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'Just a Little Thing like the Colour of Their Skin Ruined Everything': Facing Race at Rhodes Ten Years After

Louise Vincent
Department of Political Studies
Rhodes University

> Personal interpretations of past time – the stories that people tell themselves in order to explain how they get to the place they currently inhabit – are often in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretive devices of a culture.[1]

> In our second year of study at Rhodes we were told that the ——— Department needs a certain number of 'black females' and so many white females and males. We were told that black women had preference because there are fewer black women in the ——— career. A girl who was believed to be black was found to be coloured. Her physical appearance was black but her background revealed she was not black...those women who did not belong to this 'blackness' had to reinvent themselves. They had to do whatever it took to be associated with black, like the coloured girl who claimed she was black....those who can do ——— are black women because the community needs 'black women' [in that career]. I didn't understand that system because I thought women were all viewed as women. Among those black women were two women who dressed like men and do what men do. One of them had no breasts and had dreadlocks. She didn't see herself as a woman. And I was curious to see if she would win a place – if the Department would see her as a 'woman'. Another striking issue between these black women was the issue of accent. Some had an 'African' accent while others had an 'American' accent. This accent issue determined [what you would specialise in]. So there was also a class division among those black women.

> What interested me is that there were also a number of good 'white female' students whose number in [the second year class] was limited but whom I thought were also 'perfect women'. Just a little thing like the colour of their skin ruined everything; you become less than perfect. After the completion of their degree, will those two women who are more like men, do what men do instead of what they are expected to do? Maybe it is fine, as long as they are women.[2]

Introduction

Opposition to apartheid gave rise to many differing ideological positions on how appropriately to understand race and racism. One of the pivotal points of debate between what we might term 'radical' and 'liberal' opponents of apartheid concerned the contrast between non-racialism and multiracialism. The race debate also formed a central schism between competing ideological forces within the liberation movement itself – central to the Congress tradition of the ANC was the notion of 'non-racialism' which was contrasted both with variants of Africanism and black consciousness. Again, disputes about the

precise nature of the relationship between race and class were very central to the ideological ferment of the time.

Non-racialism as the answer to the ruling National Party's racial dispensation was, then, the clarion call of those who aligned themselves with the Congress tradition. The nub of the idea of non-racialism was best summed up in an aphorism which I heard for the first time in a speech given by Harry Gwala at Rhodes shortly after his release from prison: 'There are only two races, the human race and the animal race', Gwala told a packed Great Hall. That formulation of race remains as radical and uncommon a proposition today as it was then. As Deborah Posel has commented, 'after decades of apartheid reasoning, the idea that South African society comprises four distinct races – "whites", "Coloureds", "Indians" and "Africans" – has become a habit of thought and experience, a facet of popular "common sense" still widely in evidence. So it remains a norm for the narratives we hear in public media or in conversation to designate unnamed social actors in terms of their race – as though this reduces their anonymity and renders their actions more intelligible'.[3]

Yet, as Posel points out too,[4] this should not be understood merely as an unfortunate residual effect of apartheid. Rather, new life has been breathed into these categories in the transition context as they begin to be employed for multiple purposes of redress and political manoeuvring. Racial identities have proved resilient in the post-apartheid period,[5] rainbow-nationalism notwithstanding. Indeed, non-racialism sometimes appears *less* a feature of the current context than *more*, as the unifying imperative of the official liberation movement's ideological line gives way to opportunities for South Africans to assert forms of identity whose foregrounding was regarded as impolitic in a different era.

This tension between our perpetual attempt to sanitise our minds of racial thoughts on the one hand, and the obvious continued social reality and significance of race on the other, remains a central feature of the way in which we live race at Rhodes and indeed in South Africa ten years after apartheid. Today, natural scientists mostly agree that no such thing as race exists from the point of view of physical, biological reality. Race does not exist; it is not a pertinent criterion of classification.[6] The ideology of non-racialism is vindicated as the factual truth – no mere political slogan. Yet it at the same time remains equally true to say, as Richard Dyer does, that the imagery of race continues to exert its power over every feature of our lives:

> At what cost regions and countries export their goods, whose voices are listened to at international gatherings, who bombs and who is bombed, who gets what jobs, housing, access to health care and education, what cultural activities are subsidised and sold, in what terms they are validated – these are all largely inextricable from racial imagery. The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world are at every point informed by judgements about people's capacities and worth, judgements based on what they look like, where they come from, how they speak, even what they eat, that is, racial judgements. Race is not the only factor governing these things and people of goodwill everywhere

> struggle to overcome the prejudices and barriers of race, but it is never not a factor, never not in play.[7]

This paper sets out to tell stories about race and identity among the present generation of Rhodes students. It does not purport to say that these experiences are everyone's experiences. Indeed, it is certain that they are not. There are those who will say that they find little evidence for race as a significant category of analysis of their or others' experience of life at Rhodes. The Vice-Chancellor cited just such an example in his welcoming remarks to Rhodes alumni earlier this year. He quoted a letter from a Xhosa student who had written to thank Rhodes and in particular his hall of residence for the experience of being at Rhodes. The writer stressed that he had 'met people from different backgrounds and NOT in one instance experienced abuse or discrimination of any sort'.[8]

My research with Rhodes students over the last three years has involved my close interaction during a period of six to seven weeks at a time with groups of some eighty participants in each of three research/teaching cycles. The research 'data' used in the paper consist of the stories told and written by the participants[9] to one another and to the author. Many described their participation in the research as being a very rare if not singular occasion in their experience as South Africans where race is truly 'faced'. This term is used in a dual sense, referring as it does to the willingness to confront the unmentionable and to the fact that this confrontation takes place in a public setting. As a researcher one of my primary goals was to create safe communal spaces in which private thoughts could frankly be expressed in public – a goal which participants felt was largely realised. While some may suggest that I found only what I sought, from the outset I was genuinely surprised by the anguish, bewilderment, anger, fear, confusion, prejudice, suspicion, suffering and pain that I encountered across the spectrum of skin colours. Many of the participants were as taken aback as I was both by what they found themselves articulating – often for the very first time – and by what they found in others.

> There was a time when I stopped coming because it was too emotionally taxing. But I returned. There was the time when I watched the melanin workshop and cried because someone understood. A lecture would spark debate for a week in the dining halls; debates which most times ended up involving not only Politics students. I was angry, worked past some of that anger into hope, hope for a little change from me and the white, Indian, coloured, black people and those for whom these categories are insufficient. I don't know how to put it into words. Five years from now I'll write you a letter letting you know. It fuelled debate which we knew existed but never found the realm or sanctuary to express these views. Rhodes graduates sit in lecture theatres for three years just to make money. If all of university were like this course we would be here for a different reason. I have hope for me... hope that I won't be just another Rhodes graduate.[10]

Encounters with Unreason

It appears intuitively likely that inter-racial contact improves racial/ethnic relations[11] whereas absence of such contact promotes prejudice and stereotyping. This seems to be the unstated dominant assumption at Rhodes. Students come into a mixed environment, mingle and become less prejudiced as a result. The mere fact of the existence of people of different skin colours here will produce this effect. However, what is referred to as 'contact theory' or 'the contact hypothesis' in the social science literature is not unproblematic in its assumptions. For one thing, we need to ask questions about the extent and quality of the supposed contact that occurs. For example, at Rhodes, my research subjects report, dining halls, friendship circles, dating, social meeting places, sports and lecture room seating continue to be highly segregated on a racial basis. As a result people tend to see and talk of one another as undifferentiated blocs ('the black guys in my residence'; 'the white girls in the tutorial'; 'coloured chicks', 'Indian okes') rather than interacting as individuals.

> She went to a private white school and therefore had no contact with black people. She chose to go to Rhodes to change this reality. She wanted to meet new people from different places and backgrounds. She thought it would be so wonderful to belong to a community where everybody would interact and mingle. She was naïve. She went to the dining hall and discovered that boys sat with boys, girls with girls, whites with whites, blacks with blacks and so on. Her heart dropped. This was the reason she hated high school. She eats mostly with the other white girls in her residence. Now she is obsessed about her weight.[12]

Racial propinquity, then, is not the same thing as racial integration and the latter is not a necessary or even likely outcome of situations of 'racial diversity'. This finding is echoed in many studies of race. For example, in Wits sociologist Alan Morris's work on race relations in Hillbrow, Johanesburg, he found that while overt acts of racism are infrequent, residents continue to express racist views about one another and 'most apartment blocks were occupied solely or mainly by one particular racial category'.[13] In many instances, Morris argues, 'contact did not lessen prejudice but served to reinforce it'.[14] Contact does not add up to integration, which implies something more than merely surface toleration of those regarded as being of a different racial category, and includes as Pettigrew suggests, acceptance, friendship, equity and equality.[15]

It is important to recognise, moreover, that integration of this kind is not just something which fails to occur for one reason or another. Rather, there are significant ways in which integration is actively guarded against under circumstances of 'contact' so that the post-1994 context may be viewed as having given rise to new forms of informal but nonetheless powerful racial entrepreneurship which have replaced official injunctions against integration. The policing of sexuality is one of the most cogent examples of this. Apartheid's concern with the calcification of racial boundaries was, as Posel writes, 'rooted in widespread anxieties about racial mixing'.[16] Apartheid, at least in part, was meant to offer the reassurance that 'white women were safe from the threat of

black male sexuality'.[17] Taboos against sexual integration continue to be a very significant thematic thread in the way in which race is experienced at Rhodes. Complex rules of dating allude constantly to strict injunctions against inter-racial and even inter-ethnic sexual interaction.

> It was at Rhodes that he began to be fully aware of and bothered by racism. He frequented the black-dominated clubs as often as he did the white-dominated ones. However, he would often go to the latter alone because his friends had long sworn they would never visit clubs filled with whites. On one occasion he went up to a group of white girls. They smiled at him but their body language changed. The two guys with them gave a half manly acknowledgement but then the one closest to him leaned over and whispered into his ear so that only he heard, 'fuck off'. He walked away feeling that he was simply where he did not belong. The next morning he woke up and felt a boiling anger. Since then, his consciousness of racism has heightened.[18]

> He... went to a Model C school and is used to multicultural diversity. During his first two weeks at Rhodes he became attracted to a white girl. They started having a relationship which had to be 'silent' for reasons known only to her. Then he overheard some of her friends discussing the relationship. They said she was worried about how everyone would react if she was seen with a black man. What if her parents found out? They white boys wouldn't want to talk to her. They would call her a slut and think she might have Aids. She broke up with him. What hurt the young man was that he thought people had changed and that all South Africans see each other as one. Even students who have never experienced apartheid, who have been to school with black people since the early 1990s still think stereotypically of black people. What killed him was that most of his black friends told him he should have stuck to his own skin colour, he should have known better.[19]

Of course a racialised sexual code of conduct is not universally embraced or adhered to and there are many examples of code-breaking behaviour. Nonetheless, the existence of the code is widely acknowledged.

> Her friends were sitting around talking when one closed the door and said, 'You guys, have you heard what ——— did? She kissed ———'. 'No, the black boy in our hall?'. 'Dude, that's so wrong!'. She didn't agree. He was a really nice guy and quite hot. The fact that the girl was white didn't matter to her. She had seriously believed that her friends were not prejudiced bitches.[20]

In some instances transgression of the code forbidding inter-racial sexual encounters is, surprisingly, viewed more negatively than gendered sexual transgression.

> She is a young student, just enjoying life. She has fun, doing whatever she pleases, not generally phased by other people's opinions. One evening, while out with friends she happens to kiss another girl, who happens to be black. This is done not as a sexually political or racial statement; she was just being herself (like so many girls her age she is exploring her sexuality). She never realised that others had seen or even cared. The following evening a boy, a farmer's son from Zimbabwe approaches. 'Did you kiss a black girl?' This took her completely by surprise. He was a friend. 'That's disgusting. I hope you're embarrassed. But don't worry, just apologise and we'll forgive you. The guys think you're a cool girl. Just say you're sorry'. She burst into tears and walked home.[21]

The first point I have made about the contact hypothesis, then, is that it assumes that contact breaks down racial barriers and leads to integration whereas this is often not the case. Moreover, contact situations are characterised by an active policing, on the part of key protagonists, against integration.

The second point is that the contact hypothesis overlooks the extent to which such 'contact' as does take place, occurs within a broader context of power relations and reflects them. It is not unusual for example, for whites to gain more from encounters with the racial 'other' than vice versa. For those already empowered in society, those who occupy the position of privileged norm in relation to a range of markers – white trustworthiness, intelligence, beauty, cleanliness, morality is not in question – contact with black students largely serves to allay baseless fears: that their possessions will be stolen in mixed residences, that black tutorial members will lower the standards of class discussion, that black Res mates will engage in unsanitary practices in Res bathrooms. For these students 'contact' in a context in which the overall hegemony of whiteness remains intact, is reassuring. It tells them that they need not change after all. They can go on being themselves. These students may therefore report a decline in their prejudices after entering the mixed environment of Rhodes. But I would suggest that such a result needs to be interrogated, revealing as it does, very unequal power relations.

> Coming to Rhodes he had an overall feeling of trepidation at moving into a more 'exposed' environment than he had been in the past, growing up as a white male. He had been to boarding school but it was an elite private school. Although there were plenty of black people they had always been in a minority and had never seemed a threat as it were. Now he didn't know what it would be like living somewhere where his race was a minority. He had been warned that at other universities where residences were 'pitch black' everything had to be kept totally locked up as a result of the endless stealing. Furthermore his black classmates had been from wealthy families and most of them had no problem mixing with the white majority. The prospect of Res now presented a different scenario. Whites were a minority and blacks were from all walks of life, not just a tiny rich elite. His fears and worries turned out to be totally unfounded. Life in Res turned out to be very much like life in boarding school. White boys seemed to be the only ones who really stuck together. There was no black 'popular group' which everyone tried to fit in with. Instead, he ended up having the same colour friends, and ran around the Res getting drunk and having fun as if he owned the place, just as he would have had he been in a predominantly white Res. He also found that theft was never a problem.[22]

It is precisely one of the markers of continued dominance that white students are able to negotiate these encounters with ease. Initial feelings of trepidation quickly give way to the realisation that all will be well. On the other hand, for those who occupy skins that are melanin-rich in various degrees, 'contact' or cross-racial encounters are frequently a very negative rather than a positive experience and these encounters often lead to a heightened awareness of one's marginality.

> White people don't see white privilege. Many of them believe in individuality and sometimes go as far as to profess to not having a culture. For this reason they are not controlled by the stereotypes attached to race and are allowed to be whoever they want to be. In the case of Rhodes the strong colonial influences and Rhodes's history of it being a white university campus under apartheid have more than contributed to the dominant white culture in this campus. White culture is taken as the norm on campus. It affects you from whatever background you come from. Personally we struggled with getting used to eating with a fork and knife, but we had to learn. I didn't want to stick out. Yet this pressure to conform to the norm goes far beyond how a person eats in the dinning hall. It has affected who gets what.[23]

> During apartheid black people were the worst off while whites were at the top. While the new South Africa may show some form of inversion, Indian people continue to hover around the middle, looking into the distance, awaiting that opportunity to shine. It's tough occupying a space of mediocrity. She remembers how on the day before school started she went for a haircut so she would look neat and respectable for those she felt most judged by, white people, who formed the majority of what would be her new class. On the morning of her first day she smeared on a thick layer of her mom's Oil of Olay so that they wouldn't think she smelt spicy. When the teacher summoned her to stand up to introduce herself her lips had locked. She felt paralysed. There she stood with the biggest problem on her shoulders: should she speak like a white or should she speak the way she usually does? If she spoke like a white her classmates may be able to understand her a little better but then what would her friends and family think? Was that not the ultimate betrayal to one's race, identity and self? With those sharp blue eyes piercing at her she uttered a few words, a cross between 'white' English and her English – a language she was convinced had never before been spoken. To this day she struggles finding her voice but she has learned that difference is a good thing, that the world does not speak the same language, and that not everyone sees it through blue eyes.[24]

Describing racism as a system of unreason, Fanon argues that there is 'nothing more neurotic... than contact with unreason'.[25]

> As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others... I was satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences. It was not really dramatic. And then... And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me.[26]

One of the things that apartheid did, as the word implies, was to separate people. It was one of apartheid's obvious and axiomatic 'achievement' that blacks and whites had limited experience of one another. It is often assumed that it was only whites who lived 'sheltered' lives during apartheid but the reality is that the whole point of apartheid was to separate everyone from everyone else. This had many obvious unfortunate effects: whites who only came into contact with blacks who as cleaners, gardeners or petrol attendants; blacks who grew up with legends about the invincibility, beauty, goodness or evil of whites. But if we take Fanon's point, apartness was also a kind of protection. It is one of the ironic features of apartheid's demise that this form of 'protection' has fallen away.

> In terms of race, I found that I was very sheltered. By living in a coloured area, I had never really come into contact with real racism. The way that I did things was never 'made strange' the way that it is now that I spend most of my time at a white-dominated university. As a result, I have become more aware and sensitive to people's remarks and attitudes towards my behaviour. This sensitivity has allowed me to see if not racism, then at the very least, prejudice as I do not conform to people's stereotypes.[27]

Apartheid and colonialism left South African society scattered with powerful institutions whose history and residual character is colonial and 'white' in very deeply embedded ways. The historically white universities are among these. There is little documentation or acknowledgement of the extent to which black students entering this institutional milieu in all its elements – human, architectural, pedagogic, social – frequently find the experience deeply painful, dislocating, disruptive, unsettling, angering, confusing and difficult. For a significant sub-section their time at Rhodes is their first extended 'encounter' with the white other. The psychologically testing nature of this experience is seldom fully acknowledged by those for whom Rhodes and its ways are very familiar, even when they are physically present here for the first time.

For some black students, this sense of foreignness is experienced as merely a strangeness, a newness which can be quite interesting and exciting.

> I remember being fascinated by being in the same lecture theatre as two white students. It was my first interaction with another race, and it felt strange as well as being lectured to by a white lecturer for the first time.[28]

For others, the experience is far more difficult to cope with as is evident from the following story:

> He grew up in the countryside with his grandparents where there were no white people. His grandparents would share their past experiences with him. His mind and heart were filled with anger when it came to other races especially the white race. He showed not even the slightest sign of liking people from a different race. It came the time for him to leave his grandparents and attend Rhodes University. For him, when he got there it was not a comfortable atmosphere because it turned out to be a place full of different races. To make matters worse he had to share almost everything with people from different races, including books, places to sleep, places for entertainment, places to eat, etc. He would spend much of his time alone in his room. He physically distanced himself and this affected his educational performance as most of his lecturers belonged to other race groups. One thing that always confused him was the fact that even some students from his own racial group associated with the race that he hated with passion. It was especially bad when some of his friends would chat with white people. In times like this he would distance himself from his own best friends. He never told them about all the stories he had been told back home and they would not understand why he was acting like this. To him, people were not supposed to eat, sleep and talk together if they were from different racial groups.[29]

Many parents naturally set out deliberately to shield their children from harmful interactions and situations. Fear and suspicion meant that there was a mutual disinclination to perforate racial barriers. So Africans, coloureds and Indians emerge as no less 'sheltered' from the 'other' as whites. Such inter-

action as did take place pre-1994 often occurred in very constricted and stereotypical settings. For this reason, those occasions or contexts in which 'encounters' with the 'other' arise, emerge as significant memory experiences in people's lives. Such encounters occurred sporadically, incidentally and atypically before 1994 but after that date become much more widespread.

> Her parents raised her in the best way they could. She presumes they thought it best to shelter her, 'protect' her from her own kind. She was always the token black at school, always spoken English to by her parents although they spoke Xhosa to each other, always grew up in the white suburbs. She was oblivious to this 'apartheid'. What was it? Why was it? And who was it affecting? What were townships? Who stayed there? Why were people so different where her grandmother stayed: people walked in and out of her 'home' and everyone lived on top of each other.[30]

> He grew up living in the backyard of an Indian family for whom his mom cooked and cleaned. The Indian family couldn't pronounce his mom's name so they gave her another name, 'Regina'. They had the same problem with his name so they called him 'Nelson'. He never saw his father because he was jailed for taking part in the anti-apartheid struggles. He once asked the Indian boy of the family why they treated his mom differently and the following day his mom asked why he had asked such a question because she was about to lose her job. The next weekend his mom told him he had to leave Johannesburg and go to live with his grandparents in Ciskei because the Indians didn't want him in their house any more because he thinks he is so smart. He had to leave his beloved place of birth to go to a place he had never seen before because some people didn't like his questioning of inequality between human beings. Now he is in university. He doesn't like Indians, especially when he hears them saying they are 'black'. He thinks that Indians are not trustworthy because during apartheid they behaved like white people. They even called black people 'kaffirs'. Now that the black government is in power, they say they are 'black'. He is trying to put everything behind him and concentrate on his studies but he finds it hard to deal with what happened to him and his family because of the Indians. He is in residence and when an Indian guy comes close to him or tries to talk to him, he ignores him.[31]

Many of the young black adults at Rhodes, born to parents who experienced the full force of apartheid and who tried to shield their children from its worst effects, found themselves, from 1994, being thrust into the new opportunities available – Model C schools, historically 'white' universities. Many of the participants in this study had their first significant 'encounters' at Model C schools where many local race dramas no doubt played themselves out.

> I encountered myself as 'the black girl' when I attended school in what was then known as a Model C school. There was a total of 3 black girls in the entire school. Here I became a representative of the entire black population. I would often be asked questions starting with 'Why do you people...?' As a black girl I have no individuality, my race is at the centre of everything I am. It determines everything I have experienced and everything I expect to experience. This is something white people fail to understand. That one's race can be a highly determining factor in one's life. This is because white people do not view themselves as 'raced' individuals. They see themselves as independent, diverse individuals. Being human is the most powerful position that a person can be in. It means that a person is entitled to basic human rights that include freedom and autonomy and most importantly, choice. White people see themselves as being just human and they don't see

> their colour as being a meaningful factor in their socialisation. The privilege of whiteness is to be the norm, natural, just human.[32]

> I went to a Model C school where I encountered my first black child in my school in Standard One and I now recall how shocked I was. I am not ashamed about it because I believe it is a natural reaction to be shocked by something you do not see every day, never mind having never seen it before. Race is real to me. I have a different colour skin to that boy in my class in standard one. I will always be a different colour skin to him.[33]

A culture of racism leads to the ubiquitous tendency to reduce black people to their blackness so that to encounter one black person is to encounter all. While whites are 'just' human, to be black is frequently to be regarded as somehow 'representative'. While whites, as Dyer points out, are in the position of power of being able to speak for the commonality of humanity[34] precisely because they are not viewed as raced at all, to be black is to speak for blackness. The implication is that to be black is to be 'other' than 'just' human. An aspect of this is to treat black subjectivity as synonymous with victimhood so that what Moosa et al. refer to as 'the dialectical nature of black peoples' experience has been insufficiently acknowledged, and their role in responding to the dilemmas confronting them has been largely overlooked'.[35] The homogenising way in which black experience is treated is encapsulated in terms like 'the oppressed' or 'the formerly disadvantaged'. White people are so much in the habit of reducing black people to their blackness that it comes as a great surprise to learn that black people don't automatically see themselves in this way. Black participants, including many from neighbouring states, reported seeing themselves as black for the first time, or at least coming to a new awareness of their black identity only through experiences that placed them in prolonged contact with whites, for example at school, university or work.

For those who did not attend Model C schools it is at Rhodes where they first come to recognise themselves 'as black'. The shift is one from encountering 'the other' in a limited range of highly unequal settings to encounters as neighbours, fellow pupils or students, playmates, potential lovers, opponents and friends.

> When she came to Rhodes she was overwhelmed by the amount of white people she saw. She couldn't stand them. After all, white people are so different. It was so bad that she wanted to leave the university, because it was and still is too white. Today she is proud of who she is. She loves being black. She still does not like white people. That is probably something that will never change.[36]

Identity is clearly not only something we construct ourselves but is also constructed in the eyes of others. Whatever you may see yourself as being, you cannot control how others see and construct you and this impacts on your identity – identity is a social construction not merely a self-construction. One of the significant ways in which our subjectivity is socially constructed then, is through encounters with those who are experienced as 'other' or different. These encounters are encounters of unequal power through which we negotiate

our identity. In performing these negotiations there are a variety of possibilities available to us. We might respond to the encounter by attempting to remould ourselves in ways that will seem more acceptable in the eyes of the other; we may reject what we see reflected in that gaze and choose an oppositional stance; or we may find ourselves in complex intervals between the two. This idea is elaborated in the work of Somali psychologist Bulhan in which he outlines three major identification patterns among the black intelligentsia. He terms these 'capitulation' to the dominant culture and ideology, 'revitalisation' which involves a repudiation of the dominant culture accompanied by a defensive romanticism of the indigenous culture, and 'radicalisation' in which individuals come to be able to engage with the dominant culture on more equal terms.[37]

> She always assumed that being what she was, was a temporary transition period, that being black would not be her identity forever. Every night before she fell asleep, she prayed for what was of most importance to her then... That nightmares would stay at bay, that no-one would kill her parents, and the most pressing – that the next morning she would wake up with soft blonde hair that moved in the wind, and eyes of a bright colour like those of the people she encountered every day. At an age where one would think young kids worry about having nice toys and stable best friends and the coolest crayons and of course the most practical lunch, she wondered why her lunch smelled only of heavy suppers of the night before, wondered why her hair didn't return to its old 'position' when she awoke form nap time, assumed that her bum and breasts were bigger because she didn't do enough sport. She though all this would change with time, because what she saw every day, who she encountered all day every day, was the norm. White people are the standard, everything else was a deviation. But then, white people didn't register as white people – they were just people, human beings.[38]

Encounters can accentuate feelings of inferiority, an attempt to adapt or accommodate oneself to the expectations of the dominant gaze, or can lead to the construction of an oppositional identity. Bulhan (1977) theorised such encounters through the notion of 'inbetweenity' which he used to describe the black intelligentsia – those who attain a distinctive status and privilege through the acquisition of western education.[39] For Bulhan such encounters lead to a dual consciousness influenced on the one hand, by western culture and on the other by formative traditional African culture.

> However, the more fully and deeply Africans have internalised western culture, the more inevitably they are drawn to seek their destiny in western countries. Yet in transporting themselves to the source of the western education they have hitherto absorbed at a distance, they are likely to encounter racism in many forms. This may be a profoundly disturbing experience... [which] may in turn lead to an intense search for cultural roots and issues of identity may become compelling'.[40]

For Fanon as with many of the black participants in this study, the only solution is self-assertion: 'I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to asset myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known'.[41] This

solution is not without its painful contradictions in the context of white racial hegemony as suggested to me in the account by a young woman who spoke, on the one hand, of being 'black and proud' but on the other, of feeling the need to shower twice a day and hand-wash her underwear.

> The story starts 20 years ago, when my mother had to walk 10-15 kilometres to get from the township to the hospital in town to deliver me, because of the bus raids at that time. It was decided that my name would be ——, a name meaning '——'. This name, although not seemingly so, is related to my race, as my mother believed her daughter would go and fight against the white domination that for so long held them captive. Born to a single mother, who was involved in politics, I was moved to my grandparents' place, as is the case with most black people's situation, and I grew up there all of my life. Born into a black, working class, traditional yet deeply religious family, my identity was starting to shape. My immediate family had a great influence on shaping my identity... The race card is probably my most intimate because I am constantly struggling with whether or not I am a racist. For the longest time I wasn't one but more recently, at least since I came to Rhodes, I have just had this distinct change of heart. I don't like colour discrimination very much, because very generally it implies, in my eyes, a gain for the lighter skinned and a loss for the darkie. I was never told I was black at home. I learnt I was black and in the process also learnt what it entailed to be black...
>
> I say things like 'I'm black and proud' meaning that on some level I do believe black people have an essence to them that white people don't have. Growing up black is not always easy but neither is growing up any other race, right? Well, I don't know but I do know my own pains of growing up black. I live it every day. In the way I do certain things, like I have to shower every morning regardless of a night shower and I do not put my underwear into the washing machine. I hand-wash it every day.[42]

This young woman's choice of anecdote resonates startlingly with Fanon who refers to 'catchphrases strewn over the surface of things: nigger underwear smells of nigger; nigger teeth are white; nigger feet are big'.[43] Fanon goes on to write of 'Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my colour. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my colour. Either why, I am locked into the infernal circle'.[44]

Myriad minute adjustments and compromises are made on a daily basis by those whose skin colour delineates them as marginal, not the privileged diverse 'norm'.

> Growing up in the post-apartheid era I have had to conform to make myself more acceptable, leaving my roots behind. I suffer from a dominant social discourse about coloured identity which says that coloured people are alcoholics, unemployed and teenagers who fall pregnant very easily. I was raised in a good home which was family oriented as many coloured families are, but I also grew up in a coloured area thus I have a thick coloured accent. I admit that when speaking to white people I hide this accent as this will allow them perhaps not to think of me as coloured but as an educated female. Although I am often mistaken for being Indian, my colouredness comes out when I speak. I try to adapt to be more acceptable.[45]

Racialised Modes of Reasoning

Formally racists policies and overtly racist patterns of behaviour and speech have largely disappeared from everyday interaction between people of different skin colours at Rhodes. However, I would argue that what Deborah Posel has termed 'apartheid's modes of racial reasoning'[46] remain widely normalised in the modalities of thought and social practices of everyday life. Posel identifies several principal features of these modes of racial reasoning. Many of these emerge as recurrent themes in the stories told by my research subjects.

Race and Racial Difference as Self-Evident 'Facts' of Experience

Apartheid's starting premise was that South Africa consists of a number of races which differ from one another in a variety of ways. The effect of apartheid was to create was Posel has termed 'different worlds of experience[47] fissured along racial fault lines. In this sense apartheid became its own best justification as the experience of apartness normalised and naturalised social differences. It remains very common for South Africans, including young university students, to regard race and in particular, the existence of four main 'race groups' – white, coloured, Indian and African – as a self-evident, common-sensical, 'utterly uncontroversial fact of life'.[48]

> She felt that even though many don't view colour as an issue on a conscious level, deep down everyone has a problem somewhere along the line with race. She experienced this openly at Rhodes. At night it is always the same thing: black students at CJs, white students at the Rat and Pop Art used to be frequented by the Indians and coloureds. Everyone, on some level, would rather be with their own colour.[49]

> He never thought he was a racist until he lived and studied with people of different racial groups at Rhodes University. He found it extremely difficult to adjust to his new environment since he had never encountered such a situation before. He hails from a place inhabited by 99 percent Indians because it was a group area during the apartheid years. The older generation who were victims of apartheid taught him never to trust a white person, never to become friends with a white person. This is how his view of race evolved. Growing up in the new South Africa he finds it extremely difficult to interact with members of other racial groups.[50]

> When I first arrived at university a worrying factor for me was how I would share bathrooms with fellow black students. Contrary to my expectations I found them to be the cleanest of all other race groups. While I profess my deep-seated love for black people, I am aware of how to a certain degree I respond to black people in a negative way. For example, a fellow Indian friend remarked how her Res neighbour, a black girl, asked her to tie her hair up into a ponytail. And she, my friend, was extremely hesitant to do so. Feeling compelled, she did it, but afterwards washed her hands in Jik. I couldn't help but wonder if I would have felt the same. Shame on me. Unless I am able to grow out of this constricting mould of prejudice I am a disgrace to society. But how am I to do so?[51]

Each of these comments takes the existence of apartheid's racial menu as self-evident: there are 'other races' and one has expectations of various kinds

about how these people behave, whether or not they are clean, noisy, similar or different to one's own racial type. Even when experience proves those expectations to be invalid, the mode of reasoning is not replaced by a dissolution of racial categories but rather, by new generalisations – blacks are in fact 'the cleanest of all'.

The privileging of whiteness

Racialised reasoning is not simply about the assumed existence of various races but also, importantly includes a hierarchical component in which whiteness, both as a biological and a social condition is privileged. Whiteness is at the apex of an hierarchical racial order.[52] Students and staff experience the privileging of whiteness both socially and physically at Rhodes in a variety of ways.

> In Res he quickly learnt that the common room is for the 'darkies' and the bar is for the 'white dudes'. The moment a white student walked into the common room to find a congregation of darkies watching television the white student would say he was 'just checking what was on' and leave immediately. At lectures it is not any different. He always noticed in his —— lecture which was taken by a black lecturer how little attention she received from the white students. Its either complete chaos or they walk out. It still amazes him today how white students always complain about black lecturers when there's nothing to complain about. He was present when one black female lecturer said, 'one of the challenges in my profession is the utter disrespect I receive from students who do not listen to me. I cannot teach them anything worthwhile because I am black'.[53]

> This is a story about a young black girl who came from the townships, from what one might call a disadvantaged school. When she first came to Rhodes she was told that she had to do ELAP which stands for English Language for Academic Purposes. The reason was because her English was not good enough to enable her to make it at varsity. Now they were going to put her into this course so that she may learn how to speak and read English properly. She started this course not knowing what it involved. As the months went by she realised that people were treating her differently because of this course. Some people even called it English for Lazy African People. The reason for this was that the class only consisted of black South Africans. The thing that made her feel bad was that she was taken out of some 1200 first-year students to do this course without even being interviewed to see what her English skills were like. The white people who asked her about what course she was doing made fun of her, saying she was just here doing nothing and that she would only start her real studies the next year. Many treated her badly because of this course. She found out that there were many other second-language English speakers at Rhodes who were not forced to do this course. Even the lecturer treated the ELAP students as if they were stupid. At the end of the year she did so well that she was given the award for the best student in ———. She was so happy because she proved to the white people that she was every bit as good as them.[54]

> Dominance on campus is most felt though by the black female. The white girls with their petite figures contribute to the prevailing hegemonic notion of white beauty. When a black girl arrives at Rhodes, she is not beautiful in her own right but in relation to the white image of beauty. They aspire to this image of white beauty because they want to be viewed as beautiful by men. Black women straighten their hair, they starve themselves to get rid of their African assets (i.e. bums and thighs). By virtue of being black they are already starting from a disadvantage.[55]

> She wanted to play ——— at Rhodes. She went to practices every week. After going for two weeks she noticed a similar pattern happening over and over again. Of course, she was black. At the ——— practices, whites would be given a chance to play. No-one would appoint her to play. She couldn't understand why she was never picked. She decided to stop going as it was a waste of time. Only whites get to play ——— at Rhodes.[56]

> In orientation week we were invited to the SRC'S parties at the union. Like good little first years we went along but quickly grew tired of the rock music and beer guzzling. My friend and I thought it would be best if we were to have a quiet night in at Res. Just before walking out of the union area a black guy approached us and told us to go to Masakhane. My friend and I later discovered that Masakhane was the dingy little 'black spot' under the union where black people congregated and danced to their music. Not knowing it then the space at the union versus that at Masakhane was a clear sign of white culture's dominance over black. If we had not met that black guy we would not have known that Masakhane exists. The SRC made sure that it advertised the Union, but there was no mention of the alternative – Masakhane. White dominance at Rhodes is apparent from what gets advertised (i.e. rugby world cup) to what doesn't (All Africa games).[57]

> In my first year at Rhodes University we wrote an essay in the ——— Department. One black woman in the class received a mark of 80 percent from the tutor but the lecturer reduced it to 60 percent, saying there were too many grammar mistakes and spelling errors. However, she had taken a first draft of the essay to a lecturer in the English Department to check for mistakes before submitting. To our surprise, the tutor, who was a white lady, said she had marked the essay according to the departmental criteria and that it had all the essential requirements to get 80 percent. She said that it was the lecturer's habit to question the marks of black students. In my mind that was implying that black students are not worth a mark of 80 per cent or more.[58]

> It was the year 2003 when he started his university studies at Rhodes. It marked the worst year of his life because he encountered racism for the very first time in his life. At university he expected different lecturers in terms of race, standard of education and many other things that could make one different from another. What shocked him was that students responded differently to lecturers because of their race. For example, when a black lecturer in his ——— class was instructing students prior to the final examination, a white student stood up and asked, 'where do you get that instruction from? Do other lecturers in the Department know what you are talking about?' This gave him the impression that white students undermine black lecturers at this university while white lecturers do not get that kind of response from students. This black lecturer was tested all the time. He was asked questions that were targeted at testing his character and thinking skills. It was enough to make him conclude that white students were racist.[59]

Some white participants recognised that their race would continue to determine their privilege.

> Like my father, I am a white middle class male and in this patriarchal society, success should not be too hard. I probably will not suffer the consequences of affirmative action as I will not have to be hired by a company which is forced to implement a programme of black empowerment. Similarly, the film industry is dominated by males, especially in the area of directing, to which I will be headed. Because I live in a society in which white middle class males are still largely in a position of dominance, I tend to see my success, and even my own subjectivity, as universally natural.[60]

This recognition is rare, however. It is far more common for white people to be entirely unaware of the privileged hegemonic position they occupy and to, in fact, feel disadvantaged by the post-1994 political context. These sentiments echo nationwide survey data which indicate that whites are only half as likely as other South Africans to accept the view that whites continue to benefit from apartheid.[61]

> In the modern world as a white male I am expected to re-invent myself but this is particularly difficult for me. As many jobs once exclusively my domain because of my race are no longer there for me.[62]

> In the historical context of South Africa today my parents see the greatest threat to me as affirmative action. Although opposing the nasty sides of apartheid and denying complicity in the continual oppression of black people, the system still held white peoples' middle classness in place. It was safe.[63]

> She questions whether or not she has a bright future because she is white. Is there a point to paying for an education if she may not be able to use it? Will she have unwillingly to move overseas? She hates that because she is white, she loses her privileges and opportunities. Apartheid was not her fault. She realises that whether you are liberal or not, you are white and should be scared of your past because you are now paying the consequences for it and it lives on in your consciousness. She wants to be African – a white African.[64]

The privileging of whiteness is particularly difficult for white people to recognise precisely because white people seldom think of themselves as raced. 'Race' is thought to have something to do with black people. In response, theorising and acknowledging white as race has become a popular academic industry. Echoing Richard Dyer, Bennett and Friedman[65] point out that it is precisely part of the privilege of being white that white people see themselves as diverse individuals and as self-evidently irreducible to their race. It therefore comes as a surprise when white people find themselves seen in the eyes of black people 'as white' – seeing the race of the 'other' is permitted white people only.

Many of the white participants in this research process started out from the position that apartheid was not of their making and had little to do with them; a position of confusion about why they as young white South Africans could somehow be regarded as complicit. Moreover, they asked why apartheid was such an issue for black students when they had not, after all, really known its full burden. In short, they felt that black students with access to all the privileges of a Rhodes education should 'get over it'.

In response, one participant wrote this:

> It is easy to say that I'm not racist and that I am not affected by race. The reality of it is how do I feel about that white man who used to drive around in a Hippo shooting teargas in my community? The same man would come at odd hours of the night to arrest my family and often they would be thrown into detention for months. During this time we would sit as siblings without word from those in detention. Today, I sit next to the siblings of those who were the iron fist in my community and they want me to believe that I was not directly affected by the policies of the apartheid regime. They are quick to remind me that was all in the past but it is this past that haunts me to this day. One afternoon I witnessed the IFP

> attack the community of Mofolo, one of the townships that make up Soweto. In that raid a friend of mine was raped and then stabbed several times until she breathed no more. She was only 18. Her 16-year old sister was also raped and stabbed to death. Her mother who was 42 years old was also raped and killed. Her grandmother who was 60 was also raped and stabbed to death. These are experiences some of us will carry to our graves yet some people want us to forget and act like it never happened. I'm sorry that the siblings of those who policed my community do not understand where I've come from but when you do not understand, don't pretend as if you do. You evoke my emotions of the past and these cannot be controlled.[66]

Some of the most powerful moments in the research arose as white participants came to the dual realisation firstly, that they had never before seen themselves as raced but had very definitely seen black students as raced and secondly, even more startlingly, that this was not how they were perceived – that they too were subject to a gaze. The white participants were surprised to learn that they were not regarded by the black participants as unique and diverse individuals but rather, 'as whites', whatever their particular history of liberal views, interracial dating and friendships, might be. One such significant moment of realisation for all the white people present in one group, including myself, was when a young black woman whom no-one had hitherto really noticed sitting in the front of the room, stood up during a discussion on race and waved her arm across the room, saying, 'it's you whites, that's the problem', her breaking voice filled with loathing and anger. For many Rhodes students as with most young South Africans this is an unusual experience because relations between black and white remain in so many instances superficially friendly, masking underlying suspicions, even hatreds.

One black woman spoke of staying up until the early hours of the morning to finish the eighty dense pages of prescribed reading material on the subject of whiteness. She reported the following day in a group discussion her intense shock at learning that white people seldom think about their race. For their part, the white participants ruefully acknowledged that they did not and that this was in itself central to their race experience. During a discussion of this issue, one participant responded by noting how she experienced her blackness as 'a cloud' which was constantly over her. This powerfully evocative image was taken up again and again in the weeks that followed by other participants who used it to portray the way in which race is always with you – if you are black.

> By virtue of being black you know that you have a 'cloud' of stereotypes that is always with you when you are living. This has contributed to the lowering of success of most black students, even at university... I feel uncomfortable even in tutorials because of having internalised an ideology that black people are stupid and they do not think as a white person. Although there is talk of a rainbow nation there will always be a great divide between black and white.[67]

The image of race as cloud brought to my mind Blake's poem 'The Little Black Boy' (1789) which is discussed also by Susan Gubar[68] in her exploration of the subordination of blackness to whiteness which lies at the centre of racist

ideology. In Blake's poem the 'Little Black Boy' is black, 'as if bereaved of light' (l.4) but his 'soul is white!' (l.2). 'And these black bodies and this sunburnt face/Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove' (l.l 15-16). In this image, blackness is synonymous with absence of light and, by implication, of value, goodness, merit. Far from operating merely at the symbolic level this form of interpretation has a real existence in the ways that white people think about black people – which was a surprising insight for many of the white participants who saw themselves at the outset as liberal, having neutral or insignificant views about race, having many black friends and acquaintances. During the research process one white man asked his white friend about a coloured girlfriend the friend had had at school. The way that he framed the question was to ask 'how bad was she'. He reflected on this formulation later:

> The more black she was the worse it was, reflecting my belief that white equals beautiful while black equals ugliness. I saw my whiteness as having more value than Peter's[69] coloured girlfriend because she had a darker skin (which only, after all, refers to the amount of pigment in the skin). It indicates that I somehow felt like a higher grade of humanity. I realised that I unconsciously feel that I am a better or higher quality human than those who have a darker skin than me. This is because I have always been advantaged by my whiteness. For example when collecting a passport or ID book I still feel as though because I am white I can skip the queue. I have learned a grading system for human identity. The more black, feminine, homosexual or poor you are, the lower your grade will be.[70]

The process here was one of the research subject closely interrogating his own question and its hidden assumptions so that he became aware of the ways in which his racial views were operating. This would not have been possible if the investigation were by way of superficial survey questionnaire-style research. It seems to me that many white people hold views which they fail to interrogate in this way, and which they believe are adequately hidden from their black counterparts by a veneer of middle class politeness. It is precisely this veneer of polite superficiality which the black participants in my study found maddening. To regard cordial relations then, the absence of overt conflict or physical confrontation, as a mark of racial harmony is clearly a mistake. Black students experience the absence of a willingness to engage passionately and sincerely with questions of prejudice, stereotypes and racism as deeply disrespectful and a measure of continuing white arrogance. In my research this attitude which one person described as 'the wide blue-eyed smile that never reaches the eyes', emerged as far more offensive to the black participants than stereotypical remarks or attitudes that are openly expressed.

Race is socio-cultural as well as biological

Posel argues that the apartheid state invested all facets of existence with racial significance.[71] Within this system everything and anything can be read as a sign of race, from how loudly or softly one talks, to which sport one enjoys, to how

frequently one has sex. The taken-for-granted notion that separate races of various kinds exist is accompanied, then, by the further assumption that the body is not the only site of differentiation. Different races are also widely assumed to evince clusters of social behaviour. This ranges from ideas about the inherent intellectual abilities of these putative different races, to demeanour, to taste in clothing, music, sport and food. These are not simply the (mis)conceptions of people who regard themselves as being of one race about people they regard as being of another race. This form of racial reasoning operates just as powerfully as an internal mechanism of patrolling the boundaries between one supposed race and another. Among black students there is a widely acknowledged close policing of one another for signs of deficient blackness which speaks to the ways in which race is viewed as more than a set of physical characteristics but is routinely thought to embody also social practices incorporating modes of dress, hairstyles, speech, mannerism, choice of music and so on.

> Personally I feel uncomfortable in tutorials because of ideologies that people have about blacks. Black people are considered stupid and they do not think like white people. A lot of black students question why I do Philosophy. They say that black people are not meant for Philosophy and that we cannot think beyond what is there.[72]

> In post-apartheid the emancipation of black people required black pride and unfortunately created degrees of blackness. People were more and more being criticised for being 'coconuts' and hairstyles were being scrutinised creating what Erasmus calls a fictitious binary between people who are black and people who are not black enough. I shaved my hair off in Grade 11. My hair was straight and processed and worked on. I felt what used to be my source of pride as a young girl, my source of beauty was now a reflection of weakness and consent to white supremacy and dominance.[73]

> She went to a 'white' school, played with white children, spoke to them in their white language. Yet she is black. She loves Robbie Williams, that song by Goo Goo Dolls, she used to have an Alanis Morrisette CD and would buy it again if she had the cash. Her favourite actor is Mel Gibson, her favourite filmmaker Quentin Tarantino and her favourite TV show, Friends. Yet she is black. Her skin is brown like the earth, her hair black as night, her lips full and thick, her nose wide and flat. She is black. African. Negro. Native. But to some, not black enough.[74]

The idea of race as an integrated and related set of biological features and social practices is closely related to a further mode of racial reasoning which is to essentialise race.

Race as Essential rather than Accidental or Contingent

> I am black. I believe that to be black is to have certain characteristics like I listen to kwaito music and speak the Venda language. Growing up I knew that I was not white and that there were things I could not do. I have this belief that white people are superior and because of their whiteness they always dominate all human beings.[75]

The underlying assumption of apartheid racial reasoning was that race adhered to persons as a cluster of essential elements rather than being mutable, fluid or

socially contingent.[76] Posel has suggested that aspects of the post-1994 political context have given new vigour to racial essentialism as racial identities have become newly politicised as the site of redress[77] and self-assertion. Racial differences, moreover, are often considered primary: the determinants of other differences across a range of forms of interaction and experience.[78]

> She came to Rhodes from a township school were there were only black students. When she got here she met a lot of other races. She particularly made friends with this white girl. They became very good friends but she experienced some problems. Black students from her Res did not want to be around her because they said they did not want a friend who is friends with the whites. And other white people did not want to be friends with her because of her colour. She was in the middle. She loved her new white friends and she was learning a lot from her about the white culture which she knew nothing about. But she did not want to lose her black friends because they represented a part of her that would always be there. She kept on trying to have them both. At the end a solution came when her white friend went away to study somewhere else.[79]

> Black people have different interests from white people. So they are not involved in a lot of the activities that take place at Rhodes. This is why they feel like Rhodes does not cater for their needs. Another thing is that there are so many divisions within the black people. Black South African girls do not hang around with Zimbabweans. They suffer from Xenophobia maybe because the number of Zimbabweans at Rhodes has increased making them feel like the minority in their own land.

> There are also divisions among black South Africans. Like the Xhosas do not mix with the Zulus. It is these differences that contribute to the great division within the black family.[80]

> I found that there was a particular stereotype of a coloured person that was appealed to, by all races. Everyone has their own idea of how 'the other' should and does behave. When questioned it was always a case of how other people were like that, not me, as I was 'one of them'. This led to me feeling as if I was invisible – I was not really coloured as coloured people were 'dodgy' in certain ways. I, therefore, was not coloured as they would not associate with dodgy people.[81]

> She went to university. She loved the freedom and enjoyed meeting new people. She met a guy called ———. They started going out. She liked him – a lot, but always felt something strange. She liked it when he spoke English. One day she went into his room and he was on the phone talking to his dad, speaking Xhosa. She felt odd and almost didn't recognise him.[82]

> Her friend at University is black. She comes from England and she doesn't seem to be black. She doesn't know any of the culture and can't speak any African languages. She thinks this is strange and never really considered her friend as an actual 'black'.[83]

Essentialised conceptions of race as a cluster of necessary biological and social characteristics are most clearly evident in the widespread labelling of a large section of Rhodes students as 'coconuts' (black on the outside, white on the inside) by other black students who regard themselves as more authentically black. This is a particularly harsh irony for those whose vilified accents of speech arise out of having been brought up in exile in highly politicised anti-apartheid families. bell hooks[84] draws a distinction between 'the easier and safer option of embracing the idea of a black essence and the more challenging

recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experiences of exile and struggle. Identity politics may be a necessary rejoinder to the tyranny of homogenised and universal paradigms but to be progressive this game must be played in a manner that embraces diversity and change rather than promoting the stifling essentialisms that narrow the discursive space opened up by the struggles for black and women's liberation'.[85]

> She grew up in Swaziland, Lusaka and London where race and colour were not an issue to her. Her parents were involved with the ANC. She remembers going to rallies chanting 'viva ANC', 'viva Mandela'. Now ten years into our new democracy she wishes that she was still totally race/colour-blind. She feels restricted and judged sometimes for being black. She tries to keep that bit of innocence with her and make friends with the human being and not the colour. But it is hard when black people call her a coconut and white people assume things about her because she is black. She is very aware that people still judge her on the colour of her skin, where she went to school and black people judge her because she never experienced apartheid South Africa at its worst. Deep down though, she is proudly black as it has been instilled in her that black is beautiful and not inferior.[86]

In the same way as apartheid relied on essentialised conceptions of race, positive affirmations of blackness for the purpose of combating an overweening hegemony of whiteness face the difficulty of falling into the trap of homogenising 'the black experience'. Yet, without claiming a common black identity how can white hegemony be challenged? Amina Mama refers to the risk of the creation of a new discursive regime, 'namely a set of prescriptions for how to be black and a set of sanctions and epithets for those daring to differ'.[87]

> She is a black female. Her mother is a domestic worker and used to work for a woman who is now her guardian. She is a person who is sometimes referred to as a coconut because she went to a private school. Her mother felt it was better for her to learn to speak English fluently and this has been a contributing factor to the racial encounters to follow for the rest of her life. As a result of only being able to speak English she finds it easier to relate to and be friends with white people. For her, encounters with her own race are more difficult as she has been socialised with whites. At family get-togethers she always feels lost as she cannot talk to her family members in their African tongue and they cannot speak English. People often mistake her for a foreigner. Her parents felt that she would be better accepted if she spoke English. Now there has been black empowerment and people are proud to be black and make their culture known. But she does not know much about her culture to be able to fit in. Her dilemma is that she is neither white nor black although people say that she is more white than black.[88]

> She's never had any black friends. Not really close ones in any case. Her father taught her English before her home language. Soon she couldn't remember how to construct grammatically correct Zulu sentences. Making friends is still today much easier with white people than with black people. With her white friends she is free to talk and be herself. The black kids never know what to do with her. Most just get angry and call her a 'coconut' and a 'model C' product. There are always the jeers and snide comments whenever she goes anywhere with her white friends. She feels comfortable and a part of them – except when talk turns to boys. She feels confused – she doesn't know if she is expected to like black boys or white boys.[89]

> She was born in Hammersmith, London, 19 years ago. Three years ago they decided to move back home – to South Africa. Since she has been 'home' she has encountered numerous difficulties, principally because she is black. She is an anomaly. She doesn't understand why black people reject her existence simply because she doesn't speak a local language. Further, she doesn't understand why she is 'allowed' to mingle with the whites just because she has an English accent. She has definitely noticed she is the only black person her white counterparts associate with. She cannot feel comfortable in her own skin. She is judged by everyone. She does not fit the status quo. She hates this feeling. She hates the division that pretends not to be there. She hates the assumptions her white friends make about blacks, and she especially hates that they don't even know when they do it. She hates that her black counterparts make assumptions about her just because she has white friends. Once a guy approached her at CJs and said 'I thought you were white because I always see you with white people'. She had no idea that coming to South Africa would make her feel so self-conscious. She can honestly say that she never encountered such complex racial hang-ups when she lived in London and attended a large inner city comprehensive school. She thinks it absolutely ridiculous when foolish people describe her as a 'coconut' as though there is one single model on which black people should live their lives. She does have white godparents and lives in a 'white' suburb. By the same token she listens to R 'n B and dances like a dream. So is she white or black?[90]

> People thought that she thought she was better than them because she spoke English. They assumed that this was a choice she had made and not that it was the only language she could speak in. White people thought that she was American, black people thought she took no pride in her 'blackness'.[91]

There is a tension between, on the one hand, the politically important claim that there is an overriding common black experience (of an oppressive socio-political context), and on the other the politically equally important recognition that there are different types of black response to a shared context. The challenge of black identity at Rhodes is not only about coping with white racism or the hidden ways in which white hegemony plays itself out. It is also about a struggle for the meaning of blackness.

Conclusion

If apartheid's racial categories were previously the locus of racial privileges and discrimination, these very same racial designations are now the site of redress – for, how else can the damage be undone and equitable treatment be established? Yet, what are the consequences of these reiterations? Can we continue to construct our social realities in racial terms – in particular drawing on apartheid's very own catalogue of race – in ways that transcend the ideological burdens of the past? What are the grammars of categorisation post-1994? To what extent, and in what ways, might they be at odds with the project of non-racialism?[92]

> My biggest scare is that not enough people have been part of this process. It should be made compulsory for the whole university. It is only in this way that we can break the ice and allow people to express themselves. We cannot hide our differences especially as leaders of the next generation. There is a whole lot of sensitivity and tension that people don't want to address. People are scared to air their opinions about race because they might

> be viewed as racists. No-one knows how the other culture thinks and we fake this ideology of togetherness. While here we have discussed race... outside we don't. We talk about money girls/boys and social status. We want to become part of the Rhodes hegemony because its cool and no-one wants to become the outsider.[93]

Posel writes of the 'lingering power of racial reasoning in the everyday lives of South African citizens'; of the ways in which 'disturbing proportions of respondents make lifestyle choices and judgements about others that reiterate and entrench existing norms of racial separateness'.[94] Furthermore, what is clear from the survey data she cites[95] is that 'the purchase of ideas of racial difference and distance remains strong and spans the population at large, rather than being concentrated among the direct beneficiaries of apartheid'.[96] Gibson and Macdonald's work based on a large, nationally representative survey of ordinary South Africans conducted from late 2000 to early 2001 found that 'South Africa is obviously not a single unified country; racial differences persist on virtually all dimensions of political and social life'.[97] It might be expected (or hoped) that if anywhere in the society, in the liberal, youthful, intellectual, relatively secluded space of the university, race might be of diminishing significance in peoples' lives. Yet, the stories here told show that while we might formally, legally, discard race, it continues to have an often unacknowledged and unseen power to determine perceptions, experiences and relationships.

There are those who may argue, as some analysts of the national political context do[98] that these findings are of little significance for the overall health of our political and institutional life. To put the point plainly, we don't need to love one another to live together.[99] As long as we have an adequate institutional and legal framework and are able to operate within reasonable bounds of tolerance and respect, our social project can progress. The alternative view is put by Lombard: 'Low levels of social trust and understanding, based largely on stereotypical views of others, infringe drastically on people's capacity to build workable relationships, which in turn are critical for rebuilding those structural social institutions that form the basis of a democratic society'.[100]

When we are unwilling to engage in a serious process of confronting race and racism this seems to be based on the idea of letting sleeping dogs lie; the fear that things will somehow be made worse if we 'go on about it'. My research leads me to the opposite conclusion. Even if the dog of racism is indeed asleep at Rhodes – and I doubt it is – we should be prepared to give it a vigorous shake in order respectfully to continue to engage with, learn from and understand more fully our past and its continuing implications for the present. The various processes of research in which I have been engaged with Rhodes students over the past three years have sought consciously to take participants beyond the usual analgesic approach and to allow for pain and prejudice to be aired within safe boundaries of respectfulness and mediation. An almost universal gratitude was expressed by participants of all skin colours for an opportunity to engage in

a conceptually sophisticated and emotionally sincere way with the complexities of race at Rhodes and, by implication, in South Africa. I am concerned about conceptions of loyalty and excellence which smack of public relations-style glossing over of problems, conflicts and inequalities. In a higher learning context which prides itself on a critical tradition and strength in the humanities I believe that the benchmark of excellence is a serious and sustained engagement with race and racism, alongside other social inequalities.

Notes

1. Steedman, 1986.
2. Exam 2003. I should point out here that the Department concerned would contest this reading of its affirmative action policy. However it emerged as an almost universally unpopular (and much misunderstood) policy in my research.
3. Posel, 2001: 56.
4. Ibid.
5. Ansell, 2004:4.
6. Guillaumin, 1999: 361.
7. Dyer, 1997:1.
8. Great Field Marquee, Rhodes University, 2 July 2004 – emphasis in the original.
9. The stories have been slightly edited for length, grammar and sense but every effort has been made to retain the intended meaning in each case. The 2004 stories arose from a brief in which the students were told to 'write down a race story or stories' – they were encouraged to write about themselves in the third-person, a technique that is thought to facilitate 'pure' description as opposed to justification or explanation. Not all chose to write about Rhodes but many did. Given the purpose of the paper I have included here mostly stories in which life at Rhodes features directly. The paper has been taken back to participants for checking.
10. Course evaluation, 2004.
11. See for example, Dixon and Rosenbaum, 2004; Morris, 1999.
12. Race stories, April 2004.
13. Morris, 1999: 667.
14. Morris, 1999: 683.
15. Pettigrew, 1975: 140 cited in Morris, 1999:675.
16. Posel, 2001:73.
17. Ibid.
18. Race stories, April 2004.
19. Race stories, April 2004.
20. Race stories, April 2004.
21. Race stories, April 2004.
22. Race stories, April 2004.
23. Essay, May 2004.

24. Race stories, April 2004.
25. 1992: 225.
26. Fanon, 1992: 221.
27. Exam, November 2003.
28. Exam, 2003.
29. Race stories, April 2004.
30. Race stories, April 2004.
31. Race stories, April 2004.
32. Exam 2003.
33. Interviews, 2003.
34. 1997:2.
35. 1997:2.
36. Race stories, April 2004.
37. Cited in Moosa et al, 1997:4.
38. Race stories, April 2004.
39. Cited in Moosa, 1997:3.
40. Moosa et al., 1997:3.
41. 1992:223 – emphasis in the original.
42. Exam, 2003.
43. 1992: 224.
44. 1992: 224.
45. Exam, 2003.
46. Posel, 2001: 70.
47. Posel, 2001: 74.
48. Posel, 2001: 70.
49. Race stories, April 2004.
50. Race stories, April 2004.
51. Race stories, 2004.
52. Posel, 2001: 71.
53. Race stories, 2004.
54. Race stories, 2004.
55. Essay, May 2004.
56. Race stories, April 2004.
57. Essay, May 2004.
58. Race stories, April 2004.
59. Race stories, April 2004.
60. Exam, November 2003.
61. Gibson and Macdonald, 2001: 13.
62. Exam, 2003.
63. Exam 2003.

64. Race stories, April 2004.
65. Bennett and Friedman, 1997:53.
66. Evaluation, 2004.
67. Exam stories, 2003.
68. 1997: 12.
69. All names have been changed.
70. Exam stories, 2003.
71. Posel, 2001:72.
72. Essay, May 2004.
73. Exam, November 2003.
74. Race stories, April 2004.
75. Exam stories, 2003.
76. Posel, 2001:72.
77. Posel, 201:77-78.
78. Posel, 2001: 73.
79. Race stories, April 2004.
80. Essay, May 2004.
81. Exam, November 2003.
82. Race stories, April 2004.
83. Race stories, April 2004.
84. 1991: 28-9.
85. Mama, 1995:156.
86. Race stories, April 2004.
87. Mama, 1995: 156.
88. Race stories, April 2004.
89. Race stories, April 2004.
90. Race stories, April 2004.
91. Race stories, April 2004.
92. Posel, 2001: 56-7.
93. Course evaluation, 2004.
94. Posel, 2001: 55.
95. Gibson and Macdonald, 2001.
96. Posel, 2001: 56.
97. 2001: 2.
98. See for example Chapman, A.R., Stellenbosch, 2002: 'Approaches to Studying Reconciliation', Paper presented at the Conference on Empirical Approaches to Studying Truth Commissions, Cited in Lombard, 2004:46.
99. Lombard, 2004:40.
100. 2004:40.

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