

PULP FICTIONS

RACE, IDEOLOGY AND THE UNIVERSITY

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Editorial

Keeping with its robust dialogic spirit, this edition of *PULP Fictions* plays host to a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Responding to the events surrounding the publication of a controversial article by Louise Mabilie, four authors from diverse (subject) positions in and outside of the University – Alfred Moraka, Gillian Schutte, Quraysha Ishmail-Sooliman and Jaco Oelofse – focus on the issue of race and racial ideology in the University space. While Moraka engages with selected theories on the meaning and conceptualisation of racism and its relation to power, history and subject formation, Oelofse attends to the racially structured nature of knowledge and its perpetuation of white cultural domination. Schutte offers a searing reflection on whiteness in the ‘new’ South Africa and Sooliman amplifies the problem of Islamophobia and seeks to draw out its association to, and as, racism.

This edition of the *PULP Fictions*, after a long hiatus, is a timely one in that it coincides with and critically challenges the central theme of what is called 20 years of ‘freedom’ in ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa. In recounting the continuation of racism, the incompleteness of transformation, the still dominant nature of whiteness and the emergence of new modes of racial power, the authors problematise the easy conceit that the nation is ‘free’ of the vestiges of colonial racism and may now move on. That this also takes place a year after the passing of Nelson Mandela, in the shadow of events such as the Marikana massacre and in the context of the emergence of movements such as the Economic Freedom Fighters, further augments the relevance and political acuity of the papers here.

The contributions contained in this edition also contend – directly and indirectly – with the University’s own historical participation in and complicity with racism. Universities in South Africa and in all other settler colonies have always been instrumental in the development of an ideological and theoretical apparatus for oppression, through constructing for example scientific experiments and sociological knowledge that rationalises the enslavement, exploitation, colonisation of the indigenous Black population. In addition, South African universities appear to exhibit an ongoing epistemological and cultural unwillingness to be truly *South African*. For one thing, a predominantly Anglo-European intellectual tradition still frames much of the content being taught to students. African history, politics, philosophy, jurisprudence etc., are continuously relegated to electives or

moved out of departments into ‘Institutes’ or ‘Centres’ of African Studies. This reflects, we think, that a certain Hegelian doubt about whether Africa has a history, and indeed an intellectual life, remains current in institutions of higher learning in this country. Indeed it remains a stark irony and injustice that the thought and history of and from Africa, rather than being the norm of intellectual and theoretical discourse, functions for many as an extra option or hobby to be pursued in leisurely time – to be found only in the ghettos and margins of universities. The papers collected in this edition then should also be read as raising serious questions about South African universities’ continued complicity in the relegation of the African in Africa to the ‘other’ also at the level of epistemology and knowledge production. Given the context, a particular and direct focus on the University of Pretoria is warranted.

It is clear from public discourse that these conversations about racism, economic power and liberation are taking place in South African society. This publication is but one attempt to intervene and participate in those conversations and adds to the growing voice calling for a socially responsive and historically grounded intellectual tradition in South Africa.

Joel Modiri (Guest Editor), Department of Jurisprudence, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria

Terblanche Delpont (Guest Co-Editor), School of Humanities: Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, University of South Africa

As the guest-editors alluded to, there has been a gap between this edition (2014) of Pulp fictions and the previous one published in 2011. This edition, focussing on ‘Race, ideology and the university’ engages in exactly the kind of conversations that we envisaged with the series when it started in 2005. The need for a vibrant and active public sphere continues. Pulp fictions could be one space for dialogue to take place and dissent to be staged. We are working already on the next two editions, the first to take up the relationship between the university as public space and the second on the notion of ‘Unnatural death and grievable life’.

Karin van Marle (Editor), Department of Jurisprudence, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria

Reflections on the Mabile saga and the Anti-Racist Forum at the University of Pretoria

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Introduction

In this article I will be reflecting on the formation of the Anti-Racist Forum (ARF) at the University of Pretoria and I will provide a brief outline of the particular event(s) that emphasised the need to establish such a forum within the University. Whether a particular policy, law, rule, practice, situation, condition or action constitutes racism is always a point of contention in both academic and non-academic settings. This article's main focus will be defining on of racism. I will contextualise this definition with regard to the University and in so doing will touch on other related themes such as transformation of, and within, the University. The definition put forward in this article is a radical left definition of racism that represents the one that the ARF subscribes to. I will rely on arguments made that subscribes to this radical left position to argue against dominant reasoning and logic relating to racism and acts of racism with the aim of addressing and exposing some of the pervasive conservative and liberal formulations of what constitutes racism. In conclusion, I offer brief reflections on the four years that I studied at the University of Pretoria and repeat the call for transformation of/in the university.

The formation of the Anti-racist Forum

Towards the end of 2013, Dr Louis Mabile, a then lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Humanities published an article on the website *praag.org*,¹ a well-known reactionary internet site hosted by Dan Roodt. In the article she made the claim that the raping of babies was a characteristic of black culture. She also accused white feminists of careerism for opting to work in discourses that critique religion, western imperialism, and capitalism and for affiliating themselves with left politics in general. Here is an extract containing some of the problematic aspects of her piece:²

In the last few decades a strong joint discourse developed in which women, non-whites, non-Christian, homosexuals and the disabled are all stereotyped as disadvantaged. This discourse naturally got a strong injection from the existence of deconstruction, which created a convenient terminology of the One and the Other. Although this theory holds a certain academic legitimacy it also lends itself to a strong pseudo-intellectualism. All that lives and breathes now think that they are making an impression when they stand up for some or other 'oppressed' and when they show their 'openness' to the 'Other'. In practice, they normally use 'safe' targets, such as the legitimate politically correct. There are several examples of this. Journalists like Christi van der Westhuizen and Hannelie Booyens know that their work will be published, when they challenge Dan Roodt, Afrikaners, the church, the USA, Capitalism and all the other suspects – and praise the leftists. Of course it would be far easier to moan about 'Calvinism', than ask the question of whether the rape of babies is becoming a cultural phenomenon in the black population.

Following the article becoming public knowledge, Dr Mabile resigned from her post at the Department of Philosophy. Some students and faculty members of the University reacted to the piece with outrage and felt the need for some kind of response that could expose Dr Mabile and the content of her piece as racist, anti-feminist, and in bad academic spirit. There were also calls for her to be held accountable for the kind of work she was producing. We, as the Anti-Racist Forum, felt that a serious and robust dialogue had to take place and that such a dialogue should not be an event

¹ <http://ghettotruth.blogspot.com/2013/08/dr-louis-mabile-racist-remarks.html?m=1> (accessed 18 February 2014). The article was published in Afrikaans, the English text which I relied on for this article has been translated by Karin Labuschagne. PRAAG is an acronym for *Pro Afrikaanse Aksie Groep*.

² (n 1 above).

but must form part of an ongoing struggle to transform and challenge racism, sexism, and homophobia within the University spaces and structures. We were all incredibly disturbed by the contents of the piece and were equally perplexed by why the University had reacted to her article in such a blasé and non-transparent manner.³ It was our understanding that the University's inability to react to this incident swiftly and transparently in way that distanced itself categorically from such objectionable views was either due to the fact that the University endorsed such views and did not deem them unacceptable or that it did not regard racism from academic staff as not warranting open and public condemnation. This entire incident was never brought to the attention of students; those of us who felt passionate about ending racism in the University were left to our own devices in respect of drawing awareness and demanding accountability in this regard.

It was out of these particular events that the ARF was established, originally operating as an informal and loose coalition of students and staff mainly from the faculties of the Humanities and Law concerned about racism in the University. At our first meeting heated debates arose between those in attendance. While all of us more less agreed that the piece was hurtful, amounted to unfair discrimination and constituted hate speech and although all of us took exception to how the university had reacted to the incident, there were serious, perhaps irreconcilable, disagreements over whether the contents of the piece did in fact constitute *racism* and if so whether that meant that Dr Mabile could herself be labelled a racist. As the debates progressed, it soon became clear that the disagreements themselves were symptomatic of serious ideological incompatibilities. It became clear that we all subscribed to different 'notions' of racism. Out of the need to understand the Dr Mabile incident beyond the scope of legalistic terminology such as 'discrimination' and 'hate speech' it was essential that our ideological conflicts were teased out. The majority of attendees were leftist⁴ in political orientation and we were uncompromising in our radical leftist understanding of racism. After some intense discussions and debates there was a majority agreement on a preliminary definition that qualified the Dr Mabile incident

³ There was no open or public recognition by the university as to the existence of this article nor was there visible action taken in relation thereto once it became public knowledge.

⁴ I am using leftist here to denote the fact that we did not subscribe to liberal political views, that in fact our politics is in part informed by a critique, rejection and struggling against liberal logics and rationalities. See W Brown & J Halley 'Introduction' in W Brown & J Halley (eds) *Left legalism/left critique* (2002) 6 - 7.

as in fact racist. Following this, we proceeded to operate informally and had regular meetings in the days and weeks following the publication of Dr Mabile's piece on praag.org. We decided on the name *Anti-Racist Forum* because we agreed that we had to settle on a name that itself embodied and described the specific political commitment (anti-racism) that motivated us. Efforts to react politically to the incident and to address racism in the university came in the form of a number of projects including writing a collective letter to the campus student newspaper the *Perdeby*,⁵ putting up posters around campus to make students aware of this incident in particular and of racism in general. We also graffiti'd the campus advertising wall, set up meetings with various interested academic staff members including the Dean of the Humanities, and affiliated with other campus political bodies that were also in different ways struggling against racism within the university. Because we were in an academic setting, it was important to make room for academic and theoretical reflections, more so because it was proving crucial that going forward the ARF had to develop a working definition of racism that all members could affiliate themselves with. Following the above events, a panel made up of all the contributors in this publication was set up to reflect on racism in the university in light of the Dr Mabile incident and to formally and publicly launch what is now the ARF.

Defining racism

Having settled upon the name Anti-Racism Forum, it was important that we clearly flesh out exactly the kind of racism that our forum was *anti* as suggested in our name. This is the definition of the racism that we understand our forum to be 'anti':

Racism is a globally functioning structural power system.⁶ This form of racism operates by means of historical, political, social, and economic power that not only establishes and perpetuates a dominator culture between white subjects and black subjects (white superiority and black inferiority complexes)⁷ but also ensures continued institutionalized racism that manifest itself in the unequal treatment of black subjects and white subjects in everyday operations such as educational systems, labour markets and criminal

⁵ ARF 'Letter from the Anti-Racism Forum' <http://www.perdeby.co.za/sections/news/3204-lettter>(accessed on 14 February 2014).

⁶ F Cress Welsing *The Isis papers: The keys to the colors* (1990) ii.

⁷ b hooks *Belonging: A culture of space* (2009) 29.

justice.⁸ Accordingly, 'black' is understood as all those individuals that were, in South Africa, defined as non-white and thus 'inferior' citizens. Racism constitutes a structural power system in that black subjects are not only excluded from most of the social and political structures but such structures are created and operate systemically to visibly disadvantage black subjects while manifestly privileging white subjects.⁹

Of importance in this definition of racism, when read within a post-apartheid constitutional South Africa, is its rejection of depoliticised liberal conceptions of racism that informs a politics characterised by colour-blindness, assimilation, reconciliation without justice, multiculturalism, and individualised acts of racism. A concern with this type of leftist definition of racism in which racism is primarily located in structural power also inevitably requires a close engagement with the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical tool through which to navigate the interlocking connections between race, class, gender, and nationality amongst others.¹⁰ This understanding of racism as a power system illustrates that racism and white supremacy (a power system that was able to entrench a minority population into the upper and higher classes of society through a process of historical and systematic oppression) are one in the same.

This definition of racism is multi-layered and needs to be further unpacked to consider its conceptual and political implications. Firstly, this definition of racism follows a long tradition of black anti-racist theories and politics that have moved away from limiting racism to individual discriminatory encounters between individual subjects. A more critical and complex definition of racism was developed that not only evoked a political world that all of us could frame ourselves in relation to, but that also enabled the development of theoretical discourses that could account for such social phenomena as internalised racism, white privilege, and decolonisation.¹¹

⁸ G Kilomba *Plantation memories: Episodes of everyday racism* (2008) 43.

⁹ Kilomba (n 8 above) 43.

¹⁰ K Crenshaw 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of colour' (1991) 43 *Stanford Law Review* 1243. Leslie McCall in 'The complexity of intersectionality' (2005) 30 *Signs* 1771 describes intersectionality as involving 'studying relationships amongst multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations'.

¹¹ Media Education Foundation (documentary) *bell hooks: Cultural criticism and transformation* (1997). See also D Pyke 'What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries' (2010) 53 *Sociological Perspectives* 551 - 572.

Secondly, in formulating this definition of racism and eschewing the restriction of racism to a collection of separate individual acts of prejudice or discrimination, the aim is to highlight that racism is not just isolated personal or individualised acts of racial discrimination but it is more fundamentally also a historical, cultural, political, and economic power system that operated and still operates in a way that privileges white people and disadvantages black people within our social world.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that it is only through this radical definition of racism that one can begin to understand why Dr Mabilie's article does in fact constitute racism. This is because the definition of racism we put forward brings into sharp focus the connection between structural power and subject position. The definition offers an account of the racialised nature of structural power in the sense that it advantages and privileges, secures and protects racial interests of subjects who are positioned as white in the world at the expense of subjects who are positioned as black in the world.¹² The implication of this is that those individuals who are positioned as white subjects in the world have to come to terms with the fact that their white subject position inevitably has to be and is in fact understood in relation to and in the context of a racialised structural power system that privileges them.¹³ For the individuals who are positioned as black subjects in the world, our relationship to this racialised structural power system is totally different. The racialised structural power system does not privilege our black subject position but rather disadvantages and negates it; it does not protect or afford benefit to it but rather neglects and oppresses it.¹⁴ In this case, the relationship between the racialised structural power system and the black subject position is one in which the racialised structural power system

¹² This understanding of the relationship between structural power and subject position is also crucial for understand arguments relating to why black subjects can't be racist or alternatively to why when one is speaking about racism one is speaking about white racism/white supremacy – the white/whiteness as already as implied in racism. Being classified as white is simply not enough for one to be racist, one must be classified as white for purposes of being positioned as such (in relation to others who are not classified as white – non-white) in relation to a structural power system for the aim of receiving privileges as benefits as a result of being white at the brutal expense of those who are not white. Racism as white supremacy does not require that the individual continuously acts and performs its racism against individuals.

¹³ Grada Kilomba's 'Dealing with racism in Europe' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj3esO11Pg> (accessed 27 March 2014).

¹⁴ Kilomba (n 13 above).

manifestly disadvantages the black subject position. As is the case with the white subject position, it is also equally important to understand the black subject position in relation to and within the context of a racialised structural power system that oppresses and disadvantages those who are positioned as black.

Looked at through this context the power relation between those individuals who are positioned as white and those individuals who are positioned as black is stark. The relationship is one in which the white subjects are privileged and powerful and have access to and can produce certain 'knowledge' and the black subjects are deprived and powerless and positioned as objects about whom certain 'knowledge' can be produced. It is through their recognition of Dr Mabille's subject position as white in relation to the subject position of black people that we can understand why the views she expressed are racist. Dr Mabille's sociological deductions and assumptions about black people and black lives follows and reflect a long racist practice by white people studying, classifying and deducing certain 'facts' about black people and black lives simply because they are white and have the power to do so. Dr Mabille was able to express and present the kind of racist views she did primarily because she is white and her whiteness is a political identity which, as a result of racialised structural power system, has positioned her and all white people as dominant and superior to black people. And it is precisely this power and privilege that has afforded her the agency to produce 'knowledge' that constructs blackness in a way that confirms the racist idea that white people are superior and moral and black people are immoral and uncivilised.¹⁵ It is through this theoretical understanding of subject position that we must understand how certain speech and, laws, rules, practices, situations, myths, stereotypes, symbols, acts, and omissions might be said to constitute racism.

Out of this above discussion might emerge a question about whether white people as a result of a subject position that already involves and implicates them within a racist discourse and hierarchy of power are not always already racists on the grounds of that subject position. In everyday settings, this question is commonly posed by a white subject when they ask 'am I racist?'. Relying more generally on the definition of racism provided

¹⁵ G Kilomba 'White is not a colour' <http://www.africavenir.org/news-archive/newsdetails/datum/2010/06/29/white-is-not-a-color-an-interview-with-author-and-psychoanalyst-grada-kilomba.html> (accessed 27 March 2014).

and more specifically on the above discussion of structural power and subject position, it is clear that the answers to this question will always be 'yes'.¹⁶ This means that the question itself is not productive and serves no real purpose because the answer is already embodied within the white subject position. This question also carries the risk of derailing or reducing the question of how we dismantle racist structural power system to inquiries centred on the morality of individual white subjects who might come to pose this question in an attempt to absolve their guilt. The question 'am I racist?' is thus not a question that a white subject must pose.¹⁷ The question that must instead be posed is 'how do I deconstruct my own racism?'.¹⁸ Unlike the former question, the latter question is a politically productive question that starts the process in which the white subject not only comes to terms with fact that she is white but begins to understand what the implications of being white and racist are and will begin to confront all the aspects of their whiteness for purposes of opening up room for the possibility of recognising the position of the black subject and consequently committing to reparations and justice.¹⁹

The University as a site of racism

The University is a microcosm of the general national and global racism. Within the formal and informal structures of the University, many black students and staff members experience subtle but nonetheless vicious forms of racism. Grada Kilomba convincingly argues that the university is not a neutral location but it is rather a space that has functioned to advance and hone the political interests of white society. She describes the university space as a place from where black people have been rendered voiceless by being denied the privilege to speak. She also describes it as the place where theoretical discourses that constructed black people as inferior were developed and confirmed. Kilomba makes the point that the University space is the place where black people were made inferior and our bodies were described, dehumanised, primitivised, brutalised, and finally, killed.

What we can glean from Kilomba's account of institutional racism and racism in general is that it is not limited to formal policies, practices, and rules. Black students and staff members themselves experience racism on a

¹⁶ Kilomba (n 15 above).

¹⁷ Kilomba (n 15 above).

¹⁸ Kilomba (n 15 above).

¹⁹ Kilomba (n 15 above).

personal and direct level as well. Notwithstanding my earlier insistence on avoiding the reduction of racism to mere personal acts of discrimination and contempt, it is worth stating that racism is not an abstract notion but a practice that has significant material and psychological effects on black people as the group upon whom racism is propagated. Individual acts of racism are an effect of a broader structural power relation between black people and white people and it is precisely as an effect of this racialised power relation that individual black staff members and students experience treatment from white colleagues that is largely informed and conditioned by anti-black racism and a historical culture of racial exclusion that is maintained and held in place by the lack of transformation within these institutions. Tshepo Madlingozi quotes former University of Cape Town lecturer Wiseman Magasela's narration of how black staff members often experience racism within the University. Magasela writes:²⁰

If you are black you are never good enough ... You have to fight against the networks that protect interests, position and privilege. The e-mail that is never sent to you, the invites that always miss your office, the meeting that is held in your absence, the mailing list without your name, the suggestions you make in meetings followed by silence as the chair jumps to the next item on the agenda, the 'inadvertent' omission of your name, the withholding of information that would advantage your understanding and self-development ... Very quickly, you learn that most of the time you are invisible. And you are secretly blamed for a lack of ambition and determination, forever involving yourself; you are not fit for promotion ... There are informal networks you are not part of. Plans are hatched over red wine at weekends that exclude you. These weekend 'informal gatherings' are where career pathing, promotions, ideas and activities are discussed and decided, with the mandatory office meeting a mere token for the formalisation of the rule of the clique.

When unpacking institutional racism it is very important to always keep in mind that the cultural settings of the university is based upon a number of ongoing and relentless practices including hyper surveillance, marginalisation, alienation, and utter disrespect for black people and the work we produce. This type of racist institutional culture renders our academic contributions and us insignificant and irrelevant and there is no measuring how wounding and painful these experience are.

²⁰ T Madlingozi 'Confronting and dismantling institutional racism in the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria' in P Visser & C Heyns (eds) *Transformation and the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria* (2007) 29.

Conclusion

I have studied law at undergraduate and now postgraduate level at the University of Pretoria and over the past four years and I have stayed at the University's residences. During this time, racism has been a recurring feature of my studies and stay here. Whether I found myself at 'res' or on campus, the very culture that is dominant at both these places have served as chilling reminders that we as black students and staff are not welcome and that, in fact, our very presence is a disturbance and scandal to the desired order and makeup of the university. This place can be alienating disheartening and a source of chronic despair.

When interesting work during lectures caught our attention and prompted us to consult with lecturers in the hopes that they will take keen interest in our intellectual curiosity and willingness to learn more, these hopes were crushed by the cold and dismissive receptions that we received in their offices. In contrast, similar gestures by our white counterparts were met with glee, undivided attention and praise. It is a well-known practice that lecturers are more generous with test and exam demarcation and scopes when conveying them to Afrikaans students than to English students. On a number of occasions, close white friends of ours even received private calls from lecturers who were seeking further clarification on answers that they had given in their test and exam answer sheets (!). The likelihood of a black student ever receiving such a courtesy is far-fetched and highly unlikely. It is these kinds of unfair and racist practices that we must all fight to eradicate.

As Madlingozi has suggested, we have to confront and dismantle institutional racism.²¹ We have to insist on transformation in the University and we have to insist that issues of race, class, and gender move from the periphery to the centre of the university's transformational aspirations. The ARF is an attempt to contribute through a different mode and from a different place to ongoing struggles against institutional racism in the University of Pretoria. It is about a commitment to creating an intellectual space where we all can develop a sense of belonging and accommodation, where the differences in culture, race, language, gender, and nationality are used in creative and exciting ways as a source of power and vitality;²² it is

²¹ Madlingozi (n 20 above).

²² Audre Lorde in J Scagliotti (director) *After Stonewall* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYYkNPSWJpk> (accessed on 27 March 2014).

about an imagined place where all of us can learn and teach from a place of freedom and love with the passion for knowledge and life.²³

²³ b hooks *Teaching to transgress* (1994) 4.

Resistance of the academic periphery

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when we speak
we are afraid our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.¹

Introduction

The transformation of universities has been a controversial topic. When individuals or organisations start to probe the issues of transformation they are usually met with hostility and disagreement. It is remarkable that after multiple incidents of racism in South African universities, the topic of transformation still remains 'controversial'. Transformation remains a topic of controversy because those who are supposed to implement it, those who are in power and maintain the status quo, are those who oppose it.

One might think that there would be a more serious commitment to transformation, especially after the series of racist incidents that occurred in South African universities in the past few years. In 2013, Dr Louise Mabile a former university lecturer at the University of Pretoria wrote the racist article 'The strange betrayal of feminism to the West', in which she made several ignorant claims about black culture, feminism, socialism, and Muslims. Her racist remarks sparked controversy all over the university. The management of the university however failed to decisively address this issue as a clear incident of racism and merely dissociated themselves from

¹ A Lorde *The Black Unicorn: Poems* (1978).

Dr Mabile's statements. Many university students and staff decided that the lack of accountability from the university needed to be addressed.

Not long after the Mabile-debacle, the Anti-Racism Forum (ARF) came together to address the issues of epistemic racism and transformation on campus. The University of Pretoria lacks transformation even on the most elementary level, still dealing with a 59% white student body and a 41% black student body.² However to merely change the racial makeup of a university by 'diversifying' the student population and staff, does not constitute transformation. The call for transformation does not merely focus on racial demographics and statistics but also in the content of what our students are being taught and the overall culture of the institution. There is also a further commitment to challenge and disturb the comfortable power arrangements of the university.

The University of Pretoria has an academic syllabus that still remains largely unchanged and untransformed. I will elucidate on the untransformed state of our university curriculum by particularly focusing on the understanding of what is knowledge and who can 'speak' knowledge.

Furthermore, emphasis will be put on how class and race affects the educational experiences of the black subject, or as Paulo Freire states it 'the experience of the colonised'. As a further point of introduction, this article makes a call for transformation – a transformation that would entail challenging the hegemonic structures of neo-liberal capitalism and the resultant, corporatisation of public spaces such as universities, which is indicative of the institutions opposition to transformation. To demonstrate the above, one must trace capitalism to its generating cause of imperialism, and the combination of colonial assumptions about Africans as always lagging behind the West – an assumption that was central to conquest and colonisation. Capitalist logic is rooted in competition and profit-making, further maintaining the unequal levers of power created by colonisation, which are clearly reflected in the university.

Deconstructing knowledge

To understand knowledge and who can '*speak*' knowledge is essential, because it allows us to understand both *who* is at the centre of academic knowledge³ and that this centre is not a neutral location.⁴

² JO Kuye 'A decade review of higher education in South Africa' (2007) 1 *African Journal of Public Affairs* 5

For Grada Kilomba, the centre of academic knowledge is a place of whiteness, a place in which the black subject is denied speech and appearance. Whiteness in Kilomba's sense is closely linked to the notion of white supremacy, especially as defined by Frances Cress Welsing:⁵

White supremacy (racism) 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, labour, law, politics, religion, sex and war).

Historically, Western knowledge understood black people, the native, as objects, as the 'Other'.⁶ Africans were classified, dehumanized, and primitivised. This is evidence of the ways in which the education system was and is under the influence of white cultural and epistemic hegemony. It is clear that these institutions of learning, is no 'safe-haven' for periphery academics and students, but a place of hostile exclusion and violence built upon the foundations of colonialism, racial segregation, and Apartheid. During the Apartheid era, this violence manifested in physical violence, which was the case with the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959 that criminalised black students who registered at white universities.

To refer to the structures of knowledge validation, as a place of violence, one must understand it as a space where any form of scholarship that does not adhere to the eurocentric order of knowledge is rejected as 'unscientific' or pseudo-knowledge. This particular issue is prevalent in most universities in South Africa. Due to the inherent whiteness of universities as the centre of knowledge, attempts by black and other subaltern voices to speak and write in its spaces often result in invalidation and dismissal of their

³ Academic knowledge must be understood as something more than just an understanding or awareness of a certain concept, but must be understood in the philosophical nature of epistemology. This includes the questions what is knowledge? Who's knowledge? I specifically make focus on the knowledge produced at South African universities.

⁴ G Kilomba *Plantation Memories: episodes of everyday racism* (2008) 27.

⁵ F Cress Welsing *Isis Papers: The keys to the colors* (1990) ii.

⁶ Cress Welsing (n 5 above).

work or co-optation by white academics who reside comfortable within the centre of academic knowledge.⁷

The point Kilomba makes with regards to violence is that under conditions of white supremacy, the University is not merely a site of knowledge-production and education, that it cannot simply be seen as a neutral space of wisdom, learning, and scholarship.⁸ This violence manifests symbolically, institutionally, and epistemologically as hostility towards black academics and students. This violence is clear as well in university residences where a culture based on Afrikaner traditions and grounded in heterosexist masculinity continues to be dominant. The songs, customs and practices of the University of Pretoria's residences and the absence of any problematisation or critique of this culture indicates a failure to meaningfully include the majority of people that ought to be represented in public institutions.

To this day, Universities in South Africa continue to perpetuate a colonial order of knowledge. In the specific context of the University of Pretoria, students are taught Rawlsian liberalism to understand African politics, Western philosophy to evaluate African society and existence, while the teaching of capitalist economics to African students is believed to ensure future generations to uphold Africa's economic bondage. My concern here is with the lack of critical and crucial engagement with African social, political, and philosophical problems. Hardly any form of African philosophy, African humanism or African political and social theory is taught at undergraduate level, this absence remains a clear sign of deeply rooted epistemic racism at the University of Pretoria. In addition, a clear hostility towards Feminist-, Marxist- or Critical Theory can be observed. Students, particularly on undergraduate level are taught primarily by academics associated with the centre.

The above mentioned example of perpetuating colonial knowledge converges with what Paulo Freire termed as the 'banking system' of education.⁹ Freire critiques the traditional education system as being teacher-centred education.¹⁰ He continues to explain that students are taught to memorise and repeat what they have learned, without

⁷ Cress Welsing (n 5 above) 1.

⁸ Kilomba (n 4 above) 28.

⁹ P Freire *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1968) 72.

¹⁰ Freire (n 9 above) 13.

understanding the meaning of the work. This results in students being objectified as empty vessels to be filled by the teacher.¹¹

Reading this with the understanding of the power relations of racism and within the public space of untransformed universities, white lecturers and academics not only now see only the objectified student, but they see the *black* objectified student that needs to be filled with knowledge. The knowledge that these lecturers are teaching is actually a knowledge that posits the black subject as an Other. In other words, the white subjects have knowledge, while the black subject may become knowledgeable. This is also true for the poor, women and homosexuals. These assumptions are reflected in the curriculum and also within the university demographics and culture.

The banking model in the case of South Africa also functions as a way of othering the object that it teaches. The knowledge transmitted through teaching, if it remains untransformed, actually alienates the student from herself or himself. In other words, the liberal notion of transformation of a university with its exclusive focus on changing the racial demographics of the student body and staff, is clearly not enough.

The banking system's similarities to colonial education is problematic in that it does not come from invention and reinventions that perpetually enquires about our own world,¹² but merely relies on notions of self-discipline, memorisation, and repetition of what they have learned. By this I mean the banking system and colonial education both alienate the student from herself or himself. To further problematise the teacher-centrism of traditional education, emphasis must be placed on the fact that the teacher can also learn from the student.

Peripheral Resistance

To decolonise knowledge, there must be resistance to traditional western education from not only students but academic staff as well. Through the experiential empowerment of students, this resistance can lead to liberation. The pedagogy required to end oppression, Freire writes, 'must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed'.

One must understand knowledge in South Africa as a product of not only western imperial and colonial ambitions, but also of Apartheid South Africa

¹¹ Freire (n 9 above) 9.

¹² Freire (n 9 above) 9.

under Afrikaner Nationalism. During the Apartheid regime educational reforms were based on '*Afrikaner fundamentele pedagogie*' and '*Christelike hoër onderwys*', while these education reforms were enforced by the Bantu Education Department to ensure that the black majority remained in the working class to serve white interests.¹³ Dr Hendrik Verwoerd infamously said:¹⁴

There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?

To further clarify the effects of Apartheid on education, I draw attention to the notorious Bantu Education Act 47 of 1953 and the *Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974*, which are some of the pieces of legislation that subsequently led to the Soweto uprisings. It is upon this historical foundation that the call for transformation is made. Apart from the formal political and constitutional changes, there must be a commitment to the decolonisation of knowledge.

Grada Kilomba makes use of three examples to emphasise the extent of colonised knowledge. Firstly by asking a series of African historical questions, she can easily observe what is considered to be general knowledge¹⁵ only a few of her students were able to answer the questions.¹⁶ Kilomba uses this experiment to see what kind of knowledge is seen as general and what kind of knowledge is marginal – her questions that focused on western history, were more easily recalled by students (white students were specifically the most vocal) but as she began asking question relating to African anti-colonial thought less and less students knew the answers. What was interesting for her is that the white students who initially answered the western history-related questions were silent on the African questions where the black students now became more vocal.

Her second example was a reflection on education in schools, where questions are asked such as '*explain the Portuguese discovery epoch*' or '*write about the great legacy of colonization*'. Kilomba, relying on Fanon's words, describe this as the best way to colonise: 'to teach the *colonised* to

¹³ <http://www.stanford.edu> (accessed 16 May 2014).

¹⁴ <http://africanhistory.about.com> (accessed 16 May 2014).

¹⁵ Here general knowledge is understood as western knowledge, in other words western history, science, medicine and civilisation.

¹⁶ Kilomba (n 4 above) 27.

speak and write from the *colonisers'* perspective'.¹⁷ It is without a doubt that this form of education is oppressive and alienating.

However, this oppression can only be overcome if people critically recognise its origins. This includes the internalisation of the oppressor consciousness. It is impossible to be free until the internal oppressor is removed.¹⁸ The important point here is that as soon as the oppressed discovers their internal oppressor – the person must act on that realisation, to lessen the oppression.

The oppressed can use their own experiences, language and realities to give meaning and explanation to their oppression.¹⁹ To achieve this, Freire argues that we need to engage in 'critical and liberating dialogue' where students and teachers are involved in dialogic exchange. Not only does this challenge the traditional education system but it is the 'correct method for a revolutionary leadership', because teachers and students are equally participating.

This form of pedagogy can be linked to Kilomba's third and most important example; writing about one's own body and experiences. I would like to emphasise that it is an imperative strategy for many African and African Diasporic scholars, to deconstruct their own realities within white academia. This not only allow us to understand existentialistic experiences within the broad framework of the social sciences but serves as a 'persistent deconstructive critique of theory itself'.²⁰

bell hooks explains that scholars who occupy the 'margins' of the academia enter a space where they have the opportunities of resistance and new possibilities.²¹ The periphery allows scholars to decolonise knowledge in a 'space of radical openness and creativity', it allows the academia to understand and critique the structures of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

The radical possibility and resistance of the periphery must not be confused with the romanticisation of oppression, but rather understood in the context that the periphery is a complex *loci*: where there exists modes of domination, there must be a call on us to resist and establish politics that

¹⁷ Kilomba (n 4 above) 12.

¹⁸ Kilomba (n 4 above) 12.

¹⁹ Kilomba (n 4 above) 12.

²⁰ G Spivak *Outside in the teaching machine* (1993).

²¹ G Kilomba *Plantation memories: episodes of everyday racism* (2008) 37. Kilomba uses bell hooks *Talking back: Thinking feminism, thinking black* (1999).

challenges that mode of operating domination. For the periphery, this is crucial for the decolonisation and transformation of knowledge, because it allows us to be visionaries and imagine alternative discourses and understandings.

Conclusion

This article does not serve to provide alternatives or solutions to the problem, but to emphasise and critique these problems. What are destructive are the narratives in education, particularly in the Humanities, Law, Commerce, Medicine, and Education faculties. It is imperative for students, lecturers and academics who are victims of racism to use their position in the periphery to resist the patriarchal, heteronormative and white supremacist hegemony of the academia. The subaltern voice might be silent and misunderstood, but within the egalitarian nature of the periphery, the discourse of deconstructing knowledge can transform the dangerous liberal and Eurocentric education system that is prevalent in *South African* universities.

Islamophobia as racism or Islamophobia is racism?

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Introduction

Much has been written about Islamophobia recently, almost as if this is a new phenomenon or experience. Most of the writings delve into the meaning, origin and interpretation of the term, and almost all of the works seem to describe Islamophobia as a form of racism or discrimination that is manifested through racist discourse.¹ This could be because of the actual incidences of harm manifested against Muslims through targeted and persistent acts of prejudice, antagonism, discrimination, intimidation and profiling including the belittling of their culture, knowledge and belief systems. The question that I had to contend with in trying to give meaning to this discourse revolves around the title of this article. Is Islamophobia a fancy word that has been concocted to disguise *racism* which is defined as:²

¹ See S Goeman 'Islamophobia is a racism' http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-goeman/islamophobia-is-a-racism_b_2428792.html (accessed 07 August 2014); S Poynting & V Mason 'The irresistible rise of Islamophobia' (2007) 43 *Journal of Sociology* 61 - 86; G Marranci 'Multiculturalism, Islam and the class of civilisations theory: rethinking Islamophobia' (2004) 5 *Culture and Religion* 105 - 117; <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/9.html> (accessed 31 January 2014).

² <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/9.html> (accessed 31 January 2014).

The belief that human races have distinctive characteristics which determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule or dominate others.

Or is Islamophobia simply the manifestation of some *form of racism*? This article will explore the different conversations and definitions of Islamophobia by beginning with the development of the term in the Runnymede report.

The post- Cold War geo-political context contributed to a renewed climate of prejudice, discrimination and antagonism, manifesting as 'social fears', particularly towards Muslims.³ The discrimination and antagonism towards Muslims resulted in the 1991 Runnymede Trust Report which defined Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims'.⁴ But the discussion around Islamophobia, specifically in the post 9/11 context, certainly must question the limiting of the definition of Islamophobia to purely some form of discrimination in much the same way as homosexuals or females or disabled persons are discriminated against. By defining Islamophobia as discrimination, the Runnymede report depoliticises actual issues of racism, whether socio-economic, material or systemic, reducing the experience to questions of interpersonal racism or individual accounts thereof.

And the reality is that Muslims who are discriminated against experience this discrimination because of their perceived 'blackness'. This is important because although there are many white Muslims, there are almost no reported cases of targeted and intentional discrimination or prejudice against these individuals. In reality, there manifests a sort of hidden pity for these white Muslims who have 'fallen astray' and there exists a silent belief that these confused persons can be coaxed back into the fold once they realise the error of their ways. Such 'sympathy' does not exist for Muslims of colour. Colour, specifically the colour brown, became a symbol that reinforced the notion of the 'other' in a post 9/11 geo-political context. 'Colour' became the trigger to re-ignite global socio-political antagonisms and this colour was now directly associated with Islam and Muslims.⁵ In this

³ R Grosfoguel & G Martin-Munoz 'Introduction: Debating Islamophobia' (2010) *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge* 1.

⁴ <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia> (accessed 31 January 2014).

⁵ M Semati 'Islamophobia, culture and race in the age of empire' (2010) 24 *Cultural Studies* 256-257.

manner, Islamophobia was promoted ‘by conflating politics, histories, societies and cultures of the Middle East into a unified and negative conception of an essentialized Islam as ideology’, which was considered to be incompatible and irreconcilable with Euro-Americaness.⁶ The colour brown once again became the colour of an ‘undesirable’ in the post 9/11 context. And the colour ‘black’ remains a signifier of inferiority when referring to Africans; be they Muslim or not. In this manner, colour which is a central pathology of racism, has now been used to widen the pathologies of racism and to develop identification strategies to inflict intentional prejudice, bias and discrimination in an Anglo-American world where ‘multi-culturalism and diversity operate to conceal white supremacy’.⁷ This notion of colour and the argument that Islamophobia *is* racism will be discussed further under the heading, ‘What is Islamophobia?’

In order to conceptualise the second conversation of Islamophobia as racism, and to fully understand the implications of these actions on the lives of those affected it is essential to approach the analysis from a Critical Race Theory perspective which describes racism as a manifestation of ‘structural power, systemic dominance [and] institutionalised ideologies’ that constitute the main elements in defining race and racial identity.⁸ Critical Race Theory locates race and racism within a discourse that does not limit the analysis to a discussion on every-day or individual discrimination based on colour; rather it identifies ‘racial oppression as primarily an institutional and systemic problem [and] racism as a structural manifestation of white social, economic and cultural power’.⁹ From this theoretical grounding, I will show that Islamophobia as racism manifests in different ways and in all aspects of life. Islamophobia is certainly more than discrimination or xenophobia and also occurs on an epistemic, cultural, and legal level. Islamophobia should thus be understood as a structural power system. Consider for example in the 2014 case of *Hassan v City of New York* CIV. NO. 2:12-3401 (WJM), where US District Judge William Martini ruled that it was perfectly legal for the New York Police Department (NYPD) to spy on American Muslims (who are mostly non-white) even without evidence of

⁶ Semati (n 5 above) 257.

⁷ R Grosfoguel & E Mielants ‘The long-durée entanglement between Islamophobia and Racism in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system: An introduction’ (2006) 5 *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 2.

⁸ JM Modiri ‘Towards a “(post-)apartheid” critical race jurisprudence: “Divining our racial themes”’ (2012) 27 *SA Public Law* 247.

⁹ Modiri (n 8 above) 247.

wrongdoing but that it was not alright for journalists to reveal it. Such rulings reveal the extent of white supremacist ideologies in institutional and legal spaces that embody a particular dominant political identity whilst claiming legal neutrality.

What is Islamophobia?

According to Grosfoguel and Mielants, Islamophobia is the ‘the subalternization and inferiorization of Islam produced by the Christian-centric religious hierarchy of the world-system since the end of the 15th century’.¹⁰ The ‘othering’ of Muslims after the fall of Islamic Spain in 1492 developed in a parallel stratum to the ‘othering’ of African people during colonisation. As territories and people were conquered, occupied and enslaved, European populations, specifically white people became privileged, laying the foundations for a global racial and ethnic hierarchy that has, even to this day, dominated the heterarchical world system.¹¹ Religious identity provided a signifier for determining ‘otherness’ and Jews and Arabs were conceived as a ‘people with the wrong religion’ whilst Africans were identified as a ‘people without religion’. Africans had no soul and were thus considered as savage and sub-human because they had no understanding and displayed no evidence of a belief in God as per the European conception of a deity.¹² And because the savage had no ability to think or rationalise, he was devoid of intellect and spirituality and because he had no written history or philosophy, he was certainly to be considered less than human. Thus within European thought, there existed a category for *people of colour* as ‘less than human’ which justified the differential treatment they were subjected to.¹³

As a result, non-white and non-Christian people had been conceived of as less than their white Christian counterparts. Proponents of the view of Islamophobia as racism argue that racism is not limited only to a discrimination against people of colour but also includes cultural and epistemic racism. This view is based on the belief that Islamophobia is an autonomous form of racism grounded in the devaluation of a non-European religion rather than racism based purely on skin colour. According to

¹⁰ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 2.

¹¹ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 2.

¹² Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 3.

¹³ CW Mills ‘Kant’s Untermenschen’ in A Valls (ed) *Race and racism in modern philosophy* (2005) 3.

Perceval, 'Islamophobia is part of the long durée of European forms of discrimination'.¹⁴

The extent of the racism is two-fold; firstly because Muslims constitute mostly a people of colour and secondly, Islam was considered by Christian-centric Europe to be the 'wrong' religion. The discrimination then manifests as cultural racism. Cultural racism is a form of racism that focuses on the cultural inferiority of a people where religion occupies a key role.¹⁵ Other writers have defined Islamophobia as a form of xenophobia, which in the case of the Danish and French Magazine *Charlie Hebdo's*¹⁶ cartoons, is determined by Danish and French ethnic nationalism.¹⁷ Grosfoguel and Martin-Munoz maintain that Islamophobia must be defined analytically, comprehensively and consistently otherwise the term will be ineffective and not contribute to the attainment of social justice.¹⁸ From the above discussion, I would like to state that I am of the opinion that Islamophobia *is* racism because it is first a fixation with colour, but it can also be argued that Islamophobia can be viewed *as* racism, because of the fixation with the religion and the systematic and intentional drive to devalue the religion, its cultural heritage and essence, its epistemology and legal frameworks through the use of 'structural power, systemic dominance [and] institutionalised ideologies'.

Islamophobia in South Africa and Other States

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities
-Voltaire

Recent incidences of Islamophobia in academic writing/reports and in the Western main stream media in South Africa highlight the resurfacing of racist, white supremacist attitudes in a country already steeped in deep

¹⁴ Grosfoguel and Martin-Munoz (n 3 above) 2. There is however, an alternative theory of Islamophobia as racism as suggested by Dladla. Dladla maintains that Islamophobia is an excuse or mask for racism rather than racism itself, it is an excuse or cover up, a justification. 'We hate them because they have a violent, patriarchal, backward ... culture and religion etc. This ethnocentrism has its basis in a racist structure'.

¹⁵ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 5.

¹⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/09/19/world/europe/france-mohammed-cartoon/index.html> (accessed 4 February 2014).

¹⁷ Grosfoguel and Martin-Munoz (n 3 above) 2.

¹⁸ Grosfoguel and Martin-Munoz (n 3 above) 1.

racial prejudice. In August 2013, University of Pretoria lecturer Dr Louise Mabile contributed her opinions on feminism to the praag.org website which insulted and defamed many groups of peoples, including Muslims. According to Mabile,¹⁹

One of the strangest phenomena of our time is the widespread tendency of feminists to associate themselves with the non-West, Africa, non-white and the Muslim world (of all things!) ... [And] Strangely enough there is also a large unwillingness to take on the Islam.

Although discussion of this blog post was covered in the media, the focus had been entirely on Mabile's claim that 'baby rape is a cultural phenomenon among the black population groups'.²⁰ Media coverage ignored her attack on Islam and Islamic legislation. In response to Mabile, the South African Council of Muslim Women's (SACMW) Safiyya Surtee addressed the matter stating that:²¹

It is ironic that Dr Mabile, in her tirade against feminists who stand with the oppressed and marginalized of the world makes a number of comments about Afrikaner society and the position of women, which resound with very early Islamic positions on women's rights (such as the right to ownership of property and strong elements of female leadership), yet sees no contradiction in pronouncing upon the entire religion (a clearly non-homogeneous tradition, made up of groups of multi-racial, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural people) as needing to be 'attacked'.

Mabile's comment constitutes a growing trend in academic writing which together with the mainstream Western media²² reinforce Islamophobic language seeking to dehumanise a people of colour, by subverting the prejudice and cloaking the attacks in religious jargon. The language thus employed characterises Islam, Islamic legislation and Muslims as being 'uncivilised, violent, authoritarian, primitive and savage'.²³ It should be understood that Islamic legislation (*Sharia'h*) is nested in practical reality

¹⁹ L Mabile 'The strange betrayal/treason of feminism against the West' 25 August 2013.

²⁰ <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/baby-rape-blogger-faces-charges-1.1571354> (accessed 31 January 2014).

²¹ <http://www.vocfm.co.za/index.php/news/2013-02-27-07-46-11/item/10701-2013-09-27-04-42-51> (accessed 31 January 2014).

²² Grosfoguel & Martin-Munoz (n 3 above) 1-2.

²³ See MA Perkins *Christendom and European identity: The legacy of a grand narrative since 1789* (2005) 238.

and not idealism; hence it offers pragmatic solutions to the realities of the human condition and existence. The *Sharia'h* is not only about punishments (*hudud*) as is widely promoted in Western circles. The focus of *Sharia'h* is about responsibility and the maintenance, protection and promotion of life.²⁴ Ironically, these aspects of Islamic law are rarely discussed or explained. Almost all discussions on the *Sharia'h* in mainstream media and western academic circles are led by individuals who have neither studied the Islamic traditions nor engaged with Muslim scholars who are authorities on the subject. In 2010, in the state of Oklahoma, voters supported the 'Save Our State' Amendment Bill which would prevent Oklahoma judges from using international or *Sharia'h* law in any state court decision.²⁵ A federal district judge halted the certification of the election results in response to a complaint filed by a Muslim citizen who stated that the amendment was a:²⁶

... gross transgression of the Establishment Clause 12' and that it constrained his ability to 'execute valid wills, assert religious liberty claims under the Oklahoma Religious Freedom Act, and enjoy equal access to the state judicial system.

The Oklahoma incident has not been an isolated occurrence. Since the amendment was initiated, almost 'two dozen state legislatures have since proposed similar laws'.²⁷ This approach is a form of cultural racism.

In parallel conversations, descriptions, images and narratives about Islam, the Middle-East and Muslims are being driven by cultural racism. Spin words such as 'uncivilized,' 'barbarian,' 'savage,' and 'terrorist' are used to focus on the 'Other's' religion so that the Europeans, Euro-Americans and Euro-Israelis can solidify their claim to superiority and maintain the hierarchical status-quo that serves Imperial interests.²⁸ The targets of Islamophobic discourses are 'the traditional colonial subjects of the Western Empires'²⁹ where claims of biological inferiority have been reconstructed to encompass as a corresponding cultural inferiority.

²⁴ <http://maqasid.wordpress.com/2007/04/05/the-objectives-of-islamic-law-sheikh-salman-al-oadah-2/> (accessed 31 January 2014).

²⁵ Y Ali 'Shariah and Citizenship: How Islamophobia is creating a second-class citizenry in America' (2012) 100 *California LR* 1028.

²⁶ Ali (n 25 above) 1030.

²⁷ Ali (n 25 above) 1030-1031.

²⁸ See K Harmon Snow 'Africom's covert war in Sudan. The winter of Bashir's discontent' 1 April 2009 <http://www.consciousbeingalliance.com/2009/04/post> (accessed 7 February 2014).

²⁹ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 5.

And it is because of the desire to maintain the status-quo inherent and inherited from a past that promoted the propaganda of an inferior and superior species based on specific human characteristics that the notion of 'culture' and 'cultural difference' has intensified in a post- Cold War geopolitical thinking through phrases such as Samuel Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilisations' and Bernard Lewis' 'The Roots of Muslim Rage'.³⁰ The events around 9/11 were thus framed by mainstream western media within a context of culture, Islam and civilisations.³¹ In Badiou's comment on the 'war on terror', we find a pertinent reality:³²

... when a predicate is attributed to a formal substance (as is the case with any derivation of a substantive from a formal adjective) it has no other consistency than that of giving an ostensible content to that form. In 'Islamic terrorism,' the predicate 'Islamic' has no other function except that of supplying an apparent content to the word 'terrorism' which is itself devoid of all content (in this instance, political).

Many South African mainstream media outlets and certain think tanks have been complicit in framing the discourse in much the same manner. For instance, comments by 'academics' or 'experts' in the South African media on terrorism with regards the Westgate Mall siege in Nairobi which took place on 21 September 2013 failed in almost every report to explain that terrorism or acts of terror do not occur in a vacuum.³³ Socio-political and geo-political contexts, theft of resources, exploitation and manipulation of a people by foreign powers and illegitimacy of the governing party/person are some of the factors that contribute to resistance and rebellion. Likewise the article by South African journalist De Wet Potgieter entitled, 'Al-Qaeda: Alive and

³⁰ Semati (n 5 above) 261.

³¹ Semati (n 5 above) 261.

³² A Badiou *Infinite thought: Truth and the return to philosophy* (2006).

³³ See A Valiente 'Kenyan bloodbath: reaping the "benefits" of US Africom collaboration' 23 September 2013 <http://libya360.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/kenyan-bloodbath-reaping-the-benefits-of-us-africom-collaboration/>; 'US Israeli interests in Somalia hinders stabilization of the region' 23 September 2013 <http://libya360.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/us-israeli-interests-in-somalia-hinders-stabilization-of-the-region/> & 'ONA Study of Africa Illustrates United States pre-occupation with militarism and intelligence on the continent' 2 September 2013 <http://libya360.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/iasc-study-of-africa-illustrates-untied-states-pre-occupation-with-militarism-and-intelligence-on-the-continent/> (accessed 4 February 2014).

well in South Africa'³⁴ which targeted the Dockrat family had to be retracted by the paper when, after considerable demands for verification of facts from the Muslim public, the editor admitted that Potgieter had misled the readers by writing a false and unverified report that undermined the integrity and credibility of South African Muslims. In response to the fabricated article, Farhad Dockrat stated,³⁵

Potgieter's pro-rightwing Afrikaans bias is evident by his failure to distinguish that there was credible and overwhelming evidence of the Boeremag terrorist plot (with possession of explosives etc.) but not an iota of evidence of any illegal activity by any South African Muslim on South African soil, which has/had the potential of threatening either the South African state, or any other foreign state for that matter.

Yet Potgieter *wrote the false report* that implicated all South African Muslims and the Daily Maverick *printed it*.

These incidences confirm that specific individuals, organisations and media outlets use stereotypes and generalisations to reinforce racism and white supremacy 'via the back-door'. By this, I mean that the individuals propagating the falsehoods, stereotypes and antagonisms are fully cognisant that what they are advocating is neither the reality nor the truth, but is intentionally slanted to suit or feed into a higher agenda. This agenda is intricately related to the maintaining of white supremacy through the vilification of the 'Muslim Other'. When analysed critically, one must notice the glaring similarities in the manner in which people of colour are given a single collective and not an individual identity so that 'all black people are inferior' and 'all Muslims are terrorists'.

Hence, Islamophobia as cultural racism has succeeded in many instances in demonising and vilifying Islam and Muslims. Through this process, the *Sharia'h* is conceived in the minds of the ordinary public as an archaic and barbaric system and Muslims are portrayed as dangerous, violent adherents of an intolerant religion. Any punitive actions against Muslims are thus justified in order to preserve 'civilisation' and Western progress.

³⁴ DW Potgieter 'Al-Qaeda: Alive and Well in South Africa – Daily Maverick' (13 May 2013) <http://muslimsinfrica.wordpress.com/2013/05/13/al-qaeda-alive-and-well-in-south-africa-daily-maverick/> (accessed 4 February 2014).

³⁵ Daily Maverick Staff Reporter 'Farhad Ahmed Dockrat responds' (15 May 2013) <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-05-15-farhad-ahmed-dockrat-responds/#.UuqzVRDa6m4> (accessed 4 February 2014).

Anti-Muslim or anti-Islam?

There is still another interpretation on Islamophobia that I feel needs to be briefly mentioned here. This is related to the actual coining of the term Islamophobia and its associated connotations. Although this aspect detracts slightly from the understanding of Islamophobia as racism/Islamophobia is racism, it is necessary to clarify the point. According to Halliday, quoted by Meer and Modood, the term Islamophobia does not adequately account for the active discrimination, prejudice and aggression experienced by Muslims *because they are Muslim*.³⁶ Halliday states the following about Islamophobia as a term and concept:³⁷

It misses the point about what it is that is being attacked: Islam as a religion was the enemy in the past: in the crusades or the *reconquista*. It is not the enemy now [...] The attack now is not against *Islam* as a faith but against *Muslims* as a people, the latter grouping together all, especially immigrants, who might be covered by the term.

Halliday's definition posits the claim that the harm that happens to these persons is because they are Muslims and it is not about a black/white issue nor is it about a dislike for Islam. His explanation ignores the reality of the discrimination as reported by Muslims who experienced and encountered it. And it certainly ignores the reality that those who are discriminated against are usually non-white Muslims. These Muslims indicated that the levels of discrimination increased when they appeared 'consciously Muslim' which often related to the wearing of Islamic attire. Hence, it is difficult to separate the impact of 'appearing Muslim from the impact of appearing to follow Islam'³⁸ and it is even more difficult to separate the impact of the discrimination from the knowledge that those discriminated against are certainly almost always non-white.

One must also consider the reality of the fact that the incidence of attacks on Muslim women with hijab is directly related to the manner in which the perpetrators perceive the hijab as an Islamic identity.³⁹ These attacks and attitudes are often related to the misrepresentation of Islam,

³⁶ N Meer & T Modood 'On conceptualising Islamophobia, anti-Muslim sentiment and cultural racism' in S Sayyid & A Vakil (eds) *Thinking thru Islamophobia, Symposium Papers* (2008) 34-35.

³⁷ Meer & Modood (n 36 above) 35.

³⁸ Meer & Modood (n 36 above) 35.

³⁹ Meer & Modood (n 36 above) 35.

Islamic values and the *Sharia'h* which is common in the media, academic writings, and in the preaching of some theologians. In the paper, 'Women and Religion, An Ongoing Struggle for Gender Equality', DJ Human mistakenly claims patriarchal, cultural practises are religious laws. He states that:⁴⁰

In more orthodox Muslim countries these rules and religious laws are applied more strictly ... Women are not allowed to possess land; to inherit some assets; to drive a vehicle ... A woman can also not initiate a divorce case against her husband. Men have the unilateral right to divorce.

It is disconcerting that pronouncements on other religions are made without studying the tenets of faith and jurisprudence in these religions and without verifying the facts. Islam is the only religion that has allowed women the right to seek a divorce (*khul*) in the event that the husband out of harm refuses to grant her her freedom, or if she is unhappy in the marriage. Such conditions are a reality in all societies today, and as mentioned previously, the *Sharia'h* addresses practical realities and is not steeped in idealism. Hence the provision has been made for a woman to seek a divorce from her husband through *khul*. But divorce *per se* is not encouraged and like all matters of family law, there is a process involved in securing the divorce whether it is a *talaq* or *khul*.⁴¹

Secondly, Arabs constitute only eighteen percent of the world's Muslims, and Saudi Arabia in particular constitutes about three percent of the world's Muslim population. Saudi Arabia is the only Muslim majority country that has denied women the right to drive and this has been misconstrued (as by Human above) as 'Islamic law' or *Sharia'h*. There is no basis for this refusal in Islam and all Muslim majority countries excluding Saudi Arabia, have given women this right. Saudi Arabia is not an Islamic country, but rather should be correctly referred to as a Muslim majority country. It is ruled by an authoritarian monarchy that has distorted religious principles to support the monarchy's political ideology in order to justify its grip on power.⁴²

Finally, in response to Human's comment on property, inheritance and economic independence, it should be noted that Islam gave women the right to education, to marry someone of their choice, to retain their identity after

⁴⁰ DJ Human 'Women and religion An ongoing struggle for gender equality' (2007) *PULP Fictions* 6.

⁴¹ <http://en.islamtoday.net/artshow-403-3471.htm> & <http://en.islamtoday.net/node/1110> & <http://islamqa.info/en/26247> (accessed 28 January 2014).

⁴² <http://www.cdhr.info/> (accessed 28 January 2014).

marriage, to divorce, to work, to own and sell property, to seek protection by the law, to vote, and to participate in civic and political engagement.⁴³ Muslim women are encouraged to maintain their maiden family names after marriage as it is directly linked to their lineage and is part of their identity and individuality. The rights to inheritance, property and political participation are clearly mentioned in the Islamic texts, but often intentionally misrepresented, endorsing cultural racism.

Islamophobia as epistemic racism

Western hegemonic identity politics and epistemology have succeeded in downgrading any non-Western knowledge. Epistemic racism promotes the notion of an inferior knowledge, and an inferior spirituality. With the inferiorisation and subalternisation of Islam, Muslim critical thinkers are considered inferior to Western/Christian thinkers and scholars. Grosfoguel and Mielants maintain that hegemonic identity politics and epistemology is linked to the ego-politics of knowledge which constitutes the foundational basis of modern Western philosophy.⁴⁴ In this scenario, man replaces God as the possessor and source of knowledge but Western man's knowledge is in essence not superior. It is perceived by Western men to be the only universal, value free objective. This perception has essentially developed from the sense of superiority that was fostered through conquests and the othering of non-white, non-Christian people. Thus the knowledge extracted does not correspond with the subjectivity of Descartes' *ego-cogito* ('I think, therefore I am') but must be understood from the vantage point of the *ego-conquirus* ('I conquer, therefore I am').⁴⁵ By claiming and asserting the superiority of Western epistemology, imperial powers and discourses are able to construct the Muslim identity as an 'Other' – an inferior people, culture and religion. This sense of entitlement allows some Western scholars the audacity to believe that any and all issues in Muslim majority countries can be pronounced upon, judged and evaluated by exclusively analysing Islam. As if Islam and Muslims exist in a vacuum. This phenomenon further manifests when Western scholars deny any critical thought or discourse produced by Muslim critical thinkers because epistemic racism promotes the idea that

⁴³ <http://www.whyislam.org/social-values-in-islam/gender-relations-in-islam/status-of-women/> & http://www.islamswomen.com/articles/do_muslim_women_have_rights.php (accessed 28 January 2014).

⁴⁴ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 8.

⁴⁵ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 8.

such thinking by the 'Other' is essentially 'uncivilised', 'inferior', 'uncultured', and 'primitive'.⁴⁶

The attacks on critical thinkers such as Professor Tariq Ramadan clearly highlight this.⁴⁷ Ramadan, who is of Egyptian descent, has been targeted by some Westerners who have sought to distort his image and his work amongst Western audiences. Ramadan's approach is distinctly moderate, teaching the youth that they can be both European and Muslim at the same time. But, his approach contradicts popular European myths that 'in order to be European you have to be Christian or secular'.⁴⁸ Such attacks highlight the extent to which Islamophobia as racism exists within institutions, dominant ideologies, and narratives that seek to preserve white supremacy and maintain white cultural, social and economic power.

Conclusion

Islamophobia today is defined as a perpetuated hostility towards Islam which has produced a fear or dislike for almost all Muslims. It promotes a monolithic concept of Islam, Muslims and Islamic cultures. As a result of this phenomenon, *all* Muslims are usually perceived as 'terrorists' or 'barbaric' or 'backward'. Islam and Muslims are portrayed as an entity that is averse to modernisation and progress and at odds with western civilisation. The language employed by the proponents of this narrative diligently promotes these untruths. In any analysis or discussion of rebellion, resistance or violent aggression perpetuated by an individual identified as Muslim, usually *all* Muslims are held responsible for the actions and expected to apologise for behaviours which they do not identify with nor subscribe to, and Islam is put on trial. And even then, Muslims are not asked to contribute to the discourse; pseudo-academic analytical comment is offered on behalf of Muslims and Islam. The existence of these double standards indicates that Islamophobia is linked to Western epistemic racism and manifests in all walks of life—whether in the work place, in education, in the public sphere or in the global war on terrorism. It further manifests in the epistemological battleground that vies for the definition and control of priorities in the world today. But it is also clear, that Islamophobia is racism. Because the evidence indicates that instances of Islamophobia are usually always directed to people of

⁴⁶ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 8-10.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/13304> & <http://www.danielpipes.org/2043/why-revoke-tariq-ramadans-us-visa> (accessed 6 May 2014).

⁴⁸ Grosfoguel & Mielants (n 7 above) 9-10.

colour and white Muslims do not experience these prejudices in any way similar to their non-white Muslim counterparts.

The whiteness default: Deconstructing our race indoctrination through a psychoanalytical lens

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I have often reflected on the question of whether it is possible to effectively take on and challenge white supremacy and racism if we do not comprehend and acknowledge that as white people we are automatically part of a global system that favours whiteness over all other races and that we reap these benefits at the expense of other races – whether we are anti-racists or right wing reactionaries. For me it is clear that the greatest challenge to white people, and especially to white anti-racist activists, is admitting to our own racist indoctrination and unconscious racism. Furthermore the challenge is recognising that we are part of the fabric of a global system of domination, which bestows privileges onto us by virtue of the colour of our skin and thus we are never ‘not benefiting’ from our whiteness. It is only by first recognising and understanding our personal embedded indoctrination that we will begin to recognise and deconstruct ideological and systemic racism.

Whilst many whites claim to stand for the discourse of non-racism in our so-called ‘rainbow nation’, the frequent eruptions of racism on our social landscape tell a different story. This, I argue, is because unconscious racism is still rife and seldom reflected upon and this plays itself out in various manifestations of racialised outbursts that are most often not recognised as racist by the broader white South African society. The terrain of what constitutes racism can only be an unresolved space in our society, where a publicly claimed non-racist discourse and an actual racist practice conflict with and contradict each other. It is this unresolved space that I am interested in excavating in my quest to explore the question of whether white people are capable of ever fully transcending racist programming which takes place within the familial, political and social construct of race-based power and the dominance of whiteness.

I tentatively argue that it is possible for white people to go some way in deconstructing and rejecting their conscious and unconscious racism but that in order to do so we need to be brutally honest about our personal conditioning. Only when the monster has been fully acknowledged can it begin to be rejected in a way that allows us to make the authentic anti-racist choice and tread the terrain of race/racism with the critical consciousness and intent to deconstruct and render racism powerless and begin to deconstruct and fight against the structural premise of racial domination. The overarching question that I seek an answer to is whether we, as white folk, are ever able to overcome completely, the racist indoctrination we were brought up with and if we can ever fully claim the status of non-racists, even those of us who are practicing anti-racist activists and who seek to overthrow the structures of white dominance.

In pursuing an answer to these questions it is necessary for me to reflect on my own racist indoctrination first.

The Whiteness Default

Through years of deep reflection on my upbringing and my own learnt racism, I have come to recognise that a deeply held conviction that is entrenched in the collective white psyche from the moment we pass into the realm of language is that to be human is to be white.¹ This is the beginning of our lifelong proficiency in the practice of racism, albeit oftentimes unconscious, for it is these messages that we learn in our formative years that ensure that racism is embedded into our psyche. This is the inevitable indoctrination of those who grow up in a white Christian settler society that has its ideological roots in a colonial narrative of Black bestiality (the bodily being) and white supremacy (the disembodied pure being created in the image of God). By turning Black people into beasts and brute bodies, this narrative excludes the humanity, the intellect and the spirit of Black folk and retained these qualities as exclusively belonging to white folk. This belief system was embedded in Christian doctrine. In this way white folk could claim to be Godly and not associated with base bodily experience, though they were clearly of the body. This dichotomy underlines the paradoxical Western metaphysical struggle between body, mind and spirit and this is what became

¹ This process took place through reading of critical race theory, my own introduction into the arts and jazz circles where racial mixing was rife, and studying African Politics. It is an ongoing process of reading and scholarship.

central to the history of modern Europe. It is this premise upon which the whiteness construct was built.

As Richard Dyer explains, Europeans developed the construct of whiteness via Christianity and spirit – ‘something that is not of the body’. He saw this as happening ‘through three elements of its constitution; Christianity, “race” and enterprise/imperialism.’² In his view Christianity, the dominant ideology in Europe, embraced the model of bodily transcendence as synonymous with the ideal of whiteness itself. This became the premise of the European discourse on race during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. White people were thus set up as the absolute opposite of non-whites, who were considered ‘no more than their bodies’.³ They were deemed base, animalistic and often endowed with demonic sexuality. Furthermore they became the recipients of the collective white projection of repressed sexuality which resulted in the proliferation of many complex, unstable, and dangerous sexual desires.

Colonial discourse created the construct of a Black primal and uncontrollable sexuality. Indigenous people were perceived by the European colonisers as wild and rampantly sexual and the enslaved Black man was constructed as inferior, savage, and ungodly. The inferiorisation and demonisation of the Black male was constructed as a way to justify the brutality of the slave system, while the notion that the Black man had an insatiable craving to conquer the bastion of pure and pious white womanhood was concocted to control white women as well as to justify the behaviours of white slave masters, who themselves projected and performed their lust on their female slaves. In this imaginary, the Black man was always lurking in the shadows waiting to rape white women, and thus they had to be brutalized to keep this threat at bay and to keep their ‘oversized genitals’ and demonic lustful nature away from the pristine white women of virtue.

Frantz Fanon suggests that whites do not project sexuality on the Black man which they themselves would like to have, but rather project onto others the faults they fear in themselves and thereby purge themselves of those evils.⁴ Unconscious fears of their own excessive and uncontrolled sexuality are allayed by ascribing this unmanaged and possibly unmanageable sexuality to Black men. Thus white men can be rest assured that they are

² R Dyer *White* (1997) 14.

³ Dyer (n 2 above) 23.

⁴ F Fanon *Black skin, white masks* (1967).

good, because the evil that they secretly fear in their own nature is manifest in other groups who are bestialised.

In demonising and over-sexualising the black male through concocting horrific imagery centred and fixated on supposed black male animalistic behaviour and monstrous genitalia, the white man could separate his own dark desires and fantasy from the Black males' imagined innate sexual deviancy – and implant this in the minds of white women as a means of controlling her sexuality too. Fanon said it best when diagnosing the horrifying figure of 'the Negro' in the fantasies of his white psychiatric patients, 'One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis: the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis'.⁵

These beliefs were embedded in the imaginary and discourse of colonial society and have remained in the contemporary white imaginary and they play themselves out in our social landscape time and time again. One such incident that is indicative of this underlying belief about the Black male is the baby rape narrative espoused by Louis Mabile on praag.org. By calling baby rape 'a black cultural phenomenon', Mabile insinuates that white people are incapable of such amoral acts of violence and that black people are collectively and 'naturally' capable of violence by virtue of their 'race' and 'culture'.

This fits snugly into the narrative that conservative enclaves of white South Africa continue to espouse around Blackness and it is one that is ardently pushed by certain moderate and conservative academics, bloggers and journalists. The message they seek to create is clear: whites are a morally superior race – blacks are dangerous and prone to committing the most heinous acts of crime against the most innocent in our society.

This narrative then, also re-invents the idea that white people occupy a faultless, pristine and religiously pure moral rung on the hierarchy of humanity. These constructed stories that white communities tell themselves are validated both privately and publicly and circulated by the social and mainstream media. The story of the black rapist forcing himself on the white female is the one that is pushed most determinedly. A white rape victim is often given much more media time to share her traumatic narrative than a black woman is. In fact most rapes of black women attract very little attention.⁶

⁵ Fanon (n 4 above) 170.

⁶ <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/beware-racial-trap-when-reporting-rape-1.1581022#.U0Kh8Md3aIQ>

No matter how denialist people may have become in a post-apartheid so-called 'Rainbow Nation', there are the deeply embedded negative beliefs around blackness that underpinned the manner in which we were raised, whether our families considered themselves to be liberal or whether they were openly racist and it these beliefs (and consequent practices) that make all white people participants in white supremacy. Certainly these beliefs were further forced on us through structural racism as experienced through the 'Whites Only' social spaces and schools, hospitals and buses. These beliefs were also performed through the laws of the land which subjugated Blacks and elevated whites – stripping Blacks of the chance for a dignified existence and robbing them of the chance for normal human aspirations whilst bestowing all manner of unearned privileges onto whites. Our cultural world was also based entirely on white representations and if we were exposed to blackness it was usually through a white lens, such as films that demeaned and degraded black culture. The passive or active acceptance of the system of one race subjugating another is adequate complicity for all South African whites to be implicated in a white supremacist order.

The horrible truth is that from the moment white children of my generation could comprehend their surroundings, we were exposed to a system in which whiteness was central to privilege, rationality and superiority while Blackness was marginalised and deemed irrational and inferior. Supposed Black inferiority justified the usurpation of independence and livelihood and turned an entire nation into slaves and later, cheap labour. This began with the invasion of these shores by the settlers in 1652 (although there were Portuguese slavers active in what is known as South Africa since the 1400's) and culminated in the 1913 Land Act. Finally this oppression of Black people was systemically entrenched in the apartheid administration.

We have to ask how this historical conditioning plays out in the contemporary collective mind of white people who were (and still are) raised to think that they are central to everything in relation to other races. The underlying premise is that whites are devoid of colour and thus are deracialised. They are naturally human whilst people endowed with colour are objectified, characterised and Othered. In this system, whiteness is the default 'human race' whilst Black people are racialised and thus dehumanised. Whiteness thus became, and still remains, the invisible factor whilst Blackness is rendered hyper-visible and deserving of white derision.

Richard Dyer describes this phenomenon by explaining that since 'whites are everywhere in representation ... they seem not to be represented to

themselves as whites'.⁷ He describes this as the representational power of whiteness, which immunises whites against typecasting. Whiteness 'culture' has the inherent belief that whites are both boundless in multiplicity yet homogeneous in their representation of good humanity: 'At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race'.⁸ The same ethos is not bestowed by whiteness onto Black people however, as they are perceived as a homogenous group with no diversity or distinction. One Black person represents the entire race (negatively) while a white person is never encumbered with the role of being representative of all whites. Dyer refers to this as the paradox of whiteness which allows whites 'to be presented as an apparently attainable, flexible, varied category, while setting up an always movable criterion of inclusion, the ascribed whiteness of your skin'.⁹ This is problematic because it is an ambiguous dichotomous state: 'Whiteness as ideal can never be attained, not only because white skin can never be hue white, but because ideally white is absence: to be really, absolutely white is to be nothing'.¹⁰

Thus whiteness usurps the life from all that is something by systemically reducing it to nothing and thereby rendering whiteness as the master signifier that constructs belief, self-identification, and social structures to which all else must bend in obeisance and subservience. This is the central premise of white supremacy, which all white people are born into. Thus I argue that white people cannot claim that they were not, or have never been, racist. This is what I refer to as the 'Whiteness Default,' which I view as the natural outcome of this racist phenomenon that relies on belief in white entitlement and domination and thus assumes natural superiority to other views and moralities. White South Africans have grown up in a country that entrenched white supremacy and systemic oppression of Black folks. Certainly white citizens who grew up in an apartheid South Africa were sure of their ascendancy over Black subjects.

None of us escape this racist conditioning. If it did not come from our families then it most certainly came from the system that pushed Blackness into the shadows, onto the outskirts, into prisons and poverty stricken homelands. It was a system that reduced Black people to servants and cheap labour status in subjugation to the master status of the white race. It was this reality that was embedded into the consciousness of South Africa's white

⁷ Dyer (n 2 above) 3.

⁸ As above.

⁹ Dyer (n 2 above) 57.

¹⁰ Dyer (n 2 above) 78.

society and which dished out to us the strong message that Black people were less valuable than white people. It was a proselytisation brought about by witnessing and being told the same racialised propaganda over and over again. This culminates in negative white attitude towards Black people and negative beliefs around the Black body and Black psychology. Mostly white people were taught to have zero empathy for Black people.

In the framework of psychoanalysis, it takes years of deep self-reflection and understanding to fully overcome the messages that were etched into our consciousness from the very beginning of our childhoods. Many of these propagated lies about Blackness found their way into our unconscious and I would go as far as to say that any white person who claims to be untouched by this supremacist programming is not being honest with themselves. This is not to say that every white person has negative feelings about Blackness in their day-to-day lives – many do not. I am more interested in the unconscious form of indoctrination and resultant residue racism than I am in every day relationships between Black and white folk.

Looking back

My South African mother married a Rhodesian farmer when I was nine years old. We all lived on a farm in Karoi during the height of the Rhodesian bush war. Prior to this we had spent quite a lot of time in institutions in South Africa such as a children's home and boarding schools because of my parents divorcing and my father abandoning his maintenance duties. In this world, Black people were peripheral. I have memories of black women polishing the stoeps (porches) and the occasional black male gardener in our neighbourhoods. I also remember the terror I felt when I saw the chain-gangs of prisoners working the sports fields. As a child in South Africa I only knew black women as cleaners and caretakers and black men as gardeners or something to be feared.

When we moved to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) we were suddenly surrounded by black men who worked in our home and garden. We had a waiter, a chef, a 'houseboy', a gardener and a 'horseboy.'¹¹ The farm labourers consisted of men and women and sometimes even small children. These labourers lived in abject poverty on the farm. They were paid a slave wage and given small rations of food. Little toddlers picked tobacco for 2

¹¹ Colonial racist and demeaning terms used for house and garden workers and commonly used at this time in history (early 1970's).

cents a leaf. There were no medical facilities or sanitation offered and homes were built out of mud and grass. In all it was a slave system, which as a child I could not fathom. I remember growing up with a mixture of sympathy at what I saw, as well as thinking that Black people required less than us, were there to serve us and were not quite as human as us. At the same time the Rhodesian war was in full throttle and we were fed the most heinous propaganda about the irrational and savage black ‘terrorists’ – whilst, on the other hand, white soldiers were set up as heroes.

I thus grew up being taught that Black people were *less than*. I also feared Black men as we were told they were all terrorists and out to kill us. At the same time, I loved the Black men who worked in our house, was attracted physically to the man who taught us to horse ride and was excited by the wild drum beats that emanated from the compound on a Saturday night. I spent a lot of time following Moendrake, our ‘horseboy’, around and asking him about *muti* and dance and ritual, as he was the head *Inyanga* on the farm. He was handsome and sang and played 70’s songs on his broken guitar. He also led the annual traditional Shona dancing on our front lawn, a spectacle¹² the workers put on for the farm owners every Christmas. I was secretly smitten with Moendrake and had little interest in the white army guys my sister was swooning over. I suppose one could say that I grew up with a pathological mixture of fear, learned superiority, curiosity and desire towards Black people.

In retrospect I realise that from the age of nine I was a fully functioning oppressor of Black folk because that is what I was taught to be. I really had no choice in the matter then. It was much later that the whole idea of white supremacy was flipped on its head for me and I realised that my childhood was based on a construct that is both false and deadly to people of other races. I majored in African Politics in my undergraduate years and studied the Rhodesian War as my topic. That was the beginning of my understanding that everything I had learned through propaganda and common sense discourse was not only false but also racist.

¹² Spectacle in the sense that this annual dancing was obligatory and in that way demeaning to the workers. Many years later I found out that the dances and songs contained within them dissenting messages for white farmers – which the farmers were oblivious to. In this sense it became a form of carnivalesque protest which I interpret as spectacle. The subject of the spectacle would be the oblivious farmer and the ironic nature of a form of entertainment for the wealthy whites becoming a form of derision toward white supremacy by the farm workers.

It was from that point that I began to rail against the false construct of whiteness. I am not sure if I realised that it was going to take years of unlearning to overcome the type of indoctrination we were fed as white children growing up in a settler country which relied on racism for the survival and the economic domination of the white race; even if you socialised and mixed in bohemian and diverse social groups, like I did. Indeed the question still remains whether we are in fact able to overcome this unconscious racism entirely or whether it is embedded into our unconscious as a complex? How much awareness does it take to not fall back into learned beliefs and privileged behaviours when mixing in interracial social groups and even in personal relationships?

My young adult social world was populated with Black struggle icons, jazz musicians and union workers. We lived in communes that were under police surveillance. We had lovers across the colour bar and openly kissed at jazz venues tucked away in taxi ranks at a time when it was illegal to do so. I spent time with lovers in townships when tyres were burning in the streets. It was a vital, painful and exciting time to be 20 something in the 80's in South African history - and we felt we had transcended it all. But the issue of white privilege was always there.

Why was I able to rent houses ostensibly for myself and then smuggle Black people in as the real tenants? My world was open to many privileges that were totally denied to my Black friends or lovers. No matter how much I immersed myself in the struggle and culture of the oppressed, I would never rid myself of the role as a member of the oppressive race and it was my privileges that made this clear.

I have been married to a Black man for the past sixteen years and we have a son of fourteen. Does this mean I have overcome my indoctrination into racism and do I harbour unconscious racism as a result of the fears and lies passed onto me via 350 years of ancestral memory around the myth of Blackness as evil and akin to the devil? This is a question I grapple with daily in my reflecting upon whether it is ever possible to overcome not only the this racist indoctrination of our childhoods but also unconscious messaging passed down from generation to generation. I think as long as I am asking those questions I am still growing and dealing with my whiteness and the systemic construct of white supremacy. It is a lifelong job to rid ourselves of this false indoctrination that we are born into as white people. I am consciously anti-racist. In fact I could go as far as to say that I am a race traitor (certainly many of my own people have called me this) – but even so, it is the unconscious that often tells the real story. It is no simple matter

undoing the damage of the whiteness construct because it is the system upon which our reality is built and which society has been operating on for centuries.

How do we even begin to undo and unravel this matrix called whiteness if we remain in denial of our being a participant of this construct, whether we identify with it or not? It is a painful thing to come to terms with our role in the subjugation of other races – so painful that many prefer to not look inward and grapple with their personal reality of growing up in a racist world. If this work is not done however, then the residue of racist programming is always there, lurking just beneath the surface and it will rear its ugly head when least expected. It is inevitable. It is the dark shadow of shame about the oppression of fellow humans. It is a psychological and emotional cancer. It must be thoroughly examined, dissected and then discarded as the barbarous madness that it is. We must also take it on ourselves to unpack the discourse of privilege and domination that perpetuates this madness.

White supremacy is not about the right wing or the left wing in the end. It is about an entire system of domination by one race over others – a system that has been in the making for over 500 years, and it lives in all of us who are born into this construct. We cannot distance ourselves from that – we can only hope to recognise it and abolish this outmoded yet enduring system that was built on falsities to begin with. We can only stand in opposition to all the cogs in this system that seek to uphold racist and sexist forms of oppression, and this means looking way beyond your group of interracial friends or Black lovers or biracial children as proof of your non-racist views. Junot Diaz asks:¹³

How can you change something if you won't even acknowledge its existence, or if you down play its significance? White supremacy is the great silence of our world, and in it is embedded much of what ails us as a planet. The silence around white supremacy is like the silence around Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* or the Voldemort name, which must never be uttered in the *Harry Potter* novels. And yet here's the rub: If a critique of white supremacy doesn't first flow through you, doesn't first implicate you, then you have missed the mark; you have, in fact, almost guaranteed its survival and reproduction. There's that old saying: The devil's greatest trick is that he convinced people that

¹³ <http://www.anisfield-wolf.org/2012/07/junot-diaz-speaks-on-race-and-literature-will-be-keynote-speaker-at-facing-race-conference-2012/> (accessed 27 February 2014).

he doesn't exist. Well, white supremacy's greatest trick is that it has convinced people that, if it exists at all, it exists always in other people, never in us.



Photo (and mural painting) by Anjuli Webster, Peer Baard and the UP Anti-Racist Forum