

## **Acknowledgement**

This special edition of the Bua Mfundi was supported by the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy. We thank our colleagues who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted this student journal.

We would also like to show our gratitude to the following people for sharing their pearls of wisdom with us during the inception stages of this special edition.

Thabang Queench, Pedro Mzileni, Sinazo Mtshengu and Chido Mutangadura

We are immensely grateful.

## CONTENTS

### FOREWORD

### ARTICLES

- Veli Mbele [2]  
*Racism and Power, Non-racialism and Colour-blindness: Illuminating the Debate*
- Pedro Mzileni [11]  
*The ceiling of racism: Black invisibility in society and higher education*
- Masixole Booi [24]  
*If it ain't broke, don't fix it': Challenges facing the institutional transformation of historically white South African universities*
- Siphokazi Tau [34]  
*Difference and Power: Why do African and white feminists fail to unite?*
- Sinethemba Msomi [40]  
*How international Investment can be used to support and advance contemporary African developmental state*
- Lutho Sokudela [47]  
*A Critique on the rejection of Homosexuality by the Xhosa Culture*

### BUA MFUNDI AUTHORS' BIOS

## **FOREWORD**

With its maiden issue of “Students Critical Engagement: the Quest for Youth Activism”, the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy launches a venture aimed at expanding the opportunities for communication among young people, both within and outside the University. As I was involved in the inception of this project, I do hope that this publication will become a vehicle for communicating the very best research, scholarship and activism of young people. Aside from its broad academic bent, this special edition has no substantive or methodological axes to grind. We hope to publish manuscripts reflecting a variety of theoretical perspectives, substantive interests, and methodological approaches.

If readers want some perspectives on the breadth and excellence of students’ research and perspectives, these articles will provide an excellent showcase. One thing these authors all share, is a sense of independence, curiosity, and drive. There are some other patterns in this issue that mirror the world around us. Many of these student authors have drawn their research inspiration from multiple disciplines.

While the papers chosen for publication vary in subject, method, writing style, and manuscript format, they are uniformly solid in content. As much as possible, we have endeavored to maintain discipline-specific styles to provide students with a publication experience comparable to one they might find in their individual disciplines.

As Series Editor, I must also thank the members of CANRAD who gave so generously of their time, when no one has any free time.

I hope you will enjoy reading this special edition.

**Sonwabo Stuurman**

## **Racism and Power, Non-racialism and Colour-blindness: Illuminating the Debate**

**By Veli Mbele**

### **Introduction**

The central thesis of this reflection is that, in contemporary terms, racism or white supremacy and anti-Blackness defines the essence of Black positionality; and that, in what is generally regarded as the mainstream discourse in contemporary South Africa, racism or white supremacy is often horribly and deliberately misdiagnosed. This misdiagnosis is principally facilitated by such ideological constructs as non-racialism and colour-blindness, which are a consequence of the continued hegemonic hold of white thought over Black thought.

This ideological hegemony assists white supremacy and anti-Blackness in their overall mission of keeping Black people ensnared in a state of perpetual captivity. The concepts of white supremacy and racism will be employed interchangeably. Racism or white supremacy, in the context of this reflection, refers to the exclusive lived-experience of people who are classified as Black, in an all-consuming anti-Black context. The word “system”, in the context of this reflection, refers to the system of racism or white supremacy as will be defined later. Consistent with its stated thesis, this reflection will, amongst others, reflect:

### **The consequences of thinking Black today**

Informed by lived-experience, as a rule, whatever idea, event or people I encounter, I examine or engage with on the basis of the question: *What does this mean for Black people?* This means that the value I attach to the ideas, events or people I encounter is automatically measured against the value that these hold for Black people. Using this as my navigational guide, I propose to examine the questions of nonracialism and colour-blindness on the basis of what I regard as one of the principal questions for a discourse such as the one we are having here today, which is: What are the implications of nonracialism and colour-blindness for Black people today? As I was grappling with the structure of the main topic, I noticed the conjunction “and” between the words

"nonracialism" and "colour-blindness", and found myself generating a set of related questions, some of which include the following:

Are nonracialism and colour-blindness two different constructs or practices or are they synonyms or complementary constructs or practices?

Is one a consequence of the other?

And, if they are indeed synonyms, does this imply that, the manner in which the topic under examination is framed, presents us with the possibility of engaging in a false discourse about two constructs, which are presented as distinct from each other, when in fact they are not?

Whatever our interpretation of the main topic or responses to the supplementary discourses that arise from it, in my view, the value of our discourse here today, will depend on, amongst others, whether we engage in discourse on the question of racism as part of a set of conscious and transformative actions, that are aimed at dismantling the system of racism or whether we do so purely out of a desire to manage the system of racism better.

While the aforementioned questions may seem unnecessary, if not irritating to some, for Black people, grappling with these questions is not just absolutely necessary, but also obligatory. And this is because of the implications that racism carries for Black people's understanding of what racism is and is not, and how they must interpret and respond to it.

In practice, this means that, even when Black people have to think about thinking about their position in the world, racism has a way in which it coerces Blacks to discipline their thoughts so that, when they verbalise them, they come out as well-manicured, polite and don't offend the inventors and primary beneficiaries of racism, and produce as a response, a type of liberal discourse, which some refer to as the politics of respectability.

In explaining this form of self-censure, Frank Wilderson, observes that: "...there is a way in which all Black speech is always coerced speech, in that you're always in what Saidiya

Hartman would call a context of slavery: anything that you say, you always have to think, 'what are the consequences of me speaking my mind going to be?'"

Steve Biko makes a related observation, when he says: "There is in South Africa an over-riding idea to move towards 'comfortable' politics, between leaders. And they hold discussions among themselves about this. Comfortable politics in the sense that we must move at a pace that doesn't rock the boat. In other words people are shaped by the system even in their consideration of approaches against the system."

He goes on to say: "Not shaped in the sense of working out meaningful strategies, but shaped in the sense of working out an approach that won't lead them into any confrontation with the system. So they tend to accommodate the system, to censor themselves, in a much stronger way than the system would probably censor them."

This phenomenon of Black speech as coerced speech was palpable in the tampered speech of President Obama who, out of fear of offending AmeriKa's white power structure, reduced the contemporary lynching of Black young people, by the police in AmeriKa, to poor gun control.

We saw a manifestation of the same when our own president, out of fear of offending the South Afrikan white power structure, minimised the racist and white supremacist nature of South Afrikan society by stating that South Africa is not a racist country and that there were only a few individuals who had racist attitudes.

What these two examples illustrate is that, even though both the AmeriKan and our own president occupy what is regarded as the most powerful political positions in their respective countries, like all Black people, both of them know intuitively that they have to think very hard about the consequences of their speech on matters that concern Black and white relations.

### **What racism is and is not**

Because of the existence of the phenomenon of coerced Black speech and the continued uncritical acceptance of the false white supremacist notion of white thought as the benchmark of all human thought, one of the most fatal errors that the Black world has

committed in its response to racism, was to rely on the very people who think of them as lesser beings to define what racism is and is not.

One of the most honest and useful definitions I have ever come across is the one that is provided by the Black existential psychiatrist, Frances Cress-Welsing. She defines racism as follows:

“Racism (white supremacy) is the local and global power system and dynamic, structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as white, whether consciously or subconsciously determined, which consists of patterns of perception, logic, symbol formation, thought, speech, action, and emotional response, as conducted simultaneously in all areas of people activity (economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war)...”

From Welsing's definition we can at least make the following deductions:

Racism or white supremacy is a historically-evolved- global system whose chief motive is subjugation;

It is a system of power whose primary concern is the dominance and survival of a particular group (white people);

It impacts all aspects of human existence;

It is the sole invention of white people;

It is not race-neutral but violently pro-white and anti-Black; and perhaps most importantly,

It is a system of violence that is maintained and reproduced through visible and invisible forms of violence.

Understood in this context, the essence of racism can therefore not be found in being called “kaffir”, “nigger” or “monkey” or having bananas thrown at you at a soccer match - while being taunted with monkey sounds. Neither can it be reduced to the experience of encountering a white old lady at a traffic light who, after noticing your dark figure, presumably moves towards her car then nervously locks her already locked doors. Racism is not even about the number of Black nominees at the Oscars.

The essence of racism is to be found in the violent and bloody history of Black people, which is defined by all manner of invaders coming into Afrika, violently capturing the bodies, land and natural wealth of *Afrikans* and, thereafter, forcefully transporting them in chains to various parts of the world and selling them and their children into a life of permanent slavery.

Racism is when, in addition to taking over your country, its natural and other forms of wealth, the invaders kill you if you resist and impose their entire alien way of life on you, your children and grandchildren, and enforce and reproduce their dominance through military and other forms of overt and covert violence.

Racism is when, as a consequence of the aforementioned, the invaders determine (without your permission), not just where you will be born, where you will live, whether or not you will receive an education or job, who amongst you will go to jail or will be co-opted by the system, at what age you are likely to die, but also what language you and your children will speak and which religion or god you will bow to.

Racism is when, after doing all of this to you, the invaders still have the nerve to blame you for your state of powerlessness and attribute this to your genetically-induced inferior intellect, laziness, inherent criminality and lack of an entrepreneurial spirit.

Having experienced all this anti-Black terror for centuries, racism is when you and your children continue to exist in a social-political-economic-cultural-intellectual context wherein you must constantly stress about whether articulating the pain of your condition might not get you in trouble or offend others, or constantly having to account for or explain your every thought and action, to the very people who believe your intellect is below that of a monkey. In essence, racism is an act of war by non-Black groups, against Black people.

### **The resilience of racism**

As stated, like all systems of oppression, racism is essentially a system of violence that is maintained and reproduced through violence. Some of the forms of violence through which racism is maintained and reproduced are subtle and difficult to detect because they are often embedded in what is presented as anti-racist discourse or practice.



One of these mutated forms of racism is non-racial racism or colour-blindness. This is a response to racism which in theory purports to oppose racism, but in practice merely seeks to persuade Blacks to fight for the reform of, recognition by, or incorporation into the system of racism. By doing this, the approach that is based on nonracialism or colour-blindness helps sustain the system of racism and enables it to mutate, gain legitimacy and assume more sophisticated forms, which are almost impossible to detect.

In the so-called post-independence era on the Afrikan continent, these mutated and subtle forms of racism have helped facilitate the installation of puppet-type governments, whose appearance is Black, but is actually controlled by powerful and ruthless - white - domestic and foreign political and economic oligarchies. In the arts, entertainment or sports, racism ensures that certain Black artists, entertainers or sportspersons are deliberately promoted above others and profiled as high achievers.

In academia or business, racism carefully selects certain Blacks (often highly certificated) and allocates them prominent positions in previously exclusive white spaces such as universities, research institutions, foundations and corporate institutions. As part of its tactic of deception, these Blacks are usually showered with overwhelming amounts of media attention, wherein they are promoted as so-called symbols of Black excellence.

All of this is calculated to not just obscure the violent and anti-Black nature of the system, but also to create the illusion in the minds of poor Blacks (especially Black young people) that the system is changing for the better and if they only have ambition and work hard, they too might be counted amongst the select group of Blacks, who are periodically celebrated as the first to achieve this and that. In essence, it is this category of Blacks, some of them well-meaning individuals, who are made visible by the system as part of its strategy to obscure the invisibility of Blacks as a group.

### **The implications of nonracialism and colour-blindness for Black people today**

While the emancipatory conceptions of racism and white supremacy, which are firmly predicated on Black existential reality, give us a useful interpretive lens through which to understand Black positionality, the interpretive lens of anti-Blackness arms us with the

weapon of intellectual precision in our analysis and understanding of Black positionality as it manifests today.

According to Michael Jeffries: "...anti-blackness more accurately captures the dehumanization and constant physical danger that black people face. The 'anti' in 'anti-blackness' is denial of black people's right to life."

Lewis Gordon observes that: "In anti-black societies, to be black is to be without a face. This is because only human beings (and presumed equals of human beings) have faces, and blacks, in such societies, are not fully human beings..."

Therefore the interpretative lens of anti-Blackness helps us to understand not just the violence that the individual Black body encounters in its daily interaction with the individual white body, but also why the rare deaths of white bodies in France or that of a Syrian toddler have the capacity to instantly thrust the world (including the leaders of the Black world) into a global frenzy of rage; and why the public and systematic lynching of over 500 000 Black bodies in West Papua is incapable of eliciting the same degree of global outrage and sympathy.

It helps us to understand the mind-numbing psychic orientation that normalises the regular and mass death of Black bodies in such places as Sudan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, Libya, Kenya, Egypt's Sinai desert, the Arab world and the periodic drowning of Blacks in the Mediterranean.

Anti-Blackness helps us to understand why the brutal deaths of Amodou Diallo, Tamir Rice, Eric Gardner, Mike Brown, Sandra Bland of AmeriKa, Alem Dechasa of Ethiopia, Andries Tatane, Nqobile Nzuza, Mike Tshele, Lerato Seema, Osiah Rahube, Jan Rivombo, Mgcineni Noki and more recently, Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe of South Afrika, will not spark a rebellion within the Black world.

At a theoretical level, anti-Blackness empowers the discourse on decolonisation and radical anti-racist practice today, to realise that the anti-Black nature of the world doesn't merely presume *other* Blacks, proletarianise them or confer upon them the status of the

subaltern- it brutally and physically obliterates the very idea that Black people exist as a category of humans.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the biggest tragedy is not so much what racism and anti-Blackness have done to the countries or wealth of Black people, but rather what it has done to the psychic integrity of Black people. Racism has succeeded not just in making anti-Black violence a part of normal human existence, but it has also succeeded in making Black people numb to their own pain and suffering, and in many instances, made it normal for Black people to become participants in their own oppression.

It is only when Black people have a proper understanding of the place of Blackness in the collective unconsciousness of the world that they will begin to see that soporific constructs such as nonracialism, colour-blindness, reverse racism, hate speech, social cohesion, multi-culturism, rainbow nation, were not designed to end Black suffering but to obscure it and at best, these constructs serve as instruments of Black anger-management. Essentially, these are tools that the system uses to police Black thought and resistance.

Once Black people begin to see this, they might also begin to see racism for what it really is: an act of war against them. And as our consciousness evolves into a higher realm, we might also be able to collectively understand what Audre Lorde meant when she said: "... the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Ahmed, S. (2007), *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*. Accessed 11/05/2016.
2. Brewer, R. (2010), *Black Radical Theory and Practice: Gender, Race, and Class*. Accessed on 11/05/2016.
3. Biko, S. (2004). *I Write What I Like*, (Picador Africa—Johannesburg).

4. Biko, S. (1972). Interview with Gail M.Gerhart, Durban.
5. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. Accessed 11/05/2016.
6. Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Bantam Classic).
7. Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin White Masks*, (Editions de Seuil.France).
8. Gordon. L.R. (2015). *What Fanon Said*, (New York, Fordham.).
9. Jeffries, M. P. (2014), *Ferguson Must Force Us To Face Anti-Blackness*. Accessed 11/05/2016.
10. Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination, Act 4 of 2000. Accessed 11/05/2016.
11. Wa Thiong'o N. (2012), *The Blackness of Black: Africa in The World Today*, a lecture delivered at University of Free State on the occasion of 10th Africa Day Lecture. Accessed 11/05/2016.
12. Welsing, F.C. (1990). *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors*. (Third World Press.)
13. Welsing, F.C. (1970). *The Cress Theory of Color Confrontation: White Supremacy: Psychogenetic Theory and World Outlook*, (Washington D.C.)
14. Wilderson, F.B, (2008), *Biko and the Problematic of Presence*. Accessed 11/05/2016.
15. Wilderson. F.B. (2014). *We're Trying To Destroy The World: Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson*. An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III. Accessed 11/05/2016. Retrieved from <http://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/>

## **The ceiling of racism: Black invisibility in society and higher education**

**By Pedro Mzileni**

### **Introduction**

Over the past couple of centuries, which are commonly referred to as an era of civilization, there has been a single story of the European colonization of Latin America, Asia and Africa, driven mainly by greed, which developed and nourished capitalism and industrialization. This era has also seen the development of socio-cultural extinction and the birth of “sameness”. In fact, it is during this era where the division, exploitation and humiliation of people along racial and gender patterns intensified.

The violent spread and development of European colonies over the world, coupled with the socio-cultural extinction and the birth of “sameness”, ushered in the hegemony of a Eurocentric orientation on every social structure of life; religion, family structure, media, community values, the judiciary and, the most important of all, knowledge production. I single out knowledge production not only because I am a student in a university, but also because I am consciously aware that how a people shape their behaviour, how they comprehend their history, how they understand their societies, how they appreciate their culture and how they get to understand themselves as human beings, all boils down to the informal and formal exchange of knowledge and ideas.

The Eurocentric hegemony has shaped knowledge along racial and gender patterns significantly and South Africa is no different. Apartheid colonialism has left us with a stubborn legacy of violent social structures that are heavily entrenched in the soul of South Africa, in the form of white supremacy, white liberalism, white racism, and Black invisibility (Mbele: 2016). In the South African context, racialized knowledge only recognizes the ideas, interests, feelings, concerns, practices, social institutions and infrastructure of white people. All other people are invisible and do not exist.

Ahmed (2007), writing on the Phenomenology of Whiteness, states that “whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific

directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space and what they ‘can do’. If to be human is to be white, then to be not white is to inhabit the negative: it is to be not [human]”. The weight of white violence and white supremacy managed to gain hegemony, and ultimately gained legitimacy through its infiltration of the South African education system and public discourse.

This paper will, firstly, attempt to comprehensively unpack the practical undertaking of Black humiliation, Black dispossession, and Black social control by white power. Secondly, the paper will state how such an undertaking ultimately led to the re-engineering of South Africa into a social society that is imbedded in whiteness, and produced, as a result, higher education that serves the intellectual colony of white feelings.

### **1. Black humiliation, Black dispossession, and Black social control by white power**

There was a violent conquest and dispossession of land and its wealth from the Native Black population (Jordan: 1997). This was carried out, mainly, by the violent force of a gun (Sebidi: 1986). Such violent dispossession was legally enveloped by the 1913 Natives Land Act (Plaatje, 1916). White conquerors racially claimed ownership of the land and its wealth. A country is a piece of land. Therefore, when one has ownership of the land, they have ownership of the country. This takeover of the land gave white settlers the power to set the genealogy of the South African society. Firstly, they enforced the acceptance and normalization of the racial, class and gender hierarchy on the conquered Natives’ Black population (Oyewumi: 1997). Through this violence, the white male was categorically placed above everybody else who was poor, landless, Black, and female (Ntsebeza: 2013).

Secondly, with the Black colonised people without ownership of land to sustain themselves, they were desperate to make a living through all means necessary (Barchiesi: 2011). Jordan (1997) states that “it resulted in a system of labour coercion in

which a multiplicity of extra-economic devices had been deployed with the specific purpose of compelling the indigenous people to make themselves readily available as a source of cheap labour power". Hendricks (2013) terms this phenomenon as being the proletarianization of the Native Black population: "the material basis for the formation of a proletarian class was the mass of the population being effectively separated from an independent means of existence and thrust into wage labour". Black people's existence as citizens in their own land of South Africa was tied to their vulnerability from land dispossession and their physical ability to sell their labour power to the white boss. In other words, the land dispossession of Black people was, in effect, a dispossession of their souls.

The peak of the migrant labour system came with the establishment of mining in the Griqua region and Witwatersrand. "Within ten years from the discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West, the diamond fields had a population, including both European and non-Europeans, of some thirty thousand" (Van der Horst, 1942). Mazibuko (2000) states that the region became a centre of attraction for thousands of people worldwide. People from all over the world were coming into the centre in search of a sustainable living. To run itself sustainably, the trading system developed new machinery to meet new global demands. This necessitated a new level of technical education, human capital, and an improved transport system. Gradually, this led to the establishment of new industrial towns and apartheid cities such as Johannesburg.

In search of work, the Native Black population migrated in large numbers to the apartheid cities which were occupied by white Europeans, such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, to name a few (Smith, 2005). The 1950 Group Areas Act ensured social control and exclusive settlement of the apartheid cities by racially demarcating them to white settlers only. "This necessitated a gigantic programme of spatial engineering in terms of which Blacks were allocated housing on the fringes of urban areas or in rural bantustans" (Pirie, 2005). Black people were allowed into the city only when their labour was needed. For most of the day, they were boxed into the

townships that are at the periphery of the apartheid city. Freund (2007) sees this phenomenology of urbanization as pseudo-suburbanization.

Importantly, universities in South Africa are built inside these apartheid cities. Underdeveloped and dysfunctional semi-colleges called Black universities are far away from the city centre in the former Bantustans (Bunting: 2004). Their purpose was and remains an agenda to choke young Black dreams and install invisible violence to its students. In other words, the biology of South Africa is a body that has been grown through the sustained efforts of white racism and Black anguish. The entire deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of South Africa is one of mansions for white people and matchbox houses for Black people. Citizen-ship for white people and subject-ship for Black people (Mamdani: 1996). Careers for white people and slave jobs for Black people. Investment accounts for white people and social grants for Black people. Racism is South Africa.

Racism is being the person who works the longest hours in the workplace to earn poverty wages. Racism is catching three taxis within a dysfunctional public transport system every morning to get to work. Racism is resorting to a protest just to get money to further your studies to better your life. Racism is when white people tell you that your poverty is as a result of laziness and the lack of an entrepreneurial spirit after 400 apartheid colonial years of enforced illiteracy, land dispossession and imposed labour in your own land. Racism is when white people, a foreign minority group of settlers, are able to freely open an H&M store in the Black numerically-dominated country of South Africa, make billions in profits, and hire that Black majority in its own land of birth as disposable cheap labour (Mzileni: 2018).

Racism is when a history imposed by white people on South African land determines the location where the Black majority of that land will stay and the type of jobs that Black majority will have. Racism is when a history imposed by white people on South African land determines what the children of the Black majority will eat, wear and which schools they will attend. Racism is when a history imposed by white people on South African land



determines where the Black majority will be buried, their date of death, the nature of diseases that will kill them and the kind of beds they will die on. Racism is the 0% unemployment rate of the minority white settler population and the 65% unemployment rate of Native Black population in the land of the indigenous Native Black population.

Racism is the real state of the nation. Racism is the real South Africa. A white nation where Black people are its visitors. The biggest danger, then, in this whole violent phenomenon would be for Black people to lose their sense of urgency, activism integrity and deep sense of realization that as each day passes, they are sinking deeper into this racial emergency. Racism has done damage in humiliating Black people but it just cannot be allowed to successfully make Black people consistently receptive to their own suffering and pain. It also cannot be acceptable for Black people to actively participate in the oppression and humiliation of other Black people. Mbele (2016) says “once Black people begin to see this, they might also begin to see racism for what it really is: an act of war against them” and begin the honest fight which begins with the return of the land to the ownership of the Native Black population as the first step to reverse centuries of Black humiliation, Black dispossession, and Black social control by white power.

## **2. Higher education that serves the intellectual colony of white feelings**

The weight of white violence and white supremacy managed to gain hegemony, and ultimately gained legitimacy through its infiltration of the South African education system and public literature. The teaching and learning of Eurocentric ideas and the consistent distribution of their knowledge outcomes to the imagination of the public through the media has sustained the violent social structure of white liberalism. The hegemonic violence of white liberalism is best demonstrated by the white race arrogantly thinking that the capacity of Black people to define and discern their problems for themselves is disabled. Hence, Hellen Zille, a white person, has the audacity to publicly describe to Black people how apartheid colonialism was of good benefit to Black people because the

racist curriculum has allowed such ideas to envelope the normal discourse in society without contestation and condemnation.

Another feature of white liberalism in the public discourse is the normalization of the usage of insignificant words and phrases by Black leaders and even some Black academics, young and old, to diagnose the problems of Black people. One often hears words from the so-called liberation movement such as “integration”, “rainbow nation”, “diversity”, “unity”, “multi-racialism”, “previously disadvantaged people”, “Mandela” and the hilarious one “colourblindness” – words, analysis and concepts that are historically, financially, and geographically associated with European white liberal fundamentalism. These are the same ideals that define the curriculum content and institutional culture of South African universities. This false knowledge is made to soften white feelings and to demobilize Black people. Mbele (2016) refers to it as an invisible weapon of “Black anger management”. It comes at the expense of terminating the value and presence of Black students, and the teachings of the communities they come from.

In addition, the agenda behind these words is to make Black people forget who is responsible for their poverty and how those responsible subjugated them. Black people are poor in South Africa because they are Black. The colour of their skin was the target of their suffering and inferiority. Therefore, South Africa does not have previously disadvantaged people, it has Black people. At the heart of Black people’s poverty is the dispossession of their land, their humanity, their culture and resources by a violent white syndicate driven by violence and greed. The effects of these evil deeds are still visible and felt by today’s generation and will be lived by the next generation. The sequencing of the curriculum content in universities for economics, social science, law, and natural science should start with the intellectual acknowledgement of this historical fact and build from that point onwards towards a decolonized and a truly Africanized South African nation (Lushaba: 2016).

However, this is currently not the case. From economics to architecture, from psychology to pharmacy – it is the same good old wine – Europeans and Americans know everything,

and African people know nothing. The poverty line in all textbooks is measured using a US dollar. The oceans that surround the African continent are named in English. Textbooks refer to all 194 countries as simply developed and developing countries instead of colonial powers and colonized territories. The curriculum does not mention that the 65% unemployment rate is a synonym for Black poverty in South Africa. They refer to the entrepreneurship that takes place in Black communities as an informal economy. Pages and pages of textbooks are littered with constant condescending viewpoints stating that a subject is poor because it is Black and lazy; a citizen is rich because it is white and works hard. A protest is not a constitutional tool to usher in change but an inconvenience that will weaken the rand.

All these are glimpses of the humiliating experience of Black students in the curriculum, all in the name of getting a qualification to certify white supremacy and Black invisibility. Challenging these practices inside the classroom has academic consequences for Black students. As you would be all aware, for Black students, academic consequences are also socio-economic consequences. In practice, this would entail, as Mbele (2016) puts it, a situation whereby as a Black student *“even when you have to think about [challenging the lecturer], you first have to think about your position in the world; racism has a way in which it coerces Blacks to discipline their thoughts so that, when they [finally] verbalise them, they come out as well-manicured, polite and don't offend the inventors and primary beneficiaries of racism [in the room], and produce, as a response, a type of liberal discourse, which some refer to as the politics of respectability”*.

I have experienced this issue personally. Recently, I was in a conference with one of my colleagues (she's Black) at the University of Pretoria and the discussion in this other lecture room was about inequality in South Africa. Of the 45 people in that lecture room, including the chair of the discussion, we were the only two who were not white and we were seated at the back. These white students there appeared as some kind of intellectual elite: highly educated, bright, and, for the most part, very liberal people. As the discussion unfolded, it became increasingly clear that, if the two of us didn't mention the race question in this discussion about inequality, no one would. These white students were not

conscious enough to the fact that race – their race – was an integral aspect of every conversation they were having.

When my colleague raised the issue in the dialogue, these white students felt accused of being “racist”. In this instance, “silencing” [of my colleague] took place when the planners were not clear that race was present at the conference even if no people of color attended; the white participants didn’t include the reality of others in their plan; and, when the issue was raised by my colleague, she was made to feel that she was the one who was “causing trouble.” “Silencing” my colleague took place again when one of the white students stood up and defended his case on the issue we raised. He was basically saying that “there’s no need to use race to solve inequality”. My colleague did not reply to him, not because she agreed with the nonsense he was saying, but rather she kept quiet to avoid appearing as a person who’s making the discussion and the entire conference “difficult”. In other words, the debate was subconsciously silenced and they thought she agreed with their logic. That’s the invisible structural social power of white privilege – silencing debates quietly.

The administrative apparatus of the university also carries the empty language of racial knowledge. Its duty is to maintain the institutional culture of the university and run its system in a predictable, rigid, certain, regular and consistent manner. Anyone who tempers with this established predictable, rigid, certain, regular and consistent manner is alienated and illegitimized. One cannot forget the embarrassing statement released at the beginning of the 2016 second semester at Nelson Mandela University. Those at the top distanced themselves and pointed at middle management based in the Marketing department. Second semester was halted by a students’ and workers’ #FeesMustFall protest and the university released a statement stating: “staff and students are advised not to come to North & South campuses today due to protests” (NMMU News: 2016). The Nelson Mandela University statement was clearly attempting to criminalize the “others” who are “not” staff and students who are protesting. It was doing this by asking staff and students not to come to campus because of a protest as if those conducting the protest were not students and staff.

In sociology, we emphasize that a social movement, no matter how big or small it is, no matter if it is successful or not, has a message that it is communicating which people must pay attention to. The people participating in the protest are not stupid or causing inconvenience as some commentators would like to make us believe. Instead, people participating in a protest are intellectuals of note. A protest is a form of scholarship. People in a protest are thinking and in pain. They are a group that is coming up with theory about their condition (Choudry and Kapoor: 2010). If one takes politics, history and context into consideration, it was suffering and a social movement that produced the giants of liberation literature like Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Chris Hani and Robert Sobukwe, to name a few. Today, that theory that oppressors tried to crush is being cited to produce PhD scholars and is a source of inspiration and political education to the youth. That can never ever be illegitimate.

Traditionally, protests in South Africa originated in the townships and were a racialized class dispute between a black working class and apartheid capitalism. Those protests had no formal rules and arrangements. It was purely masses of Black people organizing themselves however they wanted and expressing the true extent of their tactics and emotions. Suddenly, now that these protests have moved from townships to the upper-class apartheid cities where universities are stationed, where the rich white people reside, suddenly there is caution, coordination, application and control of how the Black working class must protest in an “acceptable manner”. Any Black protest that does not appreciate the standard set by the apartheid city is deemed “illegitimate” by the decorum (Fryer: 2016).

The concept of illegitimacy requires further interrogation in the curriculum content in higher education. To examine illegitimacy further, a case in point recently was the protest waged by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) when it “vandalized” an H&M store. I argue that what was done by the EFF at H&M stores was incredibly necessary on behalf of the Black majority who are daily victims of racism. The actions of the EFF were much bigger than itself as a party. Their action carried and encapsulated the boiling pain and

frustration of the entire Black race in the land. For too long, South African business and the world market has thrived on white feelings, white beauty, white supremacy and Black humiliation. The H&M store could not hide the contours of its white racism by stating that “it did not notice the sensitivity of its advert to Black people”. This statement, precisely, reaffirmed that Black people are invisible in its racist business practice.

Furthermore, in the entire value chain of the sociological imagination and upbringing of white people, Black people are not able beings who can exist, think, speak and walk. If they are to do those things, they need white supervision. It does not end there. What has emerged since the incident is a thoughtless voice that delegitimises the action taken by the EFF. The ideological orientation of the apologists of the white liberal discourse believe that the action taken by the EFF was vandalising the H&M stores. To them, the EFF was violent, it was damaging property and it should have rather staged a peaceful protest or written a petition to H&M. The racists in the land share similar sentiments.

What is strange about this discourse is that it seems that the victims of racism, victims of cruelty, the oppressed Black people, are being instructed by their white oppressors on how they should react to their pain. Not only do white supremacists have an entitlement to physically and psychologically beat up a Black person, but they also elevate their disdain [for Blacks] by having the audacity to prescribe medication for the pain they have imposed. It is what Fryer (2016) accurately describe as the system telling an individual that “this is how you are supposed to feel the pain, you are not supposed to feel the pain this way; this is how you are supposed to define the pain and you must prove beyond reasonable doubt to me that you are indeed feeling the pain”.

The new Africanized curriculum in higher education for social sciences must begin to make alternative interpretations of society, to see the oppressed and humiliated Black people responding to racism as being normal human beings who are addressing injustice as they choose and are legitimate to do so. Oppressed Black people responding to racism are not illegitimate. It is racism that is illegitimate. Robbed citizens responding to a lack of service delivery by protesting cannot be illegitimate. It is a government that fails to

deliver to its citizens that is illegitimate. The powerful who oppress the weak cannot prescribe illegitimacy. It is the oppressed who feel the weight of violence on their shoulders and it is them who must decide their own best possible method to crush their dehumanisation (Freire: 2000).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a renewed curriculum in higher education will articulate racism for what it truly is. Violence is dehumanising. Racism is violence. Racism is dehumanising. Nobody responds to a tragedy that threatens their life respectably. Therefore, violence aimed at dehumanising Black people in their own land must be addressed with decisive action that will uproot the racist head “off its stiffened neck” (Mogoeng: 2016). Anything that smells of apartheid and white supremacy in South Africa must be met head-on.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Ahmed, S. 2007. A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*. 8(2). 149-168.

Barchiesi, F. 2011. *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Bunting, I., 2004, ‘The higher education landscape under apartheid’, in N. Cloete, P. Maassen, R. Fehnel, T. Moja, H. Perold. & T. Gibbon (eds.), *Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities in South Africa*, 35–52, Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht.

Choudry, A., & Kapoor, D. 2010. *Learning from the ground up: Global perspectives on social movements and knowledge production*. Palgrave MacMillan: New York.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Freund, B. 2007. *The African City: A History*. Cambridge University Press: New York.

Fryer, D. (2016). *The political and social economy of transformation: higher education possibilities in comparative perspective*. Conference Paper. South African Sociological Association congress 2016: Grahamstown.

Hendricks, F. 2013. Rhetoric and reality in restitution and redistribution: ongoing land and agrarian questions in South Africa, in Hendricks, F., Ntsebeza, L & Helliker, K. (eds), *The promise of the land: undoing a century of dispossession in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

Jordan, P, Z. 1997. *The National Question in Post 1994 South Africa*. A discussion paper in preparation for the ANC's 50<sup>th</sup> National Conference. Cape Town. [Online]. Available: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/anc/1997/national-question.htm> [07 March 2018].

Lushaba, L. 2016. *Open letter to Anthony Butler*. [Online]. Available: <https://blackopinion.co.za/2016/09/01/whose-skin-colour-evidence-moral-depravity-cultural-decrepity-sexual-permissiveness-whose-brown-bodies-modern-rational-knowledge-inscri/> [07 March 2018].

Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Mazibuko, R. P. 2000. *The effects of migrant labour on the family system*. Masters dissertation: University of South Africa.

Mbele, V. (2016). *Racism and power, non-racialism and colour-blindness: illuminating the debate*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pambazuka.org/human-security/racism-and-power-non-racialism-and-colourblindness-illuminating-debate> [07 March 2018].



Mogoeng, M. 2016. *Nkandla Judgement: Economic Freedom Fighters v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others; Democratic Alliance v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others*. Constitutional Court of South Africa: ZACC 11.

Mzileni, P. 2018. *Actions of racism victims cannot be considered illegitimate*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.heraldlive.co.za/opinion/2018/01/18/pedro-mzileni-actions-racism-victims-cannot-considered-illegitimate/> [07 March 2018].

NMMU News. (2016). *Student protests update*. [Online]. Available: <http://news.nmmu.ac.za/News/Student-protest-update> [07 March 2018].

Ntsebeza, L. 2013. The more things change, the more they remain the same: rural land tenure and democracy in the former Bantustans, in Hendricks, F., Ntsebeza, L & Helliker, K. (eds), *The promise of the land: undoing a century of dispossession in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

Pirie, G, H. 2005. Travelling under apartheid. in Smith, D.M. (ed), *The apartheid city and beyond: Urbanization and social change in South Africa*. London: Witwatersrand University Press.

Plaatje, S. T. 1969 [1916]. *Native Life in South Africa, before and since the European war and the Boer rebellion*. New York. Negro Universities Press.

Sebedi, L. 1986. The dynamics of the Black struggle and its Implications for Black Theology, in Mosala, I.J & Tlhagale, B. (eds), *The unquestionable right to be free: Essays in Black Theology*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1-36.

Smith, D, M. 2005. *Introduction*. in Smith, D.M. (ed), *The apartheid city and beyond: Urbanization and social change in South Africa*. London: Witwatersrand University Press.

Van de Horst, S. 1942. *Native labour in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd.

## **‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’: Challenges facing the institutional transformation of historically white South African universities**

**By Masixole Boo**

### **Introduction**

Although there has been institutional reform in South African higher education institutions and changes in employment policies, the post-apartheid higher education transformation project is faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining black<sup>1</sup> academics and other senior staff. During 2003 to 2009, the representation of black Africans in the academic staff of all 25 South African public universities increased from 21.3% to 28%; similarly for coloureds and Indians, there has been a slight increase from 4.5% to 5.2% and 7.9% to 8.4%, respectively, whereas, the percentage of white academic staff has declined from 62% to 58% (HESA 2011 3; Mngomezulu & Ndlovu 2013 112).

In accordance with the Staffing South Africa’s Universities Framework (SSAUF), that is implemented by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), a Historically White University (HWU<sup>2</sup>) on which this investigation is based, has endeavored to train and retain the next generation of academics through two accelerated development programmes (ADPs) which offer a three-year mentoring system, with the aim of assisting black and female South Africans to develop the research skills and teaching qualifications necessary for them to establish themselves as scholars, researchers and intellectuals. In total, ADP participants from 2001 to 2014 have occupied 44 academic posts at the study site. Currently, 18 (or 41%) are permanent staff members, while 15 (or 34%) are currently on the ADPs, lined up for permanent posts. The remaining ADP recipients have either held a three-year contract or subsequently left the university after participating in the programme.

But as Soudien (2010: 4-5) has noted, transformation of South Africa’s higher education institutions does not have to do only with becoming more representative of the country’s population demographics:

*A particular problem is the degree to which representivity masks the continued presence of racism or sexism (or indeed any other form of discrimination) and the emergence of different manifestations of exclusion that representivity by itself is unable to resolve. It is also necessary to remain aware of how stigmatisation, especially racial stigmatisation, can persist within a representative entity.*

Transformation is thus also an ideological process, which needs to interrogate the nature of privilege, the distribution of power in society and the processes through which social exclusion is maintained (Soudien 2010: 4). The long-term success and wider impact of accelerated development programmes in the academy is dependent on the transformation of institutional cultures as the academics recruited through these programmes are more likely to leave the university – in what has been termed the ‘revolving door’ syndrome – if they experience the institutional culture as discomforting and alienating. Furthermore, although ADPs may improve the demographic composition of active agents in the university, the processes through which decisions are made are shaped by historical and cultural realities deeply instilled within the institution. Existing literature focuses on the need to change the racial composition of academic staff, but the extent to which these programmes address the institutional cultures that make it difficult to retain black staff once recruited, has not been widely addressed.

This paper tries to look beyond demographic change alone to whether ADPs have the potential to contribute to changing dominant institutional cultures, particularly at HWUs. Our contention is that the reproduction of naturalised norms and values that form part of the existing culture of an institution are difficult to shift, even when a university succeeds in changing its demographic makeup. According to extant literature, a major obstacle preventing black and female academics from thriving and reaching their full potential in South African higher education are alienating and exclusive institutional cultures, especially at HWUs (see, for example, Badat 2010; HESA 2011; Canham 2013).

Given this, in this paper we are interested in what the experiences of a particular cohort of ADP academics can tell us about what enables or constrains the ability of those recruited through such programmes to make an impact on the culture, values and practices of an institution.

### **The reproduction of white-middle-class habitus through academic inbreeding**

In the extract below, Kathrin points to an alienating and exclusive middle-class culture where lecturers and students from working class backgrounds, feel a sense of not belonging to the university culture:

**Kathrin:** *I would not exchange that experience of being a working-class student for anything because that is what helps me even today. You know if that particular [working class] student I was back then, feels the same thing [today] that I have experienced, then it means there is something we are not doing right, not only am I talking about the matric stuff but within the university, whereby you feel you don't belong and you feel like an outcast. This is a very nice environment for students who are familiar with a certain culture because we know that this university is a westernized, liberal and very middle-class kind of university. But now, when you've trained in that particular background for a while, even if you are a black person, for instance, if you have been to [a private school or a former Model C school] and you have been cultured in that way and you get here and you would be like: 'I do not know why are these [working class] people complaining.' You do not understand the person who is coming from [a township] high school, a person who has never seen a computer or touched a computer before, who does not even know how to do research and you'd be like 'oh my God, these are so basic'. So the university favours middle-class students one way or the other; that is why we need transformation in terms of teaching staff members for those working class students. That is what we are here for: to create a mirror for the students to say 'actually I can see myself in Siyanda, I can see*

*myself in Simpiwe' so that students can feel like they are at home.*

As the culture of middle-class families mirror the dominant cultural practices in the education system (Bourdieu 1973: 56), those individuals who attended private schools and former Model C schools are familiar with the everyday practices and routines of life in a middle-class environment due to their early family and school socialisation. Individuals from working-class backgrounds, who have not 'been cultured in that way' are expected to familiarise themselves with these cultural dispositions that predominate and are taken to be the norm and which are alien to them. It is these individuals who are more likely to be agents of transformation because, as Kathrin explains, when you are part of the dominant culture you take its ways to be the norm and it is difficult to 'see' the university from the perspective of someone who does not find those values, routines, practices and expectations familiar at all. Having a habitus that is different to, and possibly at odds with, that of the dominant groups allows such individuals to identify and therefore, potentially, to disrupt exclusionary cultures. On the other hand, these individuals do not necessarily occupy positions of power and influence in the field from which to effect such disruptions.

While black lecturers recruited through ADPs might successfully embody the characteristics that are approved in an HWU (such as accent, disposition, pedagogic approach and so on), these lecturers also routinely report feeling 'belittled', 'silenced' and alienated. Brian, for example, spoke about being labeled 'one of the ADP people' whose place in the university is owed to affirmative action rather than merit.

While lecturers recruited through the ADP constitute a potentially powerful resource from which the university can draw from, in that they are able to see, and therefore to change, what is alienating and excluding about its culture, the stigmatisation, 'belittling' and 'silencing' of black academics means that existing practices are reproduced rather than interrupted.

Many of the participants reported feeling the need to constantly prove their worth to the academic community, as Brenda, for example, explains:

**Brenda:** *In terms of being a student and a staff member, while I was on the [ADP] it was difficult because everyone knows what the [ADP] is about: it is about employing staff members who are black and women in order to transform what the university looks like. I spent a lot of time trying to prove to other academics in my department and the university that I did deserve the position. I might be a woman but that is not the only reason I got this post, that I actually deserve to be here and I was going to contribute something more than just window dressing.*

One of the ways in which historically white South African universities have sought to meet the challenge of changing academic staff demographics is captured in the telling moniker, 'grow your own timber'. Himself an alumnus of this study site, Mlungisi criticised the idea of HWUs 'growing their own timber' – that is to say, recruiting and appointing mainly their black alumni and being leery of 'outsiders':

Mlungisi, like Kristin, highlights the fact that those who are bred within the system find it difficult to 'really see how things are'. Those most likely to bring in fresh ideas, to see what is excluding and alienating about the existing culture and to have a material interest in changing it, are most likely 'people coming from outside'. Another ADP alumnus, Amanda Hlengwa, has called timber grown and then recruited from within the milieu of historically white educational settings 'safe bets' (Hlengwa 2015: 152) for the institution because these individuals possess embodied cultural dispositions that are similar to those of the dominant groups and thus are seen as more likely to safeguard than to threaten the reproduction of those dispositions. On the other hand, to appoint 'young scholars that do not have a history with [this HWU]' is seen as risky because such people do not easily 'fit in' or 'know how things work'.

By retaining its own graduates through the ADP, HWUs recreate its own likeness, thus sustaining and reproducing its own (white, middle-class) image. Lesego describes how unequal power relations, which stultify the potential for agency to effect transformation on the part of a new black staff member, are an adverse effect of academic inbreeding:

***Lesego:** So that transition on its own has had a bearing on my voice to influence transformation, the fact that you were a student in the department for years can be used against you. I am not saying that people are anti-transformation but it is that sense of paternalism that they treat you like you are still a student so it is the paternalistic attitude that kind of hinders you from being a full member who participates on [an] equal scale as anyone else.*

The transition from being a student to becoming a staff member in the same institution with the assistance of the ADP was 'used against [Lesego]' in the sense that it 'hindered' his agency or 'voice to influence transformation' as a legitimate faculty member 'who participates on [an] equal scale as anyone else'. The 'sense of paternalism' experienced by Lesego could be described as an orientation strategy that older agents in the field use to reproduce the lecturer-student relationship once a student becomes a colleague and thus sustain their own position of privilege, power and influence over the field.

## **Conclusion**

The transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa will involve rethinking and reimagining all practices, institutions and values that existed in the apartheid system (Department of Education 1997: 3). What is needed is not only institutional restructuring, change in employment policies, demographic and curriculum transformation but also a radical change of institutional cultures and practices that are currently informed by racialised, gendered and classed assumptions inherited from the colonial and apartheid past. It is the intention of ADPs to recruit black academics who can contribute to the development of new, shared cultures and values in institutions currently experienced as alienating by many people. However, what we have suggested here is that while these programmes do make a contribution to changing the demographic composition of the academic workforce, when an institution, whether wittingly or unwittingly, populates such a programme with its own 'timber' or with those who are perceived to 'fit in', the reproduction of precisely

those white, middle-class dispositions that perpetuate alienation, marginalization and exclusion is assured. The practice of academic inbreeding means that while new entrants recruited through ADPs may be black, their cultural dispositions, assumptions and ways of being, by their own admission, are not necessarily that different from the existing dominant institutional cultures. That is what makes these individuals 'safe options' who will sustain the institution's identity rather than seeing it with fresh eyes and questioning norms that are taken for granted by insiders and those who hail from similar institutions and educational backgrounds.

In this way, institutional racialised and classed unequal power relations are disguised as academic experience and 'excellence'. These in turn emerge as the rules of the field which sustain 'our way of doing things'. Black academics who emerge from ADPs report that as a result of practices of inbreeding and safe bet recruiting, the potential of these programmes to make a contribution to transformation that goes beyond demographic change and extends to questioning and interrupting business-as-usual practices, is blunted. An identity of that which is 'not broken', and therefore not in need of being 'fixed' serves to delegitimise the project of transformation and resurface existing power and privilege which is invested in maintaining existing practices.

As expressed by the participants, the recruitment of the 'right' kind of black middle-class academics who are most likely to adopt 'our way of doing things' means that the university is not overcoming its main challenge. Recruitment and retention of black academics has been cited as one of the main challenges facing HWUs in South Africa. But if these institutions insist on recruiting only from among a thin stratum of black academics who are themselves products of these institutions because only these people are seen as having the capacity to 'fit in' and be successful, then it is perhaps unsurprising that the challenge of finding 'suitable' black academics remains intractable. It is the idea of 'suitability' that needs to be challenged. Moreover, when it comes to the challenge of retaining those who are appointed, what is not recognized is the valuable contribution that those who can view the culture with fresh eyes could make to changing it from one that is perceived as antagonistic and alienating to one that is supportive and conducive to the professional development of black staff whose



perspective and experience may be quite different to the existing practices and culture of the university.

While it may be that there is often no deliberate intent to exclude, what our research does is to surface hidden practices that go on unnoticed, produced unthinkingly by those in a position to influence recruitment processes. HWUs, in particular, need to interrogate their assumptions about who will and will not 'fit in' when recruiting new black staff. On the one hand we often proclaim a commitment to transformation of our institutional cultures. But then, on the other hand, when someone presents themselves to us as likely to offer a different perspective or set of skills or to have a different disposition than what is customary in the existing institutional milieu, we see the person as a 'risk' and, the statistics suggest, are likely to turn instead to the safety of 'one of our own'. Rather than celebrating the potential energy and impetus towards growth that difference and diversity can offer, the comfort of familiarity is difficult to resist. Those who occupy positions of status and privilege are those who have the most to lose from change. If *their* way is the existing way then a new way will mean a potential devaluing of the cultural currency possessed by these powerful agents. It is in the interests of these agents, therefore, to meet the demand for demographic change, while at the same time managing the process in such a way that the institutional culture is left largely unscathed. A variety of strategies are employed in order to realize this goal – starting with the recruitment of the 'right blacks' and extending to undermining black academics recruited through ADPs by labeling them affirmative action appointments and drawing on a discourse of academic excellence and achievement to present existing practices not as *a* way but as *the* way.

By focusing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social and cultural reproduction, we have not explored the possibilities for 'pedagogic interruption' (Bernstein 1996) or supportive social relations in disrupting and subverting the dominant institutional culture; this is an acknowledged limitation of the study. Further research could explore the following questions: How could black academics' lived narratives of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) reveal fault lines in the cultural reproduction in

an HWU? What are the conflicting values between traditional and organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971) and how do these values inform cultural reproduction and transformation?

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Badat, S., 2010. The challenges of transformation in higher education and training institutions in South Africa, Development Bank of Southern Africa, viewed 20 November 2014 from: [http://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-Us/Publications/Documents/Thechallenges of transformation in higher education and training institutions inSouth Africa by Saleem Badat.pdf](http://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-Us/Publications/Documents/Thechallenges%20of%20transformation%20in%20higher%20education%20and%20training%20institutions%20in%20South%20Africa%20by%20Saleem%20Badat.pdf).

Booi, M., Vincent, L. & Liccardo, S., 2017. Counting on demographic equity to transform institutional cultures at historically white South African universities? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(3), pp. 498-510.

Bernstein, B. 1996. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor and Francis.

4. Bourdieu, P., 1973. Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In L. Karabel and A. H Halsey (eds), *Power and Ideology in Education*. pp. 487–511. Oxford Univeristy: Oxford Univeristy Press.

5. Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1998. *The state nobility: Elite schools in the field of power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.C., 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D., 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Roodt, M., 2011. *Research and Policy Brief: “Model C” is the model to emulate*, South African Institute for Race Relations. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. Viewed

22 January 2016, from: <http://irr.org.za/reports-and-publications/researchpolicy-brief/research-and-policy-brief-model-c-is-the-model-to-emulate-1-february-2011>.

Soudien, C., 2010. Transformation in higher education- A briefing paper, Pretoria Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).

## Difference and Power: Why do African and white feminists fail to unite?

By Siphokazi Tau

### Introduction

As early as the 17th century and into the 20th century, white women from Europe and North America, challenged the social contract that guided society, of which the right to vote and work, respectively, were awarded to white males only. Decades thereafter, the feminist movement, particularly that which is located in the global South (Latin America, Africa and certain parts of Asia), has grown and has birthed conversations of intersecting issues – conversations of race, class, sexual orientation and the LGBTIQ+ movement – and in so doing, has exposed how these intersections reveal various systems of oppression. What these “conversations” have brought forth is the disdain that Bell Hooks in *Ain't I a Woman* expresses, in that mainstream feminism ignores the “intersectionality of various social divisions” that the marginalised people face.<sup>1</sup> And, fundamentally, one cannot assume (which mainstream feminism does) that all women are “white” as per social realities and expectations. Hooks, in that intentional title, questions why the notion of race, class and gender are seen as mutually exclusive, whereas women situated in the global south (mostly historically-marginalised, due to colonialism) navigate life through all those lenses, often times all at once.

In the past three to five years, a conversation has swept through the movement around these issues. It is taking place in various spaces, within our communities, churches, and universities. Whether or not these conversations yield the desired outcomes, is a different debate altogether. Although the feminist movement with its nuances has managed to create more meaningful dialogues, the movement remains divided as a result of race, hence the African vs white feminist dialogue. Bell hooks writes in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, that “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”<sup>2</sup> She further explains that, according to this definition, we are thus given an understanding that we, as both women and men, are socialized to

---

<sup>1</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics*. European Journal of Women's Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Hooks, B. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press.

accept sexist thought and action. Other perceptions of feminists include: “You mean those white women who don’t like to cook?” or, “Those single women who can’t have babies?” or my personal favourite, “You mean LESBIANS?”<sup>3</sup>

Feminism is viewed as foreign on the African continent; “throughout Africa, our brothers and sisters tie feminism to western voodoo, a type of evil cult that tells African women it is okay to be unmarried, focused on your career and not on procreation”(Kimou; 2013).<sup>4</sup> This, one could argue, is due to the hostility that traditional, western feminism has represented towards women of colour. In as much as feminism (western) presented a different perspective on how one can interpret and understand the world (a woman’s perspective) which has been historically excluded, western feminists remained silent and were complicit in the violence that non-white women were experiencing throughout slavery and the colonial system and even post-colonialism. This inconsistency exposed the loophole within the movement, that in its (feminism) justifications for a more just society, it neglected various other contexts, making the movement illegitimate and equally problematic to the then status quo.

Having said that, the more historically known and basic definition of feminism is that it is a movement that seeks to achieve the political, economic and social equality of both sexes, understanding that those spaces previously used to, and in some respects continue to, reject the participation and contribution of women. But why, even in understanding the definition of the movement, is there a disconnect between African women and white women who identify with this ideology? Mary Kalawole (2002) articulates this reality in *Transcending incongruities: rethinking feminisms and the dynamics of identity in Africa*, that when addressing gender in the African context, one needs to be cognisant of the historical and cultural dynamics, and that the continued failure to understand this context leads to the many misconceptions of the ideology with Africans and in my opinion, the ignorance and arrogance of white feminists.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Kimou, S. 2013. African men don’t do feminists. <http://voicesofafrica.co.za/african-men-dont-do-feminists/>.

<sup>4</sup> Kimou, S. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Kalawole, M. 2002. *Transcending incongruities: rethinking feminism and the dynamics of identity in Africa*. Agenda, 17:54, 92-98. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2002.9676183>

The reality that African feminists like myself face, is that when white feminists preach of the movement, they ignore the fact that they are more likely to excel within social, political and mostly economic spaces because of the privilege they carry. Fundamentally, white women very rarely engage and address their historical role as the coloniser towards African women, the colonised. Adele Oyeke (2014) explains that “there are those that feel that the failure of what is termed western feminism to capture the challenges of black women stems largely from its inability, not unwillingness, to grasp the historical nature of such challenges and the implications there from”.<sup>6</sup> So, in other words, it ignores the realities of black women due to their racial inclinations; this debate emerged in 1991, at the “Women and gender in southern Africa conference” when the dominance of white women’s voices was challenged and, furthermore, the debate brought forth the notion of triple oppression, that of race, class and gender (De la Rey; 2017)<sup>7</sup>.

According to Oyewumi (1997)<sup>8</sup>, many African people and, in particular, the Yoruba people of Nigeria, were genderless and used seniority, age and lineage as a means of accessing power (socio-economic and political). Furthermore, colonialism resulted in the “role” of the woman being that which is not of man, and thus secondary. So in other words, what colonialism did was expose the role, position and value of white women [compared] to white men, that of being subordinate and not worthy of legal and political privileges and rights, if you like. The reality is that white women benefitted through the oppression of Africans and in some respects, particularly in terms of economic emancipation, continue to benefit more than African women. This “culture shock” (of power) experienced by white feminists (and women) comes from the Eurocentric historical tradition, coming from Greek philosopher Aristotle, that “the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior... the one rules, and the other is ruled...” [Kasubhai; 1996:37, 47], and in, essence, arguing that women are intellectually weak. Aristotle has fundamentally influenced society, both politically and culturally, if you like, and their thoughts continue to impact what we consider

---

<sup>6</sup> Oyeke, A.O. 2014. African Feminism: Some Critical Considerations. Lagos State University, Nigeria; Volume 15, 1:2014.

<sup>7</sup> De la Rey, C. 2017. South African feminism, race and racism. *Agenda*, 13:32, 6-10. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.1997.9675578>

<sup>8</sup> Oyewumi, Oyeronke. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

as “knowledge” today.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the rejection of white feminists by African feminists, and the reluctance to unite with white feminists lies in the reality that white feminists fail to appreciate the cultural and historical contexts of African women which shape their realities, such as race; and their encounter with colonialism, to which white women contributed.

Rebecca Davis in her essay, “Confessions of a white feminist”, argues that white feminism now carries a trail of disgrace instead of a “badge of honour”. “It is a term now redolent of unexplored privilege; of an unwillingness to grapple with the imperative of intersectional politics; of a particularly oblivious, elite form of social consciousness.”<sup>10</sup> What this speaks to is the distortion that mainstream feminism creates by looking at the non-white woman’s experience through a single lens, that of being a woman only. Firstly, what this does is that it erases the stories and realities of women of colour from the dominant narratives which place women at the centre. Secondly, there is a way of thinking about feminism that is located in the global south which then gets left out of the discourse; it disregards the reality that navigating the world as a “black” person is also linked to other socially-constructed oppressions such as class, gender and sexuality. What then becomes problematic about this position from mainstream feminism is that it exposes the “hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible experiences of the more marginalized members of that specific social category and construct an homogenized ‘right way’ to be its member”.<sup>11</sup>

African feminism and white feminism (mainstream) expose the reality of difference and power, in the sense that whilst (white) feminism speaks to “women” overcoming oppression by men and the patriarchal system, for women of colour, that kind of feminism is silent on the other categories of oppression they have to face (such as gender, class, race and sexuality), at times, all at once. That intersectionality then justifies the lack of buy-in African women and women situated in the global south have towards feminism and identifying with such an elitist ideology, in other words “intersectionality states that a

---

<sup>9</sup> Tau, S. Women -- The Gatekeepers Of Patriarchy.

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/siphokazi-tau/women-the-gatekeepers-of-patriarchy\\_a\\_23198479/](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/siphokazi-tau/women-the-gatekeepers-of-patriarchy_a_23198479/)

<sup>10</sup> Thorpe, J. 2018. Feminism is. Kwela Books. Pg.107.

<sup>11</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. Intersectionality and Feminist Politics. European Journal of Women’s Studies

Black woman's experience of systemic oppression is not somehow equal to that of a Black man added to that of a white woman".<sup>12</sup> Feminism aims to address the transformation that is needed in a society that excludes women from the current narratives and discourses, however, in its construction with white liberal women at the centre, fails to be critical and aware of its exclusionary nature. Therefore, because of its inability to grasp the multilayered realities faced by women of colour, particularly those from the global south, it therefore ceases to be a true movement in the sense that, in its advancement of women, white feminists assume, arrogantly so, that non-white women lack the agency and ability to self-determine and champion their own struggles and oppressions. White feminists assume a position of dominance and power, and thus make it challenging for women of colour/African feminists to unite [with them] and buy into the movement as it is.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Crenshaw, K. 1989. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-Racist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol.1989:Iss.1, Article 8.
2. De la Rey, C. 2017. *South African feminism, race and racism*. Agenda, 13:32, 6-10. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.1997.9675578>
3. Hooks, B. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press.
4. Kalawole, M. 2002. *Transcending incongruities: rethinking feminism and the dynamics of identity in Africa*. Agenda, 17:54, 92-98. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2002.9676183>
5. Kimou, S. 2013. *African men don't do feminists*. <http://voicesofafrica.co.za/african-men-dont-do-feminists/>.

---

<sup>12</sup> Poisson, A. Practicing Intersectionality: Against the colonization of Black thought in white feminist discourse. 11 Jan 2018. <https://medium.com/@arianepoisson/practicing-intersectionality-against-the-colonization-of-black-thought-in-white-feminist-discourse-fa4db9ef96b8>



6. Oyewumi, Oyeronke. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
7. Oyekan, A.O. 2014. *African Feminism: Some Critical Considerations*. Lagos State University, Nigeria; Volume 15, 1:2014.
8. Poisson, A. Practicing Intersectionality: Against the colonization of Black thought in white feminist discourse. 11 Jan 2018.  
<https://medium.com/@arianepoisson/practicing-intersectionality-against-the-colonization-of-black-thought-in-white-feminist-discourse-fa4db9ef96b8>
9. Tau, S. 2017. *Women The Gatekeepers Of Patriarchy*.  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/siphokazi-tau/women-the-gatekeepers-of-patriarchy\\_a\\_23198479/](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/siphokazi-tau/women-the-gatekeepers-of-patriarchy_a_23198479/)
10. Thorpe, J. 2018. *Feminism is*. Kwela Books. Pg.107.
11. Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. Intersectionality and Feminist Politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*.

## **How international investment can be used to support and advance contemporary African developmental states**

**By Sinethembe Msomi**

### **INTRODUCTION**

International investment, for decades, has been an important component in the development debate in Africa, featuring regularly in the development strategies of many countries. The approach to international investment has taken two different views. There are those who argue for open foreign investment and those who support a gradual process through regulation. Since the independence of Africa, the gradual process towards international investment dominated until the 1980s; the rationale for making use of international investment is still pertinent, however, the free-open approach seems to be finding more expression. There are a number of case studies which illustrate that regulation in foreign investment is an important feature in development.

The paper addresses the question of how international investment can be used to support The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and advance contemporary African developmental states. In attempting to resolve this question, a number of case studies are cited to show how developing states have used regulative measures to stimulate economic development. The response to this question is that regulation in international investment is an imperative and this is substantiated through the various case studies.

The body of this document begins by highlighting the importance of international investment for a developmental state. Subsequently, the question of regulation and opened international investment is interrogated. The point that is being established is that regulation is an imperative to development. The conclusion of the document is that the goal for African development must follow "the infant industry thinking" which is also well tailored to the needs of Africa.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT**

The importance of international investment manifests in that many countries spend significant resources on investment promotion agencies in the hope of attracting inflows of foreign direct investment. In the context of Africa, the need for international investment is necessitated by the sluggish economic and development conditions which make it difficult for many developing countries to generate enough savings to satisfy their own investment needs. Foreign capital facilitates essential imports required to carry out development programmes such as capital goods, know-how, raw materials and other inputs and consumer goods which might not be indigenously available.

When exports earnings are insufficient to finance vital imports, foreign capital could reduce the foreign exchange gap. Foreign investment may also increase the country's exports and reduce the import requirements, if such investments take place in export oriented and import competing industries. As long as foreign investment raises productivity, it would benefit: domestic labour in the form of increased real wages; consumers, if foreign investment is cost reducing in a particular industry; consumers, additionally, through lower product prices; and government, as the increase in production and foreign trade increases the fiscal revenue of the government.

Foreign capital flowing into developing countries consists of three main elements—grants, debts and investments. Chang (2007) outlines the significance of foreign direct investment (FDI): It helps increase the investment level and thereby the income and employment in the host country. It facilitates the transfer of technology to the recipient country. It may kindle a managerial revolution in the recipient country through the professional management and employment of highly sophisticated management techniques. Foreign capital may enable the country to increase its exports and reduce import requirements. Foreign investment might stimulate domestic enterprises to perform better and increase competition and break domestic monopolies.

In developing countries, FDI has the following advantages: It shifts the burden of risk

of an investment from domestic to foreign investors; repayments are linked to the profitability of the underlying investment, whereas under debt financing, the borrowed funds must be serviced regardless of projects costs. In the 1950s and 1960s, in particular, aid was channeled into industrial development and projects to improve agricultural activities through the use of technology. There was also a focus on large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dam construction and road building (Willis 2011). The international conference on financing for development in March 2002 in Mexico was held as a result of concerns raised by developing nations in mobilising resources to finance their development. The focus on development and poverty eradication in an effort to free society from the dire conditions of extreme poverty is what necessitates international investment; the foreign capital acts a catalyst in achieving socio-economic development.

From the preceding statements, it is clear that the importance of international investment in advancing the development agenda of any country is an imperative that can never be discounted. The most important question that needs to be addressed is whether international investment should be regulated or opened.

### **SHOULD INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT BE REGULATED?**

Rodrick (2001) gives an interesting case study between Vietnam and Haiti: Country A engages in state trading, maintains import monopolies, retains quantitative restrictions and high tariffs (in the range of 30-50 percent) on imports of agricultural and industrial products, and is not a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Country B, a WTO member, has slashed import tariffs to a maximum of 15 percent and removed all quantitative restrictions, earning a rare commendation from the US State Department. One of the two economies has experienced GDP growth rates in excess of 8 percent per annum, has sharply reduced poverty, has expanded trade at double-digit rates, and has attracted large amounts of foreign investment. The other economy has stagnated and suffered deteriorating social indicators and has made little progress in integrating with the world economy, as judged by trade and foreign investment flows. Country A is

Vietnam, which since the mid-1980s has followed Chinese-style gradualism and a two-track reform program. Vietnam has been phenomenally successful, achieving not only high growth and poverty alleviation, but also rapid integration into the world economy despite high barriers to trade. Country B is Haiti. Haiti has gone nowhere even though the country undertook a comprehensive trade liberalization in 1994-95. Equally, it is no coincidence that developing countries have experienced more financial crises since opening up capital markets from the 1980s.

This can be understood in the sense that the financial markets of developing countries are small relative to the amount of capital circulating around the international financial system. According to Chang (2007), the Nigerian stock market, the second largest in Sub-Saharan Africa, is worth less than one five-thousandth of the US stock market. Ghana's stock market is worth only 0.006% of the US market. What is a mere drop in the ocean of rich country assets will be a flood that can sweep away financial markets in developing countries.

The case of Marikana is another living testimony of why developing countries such as South Africa need to regulate international investment, in order to mitigate phenomena such as capital flight. Forslund's updated report still accuses Lonmin of moving an average of R400 million a year out of its operating subsidiaries in South Africa through two "profit shifting" agreements (Van Rensburg 2015). Moghalu (2014) addresses the point of how brown-field investments can be a possible impediment to development: Brownfield FDI is made with the explicit intention of not doing much to improve the productive capabilities of the company bought, or the investor can destroy the existing productive capabilities through "asset stripping", leading to the destruction of domestic firms; firms that had the potential to grow successful operations prior to the premature exposure to competition.

The point that is being established is that at the infant stage of development, there is certainly a need to regulate investments made to the country in order to ensure that they contribute to the long-term development of the country, i.e. the case of Vietnam

and Haiti. Equally, at the infant stage of the development of developing countries, 0.006% in international terms is not the same in developing countries.

Moreover, the importance of regulation manifests in the consistent efforts by developed countries to erect structural constraints through international agreements that seek to restrict the ability to regulate foreign investment. De Vylder (2001) identifies MAI (Multilateral Agreements in Investment), TRIMS (Trade-Related Investment Measures), and TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) as some of the vehicles established by developed countries to erect structural constraints.

The article by Steyn (2016) demonstrates how the South African steel industry is collapsing due to the structural constraints as a result of international agreements: Last year, the government threw its weight behind tariff protections for the steel industry, with a 10% import tariff introduced on some steel products, the maximum allowed for under World Trade Organisation rules. In a submission on Monday, South Africa notified the WTO it has started an investigation into safeguard measures on the imports of some steel products. The application was lodged by the South African Iron and Steel Institute on behalf of its members producing these products.

Mutume (2006), using the case of Lesotho, demonstrates how foreign investment within the context of an opened market is a threat to the long term development of a country: Under the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA), major Asian textile companies, limited in exporting directly to the EU and the US, set up subsidiaries in less developed countries, including Lesotho. In particular, they took advantage of Lesotho's easy access to the US market under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of 2000, which offered duty-free entry to some products from African countries that adopted market-based economic policies, introduced political pluralism and eliminated barriers to US trade and investment. As a result, textiles and clothing became Lesotho's economic mainstay, which at one point employed 56,000 workers — thus accounting for virtually every manufacturing job in the country. "Most, if not all, our foreign investors come from Asia, mainly Taiwan and China," notes Mr. Daniel Maraisane, head of the main clothing workers' union. But with the end of the quota system, he adds, those

investors “say it’s now easier and cheaper to manufacture in China and India. So, they are starting to go back home...” There’s simply no way little Lesotho can compete with such giants.

Chang (2007) points out some of the instruments that have been used by countries in their development process: Singapore has had free trade and relied heavily on foreign investment, but, even so, it does not conform in other respects to the neo-liberal ideal. Though it welcomed foreign investors, it used considerable subsidies in order to attract transnational corporations in industries it considered strategic, especially in the form of government investment in infrastructure, and education targeted at particular industries.

The more recent economic success stories of China, and increasingly, India, are also examples that show the importance of strategic, rather than unconditional, integration with the global economy, based on a nationalistic vision. Like the US in the mid-19th century, or Japan and Korea in the mid-20th century, China used high tariffs to build up its industrial base. Right up to the 1990s, China’s average tariff was over 30%. Admittedly, it has been more welcoming to foreign investment than Japan or Korea. But it still imposed foreign ownership ceilings and local content requirements (the requirements that the foreign firms buy at least a certain proportion of their inputs from local suppliers).

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this document is to discuss how international investment can be used to support and advance contemporary African developmental states. The objectives of the study are to show the importance of international investment for a developmental state; to show the importance of regulation; and to name some of the regulation instruments employed by other developing states. Worth more than ordinary consideration is that any attempt to undermine the importance of international investment in the development of Africa is being narrow minded. It is a fallacy for African

leaders to employ the open approach to international investment as it is a threat to the development of the state. Rather, there are numerous reasons why African leaders must employ the approach regulation. Overall, the key point that must be stated is that there are various instruments that can be combined as per the context of the country to regulate and monitor investment in order to maintain the long-term needs of the country. The ability to attract investments assists in building capacity to produce tradable goods; consequently, promoting trade depends on the economic policies of the country. It is important to remember that Africa, for years, has been a subordinate of white domination, therefore an economic programme must break the shackles of neo-colonialism that have tied African resources to the western world, which continues to loot Africa's resources and create conflicts in the process, Fragmentation is part and parcel of "marginalisation".



## **A CRITIQUE ON THE REJECTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY BY THE XHOSA CULTURE**

**BY LUTHO SOKUDELA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Homosexuality is not a mental illness or a depravity, it is not a sickness or a deficiency and it is not an abnormality or in any way a “trend”. Homosexual individuals are not seeking attention or deprived of love. They are normal human beings. People do not become homosexual because they were sexually abused as children, and there was never a deficiency in sex-role modelling by their parents. Homosexuality is defined by Shagor (2009) as attraction to members of the same sex. It is often linked with two other categories of sexual orientation, namely, heterosexuality and bisexuality.

Roughly described, “it is the way a portion of the population express sexuality and human love” (Shagor, 2009). Sexual orientation is defined as patterns of romantic, emotional and sexual attraction, and also our sense of social and personal identity based of those attractions. Sexual orientation is not a “one-way matter” (a matter of black or white), but is a double-edged sword with exclusive attraction to the opposite sex on one end and exclusive attraction on the other. With that being said, the purpose of this paper is to criticize the rejection of Homosexuality by the Xhosa Culture.

### **AmaXhosa**

AmaXhosa were part of the gradual Bantu migration movement from southern Zaire in various directions to cover most of Africa south of the Sahara. The Xhosa people of today developed from an early clan of the Nguni people. They comprise a set of clan lineages, among whom the main groups are Bhaca, Bomvana, Mfengu, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Xesibe, and Thembu (Jones & Jenkins, 2008).

Veneration of the ancestors, sometimes called “ancestral worship”, is very prominent among the Xhosa people. The ancestors are still considered part of the community of the lineage. They believe the ancestors reward those who venerate them and punish those who neglect them. Many mix ancestral worship with their Christian faith. There is a

strong sense of loyalty among the tribe or community. Most things are shared and those that have more are expected to share more with those less fortunate (Jones & Jenkins, 2008).

## **Culture**

With regard to homosexuality, the Xhosa culture's objection to the practice is based on the conceptualization of gender roles. Feminist ideologies have not been fully embraced in the Xhosa culture either, and are considered Western and colonial in nature (Mtshiselwa, 2011).

The Xhosa culture perceives homosexuality as an *anathema*. According to them, acceptance of homosexuality denigrates their values of Africanization and enculturation. Heterosexuality in Xhosa culture is portrayed as historically and culturally valid while homosexuality is denied any historical validity; the historical possibility of homosexuality is denied, and heterosexuality is considered to be the norm. Homosexuality is deemed as unnatural, an illegitimate sexual relationship and a corrupter of the moral fibre of society (Mtshiselwa, 2011).

This is a narrow and self-centred way of looking at this because the fact that there is no account of homosexuality in their history, does not mean there isn't any. The problem here is that the history is selectively narrated by certain people who may, or may not have certain agendas for or against homosexuality. What is of importance here is that this cannot be an acceptable excuse for its rejection. Acceptance of homosexuality is perceived as embracing colonialism and this is also the case with feminist ideologies. In Xhosa culture, homosexuality is rejected in an effort to continue upholding cultural belief systems (Mtshiselwa, 2011). Of course, we must accept that culture is rigid and can never change in just the blink of an eye, it takes time and consistency of the change, but it is not impossible; it can be done and it has been done before.

Basing the rejection of homosexuality on "embracing colonialism" is incorrect because, already, we have had to assimilate "colonialism" in order to survive. This is because of things like globalization, which are aimed at making the world a global village and

AmaXhosa are not immune to this and are not living in a vacuum. Also, almost everything that we have and use, is what was brought by colonialism and there has been no rejection of these things because they benefit from them. Every day, they use cell phones, laptops, iPads and all kinds of technologies.

They wear clothes, use cars and live in brick houses and all of that. The point that I am driving home is that there are double standards within the culture where they tend to accept things that work for them and there is a reluctance of accepting things that will not necessarily benefit a certain group. In rejecting homosexuality, the phrase utilized is “it is culturally unacceptable”. In reference to the phrase, one would say it confuses questions of morality with those of acceptability. Homosexuality is not necessarily considered immoral because it is not culturally acceptable. Culture and the discussions on homosexuality are problematic and therefore, culture cannot constitute the correct context within which to engage the issue of homosexuality.

### **Sexual Intercourse**

Sexual intercourse in homosexuality is deemed immoral and an abomination by both some sections of the believing community and those immersed in cultural necromancy: it offends the Supernatural being and the living–dead (Mtshiselwa, 2011). In a heterosexual relationship, anal sex is preferred and is not seen as an issue. On these grounds, rejecting homosexuality in terms of anal sex depicts a patriarchal approach to defining sexuality since there is a different approach to sexual activity in lesbianism (Mtshiselwa, 2011). Also, it is considered that sexual intercourse and sexual pleasure cannot occur between people of the same sex. It is quite unfair to limit *same-sex* relationships to focusing only on sexual intercourse between people of opposite sex because this depicts an ignorance of other dimensions of relationships that are quite important

### **Tradition**

Mtshiselwa (2011) observes that it is the tradition or rather the historical absence of a certain practice within the tradition – and therefore the absence of certain practices within

tradition is used to argue for the denial of the cultural legitimacy of homosexuality, and questions the morality of such orientation.

Perhaps this is the context in which the immorality of homosexuality emanates because it is deemed unnatural within the Xhosa tradition. Mtshiselwa (2011) explains that “negative Xhosa perceptions and views of homosexuality are grounded in the honour and shame concepts, which are evident within the black communities, particularly in the Xhosa ethnic group”. The honour of men and women is defined according to their respective gender roles, as constructed by the culture of the people. This means the male figure is expected to protect, love, and manage his family as the head of the household and the female figure is expected to raise the children, take care of household duties and be submissive (Mtshiselwa, 2011). This means that failure to uphold these expectations is deemed to be shameful.

Within these socially and culturally patterned honour and shame ideologies, one sees an emphasis being placed on headship, production and the raising of children, and other distinct responsibilities that are categorically streamlined, based on gender (Mtshiselwa, 2011). The truth of the matter is that culture is dynamic in asserting that sexual identity and sexual desires are not fixed and unchanging. The reasoning behind this phenomenon is that culture is dynamic. Since an African response to homosexuality is based on cultural ideologies, critical questions regarding headship, production and the allocation of responsibilities are posed: For purposes of maintaining order in the family, who should be the head of the family in a homosexual partnership or marriage relationship? How does reproduction by means of sexual intercourse manifest itself between gays and lesbians? How could they raise children in such a manner that it embraces cultural values in the African–South African context? How do homosexual relationships embrace the linkage between gender and responsibility as valued in the Xhosa context? Questions like these are usually asked, but often, answers are not as forthcoming as they should be.

## Gender Roles

Gender roles are culturally and socially determined. Every society has its own assumptions about how men and women feel biologically, dress, act and work; these are the cultural norms for feminine and masculine behaviour evident in all human beings. Rejection of homosexuality by Xhosa culture is specifically based on two main factors: the issue of morality and gender role constructions.

The honour of men is jeopardized when subscribing to homosexuality and, therefore, the rejection of homosexuality enhances the maintenance of honour and morality among the members of the Xhosa community (Mtshiselwa, 2011). There is a strong emphasis on the honour of men more than that of women and this is very patriarchal in nature because it is “Patro-centric”; it bases its arguments on the comfort of men. The problem with Patriarchy is that it objectifies women and reduces them to lesser human beings than men. This is based on masculinity and even subjugates less masculine men.

## Conclusion

Homosexuality is defined as the attraction to members of the same sex. Homosexuality is not a mental illness or a depravity. It is the way a portion of the population express sexuality and human love. In the Xhosa culture, homosexuality is rejected. The Xhosa culture’s objection to the practice is based on the conceptualization of gender roles. Objecting to homosexuality signifies the rejection of colonization and its negation of Xhosa cultural identity. The nullification of homosexuality based on “embracing colonialism” is incorrect because already we have had to assimilate “colonialism” in order to survive. Culture cannot construct the correct context to debate the issue of homosexuality.

It is very wrong to limit *same-sex* relationships to focusing only on intercourse between people of the opposite sex and this is because it shows an ignorance of other facets of relationships that are also just as important. In the rejection of homosexuality by the Xhosa Culture, there seems to exist a strong emphasis on the honour of men more than that of women and this is very patriarchal in nature because it is “Patro-centric”; it bases

its arguments on the comfort and the benefiting of men. After all the above deliberations, the paper has successfully and emphatically served its purpose, which is to offer a critique of the rejection of homosexuality by the Xhosa culture.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Jones, C., & Jenkins, O. B. (2008, October 6). *A Cultural Profile Of The Xhosa People*. Retrieved October 09, 2014, from Strategy Leader: [www.strategyleader.org/profiles/xhosa.html](http://www.strategyleader.org/profiles/xhosa.html)
- Mtshiselwa, N. (2011). A biblical Perspective and Critique of Homosexuality by the Xhosa People. *Theologie Viatorum*, 2(35), 273-31. Retrieved October 04, 2011
- Psychology Today. (2014). *Sexual Orientation*. Retrieved October 07, 2014, from Psychology Today: [www.psychologytoday.com/basic/homosexuality](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basic/homosexuality)
- Shagor, H. (2009). Homosexuality: A brief study. *Homosexuality*, 4-7. Retrieved October 05, 2014