy way of removing negative stereotypes and connotations attached to certain races. Attempts to remove race are about whitewashing history by replacing Heritage Day with Braai Day. Many argue for this because they claim our love for a braai is the only thing we have in common across the racial spectrum.

Why is it still important to talk about race in the post- millennial, post-apartheid South Africa? It is important because apartheid capitalised on differences in race, ethnicity, class and gender. When it was finally abolished in 1994, South Africa introduced a new ideology in the name of nation building: rainbowism. This emphasised common ground and sameness rather than a focus on difference, which was meant to fight racism and discrimination but did the opposite. The rainbow nation ideal robbed us of the opportunity to dig out and deal with the apartheid wound. It was instead focused on the parts of multi-culturalism that are comfortable for the white minority. It rejected any attempts to deal with structural inequality. Ant it invalidated and silenced people's lived experiences of oppression, inequality and pain in pursuit of the perfect picture of racial unity and harmony.

Where does identity fit into this conversation? Part of growing up and becoming adults is about forming identity. We do this by understanding who we are as individuals and as groups across the racial, class, gender and religious spectrum. This is part of what informed me when I started building a decolonised curriculum for

Political Reporting. I wanted it to be rooted in the specific politics of the Western Cape. The Western Cape has a complex set of politics that is different to the rest of the country. Its features are that it has a majority coloured or 'so called' coloured population. This province also has the largest numbers of white people in South Africa even though they are still a minority in the province. By contrast the other provinces in the rest of South Africa have a majority black (African) population and minority white population. The fact that this province has the largest white population in South Africa permeates every lived experience in Cape Town, with citizens of colour relegated to the outskirts of Cape Town and its surrounds. This province also has the Democratic Alliance in government instead of the majority South African party, the African National Congress which governs all other South African provinces. The Western Cape within which the City of Cape Town is located, is also the only province in South Africa which never had a homeland for blacks during apartheid and so the place of blacks (Africans) in this province is constantly under question. As a result, one of the other features of Cape Town, one we don't speak about often enough is (so-called) coloured vs black (African) conflict. This conflict is never acknowledged but plays itself out in the politics of the province daily and more so during elections. Each political party from the Democratic Alliance to the African National Congress uses this conflict in varying degrees in their electioneering.

I teach students about race, class and gender because they inform each other and work together to form different identities for all South Africans. As part of learning about this I used critical theories of race, class and gender to unpack all racial, gender and class identities in post- apartheid South Africa from black (African) to white identity and (so-called) coloured identity. The parts where we unpacked (so-called) coloured identity was seen as the most controversial because it had not really been done much before as part of thinking through a politics subject at my institution. Parents were up in arms and rejected the ideas I was trying to get students to critically analyse and it was a painful time. I had to ask myself if I really wanted to continue to teach this subject and why. I decided to push back because it was an important part of coming to understand South African and provincial (Western Cape) politics.

My own experiences of discrimination as a young black woman in the media made me push forward and continue to teach this way because identity was the first aspect of my identity that was under attack as a young journalist in South Africa's untransformed newsrooms. I knew that students would face an attack on their race, gender, class, religion and every other aspect of their identity. I felt it was critical for me to teach them and allow them to unpack their identity in the relative safety of the classroom so that they could have a clearer sense of self as this would help them survive the newsroom attacks on their person. It is only when you do not know who you are that others can use you against yourself. I wanted students to be rooted in self and also understand their own subjective views as journalists, and their origins.

In order to unpack identity, we developed digital stories and these sought to help students unpack their race, gender, class and religion, their worldviews or ideologies and who their points of reference and influences were. I found that in the first year of the digital storytelling project students started out denying and rejecting the term (so-called) coloured. In the second year they embraced and welcomed the term while critically engaging with its origins and meaning. In the third year, they began to talk about what it means to embody a brown skin as black and (so-called) coloured students. We then had digital stories that unpacked internalised racism and colourism within the black (African) and (so-called) coloured communities.

We have unpacked racial identity and its varied meanings enough now to be able to begin unpacking class identity. I am particularly interested in the class identity of black (Africans) who move to neighbourhoods that are of a different class to them. Black (African) middle class families move to (so-called) coloured, Indian and white working-class communities. That is because apartheid spatial planning still deems properties in black (African) townships as the least valuable, followed by (so-called) coloured, then Indian neighbourhoods. Upwardly mobile blacks (Africans) and (so-called) coloureds and Indians then move into neighbourhoods of a different class to them. As South Africa still prioritises race over other factors, any conflict between people in these communities is currently read as only racial but there is class conflict that has not yet been examined. To be black (read African) during apartheid was to be poor and so the view of the working-class communities that middle-class blacks in

particular join may still hold this mentality of blackness as poverty even though reality shows otherwise. In some cases these blacks may be unwelcome in these neighbourhoods because they are seen as only able to afford the neighborhoods because they are beneficiaries of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. In other cases, because they are read as poor, they are accused of bringing down the neighborhood – the opposite of gentrification. I am interested in how these neighbours of different races and classes are able to come together and forge a new neighbourhood identity that transcends race and class. Children who grow up in these racially and class differentiated neighbourhoods are often left to figure out this important question on their own because parents fail to unpack its complexity for them.

Parents fail to engage their children about race and racism in this country as with many countries in the world. Parents dont know how to teach their kids what it means to embody their skin. Parents of colour fail to teach their kids what it means to embody a brown skin. They fail to prepare their kids for the kinds of racist reactions people may have towards their children purely because of their brown skin. On the other hand, white parents fail to teach their kids what it means to embody a white skin, the effect of whiteness in the world and how their own children may be read by those who encounter them.

We need to figure out how we can talk to the past and figure out our identities without erasing the identities of others that we share this beautiful country with. We also need to allow this generation of South Africans to figure themselves and their identities out. As a result of our history, it will take time to move beyond racialized notions of identity. Young people are leading the way somehow. They are learning to navigate identity and develop new and emerging identities, these are of course tainted by the inhumane apartheid past but also positively influenced by their experiences of diverse classrooms and living in a multi-racial, multi-cultural post-apartheid South Africa.

Race: Unmaking the Past, Remaking the Future

Desiree Lewis

This theme is refreshing, gesturing towards the urgency of discovering worlds beyond those structured by race. In an age when “identity politics” is so prominent, we tend to lose sight of what it is we actually want. We fixate on where we are as a point of departure, as though worlds of freedom could somehow emerge spontaneously out of “rejecting” these. This is sometimes evident in currently popular discourses of “decolonisation”, where the focus comes to fall on challenging what exists. But what vision drives “decolonisation”, and how can we envisage worlds beyond “colonization. Is it in fact possible to entirely “decolonize” our presents? And what are the ways in which we can think about freedom without being trapped in essentialism and idealistic rhetoric?

For me, an especially valuable way of rethinking race in the present (and therefore also speculating about how to unmake it) is how racial discourses and racism have shifted in the new millennium. It is justifiable and all-important to insist that racism is persisting in the present, that earlier forms of colonial stereotyping endure. And that, for example, apartheid continues in the “postapartheid” or that colonialism haunts the “postcolonial. At the same time, we need to pay careful attention to how race has been reconfigured in the present. This has been done in ways that often encourage the collusion of the formerly colonized. New ways of coding race have become globalised. And it is significant that we reflect on South African discourses and politics around race in the context of these within a broader global imaginary. Too often it seems to me, South Africans assume that race-obsessed discourse is unique to South Africa.

New globalized ways of imagining race focus not so much on myths about inherent, biological or physiological differences and Darwinian hierarchies. Neo-racism focuses instead on ideas about “fundamental” cultural differences among groups. The argument from this perspective is that all groups must have the right to express and defend their distinct cultures, and that to ignore the deep cultural differences among

groups is disrespectful. This benign face of racism has been promoted under the guise of “multiculturalism”. In the global North, therefore, multiculturalism has become a prominent way of managing and understanding differences.

What Mahmood Mamdani calls “culture talk” is deployed to mystify fundamentally political problems and present them as though they were evidence of groups’ inherent cultural differences. It is therefore no coincidence that multiculturalism peaked in the wake of 9/11. First in the US, and later in the global North more generally, the argument came to be that certain groups had somehow remained “stuck” in “their cultures”: premodern, static, primordial and atavistic ways of thinking about the self, loyalty, and group identity. This way of thinking, the argument went – drove irrational and “barbaric” behaviour that was antithetical to “modernity”, “progress” and “democracy”. Many groups so-defined (most notably Muslims) were simply unable to embrace “modernity” as signaled by confidence in dominant Northern political, cultural and social practices and principles. Evading the issue of Northern worldviews including (in fact centralizing) neo-imperialist and classist strategies for managing immigrants, “outsiders” and “easterners”, this “culture talk” pathologised the political behavior of others as evidence of the failure to embrace modernity and democracy. Thus, Muslims (and not only Islamists) were inherently “extremist” and prone to violence and defending their “culture” because they were “stuck” in a premodern and irrational sense of loyalty; for the Germans, immigrant Turks were unable to assimilate because of their similar “stuckness in culture”. In the past few years the German mainstream media, including “reputable” papers like *Der Spiegel*, has fixated on stories of honour killings, traumatized Turkish women victims of patriarchal culture, etc.

It goes without saying that for many Northerners those in the North are somehow culture-less, free from the ties that – it is argued – lead to irrational behaviour, group loyalty driven by blind feeling, patriotism, unjust feudalistic relations and, of course, human rights violations (sexism, homophobia).

But the new neo-racism not only serves the agendas of those in historical positions of power. It has also been defending and actively celebrated by “minorities” and those who have historically been oppressed by neo-colonialism and white racism. For many, identity politics, in the form of affirming and performing an invented and distorted “culture”, has been seen as a way of speaking back to chauvinism and racism. Consequently, “culture” has often been constructed in ways that distort the inevitable complexity and fluidity of groups. In many cases, then, identity politics ends up shoring up some of the most reactionary and violent forms of “affirmation” (including homophobia, for example) to perform senses of self that are seen to be antithetical to neo-imperialism, which is coded as “western modernity”.

Having said this, I do not believe that it is possible to dispense with identity politics or to argue that it is always inevitably retrogressive. On the contrary, I believe – following Stuart Hall, for example – that identity politics is crucial in the struggles for recognition among groups who have been politically misrecognized or not recognized. Identity politics based on racialized, gendered or heteronormalised stereotyping and subordination can confront the psychic, emotional and political subordination of, for example, blacks, women and queers. It therefore cannot be dismissed as “false consciousness” or as being incidental to primary classed struggles against capitalism. In fact, economic struggles around resources often have a logic that is quite separate from politics based on racialized, gendered or heterosexualised supremacy (e.g. working-class whites challenging black working class people, South African poor people attacking “foreign blacks”, homophobia experienced among middle-class people).

Current debates around identity politics tend to be bifurcated. One is expected to be either “pro” or “anti” identity politics. The crucial question, however, should surely be: “What are particular identity politics for and what are they aimed at?” I believe that identity politics based on the strategic identification of, for example, “black”, “woman”, “black woman” or “gay” continues to be important in current transformative political struggles.

At the same time, I believe that the identities adopted should be tactical, provisional and strategic. To “embrace” being black, black woman, or gay then becomes a political strategy to address the political (and not fundamental or essential “fact”) of racial, gendered or sexualized difference. It is when these identities become ends in themselves that the problem arises. When identities are invoked as some kind of essence that needs to be recovered in struggles for freedom, we are no longer unmaking racism but doing it in a new form. And we are also abandoning the necessary political and conceptual work needed to “remake the future”.

Which leads me back to the way that identity politics can reinforce the new racism. I have been struck in recent years by the obsessive need to mobilise ideas about distinct “cultures that are seen to be possessed by socially subordinate groups. Expressing outrage and resentment about being marginalized, left out or excluded, these groups often summon up extremely specious notions of their unique and distinctive cultures. Among many coloured people then, coloured culture is seen to be under threat and in need of being defended.

Identity politics that mobilises culture in questions for freedom will always remain a dead end. This is because the “talking back” to race amounts to a reinforcement of its primary assumptions. These are no longer based on old racial ideas about biological difference, but on the sacredness of each groups’ having a unique culture. The result of this perception is to create clearly bounded and essentialised groups that are believed to be inherently antagonistic.

‘Race’ – a ghost story, racism – a tale of an epidemic

Angelo Fick

In South Africa the story of ‘race’ is a ghost story, a tale of belief (and acting on the belief) in the reality of spirit possession. The unreality of ‘race’ has been dealt with definitively in scientific scholarship over the last century. Yet, despite this phantasmatic existence, ‘race’ has had very real effects, and the most toxic of these

has been racism. While 'race' may be entirely imaginary, racism is all too real, in much the same way that the ghost may be fictional, but the responses consequent to belief in it are not.

'Race' was constructed in and through language in South Africa, both during the colonial period, and during that half-century of its extension and internal intensification in apartheid. The construction of racial categories in legislation by the state, a significant way in which 'race' was reified in this part of the world, occurred in and through language. The Population Registration Act (1950) definitions are most revealing in this regard: a "white person" means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person'. By such acts of psychiatric cabaret, language reduced to nonsense, 'race' was constructed in South Africa for a long time. The spectral traces of such legislation remain with us, despite their being repealed in late apartheid, partly because generations of South Africans were interpellated into these acts of linguistic inanity, but also partly because the post-apartheid political economy continues to deploy the terms of that legislation as if they were entirely logical and accurate descriptions, rather than scientifically invalidated prescriptions.

But 'race' was not only constructed by the imposition of legal definitions, however absurd those may read. The performance of 'race' re-inscribed its consequences every day. What sort of housing, schooling, jobs, and access to public services and amenities one got was determined by racial categorisation. The material benefits which accrued to people in colonial and apartheid South Africa were determined by this ghost, 'race'. Where one lived, whether one qualified for a state pension or subsidised public health care, whether one got a civil service job as a teacher with a housing subsidy or whether one became a domestic servant, whether one could buy and own property to pass on to one's children, whether one's children's schools had qualified teachers, textbooks and equipment, and sports and recreation facilities, were all largely determined by the category in which one was defined. That definition in turn determined socialisation patterns as the rigid lines of 'race' division were policed

everyday by ordinary people as well as by officials of the state. As Bessie Head once observed, in a world of so many signs and divisions, one ended up with no people at all. Of course there were exceptions, but these do not disprove the rule.

The ghost of 'race', so definitively and horrifically shown to be unreal in the wake of the European holocaust of the mid-twentieth century, thus had very real consequences then. But, having not been exorcised, that ghost continues to have those effects, around the world, as Richard Dyer (1997) argues. The fiction determined who lived in the cities, and who did not; it allowed some to move freely, and others to carry a '*dompas*' which would represent them for they could not represent themselves, pace Karl Marx. These habits of being and belief were heritable, and passed along the generations, for both Black and white subjects in South Africa. And if the people who teach you believe in ghosts, it is hard to insist that the ghost is not real. And when they leave you a house which they taught you to believe was haunted by ghosts who determine your habitation, very little will convince you that there is no ghost in the house, and that you can live by other patterns, non-ghostly ones. In post-millennial post-apartheid South Africa, 'race' remains the un-exorcised ghost, the unreal which continues to have real effects.

The biological understanding of 'race' has long been disproved, and only the most extreme racists will continue to insist on biological definitions of racial difference. But this does not mean that everyone else agrees that 'race' is not real. Despite half a century of rigorous scholarship in critical race theory, and the profound consequences this research has had in other fields ranging from the study of medicine and anatomy through the study of economics and philosophy, many South Africans continue to invest profoundly in views that reify 'race'. Senior politicians dismiss that body of work – and it is doubtful that they have immersed themselves in it, but then, many of those politicians have a record of anti-intellectual and anti-scientific views on other matters deemed far more narrowly scientific, such as epidemiology – with quite dire consequences for the body politic. And this brings me to my second part of the story of 'race', a tale that is not just about its spectral existence/non-existence, but the story of one of its consequences, racism. That is the story of an epidemic.

Michael Banton outlines the various idioms by which 'race' is conceived (and misconceived). While the use of 'race' is not always synonymous with racism, racism requires an understanding of 'race'. In our talk about racism we often reveal our understanding of the status of 'race', producing what David Theo Goldberg calls 'racial knowledge', and having that knowledge reproduced through our speech acts. In contemporary South Africa politicians sometimes speak against racism, but they do so as if they need no scientific information about how 'race' works. Some politicians even dismiss scientific scholarship on 'race' and racism. But if we think of racism as a diseased aspect of the body politic, and extend that analogy, we may well ask why politicians would imagine themselves best placed to deal with a problem they do not study, and more especially when they often dismiss the insights of those who do study the phenomenon.

Would we take the response and suggestions of a politician over that of epidemiologist in the case of an actual disease? In South Africa, in at least two political parties, we have seen this precise clash between politicians and HIV-AIDS scientists. Yet, we do not show similar outrage when politicians tackle infinitely more complex social phenomena while ignoring the scholarship on those phenomena, or worse, dismissing them. The consequence is that we are constantly asked to engage symptoms rather than prospecting for and dealing with causes. It is the analogical equivalent of thinking a good cough syrup cures the underlying chest disease, with no identification of the aetiology.

There is also a fixation with understanding contemporary racism as nothing but the continuation of past racism. This ignores the processes by which we make and remake 'race' in everyday life in the contemporary context, through current institutions and practices, in relation to current dynamics, rather than just by relying on those old and nonsensical definitions of the past. In a country in which the spatial dynamics of colonialism and apartheid have not been undone, some of the 'race' work (including the racism which follows from that work) does indeed rely on the past. However, much of it relies on the dynamics in the current political economy, and in

socio-political changes which are specific to the post-apartheid period. At a most literal level the technologies through which 'race' is (re)made and through which racism is effected have shifted beyond merely the interpersonal and administrative. With the widespread use of the internet, the articulation of local understandings of 'race' and practices of racism now articulate instantaneously and easily with articulations elsewhere. Think of the travels of the people of Afriforum, taking their local understanding of 'race' and difference on road shows to the United States and Australia, and not just articulating their local views there, but rearticulating their views in relation to the conceptions of 'race' and practices of racism in those distant spaces, and returning with them. One also increasingly and more readily hears the echoes among politicians in different parts of the world, who often profess different political positions, when they speak on 'race'. Think of political figures in Australia and the United States of America and South Africa who articulate the notion that 'it's okay to be white' (as Hanson phrases it), or that there is 'an attack on Western civilization' (or its values), and defences for the exigencies of colonialism or revisions of what the achievements of colonialism were are now articulating themselves beyond local contexts, and in relation to global political economies. South Africa is no longer what Jacques Derrida called *'le dernier mot du racisme'* (the last word in racism).

Robert Miles indicated a generation ago that it was time to move the debate beyond 'race relations', and for critical race scholars to engage anti-racist politics and activism. He suggested that instead of using 'race' to make sense of the world, we should examine how 'race' is used to make sense of the world. We cannot continue to rely on the dated conception of social distance founded in 1950s sociological studies of 'race' – those studies reified 'race'. It is also beyond the time to move away from non-racism (or non-racialism), which also dates from the 1950s, into actual anti-racist work. Anti-racist politics, as Ruth Frankenberg shows, is not about dismissing the very real effects of 'race', especially those which Richard Dyer outlines at the start of *White* (1997). Anti-racist work is not to engage in colour evasion (epitomised by approaches which invest in such as 'it doesn't matter what colour people are ..', because even though 'race' is not colour, it is often in that metaphor that commonsensical misconceptions of 'race' circulate) or 'power evasion'

(admitting that there is racialised difference, which reifies the unreal 'race', but suggesting that it ought not to matter when it comes to resource allocation). True anti-racist work acknowledges that while 'race' is not real (it's spectral, ghostly), its consequences (among them racism, but also privilege, as Peggy McIntosh showed) are real. In South Africa those consequences are not just fixed in the past. Where we live, where our children are schooled, what jobs we get, whether we are taken to be competent professionals or whether we are thought to be affirmative action appointees, whether in some towns we use the front entrance or not, whether we can hire the wedding venue or vacation chalet, whether we are assumed to be legitimate in our presence in a space or whether we are seen to be trespassers: 'race' plays a role still, and racism structures life chances for many in post-millennial post-apartheid South Africa, still. Think of the coffin case in Mpumlanga, or the killing of the young person in Coligny in the North West; these are merely spectacular versions of the quotidian expression of racism in the lives of millions of South Africans every day.

We urgently need to unmake the work done by the work of 'race'. Some of this means using language more carefully. The continued definition of human beings in line with legislative categories which date from the 1950s and were abolished a generation ago does not adequately address contemporary dynamics. Njabulo Ndebele remarks about this continued reliance on old terms for their security without addressing the new dynamics of a society which is not static. This is not to suggest that those old definitions and their repercussions – political, economic, etc. – have no effect in the contemporary moment; however, they are not the only or even the best terms for understanding the present. We cannot in 2018 continue to live in the intellectual, political, and even linguistic prison house constructed in 1950. We thus need to educate people into understanding themselves in ways which are not limited to old categories, and old names.

Some of this work would require South Africans to begin to think about what they have in common with one another despite those false categorical differences. Our use of 'race' categories from the 1950s consistently erases valuable work done from the 1970s onwards in political formations and organisations in South Africa. We also

dare not dismiss the valuable work on ‘race’ done in the social sciences and humanities over the last generation and earlier. Some of this includes the study of whiteness locally – one thinks of the work of Melissa Steyn and Christi van der Westhuizen, but before that, also the critical work by J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, among others – as well as the study of whiteness elsewhere and in a global context – one thinks of the work of Vron Ware, George Lipsitz, and David Roediger, among many others.

Also, we must face the reality that politicians and scientists work in different time-frames. Politicians have their eyes on the next election, which may be a year away, or five years away. Scientists have a much longer gaze, both into the past, and into the future. The dismissal of scientific work on ‘race’ by politicians must be read in this light. How politicians and scientists ‘perform’ and present their thought on ‘race’ is also different. The former want direct return on investment by persuading potential voters that they have the answer to their problems; the latter must produce work judged to be verifiable by scientific standards regulated by their peers, rather than by immediate support from individuals and groups of individuals who keep them in power.

Our past is important, and we dare not dismiss it or practice rituals of forgetting. However, the present and the future are as important, for if we dismiss the past, we risk repeating it, as Marx would have it, first as tragedy, then as farce. Zoë Wicomb, in ‘Another Story’ (1990), suggests that ‘lexical vigilance is a matter of mental hygiene, a regular rethinking of words in common use, like cleaning out rotten food from the back of the refrigerator when no one expects food to rot and poison the rest’. We have a lot of rotten food in our society. All of us need to stop handing round this same old rotten food as if it is nutritious. We need to think more carefully about the language we use every day, because habits of speech reflect habits of thought, and those in turn can engender habits of being. We need new names, to invoke NoViolet Bulawayo, but we also need new ways of being beyond those names if we are to unmake the past and the present for a better future. We must strive towards that world envisioned by Bessie Head, beyond ‘race’ and its excrescent twin, racism.

Bibliography

- Back, Les; & John Solomos (eds). 2000. *Theories of race and racism: a reader*. Routledge: New York & London.
- Bell, Terry; & Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza. 2003. *Unfinished business: South Africa, Apartheid and truth*. Verso: London & New York.
- Coetzee, J.M. 2001. *Stranger shores: essays, 1986-1999*. Secker & Warburg: London.
- . 1988. *White writing: on the culture of letters in South Africa*. Yale University Press: New Haven.
- Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. Routledge: London & New York.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White women, race matters: the social construction of whiteness*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1988. *The essential gesture: writers, politics, and places*. Taurus & David Philip: Johannesburg & Cape Town.
- Lipsitz, George. 1998. *The possessive investment in whiteness: how white people benefit from identity politics*. Templeton University Press: Philadelphia.
- McIntosh, Peggy. 1990. White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack. In *Independent School*, 49(2), 31-35.
- Miles, Robert. 1993. *Racism after 'race relations'*. Routledge: London.
- Roediger, David. 1994. *Towards the abolition of whiteness: essays on race*. Verso: London.
- Steyn, Melissa. 1998. *'Whiteness just isn't what it used to be': white identity in a changing South Africa*. SUNY Press: Albany.
- van der Westhuizen, Christi. 2007. *White power and the rise and fall of the National Party*. Zebra Press: Johannesburg.
- Ware, Vron. 1992. *Beyond the pale: white women, racism and history*. Verso: London.
- Wicomb, Zoë. 2008 [1990]. 'Another Story'. In *The one that got away*. The New Press: New York.