



FAULT A PRIMER ON RACE, SCIENCE AND SOCIETY LINES

EDITORS

JONATHAN JANSEN

& CYRILL WALTERS

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Fault Lines: A primer on race, science and society

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CONTENTS

Foreword	xi
<i>Nico Koopman</i>	
Preface	xv
<i>Jonathan Jansen</i>	
Introduction	1
<i>Jonathan Jansen</i>	
Is race real?	2
Where does race come from?	4
How does any group (such as coloureds) come to be a racial problem?	6
Why are women of colour represented negatively in research?	7
Is research not objective?	8
What are the ethical foundations of sound research (on race)?	9
What does a critical (rather than essentialist) study of race look like?	10
What does a systemic (or structural) rather than racial group analysis of problems look like?	11
Does method matter when the questions are flawed?	12
Can race be unlearned?	13
Conclusion	14
Endnotes	15
Bibliography	16

SECTION A

RACE AND THE GENES

1	The Role of Genetics in Racial Categorisation of Humans	21
	<i>Soraya Bardien-Kruger & Amica Müller-Nedebock</i>	
	Introduction	21
	The basics of DNA	22
	Genetic variation in humans: How did this come about?	23
	Link between genetic variation and human disease	25
	Concept of race: On what is the label based?	27
	Eugenics	31
	Concluding remarks	33
	Endnotes	33
	Bibliography	36

2	The Boomerang: How eugenics and racial science in the German colonies rebounded on Europe and the rest of the world	41
	<i>Steven Robins</i>	
	Introduction	41
	The boomerang	45
	Conclusion	48
	Endnotes	51
	Bibliography	53

SECTION B

RACE AND THE PRESENT PAST

3	Reinterrogating Race in Scientific Research: A view from the history of physical anthropology	57
	<i>Handri Walters</i>	
	Introduction	57
	A short history of physical anthropology	58
	Physical anthropology comes to Stellenbosch University	62
	A lesson from history	65
	Conclusion	68
	Endnotes	69
	Bibliography	71
4	A Century of Misery Research on Coloured People	73
	<i>Jonathan Jansen & Cyrill Walters</i>	
	Introduction	73
	Digging in the archives	74
	A thematic analysis of race and research at Stellenbosch University	75
	Making sense of a century of misery research on coloured people	78
	Misery research and the compulsion to compare	78
	Conclusion	80
	Endnotes	81
	Bibliography	87
5	Pitfalls of a Profession: Afrikaner historians and the notion of an “objective-scientific” approach in perspective	93
	<i>Albert Grundlingh</i>	
	“Volksgeskiedenis” and academe	93
	The mantra of “objective-scientific” history	95
	Implications	97
	Endnotes	99
	Bibliography	100

SECTION C

MAKING UP RACE AND “THE OTHER” IN THE SOCIAL AND MEDICAL SCIENCES

6	Difficult Knowledge: The state of the discussion around ‘race’ in the social sciences	103
	<i>Crain Soudien</i>	
	Introduction	103
	The social construction explanation	104
	Some caveats	108
	Racial realism	109
	Conclusion	111
	Endnotes	112
	Bibliography	115
7	Race and Health: Dilemmas of the South African health researcher	119
	<i>Jimmy Volmink, Lynn Hendricks, Lindokuhle Mazibuko & Leslie Swartz</i>	
	Introduction	119
	Explaining the influence of race on health and disease	120
	Concepts related to race	121
	International debates about the use of racial terminology in health research	122
	Investigating the use of race in health research at Stellenbosch University	123
	Discussion	124
	Conclusions	127
	Endnotes	128
	Bibliography	130
8	Of “Basters” and “Bastards”: Overcoming the problematic connection of race and gender in the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation	133
	<i>Juliana Claassens</i>	
	A mere translation error?	133
	Border anxiety	135
	From disgust to abjection	136
	From disgust to humanity	138
	Conclusion	140
	Endnotes	140
	Bibliography	143
9	Disability: The forgotten side of race science	145
	<i>Leslie Swartz, Jason Bantjes, Heidi Lourens & Brian Watermeyer</i>	
	Story 1: Disability and the politics of time	148
	Story 2: The politics of (lack of) accommodation	150
	Story 3: The illegitimacy of anger	153
	Discussion	155
	Endnotes	156
	Bibliography	158

SECTION D

THE GENDER QUESTION IN RACIAL SCIENCE

10	Race, Science and Gender: Producing the black woman's body as the deviant, degenerate "other"	163
	<i>Barbara Boswell</i>	
	On race and racial terminology	164
	A brief history of race science	167
	Contemporary recursions of scientific racism, and how they produce gender	170
	Endnotes	172
	Bibliography	173
 11	 Problematizing Race and Gender in Everyday Research Processes: A model of feminist research praxis	 175
	<i>Amanda Gouws</i>	
	Introduction	175
	A gender perspective	176
	Issues of race hiding in plain sight	177
	The feminist research process	179
	Discussion	184
	Conclusion	185
	Endnotes	186
	Bibliography	188

SECTION E

PERFORMING RACE

12	Race and the Politics of Knowledge in Sports Science	191
	<i>Francois Cleophas</i>	
	Introduction	191
	Race in sports science	192
	Uncovering networks of race in modern-day sports science	194
	Final thoughts	196
	Endnotes	198
	Bibliography	200
 13	 Music's "Non-Political Neutrality": When race dare not speak its name	 203
	<i>Willemien Froneman & Stephanus Muller</i>	
	Endnotes	214
	Bibliography	217

SECTION F

UNLEARNING RACE

14	“Race” by Any Other Name Would Smell	221
	<i>Cecilia Jacobs</i>	
	A personal journey	221
	A perspective from the field: Higher education studies	223
	Researching “race”	228
	Intergenerational conversations	229
	Endnotes	231
	Bibliography	233
15	Unlearning Race: The ‘Introduction to the Humanities’ curriculum at Stellenbosch University	237
	<i>Anita Jonker</i>	
	Introduction	237
	The social context that produces offensive research	237
	The institutional context of knowledge production	238
	Then the dam wall burst	239
	Rationale for EDPs at South African universities	240
	Student-centredness	241
	Multilingualism	241
	Students’ knowledge and experiences	243
	Grappling with the meanings of race in the aftermath of the troubled publication	244
	When good intentions are undermined by race essentialist discourse	246
	Conclusion	247
	Endnotes	248
	Bibliography	249

SECTION G

THE ETHICS QUESTION IN RACIAL SCIENCE

16	Science, Race and Ethics	253
	<i>Keymanthri Moodley</i>	
	A historical perspective	253
	Exploitation of research participants	254
	Project Coast (1981-1995)	255
	The Bezwoda case	256
	Race as a research variable in science	257
	Ethical research must be scientifically sound	258
	Conclusion	267
	Endnotes	267
	Bibliography	271

Author Index	275
Contributing Authors	281



Foreword

The campus deliberations that followed the publication of the Sport Science article¹ prompted Stellenbosch University to reflect afresh upon the challenges of transforming our institutional culture. We have to revisit the subconscious prejudices with which we function. We have to re-examine the structures, systems, policies, processes and practices that are both built upon and perpetuate these prejudices. And we need to look at the underlying religious and secular world views that seem to legitimate these prejudices and the structures that are erected upon them.

The discussions on the Stellenbosch campuses since the publication of the article, including the 16 September 2019 inaugural lecture² of Professor Jonathan Jansen, “From ‘Die Sedelike Toestand van die Kleurling’ to ‘the Cognitive Functioning of Coloured Women’: A Century of Research on Coloured People at Stellenbosch University” provided various approaches and insights for addressing this challenge.

Primary amongst these insights is that the notion of race should not be accepted unproblematically. Race is a *social and political* construct that was invented by Western colonial thinkers. It aims to portray colonising nations as superior and people from so-called colonies as inferior. People from Europe, especially males, are portrayed as superior with regard to knowledge, intelligence, capacity to govern and lead, culture, creativity, innovation, aesthetics, morality and spirituality. Perceived differences should not be used to construct race in this denigrating and discriminatory manner.

Flowing from this, every discussion on the Stellenbosch campuses since the Sport Science article appeared, warned against *racial essentialism*. When we talk about the heart of something, we call it the essence of that specific thing. If you take that feature away, that thing is no longer that thing. Racial essentialism means to look at a human being and to say your colour, hair texture, face shape, nose size and other physical features are your essence, and those factors determine your humanity, your dignity, your worth, your value, your esteem and the respect and regard owed to you. Racial essentialists add other features, besides physical ones, to the list of essential features of human beings: presumed emotionality, intelligence, capacity for leadership and culture building, morality and spirituality, amongst others.

The campus discussions cautioned that discourses about categories such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability should not be separated from each other, but that the interwovenness and interdependency – the intersectionality – between them should be recognised. The feminist scholar, Sarah Ahmed,³ urges that

the concept of intersectionality be used as a crucial tool in the quest for liberation from various forms of discrimination. This notion helps us to speak in nuanced and clear ways about identity questions, while respecting the complexity and ambiguity of such discourses.

The discussions also sought ways to attend to diversity and particularity that avoid racial essentialism and racist prejudice. South Africa is a country of diversity par excellence. Our country's national motto of 'iKE E: /XARRA //KE', or 'Diverse People Unite', does not imply that we strive for uniformity. Unity in diversity prioritises our oneness and equality as human beings. Within that unity, we acknowledge plurality and diversity. It is, therefore, important that we attend to the particular groupings that constitute our society of unity in diversity.

Race essentialism and racist prejudices are obstacles to be avoided when we undertake the journey of both popular and scientific reflection about particular groups. Racial analysis should not be done where sociological and socioeconomic analyses are supposed to be done. Persons who are studied should not become objects, but subjects and agents in their own right. And the temptation to practise a scholarship of pity should be resisted. One of the five values of Stellenbosch University is the value of compassion. This does not mean, however, that our societal partners should be consciously or subconsciously stereotyped and stigmatised, patronised and demeaned from a sense of condescension or pity. That would be a distortion of the University's compassionate quest for dignity, healing, justice, freedom and equality for all.

Finally, the campus discussions specifically called on the University to prioritise education and training about these themes. This book advances that goal. The contributions challenge us to revive the three cherished practices of the struggle against apartheid: to conscientise, organise and mobilise.

We should *conscientise* in two ways. We should become conscious and aware of our subconscious presuppositions and prejudices. We should also view challenges of discrimination as challenges of the conscience, as moral challenges, as ethical challenges that have to do with either advancing or inhibiting humanisation and dignity for all.

We should also *organise*. Working intentionally on our structures, policies, processes and programmes should enjoy consistent attention.

And the essays collected here motivate us to *mobilise* and muster all our resources. Universities are uniquely placed and resourced to make indispensable contributions as we journey together to a society of dignity, healing, justice, freedom and equality for all.

Stellenbosch University expresses its gratitude to the editors of this volume, Professor Jonathan Jansen and Dr Cyril Walters, and to all the contributors. This timely publication renders a much-needed service to our staff, students, institutional partners, the wider higher education landscape, and to society more broadly, both locally and globally.

Professor Nico Koopman

Vice-Rector: Social Impact, Transformation & Personnel

Endnotes

- 1 Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, And Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition* (2019): 93-114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>
 - 2 Jonathan D. Jansen, “From ‘Die Sedelike Toestand van die Kleurling’ to ‘the Cognitive Functioning of Coloured Women’: A Century of Research on Coloured People at Stellenbosch University”. Inaugural lecture, Stellenbosch, 16 September 2019.
 - 3 S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist life* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017), 118, 275, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373377>. Also see the forthcoming publication of Kimberlé Crenshaw, “On Intersectionality: Essential Writings” (New York: The New Press, September 2020).
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Preface

Jonathan Jansen

Sometimes a controversial research publication can be a blessing in disguise. This is certainly the case with the now-retracted article published in 2019 by researchers in the Department of Sport Science at Stellenbosch University (SU). The article claimed, in short, that coloured women “presented with” low education levels and unhealthy lifestyles. While these published claims caused considerable harm to people of colour, it forced into the open a long overdue debate on race, science and society. What the article did, in other words, was to expose dangerous fault lines in how research (and indeed teaching) is conducted in South African universities and across the world.

In geology, a fault line is a sudden crack or fissure in the earth’s surface that portends deeper problems in the crust below. The crack is therefore a warning sign that requires urgent action, failing which something worse could happen. This book deploys the metaphor of the fault line to suggest that the Sport Science article pointed to a number of problems below the surface of the rock-solid research enterprise in this and other universities. Those underlying problems include the ease with which human subjects in research are assigned to their apartheid racial classifications: for example, a recent SU study on the relative strength of the pelvic muscles of coloured, African and white women. Or the tendency in research to explain social, health or behavioural outcomes as if these were determined by colouredness, for example, a common set of studies on tuberculosis amongst coloured people.

This book brings together some of the most accomplished scholars and scientists at Stellenbosch and other universities to explain why these fault lines exist, where they come from, and what danger they warn of when it comes to race, science and society. The authors address these fault lines from different disciplinary perspectives that include anthropology, political science, medicine, ethics, sociology, education, literary studies, theology, genetics and history. As a result, this rich collection of chapters offers insights deep below the surface manifestations of the problems of race and research at South African universities.

What runs through these chapters is a shared concern with the politics of knowledge. Put simply, when researchers conduct research, they are producing knowledge. Yet the process of doing research and generating knowledge is anything but simple.

Those who do research have power (resources, money, status), while those they study often do not – as in the case of studies on vulnerable communities. Research in some disciplines is funded by large private-sector companies that sometimes have an interest in the results – as in the case of pharmaceutical companies. Researchers can publish results and make consequential claims about their subjects; this is one reason why research in universities needs approval from academic and ethics committees. Published research can earn money in South Africa in the form of state subsidies for accredited publications. Good research can advance a researcher’s status and standing through an institution’s promotions policies. Knowledge produced through research can inform and legitimate official policies that govern people’s lives. In all these ways and more, knowledge is power.

It is precisely because of this close relationship between knowledge and power that runs through all university activities that students, staff and communities need to recognise the potential fault lines that come with doing academic work (teaching, learning, research, and service), whether in psychology or medicine or engineering or law. This book addresses some of these fault lines through key questions of vital importance to every student, such as the following:

- ◆ What is race, where does it come from and is it even real?
- ◆ How does any group come to be a racial problem?
- ◆ Why does race show up as common sense in research?
- ◆ What is different about a critical (rather than essentialist) approach to race and research?
- ◆ Do the (research) facts speak for themselves? And if so, what do they say?
- ◆ What are the ethical foundations of good research on human subjects?
- ◆ Why are (coloured) women negatively presented in research?
- ◆ What does a systems (structural) – rather than a group – analysis of race look like?

This book is not about one published research article or about one university or even about one country. It is about troubling lines of research on race, science and society in South Africa and other parts of the world. The Sport Science article was, after all, accepted for publication in an American online journal that saw no problem with the original submission.

Finally, it is intended that this book be made widely available for undergraduate students as an introduction to race, science and society across all disciplines. It would also be a valuable guide to postgraduate students embarking on research, offering important guard rails for choosing research problems with some degree

of consciousness about the conceptual, the ethical, the procedural and the political when it comes to doing advanced study. The book is, however, written with a much broader audience in mind, so it is meant to be accessible to campuses and communities struggling to make sense of race, science and society in the aftermath of apartheid.

Introduction

Jonathan Jansen

In April 2019, a professor and four of her postgraduate students at Stellenbosch University (SU) published a research report in which they claimed that “coloured women in South Africa have an increased risk for low cognitive functioning, as they present with low education levels and unhealthy lifestyle behaviours”.¹ Read bluntly, coloured women are both unintelligent and unhealthy.

A group of university academics who discovered the publication started an online petition signed by more than 10 000 people to demand that the journal withdraw the article.² Shortly afterwards, the editors and publisher of the online journal, *Aging, Neuropsychology, and Cognition*, did in fact withdraw the article noting that “assertions about ‘colored’ South African women based on the data presented ... cannot be supported by the study”.³

Across the campuses of this former white university, there was immediate outrage amongst – especially black – students and staff who objected to “the use of stigmatising race-based categories in science and research”.⁴ A number of symposia⁵ were convened in response to the crisis, in which senior academics addressed issues such as the legacy of historical racism in university, the role of various disciplines (like anthropology) complicit in racist science, and the genetic refutation of the idea of separate races and the use of racial categories for marking out humanity. In these public fora, questions were asked about ethical review – how did the protocols for the study escape scrutiny *within the institution*? The research was funded by a state agency, the National Research Foundation, raising further questions about standards of external review. And how did the research pass peer review by an international journal?⁶

The University management showed an evolution of outrage that started with an appeal to “rigorous discussion and critical debate” in the first reaction (24 April), to an “unconditional apology” in the second response (30 April), concluding with emotive expressions that included words such as “disbelief”, “appalled”, “saddened”, “wrong”, “indefensible” and an invitation “to reinvent Stellenbosch University” in the third and final statement (21 May). The Senate of the University passed a unanimous motion condemning the article and committed the University to “a module on anti-racism, democracy and critical citizenship to all first year students”.⁷

A common core curriculum was piloted, in which undergraduate students were exposed to “big questions” about race, identity, fairness and the problem of change across the disciplines. The rapid responses notwithstanding, what the controversial article did was to lay bare some serious *fault lines* in knowledge production and social transformation inside one of South Africa’s oldest universities.

It is those “fault lines” displayed so troublingly in “the Sport Science article” (henceforth, the shorthand reference to the publication throughout the book) that this collection of essays seeks to address. The fault lines discussed are represented in the form of some critical questions that the authors seek to address.

Is race real?

The first and perhaps most obvious fault line in the article is the ease of reference to coloured women in the title. Coloured is a contentious racial classification that gained firm legal status during the apartheid years.⁸ The white Nationalist government devised a unique and abhorrent system of racial classification that legally separated South Africans into one of four groups who at the same time were arranged hierarchically (white, Indian, coloured and African, in that descending order), and treated accordingly. For example, in terms of government funding for education, the per capita spending on white children was higher than that for Indian children, who in turn enjoyed higher funding than coloured children; African children received the least funding. To this day, the racially unequal funding of education is mirrored almost perfectly in the unequal outcomes of schooling.⁹

Such systematic and discriminatory treatment of South African citizens as *racial groups* (sometimes politely referred to as *population groups*) continued over many decades and reflected not only in the *material conditions* of people’s lives, but in their *social understandings* of themselves. More than two decades after apartheid, many (certainly not all) South Africans have become comfortable referring to themselves by these racial classifications, which have come to assume the status of common sense.¹⁰ But are there grounds for treating race as common sense? Put differently, is race even real?

There are two sets of chapters in the book that take on this crucial question – one from the perspective of *sociology*, which deals with studies of society, and the other from the perspective of *genetics*, which concerns studies of the genes. The sociologist of education, Crain Soudien, carefully describes two ways in which scholars think about race. First, the social constructionists firmly dispute that there is any biological basis for race; put simply, there is only the human race. Nonetheless, they see race as something made up (constructed) to serve certain social or political ends. This group

of scholars would therefore speak of “the social construction of race”, meaning that no human is born into a “race”, but that society constructs notions of race such as in the case of South Africa’s four racial groups.

The *racial realists*, on the other hand, believe that people experience race as real in their everyday lives. In other words, even though race might well be a human construction without any basis in biology, entire societies are organised on the basis of racial differences. A well-known dictum from the social sciences holds that “if people experience something as real, it is real in its consequences”. It is also racial realists who make the point that to undo the racial inequalities of the past, one has to be able “to name race” in the way it still distributes advantage and disadvantage in the economy (a white graduate has a much better chance of getting a job than a black graduate), in higher education (coloured students have the lowest participation rates in university) and in society more broadly (a white family is more likely to purchase a home in an expensive suburb than a black family). Race realists, therefore, would defend the use of racial categories to monitor progress in overcoming inequalities.

What both groups, the social constructionists and the racial realists, might agree on, however, is that there are no biological grounds for race – that humans are one race. After all, race as a category is *unstable* – over the course of history the number of recognised “races” changed all the time. Entire groups changed their racial status as their social circumstances changed, something reflected in published titles such as *How the Irish Became White*¹¹ or *How Italians Became White*.¹² As South Africans know all too well, race as a category is also *arbitrary*, for every year, in response to a question from the Opposition benches, the responsible apartheid Minister in Parliament would announce the number of persons who were reclassified from coloured to white or from African to coloured across all categories of racial classification. There were certainly no scientific pretensions in determining race, for the so-called “pencil test” (if the pencil placed in your hair fell out when shaking your head, then you were white) was sometimes used to determine the racial classification of a South African citizen.

Despite a broad consensus on race as unstable, arbitrary and unscientific, there is nevertheless a minority of scientists – mainly geneticists – who from time to time try to uphold the notion of racial differences. To address these troublesome developments, geneticists Soraya Bardien-Kruger and Amica Müller-Nedebock confront the question directly.

Their starting point is as simple as their conclusion: all human beings share 99.9% of the same genetic material and therefore there is no biological basis for racial classification. How then does one explain the minor differences of 0.01% amongst

humans? As these authors and many others argue, those minor differences have to do with the migrations of populations out of Africa centuries ago, so that different environments led to variations in, for example, skin colour. Also, groups that live in isolation or who reproduce within a small group would over time show common genetic variants as a result; examples in this regard are Tay-Sachs disease amongst Ashkenazi Jews and hypercholesterolemia amongst certain Afrikaner families.

The critical observation of these studies – using South African examples – is that not all persons in a group (such as whites or coloureds) share the same genetic variations, that those variations could also appear in other groups (such as Africans or Indians), and that changes in the genes are unstable, i.e. it can alter over generations. Most important for the South African context, such minor genetic variations do not correspond to apartheid’s classification of human beings into racial groups.

Regardless of these arguments, as Crain Soudien makes clear, “some ideas die hard”, and as Angela Saini observes in her book, *Superior*, genetics is not only science, it is also a way of seeing.¹³ This means that even with the best evidence available, if in your upbringing you have come to “see” people as distinct races, it is very difficult to see them simply as human beings. In the rather simple analogy used of a lesser species, a fish does not question the water it swims in. Which raises a different question – another fault line from the Sport Science article – how did race come to be seen so powerfully as common sense in our understandings?

Where does race come from?

In 2013, a Stellenbosch University researcher opened a cupboard in the Sasol Museum on campus. What happened next exposed to the public a major fault line on race and science in the history of the institution. The researcher found a human skull of a coloured person, as well as eye and hair colour charts used to measure race. By all accounts, these instruments, bearing the name of Hitler’s most senior scientist, Eugen Fischer, were once used in the teaching of anthropology (then called *Volkekunde*) at Stellenbosch.

In her contribution to this book, researcher Handri Walters makes the important point that the notion that you could divide humans into “races” and then “measure race” are relatively recent ideas. The discipline that took on this task of measuring race at SU was physical anthropology, which in the 1920s was housed in the Zoology Department. This was a period in history characterised by what South African historian Deborah Posel has called “measurement mania” in the race industry.

By measuring race, these scientists also produced race, by giving scientific validity to the idea that humans could be divided into different racial groups. In this regard,

SU students were fair game. This science of measurement of humans was called anthropometry and the first group to be measured were 130 white students, followed twelve years later by the measurement of 133 coloured men. Handri Walters makes the powerful argument that these attempts to measure race gave scientific justification for the racial policies that emerged in South Africa during twentieth century, culminating in the extreme politics of the National Party that came to power in 1948 and formed the first apartheid government.

The important contribution of historians is that “race” was not always out there as a naturally occurring phenomenon, but that humans created race, so to speak, and in the course of time scientists gave intellectual justification for a troubled concept. It was only in 1950, with the landmark statement by UNESCO that “race was a social myth”, that growing numbers of scientists began to concede that there was no biological or cultural basis for race. As Walters observes, the persistence of the idea simply shows that “race and politics hardly function in isolation”.

No study of racial science is possible, however, without understanding a powerful moment in human history called eugenics. This is what another anthropologist, Steven Robins, sheds light on in his remarkable chapter in this book. Having had members of his own family exterminated by Hitler’s gas chambers – the subject of a moving memoir by the same author, *Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa* – Robins writes with remarkable constraint and insight into the science of eugenics that informed Nazi ideology. Eugenics was the basic idea that you could breed-out the inferior characteristics of humans and breed-in their best qualities in pursuit of the pure (white) race. Eugen Fischer, a German university rector no less, would propagate this science of eugenics, which provided Hitler with the intellectual ammunition for the genocide commonly referred to as the Holocaust.

It was, however, Fischer’s excursion into South West Africa (Namibia), with his 1913 study on “The Bastards of Rehoboth” where he provided the services of science to argue for the undesirability of mixed races. The policy implications for this German colony were clear – sexual intercourse between black and white (called miscegenation in those days) and mixed marriages would breed an inferior race. It is not difficult to see how this kind of thinking could lead to the genocide of the Jews (and other “inferior” groups) or how such fatal ideas would gain currency in white South Africa, where the Immorality Acts (1927, 1950) and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) would become a reality in later decades. The bastard (in South African terms, the coloured) was the decrepit and undesirable product of the mixing of the races, according to science and, curiously, the divine.

How does any group (such as coloureds) come to be a racial problem?

This is precisely where the theology scholar Juliana Claassens comes to our aid with a brilliant thesis on the concept of *basters* and “bastards” from the Bible, of all places. Right there, in the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, she found that the Hebrew word for incest (*mamzēr*) was mistranslated in the Afrikaans Bible as mixed-race (*baster*). In other words, a word that was meant to indicate a child born from sex within a family came to be translated as a child born to parents from different races. The original culprit, by the way, was the Biblical Lot who slept with his daughters and produced the sons Ammon and Moab. This is a monumental error of translation in the Afrikaans Bible, because it would come to add theological justification for the political construction of a mixed-race group called coloureds but also, as the author shows, for treating them exactly as the Ammonites and Moabites were treated – as outcasts because of a disgusting sexual liaison.

It is the politics of disgust that would become a major fault line in SU research over the course of a century. This is what the Jansen chapter demonstrates, by examining the systematic ways in which a political classification, coloured, gained legal status in apartheid’s Population Registration Act (1950). It all started with what became known as “the poor white problem” of the 1920s and 1930s. A fragile group coming out of the devastation of the South African War (1899-1902), white Afrikaans-speaking people did not at the time have a strong sense of racial identity, even as they gained a growing sense of political power in the early parts of the twentieth century. The legacy of the war, a crippling drought in the rural areas and an economic depression (the Great Depression) saw thousands of whites migrate to the cities, making visible the poor white problem.

This group of poor whites, sharing the same socioeconomic circumstances of poor Africans and coloureds, lived together in the same social spaces. The white elites saw this closeness as a threat to their ideals of white purity and white supremacy. In other words, poor whites were not only exposed to competition for jobs with, especially, coloureds in the Cape but their intimacy also threatened the social degradation of the white race. For this reason, whites needed to be legally separated from coloureds.

But the law was not enough. As an outcast group, coloureds had to be cast as disgusting in their very essence, so that whites would choose not to “mix” with these undesirables. That is why for over a hundred years, coloureds in SU dissertations and theses (amongst other institutional publications) are consistently described as decrepit, pitiful, violent, aggressive, drunk, oversexed, unhealthy and unintelligent.¹⁴ The laws were designed to make “mixing” a crime, but discourses of disgust were developed to discourage social intercourse in the choices that whites made with respect to this inferior group of humans. This is precisely why the Sport Science

article was unexceptional – it merely continued a tradition of institutional research on coloured people politely deemed as “vulnerable”, but who substantively are regarded, once again, as objects of disgust. In this regard, it is coloured women who are singled out for special treatment.

Why are women of colour represented negatively in research?

A point often missed in the Sport Science article is that five white women embarked on a study of 60 coloured women, only to conclude that their subjects had poor education and unhealthy lifestyles. Two contributions seize on the fact that there was a powerful gender question that underpinned this research and that demanded closer scrutiny.

A scholar of English literature, Barbara Boswell, draws attention to the fact that depictions in the Sport Science article of “the degenerate figure of the South African coloured women” is no accident in the present, but a product of history. What the author does, however, is to show the interplay between race and gender in creating these stable images of degenerate women of colour. Here historical examples include the well-told story of the Khoisan woman, Sarah Baartman, who was presented to European audiences as a freak of nature because of her large buttocks.

In this regard, Boswell (and the next author, Amanda Gouws) provide what they call an intersectionalist analysis of the Sport Science article. Intersectionality holds that a person or group can be affected by a number of different disadvantages or oppressions, such as race and gender (or disability, sexuality, social class, etc.) all at the same time, as in the case of coloured women. The value of such a perspective on discrimination is that it gives a more complex account of oppressions that shows how these different identities – poor, coloured, women – together impact on the disadvantages experienced by these 60 women from the impoverished area of Cloetesville, Stellenbosch.

But surely researchers should be conscious or aware of who they are (privileged whites) and who their studied subjects are (impoverished coloureds)? Clearly this was not evident in the Sport Science article, leading the political scientist Amanda Gouws to offer a feminist perspective on the same research. In traditional research, a researcher might claim that “the facts speak for themselves”, and that the task is to obtain objective facts about a studied phenomenon using the best methods available to determine the truth; this is what is called positivist research.

In feminist research, by contrast, a researcher also sets out to determine the truth about something studied, but is conscious all the time of who she is and who the participants in the study are; feminists call this reflexivity. One important reality

check for this kind of researcher is, as Gouws describes, the power differential between the research team from an elite university and the researched in an impoverished township. This means, at the very least, approaching your subjects with respect, making clear the intentions of your research, and sharing your findings with them for their review and feedback. This kind of reflexivity comes with a starting commitment not to do any harm to those who choose to participate in your study.

Gouws is at pains to point out that feminist research makes these kinds of demands on a reflexive, respectful researcher, unlike traditional research, which might insist that the objective facts speak for themselves. But do facts stand independent of values, interests, power and even politics?

Is research not objective?

Another way of posing the question is, Do the facts not speak for themselves and, if so, what do they say? In his book *The Night Trains*, South Africa's preeminent social historian rails against "the ruling classes of the day who wish to make knowledge about the past the servant of the present".¹⁵ How is this done? The historian Albert Grundlingh's chapter in this book describes "the objective-scientific" approach to the historical studies at Stellenbosch University during the apartheid years.

In reality, this approach was neither objective nor scientific, for what it did was to account for history only to the extent that it fit the *volksgeskiedenis* of the white Afrikaner nationalists. The *volk*, in this case the Afrikaners, were God-fearing pioneers who overcame great hardships, conquered backward tribes and brought Christian civilisation to South Africa. To the extent that "the facts" fitted this glorious narrative of a noble people, such studies of history were deemed to be objective and scientific.

As mentioned earlier, there is a school of thought called *positivism* (closely related to another term, "empiricism")¹⁶ which holds that the only true knowledge is that which is obtained through the tried and tested methods of science, such as through experiments. In a positivist's view of science, therefore, knowledge is value-free and devoid of any ideology or politics. Yet Grundlingh is not the only scholar to demonstrate that such claims to scientific objectivity was a pretense. The research traditions of Afrikaans universities like Stellenbosch certainly pretended that the disciplines were value-free and objective – from fundamental pedagogics (education) and psychology to anatomy and genetics.

The attractiveness of a positivist view of knowledge is that it values the certainty, objectivity, causality and predictability associated with experimental methods. Research, however, is never a value-neutral activity, from the choice of questions,

to the selection of methods, to the interpretation of findings. Think, for example, of two extremes to make the simple point: the use of animal experiments to test cosmetics and the measurement of race and intelligence. However narrow the measuring instruments, in each case, the research starts with a value proposition – that animals are dispensable for cosmetic enhancement of humans or that some races are more intelligent than others. *Whenever there are alternative ways of thinking and doing research, the choice involves values.*

In the context of Stellenbosch University over a century, this positivist view of knowledge carried the following limitations. One, for many decades SU research, as at the other Afrikaans universities, started from a racist foundation that assumed there were four races, graded on a scale of civilisation that placed whites at the top and Africans at the bottom. Two, research typically screened out alternative perspectives on knowledge in favour of the conservative white nationalist narrative, such as the *Volkekunde* of the Afrikaans universities compared to other, more critical traditions of anthropology at other universities. Three, research was mainly conducted by “whites on blacks” with little reflexivity (discussed earlier) and even less accountability to those who were being studied. This last point on accountability raises the crucial question of ethics. How did the Sport Science article clear the hurdle of ethical review?

What are the ethical foundations of sound research (on race)?

Science has a dismal record on ethics. Nazi scientists did horrific experiments on Jewish prisoners in the death camps. American scientists withheld penicillin treatment from African American men who were part of an experiment on syphilis. Keymanthri Moodley, a leading expert on ethics in science, gives a powerful account of ethical violations in the conduct of research in South Africa and abroad.

Today there are all kinds of ethical clearances required for new research – including at Stellenbosch University. So how did this study on coloured women obtain ethical clearance? Why did nobody sense that a study of whites-on-blacks should at least have merited another look? How could a study on the intellectual and hygienic standards of coloured women escape scrutiny? What role did the research subjects themselves play in the research process, whether to grant approval to proceed but also to view the results? Or did the research protocols submitted for ethical review differ from those actually applied in the field? At the time of writing, these questions were under investigation.

Moodley gives a sense of what makes research ethical, including respect for participants, informed consent, risk-benefit ratios and the fair selection of participants.

This latter point is particularly interesting – why did the researchers single out coloured women for selection? Did they really believe there was something in *colouredness* that could explain cognitive or health outcomes?

This last question refers to *racial essentialism*, the basic apartheid idea that there is something in the essence of a presumed racial group that defines them as, say, Indian that is different from being coloured or white or African. That this racial essence of the four apartheid classifications could in turn explain different social or health or intellectual outcomes is called *racial determinism* – an equally dangerous idea that threads through 100 years of SU research on coloured people.¹⁷

The challenge for ethical review when it comes to race is that, at the very least, the members of such committees should have a profound sensitivity around studies that merely affirm stubborn commitments to racial essentialism and racial determinism. But not all studies of race are socially regressive. Put differently, there are *critical studies of race* that should not be denied ethical clearance simply because the study is about race. The point of departure for such critical studies of race is not that race is real, in the sense of it being a biological or cultural essence; rather, the starting point for such studies is that race is a social category whose functions need to be unmasked – especially in the most unlikely of places, like music and physical education.

What does a critical (rather than essentialist) study of race look like?

In a stunning turn of phrase, Stephanus Muller and Willemien Froneman of SU's Music Department make the important point in their chapter that “racial knowledge also passes through the ear”. Music can therefore be a vehicle for conveying essentialist ideas about race, as in Matilda Burden's (1991) study on “Die Volkslied onder Bruinmense”.¹⁸ Here the researcher is determined to demonstrate, through ample reproductions of folk music and their disturbing racist lyrics (of which the student is seemingly unaware), that coloured music is different in tone, style and content from white music. It cannot be the same, for it is made and heard differently according to one's racial group. The very idea of black music is, in this view, inferior, strange, imitative, lustful and worse, as the authors write of the contempt for jazz in the first Afrikaans history book on music.

What the two authors do is to show how race is performed through music or, in their words, how it passes through the human ear. Music in the Afrikaans churches conveys a sense of dark foreboding, as in the heavy psalms. The routine performance of large Afrikaans university choirs used for years to present a diet of upper-class, European classical music, conveying a sense of purity. The performance of the Cape Malay music is there in part to demonstrate racial distinctiveness. Wouter de Wet's selection of songs on RSG's *Loof die Here* every Sunday morning was much

more likely to include Dutch and British songs than black or coloured music in the classical or gospel genres. Music on and off campuses is streamed through the ear and performed according to distinctive selections by race, unmistakable from our musical pasts. It is, however, not only the ear that “hears” race; it is the whole body that performs race, and here the history of Physical Education at SU is a vital example, for the vexed article came from no lesser discipline than Sport Science itself.

Francois Cleophas is a sports science scholar who, in his chapter, draws attention to the long history of *race as performance*, through what has variously been called Physical Education, then Human Movement Studies, and now Sport Science. In efforts to explain the performance of athletes by race, early research in the field was eager to point out that black bodies were inherently different from white bodies. Those defining features were located in the essence of being black or white, and not simply by virtue of one or other physical trait that some athletes possess and others do not. It therefore makes sense that the vexed article that caused all the problems in fact came from researchers in Sport Science at SU, where it was a matter of common sense that coloured women could be described by their social and intellectual traits. Physical measurements of these women’s bodies, as the Cleophas chapter shows, were the foundations on which the problematic claims were made in the troubled research. In the end, as the Sport Science article claims, coloured women showed up with critical deficits – of not having the required cognitive functions or the desired lifestyle habits. There are even educational programmes whose starting point is the notion of academic deficits rather than positive assets that students bring to university.

What does a systemic (or structural) rather than racial group analysis of problems look like?

Long before the SU educationist, Cecilia Jacobs, became an academic development specialist, she had a strong sense of coloured identity as politically objectionable. “I am not a coloured woman”, she emphasises in her moving contribution to this book. She is not alone. There are large numbers of people who carry this apartheid identity but who also recognise it as a political classification imposed on a group of people in order to divide them from other South Africans. In other words, there is a political consciousness of the origins and purposes of racial classification when it comes to coloured people. This critical reflexivity around manufactured racial identities is the direct opposite of the common-sense understanding of coloured identity shared by many others. Whichever perspective one adopts, academic development programmes at universities first started with the notion of racial and class deficits that needed to be overcome through teaching and learning support in order for students to experience success in their degree studies.

The assumption that students (like the coloured women in the study) need to be “fixed” through appropriate support is an enticing idea that throws up an important question. When is a problem the individual or group and when is it the system? Take the example of scores of studies on drinking addiction amongst coloured farm labourers. One approach is to see the problem as self-evident: coloured people as a group are addicted to drink and therefore need upliftment through social welfare.

A systemic analysis would argue that some farm labourers are indeed addicted to strong drink and that the reason for this is a long history of economic exploitation in which these workers were paid in part through cheap wines (the tot system) by white farmers, which kept them drunk, dependent and deprived of a full living wage.¹⁹ In other words, the problem does not lie in being coloured but in decades of being exploited as cheap labour on the vineyards.

This is a crucial point, since a century of research at SU has been characterised by narrow empirical descriptions of a problem, such as the cognitive function and lifestyle patterns of coloured people. The health and educational status of these women are then explained on their own terms rather than in relation to what caused those conditions in the first place. In this case, centuries of racial discrimination and economic exploitation “kept people in their place” and now researchers descend on what they politely call “vulnerable communities”, as if the problem is also the explanation.

Researchers come to communities with measuring tools – those instruments designed to account for social, physical or cognitive status; this raises another question – is the problem of the Sport Science article one of appropriate methodology or the research question itself?

Does method matter when the questions are flawed?

A standard piece of advice that a research supervisor gives a student is that the methodology chosen depends entirely on the questions they pose. Students attached to a favourite set of methods are warned that “when all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail”. It is for precisely this reason that many of the respondents to the Sport Science article did not engage with the details of the methodology in the troubled article: because the questions themselves were poorly posed. In other words, it did not really matter what methods were used, because the questions about coloured women’s education levels and personal health were themselves offensive – especially when those studying these poor black women were white, privileged researchers from the nearby elite university.

The Psychological Society of South Africa felt no such constraint when they took on “the flawed methodology” of the Sport Science study. To begin with, the sample is far too small (60 women) to make generalisable claims about “coloured women”. In other words, in the reading of the conclusions, the sample became the population. Worse, the already small sample decreased further when the 60 women were divided into four uneven age-groups, making comparison amongst them even more questionable. Then, one of the main instruments used, the Montreal Cognitive Assessment Test (MoCA), a North American test that takes a mere 10 minutes to complete, was found in other studies to be seriously flawed when applied to populations in other national or cultural contexts.²⁰

There are once again important ethical questions of concern when the commitment to statistical measurement is not preceded by ethical questions about how the research impacts on issues such as human dignity, value and respect, especially in the case of disadvantaged communities. Which raises yet another question in the politics of knowledge: what if those doing research simply cannot “see” what is wrong with locating a social problem within the racial identity of a person or a group, as in the Sport Science publication? Put differently, can race be unlearned? And even when “race” is recognised as a problem by campus citizens (students, staff and researchers in particular), how does one unlearn cherished concepts?

Can race be unlearned?

It is one thing to recognise the harmful politics of race in the ways knowledge is produced through research; it is a completely different matter to “unlearn race” in the ways we teach, learn and live our lives. This is the vocation of Anita Jonker in this book, where she introduces an innovative course at Stellenbosch University called *An Introduction to the Humanities*. The broader programme is intended to offer an extended course of study to disadvantaged students, much like the Academic Development Programme that Cecilia Jacobs analyses in her contribution.

Yet what is different about this intervention, where students do the first year of normal degree studies over a two year period, is that the goal is not simply to overcome “deficits” from a dysfunctional school system, but to engage students in what could be called critical race studies. Jonker’s programme teaches students to “unlearn race” by putting the uncomfortable subject on the table; for example, students learn about race as a social construct and race as a political device to divide South African citizens and to advance whites at the expense of blacks. In other words, students are empowered with a critical vocabulary with which to make sense of the world around them. What is further novel about this curriculum is that

student knowledge and experiences are starting points for a critical engagement on race, science and society; in addition, they are enabled to draw on their own languages in engaging these important topics.

What this innovative curriculum demonstrates is that it is not possible for universities like Stellenbosch to uproot racialised thinking in the disciplines through political standpoints (“we condemn racism in research”) or governance reforms (“we are reviewing our ethical procedures”) alone. Ultimately, changing the minds of students, staff and communities about essentialist notions of race and research requires pedagogical (educational) interventions across the curriculum, from the natural sciences and engineering to the social sciences and humanities.

Even so, can race, in fact, be unlearned? It is important to remember that universities are not the only places where students learn about race. Other institutions, such as the home, the school, the sports club, and the church (as well as other faith-based groups), are all-powerful sites for directly or indirectly learning about race.²¹ When a university curriculum challenges already embedded notions about race and society amongst undergraduates, for example, it can have three effects. It affirms what some students already know (e.g. that race is a construction), it evokes resistance (e.g. that there are races and that they are different, end of story) and it troubles familiar knowledge (e.g. that maybe what I know about race could be wrong). The pedagogical task is not to provide students with “the right answers”, but to enable them to question cherished knowledge and to revisit those certainties about race, science and society.

Conclusion

Whatever one studies, whether architecture or physiotherapy or economics, it is vital to have a broader understanding of science and society as part of a university education. A student who graduates with only a narrow set of skills or competences as an engineer or dentist or journalist would not be able to engage the most complex issues of our times, such as ethics, knowledge, politics and values. And without an understanding of the enduring effects of race in science and society, a graduate’s capacity to engage in and transform South African society would be seriously limited.

That is what this book provides, in one place: a broader education than what a specific degree alone can offer.

Endnotes

- 1 Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology And Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>
- 2 Barbara Boswell, “Letter to the Editorial Board of Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition” (2019), <https://bit.ly/2UwhtEh>
- 3 “Statement of Retraction: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1614759>
- 4 Motion for discussion at Senate submitted to Registrar of Stellenbosch University by 14 senior academics, 22 May 2019.
- 5 The first symposium was titled “Race as a Variable in Scientific Research – Controversies and Concerns”, SU Tygerberg Campus, 13 May 2019; the second symposium (organised by three concerned University Council members, Professors Amanda Gouws, Aslam Fataar and Usuf Chikte) was titled “Restructuring Science and Research at SU”, Library, SU Main Campus, 21 May 2019; the third symposium was hosted by the Department of Psychology at SU and titled “Race, Representation and Psychological Research”, 7 June 2019.
- 6 Some of these questions are taken on in Sarah Wild, “How Long-Discredited ‘Race Science’ Research Got Published from Two South African Universities”, *Quartz Africa* 29 July 2019, <https://bit.ly/2UEdANt>
- 7 Motion for discussion at Senate, 22 May 2019.
- 8 For an accessible read on the politics of classification of coloured people, see Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).
- 9 Nic Spaull and Jonathan D. Jansen eds., *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality: A Study of the Present Situation and Future Possibilities* (Cham: Springer, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18811-5>
- 10 Deborah Posel, “Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa”, *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.2307/525576>
- 11 Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 12 Brent Staples, “How Italians Became ‘White’”, *The New York Times*, 12 October 2019, <https://nyti.ms/2OBvM6L>
- 13 Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (London: 4th Estate, 2019).
- 14 Jonathan D. Jansen, Cyrill Walters and Mkululi D. Nompumza, “A Scholarship of Contempt and Pity: A Century of Research on Coloured People at Stellenbosch University, South Africa” (in press).
- 15 Charles van Onselen, *The Night Trains: Moving Mozambican Miners to and from South Africa, circa 1902–1955* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2019).
- 16 Empiricism holds that the only true knowledge is that derived from what humans experience through the senses such as observation; in other words, there is no knowledge without experience.

- 17 Jonathan D. Jansen, Cyril Walters and Mkululi D. Nompumza, "A Scholarship of Contempt and Pity: A Century of Research on Coloured People at Stellenbosch University, South Africa" (in press).
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Jim Te Water Naude et al., "The 'Dop' System around Stellenbosch: Results of a Farm Survey", *South African Medical Journal / Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geneeskunde* 88, no. 9 (1998).
- 20 Psychological Society of South Africa, Division for Research & Methodology, "An Open Critique of the Nieuwoudt et al. (2019) Study on Coloured Women", *The Thought Leader* 29 April 2019, <https://bit.ly/2vhEAaQ>
- 21 See Jonathan D. Jansen, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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SECTION A



Race and the Genes



The Role of Genetics in Racial Categorisation of Humans

***Soraya Bardien-Kruger &
Amica Müller-Nedebock***

Introduction

Only very recently in the history of modern humans have we learned how to read the stories hidden in our DNA. The ability to read and interpret DNA has revealed that many things are not as they are perceived to be. For instance, physical features between two people may be strikingly different and therefore be taken to mean that the individuals are fundamentally different, when in fact the DNA of any two humans is almost identical (99.9% the same) on a genetic level.

Given the physical differences apparent between populations, much research has gone into studying what makes them different. This type of research, no matter how well intentioned, has led to the pseudoscientific arguments used to justify movements such as the slave trade, the eugenics movement and apartheid in South Africa. Scientists at Stellenbosch University have also played a significant role in highlighting the 'racial' differences in the South African population. One such study is the now-retracted Sport Science article.¹ In this study, the authors, albeit unwittingly, reinforce racial stereotyping by concluding that so-called 'coloured' women in South Africa have lower cognitive functioning when compared to American age-standardised norms, and that this is due to exposure to a variety of factors with known negative effects on cognitive function. In an attempt to shed some light on the inaccuracies of the assumptions on which this article is based, this chapter will provide some background to racial categorisation from a genetic perspective. It will start with basic concepts in genetics and then expand into some of the more complex concepts and theories supporting the fact that there is no genetic basis for race in humans.

The basics of DNA

DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid. Everyone, with the exception of identical twins, has a unique set of DNA. This DNA is an instruction manual that contains the information our cells need to make proteins and other molecules essential for our development, growth and survival. All human cells, except red blood cells, contain DNA, which is stored in a part of the cell known as the nucleus.

DNA occurs in the form of a double helix, which resembles a twisted ladder-like structure. The rungs of this 'ladder' are made up of four nucleotide bases: adenine (A), cytosine (C), guanine (G) and thymine (T). Combinations of these bases form three-letter 'words' called **codons**, which the cell reads to make proteins.

Each codon specifies which protein building block, known as an **amino acid**, should be added next during the process of making proteins. Various combinations of amino acids make up different proteins. The three-letter codons are pieced together in an estimated 20 000 to 25 000 'sentences' called **genes**.² The genes are separated by nucleotide bases which do not code for amino acids but are still important. These stretches of jumbled-up bases are called non-coding DNA (also referred to as junk DNA) and they make up the vast majority (98.8%) of our DNA. Some of the non-coding DNA functions as 'punctuation marks', providing information as to where one gene ends and the next one starts. Other non-coding DNA regulates when and how much of the proteins are made, or control how DNA is packaged within the cell. However, there is still a lot that is not yet known about non-coding DNA and its functions.

The DNA double helix is tightly coiled around proteins to form X-like structures called **chromosomes**. Humans have a total of 23 chromosome pairs. Twenty-two of these are called autosomes and one is a pair of sex chromosomes that determines whether one is female or male. If one inherits two X sex chromosomes, one is female, whereas if one has inherited an X and a Y sex chromosome, one is male. Humans inherit one chromosome of every chromosome pair from each of their parents.

It is important to note that *all humans have the same set of genes*, but they can have *slightly different* versions of these genes. These different versions are due to variations in DNA, known as **alleles**. Two alleles of a gene could have different properties, for example, one coding for blue eyes and another coding for brown eyes. The fact that humans have the same genes, but different alleles, is what makes them incredibly similar, yet amazingly unique.

Genetic variation in humans: How did this come about?

The differences in alleles between individuals is known as **genetic variation**, and there are several ways in which this can come about, including mutation and sexual reproduction. Importantly, genetic variation can exist not only in genes but also in non-coding DNA. Sexual reproduction is an important source of genetic variation in humans. Siblings (except identical twins) from the same parents are not identical genetically or physically. This is because sexual reproduction involves genetic shuffling and random fertilisation, which contribute to genetic variation and the resulting differences in appearance.

Genetic shuffling (i.e. crossing over of individual chromosomes from chromosome pairs) occurs during the formation of sex cells (i.e. a woman's egg cells and a man's sperm cells). When these sex cells are formed, the maternal and paternal chromosomes of an individual exchange pieces of DNA to form new combinations of alleles (Figure 1.1). Subsequently, the individual chromosomes from each newly shuffled chromosome pair are randomly separated into different cells, so that every sex cell contains only 23 individual *chromosomes* instead of 23 *chromosome pairs*. This process ensures that every sex cell formed has a unique set of chromosomes. Upon fertilisation of an egg cell with a sperm cell, the individual chromosomes from the two sex cells form a new combination of 23 chromosome pairs with a unique combination of alleles.

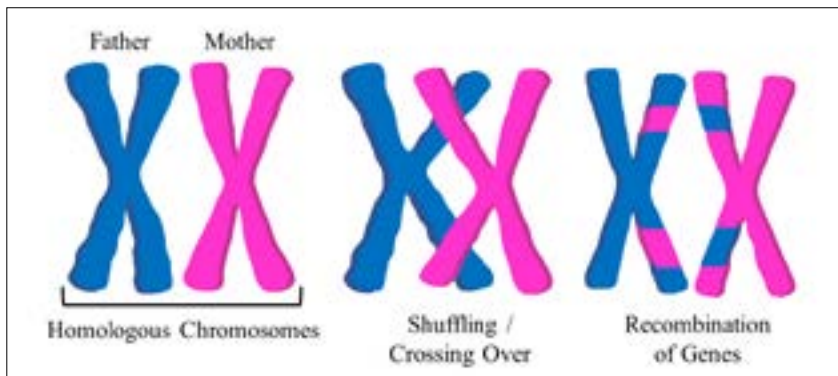


FIGURE 1.1: Genetic shuffling to produce new combinations of alleles in offspring
[Illustration by Caitlin McCaffrey]

Another way in which new alleles can come about is through mutation – a random change in the nucleotide sequence of DNA. This can be caused by environmental factors, such as chemicals and radiation, but also by errors made by the cell when copying DNA into new cells. In humans and other multicellular organisms, only mutations in cell lines that give rise to sex cells will be passed on to the offspring.

Genetic variation in populations

By biological definition, populations consist of members of the same species that interbreed. High genetic variation is evident in a population when there are many different alleles and many different combinations of these alleles. Collectively, the different alleles within a population are known as the population's **gene pool**.

This gene pool can change over time. Different allelic forms of a single gene can appear and disappear. Some alleles may also become 'fixed' in a population, which means that a population only has one version of that allele, and all others have been removed or lost. Changes in a population's gene pool and allele fixation can be due to environmental factors that favour certain traits over others, the death of a large number of individuals within the population or the migration of individuals into or out of the population.

Out-of-Africa hypothesis

Ancestors of humans originated in Africa and subsequently populated the rest of the world.³ Groups moved away from the population nested in Africa and expanded in all directions of the globe about 60 000 years ago (Figure 1.2).⁴ The smaller groups took with them only a subset of the alleles and genetic variation found in the ancestral African gene pool. This means that the *greatest genetic diversity is found in African populations*. The smaller populations that moved away from Africa settled, grew in size and gave rise to new populations, which 'budded off' and repeated this process.⁵ However, it is now known that these populations moved in all directions all the time, with genetic exchange (gene flow) occurring between populations, thus blurring the genetic lines between them.⁶ For instance, Eurasian populations that had left Africa later (~3 000 years ago) again exchanged genetic variation with ancestral African populations.⁷ Moreover, analysis of several genomes has indicated ancient **admixture** (more than one genetic ancestry) amongst populations that expanded from Africa.⁸ This means that some populations that left Africa also exchanged genetic variation (mated) with now-extinct groups of hominids such as Neanderthals and Denisovans.

To study genetic variation, gene flow and migration patterns amongst humans, geneticists often investigate **single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs)** in DNA. These are individual nucleotide bases within the genome that vary widely between people and are in fact the most common type of genetic differences between individuals, accounting for ~95% of all known sequence variation.⁹ SNPs can be located within genes or in non-coding DNA. Given that most human DNA is non-coding, most SNPs (and therefore most genetic variation) are also located in the non-coding DNA. Some SNPs have been conserved over thousands of generations in human populations and therefore enable one to infer the genetic ancestry of an individual.¹⁰



FIGURE 1.2: A depiction of the Out-of-Africa hypothesis indicating that modern humans originated in Africa and then migrated to other regions of the world. The greatest genetic diversity is seen in Africa when compared to the rest of the world. [Illustration by Caitlin McCaffrey]

Many are shared by populations across the globe,¹¹ but their frequencies can differ widely between geographic populations¹² due to the different ancestral gene pools of populations and the different factors that may have shaped these gene pools over time.

Link between genetic variation and human disease

Why do some genetic diseases and traits appear to be more common in some populations than in others? In addition to genetic variation, which can help infer the ancestry of individuals, disease-causing alleles and SNPs can also be found at different frequencies amongst different populations around the world. Again, this is due to the different ancestral gene pools from which the populations originated and the different ways these genes pools have changed over time.

Selective advantage

One way in which an allele can become more frequent in a gene pool is if it codes for a trait that is favourable for a given environment. As such, some alleles have been passed on through generations because they confer some form of selective advantage to the individuals in the population. Sometimes an allele that causes a genetic disease is actually passed on to subsequent generations because it helps individuals survive

in certain climates or protects them against a deadly disease. For instance, an allele in the **HbS** gene, which is protective against malaria infection, but causes sickle cell disease, has been passed on through generations in populations living in areas with a high incidence of malaria (e.g. West Africa).¹³ In this case, the sickle cell allele was advantageous because it protected individuals from malaria infection (a common cause of death), and therefore it became more common in the population's gene pool over time.

Another example is an allele in the **HFE** gene that causes hemochromatosis (an iron overload disorder), which is found at high frequencies in individuals of Northern European ancestry.¹⁴ Given that iron is an essential micronutrient needed to effectively regulate body temperature, the allele is thought to have helped individuals survive the cold and wet climate in European countries.¹⁵ It was therefore selected for in individuals living in Northern Europe.

In addition to diseases, some differences in physical traits between populations, such as skin pigmentation, are also due to selective advantage. In humans, skin pigmentation is an adaptation to differing levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Regions close to the equator receive more UV radiation than temperate regions. Therefore, alleles for darker pigmentation became more common in populations living in these equatorial regions, as they protected individuals from harmful diseases such as skin cancer. In contrast, alleles for lighter skin pigmentation were favoured in the temperate regions, where the UV radiation was less severe. It should be noted, however, that skin pigmentation is a complex trait influenced by alleles at a number of different genes, and it has been under continuous evolution throughout hominid history.¹⁶

Founder effects

Sometimes populations have an increased frequency of a disease-causing allele not because it was particularly useful, but simply because the allele was present in one or a few of the individuals who originally founded the population (i.e. the individuals who moved away from their ancestral population and gave rise to the new population). As the new population increased in size, the allele increased in frequency over generations and became more common in the gene pool. This is known as the **founder effect** and it is thought to account for an increased frequency of genetic disorders in some populations. The increased frequency of Bardet-Biedl syndrome (BBS) in the island population of Newfoundland¹⁷ is a fairly recent example of how the founder effect has increased the frequency of a disease-causing allele in a population. BBS affects multiple body systems, and features of the disease include obesity and intellectual impairment. The founding population of Newfoundland was small (~20 000 settlers in 1760) and consisted of individuals from England and Ireland, some of whom carried alleles for BBS.¹⁸

Another example of a population with a founder effect can be found in South Africa. The Afrikaner population is based on the Dutch, German and French immigrants who settled in the Cape in the 1600s and founded a new population here. It has been estimated that in the period between 1637 and 1806, the total number of progenitors for this population was approximately 4000 individuals.¹⁹ Founder effects for a number of diseases have been observed in this population, possibly due to the fact that the disease alleles were present in the original progenitors and were later amplified through exponential population expansion.²⁰

However, it is important to note that the fact that a disease is more common in some populations than in others does not mean it is exclusive to a particular population. The same genetic diseases can be found across all populations in the world. The fact that modern-day humans move across the globe with ease and intermarry also means that frequencies of these disease-causing alleles and other genetic variations are likely to change again over time. Moreover, it should be stressed that differences in allele frequencies between populations do not solely account for health disparities between populations. Health disparities apparent between different geographic regions are also due to differences in access to healthcare, diets, lifestyles and socioeconomic factors, all of which influence disease prevalence and incidence.

Concept of race: On what is the label based?

Different populations around the world can have different frequencies of alleles based on which ancestral gene pool they originated from. However, this does not mean that humans from populations around the world are different enough from one another to justify being separated into distinct groups. In this section, it will be explained why this is the case.

Taxonomic classification and race

Taxonomy is the branch of science involving classification and naming of organisms in an ordered system to indicate the relationship between them. In taxonomy, species were traditionally and primarily distinguished based on their physical appearances. However, appearance cannot tell how genetically different or similar two organisms are. Many organisms that look almost identical are actually quite different to one another at the genetic level and vice versa. For instance, some organisms previously classified as a single species based on appearance (e.g. populations of the popular lab worm, *Lumbriculus variegatus*) have now been found to be genetically different enough to be classified as separate species.²¹ In contrast, the African elephant and the dassie, which look nothing alike, are in fact evolutionarily related to one another, albeit distantly.²² This highlights an important notion, i.e. what is visible to the naked eye does not tell one much about genetics.

This also holds true for humans, who have historically been grouped into races based primarily on their geographic location and physical appearance, particularly their skin colour. Analysis of the complete DNA sequences of two American so-called ‘white’ geneticists of European origin (James Watson and Craig Venter) revealed that they were more dissimilar to each other than they were to a scientist of Asian descent, Seong-Jin Kim.²³ Although physical features may appear to be strikingly different across the world, they are only determined by a tiny percentage of our DNA. The *observable* traits that differ between populations are therefore superficial and few. Importantly, most human genetic variation (~90–95%) is due to variation amongst individuals within a population, whereas only about 5–10% is attributable to variation between populations.²⁴ This 5–10% of genetic variation falls well below the 25% threshold that taxonomists use to divide organisms into subspecies. In other words, this means that human populations are not genetically distinct enough to be divided into subspecies or, in this case, races. Consequently, there is *no genetic basis for race in humans*.

Race as a variable in genetic studies

If race has no genetic basis, why does one read about it in genetics studies? Although race and ethnicity are related concepts, and are often used interchangeably, they are quite different. Race is based mainly on observable differences in physical appearance (e.g. skin colour and eye colour). In contrast, ethnicity is a complex concept that reflects biological factors and refers to communality in cultural heritage, language, social practice, religion and many other factors. Often geneticists use broad racial terminology to define their study group when in fact they could define it more clearly in other ways, including the group’s ethnicity. The language that is used in scientific research matters, and assigning racial or even ethnic labels to study participants is often unnecessary, depending on the research context and question. This is important to note because scientific reports (mis)using racial terminology can easily be misinterpreted by the public, and they have been used to justify racism and eugenics, as will be discussed later.

If geneticists should not use racial or even ethnic groups in their studies, why should they try to group together individuals at all? In some instances, grouping individuals together based on common *genetic ancestry* is important in order to answer key research questions. It was stated previously that populations across the world have different frequencies of genetic variation. In studies on human population genetics, individuals who share ethnolinguistic backgrounds are grouped together to study human history and migration patterns. Also, geneticists study genetic variation that could be associated with, or may cause, a disease. Very often, a group of individuals

who have a similar genetic ancestry are selected for genetics studies so that SNPs (or other genetic variants) that are found in people affected by a disease and are absent in people without the disease can be identified. If individuals from different genetic ancestral backgrounds are studied together, it becomes difficult to pinpoint SNPs that actually cause disease, since there will be many more SNPs that differ between the individuals, given their genetic ancestry (and not their disease status). Moreover, if the disease group consists mostly of individuals from ancestry X, but the healthy control group consists mostly of individuals of ancestry Y, then a SNP found in individuals of ancestry X may be incorrectly associated with the disease simply because the SNP is overrepresented in the disease group.

To illustrate this point, two famous geneticists, Lander and Schork, provided a humorous example of a hypothetical study in San Francisco to investigate alleles in the immune system gene complex (HLA) and the ability to eat with chopsticks. An association between a particular HLA allele (HLA-A1) would be found, not because there is a biological link between the allele and eating with chopsticks, but because this allele is more common in individuals of Asian ancestry than those of European ancestry.²⁵ For this reason, it is necessary for geneticists to group individuals together for research based on their *genetic* ancestry to avoid making such false connections between a SNP and a disease or a trait of interest. It is important to note, however, that the knowledge gained from studies in one population in which disease-causing variants are identified can then be applied to help identify susceptible individuals from other populations. This is due to the fact that the same alleles are usually found in all populations, **but they just occur at different frequencies.**

However, recruiting individuals with the same genetic ancestry for such studies is difficult, given that genetic ancestry is not an observable trait; nor is it quick and inexpensive to test for. Thus, past studies have resorted to recruiting individuals based on historically defined racial categories, despite their being poor proxies for genetic ancestry. Very often, the racial category assigned to an individual based on their physical appearance disagrees with their genetic ancestry. For instance, a person with a so-called 'black' and a 'white' parent in the United States of America (USA) is socially classified as a 'black' or 'African American'. This is due to the 'one-drop rule', a historical social and legal classification in the USA that held that an individual with even one ancestor of sub-Saharan African ancestry would be considered to be 'black'.²⁶ Interestingly, the proportions of African and European ancestry in self-identified 'African Americans' has been shown to vary widely,²⁷ highlighting that race is a poor indicator of genetic ancestry.

The ‘African American’ group is not the only one in the USA varying in terms of their admixture (i.e. having more than one genetic ancestry). Another example is the ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’ group. Mexican Americans have a higher proportion of Native American ancestry (between 35% and 64%), and a lower proportion of African ancestry (between 3 and 5%), than Puerto Ricans, whose African ancestry is higher (between 18 and 25%) than their Native American ancestry (between 12 and 15%).²⁸ Therefore, for these individuals, the use of a single ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’ category is a poor description of their genetic ancestry.

Taken together, these observations reveal that characterising races simply as ‘white’, ‘black’, ‘Asian’ or ‘Latino/Hispanic’ is an inaccurate way to predict human genetic diversity or similarity. Although racial categories may be helpful in studying sociocultural and socioeconomic factors, such as income and housing, given the history of racial discrimination around the world, they are not always useful in revealing the genetic ancestry or the extent of genetic admixture in an individual. Importantly, as multiethnic marriages and intermarriage between different global population groups become more common, it is increasingly difficult (and will become more so) to assign a single ethnicity to an individual. Here it is important to highlight the fact that humans are *one continuously variable, interbreeding species*. This does not mean humans are all the same, or that there are no observable differences within our species. It just means that trying to separate the human species into distinct groups, based on physical differences, has little genetic meaning.

Despite this knowledge, the genetics community has long debated the use of racial and ethnic terminology in research, but it has failed to reach a global consensus on this question. Perhaps, many researchers fail to see the consequences of using such terminology in modern-day society. Recently, the use of such terminology, combined with the misinterpretation of study findings, has led to much debate in the media about *possible genetic superiority* of certain racial groups. This prompted the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) to put out a statement in November 2018 denouncing attempts to link genetics and racial supremacy.²⁹ The statement declares that the Society is “alarmed to see a societal resurgence of groups rejecting the value of genetic diversity and using discredited or distorted genetic concepts to bolster bogus claims of ‘white supremacy’”. It goes on to say, “Any attempt to use genetics to rank populations demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of genetics.” Such misconstrued ideas about genetics being able to justify supremacy of any kind threaten the re-emergence of eugenics.

Eugenics

Eugenics can be defined as a set of views and practices that aim to ‘improve’ the genetic make-up of the human population or to increase the occurrence of desirable characteristics. The term was first used by Francis Galton in 1883 and was thought to be based on the work of Charles Darwin.

Eugenics principles can be divided into two categories: *Positive eugenics* is aimed at encouraging reproduction of groups thought to be superior, for example, individuals who are thought to be intelligent, healthy, and successful. *Negative eugenics* is about eradicating, through forced sterilisation, abortions, segregation or marriage prohibitions of individuals with ‘undesirable’ traits such as physical or mental disorders, criminality, homosexuality and members of certain population groups. The movie *Gattaca* provides a chilling account of a future world in which eugenics is used to decide what people are capable of and their place in society. In the movie, children are conceived through genetic selection to ensure that they have the best genetic characteristics of their parents and are considered superior to individuals who are conceived outside of the eugenics programme.

In modern times, eugenics is seen as being linked to ‘white’ supremacism. The contemporary history of eugenics began in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when the eugenics movement was started in the United Kingdom, and later spread to other countries throughout Europe as well as the USA. These countries adopted eugenics policies with a goal to improve the quality of their populations’ genetics. Later, during World War II, the eugenics movement became associated with the genocidal programmes of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. During the Nuremberg trials, the defendants tried to justify their human rights abuses by claiming there was little difference between the Nazi and American eugenics programmes.³⁰ After World War II, with the institution of new human rights laws and regulations, many countries started to reject eugenics policies, although some, such as the USA, continued with involuntary or forced sterilisations.³¹ A major criticism of eugenics policies is that they will permanently and artificially disrupt millions of years of evolution, and that attempting to create genetic lines devoid of ‘defects’ can have far-reaching resulting negative effects on immunity and species resilience.

Since the 1980s, with the development of new assisted reproductive technology, such as *in vitro* fertilisation, preimplantation genetic testing, surrogacy and mitochondrial replacement therapy, fears of eugenics are re-emerging. Today, we have technologies, such as DNA editing, that make it possible to alter the genetic composition of an individual. Scientists are already using DNA editing to treat individuals with blood disorders and cancers in ongoing clinical trials and they plan to treat a range of

additional disorders, including inherited blindness, in the near future.³² Also, DNA editing of human embryos that inactivated a gene involved in HIV infection has recently resulted in the birth of potentially HIV-resistant humans in China.³³ These experiments were widely criticised as being ethically questionable and technically flawed, but it is anticipated that such applications will continue to become more widespread. The fear is that these approaches will not stop at disease prevention, but will also be used to intentionally ‘improve’ individuals, i.e. genetic enhancement of physical and intellectual traits. This will bring with it its own set of ethical, moral and legal dilemmas.

Eugenics in South Africa

As the scholar Linda Naicker points out, “the scientific theory of eugenics laid the foundation for South Africa’s race policies and continued to be a key driver of racial segregation throughout the formative years of apartheid and should, therefore, be a concomitant consideration when analysing issues of racial formation in South Africa”.³⁴ The concepts of ‘inferior types’ and European superiority were widely propagated by South African eugenicists. They and others were concerned that the mixing of racial groups was a social crime that would cause great damage to ‘white civilisation’.

Historian Susanne Klausen has examined the eugenic beliefs of members of the English-speaking medical profession in South Africa during the first three decades of the last century. She found that South African eugenicists, concerned about the future and health of the ‘white’ race, believed it was their duty to interfere in people’s social relations. They thought that there was a link between the health of the ‘white’ population, the role of ‘white’ women as ‘mothers of the nation’ and the health of the South African state. The growth of urban slums due to the migration of landless ‘Afrikaners’ and ‘black Africans’ to urban areas to find employment was a major concern in the country.³⁵

The medical profession in South Africa was particularly concerned about the escalation of ‘feble-mindedness’ amongst ‘white’ people due to racial mixing in these slums. ‘Feble-mindedness’ was a flexible category that could include individuals with putative mental, and often physical, moral and other deficiencies, depending on the context. The medical profession believed that, if not stopped, this ‘degeneration’ would result in social, cultural and economic devastation of the ‘white’ population in this country. In her article, Naicker states:

Even though racist practices were commonplace in the first three decades of colonialism in South Africa and loomed large throughout its history, the theoretical orientation of the concept was a British construct which was expanded by the South African colonial medical profession early in the 20th century.³⁶

Given what is now known about the negative genetic consequences and human suffering caused by the practice of eugenics, it is important not to take modern eugenic ideas (such as genome editing in the name of disease prevention) a step too far. It should also be noted that in the past, eugenics mainly involved the sterilisation of, and the enforcement of reproduction laws against, adults. Now, in the post-genomic era, it is embryos that are being artificially genetically manipulated. A major ethical concern is that the unborn foetus, upon whom these eugenic procedures are being practised, has no voice to express their opinion about what is being done to them. With the possibility of DNA editing becoming more frequent in the future, in the quest to create 'perfect' disease-resistant humans, it should be remembered that genetic diversity and genetic 'flaws' have enabled the human population to survive and thrive over thousands of years.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of some key concepts in human genetics that explain why race has no genetic basis. It is known that DNA codes for the same set of genes in all humans, but each person can have different alleles. The differences that occur in the frequency of alleles between populations are due to the different gene pools that the populations originated from, and the factors that shaped these gene pools over time. These genetic differences between populations are too small to justify grouping humans into *distinct* categories such as 'races'. In other words, *humans are more genetically similar than they are dissimilar*. Broad racial categorisation, e.g. 'black', is a poor indicator of genetic diversity and of genetic ancestry. The use of racial terminology in scientific writing can lead to the misunderstanding of genetic studies as providing support for or fuelling racism. Finally, the discriminatory eugenics practises of the past are threatening to make a comeback, and we should be prepared for this with thorough consideration and understanding of all of the concomitant ethical, moral and legal implications.

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The Boomerang

How eugenics and racial science in the German colonies rebounded on Europe and the rest of the world

Steven Robins

Introduction

In 1936, the British-trained professor of zoology Harold Benjamin Fantham published an article titled “Some Race Problems in South Africa” in *The Scientific Monthly*.¹ The opening section of the article provided detailed “physionomical” descriptions of the “Bushmen” and “Hottentots”, alongside accounts of the other “races” of South Africa:

The Bushmen are a primitive people, short of stature, slim, muddy yellow in color, with small tufts of rusty brown, wooly hair, giving a peppercorn appearance. Their skin is greatly wrinkled. They have low foreheads, prominent cheekbones, small, sunken eyes and ears with very little trace of lobes. Their noses are small, flat and broad. Their jaws project only a little. They have hollow backs due to inward lumbosacral curvature, making the buttocks appear prominent ... The Hottentots are of medium stature and slight build, with small hands and feet. They are reddish-yellow in color, with narrow heads, black wooly hair, high cheekbones, hollow cheeks, pointed chins, eyes far apart, ears with moderately developed lobes and broad, flat noses. A fair degree of prognathism is present. There is marked lumbosacral curvature and characteristic steatopygia ...

This description was followed by a detailed analysis of the physical, social, psychological and intellectual characteristics of the “racially mixed Cape Coloured” population, including an account of a family with Jewish and Cape coloured ancestry:

In Family (7) the Jewish influence is very marked. In some parts of the Cape Province, for instance, in the neighbourhoods of Port Elizabeth and Outdshoorn, Cape Colored people with markedly Semitic cast of nose and countenance can often be seen. Europeans in these neighbourhoods, intimately acquainted with local conditions, have expressed their opinion that these Hebrew-like Coloured people “mark the past of the itinerant Semite pedlar,” and there appears to be very good evidence for this view.²

Fantham, who held positions as Professor of Zoology at both the University of Witwatersrand and McGill University in Montreal, was by then widely published in the field of parasitology; he was also clearly deeply influenced by the then “cutting-edge” global science of eugenics. By measuring, describing and categorising these physical features, he sought to address “race problems” in South Africa. He believed that by the mid-1930s, South Africa was already well placed to use eugenics to address problems of “racial mixing”:

In general, as I have often stated, while intermarriage of black and white is not desirable biologically or socially, yet that does not condemn racial admixture as a whole, for admixture of peoples at similar levels of civilization may result in the perpetuation of highly desirable qualities. In South Africa, and in other countries where the color problem exists, more attention to the maintenance of racial integrity seems desirable ... Fortunately, the need for such eugenics research has been realised. In South Africa since 1920 there has been an active Eugenics and Genetics Committee of the South Africans Association for the Advancement of Science, which is a member of the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations and work on racial admixture has been published by the Association. Also, since 1930, there has been a Race Welfare Society in Johannesburg ... for the encouragement of propagation among the better types in the community and the restriction of the same among the less mentally and socially adequate members.³

While clearly much has changed in the human sciences since 1936, it would seem that certain eugenics ideas about how “racial miscegenation” contributes towards the creation of new stable and homogenous “hybrid races” seems to have somehow persisted into the present.

In 2019, the South African media reported on a study by the Stellenbosch University’s Department of Sport Science that claimed that “coloured women in South Africa have an increased risk for low cognitive functioning, as they present with low education levels and unhealthy lifestyle behaviours”.⁴ While many South Africans were indeed shocked that such a sweeping (and unscientific) generalisation could be inferred from a small sample of 60 women, for others this was hardly surprising, given the vast number of books, research reports and journal articles produced at Stellenbosch University on the social, economic, cultural and psychological characteristics of “the coloured population”. Such studies have tended

to be based on the essentialist idea that this culturally and biologically homogenous group needed to be “rescued” from a litany of endemic pathologies. Similarly, the 2019 Sport Science article implied that this homogeneity was self-evident: “The Coloured community is, in terms of social class, considered the most homogenous group in South Africa and are generally described as a poor, lower working-class community.”⁵ Yet, a vast body of social science literature insists that the apartheid category of “coloured” is a social and political construction that is in reality anything but homogenous.⁶ In fact, it could be argued that “coloureds” are *the most* culturally, politically and economically heterogeneous group in South Africa. Moreover, it is common knowledge that this population has diverse Khoe, San, European, and African and Asian slave ancestry. It will be suggested that the legacy of racial science research on “mixed race” populations could go some way towards accounting for how “the coloured population” has come to be seen as homogenous group in need of “rescue”.

This chapter seeks to understand the ways in which, during the early twentieth century, the global science of eugenics created anxiety about “racial mixing”. This concern is traced to the 1908 eugenics⁷ study of the German scientist Dr Eugen Fischer, who studied the “mixed-race” Rehoboth Bastards of Namibia. It will be shown that Fischer’s study provided a template for thinking about the problem of racial miscegenation.

In the first half of the twentieth century in South Africa, anxiety about racial mixing found expression in a number of commissions of inquiry, including the 1938 Wilcocks Commission, which investigated virtually every aspect of coloured life and arrived at conclusions that have had enduring effects. As Steffen Jensen has observed:

The Wilcocks Commission distinguished between three classes. One was the “the undesirable class, comprising the ‘skolly boys’ (often habitually armed with knives or razor blades), the habitual convict, the ex-convicted, the drunkards, and the habitual loafers”. A second comprised “the farm and the unskilled labourers, the factor workers, and the household servants in rural and urban areas”, and a third, “the relatively well-to-do and educated coloured people”.⁸

Jensen also observes that the Commission lamented the fact that whites typically placed all “coloured” people into the first group, i.e. the *skollie* category. Nonetheless, the Commission still ended up reproducing such stereotypes by concluding that this population lacked proper leaders and upstanding male role models, and that it was this that contributed towards undermining social cohesion and a host of other social pathologies, including the *skollie* phenomenon. It was this conception of a leaderless group living in chronic poverty that contributed towards constructing “the coloureds” as a population in dire need of rescue and urgent remedial action by the

paternalistic state. The following excerpt from Jensen's account of the Wilcocks report focuses specifically on Chapter 3, which addresses "Special Problems":

These [problems] included deleterious home influences, illegitimacy, juvenile delinquency, intemperance, dagga smoking, theft, minor offences, recidivism, need for legal assistance, social discontent and miscegenation. All these "special problems" related to a particular class of people among the coloureds, the "submerged class"... What emerged from the Commission's discussions was the image of a mother's uphill battle to be a true homemaker. She was obliged to work, had little education and knowledge about nutrition, was poor and worn out by multiple pregnancies – and, crucially, was not supported by husband and father figures in her efforts. This failure to make the home sound often allowed children to go astray, and they subsequently became anti-social, that is, *skollies*. In sharp contrast, the image of the father was of someone absent, shirking his responsibilities and indulging in alcohol ...⁹

What is particularly interesting about this account of the Wilcocks report is the gendered dimensions of the framing of "the Coloured problem". These gendered images and stereotypes have found expression in studies produced at Stellenbosch University over the past century; and, as the Sport Science study illustrates, such ideas persist into the present.

What is also of note in Jensen's account of the Wilcocks report is the apparent lack of consensus amongst Commission members about the consequences of racial miscegenation, and what to recommend in terms of policy. Yet, once the apartheid government came to power in 1948, it immediately set about introducing racial laws such as the Immorality Act precisely to prevent racial miscegenation. This aspect of apartheid policy, it will be argued, emerged in the shadow of eugenics-based policies introduced in the German colonies and in Nazi Germany to prevent racial mixing. The following sections will show how scientific ideas concerning racial miscegenation in German South West Africa boomeranged back to Europe with such catastrophic consequences in the 1930s. This excursion into the early twentieth century history of racial science will provide insights into the global spread of eugenics and the persistence of similar forms of race-thinking in the contemporary period. Due to space constraints, the chapter will not be able to discuss the twentieth-century history of the close relationship between eugenics and immigration policies that restricted entry to Europe and the United States of unwanted populations of poor people, the "feble-minded" from Southern and Eastern Europe, and racial, ethnic and religious minorities.¹⁰

A systematic history of race-thinking would have to go back to at least the 1730s, when Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist, and founder of modern taxonomy, established the modern system of naming and classifying

organisms. This chapter, however, limits itself to early twentieth-century racial science and focuses specifically on how this contributed towards the Nazi genocide and the global spread of eugenics. What this account will also attempt to show is that, even though eugenics was thoroughly discredited after World War II, similar forms of race-thinking continue to reproduce racial stereotypes and essentialist beliefs, for instance, the notion that “the coloureds” constitute the most homogenous group in South Africa.

The boomerang

When scholars write about the role of eugenics in the Nazi genocide, they usually view it as simply a European affair, involving German scientists, as well as politicians, bureaucrats, police, soldiers and ordinary citizens. In popular accounts of the rise of Nazism, Dr Josef Mengele typically features as the evil, irrational, if not mad, medical scientist. Yet, this story of Nazi eugenics can be told from a very different perspective – one that recognises the pervasiveness of eugenics and racial science throughout the world. So, while the Nazis took eugenics-based policies in unprecedented directions in the 1930s and 1940s, since at least the first decade of the twentieth century, eugenics had been accepted as a legitimate, modern scientific enterprise across the political spectrum, especially in Europe and the United States. It was also widely acknowledged as one of the most progressive sciences of “human improvement”. In fact, it could be understood in relation to ways in which genetic science is now widely believed to be the key to future public health interventions. By focusing on influential German scientist Eugen Fischer, this chapter seeks to understand how eugenics came to acquire such worldwide scientific authority, and how it contributed towards reinforcing “common-sense” beliefs about the perils of “racial mixing” (miscegenation), ideas that animated apartheid policies and continue to haunt our contemporary world.

Conventional accounts of the complicity of science in Nazism usually begin in 1933, when Hitler appointed his favourite racial scientist, Dr Eugen Fischer, as rector of the Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University) in Berlin. By 1938, with Hitler’s unequivocal support, Fischer became one of the most influential scientists involved in the Nazis’ eugenics programmes, which included the forced sterilisation and euthanising of mentally and physically disabled people. The discrimination against and murder of the Reich’s Jews were also underpinned by the science of anthropology, and by eugenics in particular.

The sciences of anthropology and eugenics colluded with biologically inflected state programmes that claimed to improve the health and welfare of national populations but, in the process, sent those deemed unworthy of belonging to a race or population

to their deaths. In the words of political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, “For the first time in history, the possibilities of the social sciences are made known, and at once it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorize a holocaust.”¹¹ This is the tragic story of the complicity of Western Enlightenment thinking in the genocidal violence of the last century. A significant strand of this story, somewhat surprisingly, begins, not in the heart of metropolitan Europe, but in a remote section of the colonial periphery of southern Africa. This unlikely story begins in 1870 with the visit of a German anthropologist and eugenics scientist to Rehoboth in South West Africa. Dr Eugen Fischer began his Rehoboth research in 1908, in the immediate aftermath of the Herero and Nama genocide. Yet, this context was not mentioned in his writing. It was only in July 2015 that the German government officially recognised that this colonial catastrophe was “part of a race war”. It is striking that Fischer’s Rehoboth study does not mention that it took place in the aftermath of an anti-colonial rebellion and genocide. Hannah Arendt and contemporary historians have provided chilling accounts of how the Nama and Herero genocide set the stage for what would happen in Nazi Europe only a few decades later.¹² Fischer’s scientific ideas, developed in Rehoboth in the early twentieth century, would likewise boomerang back to Europe.

Fischer’s study of 310 Bastards, who were the offspring of white Boer or German fathers and “Hottentot” (Khoikhoi) mothers, was part of a scientific enquiry into the role of heredity in human evolution, with a focus on the effects of racial mixing.¹³ The study was of great significance at the time, when German scientists and colonial officials in South West Africa were debating the cultural and biological consequences of miscegenation. Historian George Steinmetz writes that, in the early 1900s, some scientists argued that “mixed-race” populations could become a genetically stable “new type”, while others maintained that they would “remain ‘in flux’, expressing a mishmash of traits from both parent races, splitting into two opposing types, or reverting to one of the two ancestral genotypes”.¹⁴ German colonial officials were perturbed by what they regarded as this racial and cultural instability of mixed-race peoples such as the Rehoboth Bastards, making them the perfect population for Fischer’s study. They were also curious about whether the “admixture of white blood” rendered the Bastards more reliable and amenable to colonial rule, or if their “in-between status” (*zwitterstellung*) made them more dangerous, unpredictable and troublesome. The rediscovery of Mendelian genetics in 1900 further fuelled Fischer’s interest in “race-mixing” in the colonies and in Germany.¹⁵

During his four months in Rehoboth, Fischer measured the size, facial structure, nose, lips, ears, hair, eyelids and eye colour of the Bastards to determine, amongst other things, whether the interbreeding of peoples of different races would result in a “new type” of mixed-race Mischlinge (mulattos). He concluded that Khoikhoi

and European features appeared in a myriad of possible combinations, and, because of this, the Rehoboth Basters could not constitute a stable mixed race. Fischer consequently abandoned his initial eugenics research programme and classified the Basters as a *mittelding* (literally a “middle thing”), or an intermediate class between the Khoikhoi and the Boer, as well as a “wedge” between the Herero and Ovambo on the one side and the Nama on the other.¹⁶ While assets to the colonial administration, they were nonetheless relegated to the biologically determined category of natives, who would forever be racially inferior to whites.

The Rehoboth Basters had acquired their intermediary position in the colonial social hierarchy in 1885, when their leaders signed a “Treaty of Protection and Friendship” with the German colonial government. Through this, they were able to secure protection and a privileged status within the regime, as well as self-governing capability in Rehoboth. In return for these privileges, they fought alongside German soldiers to suppress uprisings by the indigenous Herero and the Nama, between whom some two or three thousand Basters had been living as a wedge for three decades of German colonial rule. In Fischer’s view, General von Trotha had “honoured the Basters” by allowing them to fight on the front lines during the Herero campaign.¹⁷ Notwithstanding their privileged status, Basters were still targets of colonial panic about intermarriage, as expressed in the growing concern that German men, and soldiers in particular, would marry Christian, Europeanised and Dutch-speaking Baster women. This would swell the numbers of Mischlinge who qualified for German citizenship and who could then move into European-settler society. The culmination of this sexual panic was the 1906 decree banning mixed marriage in the colony, a racial law that was later to be adopted in Nazi Germany in 1935 and introduced to apartheid South Africa as the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts of 1949 and 1950.

By the time Fischer arrived in Rehoboth in 1908, the colony had already assimilated popular eugenicist ideas that racially mixed peoples were politically unreliable, potentially dangerous, and subject to cultural degeneration and biological decay. Although the Rehoboth Basters continued to be loyal and useful allies to German officials, the possibility of a Baster rebellion remained a worry. In 1913, Fischer’s ethnography, *The Bastards of Rehoboth and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man*,¹⁸ was published to widespread acclaim. Its appendix provides practical recommendations for German colonial policy, including the use of Basters as low-level officials, foremen and native police to reinforce German colonial rule. Fischer also recommends that the ban on mixed marriages and racial miscegenation in the German colonies be upheld, which would later influence Nazi laws to promote “the protection of German blood and honour” through the Nazi Marriage Act of 1935 and what became the Nuremberg Laws.

Fischer's study in Rehoboth was also deployed by National Socialists to support the idea that the recessive genes of racially mixed populations led to physiological, psychological and intellectual degeneration. By the late 1930s, Fischer was one of Germany's most influential scientists, with his institute in Berlin laying the foundations for Nazi eugenics, which would find their ultimate expression in the Final Solution. Fischer's position on Jews as a foreign body in the German Volk allowed him to promote his institute as Germany's foremost architect of racial-classification policies, including the notorious "genetic and race science certificates of descent". Fischer was also appointed a judge for Berlin's Appellate Genetic Health Court, where he helped to implement the Sterilisation Law of 1933 to combat hereditary medicalised conditions.¹⁹

Fischer's story provides sobering lessons for science, and for my own discipline of anthropology. He was an ambitious man who believed that scientific expertise ought to determine state policies, but he had struggled to influence policy during the Weimar Republic period because of the accountability structures of liberal democracy. To influence policy one had to lobby and pressure parliamentarians, which was a slow and laborious process. The Nazis' rise to power presented him with unprecedented opportunities to short-circuit all of this. In no time, he had a direct line to the most powerful Nazis. As director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, Fischer and his colleagues offered to provide the Nazis with scientific expertise to guide their eugenics policies. In return, Fischer attained unprecedented access to state resources for research. Medical scientists and doctors became virtual gods during the Third Reich. Their expertise was seen to hold the key to the modern eugenicist state so desired by the Nazis.

Conclusion

Fischer contributed to the co-authored book, *Human Heredity*,²⁰ which Hitler read in a Munich prison in 1923. By then, it was already the standard text on German eugenics, and, once it was translated into English in 1931,²¹ it became a bible for a burgeoning international eugenics movement. Fischer wrote Section Two of the book, "Racial Differences in Mankind", which included anthropometric photographs of "racial types" arranged in the following sequence: Nordic, Alpine (Maritime Alps), Oriental, Mongoloid, Negroid; the section ends with photographs of "Cross-Breeds between Europeans and Hottentots in German South West Africa".²²

This social-evolutionist brand of eugenics was not a uniquely German invention. By the 1920s, it had become part of an international scientific movement that, in addition to promoting compulsory sterilisation of the "inferior types", sought to

influence immigration policies to keep out undesirable individuals and populations. In Britain and the United States, the eugenics movement largely derived its inspiration from the English scientist Sir Francis Galton, who was the younger cousin of Charles Darwin. Galton studied the English upper classes and determined that their dominant social position was based on their inheritance of superior physical and mental characteristics. His ideas were also influenced by his experiences in southern Africa in 1850, when, for most of his visit, he travelled on the back of an ox through the hot, dry and dusty interior of what is now Namibia – interestingly, the same territory where Fischer forged his ideas half a century later. Galton returned to London in 1852 and published his 300-page memoir, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa*,²³ a year later. Not for the last time, scientific ideas incubated in the laboratories of the violent colonial frontier found their way back to Europe.

Following the catastrophic consequences of Nazi eugenics, UNESCO produced an authoritative statement²⁴ insisting that there was no scientific evidence for claims concerning the biological determination of racial categories and boundaries. This document concluded that *Homo sapiens* was one species and that there was no evidence for the existence of “pure races”; there was also no scientific justification for discouraging reproduction between people of different so-called races. Furthermore, by the latter decades of the twentieth century, social scientists seemed to share a consensus that concepts such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality were social, political and cultural constructions that had no biological foundation whatsoever. However, “common-sense” ideas about the cultural and biological differences between different “races” continue to circulate in both popular and academic discourses.

What is especially disturbing in the contemporary moment is how, with the rise of the right-wing authoritarian nationalism, as well as anti-Muslim and anti-immigration movements, discredited eugenics ideas have been resurrected by conservative politicians, activists and scientists who insist that white people of European descent are biologically, culturally and intellectually superior to everyone else. These ideas continue to be disseminated through social media and right-wing publications, including academic journals such as *Northlander*, the *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, the *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* and Roger Pearson’s *Mankind Quarterly*.²⁵ As Angela Saini, the author of *Superior: The Return of Race Science*²⁶ observes, “[a]fter the Second World War, the belief that differences between so-called ‘races’ are genetic became taboo. Now, with the far right resurgent, it’s back.”²⁷ She also notes that what is of great concern is that these racial ideas are not simply the views of right-wing politicians, neo-Nazi extremists and their supporters, but that they are now recirculating in academic journals.

These ideas persist despite the post-war scientific consensus that eugenics is a pseudoscience and that “race” is a myth. Most social scientists these days would no doubt also agree that “race” is a social and political construct – rather than being a biological essence. Yet, what is becoming increasingly clear is that, due to perceived threats of competition for jobs and an increase in religious and cultural diversity and intolerance towards immigrants, some ethno-nationalists and populists are once again seeking to reassert essentialist conceptions of fixed and discrete bio-cultural differences and hard, immutable boundaries between “racial” populations. In other words, scientific ideas forged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the name of “racial purity” seem to be gaining traction once more. It would appear that a discredited eugenics science and “common-sense” beliefs about the existence of homogenous racial, religious and ethnic groups continue to haunt both scientific and political discourses.

Although it appears that the crude, pseudoscientific eugenics of the early twentieth century is dead and buried, the Sport Science study reveals that common-sense beliefs that it is possible to identify and classify homogenous racial and ethnic populations persist. It was precisely this type of thinking that made it possible for the Sport Science researchers to make the claim, based on a small sample of 60 women, that “[t]he Coloured community is, in terms of social class, considered the most homogenous group in South Africa and are generally described as a poor, lower working-class community”.²⁸ It was from this unwarranted generalisation that the researchers extrapolated from their findings to assert that “coloured women” suffered from cognitive deficiencies. These conclusions not only reflected bad science, but also mirrored the kind of racial, ethnic, religious and cultural stereotyping that currently plagues our world. Such “common-sense” conceptions of homogenous racial categories can become particularly pernicious in an age of nationalist populism, where right-wing politicians seek to draw clear bio-cultural boundaries between indigenous natives and undesirable outsiders. As we have seen in many parts of the world, including postapartheid South Africa, these beliefs can fuel the toxic rhetoric of ethno-nationalist demagogues who incite their followers to attack migrants, who are blamed for “stealing our jobs and our women” and are labelled as dangerous criminals and drug dealers. In recent decades, we have also seen how “ethnic cleansing” in the Balkans, Rwanda and numerous other parts of the world began with the circulation of “othering” discourses that contributed towards pitting “our people” (e.g. virtuous national citizens) against “the enemies within”. Although the Sport Science study clearly did not have such malicious intent, the lessons from early twentieth-century eugenics (and apartheid), reveal that scientific theories, concepts and categories can, under specific conditions, become lethal.

Endnotes

- 1 H.B. Fantham, “Some Race Problems in South Africa”, *The Scientific Monthly* 42, no. 2 (1936): 151–68.
- 2 Ibid., 162.
- 3 Ibid., 168.
- 4 Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology And Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>
- 5 Ibid., 6.
- 6 Zimitri Erasmus, *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001).
- 7 For a comprehensive account of the shift from eugenics to genetics, see Adam Rutherford, *A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived: The Stories in Our Genes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016). Various accounts of the history of eugenics suggest that in his 1883 book *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1869), Francis Galton coined the term “eugenics” to refer to what later became a global science that advocated controlled selective breeding of human populations (for instance, by means of sterilisation) to improve the population’s genetic composition. Galton insisted upon human hierarchies and advocated the selective breeding of “the better sorts” (i.e. the English elites and aristocracy) to ensure that they bred in larger numbers than the poor, working class and other inferior classes. In 1873, he wrote in *The Times* (Francis Galton, “Africa for the Chinese”, *The Times*, 5 June 1873, <http://galton.org/letters/africa-for-chinese/AfricaForTheChinese.htm>) that it would be best if Africa was colonised, because the “negro race” would not develop by themselves. Galton was also convinced that Boer advances during South African War indicated that something needed to be done urgently, for instance compulsory sterilisation, to improve the British national stock. Other sources on the history of eugenics include Edwin Black, *War against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003); Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, 1927–1945: Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Robert S. Cohen, Jürgen Renn and Kostas Gavroglu, vol. 259, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6600-9>; Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511817199>; and Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2009).
- 8 Steffen Jensen, *Gangs, Politics & Dignity in Cape Town* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See Steven L. Robins, *Letters of Stone: from Nazi Germany to South Africa* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.116.145302>
- 11 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10.
- 12 See David Olusoga, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

- 13 This discussion of Fischer draws extensively from the work of Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, 1927-1945: Crossing Boundaries* and Annegret Ehmann. See Annegret Ehmann, “From Colonial Racism to Nazi Population Policy: The Role of the So-Called Mischlinge”, in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 115-33.
- 14 George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 217, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226772448.001.0001>
- 15 Ibid., 233-34. In 1865, Gregor Johann Mendel discovered laws of biological inheritance that were controversial at the time but had, by the early 1890s, come to be accepted in scientific circles.
- 16 Ibid., 234.
- 17 Ibid., 217-25.
- 18 Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardisierungsproblem beim Menschen: Anthropologische und Ethnologische Studien am Rehobother Bastardvolk in Deutsch-Suedwestafrika* (Jena: Verlag Gustav Fischer, 1913), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01943440>
- 19 See Handri Walters, “Tracing Objects of Measurement: Locating Intersections of Race, Science and Politics at Stellenbosch University” (PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018).
- 20 Erwin Baur, Fritz Lenz and Eugen Fischer, *Grundriss der Menschlichen Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene* (Munich: Lehmann, 1923), <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.33345>
- 21 Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer and Fritz Lenz, *Human Heredity* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), <https://doi.org/10.1097/00007611-193111000-00017>.
- 22 Ibid., 192.
- 23 Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1853).
- 24 UNESCO, *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry* (Paris: Unesco, 1952).
- 25 Angela Saini, “Why Race Science Is On the Rise Again”, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2019, <https://bit.ly/31C87Iu>
- 26 Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (London: 4th Estate, 2019).
- 27 Saini, “Why Race Science Is On the Rise Again”.
- 28 Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, 1-2.

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SECTION B



Race and the Present Past



Reinterrogating Race in Scientific Research

A view from the history of physical anthropology

Handri Walters

Introduction

It might come as a surprise to some to learn that the concept of race is a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of humanity. Race, as a marker of human difference, was only introduced in the sixteenth century. However, over the course of a few centuries, the world would witness a powerful transformation in the “perceptions of human difference” as framed by the concept of race.¹ First, there was the introduction of racial variation based on observable differences, then the idea of racial categorisation, followed by the idea that these categories could be organised according to a human hierarchy.

Coinciding with these new understandings of race was the development of a methodology to study race in all its perceived manifestations. From the late eighteenth century onwards, scientific understandings of race postulated that it was something that could be “known” through rigorous scientific study that relied on observation and measurement. The idea was premised on a few core assumptions related to race. Most importantly, these studies were premised on the assumption that race existed in plural form – i.e. that many different racial “types” (categories) existed. It was further believed that each of these racial categories had an encompassing set of characteristics that were unique to the category. Thus, scientists believed that these characteristics could be used to identify a person’s “race”. It was assumed that race was an essentialised entity, as it could be summed up in a fixed, unchanging list

of characteristics. Such an understanding of race was also premised on the belief that each racial category was a homogeneous collective – meaning all members of a particular “race” were alike. In other words, a specific racial category was believed to illustrate uniformity in terms of both appearance and behaviour. This meant that scientific conclusions about a few members of the group could be extended to include the entire group. These core assumptions culminated in a shorthand act of sense-making: when it came to the study of race (and of various “races”), there was an inherent or inborn “essence” to be found, and this essence was believed to produce preexisting characteristics related to both visible traits (the most obvious being skin colour) and invisible or behavioural traits (which included intellectual ability and temperament). These traits were believed to be inherent and inescapable. Such beliefs formed the foundation of scientific curiosity and inquiry as it pertained to the study of race in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These assumptions and beliefs were, of course, uniformly false. By providing a brief history of physical anthropology as it developed globally, and as it eventually made its way to Stellenbosch University in the 1920s, this chapter seeks to reinterrogate the concept of race. It will be illustrated here how biological understandings of race were applied and made concrete through human measurement. But more importantly, it will be illustrated how these understandings of race were employed in pursuit of political ideals rather than scientific objectivity. In hindsight, the scientific project to study and conceptualise race reveals blatant practices of power that manifested through acts of inclusion and exclusion, and practices of silencing and marginalising some, while its own voice grew boisterous. While race has become a taken-for-granted part of South African vocabularies, and often continues to be a taken-for-granted concept in scientific research (as recently illustrated by the publication of the Sport Science article), this chapter invites critical reflection on the common understandings of race as well as its utility in scientific practice.

A short history of physical anthropology

The discipline of physical anthropology largely developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But it developed on the back of existing formulations of human diversity that can be traced back to the eighteenth century. Central to the developing understandings of race was scientific categorisation, as found in the work of Carl Linnaeus, who offered the first comprehensive attempt to scientifically classify and categorise human populations in *Systema Naturae*.² Postulating the existence of four human varieties premised on skin colour and place of origin (Europe, America, Asia and Africa), Linnaeus relied on physical, observable differences to aid his categorical classifications. This logic for classification relied on (and promulgated)

an essentialised understanding of these “human varieties” as each sharing unique characteristics with members of the respective category.

But of course, human variation is such that true uniformity is hard to find. While people might share certain features, no two people look exactly alike (with the exception of identical twins). Thus, the scientific classificatory system of Linnaeus, which was also applied beyond the human species, postulated that while not all members of the group possessed exactly the same characteristics, racial groupings could nonetheless be determined by the appearance of common characteristics found in the group. The notion of aggregates, or an “estimate of the degree of overall similarity”,³ was thus employed to categorise individuals into the main racial groupings. This marked the beginnings of racial essentialism: ignoring variation within so-called designated categories in favour of a few shared characteristics that would come to define the entire group.

The ways in which the newly racialised human could be studied and categorised would expand tremendously over the course of a few centuries. Many scientists contributed, in their own way, to the refinement of human categorisation through scientific study. Shortly after Linnaeus postulated his four varieties, German anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach suggested the existence of five races, based on his studies of human skulls in 1779. For him the skull was the most significant indicator of racial difference.⁴ Through his scientific engagements, Blumenbach linked observable difference (in the form of skin colour) with skull size – thereby adding another characteristic to a growing list of attributes used for racial classification.⁵

Petrus Camper, a Dutch anatomist and zoologist who showed similar enthusiasm for the study of the skull, proposed that the angle of the jaw was another determining factor for racial difference. He developed tools for the exact measurement of the jaw and other features of the skull. In fact, the centrality of studying the skull became a science in itself during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Craniology (the study of the skull as related to racial difference) was given scientific credence through the work of Pierre Paul Broca, who invented a number of instruments used for precise measurements of the skull and, through this, propagated the standardisation of these measuring techniques.⁶ The work of Camper and Broca was significant, because it gave the study of race “the aura of an exact science”.⁷ As noted by David Bindman, “Their work of classification made possible theories of human categories based on deductions drawn from carefully considered evidence, at least by the standards of the time.”⁸ The ability to measure human attributes and draw conclusions based on those measurements greatly contributed to the developing methodology of racial categorisation. It also informed the developing discipline of

physical anthropology. The study of racial traits (as related to racial categorisation), coupled with a scientific methodology that relied on observation and measurement, became the domain of the physical anthropologist.

Race was conceptualised as something that was visible and also legible through human measurement. Skin colour, eye colour, hair colour and texture, the shape of the skull, the protrusion of the jaw, the shape of the nose and even the lips all became relevant characteristics in distinguishing racial categories. Understandings of race saw it as an essentialised entity that spoke to intricate connections between the visible, the invisible, and inherent qualities. These understandings and assumptions informed the point of departure for most scientific engagements with race – most of which tried to confirm instead of challenge these basic assumptions.

By the early twentieth century, the discipline of physical anthropology acquired all the characteristics of a legitimate scientific field of study. Relying on observation and measurement, physical anthropology was guided by standard methods for measurement, as prescribed by an international committee between 1910 and 1914.⁹ This was followed by the publication of the authoritative textbook for physical anthropology, written by Rudolf Martin, in 1914. Martin's book offered the first comprehensive standardisation of, and detailed instructions for, human measurement.¹⁰ It was in this publication that Martin conceptualised “type”, “kind”, and “variety” as expressions of human differentiation.¹¹ Anthropometry, a science that subjected the human body in its entirety to measurement, became a widespread paradigmatic frame, as well as a set of practices in scientific circles and in the field of physical anthropology. The practice of anthropometry became the cornerstone for classification, as it was perceived to offer objective scientific proof of the differences to be found amongst various human races. A prescribed toolkit for measurement contributed to the global operation of this science.

Coupled with an attempt to standardise the methods of anthropometry, tables for the measurement of hair, skin and eye colour were produced in the early twentieth century to aid the identification and measurement of visual markers.¹² The aim of such standardised approaches to human measurement, as prescribed in Martin's textbook, was “to secure a uniformity of techniques” in the face of increased scrutiny of the accuracy of human measurement. And thus, with the use of Martin's toolkit, consisting of a calliper compass, a beam compass, a sliding compass, a craniometer, an anthropometer, a tape measure and about eight other tools for various measurements of the human body, human diversity could be quantified and ultimately categorised. Detailed prescriptions, along with a shared *instrumentarium* (or universally recognised instruments for the practice of physical anthropology), thus ensured uniformity in studies conducted around the globe. It similarly ensured the comparability of the results of these respective studies.¹³

Thus, by the early twentieth century, physical anthropology was well established as a powerful force in the conceptualisation and study of the perceived plurality of “races”. The science had international prescriptions for measurement and a single textbook with prescribed instruments, and it was supported by a fairly global consensus regarding its practice and the results it rendered. Based on this information, it would seem that studies had an air of validity and replicability – in theory, it could be replicated and compared with other studies of its kind. What started in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century as the study of visible physical differences found in humans was transformed into a seemingly exact science of measurement by the early twentieth century. “Callipers, footrules, [and] measuring apparatus are without preconceived ideas” wrote the Swiss anthropologist Eugène Pittard.¹⁴ Indeed, Pittard believed that the use of instruments for measurement had brought “an ensemble of exact morphological characters”¹⁵ for classification purposes. The standardisation of measurements and the resultant statistics that could be acquired thus became an integral part of physical anthropology. There was a firm belief that scientific measurements, as determined by a range of scientific instruments, could bring forth objective knowledge. But while instruments designed for human measurement might, supposedly, be “without preconceived ideas”, the scientist certainly is not. Any perception that scientific practice can be removed from the broader political, social and ideological context in which it is practised is, indeed, a false one.

Some of the most poignant examples illustrating the connections between science, politics and ideology are to be found in the “scientific” study and construction of race over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This new scientific field, namely the study of racial difference through physical anthropology, gained a foothold through its utilitarian nature. This science could be rendered useful to support and enforce the existence of a racial hierarchy within colonial governments and state policies. In the United States, the likes of Samuel Morton, Louis Agassiz and Josiah Nott all pursued the new science of human measurement to establish what they regarded as the inferiority of the “American Negro”.¹⁶

Playing into the political context of nineteenth century America, their theories were often drawn upon to justify legislation, institutional discrimination, and public perceptions of race (so-called common-sense understandings that lacked, up until that point, scientific foundations). The relation between the rise of anthropology as a discipline and its use in the disfranchisement of “non-European” populations was certainly not limited to the United States. The case was very similar in other parts of the world, where European expansion, encounters with the racial “other”, and subsequent colonial rule, were often supported by the employment of scientific (often anthropological) knowledge. In this regard, Henrika Kuklick has observed

that “anthropology’s academic gains [were] correlated with practitioners’ turn toward promoting the discipline’s utility for colonial rulers”.¹⁷ It is thus the utility of the discipline, the fact that it could be utilised for political gain, that proved to be one of its greatest strengths.

The use of anthropological racial constructs to support legislation, and the use of legislation to in turn support the validity of these racial constructs often resulted in circular and reciprocal arguments that cemented the existence of racial categories, as well as a hierarchy that entitled some to rule and others to be ruled, some to be included and others excluded. In this sense, the recognition of racial difference more often than not implied the rejection of a shared humanity in favour of forms of political, economic and social control that saw the dehumanisation of particular groups.

This practice continued well into the twentieth century. Ideas about a natural hierarchy of race, alongside a growing eugenics movement that postulated the improvement of the human race through selective breeding, manifested in the formulation of immigration policies in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924, otherwise known as the Johnson-Reed Act, restricted the number of immigrants allowed into the United States. These restrictions applied mostly to those coming from Asia, those coming from Southern and Eastern Europe, and those generally coming from the southern hemisphere. Western Europeans and those who came from Britain remained largely unaffected. The passing of the act came as a victory to more radical American anthropologists, who saw their racial theories come to fruition. But while these anthropologists celebrated their victory in the United States, physical anthropology found a new home halfway across the world when it was introduced to the students of Stellenbosch University.

Physical anthropology comes to Stellenbosch University

In 1924, as the Johnson-Reed Act took effect in the United States, physical anthropology was introduced for the first time at Stellenbosch University. Under the guidance of Professor C.G.S. (Con) de Villiers and Dr Coert Grobbelaar, both of whom completed their doctoral studies in Europe in the early 1920s, the discipline was introduced in the Zoology Department. A global science had landed in the local setting of South Africa’s first Afrikaans university. Elsewhere in South Africa, at historically English universities, the likes of Matthew Drennan, at the University of Cape Town, and Raymond Dart, at the University of the Witwatersrand, focused their attention on the study of human origins and “indigenous racial types”, as found in southern Africa. At Stellenbosch, the pursuit and practice of physical anthropology departed from these concerns.

Within the first year of introducing the discipline, Rudolf Martin's textbook and the prescribed instruments for measurement were acquired. By the very next year, the science was put to work when the department embarked on its first project of human measurement in 1925. Over the next four decades, other studies would follow. The studies produced by the Zoology Department over the course of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s imply that the utility of physical anthropology was also recognised by those who introduced and practised it at Stellenbosch University. These studies are revealing of the political and ideological landscape of a growing Afrikaner nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the rising tide of early formulations of racial categorisation that would come to be implemented during apartheid. In fact, the first two major projects of human measurement launched by the Zoology Department are compelling examples of a science informed by politics. While physical anthropologists in southern Africa were generally looking to the racial "other" as an object of study, those at Stellenbosch University chose to have their very first study of human measurement focus on the racial "self".

In 1925, a project was launched to measure the white, Dutch-speaking students of Stellenbosch University. The study consisted of 130 participants, who were subjected to 70 bodily measurements, 49 measurements of the head and facial features, and observations that related to their skin, eye and hair colour.¹⁸ When the results were published, the researchers offered two main conclusions. One, these participants were of Western European descent. And two, the participants ranked amongst the tall races of Europe (at the time considered to be a visible sign of racial superiority). The conclusions drawn were extended to the entire South African population of Dutch descent (read Afrikaners) – linking particular characteristics to this designated group of people. The political context in which this study occurred was informed by an Afrikaner nationalist movement then gaining momentum; by a global eugenics movement; and also by a concern with a growing number of poor whites in South Africa that both challenged notions of white superiority and provided an electorate to secure political control. The published results of the study left the reader with a stark reminder of the European likeness found in the Dutch-speaking (or Afrikaner) subjects.

In the era of eugenics, this conclusion established the Afrikaner amongst the ranks of the perceived racially superior nations of Western Europe. Similar to European anthropological studies of the *volk* or the 'nation', the study at Stellenbosch confirmed the existence of "transnational communities of blood, history and destiny"¹⁹ – the type of conclusion on which the nationalisms of the time were built. Through their physical manifestation, the Afrikaners had, seemingly, proved themselves worthy of rule. But these stated conclusions masked one of the more important deductions

made by the researchers: framing those of Dutch-descent, or the Afrikaners, as a racialised homogeneous collective.

Over the course of the next few decades, more such studies would follow. In 1937, the Zoology Department launched a similar project to measure the “coloured” males of the Stellenbosch area. For this study, 133 pre-identified “coloured” males were subjected to the prescribed measurements of physical anthropology. The study at Stellenbosch concluded that the individuals examined were “quite representative of the Coloured Population”²⁰ – thereby postulating the existence of a “coloured” type. In this regard, it needs to be kept in mind that the political context of this decade was informed by a growing paranoia about the threat of racial mixture that could compromise white purity. This paranoia was fueled by a publication by George Findlay in 1936, in which he controversially claimed that many individuals who should be classified as “coloured” were instead passing for white. Clear identification, or the ability to distinguish clearly between those considered to be “white” and those considered to be “coloured”, was seemingly an important step in the right direction. The context was similarly informed by government commissions launched specifically to study the “Cape Coloured” population – of which the most (in)famous was the Wilcocks Commission.²¹ Further investigations also included an inquiry into mixed marriages in the latter half of the 1930s. Fears of miscegenation were driving the nationalist agenda and the distinction between “white” and “coloured” became central to this debate in the 1930s. And the copious amounts of studies produced during the 1930s and early 1940s, including the one produced by the Zoology Department at Stellenbosch, marked the beginnings of a categorical definition of the “coloured” population.

These studies were products of their time. They stemmed from the field of physical anthropology at the height of the global eugenics movement and a burgeoning Afrikaner nationalist movement. It came at a time when race, in all its assumed manifestations, was regularly employed in scientific studies as a determining factor – meaning “race” was seen as an explanation for everything about a person or a group. But these studies also cannot be removed from the broader political context in which they operated at the time. In this context, such studies can be viewed as attempts to constitute or create subjects of the state – in this case, producing race-based groupings that became the target of state policies and laws. They contributed to a narrative of fixed racial categories that could be measured, defined and identified – a narrative that eventually found its expression in the Population Registration Act of 1950 under the apartheid government.

A lesson from history

What do the above history and examples tell us about race? They tell us that for the longest time scientists tried to make race their constant – the unchangeable factor to which everything else could be related. The certainty with which conclusions were drawn, and racial types described, completely disguised the shaky foundations on which the science was built. At no point was there any real consensus about the number of races found on earth. By the early twentieth century, some postulated the existence of three separate races, others as many as 60 (and a range of varying numbers in between). In terms of human measurement, and the conclusions drawn from it, it was also fairly common to find that studies of the same collective (or type) could render polar opposite results (depending on who was doing the study and dictating the results). And finally, no generalisation pertaining to a specific category would ever hold. There is a related question here: what do this history and these examples tell us about racial science? They tell us that for the longest time scientist tried to make race their constant, and for the longest time they got it wrong. The science was flawed because it was fixated on a false determining factor – the idea that there were a plurality of “races” to be found; that these “races” each had inherent and unique characteristics shared by the group; and, as a result, that these “races” could be studied and known through meticulous measurement and observation.

Some scientists identified this flaw fairly early on. By 1913, anthropologist Franz Boas used the science of measurement to illustrate that environmental conditions were far more influential in the development of human beings than biological determinism. W.E. du Bois had also, by this time, brought attention to the findings of leading scientists who claimed that there was no link between physical characteristics and mental characteristics. By 1911, Du Bois stated, “Race offers no index to its innate or inherited capacities.”²² Their ideas were mostly rejected at the time, only to be embraced a few decades later.

In the wake of World War II, a committee of academics appointed by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was beginning to craft a response to the racially motivated atrocities of Nazi Germany. The resulting UNESCO statement of 1950, with a revised statement following in 1952 that contained greater input from geneticists and physical anthropologists, most famously proclaimed that “‘race’ [was] not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth”.²³ It further stated, “Scientists are generally agreed that all men living today belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens*, and are derived from a common stock.”²⁴

The UNESCO statement declared race to be a social myth almost 70 years ago. By the 1970s, more than 40 years ago, these claims were backed up by genetic science, when it was discovered that the genetic differences amongst two people classified as belonging to the same racial group can be greater than differences found between two people classified as belonging to different racial groups.²⁵ “Race” or designated “racial categories” were not visible in the genes. More recently, the American Association of Physical Anthropologists released a Statement on Race and Racism,²⁶ of which the opening line of the executive summary reads, “Race does not provide an accurate representation of human biological variation. It was never accurate in the past, and it remains inaccurate when referencing contemporary human populations.” These denunciations of race shared common conclusions: Supposed racial categories are not homogenous, cannot be essentialised, and are not determinant and inescapable; and we are a single human race, not plural “races”.

While we can acknowledge that visible and invisible variations exist as the result of evolution over thousands of years that occurred in accordance with immediate geographical environment, these visible manifestations of difference cannot be neatly categorised into homogenous groups. These visible manifestations also cannot tell us much about behaviour or capability. They merely point to physical adaptations to survive various environmental conditions found in the world.²⁷

Yet with all this information available, nothing could truly reverse the detrimental impact of racial science – neither the UNESCO statement, nor the denunciations stemming from the science itself. Over the course of centuries, these ideas were entrenched in the minds of the public, in the minds of politicians and policymakers, and in the legal frameworks of countries across the globe. Over the course of a few centuries, these ideas infused societal structures and institutions the world over. Through the discriminatory regulation of access to resources – including, but certainly not limited to, education, healthcare, jobs, and political power – society came to reflect these schisms that it had postulated from the very beginning. South Africa is a particularly good example. The country was not only affected by a colonial history, but also by a more recent history with race-based discriminatory legislation. While UNESCO was declaring race to be a myth in 1950, South Africa was in the process of implementing laws to govern what they perceived to be four designated racial categories. And through scientific study, these categories were solidified in South Africa. And through daily practices of racial categorisation, they were solidified in South African minds.

More recently, the Sport Science article revealed how these practices of racial categorisation have also become solidified in scientific practice. At first glance, I suspect, there are many who would not take issue with the article’s conclusions.

In fact, the article was produced by five authors, and submitted to, and accepted by, an international, accredited scientific journal – meaning it was reviewed by peers and read by the editor of the journal. And yet, at no point along the way was the article scrutinised for the problematic link it postulated between a specified “racial” group and low cognitive functioning. But this *is* highly problematic. In the article, it is simply assumed that “coloured” refers to a homogeneous collective that can be subjected to scientific study, and that this study could offer another “characteristic” related to this supposed homogeneous collective. Thus, in this study, the term “coloured” became the centre of generalised conclusions that could be seamlessly applied to a single, supposedly homogeneous, category of people.

Like so many studies produced during the height of racial science, the Sport Science study was premised on a false assumption. Or let me rephrase that: The framing of the study was entirely misguided. The researchers insisted on linking low cognitive functioning with a supposed racial group, yet failed to take into account that their conclusions could most likely pertain to *any* individual exposed to a similar set of environmental circumstances. And while we can admit that, in South Africa, the laws implemented by the apartheid state certainly shaped the conditions or environments in which designated racial categories had to engage daily life, and that this has left a lasting legacy in the form of structural inequalities, the conclusions offered by the Sport Science article still do not apply exclusively to the category of people historically identified as “coloured”. To pretend that it does is simply false.

Yet, the common understandings of apartheid-era racial categories that we have been left with, or that we inherited, seemingly remain plagued by notions of essentialism and homogeneity, and generalisations flow with relative ease from these assumptions. This speaks to a long history of racial science, where a causal link was made between a supposed racial category and some characteristic that one exhibits (or should exhibit): tall *because* you are of European descent;²⁸ a body that is predisposed for menial labour *because* you are black;²⁹ or low cognitive functioning *because* you are coloured.³⁰

These slippages still occur too quickly and too frequently. When dealing with race in research, the slippage occurs when the concept itself, or the designated racial category itself, is seen as the inherent explanation for any given occurrence. These slippages ignore the role of the environment and the forces that structured the conditions that allowed unequal outcomes. What they mostly ignore is that those conditions could only have been created for specific categories of people once the group itself was identified, constructed, and deemed as “other”. These slippages occur when we ignore that our conclusions could have pertained to *any* human being exposed to a particular set of environmental circumstance (as Franz Boas argued early in

the twentieth century). These slippages occur when race, or one's racial category, is accepted as a given, and specific characteristics (be they physical, behavioural or social) are related *only* to that category. This results in the perpetuation of a false narrative. We cannot continue along this path, for these categories in themselves cannot relay accurate information.

Conclusion

A critical engagement with the history of anthropology, and more specifically physical anthropology, and its engagements with race over the centuries, offers many lessons. It illustrates how science and politics hardly function in isolation. Therefore, any critical engagement must include a scrutiny of the science itself, the epistemology, the concepts employed, and the context in which it was put to work. For instance, the copious number of studies stemming from Stellenbosch University that relate to the so-called “coloured” population over the course of the twentieth century assumed that “coloured” was a homogeneous grouping and that scientific study could expand knowledge about this category of people. These studies never questioned the existence of racial categories themselves. It was simply taken-for-granted knowledge. This was the case in the 1937 study on “coloured males” discussed earlier. In it, the diversity of data was framed in a manner that spoke of homogeneity – thereby confirming the initial premise that various “races” exist and that they are measurable and observable and thereby identifiable. Given these assumptions, the only outcome of the study was to produce what is presumed to already exist.³¹ This is the fallacy of relying on taken-for-granted racial categories as a starting point for research. In matters of race, you can only end up confirming the category you set out to measure. This leaves an inherent bias in place.

This history is presented to inspire critical reflection, but more importantly, to illustrate both the arbitrary nature of racial categorisation, and the absurdity and danger of ideologically informed “science”. Its value and importance is located in one central revelation: racial science should be viewed as the product of social and political narratives, rather than the product of sound science.

What is race supposed to tell us? How useful is this concept in the majority of studies that we conduct? In South Africa, we have started using these designated racial categories as a shortcut to try to explain “what we are dealing with” in a seemingly all-encompassing way. But these categories still require critical engagement every time we choose to employ them. We constantly need to remind ourselves that these categories are social constructions; that they are not homogeneous; that they are not defined by an “essence”; that we cannot make generalisations based on them; and that, more often than not, the conclusions we arrive at might be related to

something other than our participants' racial categories. I ultimately rely on the words of anthropologist Anthony Appiah to drive the point home: "The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask 'race' to do for us."³²

Endnotes

- 1 Audrey Smedley, "Race' And the Construction of Human Identity", *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 3 (1998): 693, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1998.100.3.690>
- 2 Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae, sive Regna Tria Naturae, Systematice Proposita per Classes, Ordines, Genera, & Species* (Leiden: Lugduni Batavorum, 1735), <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.877>
- 3 Howell V. Daly, "Phenetic Classification and Typology", *Systematic Zoology* 10, no. 4 (1961): 176, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2411615>
- 4 "Germany", in *History of Physical Anthropology*, ed. Frank Spencer (New York: Garland), 427-28.
- 5 While Blumenbach linked skin colour to skull size, subsequent studies attempted to link skull size with innate intelligence. Race became something that was not only linked with visible differences, but also inherent capability and the potential for development or advancement. These scientific postulations fed into philosopher Immanuel Kant's idea of a human hierarchy in *Of the Different Human Races* (Immanuel Kant, *Von den Verschiedenen Racen der Menschen* [Königsberg: Hartung, 1775]). Here Kant claimed that particular racial groups were born inherently inferior to others with no hope or capability of improving their condition. These narratives would later be rendered useful for the justification of colonial rule and state policies aimed at the lower classes.
- 6 Alfred C. Haddon, *History of Anthropology* (London: Watts & Co., 1910), 38.
- 7 David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 201.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 153.
- 9 C.S. Grobbelaar, "Anthropometry and Its Role in South Africa. Presidential Address to Section 'D' of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science", *South African Journal of Science* 44 (1948): 53; G.F. van Wyk, "A Preliminary Account of the Physical Anthropology of The 'Cape Coloured People' (Males)", *Annale van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch, Reeks A* 17, no. 2 (1939): 61.
- 10 "Germany", 429.
- 11 Amos Morris-Reich, "Anthropology, Standardization and Measurement: Rudolf Martin and Anthropometric Photography", *BJHS The British Journal for the History of Science* 46, no. 170 (2013): 498, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000708741200012X>
- 12 Rudolf Martin developed his eye colour table in 1903, Felix von Luschan developed the skin colour table in 1905, and Eugen Fischer developed his hair colour and texture table in 1907 (See "Eugen Fischer's Hair Colour Gauge", n.d., <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/ucl-science-collections/eugen-fischers-hair-colour-gauge>). By 1917, these objects were mass produced and distributed around the world to aid scientists and researchers in their endeavours. The instruments also made their way to Stellenbosch University in the 1920s.

- 13 Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, *Measuring the Master Race* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014), 164.
- 14 Eugène Pittard, *Race and History: An Ethnological Introduction to History* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927), 34.
- 15 Ibid., 35.
- 16 Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnh2d>
- 17 Henrika Kuklick, “Introduction”, in *New History of Anthropology* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 60.
- 18 G.C.A. van der Westhuyzen, “An Account of Anthropometrical and Anthroposcopycal Observations Carried out on Male Students at the University of Stellenbosch”, *Annale van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch, Reeks A VII*, no. 5 (1929).
- 19 Richard McMahon, *The Races of Europe: Construction of National Identities in the Social Sciences, 1839–1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 17–18, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-31846-6>
- 20 G.F. van Wyk, “A Preliminary Account of the Physical Anthropology of The ‘Cape Coloured People’ (Males)”, 3.
- 21 See Raymond William Wilcocks, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1937).
- 22 Cited in Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race”, *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448319>
- 23 UNESCO, *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry* (Paris: Unesco, 1952), 101.
- 24 Ibid., 11.
- 25 Richard C. Lewontin, “The Apportionment of Human Diversity”, in *Evolutionary Biology*, Vol. 6, ed. Theodosius Dobzhansky, Max K. Hecht and William C. Steere (New York: Springer, 1972), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-9063-3_14
- 26 American Association of Physical Anthropologists, “AAPA Statement on Race & Racism” (2019), <https://bit.ly/37bullR>
- 27 A compelling example of this can be found in the work of Nina G. Jablonski (see *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014]), who explains skin pigmentation in terms of evolutionary development as influenced by geographical setting and other environmental factors.
- 28 See Van der Westhuyzen, G.C.A. “An Account of Anthropometrical and Anthroposcopycal Observations Carried out on Male Students at the University of Stellenbosch”.
- 29 See Z.U. Potgieter, “A Study of Male Somatotypes among the South African Bantu Mine Labourers Compared with Other Groups (Sheldon’s Nomenclature)”, *Annals of the University of Stellenbosch* 35A, no. 3 (1959).
- 30 See Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>

- 31 In her recent discussion of Jewish notions of selfhood (see *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012], 108, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226201429.001.0001>), Abu El-Haj illustrates how the notion of a Jewish “self” often relied on a biblical historical record that instilled notions of an existing collective. But this historical record has often offered a starting point for subsequent study – be it in the field of genetics or otherwise. In this regard, Abu El-Haj argues, “further studies will only produce a Jewish nation that it presumed already exist”.
- 32 Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race”, 35.

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A Century of Misery Research on Coloured People

Jonathan Jansen & Cyril Walters

You know, they are a negative group ... a non-person. They are the people that were left after the nations were sorted out. They are the rest.¹

Introduction

When a group of Stellenbosch University (SU) researchers published an article on the “low cognitive functioning” and “unhealthy lifestyle behaviours” of coloured women,² there was immediate outrage across the campus and the country. Yet this particular piece of published research was by no means exceptional. In fact, for the past hundred years Stellenbosch – and other South African universities – had been engaged in what is called race-essentialist research, that is, studies that insisted that there are four racial groups (whites, Indians, coloureds and Africans) and that certain aptitudes, behaviours and even diseases were directly related to these political classifications.³

Take an assortment of medical conditions and you will find research that linked a racial classification to a particular physical ailment or status: Indians had stomach ulcers. Afrikaners had high cholesterol. Coloureds had TB, or tuberculosis. African women had stronger pelvic floor muscles compared to other “racial groups”.⁴ What was claimed for biomedical problems was also assumed for a range of social conditions from the early 1900s into the present – that there is a relationship between your presumed racial group and certain social, health and behavioural outcomes. No one group was more affected by these studied associations between racial classification and negative outcomes than those classified as coloured under apartheid – something this chapter calls misery research.

Misery research is the propensity to describe a group of people through the lens of disgust. The attribution of disgust has been applied to various outgroups, such as the Roma (Gypsies) of Europe⁵ or unauthorised immigrants in North America.⁶ The stigmatised group is represented in public discourse as problematic and pitiful in who they are and how they live their lives. They are portrayed as lacking in certain social sensibilities, such as prudent sexual behaviours or the conduct of respectable family lives. These groups make bad choices, threaten public decency, break the law and seem forever stuck in their sad situation. Studies of such groups tend to focus singularly on their state of misery, so that the supposed condition of the part (a small sample) substitutes for the whole, as in studies of coloured people.

Digging in the archives

As soon as the controversial publication became public knowledge, a SU research team started to dig up all available institutional research on the subject of coloured people over the course of a hundred years, since the first full year of SU's academic founding in 1919 through to 2019. The starting hypothesis of this review was that the troubled research on coloured women's cognition and health was not an aberration, but one in a long tradition of misery research about this particular group of citizens.

Most of the SU research on coloured people was available in the form of master's and doctoral research published in the form of a dissertation.⁷ The dissertation turned out to be an ideal subject for trying to understand how SU as an institution regarded and represented the coloured community through research. That is because the dissertation is an institutional product. While a student is required to indicate on completion that the dissertation is their own work, in reality it is the outcome of a complex institutional process. The student approaches or is assigned a university supervisor; in most cases, that student is directed towards a particular area of research familiar to the supervisor, and one in which s/he has interest and expertise. Often there is a group of students working in the same area, e.g. coloured gangs.

The university passes the research proposal through ethical review and funds the dissertation research from internal and/or outside resources. The dissertation proposal is approved by a university committee. The completed dissertation is examined internally, and often externally as well. A final decision is made by the university authorities to award the degree. Out of the dissertation, the student and the supervisor often co-author one or more journal articles from the dissertation. In short, the dissertation is a product of university processes and therefore offers a unique insight into the institutional mind on the subject – in this case, coloured people.

The study also examined other research reports, journal articles and published opinions from academics and leaders at SU over the century that specifically dealt with coloured people. Of special interest were the in-house journals of the University, as well as four commissions on coloured people, all of which were led and heavily represented by SU professors and their researchers.⁸ In this way, using a rich collection of institutional documentation, it was possible to gain a reliable account of how SU research portrayed a group of people who came to be formally classified as “coloured” under apartheid.

A thematic analysis of race and research at Stellenbosch University

An earlier study undertook a longitudinal analysis of research on coloured people to determine what exactly was studied about the subject in each decade since 1919.⁹ What this chapter offers is a thematic analysis of the research about coloured people to find out what common areas of inquiry were pursued at the University.

Over the course of 100 years, there are five major themes about coloureds represented in the institutional research that emerges from this single university. To be sure, there are minor research themes on coloureds as subjects of institutional study, such as their cognitive abilities,¹⁰ bone measurements,¹¹ culture¹² and work habits.¹³ This section, however, focuses on those studied areas in which there is a more substantial volume of academic research on a specific theme of coloured lives inside one institution, Stellenbosch University.

The intimate lives of coloured people

A first theme is concerned with *the intimate lives of coloured people*. This theme covers broad topics, such as sex, morality and relationships. One concentration within this body of research has to do with the immoral lives of coloureds, their sexual passions, and venereal diseases.¹⁴ Another concentration involves research on family planning – or the lack thereof – amongst coloured people,¹⁵ family housing conditions¹⁶ and family relationships.¹⁷

It was McDonald¹⁸ who kicked off an enduring tradition of intimate research on “Die sedelike toestand van die Kleurling familie”.¹⁹ Not lacking in restraint, this research dissertation from the Faculty of Arts & Philosophy launches into “die onbeskaafde leefwyse van vele [Kleurling] ouers”²⁰ and the “sedelike korruptheid van die Kleurling”.²¹ In their very origins, “Die tans bestaande kleurling-bevolking is uitsluitlik afkomstig van heidense voorouers wat in gebreke was aan hoë sedelike norme en standaarde”.²² The moral depravity of the coloured is a lifelong curse, for “In skande is the Kleurling gebore en in skande sit hy sy lewe voort en dit tot sy eie nadeel en vernietiging”.²³

Inside South Africa's democracy, one would expect a toning down of such racial invective about the intimate lives of coloured people in SU research. It is nevertheless in the postapartheid period that a set of studies on coloured women's sexual behaviours come under special scrutiny. The focus of this research is on high-risk behaviours of coloured women,²⁴ for whom sexual relationships were "a primary source of meaning-giving" ... "pervading all aspects of their everyday existence".²⁵ When studying "Die verskille tussen bruin en swart adolessente se seksuele gedrag", blacks were worse than coloureds, since they had more sex earlier ("coitus"), more pregnancies and more masturbation.²⁶

The decrepit lives of coloured people

Another theme focuses on *the decrepit lives of coloured people*. In this line of research, coloureds are represented as suffering from illness, disease and infirmity.²⁷ It is not only the living who come under biomedical scrutiny for health conditions but also the dead, as in a productive area of Stellenbosch research – coloured cadavers in the University's Kirsten Collection in the Anatomy Department of the Medical School.²⁸ The strong association between coloureds and tuberculosis is another area of prolific and sustained research at SU,²⁹ alongside such infections as HIV.³⁰ In addition to physical illnesses amongst coloured people, such as venereal diseases,³¹ there is also research over the decades on the emotional ailments of coloureds,³² and the health consequences of substance abuse.³³

One powerful illustration of the underlying racism in the decrepit lives of the group is found in this study on premature babies by the Department of Pediatrics, which juxtaposes animal undernutrition with that of coloured women:

Studies in diere het getoon dat moederlike ondervoeding die geboortemassa van die pasgeborenes aansienlik verminder. Kaapse Kleurlingmoeders is beduidend korter, ligter en maerder as blanke moeders.³⁴

The criminal lives of coloured people

The criminal lives of coloured people constitute another enduring line of research inside SU. The representation of coloureds as gangsters is commonplace in research on criminal behaviour,³⁵ and special attention is paid to youth offenders within this genre.³⁶ Here, too, the tendency is towards racial comparisons; perhaps unsurprisingly, the research shows that coloured people are more aggressive than other "races",³⁷ and that there is a relationship between aggression and social competence where, once again, coloureds perform the worst.³⁸ In all four major commissions into coloured people, the criminal lives of coloured people would come to enjoy substantial attention.³⁹ Even when a more progressive lens was trained on

the coloured as subject, it was often about criminal behaviour, such as in a doctoral dissertation on “The Cape rapist”.⁴⁰

This racial trope on coloured criminality is well-established in these studies. A coloured is a violent gangster prone to substance abuse, which in turn leads to all kinds of criminal activities that degrade the community.⁴¹ Moreover, coloured youth criminals are intellectually impaired, so that there is a relationship between verbal intelligence and moral judgement.⁴² It is a deeply embedded dysfunctionality that has not changed over the years and has become part of the coloured experience, as one study concluded: “Delinquent behaviour is still endemic amongst a large part of this community.”⁴³

The drinking habits of coloured people

Another persistent theme in institutional research concerns *the drinking lives of coloured people*. In this research, drinking is not a social event but a criminal habit of “the problem drinker”.⁴⁴ Such studies are often related to coloured farm labourers in the vineyards, where alcohol served as full or partial payments to workers – the so-called *tot system*.⁴⁵ This research speaks of “a drinking pattern”⁴⁶ and describes alcohol as an essential feature of coloured identity⁴⁷ that organises social life and industry,⁴⁸ constitutes male friendships⁴⁹ and leads to all kinds of criminal activity,⁵⁰ from which they need to be rescued through legislation⁵¹ and social welfare.⁵² Even with alcohol abuse, the compulsion to compare across racial categories reflects once again the commitment to racial essentialism underpinning institutional research.⁵³

The pitiful lives of coloured people

The strongest theme running through SU research over the years is *the pitiful lives of coloured people*, who need to be uplifted through social welfare. That is to say, coloured people are subjects to be ridiculed and rescued at the same time.⁵⁴ The target areas for upliftment include coloured poverty,⁵⁵ coloured education⁵⁶ and coloured growth, development and expansion more generally.⁵⁷

There are two institutions key to this coloured rescue act – the government’s social welfare department⁵⁸ and the church.⁵⁹ All the major commissions into coloured people lay emphasis on the *opheffing* (upliftment) of this frail and feckless population.⁶⁰ More recent research, while offering a sympathetic treatment of the subject,⁶¹ would nevertheless treat coloureds as powerless,⁶² trapped in their misery⁶³ and still in need of improved treatment.⁶⁴ In other words, the picture of pitifulness rather than agency or activism (see by contrast, Lewis⁶⁵; Soudien⁶⁶) continues to frame coloured people as subjects of institutional study.

Making sense of a century of misery research on coloured people

There is no other group of South Africans who have been subjected, through the conduct of research, to such an unrelenting assault on their dignity and humanity as those classified as coloured under apartheid. Why?

For white Afrikaners, coloured people constituted an existential threat to their own fragile identities as they emerged from the devastation of the South African War of 1899-1902. With the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the early twentieth century and the determination to build a united *volk*, coloureds threatened the purity of race and the politics of white identity formation.⁶⁷ They had to be separated “in life and limb” from the whites, the SU academic P.J. Coertze⁶⁸ would forcefully argue in the 1940s. It was particularly “poor whites” in this period who faced “the threat of disqualification from whiteness”⁶⁹ by being relegated to the status of coloured people.⁷⁰ Hence the call for an emphatic distancing between Afrikaners and coloureds and the need to “police the borders of whiteness”.⁷¹ Calls for segregation, however, had an unexpected logic, as the foremost historian of Afrikaners would put it: “Separation was necessary not because people were so different from one another but rather because they were so alike.”⁷² Separation, however, was not enough.

In order to justify such absolute distancing between the two groups, coloureds had to be described not only as different from whites in every way but as objects of moral disgust – drunk, sickly, weak, rapacious, violent, aggressive, irresponsible and unintelligent. It was therefore not only apartheid laws and policies but research itself that was summoned to present coloureds as repulsive – as meriting social, physical and cultural separation from whites. Disgust is not, however, employed only to invoke moral repulsion but serves as a political device for distancing outgroups through dehumanisation.⁷³

Misery research and the compulsion to compare

To merely describe coloured persons as objects of moral disgust would serve no purpose without also comparing and contrasting them with whites. The goal is to prove that whites stand on a higher rung of civilisation in every sense and that coloureds are below them – as decades of research was intent on showing from the very beginning. Whites had more bodily hair than coloureds.⁷⁴ Whites were intelligent, coloureds less so.⁷⁵ The Eur-Hott group had a medium-sized penis but that of the Bushman would “descend and elongate as soon as the Bantu element mixes with the Bushman”.⁷⁶ Whites have culture, whereas coloureds have no culture, no poets and no writers.⁷⁷

As time moves on, the odious comparisons persist. Venereal disease is more common amongst non-whites than whites, a statement that even the researchers

concede that they had no evidence for.⁷⁸ Essential hypertension, says Venter,⁷⁹ might well have to do with the skin colour of the different races. Where coloureds do have culture, it is “*eiesoortig*” (unique to the group) insists Matilda Burden,⁸⁰ and poses no threat to distinctive white music. Coloureds are more aggressive than other “cultural groups” holds Norma Katherine Möller,⁸¹ and more susceptible to tuberculosis.⁸² Even amongst the dead, markings on skeletal bones show that the health deficiencies of coloureds exceed those of whites,⁸³ while Van der Walt⁸⁴ found value in comparing the strength of the pelvic floor muscles of coloureds with those of whites and Africans.

Comparison, as these studies have shown, is not neutral. It was used to establish and reinforce apartheid’s artificial hierarchies of race, in which whites remained atop the civilisational ladder in culture, intelligence, health, education and every other social or economic indicator, followed by Indians, coloureds and Africans at the bottom of the pile.⁸⁵

Is it possible, nonetheless, that the research is simply drawing attention to the obvious – that coloureds are drunk, violent and miserable people? To begin with, every community, however defined, has always had social and economic outcasts, such as South Africa’s poor whites.⁸⁶ Which group to study within a particular community is a choice. The consistent pattern of SU research over the decades was to home in on low-income communities – as in the case of the Sport Science article on coloured women’s cognition. There is virtually no SU dissertation research on the coloured middle classes (by contrast, see Soudien⁸⁷; April and Josias⁸⁸), since they defy the much-needed stereotype of this misery group and therefore rattle the ideological certainties of race and accomplishment on which white power and privilege so much relied.

Only in recent times has there emerged the beginnings of a substantive scholarship from within SU on the coloured middle classes, and their achievements and struggles under the weight of apartheid oppression. Chief amongst these writings is the work of Stellenbosch historians, such as Herman Giliomee’s⁸⁹ striking account of a dignified, hardworking class of coloured people, many of whom built and owned their own well-kept homes in the town before the tragedy of forced removals.

There is also in SU research a more recent shift from merely describing the miserable conditions of *some* coloured people to explaining their conditions of deprivation and poverty in relations to systems of power.⁹⁰ People from low-income communities were not born poor, nor are their struggles because of something inherent in *colouredness*. Coloured people – like black people more generally – were made poor through damning racial legislation,⁹¹ even as “poor whites” were uplifted through pro-white government policies long before the inauguration of apartheid in 1948.⁹²

Conclusion

When the wife of the last white President of South Africa described coloured people as “a negative group ... a non-person ... the rest” (see epigraph), Marika de Klerk was not only reflecting a good measure of white public opinion; she had solid backing from a century of institutional research depicting this group of citizens in such degrading terms.

As this chapter has shown, it was the political threat of coloured people to white identity and white supremacy that explains the enduring legacy of misery research inside the University that became the laboratory for producing the knowledge that would become the foundation on which apartheid policies and plans towards this group of South Africans would be built. To this end, coloured people had to be defined as a distinctive, as well as a decrepit, racial group in order to legitimise their absolute distancing from white people.

What does all of this mean for the transformation of knowledge and of race relations on the campus and in the country, given the long shadow of apartheid? It means recognising how race has assumed the status of common sense in the understanding of ourselves and others. The idea that there are racial essences (something within) that define us as coloured or white or African is taken for granted in everyday life; this is called *racial essentialism* and it is found in much of the research surveyed in this study.

The idea that there are racial determinants to the behaviour of groups carrying different classifications is also commonplace even in everyday expressions: coloured men are drunkards and coloured women are oversexed; this is called *racial determinism*, which idea also runs through many of the studies covered in this review.

Changing such deeply held beliefs will not be easy, since every South African is socialised from early on in life to think of him/herself as part of a race and to think of each race as having particular characteristics and behaving in particular ways; this is something the co-author once referred to as *knowledge in the blood*.⁹³

But change can and does happen – as in the case of Professor C.S. (Kees) van der Waal from the Anthropology Department of Stellenbosch University, who recognised the power of his academic socialisation within his discipline when it was still called *Volkekunde*. In his words, “I had been formed into a myopic, conservative racist”,⁹⁴ but as he became exposed to other schools of thought in anthropology, he recognised the roots of his dilemma – “the danger of essentialism”.⁹⁵

Endnotes

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Pitfalls of a Profession

Afrikaner historians and the notion of an “objective-scientific” approach in perspective

Albert Grundlingh

“Volksgeskiedenis” and academe

From about the 1930s until late into the twentieth century, professional historical writing in Afrikaner circles was closely linked to the universities, and the universities in turn played a significant role in promoting the wider nationalist enterprise. History was regarded as a crucial discipline: the past was needed to legitimate the present. In an influential text written in 1941 on Afrikaans universities, the importance of the past was emphasised in near-religious terms: the “calling” and “destination” of the Afrikaner people were predetermined by their past and the “volk” therefore had a duty to honour and obey the sanctity of that past.¹

“Volksgeskiedenis” was marked by certain characteristics. It was a history infused with romantic notions of God-fearing, intrepid nineteenth-century pioneers, great visionary leaders and loyal followers who, despite trials and tribulations, established a “civilised” form of government in the interior and “tamed” the land. It was a form of history that stood in contrast to the prevailing imperialist view of the time, in which South Africa only featured as part of the British Empire, or the emerging liberal perspective that had a more composite interpretation of South Africa’s past.

The Department of History at Stellenbosch University assumed a central role in providing credence to history as an academic discipline, without questioning the main tenets of “volksgeskiedenis”. Particularly adept at maintaining a symbiotic

relationship between the demands of academe and the demands of the “volk” was Professor H.B. Thom, who headed the department between 1937 and 1954 and then became rector of the University.

During these crucial years of rampant Afrikaner nationalism, Thom was not a rabble-rousing propagator of Afrikaner history; on the contrary, in the more sedate style of the Cape Afrikaner, he promoted the linkages between the “volk” and their “true” past in a sober, calm, dignified and even detached manner. He was considered the ideal Afrikaans aristocrat and scholar, one who could skilfully blend nationalist cultural and political life and academe into one harmonious whole. His *magnum opus*, a biography of the Voortrekker leader Gerrit Maritz, which appeared in 1947, was viewed as an eminently successful synthesis of “volksgeskiedenis” and academic demands.²

Thom’s achievement was not without implications for Afrikaans historical writing as a political discourse. He believed that the “main aim” of history was “to search for the truth in an honest way, and to keep that aim pure, but at the same time ... to do that in the midst of the “volk”.”³

The possibility that the “truth” might be found outside the closed circle of the “volk” was not really a consideration that merited serious attention. Provided one’s research had been thorough enough, the “facts” themselves, without any embellishment, would reinforce and strengthen the case of the “volk”.

Thom’s influence radiated far and wide. After 1948, virtually every Afrikaans history department in the country, as well as the bilingual departments of what was the University of Port Elizabeth and the University of South Africa, employed former Stellenbosch graduates, often in leading positions. His views, in a truncated and at times in more robust form, were propagated by some of his acolytes.

The role played by Afrikaner nationalist historians is not unique; invariably in countries involved in nation-building exercises, historians are given to indulging in exaggerated patriotic myth-making. Specifically in Africa, it represented the kind of historiography that reigned supreme in the aftermath of the colonial era. Nationalist historiography in newly independent countries often served the interests of the postcolonial state, and the rediscovery of African history, as opposed to its earlier denial in the colonial period, was often accompanied by the political processes of nation-building. In both South African and African historiography more broadly, this approach had an attenuating effect on the study and understanding of the past. Writing about African historiography, Caroline Neale has remarked:

To some [historians] it now seems regrettable, both from a political point of view in that it [nationalist history] served the interest of new regimes which in

hindsight were not what historians hoped they would be, and from an intellectual point of view, in that historians concentrated on narrowly political themes at the expense of social and economic ones.⁴

In current South Africa, the same trend can be observed with the historical projection of the African National Congress as the prime, if not the only, liberator of the country. A new mythology has arisen of an all-conquering movement that almost single-handedly delivered South Africa from apartheid and that therefore must be trusted in building a new nation. Despite the party's numerous moral failures and other shortcomings, it still lays claim to this constructed historical preeminence. A dominant African nationalism, it has recently been argued, has society in its grip: "It is here that the society finds itself pinned down, captured, trapped in an especially powerful form of hegemony."⁵ The ramifications of this, albeit of a different order qualitatively perhaps, may yet turn out to be no less dangerous than a virulent Afrikaner nationalism was in the previous century.

The mantra of "objective-scientific" history

Unpacking the specific dynamics of African nationalism in this country, and the structural elements underpinning its historical discourse, is a task that still needs to be undertaken. As far as Afrikaner nationalist history, the object of this chapter, is concerned, the question is much the same: how was a nationalist history paraded with authority in academe?

In Afrikaans historical writing, the terms "objective" and "scientific" were often linked, hence the hyphenated form. It was under the aegis of "objectivity" that historical writing had to be disciplined in order to conform to the dictates and demands of a "science". The two concepts were thus often used in tandem.

Not surprisingly, it was at Stellenbosch University that the notion of "objective-scientific" history was emphasised, propagated and transmitted further afield. With some justification, the History Department could claim in 1969 that it had a "famous tradition" in this respect. It was a source of great pride that Stellenbosch was responsible for laying the foundations of the "new tradition in South Africa of thorough archival research and objective, critical judgement of the facts".⁶

One of the earliest expressions of the "objective-scientific" ideal in Afrikaans was that of S.F.N. Gie, the first professor of South African history at Stellenbosch, from 1918 to 1926. Addressing a student society in 1920, Gie accentuated an "honest and objective" attitude as an essential requirement for the "scientific" historian. These intellectual qualities, Gie argued, could only be gained through "hard work and experience" in dealing with the subject.⁷

Some 15 years later, J.A. Wiid, Gie's successor in South African history, endorsed much the same view. He did admit, though, that complete objectivity was not possible and that "subjective" factors would always intrude. Nevertheless, this should not deter the historian from striving towards objectivity.⁸ Taken at face value, this statement seemed reasonable enough, but the built-in contradiction – how to achieve something that cannot be achieved – was never confronted. This point of departure also had other implications. Under the guise of "unavoidable subjective factors", various versions of "volksgeskiedenis", as long as they were not openly propagandist, could receive authoritative approval as acceptable "scientific" history. This left the door open for "objective-scientific" history to collapse into "volksgeskiedenis". Hermann Giliomee, one of the more thoughtful lecturers in the department in the 1970s and early 1980s, picked up on this and explained later:

The major lesson I learnt at Stellenbosch is that the writing of history is only of value when one tries one's utmost to establish the truth and does not attempt to put the truth at the service of a particular political ideal. I felt, however, that at Stellenbosch the "objective-scientific" method had become a fetish that created the illusion on the part of some that they were recording history impartially.⁹

The idea of "objective" scientific history in Stellenbosch and elsewhere had gradually assumed the status of holy writ and it cast a powerful spell. In the late 1980s, this notion was still billed as a "fundamental principle".¹⁰

The enmeshment of "objective-scientific" history and "volksgeskiedenis" meant that politically and socially conditioned values were relatively easily accommodated. In turn, these factors also influenced the internal structure of the discipline itself, such as the loci of power within it, research priorities, the division and allocation of resources, career patterns and advancement, decisions on what to publish and the reception of publications. The knowledge generated in this way cannot be seen as separate from the process through which it has been forged.

For Afrikaans historians, the ideal of "objective-scientific" history came to constitute a defence against any form of history seen to undermine their view of the past. Other histories were politically inspired, but history as written by Afrikaans professionals, so it was claimed, rose above politics, because it was "objective" and "scientific". The belief in the superiority of their "apolitical" position was firm and it was regarded as a neutral counterpoint to any form of ideological historical writing. There was little realisation that "objective-scientific" history was itself a political project imbued with conservative notions.

Implications

One of the implications of the emphasis on “objective-scientific” history is that it encouraged conformity and consensus, reducing the potential for conflict over substantial matters of interpretation. Those who dared to pursue themes considered unorthodox or controversial by the establishment could easily fall foul of accusations that their research might compromise the sacred tenets of the profession. “Objectivity”, in fact, was “valued not as the outcome of professional conflict, but as a prophylactic against it”.¹¹

An example of this was the way in which Thom, in 1940, reviewed a book by J.S. Marais, at the time from the University of Cape Town, on the Cape “coloured” people from 1652 to 1937.¹² Thom had little to say about the importance of the topic, the contribution (or otherwise) of the book to existing knowledge, the ideas and issues it raised and the possible new avenues of research it opened. He preferred instead to judge the book on what he regarded as “objective-scientific” criteria. Whereas Marais was fairly critical of the way in which Boers had treated “coloureds” in the nineteenth century and earlier, Thom did his best to exonerate the Boers on “scientific” grounds. This was not an isolated case. In an address given in 1943, Thom generally took English-speaking historians to task for not being “objective” enough in their writing.¹³

A further ramification of this line of approach is that it impacted on the choice of themes to be researched. The history of political parties and related subjects, as well as particular biographical studies, were the staple diet of most Afrikaner historians. Although such themes are to be found in virtually any historiographical tradition, in the case of Afrikaans-speaking historians, they supplanted almost any other form of historiography. In addition, the topics were usually exceedingly narrowly conceived; politics were simply politics and socioeconomic influences had little, or no, relation to politics. This promoted a certain degree of rigidity, as well as a lack of context; technically speaking, many of the works were impeccable, but in terms of a conceptual understanding of the motivations of the complex South African past, they had little to offer. In fact, an eminent, if at times somewhat erratic, Afrikaans historian was correct when he asserted late in life: “The Afrikaner form of historiography was elitist, personality-bound, idealistic, qualitative and narrative-bound – as if history was solely and merely aimed at the exercising of political power by the state.”¹⁴

There were also other, wider conceptual issues at stake. In essence, it meant that a nationalistic paradigm was diametrically opposed to the basic conceptualisation, nature and aims of a more class-based social history. Whereas nationalist historiography

emphasises ethnic or national unity, class conflict and division are of importance to the social historian; where party politics, official state policy and constitutional issues are regarded in nationalistic historiography as a natural given, the social historian questions the nature and function of these institutions and structures in the particular developmental stages of capitalism; and where the focus of nationalistic historiography is on great leaders and the utterances of politicians, the social historian concentrates to a large extent on the way in which “ordinary people” experienced certain historical events and processes. Social history also usually has an oppositional character, while nationalistic historiography tends to confirm to the status quo.

An additional complication is the adoption, without due reflection, of key categories emanating from a nationalist discourse. Racial and ethnic conceptualisations often rule in such expositions, and they do not usually allow for much class analysis, but tend to reify and extend the analytical purchase of such inherited approaches. In South Africa, this kind of baggage makes it more difficult to move into new areas of exploration.

Ideally, the evaluation of a final research product would come back to its original conceptualisation and to an appreciation of the selection of interpretive principles that go beyond the conventional historical evidence itself. To think otherwise can lead to dangerous distortions. Having said that, though, it is equally necessary to enter a caveat. Once the facts have been apprehended, one should also be aware that there are other facts which still roam free, and that these should at times be harnessed in order to run one’s narrative against the grain. Runaway relativism can be just as dangerous as narrow empiricism.

In the final reckoning, the Sport Science article fell prey not so much to slovenly empirical research, but to misleading assumptions about “objective” science. Viewed from the vantage point of the preoccupations that influenced Afrikaner historiography for a considerable period, this does not seem all that strange. The “politics of research” passed both sets of researchers by, either deliberately, or perhaps unwittingly so. What is called for is a recognition of, and ideally a promotion of, the “notion of the mutually provocative interaction between theoretical questioning and research having an empirical and historical dimension”.¹⁵

Endnotes

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 - 2 Floris Albertus van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaners se Groot Trek na die Stede, En Ander Opstelle* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1982), 271.
 - 3 Hendrik Bernardus Thom, “Die Huidige Stand van Historiese Navorsing in Suid-Afrika”, *Die Stellenbosche Oudstudent*, April 1943, 18.
 - 4 Caroline Neale, “The Idea of Progress in the Revision of African History, 1960-1970”, In *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa*, ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David S. Newbury (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986), 120-21.
 - 5 Belinda Bozzoli, “The Janus Face of African Nationalism Today”, *Politicsweb*, 17 February 2019, 2, <https://bit.ly/37cI7EA>; See also Francis Meli, *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988).
 - 6 D.J. Kotzé, *Professor H.B. Thom* (Stellenbosch: Die Universiteit, 1969), 17.
 - 7 Stefanus Francois Naudé Gie, “Gesiedenis as Wetenskap”, *Die Huisgenoot*, October 1920, 254.
 - 8 J.A. Wiid, “Subjektiewe Faktore in die Geskiedskrywing”, *Stellenbosche Oudstudent*, April 1935, 19-22.
 - 9 Hermann Giliomee, *Hermann Giliomee, Historian: An Autobiography* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2016), 58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zkjzr0>
 - 10 D.J. van Zyl, “Gesiedenis as Vak en Wetenskap: Nuwe Uitdagings”, *South African Historical Journal* 19, no. 1 (1987): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582478708671619>
 - 11 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511816345>
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 - 13 Thom, “Die Huidige Stand van Historiese Navorsing in Suid-Afrika”, 17.
 - 14 Floris Albertus van Jaarsveld, “Politieke Gesiedenis uit Ballingskap Herroep” (Unpublished Paper, 1991), 10.
 - 15 Dominick LaCapra, “From What Subject-Position(s) Should One Address the Politics of Research?”, In *The Politics of Research*, ed. Elizabeth Ann Kaplan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 68.
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SECTION C



**Making up Race
and "the Other"
in the Social and
Medical Sciences**



Difficult Knowledge

The state of the discussion around ‘race’ in the social sciences

Crain Soudien

Introduction

Some ideas die hard. They refuse to go away, even when the evidence that they are false is put in front of us. In the European Middle Ages, it was believed that the sun revolved around the earth. People who suggested otherwise were put to death. In contemporary times, we have the idea of “race”. When we are told that it is a lie, many amongst us, perhaps most of us around the world, respond with almost instinctive incomprehension and, what’s more, often exasperation. “What? Get real, man!”, we exclaim. There is some justification for this response. It is about the real experience of racism. It is alive and material in many people’s lives. If this is case, goes the logic, how can “race” then not be real?

In this contribution, I will briefly review the state of the discussion around “race”. The immediate context for the review is, of course, the Sport Science article,¹ since retracted by the journal *Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition*, on age- and education-related effects on the cognitive functioning of what the authors called ‘coloured’ women. The journal retracted the article, because it contained assertions about ‘coloured’ women that were not supported by the data presented in the article. The approach I take here focuses on the state of the broader discussion about race, as it is playing itself out in the social sciences and humanities community. Important about the social science discussion for scholars in a number of fields and disciplines, including the field of cognition addressed by Nieuwoudt and her colleagues, is,

I suggest, its focus on what social scientists call “the politics of knowledge”. All forms of knowledge are constructed on complex foundations of power. This is not an angle or a line of sight which enjoys much interest in many non-social science fields and disciplines. That Nieuwoudt and her colleagues have had to come to learn this in the way they have is unfortunate. “Race” as a field of knowing is particularly political.

In setting up the discussion in the social science community, it is necessary to contextualise the discursive climate, or the politics – not just people’s modes of reasoning but the *ways* in which they talk, argue and reason – that surrounds the question of “race”. This bears directly, of course, on the way in which Nieuwoudt and her colleagues approached their task. “Race” presents itself, we must acknowledge, as a difficult subject for many of us, including those of us who are in the academy. We are all at once awkward and diffident or else strident, confident and assertive, or all of those together simultaneously, when we are asked to talk about it. We raise our voices. We lose our ability to speak. We rise in anger. We cower in fear. It is difficult for many reasons. Some of these are theoretical and conceptual and are about what ‘race’ means, what it stands for and the uses to which it is put. Others are about what it means experientially in our lives. Central in this is the difficulty of drawing out for ourselves a meaning that we can hold together, both for what can be described as the theory of it and its practice – the knowledge we have of it and the practice to which we put our knowledge. In this process of holding together the theory and the practice, and this is at the core of the argument I am making, is the conflation of the term “race” with the real experience of racism. This conflation produces both academic and practical challenges – how one thinks and how one lives. It is the latter which is largely, although not entirely, the focus of this chapter. It looks at how the discussion is being approached in the social science community, and especially how the community is dealing with the awkwardness of the “truth” of “race” versus its “reality”. In this discussion, I juxtapose *social constructionism* with what I refer to here as *racial realism*. While social constructionism, as I will show, is the preferred theoretical approach of the social sciences, there continue to circulate around social constructionism concerns about its practicality – its ability to facilitate the development of social practices able to respond to and manage “race” and its complexities. Those concerns are captured in racial realism.

The social construction explanation

Towards understanding social construction, it is important to remind ourselves about the “common sense” of “race”. That common sense – the “truth” for most us – lies in the idea that “race” is a “natural” thing. It is in our bodies.² Its “natural” reality is evident in our skin colour, hair texture, the shape of our noses, and our physiognomic features. It is what we can see, the “obvious” reality. Upon this is constructed, and then

elaborated and extended into behaviour, beliefs about capability and predisposition – white people having superior reasoning faculties, black people having superior physical abilities, etc. – and worse, moral capacity, being unequally distributed amongst different ‘races’. Cruel whites. Savage blacks. Cheating Indians. And, in the South African context, drunken coloureds.

This explanation arose out of the turn towards positivism that took hold in the scientific world around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Positivism is a scientific method used in the natural sciences, and adopted by the social sciences, that is based on the principle of the existence of objective facts, facts that can be scientifically verified. Up until the 1960s, the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology – three of the main social science disciplines responsible for understanding human beings and their behaviour – carried the heavy imprint of positivism. The world’s peoples were divided into racial categories, the world’s three great population subgroups – caucasoids, negroids and mongoloids – or white, black and yellow. Their abilities, their temperaments and behaviour, and critically their achievements – the level of “civilisation” to which they had come – were attributable to their racial classifications. This classification was taught as “objective fact”. It would not have been at all unusual for students reading these disciplines to be told about this great human “fact”.³

But what about the “privileged” people of the academy, especially the sociologists, the psychologists, the educationists, the anthropologists, the historians, the political scientists, the literary scholars, the legal experts and the economists? How do they approach the question of “race”? Significantly, amongst this community of researchers, there are very few around the world who now, in the twenty-first century, believe in the idea of “race” as a biological truth. Most now would agree with the broad scientific position that it cannot be empirically demonstrated and that it is a social construction.

Social constructionism as an approach to thinking about “race” has been long in the making. From the very inception of the formal discussion about human biology in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a debate about the nature and character of human differences – about how to explain these. The discussion took a eugenics turn in the late nineteenth century, with the work of Francis Galton on the Herero, right here in southern Africa.⁴ Present in this turn, and driving it in some ways, was the spectral figure of South Africa and its “great men” of physical anthropology and palaeontology – Raymond Dart, Robert Broome and Philip Tobias. Their “great” scientific aim was to prove, through fields like craniology – the size of the human brain – that “black” brains were smaller than “white” brains.⁵ They failed. They could not find the definitive evidence they sought to show that

African people, the people they classified as Negroids, had smaller brains than European people (Caucasoids and now, extraordinarily, parlayed into the wonderfully symbolic word, without a hint of irony, “Caucasian”) and were, therefore, genetically inferior. They hung on to their beliefs, however, right into the 1970s. South Africa’s most eminent palaeontologist, Tobias,⁶ struggled right up until the end of his life to come to terms with the idea that “race” was not real.

There were scholars challenging this orthodoxy, beginning, already, in the late 1920s. One of them was a biologist who taught at the University of Cape Town, Lancelot Hogben.⁷ He contributed, interestingly, to the emergence of a strain of thinking against “race” which flowered in Cape Town in the work of intellectual-activists in the New Era Fellowship and the organisations that subsequently arose in its wake, such as the Non-European Unity Movement.⁸ Innovative and disruptive as this work was, it did not find traction in the broader social science community. It was the publication of a statement by UNESCO in 1950, essentially as a response to the racist horror of Nazism and its responsibility for the Holocaust, which inaugurated the global process of questioning the idea of “race”. The statement was and remains, in its many subsequent iterations after 1950, ambiguous in many respects. But, for the first time, the world’s major scientific authorities pronounced on the meaning of “race”. The fourteenth point in the statement read as follows: “The biological fact of race and the myth of ‘race’ should be distinguished. For all practical social purposes ‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth... The biological differences between ethnic groups should be disregarded from the standpoint of social acceptance and social action.”⁹

The UNESCO statement stimulated the anti-positivist shift in fields like sociology and anthropology.¹⁰ Out of this shift emerged new approaches to science, such as deconstructionism and social constructionism. A social construction is an explanation of reality that has its basis in the understandings and behaviour of people and their behaviour in specific social settings. It found support from important natural scientists such as Richard Lewontin¹¹ and Stephen J. Gould.¹² They showed how insignificant “race” and its supposed markers were in explaining human variation. This work laid the foundation for the human genome project, which provided repeated confirmation that the levels of genetic variation within populations were much greater than they were between population groups.¹³ Genome mapping emphasised the hazards around the use of “race” as a concept. In 1997, the American Anthropological Association issued its *Statement on “Race”*.¹⁴ The statement asserted that:

With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century ... it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g. DNA)

indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies *within so-called racial groups* ... There is greater variation within “racial” groups than between them ... and because physical traits are inherited independently of one another, knowing the range of one trait does not predict the presence of others. For example, skin color varies largely from light in the temperate zones in the north to dark in the tropical areas in the south; its intensity is not related to nose shape or hair texture.¹⁵ [my own emphasis]

The anthropologists were followed ten years later by a group of Stanford scientists who published a letter in the journal *Genome Biology* on “the ethics of characterising difference: guiding principles on using racial categories in human genetics”.¹⁶ They put forward ten principles to guide the use of racial and ethnic labels when working with differences between putative groups. Of these, three are pertinent:

1. We believe that there is no scientific basis for any claim that the pattern of human genetic variation supports hierarchically organized categories of race and ethnicity.¹⁷
2. We recognize that individuals of two different geographically defined human populations are more likely to differ at any given site in the genome than are two individuals of the same geographically defined population.¹⁸
3. We discourage the use of race as a proxy for biological similarity and support efforts to minimize the use of the categories of race in clinical medicine, maintaining focus on the individual rather than the group.¹⁹

Important social scientists who have addressed the question of “race” include Philomena Essed and David Goldberg,²⁰ Paul Gilroy,²¹ and Lewis Gordon.²² Brett St. Louis, who conducted an overview of the literature in 2002, summed up the agreement amongst these scholars as follows: “We have long been aware that ‘race’ has no sustainable biological foundation, and convinced of its socially constructed basis, we instead recognize the *racialization* of different groups that are culturally, socially and historically constituted.”²³ Zeus Leonardo, another scholar of “race”, pointed out that “it is clear therefore at least for much of the academy, that the inviolable sanctity of race is under fire, ... under erasure”.²⁴ Also surveying the literature, Moore, Pandian and Kosek argue that both “race” and nature are what they call historical artefacts, “assemblages of material, discourse, and practice irreducible to a universal essence ... Nature appears to precede history, even as it wipes away the historical traces of its own fashioning”.²⁵

Significant about what we have here are two developments: general agreement about the “made-up” nature of “race”, and a concern with understanding the ways in which the idea has historically entered and been sedimented in popular discourse.²⁶ Emerging from this concern is an awareness of what happens as popular discourses seek moral justification and so go in search of evidence. The results that flow from

this – conventional wisdoms, “truths”, beliefs – as can be seen around the world, are approaches to “race” that depend entirely on what is going on in a society at a particular time. “Race” emerges from this as a fluid, if not arbitrary, concept. So, as in South Africa during the twentieth century, particular groups of people are included in the category of “European” or “white”, as circumstances necessitate. Before 1945, there was ambiguity in South Africa about people thought to be “Jewish”. Geoffrey Cronjé, the little-known intellectual behind the architecture of apartheid, produced in 1945 a list of the racial groups in South Africa.²⁷ This list began with “Europeans” and explicitly listed “Die Jode”, Jewish people, as a separate “race”. People who came from Japan came to be classified as “honorary whites” in the 1970s, when South African and Japanese trade rapidly increased in volume and value. In Brazil, several categories of white and black were located on a colour spectrum. Howard Winant, one of the world’s most important sociologists of “race”, described Brazil as a “racial project”.²⁸ The meaning of “race” there was in “constant formation”.²⁹ The point is that, in the absence of objective criteria, societies took whatever was convenient and used it as it thought was appropriate to determine who fell inside and outside of whatever normative framework for classification of people was dominant. And so, it is important to emphasise, the idea of “race” is fluid and takes different expressions in different contexts.³⁰ This is what a social construction is. It means one thing in Brazil, another in the United States and yet another in South Africa. An individual could be seen, described and classified in very different ways in different social settings.

Some caveats

These same social constructionists who have given us the explanation of the social history behind the use of the term “race”, however, generally do not explain the durable, persistent and steadfast attachment to the idea that one sees in public discourse and official policy. They do not account for its deployment, almost universally, as a category of social analysis in academic writing. What one has instead, in academic engagements with it, is disavowal of the idea through the stratagem of something like “it is recognised that the use of these terms is unacceptable”. But then, without irony, the idea is not only rehabilitated but completely reified: “white people do x, y and z, and black people manifest the following”. Bonilla-Silva says of these people that “writers in this group then [after disavowal] proceed to discuss ‘racial’ differences in academic achievement, crime, and SAT scores as if they were truly racial”.³¹ The complexity of the manoeuvre, as a reflection of just where we are as individuals and groups in the present time and space, is, I want to argue, symptomatic of the precariousness of modernity and its identity compulsions.

I suggest that what is in play in this simultaneous avowal and disavowal of race is the difficulty of the cognitive management of, on the one hand, affect – our complex desires and repulsions forged in the heat of all that a master concept like “race” stands for³² – and reason, that which we consciously come to learn is “better knowledge”, as in the social constructedness of “race”. What the complexity of this cognitive moment requires, for us to understand ourselves better, is dedicated study. This is what cognitive sociology is now trying to do.³³ It involves getting on top of the complex processes of boundary construction between people – those processes in and through which they come to see and make sense of difference. Human beings account for and explain themselves as individuals and members of groups in relation to everything around themselves – the physical world, the organic world and the spiritual world. How they do that explaining and accounting in relation to other human beings is of particular consequence to us here, because they are accounting and explaining themselves as being attached – either naturally or socially – to some human beings, or not. Some people are like them, others not.

A handful of scholars, whom I here call “racial realists”, attempt to take us out of the conundrum of the simultaneous existence and non-existence of race. Prominent amongst them in the South African context are Xolela Mangcu³⁴ and Mabogo More,³⁵ and in the United States, the cultural theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, author of *Seeing Through Race*.³⁶ I will concentrate on the work of Mitchell, as he develops the most thorough argument, ultimately drawing on the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan for the necessity of “race” as a framework for social analysis. Mitchell holds on to the idea of “race”, even as he acknowledges its socially constructed nature. His version of “racial realism” takes the position that the social constructionist position is naïve and fails to understand the materiality of “race”. Here, I will work with the insights and challenges that racial realism brings to what is now the conventional wisdom around “race”. The insights are about the persistence of whiteness and the emergence of phenomena like as colour-blindness and colourism. The challenges, I seek to show, are about how “race” works as a discourse, and the many difficulties that arise within its politics.

Racial realism

Mitchell begins his argument with the question, as do, implicitly, Mangcu and More, about what is achieved by the social constructionist consensus around “race” and he refers, skeptically, to the “release” that social constructionists claim to derive from the position they take: “Who exactly is freed by the post-racial discourse and the abandonment of race as a concept?”³⁷

Towards demonstrating social constructionism's naïvety, Mitchell says that we need to understand "race" as a medium that

requires careful description and analysis ... One might find a way to complete Du Bois's incomplete argument by understanding that it was always driven by a desire to affirm race while negating and opposing racism, a desire that could only be articulated as an endless vacillation between the categories of science and the socio-historical, between nature and culture. Du Bois's whole intellectual career ... could then be seen as a heroic attempt to *mediate* these antinomies.³⁸
[Mitchell's emphasis]

In elucidating his position, Mitchell says, "We have to ask ourselves, as Cornel West and Ian Hacking do, why race still matters when it has repeatedly been exposed as a pseudoscientific illusion and an ideological mystification. The answer lies in the peculiar position of race in the unavoidable human practice of classifying and discriminating kinds of things."³⁹ It has the status, he argues, of a "conceptual icon, a potent, magical, talismanic word that can be uttered in the service of a diagnosis or as a symptom of racism; it can be used as an analytic device or a polemical, rhetorical weapon".⁴⁰

Critical about Mitchell's contribution is not so much a rehabilitation of the idea of "race" as a thing to be inhabited and lived, which is essentially what Mangcu and More seek, but its use as a *medium*, or, and this is my rendering of it, as a *method of interpretation*. It is "real", he explains, "not in the position of what Lacan called 'the Real', it is rather a matter of constructed, mediated, represented 'reality' – visible, audible, and legible".⁴¹ It is, he continues,

the unrepresentable gap ... that opens up when the medium is fractured, when the Symbolic and Imaginary tear apart, the site of affect and the effects of trauma. The Real, as you have probably surmised is the location not of race, but of *racism*. Racism is what hurts. It is the disease, possibly an autoimmune disorder and certainly an infectious malady. Race is the ambiguous medicine/poison, the *pharmakon*, for inflicting or alleviating the pain caused by racism. Race is the set of symptoms or signs – the diagnostic tool – that provides access to the disease known as racism.⁴² [Mitchell's emphases]

Mitchell draws on Sartre to explain that racism is a "nourished and nurtured passion" that evolves into a "conception of the world ... that may be expressed by statements of reasonable tenor ... which can involve even bodily modifications, ... involve ... the mind [in] ... deep-seated and complete [ways] ... as happens in hysteria".⁴³

Significant about this cognitive process, says Mitchell, is that "racism is the brute fact, the bodily reality and race is the derivative term, devised either as imaginary cause for the effects of racism or to provide a rational explanation, a realistic picture

and diagnosis of this mysterious syndrome known as racism”.⁴⁴ “Race”, he posits, is not the cause of racism, “but its excuse, alibi, explanation, or reaction formation”.

The point of the questionable scientific value of the term “race” is not lost on Mitchell.⁴⁵ He hears the social scientists – scholars such as Appiah⁴⁶ and Gilroy⁴⁷ – who argue that “race is an illusion unworthy of our credence” and acknowledges that it is a “fetish concept ... invit[ing] compulsively repetitious confirmation in both positive and negative practices”.⁴⁸ In terms of this, he acknowledges, the idea reinforces a code of “collective solidarity, of brotherhood and sisterhood” and that this “threatens to become ‘grouptink’ under certain conditions or becomes ‘good to think’”.⁴⁹ It also, he says, finally, becomes a “god term” – “the alibi for murder, slavery and other forms of human sacrifice”.⁵⁰ But he insists that the critics miss the point about its link to the persistence of racism: “Even though Joshua Glasgow admits that ‘the concept of race seems irredeemably corrupted’, it remains [he says] curiously too valuable to do without.”⁵¹ He concedes that the endeavour he is opening up is a “precarious” one, but insists on its “necessity” as a “framework in which any kind of reality testing could take place”.⁵² There is no other idea in contemporary use which is able to go after the insistent creativity of racism. The postracial era, he argues, has unleashed “an epidemic of racialization, in which a variety of ethnicities and identities are mobilized to satisfy what looks like a structural need for an Other and an enemy”.⁵³ To the question, then, of whether the idea of “race” should be conserved, he replies, “My answer is: Yes, everything must be conserved. The whole unfolding of the conception of race as a scientific and political-cultural concept must be remembered and reframed, especially at a time of racialization run wild.”⁵⁴

Significant for racial realists is accepting “race” as a mediating concept for engaging with “the white things in the world”.⁵⁵ How it will do this, as Mitchell says, is to constantly “seek, test, and of course, ... reject new evidence”.⁵⁶ The approach is essentially a methodology. It carries within it the mechanism and procedure for both intuiting and detecting the conceits and strategies of racism. As racism evolves and takes new shapes, it provides the analytic tools to understand the discursive objects that are in creation.

Conclusion

It is important in working with racial realism to sift out and remain aware of the multiple moves that are in play in the argument that is being made. Two are significant. The first is the distinction it makes between “race” and racism. In Mitchell’s explanation, they are not the same thing. The second is being clear about the work that the concepts do and what purpose they serve.

With respect to the first, Mitchell works hard, not always successfully, I think, to prise apart “race” and racism. He does not succeed, I suggest, simply because of the complexity of the movement between the psychological and the social and the movement from “race” to racism.

So, what are we left with then? Racial realists such as Mitchell concede that “race” is a made-up idea: “[It is] a myth.”⁵⁷ “Race is built”, he says, “with the bodies of myths as well as myths about bodies, and it is constituted as a reality that cannot be erased by fiat.”⁵⁸ It is important to pause there. We have then, even amongst the racial realists, the confirmation of the falsehood of the idea of race. In accepting its falsehood, however, they remain supremely alert to its usefulness for the project of racism. It will play any role that is required. In that, it is utterly plastic. It will be used as it suits its users.

It is the racial realists’ second move that is crucial – that which calls our attention to racism. Demanded from us, they insist, is an explanation of how racism works. And here we are, I would like to suggest, in some difficulty. The explanatory schema of theorists such as Lacan are useful, but we need to see, as Hook, following Bhabha, asks of us, how the whole assemblage of forces operating in the experience of racism, how the material, as it is intersectionally brought together in the economic, the cultural and the social, is entangled and articulated with the psychological, to produce *real* effects.⁵⁹ The “real” of racism, it needs to be emphasised here, is not in “race”, it is in what racism gives rise to. Real advantage. Real disadvantage.

Endnotes

- 1 Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology And Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>
- 2 It continues, in ways that could be described as over-determining, to qualify modes of engagement in even current anti-racist discourses such as Critical Race Theory (see M.E.L. Bush, “Race, Ethnicity, and Whiteness”, *SAGE Race Relations Abstracts* 29, no. 3-4 (2004): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0307920104050563>). The focus of CRT on racism, while deeply important, insufficiently problematises notions of “race”. Anti-racism, it must be stressed, is not the same as “anti-race”.
- 3 See William Clouser Boyd and Isaac Asimov, *Races and People* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1955).
- 4 See Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139939546>
- 5 See Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2006); Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

- 6 See Christa Kuljian, *Darwin's Hunch: Science, Race and the Search for Human Origins* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2016).
- 7 See Crain Soudien, *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 53, <https://doi.org/10.18772/12019063177>
- 8 Soudien, *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s*.
- 9 UNESCO, *The Race Question* (Paris: UNESCO, 1950), para. 14. <https://bit.ly/3bwxMa0>
- 10 See Ashley Montagu, *The Concept of Race* (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1964); Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).
- 11 Richard C. Lewontin, "Is Nature Probable or Capricious?", *BioScience* 16, no. 1 (1966), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1293548>
- 12 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981).
- 13 Lynn B. Jorde and P. Wooding Stephen, "Genetic variation, classification and 'race'", *Nature Genetics* 36, no. 11s (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1038/ng1435>
- 14 American Anthropological Association, "AAA Statement on Race", 1998, <https://bit.ly/2SCOa0c>
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Sandra Soo-Jin Lee et al., "The Ethics of Characterizing Difference: Guiding Principles on Using Racial Categories in Human Genetics", *Genome biology* 9, no. 7 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1186/gb-2008-9-7-404>
- 17 Lee et al., "The Ethics of Characterizing Difference: Guiding Principles on Using Racial Categories in Human Genetics", para. 3.
- 18 Ibid., para. 5.
- 19 Lee et al., "The Ethics of Characterizing Difference: Guiding Principles on Using Racial Categories in Human Genetics", para. 16.
- 20 Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg, *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); David Theo Goldberg, ed., *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- 21 Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Penguin, 2001); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) (*Between Camps* and *Against Race*, even though they have two different titles, are the same book; they were published under different titles in the UK and the USA.); Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black In the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- 22 Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (London: Routledge, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635163>
- 23 Brett St. Louis, "Post-Race/Post-Politics? Activist-Intellectualism and the Reification of Race", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870220136673>
- 24 Zeus Leonardo, "After the Glow: Race Ambivalence and Other Educational Prognoses", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43, no. 6 (2011): 677-78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00645.x>

- 25 Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek and Anand Pandian, *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384656>
- 26 Donaldo Macedo and Panayota Gounari, *The Globalization of Racism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634388>
- 27 Geoffrey Cronjé, *'n Tuiste vir die Nageslag: Die Blywende Oplossing van Suid-Afrika se Rassevraagstukke* (Johannesburg: Publicité, 1945), 8.
- 28 Howard Winant, "Rethinking Race in Brazil", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 1 (1992): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00022999>
- 29 See also Eugenia Demuro, "Examining 'Latinidad' in Latin America: Race, 'Latinidad' and the Decolonial Option", *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012).
- 30 See Zimitri Erasmus and Jacques de Wet, *Not Naming "Race": Some Medical Students' Experiences and Perceptions of "Race" and Racism at the Health Sciences Faculty of the University of Cape Town* (Cape Town: Institute for Intercultural and Diversity Studies in Southern Africa, 2003); Henry A. Giroux, "Spectacles of Race and Pedagogies of Denial: Antiracist Pedagogy", in *Globalization of Racism*, ed. Donaldo Macedo and Panayota Gounari (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2005), 68; Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis, *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum* (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2001); Ciraj Rassool, *Taking the Nation to School: IB Tabata and the Politics of Knowledge* (Bellville: Department of History and Institute for Historical Research, UWC, 2001).
- 31 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 8.
- 32 See Derek Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (London: Psychology Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203140529>
- 33 See Wayne H. Brekhus et al., "On the Contributions of Cognitive Sociology to the Sociological Study of Race", *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2009.00259.x>
- 34 Xolela Mangcu, "Don't Brush Aside the Race Factor: Use It to Build a Reconciled and Diverse Society", *Sunday Times*, 2 December 2012, <https://bit.ly/31VHsXv>
- 35 Mabogo Samuel More, *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2017).
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- 37 Ibid., 15.
- 38 Ibid., 15-16.
- 39 Ibid., 38.
- 40 Ibid., 39.
- 41 Ibid., 17.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 19.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., 21.

- 46 Kwame Anthony Appiah et al., *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400822096>
- 47 Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*.
- 48 Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 39.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., 22.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid., 31.
- 54 Ibid., 32.
- 55 Ibid., 38.
- 56 Ibid., 17.
- 57 Ibid., 23.
- 58 Ibid., 20.
- 59 Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, 16.

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Race and Health

Dilemmas of the South African health researcher

*Jimmy Volmink, Lynn Hendricks,
Lindokuhle Mazibuko & Leslie Swartz*

Introduction

We begin this chapter by discussing responses by members of our team to comments on articles submitted to major international journals focusing on health research. Recently, when one of our manuscripts was close to being accepted, the editors asked the author team to change its use of the term “coloured” to “mixed race”. Shortly after this, another journal asked us to change the term “coloured” to “people of diverse origin”. Some years ago, we were asked by a journal published in the USA to change our use of “coloured” by describing our (South African) research participants as “African American”! Lastly, when a reviewer read a manuscript we wrote about the Mamre Community Health Project, a project in a South African community where most inhabitants identify as “coloured”, we were asked to expand on the rituals and practices of what the reviewer called “the Mamre”. In this particular case, the implication was that there was an African tribe called “the Mamre” similar in nature, we assume, to “the Nuer”, a “tribe” described by Evans-Pritchard¹ in the middle of the twentieth century.

The absurdity of the last two of these examples is obvious, and the requests were therefore easy to resist. In the case of both of the other examples, however, with articles close to acceptance in prestigious journals, we simply complied with what the editors wanted. This was despite the fact that all the authors agreed that technically

all people are “mixed race” and “of diverse origin”. In the event, we queried the editor suggestions in both cases and argued for our use of the word “coloured” as a category with social meaning in South Africa, a category which does not map onto scientifically justifiable “racial” or “origin” categories, but one which may have profound implications for how one is positioned socially.

These examples from our own research highlight what we suspect is a central issue for many health researchers in South Africa. Most of us are not social scientists and are not centrally concerned with the politics of labelling and identity. Instead, we are interested in health matters and in questions of how to improve health. In reflecting on the debacle of the Sport Science article that sparked the controversy which ultimately led to this book, we have no doubt that there is a debate to be had about racism, implicit or explicit, in health research. But there is also a narrative about researchers directing their energies to improving health, not on thinking about and discussing complex social issues. There may also be a story, we suggest, of simple naïvety about social issues which have important bearing on health and health research.

Explaining the influence of race on health and disease

It is incontrovertible that race has profound implications for health and illness, but what are we to make of claims that racial differences or disparities in health are related to biological differences amongst race groups? A book, published under the auspices of the American Anthropological Association, titled *Race: Are We So Different?* offers an in-depth account of current scientific thinking on “race-as-biology” that is helpful for our understanding of the link between race and health.² The authors begin by acknowledging the reality and necessity of human biological variation and continue by making the case that race provides a poor explanation for such biological variation or difference. A number of arguments are offered in support of this view:

1. **Human variation is continuous.** Genetics (allele frequencies) tend to vary gradually, and there is no consistent means of using this information to determine where one race begins and another ends. This reality fits poorly with the idea of race as fixed and unchanging human types. Evolution, rather than race, say the authors, therefore provides the better explanation for human variability;
2. **Human biological variation involves a number of traits which vary independently.** While skin colour, for example, may correlate with a few other phenotypic traits, such as hair and eye colour, there is no evidence that it influences mental abilities, behaviour or disease risk;

3. **Genetic variation within races far exceeds the variation between them.** This means that two individuals who self-identify as “white” may be more genetically different from one another than from someone who self-identifies as “black”; and
4. **There is no method of consistently classifying humans by race.** If groups cannot be defined in a reliable and consistent fashion, it is not possible to make generalisations about them.

Given these limitations to the use of race as an explanation for biological (genetic) difference, how might we account for the observed health differences/disparities across so-called race groups? Why do people of colour, for example, experience worse health throughout the life course and die at younger ages than whites? The most likely reason is that people from different race groups often experience different and unequal social conditions, related to socioeconomic status, educational attainment, nutrition, housing, psychosocial stress, and quality of care. These socially mediated factors, acting directly or in interaction with genetic factors, can lead to health disparities between race groups. It should, at the same time, be kept in mind that peoples’ social experiences, even within one race group, can vary widely, causing substantial within-group health differences.

It further needs to be mentioned that there are instances where causative alleles (genetic risks) do cluster within socially defined racial or ethnic groups (or subgroups), which can contribute to disease incidence varying by race/ethnicity.³ This phenomenon is most commonly encountered in monogenic diseases. Examples include sickle cell anaemia (previously considered to be a disease of black people) in those people whose ancestors lived in malarial areas, Tay-Sachs disease amongst Ashkenazi Jews and cystic fibrosis in people of Northern European descent. Such effects are much less likely to be seen in common diseases, for example, hypertension, diabetes and cancer, where causation is much more complex. For these diseases, numerous genetic variants interact and usually combine with environmental factors to determine disease risk, and the relative contribution of genetic factors to disease incidence is typically small.

Concepts related to race

Two concepts related to race that are regularly conflated with race in the health literature deserve special mention: ethnicity and ancestry.⁴ Ethnicity is often used interchangeably or in combination with race (as race/ethnicity). Ethnic categories are used to group people according to their shared cultural heritage, language, social practice, traditions, and geopolitical considerations. As with race, there is no universal

agreement on how ethnic groups should be defined, and no clear principles for their application in research or practice, which similarly limits the value of ethnicity as an explanatory variable for health differences.

Ancestry refers to the geographical origins of a person's recent biological ancestors, as reflected in the DNA inherited from those ancestors. Genetic ancestry is inferred by comparing an individual's genotype to global reference populations, using ancestry informative markers (AIMs). Unlike race or ethnicity, which is concerned with how a person fits into a particular group, genetic ancestry focuses on how an individual's history has unfolded – essentially, how his or her ancestors moved and mated. Someone's self-identified or assigned race or ethnicity may therefore differ considerably from data computed using AIMs, and may also reflect multiple ancestral origins. "Genetic ancestry" is generally regarded as more useful term for describing human diversity.

As methods used to decipher genetic/genomic information advance and computational capacity improves, and the integration of genetic information with data on the environmental, social and economic drivers of health and disease becomes more widespread, personalised medicine will emerge as a more effective and efficient approach to managing disease.⁵ This development will help shift practice away from the use of race as a marker of disease risk and promote the adoption of more direct and reliable measures at the level of the individual. For now, the ubiquitous and controversial practice of relying on concepts of race and ethnicity to explain health differences will, however, persist. This may have important social consequences, and not just for research. For example, Tsai et al.⁶ reported that race was used as an unexplained, definitive category in the teaching of medical students in the USA, and that essentialist and misleading ideas about race were being reproduced through this education. The same is true of the training of health professionals in many other countries.

International debates about the use of racial terminology in health research

Anguish about how and when or if to use the concept of race in medical research and education is not unique to South Africa. For example, in 2017, the *American Journal of Bioethics* published an article titled "Now Is the Time for a Postracial Medicine: Biomedical Research, the National Institutes of Health, and the Perpetuation of Scientific Racism".⁷ We do not have the space here to review the many responses both in the issue in which the article appeared and elsewhere, but these provide useful contextual readings for anyone considering race issues in health-related research. Recently, Gutin⁸ has joined a global chorus of researchers and scientists calling for health scientists and practitioners to develop a more sophisticated

understanding of race in health research and practice. Our own contribution in this chapter is more modest: we provide a snapshot of health research published by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) at Stellenbosch University. Three of the authors of this chapter are associated with that faculty, and the fourth author is employed at Stellenbosch University and regularly collaborates with colleagues at the FMHS.

Investigating the use of race in health research at Stellenbosch University

We believed that if as an institution we were serious about addressing the problems associated with the publication of the Sport Science article on “colored women”, it would be important to understand the context of that article. An important part of that context is the landscape of health-related research published at Stellenbosch University (SU). We, therefore, became interested in looking at how the concept of “race” was being used by researchers at the FMHS. This led to our decision to conduct a mini-review of articles published over a one-year period (2018) by researchers based at the Faculty. We aimed to determine how often the concept of “race” was used in research and to explore why and how racial categories were used. Additionally, we examined the extent to which use of the race concept conformed to previous international guidance on the use and reporting of race in biomedical research.⁹

We plan to report the detail of our review elsewhere, but for purposes of this chapter, we note, probably not surprisingly, that there was striking heterogeneity in terms used for “racial categories” across the 15 relevant articles we identified (see Table 7.1), and in almost none of these articles was the use of the categories discussed in any detail. It is simply not clear, in most cases, what the authors understood by the categories they were using.

It is possible that the sheer number of unexplained terms used in the articles may in itself reflect conflicts and confusions regarding what may be the “appropriate” terms to use, and it may also reflect not the researchers’ own preferences, but suggestions and requirements from journal editors, as we ourselves have experienced.

We noted a general conflation of concepts of ancestry, ethnicity and race. Race was commonly presented as a stable category and a risk factor for various health outcomes. In some articles, a distinction was made between the supposed “homogeneity” of the black or white racial groups, as against the “mixed” nature of the coloured group. This distinction, in terms of genetic variation, is not justified. Here, we see a clear conflation between ideas of genetic diversity and aspects of social categorisation.

We do not attribute any ill intention to this conflation, but it does speak to the overlay of unsubstantiated “race science” thinking – a legacy from imperial and apartheid views of races – in current health science research. The colonial and apartheid category of “coloured” was constituted precisely as a boundary-breaking condition constituted largely through the breach of miscegenation taboos. As Posel¹⁰ notes, it is the “coloured” label that was defined in the Population Registration Act as “a person who is not a white person nor a native”, which creates a particular challenge for common-sense or naïve understandings, as it violates the neatness of supposedly “pure” categories. Given this, it is probably not surprising that the article that sparked this book was one dealing not with other “racial” categories, but with the category of “coloured”, the constitution of which implies a breaking of boundaries, and hence a taboo.

TABLE 7.1: Terms used for referring to apartheid era and other racial categories

Black	White	Coloured	Indian
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Black African ▪ Black ▪ Bantu ▪ Black Xhosa-speaking ▪ Black Xhosa African ▪ African ▪ Black African descents (black population) ▪ Native Africans ▪ Xhosa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ White ▪ European ▪ Caucasian ▪ European descents (white population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mixed ancestry ▪ Mixed ▪ Coloured ▪ South African Coloured ▪ Khoisan ▪ Coloured, Mixed ancestry ▪ Admixed ▪ Mixed descents (coloured population) ▪ Mixed population ▪ Mixed race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indian ▪ Asian

Discussion

It is clear that as health researchers, we cannot and should not be taking “racial” categories for granted – we should not be skipping over the challenge of engaging with complexity. Following international and local guidelines, we suggest the following.

The reason for using race or ethnicity should be specified

Whenever researchers use race in research, they should provide clear justification for doing so. The use of terms such as race or ethnicity without explanation can reinforce the impression that these are natural means of grouping people,¹¹ or that

group differences are genetically determined, with little or no influence from social and environmental factors.¹² Such practice also creates the idea of certain race/ethnic groups being genetically “at-risk”, which can reinforce racial stereotypes.¹³

Almost half of the studies we reviewed failed to state the purpose for using race as a variable, and in cases where authors did provide reasons, the majority expressed interest in studying race as a biological variable (a proxy for genetic risk), which is not feasible in the absence of actual genetic evidence. Furthermore, we found no studies where the intention was to evaluate race as a marker for socially mediated forces, and none that specifically focused on racial or ethnic discrimination or structural racism as potential drivers of health disparities.¹⁴

Racial categories should be described and justified

Racial categories are often broad and overlapping and can have ambiguous or contradictory meanings amongst researchers, research participants, and the general public.¹⁵ The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has recommended the following:

Authors should define how they determined race or ethnicity and justify their relevance. Authors should use neutral, precise, and respectful language to describe study participants and avoid the use of terminology that might stigmatize participants.¹⁶

We found that authors sometimes used a variety of labels in referring to a particular race group in different parts of the same article. In addition, multiple terms for the same racial/ethnic group were often used across studies. This lack of uniformity makes interpretation of the reported findings challenging. We further noted the adoption of the term “Caucasian”. The history of the origins of this term is instructive.¹⁷ Introduced in 1795 by the naturalist Johann Blumenbach, it was originally used in reference to a skull found in the Caucasus Mountains (between the Black and Caspian Seas) that was used by Blumenbach to exemplify his “superior race”, which later came to be synonymous with the “white race”. The continued use of the term “Caucasian” is problematic, because it lacks meaning (most white people do not have their origins in the Caucasus; there is no Caucasoid language or culture, etc.) and also because it is offensive, given its links to ideas of white supremacy.

Our review further found that in most studies, investigators either did not state how race was determined or indicated that self-reporting had been used. Racial or ethnic self-identification presents a number of challenges, which should be acknowledged, such as the fact that identities are complex and multi-layered. People may, for example, resent the imposition of a particular race category and choose another, or

they may identify with more than one group. Self-identity can also evolve across time or place, along with the changing social or political meanings associated with a particular classification.¹⁸

All relevant variables should be considered in the analyses

Most health problems arise from the social conditions in which people live and work, from their genetic make-up and from interactions between the two. In addition, racism and other forms of discrimination mediated through psychosocial stress, poor healthcare access and differential quality of care can have profound effects on health disparities. Researchers assessing differences in health attributes or disease risks amongst groups defined by race, ethnicity or ancestry should therefore exercise care in attributing racial differences to genetic factors without considering all relevant sociocultural and environmental factors. While a number of the studies in our sample gave some attention to confounding variables, very few of these variables were considered or adjusted for in the analyses. In particular, socioeconomic and educational factors received scant attention, and the word “racism” did not feature in any of the 15 studies.

The use of race or ethnicity as markers of biological variation should be discouraged

Using race in health research and practice perpetuates the idea of inherent racial differences that can impact negatively on patient care in several ways.¹⁹ First, “clinical racial profiling” can contribute to diagnoses being delayed or missed. For example, a doctor may fail to consider a diagnosis of sickle cell disease in a patient who looks or self-identifies as white, if she considers the disease to be more prevalent in black people. Second, viewing patients through a racial lens encourages evaluation of people as representatives of particular race groups, rather than as individuals. This can promote racial bias in the delivery of care. It has, for example, been documented that the erroneous belief that blacks are less likely to experience pain than whites influences the way black patients are perceived, and accounts for racial disparities in pain assessment and treatment.²⁰ A third way the understanding of “race-as-biology” can undermine the quality of patient care is by fostering a mind-set that undervalues the importance of the social, environmental and structural causes of disease. Thus the study of the biological costs of social factors, operating through racism and other forms of discrimination, generally tends to be neglected in health research.²¹

It needs to be emphasised that even though race and ethnicity in research can have value in tracking and addressing health disparities, they remain poor surrogates for genetic variability (as noted earlier in this chapter) and therefore their use in studying disease risk is discouraged. Ancestry, ideally estimated through direct

measurement of genomic information, rather than self-report, offers a better way of assessing genetic susceptibility. It has been recommended that health researchers use biogeographical (genetic) “ancestry” to study the potential health effects of genetic variation, “race” to describe socially-mediated health disparities; and “ethnicity” where the interest is in evaluating such factors as traditions, lifestyle, diet and values.²² Our review demonstrated a great deal of confusion and inconsistency in the way these terms are being used, with many instances being identified of authors using the labels interchangeably.

Conclusions

Ours was a small study, occasioned by a particular impetus. Our intention in this chapter is not to argue for representivity of the articles we reviewed, but rather to provide a partial institutional context for understanding the article that led to the outcry. It is also important for us to acknowledge that because of where we ourselves are placed, we looked at publications from only one faculty in one university – without more research, we cannot say how representative our findings may be of health research more generally in South Africa. We suspect that we would find many similar usages of terms across a range of South African universities and research institutions, but we cannot, of course, be sure of this without having the data.

Overall, the picture we saw is similar to what has been reported in the international medical literature: use of terms of convenience or shorthand terms to designate research populations, with very little engagement with what terms mean, and with the common conflation between the concepts of race, ethnicity, ancestry, or genetic variation. In all the articles we reviewed, researchers were focused on clinical and health issues of concern, and in general, mention of race or ethnicity was secondary to the primary aim of the research.

We do not believe that it is helpful to blame medical researchers for this – the patterns we see are similar to what is seen globally and reflect the limitations inherent in health sciences education, where race is often dealt with as a “black box” concept, representing presumed biological (genetic), environmental, social and cultural factors affecting health.²³ But what is key here is that we can see how health research in our own faculty is reproducing the problems identified in the local and the international literature regarding the use of these categories. As readers of the articles we reviewed, we cannot know what the thinking was on the part of researchers in their approaches to questions of reporting of race and ethnicity, and this is a question for further research. On an impressionistic basis, however, and recognising the limitations of our interpretation of motives that are not explicitly mentioned by authors, we suggest that there are two key issues which should be

addressed in further research and training. The first of these may be the somewhat unthinking use of labels without due care to their complexity, and the second may be the wish to avoid discussion of an issue which many South African authors are well aware has been a source of great pain and injustice, but not the focus of concern of the researchers themselves. Both these responses (if we are correct that they are there) are understandable. It is clear that for South African health research to move forward in a more scholarly manner with respect to the use of racial labels in research, we need to be aware of and to implement existing international guidelines. It is also incumbent upon us, however, to consider the local context and the particular history of racial terminology and divisions in our country, and the ongoing legacy of this in our work at present.

Endnotes

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Of “Basters” and “Bastards”

Overcoming the problematic connection of race and gender in the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation

Juliana Claassens

During the fallout from the now infamous Sport Science article,¹ a colleague of mine in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University shared an anecdote of some coloured woman who was removed from a shortlist for some position at some company. The reason for this decision: “You know, that study”

Some coloured woman. Some position. Some company. Like most anecdotes, this one is not easily verified. However, what rings true about it is what everyone knows who so fiercely critiqued this study portraying *some* coloured South African women as somehow representing *all* coloured South African women: ethnic and gender stereotypes, once they are out there, have an effect. And even though the article has been retracted, the stereotypes out there remain out there.

A mere translation error?

I first became aware of the incredible power of identity constructions to cause injury while still a student at Stellenbosch University, studying Hebrew. My professor, Ferdinand Deist, taught our class about the incredible harm a translation error can inflict. In his article “The Dangers of Deuteronomy”,² he shows how a translation error in the first Afrikaans Bible translation of 1933 was used as “proof” of God’s “intent” to keep races separate. In a series of laws in Deuteronomy 23, the offspring of an incestuous relationship (NRSV “illicit union”, Hebrew *mamzēr*) are prohibited

from becoming part of the congregation of God (*qēhal yhw̄h*) (Deut. 23:2). This exclusionary law is followed in the next verse by the prohibition against an Ammonite or a Moabite ever setting foot in God's congregation (Deut. 23:3), even up to the tenth generation.

These two laws together likely reflected the troubling story of the two daughters of Lot who, after the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone, slept with their intoxicated father, as told in Genesis 19:30-38. The two sons born of this incestuous relationship, Ammon and Moab, would become the ancestors of these banned peoples.³

These laws and the associated narrative in Genesis 19 are troubling enough in themselves. However, the 1933 Afrikaans Bible translation caused far greater problems when it turned the Hebrew word *mamzēr*, meaning a child born of incest, into "baster", or "a child born from parents of different races". This corruption of the original meaning was most likely inspired by an earlier, also erroneous, translation – this time of *mamzēr* into the Dutch "bastaard" (cognate to the English "bastard"), which changed its meaning to "a child born out of wedlock".⁴

My Greek professor always used to say, "*un traduttore è un traditore*" – "a translator is a traitor". In this case, though, the translation error had very serious real-world consequences, as a law about incest was turned first into a reference to sexual immorality ("bastaard"), and then, by the Afrikaans translators, into a matter of race ("baster"). The effect of this most problematic line of interpretation was that it condoned prohibiting and expelling individuals from the community of believers – individuals who in today's terms would be described as of mixed-race heritage, or in the South African context, "coloured".

This unfortunate page in the history of biblical interpretation illustrates two things: First, the construction of race and gender in the Hebrew Bible is in itself quite often extremely problematic and in need of serious critical interrogation. And second, the interpretations of these troubling representations of gender and race have also been greatly problematic and equally in need of serious critical investigation.

In this chapter, as a feminist biblical interpreter who for the past nine years has sought to cultivate critical hermeneutical skills in the next generation of biblical interpreters,⁵ I will ask two questions. First, how is one to understand the troubling way race and gender is presented in Deuteronomy 23, which aligns with the narrative of Moab and Ammon's birth story in Genesis 19? And second, how does one explain the problematic association between race and gender that shaped the original translation error and continues to this day, as manifested in the Sport Science article published by students and a faculty member at my university.

Border anxiety

The first task of critical biblical interpretation is to try to understand the disturbing connection drawn in these narrative and legal traditions between the Ammonites/Moabites and incest, which the translation error also later racialised. In this regard, it is important to know that rules about both food and sex played a vital role in creating and maintaining boundaries between Israel and her neighbors. Especially in the Book of Leviticus, many of the laws have to do with the distinction between clean/unclean, pure/impure, permitted/forbidden foods, as well as sexual activities that were considered to be crucial in delineating Israel's identity from that of other nations.

For instance, in Leviticus 20:22, at the end of a section outlining forbidden sexual relationships, one finds the commandment to keep all the statutes and commandments so that "the land in which you live does not vomit you out" – vomiting being closely associated with the act of casting out, or one could say, abjection.⁶ The divine commandment further calls upon the people to separate themselves from other, unclean, or one could say, disgusting nations so that they may be holy as God is holy (Lev. 20:26).⁷ A similar tendency is also evident in Numbers 25:1-3, where God is portrayed as furious with the people of Israel who "defiled themselves" by their sexual liaisons with Moabite women and their suspicious food practices, which involved eating and bowing down before Baal of Peor.⁸

In particular, the obsession with sex, which exhibits strong connotations of disgust, is frequently used to demonise the vile sexual practices of the Other. This point has been compellingly made by Randall Bailey,⁹ who demonstrates how sexual rhetoric is used to stigmatise and to mark as repulsive members of other ethnic groups. This includes the Canaanites as well as the Moabites and Ammonites whose birth story is depicted in Genesis 19, as we have seen.¹⁰ Such stereotypical representations are almost never rooted in any real observations, but rather in preexisting ideas and feelings of hatred and resentment towards the Other. Kenneth Stone,¹¹ drawing on the work of anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, writes that "beliefs about the shameless sexual behaviors of others are put forward even when opportunities for the actual observation of such persons and practices are absent".

Nevertheless, such representations, void of reality as they may be, are psychologically incredibly strong as justifications for acts of abjection. In the story of Lot's daughters that tells of the origins of the Moabites and the Ammonites, it is the close association between sex and disgust that grounds the demonisation and discrediting of the others in Israel's midst whose presence has become threatening to the fragile boundaries of the self. Citing the work of Jonathan Smith, Johnny Miles puts it

this way: “The real problematic emerges when the ‘other’ is ‘TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US’, or when he claims to ‘BE-US’.”¹²

Thus, the story of Lot’s daughters expresses, on a deeply existential level, Israel’s struggle with the Other in her midst – the near descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot, presented as being born out of repulsive sexual union and hence worthy of being abjected, as decreed in the harsh laws in Deuteronomy 23:2-3. Through these laws and their associated narratives, one sees how boundaries are drawn in terms of revolting sexual practices – incest being particularly offensive in nature. By repeating expressions of disgust in law and in narrative, a certain representation of a particular group is fixed and perpetuated.¹³

It is precisely because there did not exist clear demarcations between Israel and Canaan, or between Israel and Moab/Ammon, that one finds the conscious or subconscious attempts in Israel’s legal and narrative traditions to alleviate what Marion Young has described as “border anxiety”.¹⁴ It is this anxiety over fragile borders that is responsible for the drive to create clear boundaries between “us” and “them”.

These stories and laws addressing illicit sexual practices that are closely associated with disgust, and hence abjection, can thus be explained in terms of this process of identity construction. Bailey puts it well: “The effect of both the narrative in Genesis 19 and the laws in Deuteronomy 23, therefore, is to label within the consciousness of the reader the view of these nations as nothing more than ‘incestuous bastards’.”¹⁵

From disgust to abjection

It is one thing to understand how identity construction works in these ancient narratives and laws. It is another to gain insight also into the human condition that is responsible for such sharp divisions between “us” and “them”, not only in the biblical traditions, but also in interpretations of texts and scholarly engagements today, which, as shown in the case of the Sport Science article, are greatly harmful to flesh-and-blood individuals.

The work of Sarah Ahmed on emotions is quite helpful in this regard. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed outlines how the powerful emotion of disgust finds its roots in the way we react from a very early age to things that we perceive to be revolting – in terms of taste, smell, or texture.¹⁶ The emotion of disgust causes strong bodily reactions, from feeling nauseous to cringing and pulling one’s face. Psychologically, the individual, when confronted with what is deemed disgusting, instinctively recoils, thereby distancing him/herself from the tainted

object. On a physical level, this notion of distancing is evident in the act of spewing out, or vomiting that which is considered disgusting.¹⁷

Disgust thus becomes a marker of that which is considered to be inferior or intolerable. Martha Nussbaum shows how, throughout history, various individuals and groups, including Jews, Muslims, women, gays and lesbians, African Americans, and also, in our South African context, black, coloured and Indian individuals, have been subjected to what Nussbaum describes as "projective disgust".¹⁸

The emotion of disgust, with its strong reflex of recoiling or distancing oneself from the contaminating "other", merges then with other emotions, such as hatred and fear, which together serve the purpose of creating distance between the self and the Other.¹⁹ In this regard, the performative nature of disgust is important. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of "performativity", Ahmed writes about "the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration".²⁰ By repeating what is deemed objectionable in discourse such as laws and narratives, one is able to "generate a community of those who are bound together through the shared condemnation of a disgusting object or event".²¹

In such expressions of disgust, stereotypes play a crucial role. Ahmed employs the useful designation of "sticky signs" to demonstrate how stereotypical perceptions come to be connected to bodies. For example, the term "Paki", in Ahmed's London context, has become an insult through repeated association with the ideas "immigrant, outsider, dirty". However, she argues that "such words do not have to be used once the sign becomes sticky. To use a sticky sign is to evoke other words, which have become intrinsic to the sign through past forms of association".²²

In this process, stereotypes identify a couple of essential characteristics regarding the way the Other is perceived to look or act, and then proceed to reduce these individuals or groups to these characteristics. As Miles explains, by means of "blanket generalizations",²³ such traits are "taken out of context and attributed to everyone associated with that characteristic". Drawing at the same time on difference as well as similarity, Miles notes that stereotypes work with the assumption that "'they' are both different from 'us' yet very much like one another".²⁴

Such stereotypical constructions of the Other that reduce, essentialise, naturalise and fix difference, are, according to Miles, "constructed by and for the benefit of the subject to achieve masterful self-definition".²⁵ However, "by naming and defining the characteristics of the Other, the dominant self denies 'others' their right to name and define themselves". Stereotypes thus inadvertently serve what Martha Nussbaum describes as "a fundamental refusal of another person's full humanity".²⁶

Stereotypical thinking about ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability that considers the Other to be inferior, repulsive or disgusting, should therefore be named for what it is: a form of interpretative violence that has very real consequences to this day. Discussing Hispanic Americans in the United States, Miles demonstrates how “ethnic stereotypes in the public discourse”,²⁷ expressed in racialised jokes, or as characters on television shows or commercials, have the function of “privileg[ing] one ethnic group by denying the ‘other’ its identity, suppressing its voice and, simultaneously, that nation’s own origins”. One only has to look to the toxic rhetoric of the current American president about Mexicans “invading” the United States, and calling them “criminals, rapists, thugs and animals”, to see the power and the danger of such representations.²⁸ Citing the work of Michael Pickering,²⁹ Miles shows how such identity constructions both “feed upon and reinforce powerful social and national myths”.³⁰

Looking again at our original example, we today may find it shocking how easily the Afrikaner interpreters could take over the identity constructions of the Moabites and Ammonites that are rooted in associations between illicit sex, disgust and abjection. We may find it even more disturbing to contemplate how these Afrikaner interpreters could further apply these ethnic stereotypes to their own context by racialising them through a translation error. However, there are numerous contemporary examples of how ethnic, as well as gendered, stereotypes continue to flourish in public discourse. The dangers such misrepresentations pose to the human dignity of those individuals and groups who have been reduced to a stereotype should guide our current and future scholarly endeavours.

From disgust to humanity

So how does one resist such harmful identity constructions and refuse to view what is other or different from oneself as inferior, or with suspicion, or even with disgust? Martha Nussbaum, in her examination of how prevalent the language of disgust has been in the political discourse that seeks to deny sexual minorities equal rights in the United States,³¹ makes a case for moving beyond what she describes as a “politics of disgust” to a “politics of humanity”.³²

According to Nussbaum, “Disgust diminishes the other, making ‘those’ people look base, more like animals or devils, without the full dignity of a person.”³³ To transcend a politics of disgust and replace it with a politics of humanity, according to Nussbaum, requires respect, deeply rooted in “the ability to see that the other is a person”³⁴ – a person with human hopes and dreams, but also, with just as human insecurities and fears – a person who is a subject, and hence “a center of perception, emotion, and reason, rather than an inert object”.³⁵

Importantly, respect, which is imperative for a politics of humanity, cannot be separated from what Nussbaum describes as “participatory imagination”.³⁶ According to Nussbaum, “[o]nly imagination animates the cold and abstract categories of morality and law, turning them into ways we can live together.”³⁷

The capacity for imaginative and emotional participation in the lives of others is an essential ingredient of any respect worthy the name. Only this capacity makes real an ability that is a key part of respect, the ability to see the other as an end, not as a mere means. The politics of humanity includes, then, both respect and imagination, and imagination understood as an ingredient essential to respect itself.³⁸

Such participatory imagination can, and ought to, be applied on various levels. In the first instance, participatory imagination extends to the world of the biblical text, as readers enter “the lives of others” from a very long time ago, and in a very different part of the world. Some of the interpretative tools employed in contemporary biblical interpretation, such as feminist, postcolonial, and queer biblical interpretation, as well as the recent approach of trauma hermeneutics, all have in common a commitment to read against the grain of the text, and to identify with the marginalised, the most vulnerable, and the subordinated or subaltern others in the text.³⁹

These contextual approaches to biblical interpretation can be described as “theology from below”. Contextual biblical interpreters ask important questions, such as Who has the power? What hidden forms of systemic or structural violence ought to be brought to light? What would those without a voice feel or think or say or do if they were given the opportunity? These approaches all interrogate constructions about the Other – as defined in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or class. And they share an interest in creating space for alternative, life-giving interpretations to emerge that take seriously the experiences of those whose voices have not been heard, or whose identities have been crushed by the stereotypical constructs forced upon them by those in power.⁴⁰

However, participatory imagination extends also into the real world. Interpreters of biblical texts, and also scholars writing academic articles, live in communities with flesh-and-blood people who can be hurt by interpretations and stereotypical constructs about them that are rooted in a conscious or subconscious desire to name and control the Other. Participatory imagination requires changing one’s positionality, being aware of one’s own prejudices and blind spots, and most importantly, seeing the Other “as an end, not as a mere means”⁴¹ – as a subject in his/her own right and not as an object to be studied and controlled. Such an attitude is described by Nussbaum as a “curious, questioning, and receptive demeanor that says, in effect, ‘Here is another human being. I wonder what he (or she) is seeing and feeling right now’”.⁴²

Conclusion

At a colloquium organised by members of the Stellenbosch University Council to help members of the community process and deal with the Sport Science article, Professor Jonathan Jansen declared: “I was surprised that you were surprised by this article.” What he captured in this statement is that we at Stellenbosch University have to face a long and painful history of scholarship that has caused, and continues to cause, a great deal of hurt with its racial and gendered ideologies.

However, what gives me hope is that there are individuals at this same university, in various departments and from different disciplines, who are fighting for things to be different. This is true of many of us who seek to challenge harmful biblical interpretations that perpetuate problematic identity constructions in terms of race, gender, class and sexual orientation, as it was also true in the case of the essay written more than 25 years ago by the professor who taught me Hebrew.

Martha Nussbaum remains hopeful that societies (and, here, I would add universities) may change, that people can unlearn disgust, can transcend racism, sexism, and homophobia, by replacing a politics of disgust with a politics of humanity. However, as she reminds us: “Ultimately, the process involves transformation at the level of the human heart, and that means that it requires great patience.”⁴³

Patience, yes. But I would also say, resolve and commitment, in addition to hard, dedicated work. And do not forget about institutional will.

Endnotes

- 1 Sharné Nieuwoudt et al., “Retracted Article: Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women”, *Neuropsychology, Development, and Cognition. Section B: Aging, Neuropsychology And Cognition* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825585.2019.1598538>
- 2 Ferdinand E. Deist, “The Dangers of Deuteronomy: A Page from the Reception History of the Book”, in *Studies in Deuteronomy: In Honour of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. F. García Martínez et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 26-27.
- 3 Ruth Tsoffar, “The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot’s Daughters”, *Women in Judaism* 5, no. 1 (2007): 7-8.
- 4 Deist, “The Dangers of Deuteronomy: A Page from the Reception History of the Book”, 26-27.
- 5 These critical hermeneutical skills pertain to methodological approaches such as gender, postcolonial, and queer biblical interpretation that all seek to critically interrogate representations of gender, race and sexual orientation in the biblical text, but also by the interpreters of the text.

- 6 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5-6. Kristeva, from a psychoanalytic point of view, describes the notion of “abjection” as an important part of identity formation. The “I” explores the boundaries of the self and deems objectionable that which does not fit into the vision of what constitutes the borders of the self.
- 7 Ken Stone, *Practising Safer Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 50.
- 8 Ibid., 53.
- 9 Randall C. Bailey, “They’re Nothing But Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives”, in *Reading from This Place. Vol. 1, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 123-24.
- 10 Stone, *Practising Safer Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective*, 63. Stone describes how William Albright was quite influential in cementing the notion of the wicked Canaanites, particularly in terms of their “sexual abominations” when it came to justifying their extermination.
- 11 Ibid., 51.
- 12 Johnny E. Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 14; Jonathan Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes”, in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs and Caroline McCracken-Flesher (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 47.
- 13 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 93.
- 14 Stone, *Practising Safer Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective*, 58-67; Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 144.
- 15 Bailey, “They’re Nothing But Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives”, 131.
- 16 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85. See also Kristeva’s notion of the abject, which has been important for a discussion of Israel’s process of identity formation, particularly as it pertains to Israel’s relationship to her neighbor in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-6. See also J. Cheryl Exum, “Hagar en Procès: The Abject in Search of Subjectivity”, in *From the Margins 1: Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg (Sheffield Sheffield Phoenix Press Limited, 2009), 1.
- 17 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.
- 18 Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 23, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674065918>. For a more extensive engagement with Nussbaum’s work on the intersection of fear and disgust and its relevance for the Hebrew Bible, see L. Juliana Claassens, “From Fear’s Narcissism to Participatory Imagination: Disrupting Disgust and Overcoming the Fear of Israel’s Hērem Laws”, in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature*, ed. F. Scott Spencer (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 77-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w1vm30.8>

- 19 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 88.
- 20 Ibid., 92; See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.
- 21 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92.
- 22 Ibid.; See also L. Juliana Claassens, “God and Violence in the Prophets”, in *Oxford Handbook to the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 339, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199859559.013.19>
- 23 Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA*, 32.
- 24 Ibid., 38.
- 25 Ibid., 32.
- 26 Martha C. Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xiv.
- 27 Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA*, 138.
- 28 Anthony Rivas, “Trump’s Language about Mexican Immigrants Under Scrutiny in Wake of El Paso Shooting”, *ABC News*, 4 August 2019, <https://abcn.ws/3bsDKsJ>; Philip Rucker “How Do You Stop These People?: Trump’s Anti-immigrant Rhetoric Looms Over El Paso Massacre”, *The Washington Post*, 4 August 2019, <https://wapo.st/31ME1IH>
- 29 Michael Pickering, “Racial Stereotypes”, in *Social Identities: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Gary Taylor and Steve Spencer (New York: Routledge, 2004), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203338674_chapter_5
- 30 Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA*, 39; Pickering, “Racial Stereotypes”, 97.
- 31 Dahlia Lithwick, “Why Has a Divided America Taken Gay Rights Seriously? A Philosopher Credits the Power of Imagination”, *Slate*, 8 March 2010, <https://bit.ly/2Sl6kEI>. According to Lithwick, Nussbaum demonstrates how “much of the political rhetoric around denying equal rights to gay Americans is rooted in the language of disgust. Their activities are depicted as ‘vile and revolting’, threatening to ‘contaminate and defile’ the rest of us. Looked at starkly, she argues, much of the anti-gay argument is bound up in feces and saliva, germs, contagion and blood.”
- 32 Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, xii-xxiii.
- 33 Ibid., 48.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., xix.
- 36 See also Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age*, 2-3.
- 37 Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, xix.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 See, for example, two collections of essays that include some of the scholars who are reading the Hebrew Bible in such a way, Christl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); L. Juliana Claassens and Carolyn J. Sharp, *Feminist Frameworks and the Bible: Celebrating Intersectionality, Interrogating Power, Embracing Ambiguity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

- 40 My own work exploring the intersection of gender and trauma is informed by exactly these questions. For instance, with regard to the story of Lot’s daughters, I seek to enter the text by means of what can be described as participatory imagination as I employ such approaches as feminist, postcolonial biblical interpretation and trauma hermeneutics to identify the multiple, intersecting levels of the traumatic memories of Israel and her neighbours that continue to haunt Israel as they seek to make sense of their place in the world; see “Excavating Trauma Narratives: Haunting Memories in the Story of Lot’s Daughters”, in *Transgression and Transformation: The Role of Feminist, Postcolonial and Queer Biblical Interpretation in Fostering Communities of Justice* (London: T&T Clark, in press).
- 41 Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, xix.
- 42 Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age*, 2-3.
- 43 Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, xx.

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Disability

The forgotten side of race science

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The impetus for this book was an article, the first line of the abstract of which reads: “Colored women in South Africa have an increased risk for low cognitive functioning.”¹ There is no question that the article reproduces racist ideas, and we are in agreement with the authors of the other chapters in this book. There is, however, another side to this article that has been less discussed. What does it mean to describe a group of people as having “increased risk for low cognitive functioning”? In much that has been written about the article, there has been almost no discussion of the social context in which the idea of somebody having, or being at risk of, “low cognitive functioning” is seen, automatically, as a form of insult.

In this chapter, we will not go into any detail about the methodological and measurement problems associated with the Sport Science article – others have done that. But we do want to point out that all the patterns of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of “race” link very strongly to other forms of exclusion and discrimination – and, notably, to discrimination on the basis of disability. People whose bodies or minds differ from what is seen as “normal” have been stigmatised and socially excluded for centuries.² This includes people with what has been termed “low cognitive functioning” and people with a range of other differences from the mainstream in terms of bodies and minds.

In a country with a history like South Africa's, it is appropriate that scholars should be very concerned with questions of race, racial exclusion, and the legacy of the racist science of eugenics. But eugenics has always been concerned not just with the issue of race as a form of exclusion and supposed inferiority, but also with disability. It was no anomaly that during the Nazi regime, for example, the first people to be murdered were killed not on the basis of their supposed racial inferiority, such as Jews and people of Sinti and Roma origin, or on the basis of what were seen as their immoral sexual habits, such as homosexuals. The first people to be killed were killed on the basis of being disabled.³ In Hitler's view, and in Nazi ideology, disabled people were commonly viewed as "useless feeders", a drain on limited state resources (and, by implication, on the hard work and sacrifice of nondisabled people), and hence worthy of extermination.⁴ What has been termed "the genocidal gaze"⁵ had its roots not only in the slaughter of Herero people in Namibia long before World War II, but also in the killing of disabled people.

Race and disability scholars have examined the intertwinings between race and disability issues in a number of ways. Most prominent at present, perhaps, is an intersectionality approach, following on the work of Crenshaw.⁶ Exploring this approach, Erelles and Minear note that there are many ways in which intersectionality can be understood and applied.⁷ These may range from scholars who regard all identity markers as social constructions to others who argue that central to understanding intersectionality must be an appreciation of categories such as race, gender, and disability, as categories of embodiment, profoundly affecting one's being in the world, even if the categories by which one is excluded are socially constructed. Recently, Loutzenheiser and Erelles note the importance of a disability approach to understanding educational exclusion for helping to "complicate spectacles of inclusion".⁸ They suggest that "disability is central to the very logic of oppression and its concomitant violence in social and educational contexts".⁹ Exclusion and oppression are common features of the experience of all excluded groups; disability is an especially productive category to study in the educational context, because a number of impairments (such as, for example, blindness or inability to walk) have an embodied reality that exists apart from social exclusion, but these impairments only become disabilities in the context of social exclusion and oppression. Watermeyer, for example, discusses how there is a reality to his visual impairment that affects his ability to browse in a library, but that there is a politics at stake when books are not available to him in accessible form.¹⁰ A disability lens is helpful for understanding racism and racial oppression in the academy, not just because of its drawing attention to issues of embodiment but also because of its showing how the educational context may act to counteract or contradict the indisputable realities of the need for appropriate inclusion of bodies which are not the norm.

Recent work examining eugenic and Nazi ideologies demonstrates how clearly ideas about racial othering and ideas about disability are not only similar and intertwined but also, to a degree, mutually constitutive. Robertson, Ley and Light note that the Nazi exterminations – and especially those murders that ended lives viewed as not worth living – were predicated on the idea that some lives have value, and some do not.¹¹ The Jewish other, the Sinti or Roma other, or any variant on an othered “racial” group, was constructed as similar in some way to the disabled other – living a life not worth living, and, crucially, becoming burdensome to the healthy population. It is clear if we look at the Sport Science article that, regardless of the authors’ intentions, there is something in the construction of coloured women’s cognitive inferiority that their lives are seen both as less worthy and as burdensome to others. The notionally neutral language of epidemiology – “increased risk for low cognitive functioning” – inserts the article into discussions of deficit on the basis of both race and disability, deficits that may be burdensome to others.

Imada makes explicit the links between ideas about disability and the colonial project more broadly:

In the broadest sense, colonialism demanded able bodyminds from subordinated subjects. Colonial projects imposed impossible regimes and expectations of self-regulation its subjects would not be able to perform. Thus, the colonized were *always already figured and constituted as disabled* [emphasis in the original], whether because of their perceived unproductivity as laborers; embodied racial-sexual differences; “unchaste” proclivities of their women; susceptibility to moral contagion and infectious diseases; or inability to learn. In the undulating colonial hall of mirrors, the inversion of these qualities – too much learnedness and the adoption of European manners, for example – could mean colonized people had failed to maintain the vigor of their “race”. Thus, we begin to see how disability operated as a flexible and capacious concept and a very useful weapon during the incarceration, elimination, and removal of unfit colonial Others.¹²

For the purposes of this chapter, a crucial feature of Imada’s argument is her recognition that the concept of disability is flexible enough to exclude and dehumanise people in a range of ways. For Imada, colonised people were constituted as disabled when they passed the threshold of being “at risk” for not being as clever or learned enough; but they were also disabled if they were indeed “clever”, as this state of learnedness removed them from their natural state.¹³ In brief, as we can see from the work of Imada and of Robertson et al., as soon as there is a discussion of race, there cannot not at some level be a discussion of disability.¹⁴ But this discussion may well be submerged and implicit.

In South Africa, because race has been, and continues to be, such a prominent and important source of discrimination and exclusion, it is probably not altogether

surprising that disability tends to be overlooked. As we have argued¹⁵ recently, though, silences around disability exclusion in higher education are serious and have negative consequences for anyone wanting to create a truly inclusive higher education system. An education system, and a system of research, that does not engage with questions of difference on the basis of diversity of bodies and minds, cannot claim to be fully inclusive. Similarly, if we view the reproduction of racist or sexist or homophobic research as a form of symbolic violence,¹⁶ it is also important to consider that the relative lack of attention given to disability in South Africa may also be a form of symbolic violence.¹⁷ Not considering disability, not seeing it, not thinking about it, is a form of effacement, a way of making disability a non-issue and, by implication, of making disabled people into non-people.

The authors of this chapter are all white South Africans, and in this we all acknowledge our historical and contemporary privilege. We work at three different universities, three of us in the privileged position of having permanent academic positions, and one of us being in a more precarious temporary academic post. Three of us have severe visual impairments that affect our daily work. In order to illustrate how disability exclusion is enacted in institutions such as our own, we now present a story from each of the disabled authors of this chapter. We will then discuss the implications of these stories for thinking about diversity in higher education in South Africa.

Story 1: Disability and the politics of time

I am a visually impaired (completely blind) lecturer at my university. Because of my disability, people are often interested to know how I do my job. They ask, for example, “How do you give feedback to your students?” “It’s quite simple,” is my usual reply, “as long as work is in an electronic format, I can read it. I have software on my computer – called a screen reader – that translates visual text into audio speech. In other words, my computer reads everything out loud.”

What I do not tell them is that the demands on a blind lecturer cannot be reduced to feedback to students – it is in actual fact, not really “quite simple”. Preparing for lectures, for example, requires some extra work on my part. Just like my colleagues, I design PowerPoint slides for each lecture. And, just like my colleagues, I prepare for lectures by reading through these slides, to familiarise myself with course content. But, unlike my sighted colleagues, I cannot stand in front of a class and read the PowerPoint slides directly from the overhead projector. And yet, I still have to be familiar with the order and content of the slides. I have to be on top of my game and relatively in control of my lectures, without any visual cues mapping my way.

But, to my mind, there are several, somewhat effective and rather time-consuming ways to surmount this obstacle. First, I could attempt to memorise the content and order of all my lecture slides. I choose not to opt for this option, not only because I do not trust my memory but also because it would take days to memorise all my slides (for some lectures I have more than 30 slides). Second, I could listen to the course content on my computer and then relay it to the class. This would certainly be the less time-consuming option. However, while some visually impaired lecturers have perfected this art, finding the perfect rhythm of speaking and listening at the same time is a skill that I have yet to master. In the end, I always find myself most comfortable with the third option – converting my slides to braille. Although this is no perfect solution, it is the one that I am most comfortable with. Brailleing slides manually (I do not own a braille printer because of its high cost) is an extremely time-consuming task. It means that I copy, word-for-word, each letter on my electronic slides.

Given all this, it is probably safe to assume that I spend more time on lecture preparations compared to my sighted colleagues. Therefore, to save at least a bit of time, I prefer to teach on the same course each year. After all, once slides are brailled, they are hopefully brailled forever. For the same reason, I prefer course content to stay the same for at least four years. This would mean that I wouldn't have to braille slides for at least three years.

But naturally, course content must change from time to time. It is, after all, important to stay up-to-date with the latest research in one's discipline. And so, not too long ago, the inevitable happened yet again – the textbook for the first years needed to change. Since I teach some lectures on this module, I immediately realised the practical ramifications this decision would have for me. Once again, I would have to braille the lecture slides. And so, over large cups of coffee, I begrudgingly buckled down and did what needed to be done. Of course, I was not cheerful about it – it is, after all, such a mind-numbingly tedious and time-consuming chore. I did not suffer in silence. I complained to anyone who wanted – and who didn't want – to listen. One early morning at work, I ran into a colleague who was also lecturing on this course. And, once again, I voiced my annoyance with the extra work I needed to do. Our conversation went something like this:

Colleague: "How was your weekend?"

Me: "Super boring. Lecture preparations, you know".

Colleague: "I hear you. I didn't have much of a weekend, either. Nowadays it's just work, work, work".

Me: "You can say that again. And to top it all, I had to braille my slides for next week's lectures and it took forever!"

Colleague: “That must be tough. But you know what? Whenever I want to complain about this course, I remind myself that there is no marking needed for this course. So, actually, we save a lot of time.”

What my colleague disregarded during our exchange was the fact that, while none of the lecturers on this course needed to mark test and examination scripts (a machine marks the first year scripts), only I needed to braille my work. While she rightfully pointed out that we all save some time on this course because of marking relief, she overlooked the fact that I needed to put in extra effort and time to prepare for my lectures. When she said, “that must be tough”, she validated my feelings, yet, in what followed, she dismissed and disregarded my experience under a blanket of sameness. This intolerance of difference that I’ve experienced is not unique to my situation as a disabled employee. In a fairly recent study, employees referred to their disabled colleagues as “different just like we are all different”.¹⁸ In this phrase, just as in the encounter with my colleague, there is a complete invalidation of the specific difference narrative of disabled persons. “We are all different” could be equated to proclaiming that racial differences and racism do not exist, because “we are all part of the human race”. This dismissal of the difference experience and narrative of disabled persons is a micro-invalidation, whereby disabled persons are squashed into a mould of sameness where they often do not fit comfortably.¹⁹

What do these invalidations do? For me, in that briefest of encounters with my colleague, I felt ashamed and embarrassed for raising my annoyance with this extra duty I needed to perform. I felt subtly reprimanded for failing to comprehend how fortunate I was. I felt like my experience was not important and perhaps even not a “real” experience. But mostly, I felt silenced and unheard.

So, what would have been a helpful response from my colleague? After relaying my frustration with braille slides to another colleague, he insightfully remarked, “You have to do so much extra work.” In that moment, I felt validated. I felt that it was okay to feel frustrated about my situation. I felt heard. In that encounter, I knew that my experience differed from that of my sighted colleagues and that it was okay to have a difference narrative.

Story 2: The politics of (lack of) accommodation

I joined my current academic department through being awarded a highly competitive five-year fellowship. Application for the fellowship had to be done jointly between myself and my chosen university department, who were expected to commit themselves to hosting me, thereby expressing support for the capacity that I would bring to their programmes. Senior staff in the department knew me

well, and were thus aware of my visual impairment. In addition, I made it clear that, if successful in my application, I would require reasonable accommodation upon joining the department.

The accommodation I requested was a half-time personal assistant, mainly to speed up laborious or inaccessible administrative tasks, but also to provide face-to-face reading for research purposes. Even with the best technology, having a visual impairment will always make the core business of academic work, that is, accessing and processing information, slower and harder. This disadvantage is amplified greatly by digital resources and applications – from university administration forms to the host of online platforms essential to scholarship – that neglect the principles of universal design. Given this unethical practice, a simple task such as filling in a form, which should take five minutes or less, can take an hour, as it involves features which are inaccessible to screen reader users such as myself.

Asking for support is not easy, and it took me several years of struggle to reach clarity that my need was justified. Until that point, and still today when my confidence is down, I ascribed my struggle to one or another lack in myself; when isolated in an inaccessible work environment, self-blame is hard to resist. In the more than a decade during which I have used assistance for the many mechanical tasks that, for me, would be extremely laborious, it has become clear to me that having assistance is essential for both my academic productivity and my sense of fulfilment in my work. Spending much of one's time battling, and often failing, to perform the most menial of one's daily tasks does not build self-esteem. It also leaves very little time or energy for the core businesses of academic life, which are research and teaching. I would not have made the contribution to disability studies that I have without reasonable accommodation.

Having been awarded my fellowship, I arrived at my new department to begin a five-year contract. Even before arrival, I prepared a document explaining, in far more detail than I provide here, my need for assistance. My head of department responded positively, and the issue was forwarded to the deanery. Then the silence began.

Over the ensuing months, my host professor and I made regular inquiries about the progress of my request, but received no official reply. Someone said there was uncertainty about how such accommodation would be funded, as HR had no mechanism for such a situation. We heard that the issue had then been escalated to the office of the deputy vice-chancellor for transformation, and requested to meet with him. Our request was granted, and I again presented my account, now for the fourth or fifth time. We were told that the issue would be attended to immediately, and we would receive an answer, but again none came. This silence was extremely

difficult for me – any real engagement would have been preferable. In the silence, I wondered whether my request was seen as entitled or absurd, or so outlandish that it did not deserve a response. Needless to say, my own demons were reawakened. Why the silence? Were university officials too embarrassed by my needs, or by their responses? I could not guess. We then heard, somehow, that the issue had reached the office of the vice-chancellor, but still the months rolled by, with regular inquiries, but no decision. Unfortunately, the inability to facilitate a simple, candid conversation about issues of disability inclusion – in fact, about issues of disability *difference* – is all too familiar. I looked back at the original document I had written requesting the accommodation, and felt embarrassed by its naïve openness. To those of us who work for disability inclusion at our universities, the anthropologist Mary Douglas’s metaphor of “matter out of place”²⁰ feels all too apt. Douglas was referring to social phenomena that trouble our cultural conventions, and must somehow be “dealt with”; it is an idea applied to disability by the theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson.²¹ I use this idea because it feels so viscerally resonant – when one raises one’s difference, and the response is silence, the difference itself quickly feels like “matter out of place”, like something wrong, illegitimate, ugly. And one’s difference is, much of the time, indistinguishable from oneself.

After endless lobbying, my request was finally granted, thankfully, a little over fifteen months after it had been made. For that time, my salary was being paid by my funders, to a university that had failed to provide me with the means to do the work I was contracted to do, leaving me at times wondering what I was there for. I want to be clear: I have no issue at all with open discussion and disagreement regarding the nature of appropriate reasonable accommodation for an employee such as myself. Anyone who knows anything about disability understands that these questions are complex, and, even as someone with two decades of experience as a disability studies researcher, I do not pretend to have all of the answers. But what is reflected in this story is a systemic and stubborn avoidance of engagement with the pressing questions posed by disability difference in our institutions. We remain far from a basic, broad recognition of disability inclusion as a pivotal matter of social justice, which is elemental to the diversity and transformation debate as a whole. Somehow, it remains acceptable in our institutions to avoid, dismiss, diminish or otherwise demean basic needs for inclusion presented to us by students and staff with disabilities. Correctly, there is a strong recognition that institutional, cultural and also personal changes have to take place if we are to transform our universities in terms of systemic responses to colour and gender. Corresponding, and arguably even more acute, forces of marginalisation in the case of disability remain peculiarly unattended to.

Story 3: The illegitimacy of anger

I have a visual impairment that makes it impossible to read standard-sized text or to do other tasks that require visual acuity. My disability is slightly unusual in that my vision is not so impaired that I need to walk around with a white cane or require the assistance of a guide dog. But my sight is so compromised that I can't drive, I often don't recognise people even if I know them, it is impossible to do things like draw money from an autobank and I cannot read anything that is printed (unless it is electronically manipulated to make it accessible). I guess when most people meet me for the first time they are not immediately aware that I am disabled. But anyone who is attentive enough and watches me trying to engage with any printed information will soon realise that I don't see like most other people. I often have to ask people to help me and frequently I have to rely on strangers to do things for me that I simply cannot do unassisted.

I am employed at a university in South Africa as a lecturer. I have worked in the same department for more than eight years, so I am fairly well known to my colleagues and I have made no secret of my disability, although it is far from the first thing I announce when I meet someone for the first time. My primary identity is not that of "disabled person" – there are many other things that I identify as before I called myself disabled. I don't consider myself an activist for disability rights; I probably don't make my disability prominent enough because I am too politically passive, too keen to fit in, too afraid of being dependant on the kindness of others and too eager to pass as competent.

Recently, I was called to a meeting along with other members of my department. We were told the meeting was "urgent" and that it was "very important that everyone attended". At the meeting a strategic plan was presented to us. We were informed that our input was needed on this "very important document", and that the purpose of this meeting was to "consult with staff". It was apparent to me that the chair of the meeting was trying to perform some kind of "participative leadership", in what I took to be a genuine effort to involve the staff in a planning process.

No electronic copies of the strategic plan were circulated to us before the meeting, and no hard copies were provided. At the meeting, the document was displayed on the wall via a data projector. The image projected onto the wall was small and the text was completely impossible for me to read. We were told that the document we were reviewing had to be submitted the next day, and so we needed to discuss it now.

For about the first hour of the meeting, I listened carefully to what was being said, but could not see any of the text that was being discussed. It was clear that other members of staff were able to read the document and were engaging with

the content of the strategic plan. An hour or so into the meeting, I calmly pointed out that I was unable to see any of the contents of this “important strategic plan” and that I felt excluded from the meeting and unable to participate in the process. The chair of the meeting looked surprised and replied something along the lines of, “But we thought you could see. I asked others, and we decided you could read it.” I was flabbergasted by the response, particularly because I had been emailing the chairperson regularly over the previous six months to ask for special computer equipment, because all printed text was inaccessible to me. I thought I had made it very clear to them that I cannot read any printed documents and that I need to modify text or use text-to-speech software to make any printed material accessible. I was even more flabbergasted by the fact that I was being told that other people had been consulted and that “we decided you could see”. Why were other people being consulted, and why was I not the one to be asked about what I can and cannot see? But the thing that amazed me most was that I had just found the words to say, “I can’t see” and “I am feeling excluded”, and the response of the chairperson was to tell me, “But we think you can see.”

The rest of the staff did not react, and no one said anything. There was silence for a little while. I tried to catch myself and tried not to react, but I could feel my face getting hot and red. I reiterated that I could not see the document and I asked if a copy could be circulated via email.

Then we took a break for lunch, after which the meeting continued. I checked my email and still no electronic version of the document had been provided. The discussion went on, and I sat silent, still unable to see what was being discussed and relying on the conversation to make fragmented sense of what was going on. I considered getting up and leaving the meeting. Then I considered staying in the room, but withdrawing and just getting on with my own work on my laptop. But I decided to ask once more for an electronic copy of the document. This time my tone was not so calm – I was angry. I was angry that my time was being wasted. I was angry that I was being excluded. I was angry that my needs were not acknowledged. I was angry that I had to ask twice for something that I should not have needed to ask for at all. I was angry that I had to get angry.

This time my request got a response – the document was emailed to us. I opened the document and started to manipulate it so that I could read it. But it was still difficult to follow. When you have a visual impairment like mine, you can’t skim something or scan over it – text-to-speech software reads every word on the page, and so it takes a long time to get through a document that you are seeing for the first time. I tried to make the font bigger so that the text was huge – but still I could not keep up with the other people in the meeting – I did not know what page we were on,

because the font was now so large that my version of the document was not the same as the version on the screen. I could not “read” fast enough or find the right place to be on the same page as everyone else. So I closed the document and withdrew from the meeting. I stayed in the room till the meeting ended and reminded myself that my opinion was not that important, and I probably did not have anything significant to add anyway. I felt bad for acting like a drama queen and for thinking that I was so important that I needed to be part of this conversation. I felt I had been unhelpful and difficult by asserting my needs so strongly. I felt foolish for making a scene. I felt disappointed with myself for letting this get to me. “Next time, rather don’t go to the meeting. It will be easier for everyone and much less stress”, I thought to myself as we all got up to leave at the end of the discussion. I started to wonder if perhaps I was not disabled enough to expect accommodations or perhaps if I was part of the problem for not making my disability more visible.

Discussion

When we met as an author group to discuss this chapter, we did not discuss in any detail what stories each of the disabled authors, each at a different South African university in 2019, would write. When we look at the three stories together, though, there are obvious common themes. Most striking for us is the casualness with which forms of disability discrimination occur, even in universities keen to transform, in a country in which discrimination on the basis of disability is outlawed constitutionally. There simply does not seem to be the worry that we find in ourselves and in colleagues about not wishing to discriminate on the basis, say, of race, gender or sexual orientation. Disability and its implications can be denied or overlooked – can easily be micro-invalidated.²²

A second feature of all of the stories is the way in which we, as academic disability activists ourselves, dealt with the exclusion and discrimination we faced. All of us, to some degree, blamed ourselves or doubted ourselves. Just as in issues of racial exclusion, one of the key issues to face is the internalisation of stigma; we also need to face our own internalised stigma and what it does to us. In the case of disability, though, this has another layer. We have suggested elsewhere²³ that in the complex emotional politics of disability, disabled people are called upon not only to manage their own disability but also to manage how nondisabled people respond to disability – disabled people are tasked with taking on the emotional labour of making disability palatable for nondisabled people. This includes making the denial of disability – the refusal even to see or acknowledge it – somehow OK. The disability scholar, Sally French, who has a visual impairment, describes being asked by her anxious parents when out on a walk, “Can you see the rainbow?”²⁴ French could not see the rainbow,

but knew that her visual impairment would cause distress to her family. So, she pretended that she could see the rainbow. In so doing, she colluded in her parents' denial of disability, their unwillingness to see it. In very different circumstances, in all three stories, we see even empowered and articulate white academics colluding in their own exclusion, and blaming themselves implicitly for being the objects of discrimination.

This observation has profound implications for how we think about the project of this book as a whole. There is no question that racism, sexism and homophobia, for example, are all issues that transforming universities need to consider. But if our universities continue to overlook and ignore issues of disability and to disavow the struggles for disability inclusion, we cannot say that they have overcome the legacy of race science. Thinking about disability and giving it its due is core to any real transformation project.

Endnotes

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SECTION D



The Gender Question in Racial Science



Race, Science and Gender

Producing the black woman's body as the deviant, degenerate “other”

Barbara Boswell

When an article on the high risk of lower cognitive functioning of “coloured” South African women appeared in March 2019, there was a justifiable outcry from the public, academics, and activists alike that the article perpetuated racial stereotypes. Such stereotypes about the deviance and degeneracy of black bodies had for centuries circulated through colonial discourses on race and white supremacy. These discourses solidified into what critical race theorists have named scientific racism, a type of racism produced by the colonial intellectual enterprise, which sought to classify and codify as inferior any subjects not white and European. In producing the Sport Science article, five white women researchers uncritically and unreflexively reproduced these racist arguments, ignoring decades of anti-racist and postcolonial scholarship. The fact that these researchers had not interrogated their positionality as white women “investigating” the cognitive functioning of “coloured” women, who historically were positioned in subordinate race and class positions to the researchers, further ignited the ire of the article’s critics. What has been missing, however, from most analyses of the article and its scientific flaws, is a discussion also of its sexism, and how discourses of racism and sexism intersect to produce the constructed category “coloured women” as cognitively deficient.

It is no accident that the small sample of 60 subjects focused on women, specifically, as opposed to “coloured” men, or a mixed-gender sample population of women and men. Indigenous South African women, and those descended from enslaved and

hybridised populations during the nineteenth century (i.e. the forebears of those who are today considered “coloured”) have historically been represented as paradoxically deficient and excessive, both intellectually and corporeally.¹ The Sport Science article draws on such stereotypes of bodily excess and intellectual deficiency, which have for centuries clung to the bodies and experiences of indigenous and black African women in the Cape. These discourses were produced through colonialism’s economic project of enslavement and trafficking of the indigenous peoples encountered through conquest. They persist today around the bodies of “coloured” women, and when used in so-called scientific literature, continue to produce dangerous stereotypes about the bodies of “coloured”/black women in South Africa.

What is needed in critiquing these freshly-produced discourses of deviance and degeneracy in “coloured” women is a critical tool that lays bare the ways in which racism and sexism (or gender discrimination) intersect to produce the category “coloured women”, taken as a monolithic racial and gendered group by the researchers of the Sport Science article. With this aim in mind, this chapter seeks to sketch a brief history of representations of race, gender, and sexuality in Southern Africa. It proposes to map the ways in which Western discourses around race and gender produced indigenous Southern Africans as the colonial “other”, and doubly “othered” indigenous and black women through discourses of deviant sexuality and the body. The chapter will describe and outline practices of scientific racism, and focusing on the figure of Sarah Baartman, will show how such theories of race produced gendered as well as racialised colonial subjects. In other words, it will show how race and gender during the colonial period co-constituted each other to produce the racialised and gendered colonial “other”, who lives on today in the degenerate figure of the “coloured” South African woman as produced by the Sport Science article.

On race and racial terminology

The authors of the Sport Science article define the category “coloured” quite narrowly, and their simplistic definition is partly responsible for the outrage against their article. They argue that “the coloured community is, in terms of social class, considered the most homogenous group in South Africa and are generally described as a poor, lower working-class community”.² Such a gross generalisation flattens the fluidity and provisional nature of “coloured” identity, which is generally taken as a socially constructed racial category by critical race theorists.

For the purpose of this chapter, I use the term “coloured” to denote an apartheid racial category, lawfully consolidated by the white Nationalist regime at the start of formal apartheid via legislation such as the Population Registration Act

of 1950. The category “coloured” remains contested in South Africa, and is often mistakenly thought of as shorthand for mixed-race. However, critical race theorist Zimitri Erasmus defines “colouredness” as exemplifying creolised cultural identities “comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being”.³ Those classified as “coloured” by the apartheid regime include a hybrid mix of the descendants of indigenous Southern Africans; descendants of enslaved people forcibly brought to the Cape from Malaysia, Indonesia, other Asian territories and Madagascar; and descendants of Dutch and British colonisers not designated “white” under apartheid.

Mohamed Adhikari notes that the term “coloured” does not designate blackness in South Africa, as it has historically in other regions, such as Great Britain and the United States of America.⁴ Tracing the genesis of the term “coloured” as a racial signifier in the late nineteenth century, after slave emancipation in Southern Africa, he conceptualises “colouredness” in terms of hybridity:

The coloured people are descended largely from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and other people of African and Asian origin who had been assimilated to Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century. Being also partly descended from European settlers, coloureds are popularly regarded as being of “mixed race” and have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population.⁵

Adhikari notes that in the years following the end of formal British slavery at the Cape in 1838, “coloured” identity started forming when the heterogenous labouring class in the Cape Colony cohered around shared socioeconomic status and assimilation into the lower ranks of colonial society at the Cape:

The emergence of a fully-fledged coloured identity as we know it today was precipitated in the late nineteenth century by the sweeping social changes that came in the wake of the mineral revolution. Not only did significant numbers of Africans start coming to the Western Cape from the 1870s onwards but assimilated colonial blacks and a wide variety of African people who had recently been incorporated into the capitalist economy were thrust together in the highly competitive environment of the newly established mining towns. These developments drove acculturated colonial blacks to assert a separate identity in order to claim a position of relative privilege to Africans on the basis of their closer assimilation to Western culture and being partly descended from European colonists.⁶

What Adhikari’s research shows is the formation of a highly fluid racial and cultural identity, shaped by political, social, and economic forces, and in the crucible of a rapidly intensifying capitalist economy. The category “coloured” was further forged by political exclusion during the first half of the twentieth century in the Cape,

such as the ineligibility of “coloured” people to be elected to the parliament of the Union of South Africa formed in 1910, and finally solidified into a legal identity by apartheid law in the 1950s.

After the end of formal apartheid, the category “coloured” has remained a self-referential racial term for some South Africans, who have subverted the intended white supremacist meanings of “colouredness” and have chosen to embrace and celebrate the idea of being “coloured”. Adhikari argues that the category “coloured” has rapidly transformed in the years following the end of apartheid, and has needed to shift from racial identity into more of a “social identity”.⁷ Erasmus’s contemporary definition of “colouredness” refers to a population group as “loosely bound together for historical reasons such as slavery, creolisation and a combination of oppressive and selective preferential treatment under apartheid: ‘coloured’ is neither a common ethnic identity nor a biological result”.⁸

These are the nuances around “coloured” identity disavowed by the authors of the 2019 article, who chose, instead, to essentialise “colouredness” as “homogenous” and “poor, lower working class”.⁹ After defining the general category “coloured” in this way, the authors go on to produce a number of gendered claims about “coloured” women specifically, staking out their scientific rationale for why this particular group (whom they name “community-dwelling coloured South African women”¹⁰) were deserving of their own study on cognitive functioning:

Coloured women in South Africa are a vulnerable population group, not only at high risk for cardiometabolic diseases, but as the findings of this study suggest, also possibly for low cognitive functioning.¹¹

Before discussing their findings, the authors note that, “It is hypothesized that lower cognitive functioning will be associated with older age and lower levels of education.”¹² The authors go on to say, in their discussion of their findings, that:

Previous research also established that coloured women present with a high incidence of risky lifestyle behaviours including tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption and recreational drug use as well as an increased prevalence of cardiometabolic diseases ...¹³

What is evident in these representations of “coloured” women is an inherent view of their deficiency and inferiority: if all “coloureds” are generally deemed “poor” and “lower working class”, as the Sport Science article’s definition implies, they are already approached with a deficit mentality. They are presumed to be disadvantaged and lesser than some mythical standard of what is considered fully human. It is hypothesised, even prior to the research study, that the sample will show lower cognitive abilities (than others), specifically at an older age and with lower levels of education. There is already an assumption, going into the research, that lower

cognitive functioning will be found. In the discussion of results quoted above, the group of women are, indeed, found to exhibit “a high incidence of risky lifestyle behaviours including tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption and recreational drug use ... Thus, evidence suggests that coloured women are exposed to most factors that have known negative effects on cognitive functioning”,¹⁴ rounding off a circular argument and self-fulfilling prophecy where the anticipated degeneracy is, indeed, found to be present in the sample of “coloured” women.

A brief history of race science

Generally, the humanities and social sciences approach the category of race as socially constructed. Kwesi Kwaa Prah, in deconstructing the idea of race, argues that:

There is only one human race ... We know currently that the genetic material responsible for the characteristics that are generally viewed as racial, like hair texture and skin colour, forms less than half of one percent of our genetic make-up and has no cultural or behavioural implications.¹⁵

The use of race as a classificatory system in modern times finds its beginning in colonisation and European imperialist expansion, which included the practice of enslaving human beings for economic gain. European race theorists from the 1600s onward, providing the so-called science behind imperialism’s drive to “other”, and providing a rationale for conquest and enslavement, worked on producing systems of racialisation in the colonies European nations were establishing. Carl Linnaeus, born in 1707, is considered the father of such racial classificatory systems and he identified four races. Part of the work of classifying human beings into different races involved labelling each race with characteristic features that differentiated them from other races, and also producing a hierarchy of superiority. Linnaeus, for example, in his eighteenth-century classificatory system, asserted that:

The American is reddish, choleric, erect; the Asiatic, yellow, melancholy, tough; the African, black, phlegmatic, slack. The American is obstinate, contented, free; the European mobile, keen inventive; the Asiatic cruel, splendour-loving, miserly; the African, sly, lazy, indifferent. The American is covered with tattooing, he rules by habit; the European is covered with close-fitting garments and rules by law; the Asiatic is enclosed in flowing garments and rules by opinion; the African is anointed with grease and rules by whim.¹⁶

Linnaeus’s taxonomy was also hierarchical, with the European at the top of the hierarchy and the African at the bottom. He further named a subspecies *Homo Monstrous*, a category not-quite human, within which he classified the “Hottentots” of Southern Africa. Linnaeus is widely regarded the founder of race science, and his work underlies many later classificatory systems.

Another iteration of scientific racism and its construction can be found in the example of Thomas Jefferson, American president and an author of the American Bill of Rights, who called on scientists to determine “the obvious inferiority” of the racialised, enslaved “other” – partly to justify the practice of slavery, of which Jefferson was a practitioner. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson described black people as follows: “They seem to require less sleep. A black after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning.”¹⁷

I quote these two thinkers, amongst others, to make two points. First, the seeming ease, authority and sense of entitlement evident in both men’s writing, which makes it seem their God-given right to name, define, categorise and define the “other”. The second point the writing demonstrates, in the case of Jefferson, is the work of rationalisation such science performs in order to justify the ongoing enslavement, mistreatment, dehumanisation, and murder of the “other”.

Feminist historian Yvette Abrahams, in the article “The Great Long National Insult: ‘Science’, Sexuality and the Khoisan in the 18th and Early 19th Century”,¹⁸ shows how the Jeffersonian impulse took shape in Southern Africa. Abrahams describes the racist depictions of Africans and the Khoisan in colonial writing as a type of “mental abuse” of indigenous peoples, originating at a time when the Khoisan were subject to enslavement, colonisation and genocide. She argues that the science of classifying, naming and ranking human beings served imperialism by

producing an orderly, known hierarchy in which the place of the white man at the top was legitimised as the “natural” order. In the case of the Khoisan, Linnaeus’s classification system relieved them of the guilt of genocide – when white settlers went to murder the Khoisan, European science offered them the conviction that the people they were killing were not human.¹⁹

Moreover, if indigenous or colonised populations are inferior, less than human, by colonial logic, this provides a justification to steal their land, enslave them, brutalise them when they resist such treatment, and ultimately kill them by genocide, if necessary. It also follows that if the subject thus classified is inferior to Europeans, then Europeans, by white supremacist colonial logic, have a duty of stewardship over indigenous or black people, who, by virtue of being so patently inferior, need guidance. This sense of stewardship flows from a deeply ingrained belief in the superiority of whiteness, and the inherent deficiency of all others not so classified. These are impulses that are evident in the Sport Science article.

These ideologies around the deficiency and degeneracy of blackness and indigeneity found resonance also in representations of blackness and indigeneity under slavery in the nineteenth century. In her work, feminist scholar Desiree Lewis shows how

white femininity during the colonial period was constructed directly against the stereotype, produced in word and image, “of the black/African body as grotesque, uncivilised and crudely sexual”.²⁰ Lewis notes that texts by colonial scientists, travel writers, novelists, artists and poets imagined whiteness through constructing the racialised “other” as bestial, a trope which constructed Africans as innately “biologically different and degenerate”,²¹ and produced indigenous and black/African women in particularly sexualised ways:

Both African men and women have been defined in terms of sexual excess, bestiality and bodily deviance. As many feminist scholars have pointed out, however, gender provides a foundation for the further othering of African female bodies.²²

Abrahams describes the colonial obsession with African bodies as the “genital encounter” that “set the terms for future interaction (between colonists and Khoisan) ... and lies at the heart of the history of Khoisan interaction with whites”.²³ She further shows through her historical research how the nineteenth century marked an increasing obsession with analysing and measuring indigenous African women’s bodies, especially their genitals.

In tracing the relationship of slavery to the sexualisation of the racialised “other”, Gabeba Baderoon²⁴ traces the ways in which discourses of black female sexual deviance were projected by slave owners onto the enslaved. Conceptualising black bodies as deviant and hypersexual provided the rationale for raping women slaves to increase “stock”, to prostitute them, and to enact other forms of sexual violence on them. This normalised sexual violence against black women, so that “enslaved and Khoisan women’s bodies were designated as available for sexual access with impunity”.²⁵ This is evidenced by the fact that not a single man, enslaved or free, was ever convicted of the rape of an enslaved woman during the entire period of slavery at the Cape.²⁶

The intersection of racism and sexism can also be seen in the inhumane treatment of Sarah Baartman by the French scientist George Cuvier, who dissected her body after her death to measure her genitalia and other body parts. Baartman was taken by Hendrik Cezar from the Cape to London, where she was exhibited as the “Hottentot Venus” on the basis that her buttocks were perceived to be abnormally large by European colonisers.²⁷ Attracting large crowds from all over Europe, she was seen as exemplary of the Khoisan of Southern Africa, and displayed as a “freak” by her handlers. After outrage about the indecent nature of her exhibition in London, leading to a court case in which it was unsuccessfully argued that she was being kept illegally as a slave, Baartman was taken to Paris in 1814, where she was examined for her “unusual” anatomy by Cuvier and a team of other French scientists, including anatomists and zoologists. Cuvier measured her body parts, going as far as making a

plaster cast out of her body, and concluded that she was the “missing link” between animals and humans. After her premature death in France in 1816, Cuvier dissected Baartman’s body, preserving both her brain and genitalia, which were on display in the Musée de l’Homme (Museum of Man) until 1972. Baartman’s remains were only repatriated to South Africa and buried in 2002.

Here we see the particularly sexualised way in which indigenous women were viewed as a curiosity, subjected to investigation, measured and represented for posterity. For Abrahams, the development of scientific racism and its gendered aspects rested directly on the body of Baartman and the fascination of colonisers with indigenous women’s anatomies. Scientific racism made indigenous women’s bodies measurable and analysable in terms of sexual deviance. In this way, Abrahams argues, the bonds between sexism and racism became further strengthened in scientific racism, at a historical moment when the physical bonds of slavery were being abolished. For the feminist historian Paula Giddings, the rising fascination with measuring Baartman’s body parts and sexualising her body arose at the same time that freed slaves in Britain and North America were anticipating inclusion into their respective societies as freed citizens and making citizenship claims in spaces where they were formerly enslaved.

While both formerly enslaved/black men and women were hypersexualised under this colonial anxiety, black women were portrayed as sexually “more savage” than men – an idea that underpinned the formation of the Victorian ideal of white womanhood.²⁸ While white women were increasingly denied sexual expression, sexuality came to define black women, and Baartman’s display “was crucial to the success of this process”.²⁹ Abrahams succinctly sums up the colonial obsession with measuring, sexually defining, and sexually “othering” the previously enslaved and indigenous: “As the physical bonds on black people weakened, the discursive ones had to grow correspondingly stronger. Racism and sexism developed together and not separately.”³⁰

Contemporary recursions of scientific racism, and how they produce gender

I locate the contemporary impulse to measure, scientifically name, and define the racialised and gendered “other” – in this case, “coloured” women – with the colonial obsession with naming, measuring and categorising indigenous and African peoples globally.

Nearly a century after Baartman’s cruel display and dissection after death, in 1937, a study was conducted at Stellenbosch University in which 133 men were enlisted in order to document and construct racial categories. The aim of the study was to distinguish white Afrikaners from “coloured” men and, according to journalist Christa Kuljian, it measured skin colour, eye colour, hair texture and more than 80 other

characteristics of the head and body to determine racial type. Thus, we see a continuation of this type of race-based scientific research into the twentieth century, for the purposes of constructing and upholding apartheid racial categorisation. The Sport Science article on “coloured” women continues in a similar vein.

Just like the sexual excess produced by the colonial gaze on black, indigenous women’s bodies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the 2019 study relies on stereotypes of black/“coloured” women as degenerate and revelling in excess. Where the nineteenth century’s race scientists created tropes of sexual excess, the latter-day colonial gaze focuses on brain functioning and cognitive abilities, just a little bit more sophisticated than measuring head sizes, as was done under colonial scientific racism. There is still a discourse of excess produced around black women’s bodies – this time the assumed excess is around consumption of harmful food, excessive alcohol intake, and indulgence in drugs. The gaze may have shifted from the sexualised body, but the perceived degeneracy, and thus, inferiority, of the “coloured” mind is taken as a given. The contemporary obsession with black/“coloured” women’s bodies comes under the guise of good intentions: of wanting to recommend “interventions” to temper the effects of “coloured” degeneracy, paternalistically, “for their own good”. The study further relies unapologetically and unreflexively on apartheid categorisation, racial taxonomy and racial hierarchy, unproblematically labelling “coloureds” the “most homogenous group in South Africa”. In doing so, it seamlessly reproduces colonial and apartheid discourses of the racial degeneracy in black bodies, and excess in black women’s bodies.

Scientists insisting on using race as a category of analysis in contemporary South Africa should note feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola’s admonition that:

The history of race is the history of slavery, colonialism and race science. The various disciplines in the academy that rescue race from an idea and elevate it to a valid ordering and meaning-making system rely on sexual violence, sexual cataloguing and measuring the bodies of the enslaved and colonised.³¹

This does not mean that scholars based in the hard sciences, social sciences, or humanities should altogether refrain from using race as a category of analysis in their research. What is required, however, when using race for the purposes of analysing people’s experiences and lives, is a rigorous reflexivity and critical consciousness of the researcher’s own processes of racialisation, their racial and gendered positionality, and their own racist, sexist and classist assumptions that they bring to such projects. Additionally, what is sorely needed is an acknowledgement of systems of race and racialisation as always socially constructed, specific to historical location, and always embedded within hierarchies and systems of power. Most importantly, researchers attempting to analyse race and systems of racialisation should have a consciousness around race that acknowledges its construction as co-constituting the creation of

hierarchical, unequal power relations globally; its culpability in the creation of systems of enslavement and the forced trafficking of human beings as part of the slave trade; its continued enmeshment in unequal economic and other power relations flowing directly from colonisation and slavery; and its role in contemporary discourses around the degeneracy and deviance of black women's bodies and intellects. Only once race is fully recognised in these ways can one begin productively to account for its implications in contemporary social problems and lives.

Endnotes

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- 8 Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 112, <https://doi.org/10.18772/12017090589>
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- 15 Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "Race and Culture: Myth and Reality", in *Discourses on Difference: Discourses on Oppression*, ed. Norman Duncan (Cape Town: CASAS, 2002), 12.

- 16 Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae, Sive Regna Tria Naturae, Systematice Proposita Per Classes, Ordines, Genera, & Species* (Leiden: Lugduni Batavorum, 1735), <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.877>, cited in Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "Race and Culture: Myth and Reality", in *Discourses on Difference: Discourses on Oppression*, ed. Norman Duncan (Cape Town: CASAS, 2002), 22.
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- 19 Ibid., 38.
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- 23 Abrahams, "The Great Long National Insult: 'Science', Sexuality and the Khoisan in the 18th And Early 19th Century", 43.
- 24 Baderoon, *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid*.
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Problematizing Race and Gender in Everyday Research Processes

A model of feminist research praxis

Amanda Gouws

Introduction

When researchers do research with human subjects, there is the hope that their findings will be taken up by, for example, government, to formulate policies; the public, for a better understanding of social, political or economic processes; or pharmaceutical companies, for new treatments. The hope is that, in the long run, everyone would benefit from the findings. But seldom is there a reflection on exactly what it means to the individuals and communities that were used as research subject-participants. More often than not, the thinking is that as long as the subject-participants were treated in an ethical way, they had played their role. Rarely is there any report back of the findings to the subject-participants.

When our the subject-participants become aware of the findings of our research and what it means for them, we as the researchers become aware of the impact of our research. This is not the type of impact for the collective good, but the type of impact that positions the subject-participants in a certain way, especially when the findings are used to generalise about entire communities.

In a country that has only recently emerged from a deeply racialised past, in which racial categories were imposed on its citizens and where “scientific research” was used to justify the racial categorisation of apartheid and exclusions based on race, researchers need to exercise caution when drawing inferences based on racial

categories. In South Africa, race is often a useful explanatory variable to understand exclusions and marginalisation, but context is everything. When race as a variable is used in an essentialist way (i.e. one that assumes certain unchanging characteristics of groups and ignores how identities are socially constructed) to argue that it is the cause of perceptions and behaviour, the findings “freeze” people in their racial identities, and cause researchers to lose sight of how the treatment of racial groups through processes of colonialisation, oppression and marginalisation have positioned them to have certain attitudes or exhibit certain behaviours.

When the controversy around the Sport Science article started on social media, it was to have serious repercussion for the researchers, the research community at Stellenbosch University, the women and communities from which the subject-participants were drawn and South Africa as a whole. At the centre of the controversy sits race and gender. In a sense, social media is a great information equaliser that can expose those who use it to research that they would not otherwise know about. It was the wrath of women from communities like the one from which the subject-participants were selected that made many a complacent researcher sit up and take note.

A gender perspective

When I read the article as a feminist scholar, the problem became apparent very quickly – both from a gender and race perspective and from the intersectionalities¹ of race, gender and class. When science is done using a positivist approach (i.e. with the idea that there is a direct relationship between the empirical world and our understanding of it through scientific methods, usually producing quantifiable findings) research subject-participants are viewed as objects whose only purpose is to provide information. There is a distance between the researchers and the subject-participants in a hierarchical power relationship. In the case of the Sport Science article, the researchers’ lack of reflexivity² about this power relationship and the way the findings were directly linked to gender and race categories were two of the major causes that triggered the controversy. These problems, combined with an inappropriate sampling technique (one cannot generalise from a “snowball sample” that produces participants who are more alike than different); broad generalisations not embedded in the findings; and using a scale developed for the global North that may not necessarily be applicable to South Africa, deepened the palpable distress of “coloured”³ women colleagues at the University in the days following the publication of the article. They experienced a deep psychological injury.

The findings of “low cognitive functioning” amongst “coloured” women caused these colleagues to feel tainted by association. There was a need to reflect on the many

dimensions of this problematic research: unintended racism and sexism; research that once more connected Stellenbosch University with its apartheid past; bad science versus good science; and how to think about research when the intersectionality of identities (such as gender, race and class) forces us to understand the complexities of the lives of our subject-participants. However, the publication of the Sport Science article should be taken as a “teachable moment”, rather than as an opportunity to condemn the authors of the article.

Below I will elaborate on the usefulness of a feminist research praxis model that allows us to do research that is not distant and removed from subject-participants, but rather relies on engaging with their lived experience. I will start by discussing why the findings of the Sport Science article can be considered racist – something that was not apparent to the authors of the article or to the peer reviewers, editor and publisher of the journal. In other words, the controversy that followed the publication exposed the unintended racist and sexist consequences of bad epistemological and methodological choices. I will then discuss the lessons feminist research praxis holds for research projects.

In this chapter, key concepts will be highlighted to emphasise their importance and to clarify their meaning for prospective researchers

Issues of race hiding in plain sight

Already in 1984, Chandra Mohanty, in her seminal article “Under Western Eyes”,⁴ wrote about the way in which Western (read white) scholars treat women of the Third World⁵ (read women who are not white) as research subject-participants. She argues that there are assumptions of “privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effects of Western scholarship” on the other.⁶ What this universality (i.e. applying to all people in the same way) refers to is a Western (white) understanding of reality through which difference with research subject-participants is conceived of as without history and as never changing. The complexities of the lives of women who are considered “Third World” are ignored and not reflected upon.

Mohanty calls this a blindness to history and reductionist – when women of colour are used as a category of analysis without an attempt to understand how context and history influence their attitudes and behaviour. Women are defined primarily in their object status – as objects of institutions and systems of oppression – such as victims of male violence or Islamic beliefs; or as universal dependents or members of tribal kinship groups; or as always in need of development interventions,⁷ etc.⁸ Through this discourse of women as victims lacking decision-making power (agency), the

complex relationships between their histories, specific oppressions and political choices, and how they are being represented in research narratives, are ignored.⁹

Feminist theorist Linda Alcoff writes about two approaches to race and racial thinking – what she calls an objectivist and subjectivist approach. The objectivist approach is a positivist way of doing research that incorporates facts, statistical categories about race and how social relations are organised around race. This approach ignores the “everydayness” of racial experiences that does not take into consideration the microinteractions in which racialisation occurs. A subjectivist approach, on the other hand, starts with the lived experience of racialisation and shows how race constitutes bodily experience, subjectivity and judgements. Race is the fundamental element of everyday embodied experience, psychic life and social interaction.¹⁰ This means the common-sense, everyday experiences and practices that do not rely on self-reflection. Common sense refers to that which is taken to be “obviously true” and about which consensus exists. As Alcoff argues, “Racial knowledge exists at the site of common sense.”¹¹ The sources of racialisation are embedded in the microprocesses of subjective existence.

This is what Philomena Essed calls “everyday racisms”.¹² According to Essed, many people have a common-sense understanding of what racism is. They associate racism with extreme types of behaviour, such as the behaviour of white supremacists, but they are far less able to identify the more complex, hidden forms of exclusion. As she puts it, “Common-sense notions reject racism explicitly, while implicitly they reproduce the notions that deny, and therefore help sustain, the inequalities of the racial-ethnic structure.”¹³ White researchers often have an uninterrogated common sense of black lives that they rarely reflect upon.

To understand exactly how invisible racism can be in the South African context, read Eusebius McKaiser’s *A Bantu in my Bathroom*¹⁴ and *Run Racist Run*.¹⁵

In their book *Race Trouble*,¹⁶ Durrheim, Mtose and Brown attempt to understand why race is present and absent at the same time in our interpretations of the world in South Africa. As they put it, “Because of the ambiguous presence and absence of race, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction in interpreting any situation.”¹⁷ This refers to how we are influenced by our subconscious understandings of race, which also inevitably enter research processes.

Very often, race is thought of in concrete and reductionist ways – as the actual reality of things – but racism also is the product of a way of life. People (including researchers) behave as racialised beings and treat others as racialised beings, with actions and discourses that are embodied and regulated through cultural norms and

social conventions.¹⁸ This recreates our understanding of race as a lived experience that is very often informed by stereotypes or prejudices.

From this discussion, it should be clear that we do not check our values, perspectives and common-sense understandings about “others” at the door before we start our research processes and fieldwork. On the contrary, our perspectives deeply influence our own understanding of the world, the type of hypotheses we formulate and our expectations about our research findings. Positivist research practices make us believe that objectivity is enhanced through distance from, and a lack of involvement with, our subject-participants. This is called “value-free” research. As a consequence, we are blinded to the influence of our views and values on the research process.

When we start our research from the position of feminist research epistemology, there will be an awareness of our values and the need to reflect on our own actions, as well as the need to involve ourselves with our subject-participants and to understand the research process as it unfolds.

The feminist research process

Power and research

Like any other human endeavour, doing research is embedded in power relations. Researchers most often have more power than the subject-participants, whether because of their knowledge of a topic or of the agendas determined by funders. There may also be race and class differences between researchers and subject-participants. And researchers have the power to interpret their data according to their ideological beliefs, which may not be the same as that of the subject-participants. Power relations are therefore multiple and can enter the research process at any given point.

In the case of the Sport Science article, the authors were more educated than their subject-participants, and had a different class position and racial identity. Their positionality (how they are positioned in relation to their subject-participants) put them in a relationship of power over their subject-participants. Reflexivity in this case would have entailed thinking about how to mediate these power differences. It would also have required an appreciation of the lived realities of these women, of, for example, how they have to use their cognitive abilities to come up with innovative ideas for feeding their families and keeping them safe.

The role of these power relations in establishing “truth” is what Michel Foucault referred to as “regimes of truth”; in other words, we establish what we consider to be true through scientific processes. According to Foucault, regimes of truth are the result of scientific discourses and institutions and are reinforced through the education system and the media. As he states in *Power/Knowledge*,¹⁹ truth is not

outside of power, and what we believe is true is generated through certain processes that we use to distinguish between true and false statements. There are techniques and procedures that are accorded value in generating truth.²⁰ Through the discourses we use when we do research, and the rules we use to test hypotheses and interpret data, we establish some type of truth; this we call our research findings. This “truth” then becomes the accepted knowledge about our research subject-participants.

The process of knowledge creation in which we engage through research is never value neutral and often highly politicised. Feminist research has at its core the desire to produce a more just world. So, it is not only doing research for the sake of research, but to utilise the outcomes of the research for some intervention, with a deep understanding that knowledge is constructed from where the researcher is situated. In this regard, we also have to think about issues of representation, in other words, of how we represent the voices of our subject-participants. It should never be through speaking about them, but rather speaking for them, in nuanced ways that capture their own voices. Feminist researchers usually give something back to the communities they work in – such as discussing the findings with subject-participants and indicating how the research will be used to the benefit of their communities.²¹ When we talk about the subjects of our research, we prefer to use the concept of subject-participant, in order not to objectify our respondents and to acknowledge that they help to co-construct knowledge.

Research subject-participant

Subject-participants of research can be individuals, groups, or organisations. They may be interviewed or observed in a participant observation. In sociopolitical research, it is problematic to call them “research subjects”, because that language treats them as immutable objects in a way that is logically inconsistent with the study of social and political phenomena. The phrase “research subject” disassociates people from the sociopolitics that are the dynamic context of their lives and were so before they became the subject of social and political science. We trouble that language by referring to those who provide and generate data in our research as “subject-participants”. By informing our work, they are participants in the research process, helping us to define the question, to create the data and to analyse that data.²²

Feminist ethics

Feminists are always deeply aware of power relations and how they influence the research process, and they are also cognisant of how politics play a role. Research that stems from feminist theories relies on self-reflexivity as a praxis (a way of doing things) that will commit researchers to think about absences, silences, differences and oppression,²³ as well as the power of epistemology (who is viewed as a knower, and whose knowledge is regarded as valid).²⁴

Feminist-informed research

Research that is feminist-informed takes as its point of departure feminist-normative concerns combined with knowledge of the diverse and complex theoretical interplays at work in any social science research project. Feminist-informed research, consequently, is self-reflexive, critical, political, and versed in multiple theoretical frameworks, in order to enable the researcher to “see” those people and processes lost in gaps silences, margins, and peripheries.²⁵

One of the most important aspects of feminist research is a praxis that means we should be self-reflexive about our research. In order to do that, we have to put ourselves, as Harding calls it, “on the same critical plane as the overt subject matter”,²⁶ in other words, put ourselves in their shoes, thereby reflecting on our own positionality as researchers. This means that our own class, race, culture and gender assumptions, biases and beliefs must be placed in the context of the research, so that we reflect on how we influence the research. When, for example, a white woman professor conducts research, she needs to reflect on the privileges that her position as a professor, as well as her race, class and education, bestow on her, and how these privileges forge relationships of power. This we call our understanding of subjectivity.

Feminist epistemology

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge that is concerned with who can be “knowers”, and what tests beliefs must pass in order to count as legitimate knowledge.

Epistemology

An epistemology refers to one’s theory of knowledge; it is the system of rules, conditions and beliefs that one uses to tell the difference between “knowledge” and “opinion,” between fact and belief. A feminist epistemology includes the belief that knowledge (truth) is produced, not simply found, and that the conditions of its production should be studied, critiqued if necessary, and certainly made explicit and exposed.²⁷ It also includes the notion that women are “knowers” (positivist science have systematically excluded women as knowers) – that women have and can produce knowledge and insight into what kinds of things can be known.²⁸

Harding²⁹ distinguishes a context of discovery and a context of justification. Both contexts inform the research process. From a feminist epistemological perspective, the context of discovery is very important because this is where relevant questions are formulated; the context of justification is where we use methodology to test our hypotheses. The context of discovery follows the “logic of discovery”. Androcentric (male-centred) science asks questions about the world in a gender-blind way that leaves women excluded. The context of discovery is therefore also about the questions that are not asked or that should be asked.³⁰ In androcentric science, interpretations about women are often added “after the fact”, after the research has been concluded

(the notion is to “add women and stir”), and very often findings have to be distorted to fit women in. For feminists, the questions that we ask therefore have to illuminate the lived experience of women and have to be included from the start.

Methodology is the theory and planning of how research should proceed. It is linked to the theory of knowledge (epistemology) used for the research project. It is a shorthand term for a theoretical or practical idea to be explored through a set of tools (the methods) that will specify what is to be investigated; what is appropriate and sufficient evidence, and how it should be produced; and what counts as good arguments about the evidence.³¹ A feminist methodology will commit us to reflect on the relationships involved in the research; on how to separate facts from beliefs; the purpose of the research; research design; and our ethical responsibilities to the subject-participants. Indeed, reflection occurs throughout the research process.³²

Method is a technique or a way of gathering evidence. The following techniques can be used: listening to informants (interviews), observing behaviour, and examining historical trends and records.³³ One can also use quantitative surveys or discourse analysis. Any method that has been used by androcentric science can be used by feminists. There is no method that is inherently feminist, but qualitative, open-ended, face-to-face interviews are preferable, because they open spaces to talk about respondents’ subjective understanding of their own lived experiences. Keeping journals is also a preferred method for feminist scholars.

Methodology

Generally, “methodology” is understood as a particular set of methods or way of doing research. However, a feminist methodology is not a series of particular methods or guidelines for research, like a protocol, but a commitment to using a whole constellation of methods reflexively and critically, with the goal being the production of data that serve feminist aims of social justice. Thus, a feminist methodology is a way of using and reflecting on methods, and not a particular set of methods or a particular research design. Rigorous feminist methodologies lead to decisions being made during the research process. This view of methodology helps us reexamine the basics of the research process in the social sciences.³⁴

Feminist praxis/standpoint

As Ackerly and True state, a feminist research ethic can improve scholarship regardless of whether it is feminist research or not.³⁵ One of the ways that a feminist epistemology enhances research is through a feminist standpoint. This entails that feminist research should start from the lives of women (or women’s experience). (It can also start from the lives of marginalised groups, for researchers not working on women’s lives.) Harding gives seven reasons why starting from the lives of

women is important for feminist research: (1) women's lives have been devalued and neglected as the starting point of scientific research; (2) women as valuable "strangers" to the social order – meaning that women's perspectives bring new insights that help with understanding; (3) women's oppression makes them less invested in ignorance; (4) knowledge emerges from struggles against the oppressors; (5) women's perspectives come from everyday activities – rather than the views of the dominant group (men); (6) women's closeness to care and caring objectives give a different perspective than that of men; and (7) women are the outsiders within that have perspectives on their own lives and the oppressive activities of the oppressors.³⁶

Feminist praxis

Feminists often use the language of "praxis" to refer to the practice of feminist scholarship that is informed by critical, feminist-normative and theoretical perspectives. Praxis is theory in action and action-oriented theory. Generally, we do not use the language of "praxis" to describe our methodology, because we don't think it is concrete enough in its prescriptions. Although critical self-reflection is not unique to critical feminism, the scope of these reflections sets most feminist contributions apart from the mainstream [malestream] social science disciplines of politics, international relations, sociology, and human geography, for example, and makes feminist inquiry an important partner in the more critical endeavours of those fields. A feminist research ethic (in the sense of a practice and a set of ethical commitments) guides the researcher through systematic reflection throughout the process, from research question to publication.³⁷

When researchers do research from a feminist standpoint perspective, it enhances what Harding calls "strong objectivity".³⁸ Harding calls "objectivism" (or positivist research) weak objectivity that gives only a partial and distorted explanation. By insisting on value-free, impartial and dispassionate research, it leads to the influence of values, perceptions and political interests being ignored, including racist and sexist assumptions. She argues that this type of blindness occurs because of the belief that only the context of justification matters, that is, the methods used for testing our hypotheses, rather than the context of discovery as well. This is the idea that "real science" is determined by methodological rules.³⁹ Objectivity is therefore defined in a very narrow way. As Harding points out about weak objectivity, "It produces claims that will be regarded as objectively valid without [the researchers] having to examine critically their own historical commitments, from which – intentionally or not – they actively construct their scientific research."⁴⁰

Strong objectivity, on the other hand, starts with women's lives and acknowledges values and interests that may influence the research. It also makes strange that which may be familiar – the views of dominant groups about women. It starts from the perspective of the lives of the "other" to show how gender (or class or race)

constructions distort the lives of women. When values are acknowledged (the values of the researcher, but also of the subject-participant) the outcome of the research is more objective (what we can call strong objectivity).⁴¹

Intersectionality

None of us only lives one identity at a time, such as race or gender; we live them all at the same time. This is what we call intersectionality of identities – for example, race, gender, sexuality and class. A person can be black, working class and lesbian – or white, middle class and heterosexual – all at the same time. But intersectionality also refers to interlocking relationships of dominance – between social, political, cultural and economic dynamics of power – that are multiple and occur simultaneously, as a consequence of how overlapping identities locate each individual in a matrix of domination.⁴²

It is therefore very difficult to make generalisations about women's experience. In South Africa, the racially defined categories, as well as class, sexuality and sexual orientation, locate women differently in different communities and very often determine their life chances and opportunities, depending on where they find themselves in the matrix of domination. Intersectionality determines women's lived experience.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality calls our attention to the fact that any situation, person, or research phenomenon can be understood only in terms of intersecting and overlapping contexts and social forces such as race, age, gender, sexuality, income, nationality, and historical moment, amongst many others. Consequently, attention to intersectionality provokes feminist inquiry to attend to the complexity of a problem that might serve to exclude or hide important dimensions that may be crucial to creating and/or sustaining a situation or problem.⁴³

Discussion

The retracted Sport Science article shows a lack of awareness by the authors of how they are positioned in relation to their subject-participants as well as a lack of reflexivity about the research process and findings. Rather than engaging with the lived experiences of their women subject-participants to see how conditions of poverty and social exclusion have shaped their lives, the authors used race as an explanatory variable to make broad generalisations (from a self-selected, snowball sample) to communities of coloured women.

The deep hurt about these generalisations was expressed by the Cape Flats Women's Movement in a response to the article: "We are the demographic of your study.

Life on the Cape Flats is brutal and the challenges we face are endless. We don't think you can even begin to imagine what kind of mental ability this takes. How do you think our children look at us now that a famous university has declared their mothers to be idiots."⁴⁴

As discussed above, the findings we generate to establish some type of truth become the accepted ideas about our subject-participants. The article created the understanding that coloured women, even when they are young, have low cognitive functioning and it reinforced the stereotypes of racist research that certain race groups have inferior abilities *because of* their race. In other words, the findings reproduce existing stereotypes and prejudices about coloured women. This is the damage done. Retracting the article cannot undo this damage.

Conclusion

In South Africa, research in the social sciences and humanities needs to contribute to the transformation of society, especially of the deeply felt legacies of a racial past. Universities will have to take the social sciences far more seriously. Neoliberal managements that focus on the marketability of skills ignore at their own peril the contribution of the social sciences to developing critical thinking and analytical skills in students. When articles like the one discussed here are published and then retracted, we need to ask how has the training of the authors failed them. And how has the neoliberal culture of “publish or perish” contributed to peer reviewers and editors not seeing the problems with the article?

For years, scholars in the social sciences and humanities have warned that they are being treated as less valuable because they are less marketable (this, of course, depends entirely on the definition of marketability – good social science surely has a different type of marketability). Good social science grapples with questions about what is good research, what the right research questions are, and how findings are used to transform our societies. The skills of critical thinking and analytical acuity that good social science teaching cultivates are invaluable in processes of social transformation, for which there is a deep need in South Africa.

In the twenty-first century, when politicians started talking about “fake news” and elevated lies to truth, there is no greater obligation on scholarly communities than to protect good social science research practices.

Endnotes

- 1 Intersectionality refers to the dynamic and shifting relationships between different identities, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, sexual orientation and disability. Black women in South Africa, for example, are differently positioned than white women because of relationships of power that may involve their class status or historical socioeconomic and political exclusions.
- 2 That is, reflecting on how our own positions in power relations and our values influence the research process.
- 3 The four categories used to divide South Africans under apartheid were white, black, coloured (mixed race) and Indian. The damage inflicted on people because of these imposed identity categories is part of the historical record of apartheid. Yet, the South African government continues to use these categories post-1994.
- 4 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
- 5 The term “Third World” is now viewed as derogatory; it has been replaced with ‘developing countries’. At the time Mohanty wrote her article, the term “Third World” was still in use.
- 6 Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, 53.
- 7 See, for example, Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) on African female genital mutilation, Chinese foot binding and Indian suttee (i.e. burning wives alive on their husbands’ funeral pyres), as some of the horrors that befall “Third World” women.
- 8 Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, 57-66.
- 9 Ibid., 69.
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SECTION E



Performing Race



Race and the Politics of Knowledge in Sports Science

Francois Cleophas

Introduction

Sports science in South Africa was initially a neglected backwater in academic studies, undertaken by an eccentric group of tenacious dissidents.¹ Previously the term “physical education” had been used, but in 1985 the discipline’s name was changed to “human movement studies”.² The sports science curriculum, to this day, concerns itself narrowly with the technologies of sport performance, giving little consideration to the role of ideology and politics in the field. Two exceptions are the recent book *Sport, Physical Culture, and the Moving Body: Materialisms, Technologies, Ecologies*,³ edited by Joshua I. Newman, Holly Thorpe, and David Andrews, and Malcolm MacLean’s article challenging the hegemonic practices of sports science, “(Re)Occupying a Cultural Commons: Reclaiming the Labour Process in Critical Sports Studies”.⁴ While there has been some attention paid to the politics of knowledge in physical education at school level,⁵ this is not the case in the university discipline known as “sports science”. As a consequence, most sports science students have not engaged critically with “racial science”, which, as this chapter will show, remains a powerful legacy of colonial and apartheid sport into the present.

The vexed article⁶ emerged from the Department of Sport Science of Stellenbosch University that had only recently, in 2018, been reassigned from the Faculty of Education to the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. It is a study that makes the coloured body central to the discipline’s fixation on measurement; so, for example, the study cites theories that ascribe “the accelerated and unfavourable

[cognitive] decline of women” to factors including “smaller head size ... [and] lower cardiorespiratory fitness levels”.⁷ The cardiovascular health of the coloured women subjects was a factor in sampling decisions⁸ and their coloured bodies were lined up – as in the anthropometric studies of the past – for measurement purposes, this time for standard calculations of body mass index.⁹ All of this raises the critical question posed by Ronald Jackson: “How did black bodies become a problem in the first place?”¹⁰

The main purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to examine at close range the policies and practices that reinforced racism in the history of sports science in South Africa and their continuing legacy in university curricula.

Race in sports science

According to a paper delivered by Jannie Krige at the First South African Congress for Physical Education at Stellenbosch University in 1945, the first anthropometric study on South African whites was carried out in 1926 by G.C.A. van der Westhuyzen under the supervision of Professor C.G.S. de Villiers from Stellenbosch.¹¹ Generating data for many future studies, it concluded that [white] South Africans could be regarded as “one of the great races of the world, ... [one] that is distinguishable from eastern races and negroids”.¹² Since the establishment of the Department of Physical Education at Stellenbosch in 1936, the first of its kind in South Africa and the predecessor of the present Department of Sport Science, a large number of race-based quantitative sports studies appeared. This is not surprising, since Krige had predicted in his paper that “the colour of skin, hair, eyes, facial features and hands will play an important part in physical education”.¹³

Another early study carried out at Stellenbosch University posed the research question: “What physical characteristics does the Cape coloured carry over from his different original tribes?”¹⁴ The conclusion was that “although the coloured retained certain character traits of all his forefathers, he is much more Europeanised than is generally accepted. In other words, the coloured is closer to the European than any of the other races”.¹⁵

Although it cannot be said that all physical education researchers were racists, the structure of South African society certainly was racist. During the 1930s, there were also anti-Semitic sentiments at play at Stellenbosch University, and in 1937 the student newspaper *Pro Libertate* claimed that newly appointed Head of Department for Physical Education, Dr Ernst Jokl, who was Jewish, had vacated the position “under a dark cloud of anti-Jewish sentiment”.¹⁶ He was replaced by a German academic, Anton Obholzer, who announced in the journal *Physical Education* that

physical educationists should be aware that “branches of physical exercises and working methods which correspond to the race characteristics concerned are looked upon as positive”.¹⁷

During this period, physical education researchers gave no consideration to the concept of race being a social construction and proceeded as if it were a biological fact. It is not at all surprising, then, that in 1942 three South African researchers conducted a study that was based on the premise that “some races possess certain abilities in certain sports”.¹⁸ These authors not only overemphasised artificial race differences in their study but also drew spurious conclusions:

The black man’s and black women’s labour capacity is higher than that of all other races so far studied in South Africa. From the general economic point of view this finding indicates that a labour policy, intelligently and unselfishly applied, and harnessing the immense untapped reservoir of native manpower could transform the African continent.¹⁹

After World War II, South African physical educationists, who were all white, continued on this path of conducting race-based research. These scientists turned to statistical analyses to justify “comparisons between the different races and types”.²⁰ Scientists like J.W. Postma at Stellenbosch University relied on data sets that provided, for example, evidence that “Bantu girls outperform white girls in speed and 600 yards running, [just as] negro children outperform white children in the 35 yards”.²¹

Like most sports scientists, Postma was committed to finding racial explanations for performance in sport. For example, he speculated – ridiculously, as it seems now – about “the longer legs and arms of negroes”; “the smaller chest and vital capacity being a limiting factor for blacks in long distance running”; and how “the successful presence of the yellow-brown race in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games [implies] that race and motor efficiency do not correlate” (freely translated).²² This entrenchment of racism in the field was further evidenced in 1960 by Izak van der Merwe, a professor in the Orange Free State University’s Department of Physical Education, who made it clear that the physical education system in South Africa must support the policy of apartheid.²³

Elsewhere in South Africa, the idea of a “healthy white race” remained in the foreground for physical education practitioners at universities. When the University of Pretoria introduced a four-year degree course in physical education in 1947, the appointed lecturer, Claude Smit, an outspoken nationalist, stated that “physical education can make a powerful contribution towards [white] patriotism” (translated from source).²⁴

It should be noted that South African physical educationists were not unique in searching for race-based explanations for performance achievements. Martin Kane, the senior editor of *Sports Illustrated*, argued a case for racial sports science, since “physical differences in the races ... enhanced the athletic potential of the negro”.²⁵ This type of thinking became a matter of common sense throughout the twentieth century.

In 1992, the second edition of Tim Noakes’s *Lore of Running* stated that “black South African runners are characterised by a muscle fibre composition that is different from that found in white distance runners”.²⁶ The same concern about race was evident in the 2001 fourth edition of the book, in which Noakes speculated that “the difference between African and Caucasian runners could be the result of ethnic differences”.²⁷

In general, most sports science studies that refer to race accept it as a biological truth and give no consideration to it as a social construction that “always serves some vested interest”.²⁸ According to Walter Williams, “No one should be surprised to find an implicit reinforcement of the previously explicit racial exclusions”²⁹ in a network of race-based research in postapartheid society.

Uncovering networks of race in modern-day sports science

From the 1970s onwards, many physical education departments throughout the world started lobbying to be moved from education faculties to medical and health sciences faculties. It was, according to Elizabeth Bressan, what these departments considered to be “their big chance for academic respectability; ... physical education [had been forced] into a situation where there was no [other] chance for survival”.³⁰ In their new faculties, physical education, and later sports science, departments in South Africa found themselves in environments where the concept of race and the body was reinforced.

Here I am referring to research projects such as one titled *Ethnic Differences in Alcohol and Drug Use and Related Sexual Risks for HIV among Vulnerable Women in Cape Town, South Africa*. The conclusions drawn in this paper are that:

Alcohol and other drug use among poor black African and coloured women in South Africa compounds their sexual risk for HIV; ... Ethnic differences in sex risk profiles may exist that should be taken into account when planning HIV risk reduction interventions; ... [And] coloured women have more entrenched alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems, particularly related to the use of methamphetamine, and are more likely to report AOD-related sex risks than Black African women.³¹

Thus, it is not surprising that the retracted Sport Science article emerged from the Department of Sport Science, located in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, since it certainly assumes that there exists a relationship between race, sports science, psychology and medicine. This is very much in the tradition of the sports science field relying firmly on research data that uses biological markers to justify the concept of race. One paper that the Sport Science article cites is that of Erasmus et al., which defines coloured people in purely biological terms as “a group that comprises an ancestry of about 32–43% Khoisan, 20–36% black, 2–28% white and 9–11% Asian”.³² The study presents these markers as fixed and permanent, without considering the idea that coloured identity is a social and political construction instead of a biological occurrence.

The Sport Science article also presents the “coloured community as a homogenous group that are generally described as a poor, lower working-class community”. Paradoxically, however, this depiction was based on the work of Du Plessis and Van der Berg, who state that “the coloured population’s diversity was perhaps greater than their common characteristics”.³³ Incidentally, Du Plessis and Van der Berg presented an equally problematic conclusions in their own study, which attempted to explain why poverty has remained so pervasive within this group from 1865 till the twenty-first century. They concluded that “patterns of behaviour established over centuries may still be dominant and to the detriment of the coloured population”.³⁴ They further state:

It is apparent that the progression rates [from grade 10 to matric] of the coloured population, having been remarkably high in the cohorts born before 1920, fell sharply thereafter and were even lower than those of the poorer, less urban black population for the cohorts born between 1920 and 1964, and were at par with that of the black population for the 1965-69 birth cohort.³⁵

This is not a very penetrating observation though, since it fails to take into account that the 1905 School Board Act in the Cape Colony made school attendance and education provision compulsory for white children only. The same Act proved to be the forerunner of race-based education legislation that affected the provision of physical education (and education in general) to children of colour.³⁶

The authors of the alcohol and drug use study cited above and the retracted Sport Science article³⁷ reveal alike a lack of understanding of the socially and politically constructed nature of race classification, as shown, for example, by their references to “mixed races”. Thus, Meyers et al. assert that:

The terms white, black African, Asian/Indian, and coloured refer to demographic markers that were chosen [for the study] for their historical significance and are still used today. Coloured refers to a grouping of people of mixed-race ancestry

that self-identify as a particular ethnic and cultural grouping in South Africa. The continued use of these markers is important for identifying ethnic disparities in health and for monitoring improvements in health and socio-economic disparities in South Africa.³⁸

In a similar vein, one of the authors of the Sport Science article, speaking in an interview on *Cape Talk* radio, said: “We have to look at different racial groups, we have to specify. All population groups have different problems and we have to characterise that.”³⁹ This is no different from what Anton Obholzer, the then-departmental chair of the Stellenbosch University Physical Education department, propagated in 1939: “The characteristics of a race are not only to be found in the physical traits, such as build, form of skull, complexion, etc. but also in the psychological aspects of life. This must be taken into consideration.”⁴⁰

What such research does, according to poet Diana Ferrus, is to allow racial supremacist ideas to strive, survive, and thrive. Not surprisingly, the Cape Flats Women’s Movement issued a statement on social media in response to the Sport Science article:

We are the demographic of your study. Life on the Cape Flats is brutal and the challenges we face are endless. We don’t think you can even begin to imagine what kind of mental ability this takes. How do you think our children look at us now that a famous university has declared their mothers to be idiots?

The Sport Science article, researched by five white women, underscores the need expressed by bell hooks “for confronting a reality of white female racism”.⁴¹

In general, black women remain more vulnerable than their white counterparts, and here it is relevant that all of the women whom the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) has pursued thus far for being intersex (the hyperandrogenism cases) – Caster Semanya, Dutee Chand, and others – are women of colour. Yet, it is not only white racism that threatens human liberation. The critically minded sport scientist is aware that racial discrimination, sexism and economic inequality are also at work in oppressed communities.⁴² Students and academics would do well to listen to Frantz Fanon, who says in this regard, “Colonial racism is no different from any other racism ... every one of my acts commits me as a [human]. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a human.”⁴³

Final thoughts

In conclusion, I turn my attention to possible practices to break down racist prejudices in sports science. A starting point is to identify, admit and show remorse for the racist networks that exist in sports science. Such a commitment requires a deep

and continuous reflection on the existing sports science curriculum. In this process, sports science students need to be taught about the dangers of racial essentialism as applied to the athletic body, and the human body more broadly.

Reflection is also a form of mourning, a process of lamenting the continued assault on the world's colonised/oppressed peoples' identities and social realities. It is an important part of healing and it leads to dreaming. Dreaming is when colonised peoples invoke their histories, world views and indigenous knowledge systems to theorise and imagine alternative possibilities – in this instance a more inclusive future for sports science methodologies.⁴⁴

In this way, sports science research could, as other fields of scientific inquiry do, enable students to refuse to accept myths, stereotypes and false assumptions that deny the shared commonness of human experience.⁴⁵ This work should not, however, be deferred to a distant future. Here, Fanon helps us understand that, “[t]he present will always contribute to building of the future. ... In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the world that will come later. I belong irreducibly to my time.”⁴⁶

The creation of new, deracialised sports science languages requires breaking the stranglehold that the politics of academic politeness has over the sports science field when it comes to issues of race. This academic politeness is expressed in the uncritical acceptance of visual vestiges of the racist past – for example, the unchallenged display of images of white former members of the Stellenbosch Physical Education Department – and in the hegemonic assimilation of students and staff into dominant cultures.

This uncritical attitude makes students stand in awe of a system of race stigmatisation, veiled by sophisticated scientific terminologies, that remains unchallenged in sports science curricula. New areas of investigation that engage with present political discourses through challenging past racial imbalances such as the political economy of sport, social sports studies⁴⁷ and standpoint theory⁴⁸ should be brought to the fore.

It is to be hoped that a new generation of sports scientists with a knowing agency, an understanding of domains of oppression within structuring systems, will emerge to break down race-based stereotypes in sports science and create new epistemologies that challenge racist ideologies with the objective of teaching and developing a decolonial and anti-racist sports science. It remains a constant and difficult fight, fraught with resistance from those who continue to practise the politics of race-based knowledge through sports science.

Endnotes

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Music's "Non-Political Neutrality"

When race dare not speak its name

Willemien Froneman & Stephanus Muller

In the first book on music published in Afrikaans, *Toonkuns*¹ by Willem Gerke,² music is explained as a thoroughly racialised form of expression. In the section on jazz (or, “die Jazz”, as Gerke calls it), the author writes that music is prone to influences of white and black magic: the former constituting “good” influences (encouragement to good deeds), and the latter “bad” influences (promptings to evil, lustful passions). Dance and music, Gerke writes, have always exerted powerful influences on people, and each nation (“volk”), each race, has songs exhibiting both the good and the bad.

Writing about the genealogy of jazz, Gerke asserts that the songs of North American negroes consisted of bastardised melodies, characterised by a strong rhythmic character, small ambit and preference for pentatonic (five-tone) pitch organisation, inherited from the original (“oer”) African negroes. The negro, according to Gerke, has always displayed a penchant for gliding from one pitch to another, leading to an overwrought sentimentality in religious singing (negro spirituals), whereas the desire to mimic (“om na te aap”), over time led to the adoption of non-percussive instruments in forms of accompaniment. These instruments were used to produce shrieks and grumbling sounds (“gillende en brommende tone”), as negroes could not sing high or low. Thus was born the “negro orchestra”, in which negroes developed “a kind of virtuosity” in the squeals and quacks (“die gil en kwek”) of the clarinet and trumpet.

At this point, two and a half pages into his narrative on the evolution and character of jazz, Gerke makes a startling cognitive leap. He asserts that this kind of music,

which had evolved into a general kind of negro amusement, would never have garnered attention amongst whites (“blankes”), were it not for the study of this music by a great (white) European, the Czech composer, Anton Dvořák (*sic*). Attracted by the “strange tunes” of the negroes, Dvořák paid attention to the “simple, often rough” negro tunes and through his use thereof elicited an appetite for these tunes amongst the music-loving public. The negroes were flattered by the attention to their spirituals, and made efforts to advance the cause of this music. Somehow, through the overwrought, sentimental and gushing performances of the negro baritones H.T. Burleyh and Rol Hayes, this music, to be sure (“sowaar”), managed to find its way into concert halls. And once the negro had appeared in the concert hall, according to Gerke, the negro orchestra followed suit.

This opened the floodgates to the incitement of the lower passions (“laer hartstogte”), and the desire to dance to the delightful, passion-arousing (“heerlike, alle-drifte-opwekkende”) negro orchestras. With the original negroes (“oer-negers”), these dances and feelings represented the feelings of women upon the return of warriors from war, but for whites (“die blankes”), these dances were softened in tempered forms. But as the original dance movements were translated into pure orchestral sounds (presumably in concert halls or jazz clubs), the instrumental sounds of the woodwinds and percussion instruments became ever more bestial. When Europe adopted jazz in the demoralised delirium of two world wars, the art of dancing was trampled underfoot (“vertrap”). The charming German waltz, the mazurka, the finely wrought French lancier, the Spanish tango and bolero, all had to make way for the Charleston and the “black bottom”, eventually leading to the lamentable outcome that the dance, once the highest form of art, was defiled (“deur die slyk gesleur”).

In Gerke’s writing, music provides a vehicle for understanding moral behaviour as racially determined – a premise still implicitly evident in the Sport Science article. His writing also displays many of the crude racial associations embedded more generally in Western discourses about music. These include the idea that African music is simple and primarily rhythmically interesting;³ that Africans have a different relation to pitch than Westerners; that African music’s bodily appeal is closely aligned to unbridled sexual lasciviousness and perversion; that it is irrational or overly sentimental in its appeal, animal-like in its lack of sophistication; and that it has a powerful capacity to corrupt Western aesthetic ideals. Although music is transparently incidental in Gerke’s discourse – the language used to describe the music is in fact aimed at describing “the black race”: simple, primitive, over-sexualised, irrational, unevolved, animal-like, dangerously corruptive – in a fascinating way there is nothing incidental about it. What Gerke thinks he knows about music aligns in disturbing ways with what we prefer not to know about race.

One of the hidden tenets of racial thinking that emerges so powerfully in musical writing like Gerke's, is the undertow of desire that belies racial stereotypes. Gerke dismisses black music and black subjects with a zeal that can only be read as pleasurable. In the moment of denouncing black music, it seems, the white writer and listener recovers some of these banned qualities for himself, experiencing their danger, exhilaration, and sexual charge vicariously. What is more, the value of white expressive culture becomes inextricably entwined with professing the danger of the black other in these ecstatic terms. In this sense Gerke's racial musical fantasies constitute morbidly ghoulish attempts at cobbling together a white (not black) musical Frankenstein. This is a moment of great anxiety almost universally described in Afrikaans writing of the 1930s in a sexual language of rape and defilement of which N.P. van Wyk Louw's epic poem, *Raka*, is the iconic example (and one that often sparked the imagination of white composers of Western art music).⁴ This heady dynamic of aversion and desire, often framed in mythological and cosmological terms of good and evil, inexorably evolved in the twentieth century into strategies of the white state to curb, entrain, suppress and deny black expressive culture in the name of the good, the noble, the elevated, the universal (and therefore Enlightenment "civilising reason"). What started off as an attempt to contain black (sonic) influence, soon turned into the national repression of black expressive culture through attempts to confine it to notions of the unchanging (and therefore primitive) ethnically diverse "traditional music", and later by draconian measures of state. Jazz, which so occupied Gerke's imagination, was a major casualty of these developments, through what Gwen Ansell describes as a four-stage imposition of silencing:

... the closing down of the last spaces for expression; the attempt to replace urban and politically aware discourses with synthetic, conservative, tribal substitutes; the creation of distractions; and – as a result of all the pressures on progressive cultural life – the driving of increasing numbers of artists into exile.⁵

The most sustained enquiry into the way in which music in South Africa has been coded with racial knowledge as part of the apartheid project was done by Carina Venter in a study titled "The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography".⁶ Venter surveys the writings of early apartheid intellectuals, including Gerrie Eloff, Geoffrey Cronjé, Hendrik Verwoerd and Piet Meyer, and their use of musical metaphors to elaborate racial theory. Turning to Afrikaans music historiography, she then explores how early Afrikaans music historiography – particularly the writing of Jan Bouws – introduces a circular reasoning of pure musical nature as aligned to song, in particular the art song that concerns itself with the setting of Afrikaans poetry. Expanding her reading to the work of composer Rosa Nepgen and musicologist Jacques Philip Malan, she argues that these ideals of purity are rooted in Christianity, with the music

discourse on the Afrikaans psalms serving to articulate ideas of racial segregation. In a later article elaborating on this work, Venter concludes by charging that Afrikaans congregational singing and the church psalm in particular, provided a musical outlet “for the Afrikaner’s darkest racial pathologies and fantasies”.⁷ Ultimately, Venter illustrates how the “high art” of Western art music, as exemplified in the nineteenth-century genre of the art song, became “an inflated symbolic legitimation for an unworkable and ideologically flawed system”,⁸ parasitically nourished by ideas of racial purity and separateness. Within this white/black matrix of musical petrification, the in-betweenness of “colouredness” served a particular function. It was articulated with respect to Cape Malay music by the poet I.D. du Plessis, who wrote a thesis (later published as a book) on the subject in 1935. For Du Plessis, Cape Malay musical culture was mainly a laboratory for whiteness, a repository for the “raw material” of white historical and anthropological contemplation and musical invention:

These songs live, and can be restored to former glory: from the ashes of a distorted melody and incomprehensible words can arise the phoenix of a newly forged song to soar into the blue Afrikaans sky ... The Cape Malay has preserved for us a song treasury. We have the responsibility to accept the cultural invigoration that he offers us.⁹

If taken more broadly, this conception of the relationship between colouredness and white social and cultural production resonates disturbingly with the flawed reasoning of the Sport Science article. It might even point to how the category of “colouredness” is still being put to work in knowledge production at Stellenbosch University. To be sure, Du Plessis regarded this musical contribution as distinct from – “culturally elevated” above that of – “die Kaapse Kleurling”, a prejudice shared by the preeminent Afrikaner conductor Anton Hartman, who wrote that “die Kleurling” was a loyal ally of the Afrikaner in the development of an own “volkskultuur”, but that it was above all the “slamaaier”, who through his “great love for song and acceptance of Afrikaans as his mother tongue, made an irrefutable contribution to our [Afrikaner] folk music and could also be expected to do so in the future”.¹⁰

Gerke’s *Toonkuns*, Venter’s research and Du Plessis’s constructs of Malay music confirm that writing and thinking about music in Afrikaans has particular and local early roots in racial discourse, and that this discourse demonstrably evolved from the racial theories and fantasies that nourished apartheid thinking. But Afrikaners and their particular kind of racial thinking are hardly unique when considering how music can be (and is) pressed into the service of racial thinking. Colonialism, more generally, informed music practices and writing that were deeply steeped in racial prejudices of all kinds. Kofi Agawu¹¹ has written compellingly about the manner in which African music carries the burden of the colonial encounter in discursive

constructs overwhelmingly informed by racial stereotypes in European and American scholarship. In the South African context – to which Agawu pays little attention – Grant Olwage¹² has carefully argued how particular music notational practices served to discipline indigenous agency in the Eastern Cape frontier encounter between missionaries and their converts. South African scholarly encounters with the racial other through music have also had a long and academically endorsed history preceding the febrile hallucinations of apartheid proper. In ethnomusicological work dating back to the early 1920s and sponsored by the Union Government of South Africa, Percival Kirby,¹³ for instance, published ambitious claims about the origins and development of music underpinned by racially essentialist and derogatory assumptions steeped in a social-evolutionist paradigm, whereas Paulette Coetzee has argued that the pioneering ethnomusicological work of Hugh Tracey (founder of the International Library of African Music, or ILAM), operated within a colonial field of power that “reserved the status of expertise for whiteness and denied the ability of Africans fully to understand and protect the value of their own art”.¹⁴

Race, as it finds expression in music, is not only a phenomenon connected to the strategies of Western racism. Outside of the grand ideological projects of colonialism and apartheid, there is also a commonly experienced and lived knowledge of music and race. As Radano and Bohlman¹⁵ have shown, race is embedded in music and related expressive practices, such as dance, in particularly powerful ways. Music marks race, and reproduces traces of race, thereby perpetuating the racial imagination itself.¹⁶ According to Radano and Bohlman, music and the racial imagination share an ontology and a metaphysics.¹⁷ As we have seen in Gerke’s writing, racial concepts fundamentally inform the basic concepts used to describe music, just as musical concepts shape the vocabulary of race. But importantly, music also has the ability to represent metaphysical values about race, identity and belonging outside of language. Music easily maps onto ideas about what belongs to “us” and what belongs to “them”, without it having to be articulated in precisely these terms. Despite the understanding that race is a biological myth and a social construct, various constituencies nonetheless seem to identify or be identified through music as “white”, “black” or “coloured”.

One way of making sense of this disjuncture between what we know scientifically about race and the ways in which race operates in the world is the recognition that racial knowledge also passes through the ear. It is as much constituted aurally as visually, making music and sound a powerful proxy for communicating essentialist ideas that have been debunked in visual and narrative discourses. Eduardo Mendieta puts it like this:

Race is the name for a technology of embodiment for which sight is just one of the elements to be policed, domesticated, surveyed, and made obedient and docile. In fact, racism dissimulates its insidiousness by foregrounding sight and the visual; but it is relentlessly attuned to every physical clue: how we walk, how we dance, how we smell, how our hair feels, and of course, how we sound. We can hear race around a corner, before we even see it. Race is as much, if not more, in the voice than in the skin colour.¹⁸

This is also the point made by Nina Sun Eidsheim in her book, *The Race of Sound*.¹⁹ She approaches the shared ontology and metaphysics of race and music by focusing on vocal timbre – the quality or tone colour attributed to certain sounds. When hearing someone speak or sing with a specific intonation, accent, or timbre, she argues, we have come to expect to learn something essential about their identity, including – fundamentally – their racial identity. This has led to a pervasive racial discrimination based on sound that is yet to be critically interrogated.

Another way of thinking about the mapping of music onto race is in terms of what has earlier been referred to as the undertow of desire and pleasure in racial stereotyping. Although Gerke's writing is rooted in the Afrikaner anxieties of 1930s, it clearly draws on tropes wrought by the first global music industry: blackface minstrelsy. The practice of white musicians and actors performing with blackened faces in burlesque skits and degrading lampoons dates back to the early nineteenth century, when white American entertainers started staging shows impersonating black slaves of African descent. These shows were an instant hit with the white American public, spread rapidly across the globe, and fundamentally shaped white views of black music, black bodies, and black culture.

In South Africa, the arrival of the Christy Minstrels in August 1862 in Cape Town, sparked what Denis-Constant Martin has called “a little revolution”.²⁰ Not only were whites “thrilled by the minstrels”, but “Africans were also fascinated by the performances, and eventually included elements of minstrelsy in *isicathamiya*, in the gumboot dances as well as in jazz and vaudeville acts”.²¹ But it was above all “Coloured Capetonians” that would be “fascinated to the extent that the aesthetic of the New Year festival was going to be deeply transformed by the infusion of minstrelsy”.²² A large part of Martin's life's work has been dedicated to the documentation of this fascination and its hybridised musical expressions in contemporary Christmas Choirs, the Cape Town New Year Carnival, the Coons and the Malay choirs,²³ and much of this work argues that there is more to the phenomenon of a clearly embraced blackface minstrelsy than racial discrimination. Martin's concerns with identity, memory and resilience in South African traditions of minstrelsy connect to Eric Lott's persuasive arguments about nineteenth-century blackface performance as the “racial unconscious” of white America. What passed as

white entertainment in America, writes Lott, involved a complicated and ambivalent relationship between “love” and “theft” of black expressive culture.²⁴ In the blackface minstrel show, he argues, we witness a racial “dynamic of mastery” that was “both the genesis and the very name of pleasure”.²⁵

Race and racialisation continues to serve as a pleasure principle in contemporary popular music in South Africa. Sometimes – but not always – this occurs within a matrix of white domination, amplified by a global (rather than only local) white racial imaginary. Perhaps the most interesting and high-profile example that has been the subject of critical enquiry has been the music of Die Antwoord. Adam Haupt points out that one of the group’s founding members, Waddy Jones, is “neither ‘coloured’ nor white Afrikaanse working class”, and continues to assert that Die Antwoord’s music amounts “to cultural appropriation given that ‘coloured’ subjects themselves have not been able to convert their cultural expressions into symbolic capital”.²⁶ He reads the music of Die Antwoord as an unambiguous performance of blackface in the group’s appropriation of coloured tropes, an instructive case of how “neo-colonial thinking on racial and gendered identities has local and global appeal” that connects in powerful ways to Web 2.0 marketing of culture.²⁷

Blackface is something of a prototype for theoretical constructs about the entanglement of music and race. But the implication of the argument stated earlier, namely that music and racial thinking share an ontology and metaphysics, means that race is embedded in musical expressions on a level more fundamental than can be adduced by particular historical or contemporary instances of, for example, blackface. In the words of John Mowitt, music is “ideological through and through”.²⁸ With reference to Althusser’s theory of interpellation, he argues that music is “not merely tendentious” but “involved in producing the very bearer of an identity” and, thus, in the “subjection of human agency”. This means that music *creates* raced subjects by calling or hailing people into raced subject positions. As Geoff Mann²⁹ notes, this significantly changes how one regards the power of music to construct and embody race. This power finds unique conduits of transmission where and when music is institutionalised, for example in the military, in government departments, concert agencies, arts councils, orchestras, choirs and educational environments like schools and universities.

In contrast with the commonly experienced and lived knowledge of music and race, music occupies a strange place within the university. Music in its institutionalised form at the university is generally thought of as floating above political concerns, referring – in the first instance – to itself. As an art rather than a science (in the ancient sense of a “branch of knowledge”), music is heard and academically domesticated as entertainment, artistic practice, discipline, aesthetic and physiological skill. This

view is closely connected to the idea of the music school or conservatoire that Martina Viljoen describes as “a locus of musical production that is rarely subjected to social critique”.³⁰ In other words, music conservatoires at universities still privilege admission for students based on assessment of their musical “talent” rather than their intellectual or critical abilities, and generally teach “concrete values” not only “through practical instruction, but also through the presentation of a quasi-religious system”.³¹ Although many of these institutions at our universities are called “music departments” rather than “conservatories”, the ideals of the conservatory system pervade teaching in a manner starkly incongruous to “the intellectual objectives that function as its academic backdrop”.³²

How does this structuring of music function racially at the university? In the South African government’s *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Performing Arts*,³³ published in August 1977, the Commission discusses organisational structures of music nationally. University music departments are discussed in Chapter 7,³⁴ but the racial significance of the discussion is only revealed towards the end of the report, where the penultimate chapter promises information on “The Performing Arts and the Black, Coloured and Indian Population Groups of South Africa”, and where five pages from a total of one hundred and twenty-two are strictly divided into the subheadings: “Black Population Group”, “Coloured Population Group”, “Indian Population Group” and “Recommendations”.³⁵ The Commission’s report, in other words, assumed performing arts institutional stakeholders, including universities, were white; or, in the language of the report, concerned “the cultural needs of the two language groups concerned”³⁶ (i.e. Afrikaners and English-speaking white South Africans).

The fact that race has historically been embedded in this discursive elision about institutionalised music in South Africa is highly significant precisely because of what Viljoen pinpoints as the heavy investment “in the principle of autonomy”³⁷ that prevails in the leading South African music training institutions. In other words, the unstated, assumed and desired whiteness of the South African music conservatoire that haunts the 1977 government report on the performing arts finds an ideal form of expression in an art form that has, since the nineteenth century, eschewed “a critical mediation between music and society” in a celebration of unstated, assumed and desired universal aesthetic value that just happens to derive historically from Europe.³⁸

The principle of autonomy as a marker of whiteness operates in insidious ways in postapartheid tertiary music education. It finds an unexpected impetus from a neoliberal rhetoric of colour-blindness and deracination – a rhetoric Christi van der Westhuizen has termed, in a different context, “whitewashing the blackout”.³⁹

In such arguments it is, ironically, the very rejection of a genetic basis for racial difference that serves to deny the presence of continued structural inequalities. "It says a lot about our state of mind", writes Winfried Lüdemann in a 2015 article significantly titled "Why Culture, Not Race, Determines Tastes In Music", "that we have become used to linking matters to race even if they don't have a racial basis ... We should take delight because in respect of music, there is only one race: the human race".⁴⁰ Divorced from political concerns, historical record and disciplinary research on music and race, this assumption finds its validation in the colonial matrix of power that has a very particular mechanism for articulating value: the prevalence of a repertoire, or canon.

Writing about the function of the canon in a different context, Bill Readings⁴¹ makes the point that universities trying to maintain European (literary) culture outside Europe rely on a shift away from an emphasis on tradition to the importance of the canon and that this shift is a prerequisite for such culture to exist. He also writes that "the canon has also stressed value rather than ethnicity – although racism is always one of the discourses protected by the discourse of value".⁴² A common narrative of development posits the university as successively propelled by "the Kantian concept of reason, the Humboldtian idea of culture, and now the techno-bureaucratic notion of excellence".⁴³ Within this trajectory, it is important to keep in mind the racial foundations of musico-cultural diversity in South Africa (as illustrated by Venter's work and supported more broadly by a substantial literature on music and race) – especially when "race" is substituted by "culture" and/or "excellence" as a less contaminated justification for the distribution of power (and resources) in musical institutions. Contrary to Lüdemann's argument, the work performed by "race" is important in understanding how music exists in postapartheid universities. Such an understanding could be structured as follows: Institutionalised music at South African universities historically assume white cultural interests as normative; the ideological implications of this assumption are papered over by a discourse of artistic autonomy that demonstrably flourishes in conservatoire environments; and the resulting embrace of a canon and its constituent ethnocentric and non-representative practices results in a field of study that is "neither practical nor ethically defensible".⁴⁴ Music's "non-political neutrality" in its university context, is therefore nothing less than the flaunting of cultural white supremacy.

When institutionalised music studies at Stellenbosch University celebrated a century of its existence in 2005 with a book significantly titled *Konservatorium 1905–2005*,⁴⁵ one that did not mention apartheid once, it was exactly this remarkable fact that struck the reviewer Chris Walton:

If someone were to read this book who had no idea that South African whites form only some ten percent of the population, then one could forgive him for assuming that the numerical relationship of white to black was in fact the exact opposite ... to ignore completely the simple, single fact that for over forty years, this institution – and many like it – served the interests of a fascist state whose premise was the big, black, White Lie of racial supremacy, is to compound that lie with a new one.⁴⁶

However, although the view that music in its university context is embedded in ways of knowing – and in fundamentally *racial/racialised* ways of knowing – is ostensibly dismissed by the embrace of music as an exemplary non-signifying, apolitical and universal expressive force, a contradictory process finds expression in strategies that make use of music to achieve clearly political ends. In this regard, music can be regarded as suitable for “upliftment” through “outreach” or “bridging programmes”, or can celebrate some or other version of “the common good” by staging cohesion in choral singing or orchestral playing, for example. The underlying logic here upholds the aesthetic autonomy of a canon, but supplements it with discrete and tacitly recognised musical racial imaginaries that allow symbolic interactions to the benefit of institutional programmes. In the centenary publication, *Stellenbosch University 100 (1918-2018)*, the Music Department of the University is described thus:

While the emphasis in the department is traditionally on art music in the Western tradition, there are lively discussions in and around the department regarding the placement of these traditions within a culturally diverse and socioeconomically unequal society. As part of its community interaction, the department annually presents the International Chamber Music Festival and offers an extensive bridging programme, in addition to supporting prominent ensembles, choirs and performances.⁴⁷

“Community interaction”, a postapartheid rhetorical device that references racial awareness and restitution, is offered here as a practical alternative to a “traditional” (and therefore apolitical and seemingly racially innocent) focus on Western art music. Its deployment in this manner and in this context is further marked by the terms “culturally diverse” and “socio-economically unequal”, with “diversity” and “inequality” (like “tradition”) functioning as placeholders for a racial awareness that dare not speak its name. Race has maintained a presence in this confabulated postapartheid institutional music discourse in two ways: First, the impulse to integrate “diversity” and those “socio-economically unequal” members of society into the central (“universal”, “apolitical”, “autonomous”) “tradition” of Western art music. This has typically happened by foregrounding and celebrating demographically diverse events or structures (like choirs or orchestras), embedded in Western (“white”) normativity, as symbols of a sociopolitical utopia to be realised at some

distant time in the future (but musically readily available). Second, the creation of a second-tier structure accommodating musical difference in a manner that does not displace or affect institutional commitments to the Western art music tradition. Both these continued functions of race could be described as “strategic”.

With regard to the first, Geoffrey Baker’s⁴⁸ trenchant critique of the Venezuelan youth orchestra programme known as “El Sistema”, behoves a careful consideration of how essentially undemocratic Western structures of musicianship function as social engineering in impoverished communities as structures of “upliftment” or “transformation”. Pointing to a “focus on culture as spectacle”,⁴⁹ “a resolute avoidance of political discussion”,⁵⁰ “a generalized lack of critical reflection and debate”,⁵¹ “a suppression of dissent”, and the enlistment of a code of ethics as “a dramaturgical device”,⁵² Baker traces the roots of these kinds of interventions to early colonial accounts that “demonstrate a belief that the skilful performance of European music signified civilisation”,⁵³ replete with its language of rescue and salvation intended to justify race-based cultural ethnocides.

But it is perhaps the position of jazz, an expression with a quintessential Western Cape character, as expressed by its most iconic practitioners, like Abdullah Ibrahim, Basil Coetzee and Robbie Jansen (and more recently, Kyle Shepherd, Ibrahim Khalil Shihab and Ramon Alexander), that continues to indicate the persistence of race in strategic institutional approaches to music at Stellenbosch University. This manifests not in the way Gerke’s crude racial imagination constructed it in the 1930s (as was illustrated at the beginning of this chapter), but in a particularly characteristic postapartheid rhetoric of racialisation.

At Stellenbosch University, jazz has only had an institutional presence since 2009, with the establishment of the Certificate Jazz Band (now the Stellenbosch University Jazz Band) early in that year. As the name indicates, the ensemble was created as an off-shoot of the Certificate Programme, established in 1999, initially to change student demographics at the Conservatoire by admitting “previously disadvantaged individuals” who had no opportunity to receive formal music tuition. Jazz, it is clear, was viewed as the “natural” musical corollary to racial assumptions about music education and the University curriculum. Unable to offer a fully-fledged jazz programme, due to the substantial resources required to offer a Western art music curriculum, the Conservatoire has viewed its Diploma Programme (i.e. the academic offering adopted in 2011 to provide increased university access to Certificate Programme students) as the most suitable avenue to offer students an opportunity to study jazz.

Taking the above into consideration, failing to make the connections between assumptions about racial constructs on the one hand, and assumptions about musical preferences, music value systems and resource allocation on the other, seems more like a decision than an oversight. The inherent contradiction of viewing music simultaneously as autonomous and apolitical (Western art music) and as strategic in addressing issues of political transformation (jazz), has to be understood not as a function of music (and its own contradictions), but rather as the displacement and maintaining of race knowledge within a symbolic system metaphorically charged with creating “harmony” and institutionally expected to fulfil functions of entertainment and corporate branding (rather than knowledge generation). In other words, the naïve or conscious understanding of music as not firmly implicated in the creation and continuation of race knowledge flourishes in particular ways in institutional environments that continue to embrace forms of collective “expressive identity or transactional consensus”,⁵⁴ approaches valued particularly highly by the postapartheid University of Excellence.

Endnotes

- 1 Willem Gerke, *Toonkuns* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1935). The word “Toonkuns” is related to the German word “Tonkunst”, which is another word for music.
- 2 J. Pierre Malan, ed., *South African Music Encyclopedia* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78-80. Gerke, a conductor and violinist, was born in 1876 in Amsterdam and died in 1953 in Pretoria. He emigrated to South Africa in 1922. The book was the fourth in a series titled *Kuns deur die Eeue* (Art Through the Centuries), with the first three publications focusing on “Boukuns” (Architecture), Skilderkuns (Painting) and Beeldhoukuns (sculpture).
- 3 V. Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 55-70. Agawu has referred to this myth as “The Invention of ‘African Rhythm’”.
- 4 See, in this regard, I.J. Grove, “Die Fyn, Fyn Net van die Woord Verklank: N.P. van Wyk Louw se Raka in Musiek”, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 42, no. 3 (2002), where he discusses the work of South African composers Graham Newcater and Stefans Grové and mentions the work of Peter Klatzow.
- 5 Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 109. See also Christopher John Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Jazz, “Race” and Society in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012); Jonathan Eato, “A Climbing Vine through Concrete: Jazz in 1960s Apartheid South Africa”, in *Jazz and Totalitarianism*, ed. Bruce Johnson (London: Routledge, 2016).
- 6 Carina Venter, “The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography” (MMus thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2009).

- 7 Carina Venter, "A Catalogue of Seepage: Apartheid's Political Grammar, Afrikaans Music Historiography and Early Afrikaner Nationalism", *SAMUS: South African Music Studies* 36/37, no. 1 (2018): 284.
- 8 Venter, "The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography", 15.
- 9 Izak David du Plessis, *Die Bydrae van die Kaapse Maleier tot die Afrikaanse Volkslied* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1935), 125.
- 10 Anton Hartman, "Afrikaans in die Wêreld van Musiek", *Handhaaf*, 1968, September, 15-17; 35.
- 11 Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*.
- 12 G. Olwage, "Music and (Post) Colonialism: The Dialectics of Choral Culture on a South African Frontier" (PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2003).
- 13 Percival R. Kirby, *Wits End: An Unconventional Autobiography* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1967), in which Kirby documents his academic work and many of his assumptions.
- 14 Paulette Coetzee, "Hugh Tracey, African Music and Colonial Power: Correspondence with Government Officials in the 1950s", *SAMUS: South African Music Studies* 36/37, no. 1 (2018).
- 15 Ronald Michael Radano and Philip Vilas Bohlman, *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 16 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 18 Eduardo Mendieta, "The Sound of Race: The Prosody of Affect", *Radical Philosophy Review* 17, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrev20143219>
- 19 Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372646>
- 20 Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past to Present* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), 78.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 22 Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past to Present*.
- 23 Apart from *Coon Carnival* (1999), see also Denis Martin, *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: African Minds, 2013) and Armelle Gaulier & Denis-Constant Martin, *Cape Town Harmonies: Memory, Humour & Resilience* (Cape Town: African Minds, 2017).
- 24 Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy", *Representations* 39, no. 1 (1992), <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.1992.39.1.99p0120h>; Eric Lott and Greil Marcus, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013).
- 25 Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy", 36.
- 26 Adam Haupt, "Part IV: Is Die Antwoord Blackface?", *Safundi* 13, no. 3-4 (2012): 421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2012.715486>; See also Adam Haupt, *Static: Race and Representation in Post-apartheid Music, Media And Film* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2012), chap. 3.

- 27 Haupt, “Part IV: Is Die Antwoord Blackface?”, 422.
- 28 John Mowitz, *Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 57, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383604>
- 29 Geoff Mann, “Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701538893>
- 30 Martina Viljoen, “A Critique of the Music School As a Conservative System of Music Production”, *Muziki* 11, no. 2 (2014): 116, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2014.966469>
- 31 Ibid., 121.
- 32 Ibid., 129.
- 33 Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Performing Arts* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1978).
- 34 Ibid., 47. Substantial space is devoted to the views of the then-Head of Music at Pretoria University, Prof. Jacques Pierre Malan, who makes a special case for the separation of conservatoires from music departments, with the former positioned outside universities and the latter assuming the function of musicological research.
- 35 Ibid., v.
- 36 Ibid., vii.
- 37 Viljoen, “A Critique of the Music School As a Conservative System of Music Production”, 129.
- 38 Viljoen, “A Critique of the Music School As a Conservative System of Music Production”.
- 39 Christi van der Westhuizen, *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2017), 84, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004365056_004
- 40 Winfried Lüdemann, “Why Culture, Not Race, Determines Tastes in Music”, *The Conversation*, 3 September 2015, <https://bit.ly/2wile67>. At the time of writing, Lüdemann was Chair of the Music Department and Vice-Dean: Arts, at Stellenbosch University. His argument is made from a definition of race “as a genetically determined phenomenon”. For a more thorough exposition of his thinking, see Winfried Lüdemann, “Musiek, Kulturele Diversiteit, Menswaardigheid en Demokrasie in Suid-Afrika”. Inaugural lecture, Stellenbosch University, 21 April 2009, <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/96487>. The implications of Lüdemann’s postapartheid investment in notions of “cultural difference” have been subjected to extended critique in Etienne Viviers, “A Critique of the Survival Anxieties That Inform South African Discourses about Western Art Music” (PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2016).
- 41 Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 42 Ibid., 85.
- 43 Ibid., 14.
- 44 Ibid., 85.
- 45 I.J. Grové, ed., *Konservatorium 1905–2005: Die Departement Musiek en die Konservatorium aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch by Geleentheid van die Eeufees 1905–2005* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2005).

- 46 Chris Walton, "Konservatorium 1905-2005. Die Departement Musiek en die Konservatorium aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch by geleentheid van die Eeufees 1905-2005 (review)", *Notes* 64, no. 2 (2007): 318-20, <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2007.0154>
- 47 A.M. Grundlingh, Hans Oosthuizen and Marietjie Delpont, *Stellenbosch University 100: 1918-2018* (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2018), 258.
- 48 Geoffrey Baker, *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 49 Ibid., 30.
- 50 Ibid., 35.
- 51 Ibid., 74.
- 52 Ibid., 90.
- 53 Ibid., 67.
- 54 Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 192.

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SECTION F



Unlearning Race



“Race” by Any Other Name Would Smell

Cecilia Jacobs

“Thank God I am not a ‘coloured’ woman”, was my instinctive reply when asked by a colleague for my response to the Sport Science article. Even as I responded with those words, I heard my father’s voice from 1974 ringing in my ears.

A personal journey

It was a usual weekday morning in 1974 as we drove to school, my parents (both teachers), my sister, her friend and I. My mother got the morning’s conversation going by broaching the subject: “What was your first thought when you woke up this morning?” All of us offered our thoughts, but it was my father’s response that made an indelible mark on my memory: “Thank God I am not a coloured!” Comments such as this, and many other conversations in my home, shaped my consciousness and my views about “race”.

I was at high school during the 1976 uprisings, and on 23 August 1976 fellow students from my school, Athlone High, issued a statement condemning “police brutality, inferior education, segregation laws and the plight of detainees”.¹ I was a teacher at a township school during the 1985 State of Emergency, when our school, along with 453 other schools in the Western Cape, was closed by the then Minister of Education and Culture. We continued teaching in nearby church halls and libraries despite this shutdown by the state. These events, along with a myriad of life

experiences, such as the forced removal from our home under the Group Areas Act in the 1960s and my detention under the 1985 State of Emergency, continued to shape my understandings of “race”.

My thinking about “race” was also deeply influenced by the ideology and teachings of the New Unity Movement (NUM) and its predecessor, the NEUM (Non-European Unity Movement). Through my participation in the NUM, I was introduced to the concept of “non-racialism” and the thinking of founder members such as Ben Kies:

One thing is certain, and that is that mutations in skin-colour, hair texture, shape of nose or skull, and stature, owing to geographical dispersal, isolation and diet, have made not the slightest difference to the biological unity of man as a single species, and provide no scientific basis for a division into what are popularly mis-called “races”.²

Soudien points to the irony of that moment in history. While Kies was influencing thinking on “race” in the 1950s, D.F. Malan and H.F. Verwoerd “were putting in place the architecture and the apparatus for the world’s most devastating racist project – apartheid”.³ The anti-apartheid struggle became for me a struggle against both the concept of “race” as a social construct, as well as a struggle against all forms of racism and, on a more personal level, the total rejection of the term “coloured”, which had been assigned to me at birth by apartheid legislation. It is a position I continued to hold after the 1994 negotiated settlement, much preferring Alexander’s metaphor of the great Gariep River and its many tributaries flowing into the “ocean of humanity” as the symbol of national unity to the idea of a “rainbow nation” of colours existing side-by-side.⁴ So, for me it always was, and still is, just the human race.

Alexander was also influential in shaping my thinking about “race”, as he steadfastly argued that “you cannot fight racial inequality, racial prejudice and race thinking by using racial categories ... fighting race with race is bad social science and even worse practical politics”.⁵ His work offers us alternatives for establishing what has actually caused the disadvantage in a particular domain (like education), such as quality of schooling, income and language. Rather than using “race” as shorthand, he offers a more nuanced class analysis, claiming that “the still large-scale overlapping of ‘race’ and class in South Africa guarantees that no disadvantaged ‘black’ person will fall through the net by virtue of the use of non-racial criteria such as language and income”.⁶ This, too, influenced my understanding of the concept of “race”, by providing a class analysis that located the notion of “race” within a broader social analysis of capitalism. This analysis, articulated so well by Zinn, offers an understanding that links racial discrimination, poverty and capitalism. He argues that “the anti-racist struggle has to be joined with the anti-capitalist struggle”.⁷ These are ideas that have carried through into my practice as an academic developer in higher education and a researcher in the field of higher education studies.

A perspective from the field: Higher education studies

This brings me to how my views on "race" and class intersect with my discipline, higher education, and the field within which I have worked for nearly three decades, academic development. Higher education studies and the subfield of academic development are not fields that an undergraduate student will likely encounter in the course of their studies. However, these fields contribute to a body of knowledge that speaks quite directly to the student experience of higher education. Therefore, the politics of knowledge with respect to "race" and the student experience of the university, as expressed in this field, are critically important.

It is ironic, therefore, that one of the gaps in the literature produced in the field of academic development is the paucity of research on working-class students' experiences of academic development in practice, and whether it has made a difference to their feelings of alienation at universities like Stellenbosch. A recent article addresses this gap, and what it found was that, while some of the working-class students interviewed valued the academic development (AD) interventions offered to them, others saw it as "a painful space that raised critical racial questions regarding who belongs in AD, how they are selected and to what extent they help students or reinforce their institutional marginality".⁸ The researchers in this study call for the problematising of the notion of "previously disadvantaged" (often invoked in the academic development field as a proxy for "race"), as it is used "to refer to black students only".

Academic development as a field has always had a strong social justice agenda in South Africa and has framed its work as widening access to higher education for those who were previously denied access due to some or other form of disadvantage.⁹ The widening of access is generally understood to go beyond formal access to a university education and particular higher education programmes, and to include "epistemological access",¹⁰ which refers to access to knowledge, and to the "goods" of the university. However, much of the research making up the body of knowledge from which academic development draws has been undertaken in "relatively unstable communities"¹¹ of academic developers. Boughey and Niven ascribe this instability to "the temporary conditions of service" under which many academic developers work, as well as "the shifting and uncertain nature of academic development in institutions often due to its uneven, informal funding over the years".¹² As a result, the quantity and quality of such research has been highly uneven and strongly focused on practice-based solutions.

In a cohort study, Scott et al. provide evidence that the system is failing the majority of its students, and it is this failing higher education system that is the field of practice for academic developers.¹³ Elsewhere, Scott raises concerns about

the reliance of the field of academic development on “craft knowledge” approaches to solving the problems of a failing higher education sector.¹⁴ Shay characterises such “craft knowledge” as embodied and developed from years of experience that academic developers have from grappling with complex problems, but without the capacity to explain the very complex problems it is intended to solve.¹⁵ Therefore, the way in which knowledge has been built in the field undermines its transformative agenda. Although it has been underpinned by issues of social justice and a desire to contest the practice of creating separate, add-on classes for “underprepared students” (a proxy for “race”), such practices prevail. So there is clearly a need to shift the research lens beyond individual pedagogical practices to the higher education sector as a whole, and to examine universities as complex social spaces.

In order to analyse how the issue of “race” has influenced practice and thinking within academic development, one needs to trace the development of the field over the past four decades. Its history in South Africa has been well documented.¹⁶ This literature identifies three phases underpinned by sets of ideas (discourses¹⁷) operating in higher education that have powerfully shaped how academic development has progressed. These phases, and the discourses underpinning them, are referred to in the literature as “academic support”, “academic development” and “institutional development”.

The “academic support” discourse is located in a set of ideas that see “disadvantaged students” (another proxy for “race”) as underprepared for higher education. Such students are seen as requiring add-on tutorials, workshops or courses to acquire a ubiquitous set of “skills” that would fill conceptual gaps and improve competence in English. Such initiatives are generally adjunct to the mainstream curriculum. This understanding of academic development work is underpinned by racialised, deficit assumptions about students.

The “academic development” discourse was a response to critiques of the “support” model and it is located in a set of ideas that seeks to move academic development initiatives from the margins to the mainstream. It signals a move away from seeing students as deficient, to a critical examination of teaching and learning in the mainstream curriculum and a focus on academic staff development.

The “institutional development” discourse saw a shift in which academic development practices were influenced by the need for systemic change in South African higher education. This set of ideas was shaped by curriculum renewal in response to the social and economic needs of the country, and an accountability to stakeholders for the quality of the graduates produced by higher education.

The thinking informing these discourses has shaped practices in the field in fundamental ways. How I situated myself in academic development and its prevailing discourses was directly influenced by my own views on "race", which in turn influenced my practices and my research as an academic developer in higher education. When I first started out as a practitioner and a researcher, in 1994, I held a different view to the prevailing notions of academic development.

In the 1990s, academic development, as a field of practice, was responding to the widening of access to higher education for students who had previously been denied access as a result of the social, economic and political policies of the apartheid state. Those traditional notions of academic development generally cast such students in a deficit mode and conceptualised academic development work as an enterprise marginal to the mainstream curriculum, designed to fix such students so that they could succeed in higher education. My view¹⁸ was that academic development work was not about catering for the needs of a racialised group of students, but rather that it should be about designing the social futures of all our students for "cohesive sociality", "new civility" and a more "equitable public realm".¹⁹ While this view of academic development has taken root at a number of institutions in the country, at Stellenbosch University, some 20 years after the "academic support" model of the 1980s was eschewed, this approach still prevails.

In examining the dominant discourses relating to academic development work at Stellenbosch University, one needs to look no further than the way in which the role of academic development centres, such as the Centre for Teaching and Learning, is understood. This centre, as well as others performing an academic development role at the University, are referred to as "support services", or "steundienste" in Afrikaans. It was only after I read an article by Tom Eaton that I truly understood my own abhorrence of the word "support" when used in relation to academic development work:

"Support" is an adult diaper. It's a machine that helps you breathe when you are unconscious. It's a charitable donation to fight a degrading, incurable malady. It's a word so steeped in fatalistic despair that everything it touches instantly becomes a lost cause and therefore awkward at best and repellent at worst.²⁰

So, how does the field of academic development play into how "race" is framed within institutional life at Stellenbosch University? I would argue that the framing of academic development work at Stellenbosch University as "support" has contributed to the feelings of alienation that students, referred to by the institution as BCI (black, coloured, Indian), experience and express through movements such as Open Stellenbosch.

In 2015, at the height of the Fallist movement, Stellenbosch University students expressed their views very publicly about the kind of space the University was for them, how they experienced it, and how this experience impacted on their learning. Below are two student views expressed publicly at the time. The first was expressed in 2015, by then-student Neil du Toit, as a Facebook post on a site titled Bonfiire (established in 2012 and since closed) which claimed to be a space for “rigorous debates on race, language, institutional culture, residence placement policies, and religion”:

The 15th was an awkward day at Stellenbosch. The university locked up the admin building, brought the dogs along, and the VC read off a pre-typed and printed speech ... In my experience the reactions to Open Stellenbosch fall into two categories: those that deny that we have any work to do to fix racism at Stellenbosch, and those that are openly racist.

The second view was expressed by Open Stellenbosch’s then-spokesperson, Sikhulekile Duma, in 2015, on the day after the movement picketed at the inauguration of Professor Wim de Villiers, the current vice-chancellor:

Stellenbosch University is a bubble. A lot of students even happily tell you that they come here so that they can run away from the issues of the country. We want to change that.

The views of these two students suggest that Stellenbosch University needs to interrogate continually whether the spaces within which its students learn are inclusive and welcoming. What is required is a reframing of academic development work. Its current framing as “support” casts the very students for whom such “support” is designed in a deficit mode, much as the Sport Science article casts “coloured” women as having a deficit in their cognitive functioning. This essentialising of students on the basis of “race” is then offered as the reason for their poor academic performance. This kind of racialised thinking locates success in higher education within the scope of particular students, while simultaneously absolving lecturers from critically reflecting on their practices, and the institution from critically reflecting on its systems.

Framing academic development work as “support” suggests an “autonomous” view²¹ of students, locating racialised understandings of “underpreparedness” and “disadvantage” within the students themselves, rather than in the broader social context within which they find themselves. Boughey²² has argued that individualised views of learning and learners are dominant in South Africa, and this is certainly the case at Stellenbosch University. This understanding of learning, also referred to in the literature as decontextualised, constructs students as independent or autonomous from the social contexts in which they were raised, in which they live and in which they learn.

Boughey and McKenna argue that central to this understanding of learning are the ideas that "education is asocial, acultural and apolitical" and that "success in education is dependent on factors inherent to the individual".²³ This understanding has resulted in academic development work at Stellenbosch University taking place separately from the mainstream functioning of the institution, leaving mainstream teaching and learning largely unchanged. The ongoing dominance of this autonomous view of students might be implicated in the feelings of alienation that students expressed through Open Stellenbosch in 2015. Boughey and McKenna argue that the construction of students and their education as asocial, acultural and apolitical, "sits alongside the anger about the rise in fees and decreased state subsidy, broad political instability, and frustrations about ongoing social inequality".²⁴

How, then, does Stellenbosch University move towards being a more inclusive space that better serves the interests of working-class students? I would argue that this requires an analysis that considers factors beyond essentialising categories such as BCI (black, coloured, Indian). This would require a shift away from the dominant asocial, acultural and apolitical construction of learning and learners, towards a class analysis that provides a more social view of learning and learners. Such a social or contextualised view of learning would see students as being shaped by the very contexts in which they were raised, in which they live and in which they learn.

This alternative view would see learning as a socially embedded phenomenon and understand that given the same life chances, all students have the potential to be educated and learn successfully. Such a view would also acknowledge that the socioeconomic context surrounding learning and knowledge construction has a significant impact on successful learning, and that learning and knowledge construction are dependent on the social structures and academic communities to which some students have access, and others do not. Such a view would require of Stellenbosch University to interrogate its context as a social space and examine how it serves to include or exclude students from access to learning and powerful knowledge.

Although teaching and learning have social and individual dimensions that relate to one another, the social context is more complex and nuanced and has a far more profound effect on successful learning than any individual characteristics of students or lecturers. It is in this area that Stellenbosch University can better serve the needs of working-class students. While a "race" analysis pushes academic development work towards individual, autonomous views of education as asocial, acultural and apolitical, a class analysis pushes academic development work towards understandings of the sociopolitical determinants of successful learning and learners in higher education, such as quality of schooling and income. This has implications for practice.

In 2007, Boughey argued that a “third generation” model of academic development practice was needed in South Africa. While the first-generation model was concerned with issues of equity and the second-generation model was concerned with issues of efficiency, Boughey offers a third-generation model of academic development that “marries a concern for equity with a concern for efficiency within an overall framework of a regard for quality”.²⁵ Such a focus on quality would require an approach to student development that moves away from additional generic extended programme courses and classes for racialised groups of students, to a wider institutional strategy that focuses on quality at programme level, and curriculum renewal that is aimed at the transformation of student learning. This signals a shift in focus away from individual students and their perceived deficits and towards academic development practices that are more contextualised within disciplines of study and contribute to “differentiated learning needs at programme level”.²⁶

Some ten years later, Behari-Leak et al. suggest a fourth generation model of academic development that contributes to a “transformative discourse” and “engenders a greater critical social justice worldview within the higher education sector in South Africa”.²⁷ They challenge the field of academic development to respond to “the critique by protesting students that academic development makes hyper-visible the schism between those who can and cannot succeed at the university”.²⁸ They also challenge academic developers to disrupt dominant cultures at universities that continue to marginalise racialised groups of students. This calls for academic developers to seize the “decolonial moment” and position themselves as change agents rather than “bridge builders” and “hand holders”.²⁹

Researching “race”

I now turn to one of the pitfalls that a nonracial perspective can lead to, when poorly understood. When “race” is used as an analytical tool in academic development research, without locating it within a broader sociopolitical analysis that links racial discrimination, poverty and capitalism, an essentialising of “race” takes place, leading to research like the Sport Science article.

Soudien describes the notion of “colour-blindness” as a weak but dominant form of nonracialism, which he refers to as a benign form of multiculturalism. According to Soudien, this position denies “race” and, because its proponents claim not to see “race”, “they deny the possibility that they can be racist”.³⁰ Herein lies the pitfall of such a position, one commonly held by liberals in the academic development movement, who understand their role, in a sometimes patronising way, as being kind to poor, disadvantaged students. This weak form of nonracialism feeds individualised views of learning, constructing students as independent of the social

contexts from which they come, and understanding success in higher education as being dependent on factors inherent to the individual student. Because racism is confined to "the domains of personal behaviour, its power, as a social phenomenon, is not made visible".³¹

Another poor version of nonracialism is what Soudien refers to as "multiracialism". This view, which sees "race" as a form of identity, goes beyond erroneous understandings of "race" as a biological phenomenon. While this understanding was associated with conservatism in the days of the anti-apartheid struggle, it appears to have gained traction in a much more thoughtful and radical form with young South Africans who were born in the late 1980s and after. In my time as a young activist as member of the NUM in the 1980s, the term "coloured" was associated with opportunistic quislings who had stood for office in the racist House of Representatives, which formed part of the notorious Tricameral Parliament of South Africa from 1984 to 1994. However, the manner in which this term has been reclaimed by young South Africans today requires a different engagement from that of the 1980s. In concluding this chapter, I would like to sketch a scenario that demonstrates how the tensions and contradictions surrounding the issue of "race", and particularly the term "coloured", continues to impact the lives of young South Africans well after the euphoria of 1994.

Intergenerational conversations

As mentioned earlier, the anti-apartheid struggle for me was a struggle against the concept of "race" as a social construct, as well as a struggle against all forms of racism occurring in the country. The nonracial perspective I held in the 1980s, and continue to hold today, is that of the total rejection of the term "coloured" in how I choose to identify myself. As the mother of a young South African woman born in 1989 who completed her undergraduate studies at Rhodes University during the first decade of the twenty-first century and her postgraduate studies at UCT during its second decade, I was deeply immersed in her process of reclaiming the term "coloured". As we debated the tensions and contradictions of our respective lived experiences, I came to engage with the notion of "colouredness" in a very different way.

Thirty-odd years later, I was compelled to rethink the views I had held so firmly in the 1980s. Across many conversations with my daughter, who is a writer, about why she considered it important to identify herself as a "coloured" woman in 2019, her arguments covered a number of issues. She pointed out that of the four apartheid racial categories, the label "coloured" was the only one that has been consistently challenged as unacceptable. This she ascribed, in part, to imperialism and the discomfort felt in the United States with the term because of its associations

there, which is quite unrelated to the South African context. Rejecting the term, in her opinion, had two consequences: a second erasure of a culture built in spite of colonialism and racial subjugation, and the denial of even the possibility of reclamation. She mentioned also a sense of pride in the food, the people, the intergenerational overcoming, the language, the rituals, the rites of passage, and the heritage, both erased and rebuilt, often in the margins of society. She spoke of the need to continue to fight for this community, which demographically has the highest percentage of men in prison and the lowest percentage of CEOs in the country.

By refusing validity to the name, and therefore the lexicon that speaks to the specificity of that human experience (words such as *ougat*, *dala* and other phrases that give expression specific to a community), the way that it can play into healing is also removed. She emphasised the need for healing of injury specific to this community: violence, substance abuse and child sexual abuse, which she stated, cannot be healed when “we refuse to acknowledge the ways in which our healing needs to be specific to us”. In her words, “I will not deprive myself of all this because the word does not sit *lekker* in some intellectuals’ mouths.” She identified as a “coloured” woman:

Because I AM a coloured woman. Because I am comfortable with it, fortified by it and driven for it. It isn't a dirty word for me. It isn't an imposed word for me. It is a word of immense power and narrative substance. My mother, my grandmother were denied basic human rights for being coloured women, and tossing it aside, when my family and people rise despite it and fall because of it, is an insult to my history.

In her view and life experience, it was “mainly UCT-educated, discourse-insulated elitists” who “have a problem with this word. So the discomfort with it is not representative. And this is telling”.

These understandings are a radical departure from the “proudly coloured” mentality that pervaded the halls of the Tricameral Parliament in the mid-80s. These are views that need to be engaged with even as we debate the kind of research that essentialises “race” and promotes ongoing racist narratives and tropes. The Sport Science article represents just one such study in a long list of similarly racist studies that continue to be conducted in the name of Stellenbosch University. In light of the much-publicised Sport Science article and the many others that did not attract the same amount of attention, there is an urgent need to think anew about what nonracialism might mean in the third decade of the twenty-first century. While I remain unwavering in my total rejection of the term “coloured” in how I choose to identify myself, I have come to realise the importance of, and urgent need for, ongoing intergenerational conversations around issues of representation, the erasure of identity and the silencing of voices.

It is my hope that through such intergenerational conversations we can create new spaces for common meaning-making that move us closer, as a country, to a truly nonracial South Africa. Alexander states that a truly nonracial South Africa is not only conceivable but also eminently feasible.³² To do this, however, he urges us to confront issues of human worth and dignity, and undertake the hard work of bringing back into our paradigms and social analyses "the entire human being and the ways in which human beings can live fulfilled lives". I believe this is possible and it is a goal that shapes the purpose of my life.

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Unlearning Race

The 'Introduction to the Humanities' curriculum at Stellenbosch University

Anita Jonker

Introduction

Within a very short period of time, the controversial Sport Science article drew intense reaction from senior researchers and executive management at Stellenbosch University, much more than protesting students have been able to evoke at historically white South African universities. While scholars and leaders on campus reacted quickly, it is doubtful whether any of the coloured¹ women who participated in the Sport Science study would have read the contentious article that appeared in an international online journal.

The social context that produces offensive research

It is clear that a historically white university like Stellenbosch University cannot separate its research thinking from the thinking that underpins its teaching and community activities. The same academics who do research are the ones who teach students and serve communities. The social, ethical and political values and perspectives that govern research are inextricably linked to academic work, such as teaching and public service. What this means is that the flurry of activity to “correct” research protocols and procedures – such as reviewing the actions of the research ethics committee – could easily overlook other affected areas of university work, such as teaching and learning. It would help, in this case, to locate the spirited debates around the Sport Science article within the social and historical contexts of Stellenbosch as a town and the University as an institution.

Some of the older residents who now live in the area of Cloeteville, where the sports science research was conducted, were living in the central area of Stellenbosch until they were forcibly removed, after Die Vlakte was proclaimed a White Group Area in 1964.² People who were classified as “coloured” were displaced from the centre of this historical town to underdeveloped areas like Cloeteville and Idas Valley. Lückhoff Secondary School, which was established in 1937 and had an excellent reputation, as well as dedicated teachers, was the first Afrikaans high school for coloured learners in the Boland. Its closure had a devastating effect on the community life and educational prospects of the residents of Die Vlakte. The impact of the trauma that communities experienced during the forced removals on Die Vlakte is still manifesting in the community today.

The reaction of especially coloured women on the SU campus must therefore not be read as simply anger directed towards one published article. It happens in the context of historical discrimination and trauma that coloured families had endured under colonialism and apartheid. Indeed, some SU women saw the article as inflicting painful memories of ongoing prejudice within a still overwhelmingly white university in terms of staffing and institutional culture. The article therefore reminded the victims of a very present past.

The institutional context of knowledge production

It is well known that the historically Afrikaans universities were run by executives and councils that were allied to the apartheid government. The high level of support that these universities gave to government had a major impact on their academic and management ethos. From their inception, therefore, the Afrikaans universities functioned as instrumentalist institutions. An instrumentalist university takes as its core business the production and dissemination of knowledge for a purpose defined or determined by a sociopolitical agenda. Knowledge is not regarded as something that is good in itself, and hence worth pursuing for its own sake. In this context, knowledge is inextricably linked to power.³

As institutions serving the apartheid state, the Afrikaans universities were managed in highly authoritarian ways. This meant that objections to institutional policies and actions, and protests by students or staff over management policies and actions, were not tolerated, for resistance was seen as not only against the university leadership but against the institutional order itself. As Ian Bunting recounts:

The intellectual agendas of the six institutions were by and large determined by the perception that they had a duty to preserve the apartheid status quo. They did engage in research activities, but much of this had a local South African

focus. A great deal of their research involved policy work for the government and government agencies, and technological work undertaken on contract for defence-related industries.⁴

Today the legacy of this authoritarian management style is still reflected in how some of these universities deal with criticism from their lecturers, support staff and students. This management style can also be observed in the outdated hierarchical structure of the various faculty and university management systems.⁵

Then the dam wall burst

It is not as if there were not any warning signs long before the distressing Sport Science article was published and retracted. Already in 2013, instruments of racial measurement were discovered on the SU campus, causing a major scandal about how the social sciences – and anthropology, then called *Volkekunde* – were taught in the past.⁶

Even more recently, students led an unprecedented protest movement in 2015-2016 against racist institutional cultures and the exclusionary costs of higher education. The small number of black professors, the Western-dominated curriculum, the untransformed symbols of a colonial and apartheid past (such as the Verwoerd plaque at SU and the Rhodes statue at UCT), the privileging of Afrikaans in teaching, and the general alienation of students in the classroom and on the campus – all of these concerns were warning signs that all was not well in the cultures and content of historically white universities like Stellenbosch. Then the Sport Science article placed the University back in crisis even as it was still recovering from the student protests of two to three years earlier.

One of the key elements of the *vervreemding* (alienation) of black students on historically white campuses has to do with struggles for academic access and success. The educationalist, Wally Morrow, is critical of the assumption that students will realise their academic potential once they are admitted to university and simply make use of their chances.⁷ He proceeds to make an important distinction between formal and epistemological access to the university. Whereas formal access relates to conforming to the formal admission requirements of the university, epistemological access is about the unequal access to knowledge, when poor, black students are compared to those who are privileged by race and class.

To address the realities of students' unequal educational backgrounds, Ian Scott and others have appealed to higher education institutions to widen their educational structures and approaches to account for the disparities in the social, economic and educational backgrounds of students.⁸ For this purpose, academic development programmes were seen as one response.

Rationale for EDPs at South African universities

Academic Development Programmes (ADPs), also called Extended Programmes or Extended Degree Programmes (EDPs) in places like Stellenbosch, were established with the explicit purpose of redressing the racial inequalities in higher education that still existed long after the official end of apartheid. Their aim, therefore, was to broaden access to students with academic potential who were disadvantaged socially and educationally because of the past.

In the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University, EDP students do their first academic year over two years. In their first year, they take two of the compulsory five mainstream subjects, and three academic support subjects or modules. In their second year, they take their other three compulsory mainstream subjects and continue with one academic support subject. The academic support subjects were meticulously designed so that EDP students can flourish in a caring university environment that provides optimal academic and emotional support.

One of three academic support subjects or modules EDP students take in their first-year, 'Texts in the Humanities', focuses on academic writing and the different writing conventions of the various subject fields or disciplines. The second academic support module, 'Information Skills', familiarises students with basic computer skills and programmes that are needed to succeed in any mainstream subject. And the third module, 'Introduction to the Humanities', is aimed at broadening students' world views and providing the intellectual foundations for further studies in the humanities. The broad-based, interdisciplinary curriculum addresses the unequal access to powerful knowledge that has characterised university education in South Africa in the past and that still excludes marginalised communities in the present.

When it comes to addressing the unequal access to powerful knowledge, one must acknowledge the common perception that students must meet specific academic literacy requirements before they can enter higher education.⁹ Socially powerful institutions, such as educational institutions, tend to support dominant discourse practices, each with their own type of literacy. Normative academic socialisation approaches aim to identify the existing academic conventions and to induct students into using these conventions.¹⁰

By contrast, vernacular literacies, found in people's everyday lives, are less "visible" and are generally regarded as "inappropriate" for university education. What is important for meaning-making, however, is that people should be able to use their range of literacies in different contexts to enable communication, solve practical problems or act as a memory aid, and in some cases, do all at the same time.¹¹

Lea and Street distinguish three overlapping and complementary models of academic literacy that are important in addressing students' unequal educational backgrounds in teaching and learning.¹² The premise of the Study Skills Model is that students need to learn a set of skills that should help them to transfer their knowledge of writing and literacy from one context to the other. The Academic Socialisation Model, on the other hand, proposes that the disciplines use different genres and discourses. Consequently, when students learn the subject-specific discourses of the various disciplines, it should enable them to reproduce or mimic those academic discourses.

A third model, the Academic Literacies Model, focuses on relationships of power, meaning-making, identity, agency and authority in the learning process. It encourages lecturers to establish what students already know and to build on that in teaching them academic literacy.¹³ So, for example, in the Academic Literacies Model, the many languages of students are not seen as an obstacle but rather as a resource for meaning-making.

With this model in mind, the 'Introduction to the Humanities' is based on three key strategies that help to "unlearn race": student-centredness, multilingualism and the primacy of student knowledge and experiences.

Student-centredness

When we consider the politics of knowledge at South African universities, it is important to reflect on how knowledge is constructed, and which teaching and learning model will make provision for students' intellectual contributions.

In traditional university teaching that uses the didactic method, or the transmission mode of teaching, the lecturer is presented as an authority who transmits established facts and ideas to students. These established facts and ideas form part of traditional discourse, which reinforces "the inherited, official shape of knowledge".¹⁴ The dialogic method presents a different model of learning and knowledge, where engaging in dialogue is understood as part of our process of becoming human, a moment where humans come together to reflect on their reality, and to exchange ideas as to how to act critically to transform their reality. According to Freire, dialogue as a way of learning is ultimately a debate about epistemology, i.e. what counts as knowledge.¹⁵

Multilingualism

In the multilingual teaching model that has been developed for the 'Introduction to the Humanities' course, technical terminology and definitions are developed in

the three official languages of the Western Cape (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa) in four different modules that introduce students to foundational concepts in the Humanities. This is deliberately done to accommodate students who are not fluent in academic English. The multilingual teaching and learning practices are aimed at providing epistemological access to students to increase their chances of achieving success in their first academic year of study.

Students have three lectures and one small-group tutorial per week. The first lecture of the week functions as a language support period, where the technical terminology of the subject field is explicitly taught and tested. In the two weekly lectures that follow, students therefore do not encounter the trilingual technical terminology for the first time, and they are able to engage in dialogues about the subject content by using the terminology. Whereas the technical terminology of a subject field is often an obstacle to students who have to learn in academic English, EDP students do not have this unnecessary barrier.

During the one weekly tutorial, students engage in small-group discussions about the subject content in their mother-tongues. To make this possible, tutors are appointed who can speak isiXhosa and English in the one tut, and Afrikaans and its different varieties in the other tut.

In the lectures there are two interpreters, one for Afrikaans and one for isiXhosa. The motivation for using students' mother tongues is to facilitate understanding, to validate their cultural and linguistic identities and to give them a tool to express themselves confidently in a class of predominantly English mother-tongue speakers.

Once students are familiar with the technical concepts and their definitions in their mother tongues, they are encouraged to ask critical questions in the tutorials and lectures, and to make contributions from their own cultural, linguistic and traditional backgrounds that can enrich the course content and enhance their fellow students' and lecturers' world views.

Since most of the students in the EDP come from marginalised South African communities, it is important to work consciously against the internalised oppression that characterises communities that have been suppressed for prolonged periods. 'Internalised oppression' refers to the internalisation of conscious or unconscious attitudes regarding inferiority by the targets of systemic oppression. Although target groups cannot oppress themselves in the same way they have been oppressed, they can practise internalised hate against themselves or their own oppressed communities.

Students' knowledge and experiences

Students' knowledge and experiences inform the intellectual foundations of the 'Introduction to the Humanities' course and provide a solid foundation for scientific thinking. What this means is that the incoming students are not seen as "in deficit", as in traditional ADP programmes, but as rich in knowledge and experiences that can and should form the springboard for new learning (see the chapter by Cecilia Jacobs in this book).

In their very first module, 'The Roots of Humanity', students are introduced to those concepts that were used to justify racism, slavery and classism. These include concepts like biological essentialism, Social Darwinism, scientific racism, National Socialism, and eugenics.

In addressing the consequences of a colonial past, this broad-based humanities curriculum instils in students a historical consciousness that accounts for the often overlooked link between discrimination in the past and new manifestations of discrimination in the present. Students learn that science has repeatedly been abused for political purposes, to justify racism, genocide and xenophobia, which makes the notion of scientific objectivity a relative concept.

When the Sport Science article was published, EDP students were doing a module titled 'Becoming Human: Troubling Gender, Sexuality, and Race'. After the controversy around the article erupted, the decision was taken to devote one week to a discussion of the article, as well as the various responses to it. Students received several articles to read that were written in response to the Sport Science article.

As is the case with their other modules, students had received a technical terminology list with 32 gender terms and 32 race-related terms, both translated into Afrikaans and isiXhosa. In this technical terminology list, the basic concepts necessary to engage in a critical and informed discussion about the topic of race or gender were listed and defined. Students had done one of their regular assessments on the terms and definitions to establish whether they had grasped the meanings of the concepts and if they could explain the ideas or concepts.

The next step, which was educationally more challenging, was to establish if students could apply the concepts in new situations, or use the newly acquired information in a new way. It was surprising how students were able to use the concepts to engage in a critical discussion about the Sport Science article, even though some had probably only rote-learned the terms for an assessment earlier in the week. Students were able to apply successfully during class discussions of the Sport Science article such terms as 'biological essentialism', 'implicit (hidden) bias', 'invisibility' and 'structural oppression'.

Grappling with the meanings of race in the aftermath of the troubled publication

Students who self-identify as coloured and who come from disadvantaged communities felt downhearted in the tutorial discussions that white researchers could make judgements about coloured women's cognitive abilities (or intelligence¹⁶), while it was clear that there were many successful professional coloured women, especially at Stellenbosch University, whom they regarded as role models and who had successful careers as academics. Some said that they had to overcome many social challenges in their own communities to come to university. Others were concerned about what the lay public would think of them as coloured students if established researchers made such claims about coloured women's potential.

Students were thus baffled when an English-speaking student who self-identifies as coloured noted that she did not think that the Sport Science article was all bad, and that one should look at the intention behind the article, or what the article endeavoured to achieve. She did not feel informed enough to evaluate the research methodology of the researchers, but she felt uncomfortable about the fact that ethnicity was linked to cognitive performance and that intelligence was portrayed as innate and unchanging. However, she pointed out that there were women who self-identified as coloured who have had poor educational opportunities and whose quality of life has not improved in the new South Africa. There should be social interventions to provide optimal professional support to these vulnerable women. The fact that the article has now led to a race row might even discourage researchers from undertaking research on vulnerable communities in future.

A student who self-identifies as a transgender man noted how he used to hate his own cultural group, the coloured people, for how they treated him as a transgender man. Since he read the articles on coloured identity in this module and discussed the issue in his tutorial groups, he realised that there are other, open-minded coloured people in the class with whom he could identify. He realised that coloured people are good enough as they are. They do not have to change to become another group.

In the dialogic teaching and learning model employed in the 'Introduction to the Humanities' course, students' own intellectual contributions and their own lived experiences are valued. The content of curricula, as well as the teaching methodology, is thus regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains socially relevant and responsive to the changing diversity profile of students in the EDP.

In 2016 and 2017, video recordings were made of students' oral contributions, and these videos now form part of the course content. Curriculum renewal was thus informed by the students themselves. The 2019 EDP group was fascinated to listen

to the race-related issues that were raised by their peers in earlier years that were so similar to what they were still experiencing in their own communities. What was significant about watching the video contributions in 2019 was that students were now watching the videos against the backdrop of the Sport Science article.

When the concept of ‘colourism’ was raised for the first time by students in the 2017 videos, I asked several established researchers and lecturers at SU if they had ever heard about the concept, but none had at that time. That experience illustrated why curricula must be designed in consultation with students in the courses that we teach. Students have lived experiences that can enrich the curricula and that can help lecturers and researchers to avoid working with over-simplified dichotomies (like black and white). Colourism is a form of prejudice or discrimination based on skin tone amongst members of the same race, in which people are treated differently based on their lighter skin tone or shade because of the social status, privilege, and opportunity that is associated with a lighter skin colour. The black author and activist Alice Walker defined the term in her 1983 *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*¹⁷ as the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour”.

In the videos, students shared their experiences of how they experienced discrimination at the hands of their own cultural groups in, amongst others, Langa, the Eastern Cape, Bonteheuwel, Kraaifontein, Heideveld and the Cape Flats. Students repeatedly referred to “proximity” or “assimilation to whiteness” and “the white gaze”.

One student from Langa noted that, as a black person, one can never win. If your English is too good, you sound “white”; if your English is too “black”, you sound like a township girl. Furthermore, people from her own cultural group use offensive terms like “yellow bone”, “coconut”, “banana” and “boere” to denigrate others for having too light a skin tone.

A student whose mother comes from Congo and whose father comes from Jamaica noted in the 2017 video how everyone in her home province wanted to be white. People used skin bleaches that were very bad for their skin, but they did not mind, as long as they could have a lighter skin colour. She was familiar with the insulting terms like “yellow bone” and “coconut”, because of her English accent and perceived “proximity to whiteness”.

In 2019, before the Afrophobic attacks, I invited the Congolese student back to talk to students about her experience of living in South Africa as a “foreign national”, even though she has lived here all her life. She said that all her life, she had thought that she was a South African. Until the Afrophobic attacks in 2008.

Then South Africans forced her to realise that she was a foreigner. She knows the term *amakwerekwere*, which is the slang word for foreigners and especially illegal immigrants. In contrast to what some activists had said in the past, she was now convinced that black people can be racist. In the class engagement with students, the distinction between ‘xenophobia’ and ‘Afrophobia’ was clearly illustrated. While ‘xenophobia’ refers to an extreme dislike or fear of foreigners, their customs and their religions, ‘Afrophobia’ refers to a range of negative attitudes and feelings specifically towards black people or people of African descent around the world, which include an irrational fear, antagonism, contempt and aversion. In the South African media, the term is used to describe the negative attitudes of black South Africans towards black African immigrants.

A student from an African country who has lived in South Africa since her childhood said that she feels more at home in the coloured community than in the African country where she comes from. When she arrived at university, she reached out to students from this African country, but they told her that her accent and looks were not the same as theirs and that she could therefore not be one of them. She said that she now felt that she suffered from “impostor syndrome”, another term that was defined for students in their race-based terminology list. However, no one had used the term in this context before. ‘Impostor syndrome’ can be defined as feelings of inadequacy that persist despite clear signs of success. “Impostors” suffer from chronic self-doubt and a sense of intellectual fraudulence that override any feelings of success or clear proof of their competence.

When students inform the curriculum in this way with their own lived experiences, using the trilingual technical terminology as a starting point, it is possible to have a more nuanced discussion about the various degrees of racism that affect their everyday lives. At the same time, one is overwhelmed by the pervasiveness of racism in South Africa, in Africa and in the world after listening to the students’ contributions.

When good intentions are undermined by race essentialist discourse

What was left out of the many SU symposia, seminars and lectures on the Sport Science article was the perspective of the five authors – the supervisor and her four postgraduate students. I sought an open discussion with the authors of the article. Unfortunately, only one was available to see me. She was completely traumatised by how the academic article was received by established researchers after all the work they had invested in the project.

It emerged that a sports science student had enrolled for a PhD in 2014. He insisted that he wanted the community of Cloetesville, with its historical lack of resources, to benefit from his research. A comprehensive research project followed after he successfully concluded his PhD, with the research participants of successive research projects in Cloetesville benefitting from his research.

Two doctoral students then undertook their research with the explicit aim of benefitting historically disadvantaged women in the Cloetesville suburb. The PhD students and biokinetics interns had regular meetings with the Cloetesville women and motivated them to adopt healthier lifestyles. They measured their vital signs (body mass, blood pressure, glucose levels, and fitness) regularly, encouraged them to do regular exercise, to adopt healthy eating habits and to take better care of their health in order to reduce minimise their chances of acquiring dementia or Alzheimer's at an early age. It was explained to them that regularly, encouraged them to do regular exercise, to adopt healthy eating habits and to take better care of their health in order to reduce their chances of acquiring dementia or Alzheimer's at an early age. It was explained to them that these diseases can cause loss of memory and other mental disabilities that can severely impact on their independence when they are older and might still want to live on their own.

For the past five years, students from the Department of Sport Science have presented free gym classes twice a week to the women and some of them who needed more intensive health interventions were treated at the Department of Sport Science for free. Ironically, after the furore about the controversial article, the Cloetesville women are still attending the weekly gym classes presented by the sports science students at the time I interviewed one of the authors.

Conclusion

This chapter has made the point that much-debated Sport Science article required a pedagogical response and not simply a "review of ethical procedures" reaction. The racial essentialist thinking that governs research at Stellenbosch University affects teaching as well. At the heart of the 'Introduction to the Humanities' intervention are students who are not only afflicted by everyday racism, but also by struggles for inclusion in the classroom. It is in the classroom where students from diverse backgrounds can unlearn the racism that produces offensive research in the first place. The retracted article also illustrated the importance of defining and critically reflecting on key concepts, like 'cognitive ability', 'intelligence' and 'coloured women', not only within one subject field, like sports science, but also in critical engagement with other disciplines.

Endnotes

- 1 It is important to distinguish between the racist use of this term to classify people according to their skin colour during apartheid and its use today by people who self-identify as "coloured" and who, both as individuals and as members of a cultural group, demand the respect and human dignity that they were not afforded under apartheid.
- 2 Hermann Giliomee, *Always Been Here: The Story of a Stellenbosch Community* (Pinelands: Africana Publishers, 2018).
- 3 Ian Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape Under Apartheid", in *Transformation in Higher Education*, ed. Nico Cloete et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 2.
- 4 Ibid., 41.
- 5 Jonathan D. Jansen, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- 6 Handri Walters, "Tracing Objects of Measurement: Locating Intersections of Race, Science and Politics at Stellenbosch University" (PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018).
- 7 W.E. Morrow, *Bounds of Democracy: Epistemological Access in Higher Education* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 36.
- 8 Ian Scott, *A Case for Improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education*, ed. Nanette Yeld and Jane Hendry, Higher Education Monitor, no. 6 (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2007), 41; Ian Scott, "First-Year Experience as Terrain of Failure or Platform for Development?: Critical Choices for Higher Education", in *Focus on First-Year Success: Perspectives Emerging from South Africa and Beyond*, ed. Brenda Leibowitz, Antoinette van der Merwe and Susan van Schalkwyk (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2009).
- 9 David R. Russell et al., "Exploring Notions of Genre in 'Academic Literacies' and 'Writing Across the Curriculum': Approaches Across Countries and Contexts", in *Genre in a Changing World*, ed. Charles Bazerman, Adair Bonini and Débora de Carvalho Figueiredo (Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, 2009), 395.
- 10 Theresa Lillis and Mary Scott, "Defining Academic Literacies Research: Issues of Epistemology, Ideology and Strategy", *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice* 4, no. 1 (2015): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1558/japl.v4i1.5>
- 11 David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic, *Situated Literacies: Theorising Reading and Writing in Context* (London: Routledge, 1999), 8, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203984963>
- 12 Mary R. Lea and Brian V. Street, "The 'Academic Literacies' Model: Theory and Applications", *Theory Into Practice* 45, no. 4 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4504_11
- 13 Ibid., 369-70.
- 14 Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, "What Is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching?", *Journal of Education* 169, no. 3 (1987): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748716900303>
- 15 Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 15.
- 16 One of the authors of the Sport Science article has insisted that the research team did not test coloured women's intelligence, but rather cognition or cognitive abilities, which refer to one's ability to reason, think outside the box, plan, organise, resist temptation/distraction, etc.

Cognitive skills can be learned (consciously or unconsciously) and therefore can change throughout one's lifespan. Intelligence, on the other hand, is fixed, and cannot be developed, according to the author. If this represents a broader view in the subject field, it clearly needs a critical interdisciplinary discussion.

- 17 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

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SECTION G



The Ethics Question in Racial Science



Science, Race and Ethics

Keymanthri Moodley

The use of racial and ethnic categories in the conduct of research has resulted in deep divisions in the scientific community in South Africa. Given our history of racial segregation and the subsequent democratic dispensation in a nonracial country, this type of division ought not to occur in the twenty-first century. Good science ought to be based on strong ethical principles. This chapter will explore the delicate relationship between science and ethics. As a point of departure, the historical origin of racial classification will be briefly discussed, as it is integral to understanding the ethics of racialised science.

A historical perspective

In 1795, a German professor of medicine and anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), building on the work of others, used the term “Caucasian” to describe one of his five races of man. The others were Malaysian, Ethiopian, Native American and Mongolian. According to Blumenbach, Caucasians originated from the region of the Caucasus mountain range that runs from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea. Georgia, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia are located in this region, east of Turkey. His work, although inaccurate, was perceived to have given credence to the concept of biological race. He also introduced racial hierarchy when he described the Caucasians as “the most beautiful race of men”.¹ In current literature, “white” people in different parts of the world are still inaccurately referred to as “Caucasian”.²

It is evident that since the 1790s, and well into the twentieth century, science has been used to confirm and authenticate folk beliefs about human differences in health, intelligence, education and wealth based on race. This coincided with the

practice of slavery and the need to justify this practice. Samuel Cartwright was a medical doctor who believed that blacks were biologically suited for slavery.³ In his time, he focused on medicalisation of aspects of slavery. For example, the behaviour linked to a slave attempting to run away from a master was termed “drapetomania” and was regarded as a disease. In the nineteenth century, some scientists attempted to quantify differences amongst races by measuring head size and other body parts (anthropometry) to document race inequality.⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century, greater attention was paid to the size of the brain, and there was a belief that race differences could be measured in this way. In the early twentieth century, intelligence tests became a major interest amongst scientists who were looking for ways to document differences in brain function between black and white people.⁵

Before and during World War II, unethical experiments were conducted on various ethnic groups globally. Eugenic practices (involving attempts to create a genetically pure race and improve the human gene pool) in Nazi Germany in the 1930s are well documented. However, similar eugenic practices occurred in the United States in the early 1900s. Between 1907 and 1927, 16 states in the USA had conducted sterilisation as a eugenic practice on the disabled, alcoholics, the poor and criminals; most of these people were black.⁶ During World War II, the Germans experimented on Jewish people in the Nazi concentration camps, and the Japanese conducted experiments on Chinese prisoners of war.⁷ After World War II, the rejection of eugenics, which had supported laws aimed at sterilising people presumed to have bad genes, resulted in a compelling critique of race as a biological concept.

In the early 1900s, several clinical trials were conducted predominantly on black people in various parts of the world. Although motivated by science, there was a level of exploitation involved in recruiting vulnerable poor black people, who were objectified in the name of science. The Tuskegee Study discussed below was one such example.⁸

Exploitation of research participants

In Alabama, in 1932, 400 African American men with syphilis and 200 healthy men (controls) were enrolled into a research project. The researchers wanted to establish what the natural history of syphilis would be if it were left untreated. Doctors were still arguing amongst themselves whether syphilis affected “blacks” and “whites” differently.⁹ At the time, there was no specific treatment for the disease.

The men were told that they had to come to the clinic regularly for physical examinations, blood tests and other tests, like lumbar punctures (where a needle is inserted into the back to obtain a spinal fluid sample). In return, they were given free rides into town, free hot lunches at the clinic, free treatment for diseases other than syphilis, and they were offered a free burial, in the event of death.

By 1945, when penicillin was discovered and was found to be effective against syphilis, the drug was deliberately withheld from this group of men. The researchers continued with their study, and the men had no idea that they were part of a research project. A study that was meant to last a year continued for 40 years. It was only in 1972 that the story was exposed in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. By then, many of the men had died, many of their wives were infected with syphilis, and some of their children were born with syphilis.¹⁰ The Tuskegee Syphilis Study became a source of great distrust of research by African Americans in the United States and one of the greatest research embarrassments of the United States government.

The USA was not the only country where people of colour were treated unfairly and atrociously in the name of science. In South Africa, the case of Wouter Basson comes to mind.

Project Coast (1981-1995)

In the 1980s, the apartheid-era government started a chemical and biological warfare research programme called Project Coast. It was headed by the cardiologist, Wouter Basson. The project had a number of civilian front companies, including Roodeplaat Research Laboratories and Delta G Scientific. The programme recruited about 200 scientists from around the world to develop various drugs, vaccines and weapons. Although this was a secret project for many years until it was shut down in 1994, testimony provided at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings revealed the type of research being conducted by medical doctors and scientists alike.

Some of the projects had a strong eugenic focus and were based on race.¹¹ The anti-fertility research projects aimed at developing anti-fertility drugs that could be administered to black women in South Africa without their knowledge. Dr Schalk van Rensburg was in charge of the fertility projects and he indicated that “fertility and fertility control studies comprised 18% of all projects”.

According to Van Rensburg, Basson had motivated for this project, as he believed the drugs could be used to prevent female soldiers from becoming pregnant. He also

wanted to contain the birth rate in the refugee camps. Van Rensburg did testify that black people were physiologically, biochemically and endocrinologically identical to white people, so it would be difficult to develop a contraceptive that would work on one race group and not on another. However, if the delivery of the drug were skewed – for example, if it were made available at clinics serving the black population – this would be possible. It appears as though animal experiments were prioritised for fertility research. Dr Jan Lourens had developed equipment for animal experiments – including a restraint chair for baboons and a “stimulator and extractor” to obtain semen from baboons.¹² The contraceptives was never developed.

Another plan involved the development of chemical warfare agents that could be used for crowd control during the apartheid era. Testimony from Dr Adriaan Goosen at the TRC hearings indicated that research conducted at Roodeplaats Research Laboratory (part of Project Coast) aimed to develop a bacterial agent that would selectively kill black people. Project Coast and its research activities were closed down after the democratic government came to power. Several charges have been brought against Dr Wouter Basson, and he was found guilty of unethical conduct by the Health Professions Council of South Africa in December 2013.¹³ However, despite the numerous charges against him, he has repeatedly raised legal challenges to rulings made against him. Another South African case involving exploitation of women in the name of research was conducted at the University of Witwatersrand by Dr Bezwoda.

The Bezwoda case

Dr Werner Bezwoda was an oncologist in private practice with a part-time appointment at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. During the 1990s, he conducted research on a sample of South African women, most of whom were classified as black. They all had advanced breast cancer and were attending a public hospital. The treatment that he claimed was beneficial was high-dose chemotherapy combined with a bone marrow transplant, rather than standard-dose chemotherapy. Such high doses of chemotherapy, used on women who were very ill, surely caused severe side effects and unimaginable suffering. His research attracted international attention because he presented his results at international oncology conferences and published in international scientific journals.

However, the apparent “beneficial” effects reported from his studies could not be replicated in other patients with breast cancer in other parts of the world. It was later discovered that his research was fraudulent. He had conducted his research on poor South African women without ethics approval and without their informed consent. Furthermore, the protocols for some of his research were written long after

he had actually finished the work.¹⁴ Although Dr Bezwoda lost his position at Wits University, and his fraudulent research was exposed, the harm caused to his patients and to other patients around the world could not be reversed. That was a violation of the cardinal rule of medicine: first, do no harm.

The three case studies above illustrate the historical relationship between scientific research and race in different contexts. However, science and race are more closely intertwined in a wide range of research contexts.

Race as a research variable in science

Scientists in all fields of study around the world have been using racial categories in research for decades.¹⁵ In most cases, the racial categories have their origin in political systems and government entities such as Statistics South Africa that keeps population data for public health and other purposes. In many cases, societies like ours have become so entrenched in racial categorisation that we often categorise ourselves and our research participants without thinking about the scientific basis of our actions or the implications of our research findings. This type of institutionalised thinking in the world of science has often remained routine and without challenge.

A major field of science that has challenged the social construct of race has been human genetics. Genomic research has established that any two individuals, irrespective of ethnicity and “race”, are 99.9% the same genetically.¹⁶ The 0.1% difference, although small, accounts for almost 3 million differences in DNA that result in differences in health, behaviour and other traits from one person to the next. Interestingly, there is more genetic difference between individuals of the same race than there are differences between individuals of different race groups. While genomic research offers great hope for healthcare, there are still many challenges, as most genomic studies have only included “European ancestry populations”.¹⁷

It has long been established that “race” has no biological basis. What is often referred to as “race” may be linked to skin colour (whites, blacks), ancestral origin (South African of Indian origin), geographical location (Asian), language (Spanish, French, isiXhosa) or culture. In genetic terms, phenotype and genotype are important words to understand. Genotype usually refers to our DNA – the genetic make-up that we inherit from our parents. Phenotype refers to our physical appearance – how we look as a result of genetically inherited characteristics and other factors.¹⁸ A wide range of environmental factors impact on our external physical appearance – exposure to the sun, nutrition, poverty, access to cosmetics and cosmetic procedures, mental and physical health, stress, and many others. Phenotypic differences form the basis for dividing people into so-called racial groups.¹⁹ In conducting scientific research on humans, these biological facts must be taken into account, as they impact on

decision-making around the ethics of research. The various ways in which people are categorised into race groups vary around the world. In North America, a black person is anyone with known African ancestors; this is referred to as the “one drop rule”.²⁰ It was only in the 2000 census in the USA that individuals were allowed to identify two or more racial ancestries.

In fact, Thomas Jefferson, a founding father and the third president (1801 to 1809) of the United States of America, had a great impact on the development of racialised science. He is regarded as the first American to write publicly about the “Negro”, and he suggested that the natural inferiority of the Negro was a rationalisation for slavery. This was documented in his book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. He called on scientists to prove his attempted justification of slavery.²¹ Consequently, an enormous body of “scientific” research was devoted to proving that human differences in health or intelligence are due to race. The controversial Sport Science article on cognitive functioning of “coloured” women is regarded as racialised science and was potentially an addition to this collection of “research” until it was retracted in response to a petition led by Professor Barbara Boswell of the University of Cape Town that was supported by thousands of scientists and academics in South Africa. The section that follows illustrates why this study is regarded as unscientific and therefore unethical.

Ethical research must be scientifically sound

All research we conduct must be in accordance with the highest standards of ethics. So what makes scientific research ethical?²²

- ◆ Collaborative partnership
- ◆ Social value
- ◆ Scientific validity
- ◆ Fair selection of participants
- ◆ Risk-benefit ratio
- ◆ Independent ethics review
- ◆ Informed consent
- ◆ Respect for participants

Collaborative partnership

Engaging with communities prior to commencing research is an important point of departure in all types of scientifically valid research. Do the communities regard the research question as important to health and well-being in their context?²³ How can the researcher-community partnership maximise co-creation of knowledge

production? A meaningful community engagement process in the Sport Science study would have clarified the community's values, culture and social practices.²⁴ Shared responsibility for research requires an authentic community engagement process. In the Sport Science study, an important question ought to have been raised about why five “white” women researchers had selected a group of sixty “coloured” women as their study participants. Perhaps this question would have been raised by the Cloetesville community itself, had the full research team met with them prior to the research. Diversity in the demographics of a research team is important in reducing power imbalances and exploitation in research.

Social value

The social value of research is measured by the improvement in health and other social circumstances of human beings. Important questions that must be considered before conducting research include:

1. To whom will the research add value?
2. What is the potential benefit to potential stakeholders?
3. How can the social value of the research be enhanced via communication of results?
4. How will the research impact on existing healthcare infrastructure?

Scientific validity

Scientific rigour is important in any scientific discipline. As a starting point, ethical research must be scientifically sound. The research question must be relevant, and preferably one that has not been answered before. For example, we may want to know how many people in the Western Cape visit traditional healers or complementary practitioners rather than doctors in day hospitals, and why. In the Sport Science study, it is not clear why there was a research interest from a group of sports scientists in establishing the cognitive functioning of a group of “coloured” women in Cloetesville.

Cognition refers to a broad range of activities carried out by the human brain – thinking, knowing, reasoning, remembering, analysing, planning, decision-making, amongst others.²⁵ Research on cognitive function is usually conducted by psychologists, neurologists, neurosurgeons, neuroscientists, psychiatrists and other mental health practitioners. In reviewing this study, an important query that ought to have been raised by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) was why cognitive function was being explored by this research team of sports scientists. Furthermore, was there any expertise in neuroscience or mental health amongst them, and what instruments were being used to measure cognitive function?

When we conduct research, we must follow rigid methodologies that are rational, precise, relevant and reproducible. We can gather from the published article that the Montreal Cognitive Assessment tool was used to measure cognitive function in South African research participants, despite the fact that it was previously found to yield flawed results.²⁶ The risk here is that healthy adults would be misclassified as impaired; the use of this tool would therefore be inappropriate. It was clear that the methodology used in such a study would be flawed. To establish this, an expert in cognitive function ought to have reviewed the research protocol submitted to the REC.

In any study, establishing a good research question requires a solid literature review. If the literature review supports the need for research in the field of study, proper selection of the research population is critical.

Fair selection of participants

Researchers need to define populations, describe the study sample and discuss their findings. In South Africa, the racial categories described by Statistics South Africa are often used in data collection. And this is where “race” often becomes an important factor. In an attempt to answer a question around access to healthcare, a scientist may decide to design his/her study and conduct it in a specific province or socioeconomic region. As a legacy of the Group Areas Act in South Africa, it might well be the case that more people of a specific apartheid-defined “racial group” live in that region. Collecting data in such a study may include a question around “race” and ethnicity. Here, race would be used as a social category, not a biological category.

What do we mean by race? Or should we be asking about ethnicity? Are these two terms interchangeable? Race refers to physical appearance – skin colour, eye colour, hair type. Race is socially constructed in an attempt to group together individuals, but it implies biological difference between groups so classed, and genetic homogeneity within heterogeneous groups.²⁷ The racial categories are broad and overlapping, and individual research participants do not fit clearly into one group or the other, due to genetic diversity within the same “race” group.²⁸

Ethnicity refers to commonality of cultural factors, including nationality, language, culture, traditions, beliefs, food habits, religion and so forth. In other words, ethnic groups are clusters of people with common cultural traits. It is sometimes useful to use these categories to study “sociocultural and traditional values” within groups. They can help to cluster individuals coming from geographically distant regions, but will not indicate the extent of admixture in a person with admixed ancestry.²⁹

Race and ethnicity are often and incorrectly used interchangeably in research. Such “imprecise use of race and ethnicity data as population descriptors in genomics research has the potential to miscommunicate the complex relationships among an individual’s social identity, ancestry, socio-economic status, and health, while also perpetuating misguided notions that discrete genetic groups exist”.³⁰ Smedley and Smedley argue that ethnicity and culture “bear no intrinsic connection to human biological variations or race”.³¹

Some argue that collection of data on race may be justified under the following circumstances:

1. Reporting race can indicate if the population studied reflects the diversity of the population to whom results are applicable.
2. Race may indicate (together with other factors) if randomisation has been successful.
3. Racial disparities exist in risk factors, treatment and health outcomes – so race may be necessary to research inequity.³²

Some studies ask for self-identified race while others make assumptions about race based on observation and recording of data by fieldworkers or data collectors. It is therefore important for a REC to clarify how data on race is to be collected if justification has been provided to use it as a variable in research. This is important because we are one human species and there are no subspecies. There must be a 15% difference genetically between groups to declare a subspecies.³³ In humans, the genetic difference between the so-called races is less than 1%. As far back as the 1790s, Blumenbach, despite his unscientific approach to categorising humans into five groups, confirmed the unity of humanity (monogeny) at a time when plurality of humans (polygeny) was popular. Although he had controversial ways of describing Caucasians, and much of his work is regarded as inaccurate today, he reported no subspecies in his work on humans. He described differences amongst humans, but attributed these to differences in climate from a geographic perspective. Blumenbach also noted heterogeneity within groups.³⁴ This is in sharp contrast to the Sport Science article, which refers to coloured women as homogenous.

Other terms are also used in scientific articles to denote categorisation of humans or ancestry. The term “Caucasian” is often used, as is the term “Non-Caucasian”. The usual implication is that Caucasians are white people of European origin. However, as we have seen historically from the work of Blumenbach, use of the word “Caucasian” is unscientific and a misnomer.³⁵ It refers to people who originated

from Georgia, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, not all Europeans and certainly not all “white” people. The use of terminology such as “black” and “African” to describe heterogeneous populations is simply inaccurate.³⁶

Data analysis and the interpretation of research results are of critical importance. Even if a statistically significant relationship between a health outcome (such as high blood pressure) and race is found, it does not establish causality. Health outcomes have multiple causes that are interrelated, and so race and ethnicity influence health through complex pathways.³⁷

Risk-benefit ratio

In any research project, it is important for a REC to identify the potential risk of harms and the potential benefits of conducting the research. This calculation is based on balancing the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. Risks include potential physical, psychological and social harms. There is a strong psychological component associated with identity in South Africa. The Sport Science study had the potential to cause both psychological and social harm to “coloured” women in Cloetesville. This could have been predicted by both the research team and the REC. However, the publication caused harm to all “coloured” women in South Africa. This was not appreciated by the reviewers at the scientific journal that published the article. The benefits from conducting the study remain unclear, given that the study was methodologically flawed. Clearly, a risk-benefit analysis was required by the research team when the study was conceived, when it was reviewed by the REC and the funder, and later by the journal reviewers and editorial team.

Scientists are often so immersed and invested in their research that they may lose objectivity. For this reason, it is important to involve an independent group of peers and others to review a study. This is the role played by the Research Ethics Committee (REC). Scientific rigour, risks and benefits, and the fair selection of study participants are important criteria that a REC will look for when it reviews research.

Independent ethics review

Before research studies are conducted anywhere in the world, they are usually submitted to a REC for review. This committee should be made up of a group of people from diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, ethnicity and scientific expertise. In addition, there should be lay representation of the communities involved in the research. The role of the REC is to protect the rights of research participants by ensuring that:

1. the study is based on good science, and
2. ethical requirements are met – voluntary consent is obtained, confidentiality is maintained, and participants are not exploited or stigmatised as a result of the research.

In order to fulfil this role, the REC has to review the study protocol and related documents, such as the questionnaire, interview guides and consent documents. In the twenty-first century, REC members must also keep abreast of advances in genomics in order to fully appreciate the new scientific variables that will be introduced into research. The qualifications, diversity and expertise of the researchers or research team are also reviewed. During the review, consideration of the following ethical principles is important:

1. Respect for participant autonomy
2. Beneficence (do good)
3. Non-maleficence (do no harm)
4. Justice (fairness)

In the case of the Sport Science study, the research location was Cloeteville. Demographically, the population of Cloeteville is reported to be 88.1% “coloured”, according to the Statistics SA Census 2011 data. This ought to have been a trigger to the REC to raise a query as to why this particular group of women was chosen for a Sport Science study, and more importantly, why this group was chosen to test cognitive function. It should also have been a trigger to look at the questionnaire to see if data was being collected on race, and if so, if it was being used as a biological research variable.

Irrespective of the responses received from the researchers, a critical question that needed to be raised with them was whether the findings of the study would stigmatise the predominantly “coloured” study population in any way. This question is based on the ethical principle of non-maleficence, or doing no harm. In the course of research, it is important that participants are not harmed while new knowledge is generated.

The quantum of social harm is much higher when civil society attempts to draw conclusions about the cognitive function of specific groups of people based on race. A diversely constituted REC and research team would be sensitive to this dynamic. After all, apartheid in South Africa was justified by past leaders of this country on the basis of difference in intellectual function. Hendrik Verwoerd (prime minister 1958-1966) is quoted in *Apartheid: A History* as follows: “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?”³⁸ Given our history, any study that attempts to link race with cognitive function must be carefully considered by a REC. This is why the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) in South Africa has guidelines for who should serve on a REC. Members should represent the demographic profile of the country to ensure sensitivity to local context in order for a proper risk assessment to be made. Another important ethical consideration in research is whether it is possible for informed consent to be obtained from potential research participants. This is established by looking at the consent documents and patient information leaflets submitted by a research team.

Informed consent

Based on the principle of respect for autonomy, all participants in research must provide voluntary informed consent before research begins.³⁹ This requires the researcher to provide detailed information about the study to the participants. Usually a process of community engagement should precede the start of the research, as described earlier. This allows for relationship-building to establish trust between the research team and participants.⁴⁰ The REC plays a pivotal role in ensuring that a community-engagement process is in place before research starts.

Furthermore, the consent language and information provided to participants is important. Information provided must include the purpose, methods, risks, benefits and alternatives to participating in the research.⁴¹ Most importantly, the language used must be clear and easily understood by the participants. In the case of the Sport Science study, potential research participants needed to be approached in advance to discuss why the study was being conducted amongst “coloured” women in the Cloetesville area. It would have been necessary to explain that their cognitive function would be measured, what cognitive function means and why it was important to measure this aspect of their lives. Given the historical sensitivity to cognitive function, more specifically to intelligence, in different “race” groups in South Africa, and because of previous research where difference in intelligence was linked to race, this study ought to have been reviewed with a high level of concern.

In 1994, the book *The Bell Curve*⁴² created debate in academic circles. Hernstein and Murray, the authors, attempted to shape public policy based on their flawed research alluding to the intellectual inferiority of some groups. The book represents late twentieth-century thinking about the presumed genetic inferiority of African Americans, women and poor people. Cognitive function and intelligence are poorly understood terms that are closely related and therefore easily confused. Intelligence is poorly defined and generally difficult to measure. There are both formal and

informal theories of intelligence. Lay conceptions of intelligence are broader than psychologists' conceptions. Studies have shown that lay persons view intelligence as consisting of verbal, practical problem-solving and social competence abilities. Many tests, including intelligence quotient (IQ) tests, do not measure all these components.⁴³ As such, it would have been very important for the researchers to justify why and how they were going to measure cognitive function, both to the REC and to the potential study participants. Obtaining valid consent from potential participants is a sign of respect for persons.

Respect for participants

It is an ethical obligation to ensure that respect for participants is maintained throughout the study. Seeking consent for participation is based on such respect. Keeping study information confidential to the extent possible is also a component of respect. Ensuring that participants are not stigmatised as a result of research is yet another way of showing respect. Conducting a study on cognitive function in a specific group of people in South Africa had the potential for harm, considering the sensitivity around testing aspects of mental function in different race groups. After a study, providing feedback to communities about the findings is essential. Media reports on the Sport Science study clearly indicate that the communities in the Western Cape felt disrespected and hurt by the conclusions drawn, and the generalisation to all "coloured" women in South Africa was rightfully severely criticised.

Once a study has received research ethics approval, it may start recruiting participants. At the conclusion of the study, publication is an ethical responsibility.

Action: Policy and publication with scientific integrity

How scientists report research findings is important, because it has the potential to reinforce prejudice in terms of race and ethnicity, thereby reducing the value of scientific research.⁴⁴ Generalisation from small studies to whole populations is also problematic. This is especially important in the wording of the title of the study. Consider the Sport Science article, "Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women". Although the study was conducted on 60 women in the Western Cape, the title of the published article refers to "coloured" women in the country in general. And because "cognitive functioning" is used, the implications for social harm, including stigmatisation, is significant.

The publication of this study was also, to a large extent, the responsibility of the journal and its reviewers, as well as the editorial team involved at the publishing

house. There was a failure to critically appraise the methodology of the research, as well as the ethics, in terms of social harm. The subsequent retraction of this article is testimony to the flawed review process. Ultimately, however, the research team ought to take full responsibility for the outcome of their research. It remains unclear why a team of sports scientists would be concerned with the cognitive function of “coloured” women.

Researcher integrity is an ethical obligation. When communities have been harmed by research, both the REC and the research team may be seen to have failed those communities. Presented here are principles towards improving accuracy in publication involving diverse populations:

- ◆ In research it is important to describe the study population in a scientifically valid way, using geographical location and specific descriptors.⁴⁵ We have learned from the International HapMap project to refer, for example, to the “Yoruba in Ibadan, Nigeria” or the “Han Chinese, in Beijing, China”.⁴⁶
- ◆ When race or ethnicity are used as research variables, the reason for its use must be provided when a project is submitted to a Research Ethics Committee (REC) for review. If there is no explanation, it is the duty of the REC to raise a query and request an explanation.
- ◆ The REC also needs to explore whether race will be assigned by the researcher based on observation (unscientific) or if the data will reflect self-identified race or ethnicity.⁴⁷ Race based on observation is problematic, because it is based on assumption and bias.
- ◆ When racial or ethnic differences are found in research, all conceptually relevant factors, including a range of social factors, must be explored.⁴⁸ Genes and the environment are usually inseparable.
- ◆ It is a good idea to engage with communities early in the course of research to establish how the potential research participants and community members would like to be described in the research study, in related scientific publications, and in the popular media.
- ◆ Provide a summary of research findings in simple language for the media to encourage accurate reporting.⁴⁹
- ◆ Avoid broad descriptions such as Asian, European or African without explanation.⁵⁰
- ◆ The use of broader descriptions such as Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid is unscientific.⁵¹

Conclusion

Use of race as a variable in scientific research is generally problematic, because racial groups based on physical characteristics are not genetically discrete or scientifically meaningful. Race has been imposed by history and should not be legitimised by science. It is important to distinguish between race as a biological category and race as a social category.⁵² There may be a place for race as a social category when there is a need to examine access to societal goods and resources, because “inequality renders race an important social policy concern”.⁵³ Racial categories may be useful in studying whether the perceived race of patients correlates with health disparities.⁵⁴ More importantly, research is needed to examine “the social attitudes and institutions that perpetuate the idea of race”.⁵⁵ Although genomics research holds great promise for the future, reporting human genomic variation must not be conflated with racial and ethnic groups.

Immigration and intermarriage in a globalised world have led to increasing heterogeneity everywhere. The number of people of mixed or diverse ethnicity is growing exponentially, making labels like “coloured” overwhelmingly inaccurate and the use of race as a biological variable in research unscientific.⁵⁶

Science and ethics are inextricably linked. There can be no science without ethics. Researchers and research teams must take final responsibility for ensuring that their scientific work is conducted ethically and with integrity.

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AUTHOR INDEX

A

Abrahams, Yvette 164-6
Abu-Lughod, Lila 135
Ackerly, Brooke 180
Adhikari, Mohamed 15, n.8; 165-6
Agamben, Giorgio 46
Agassiz, Louis 61
Agawu, Kofi 206-7
Ahmed, Sarah xi; 136-7
Albright, William 141, n.10
Alcoff, Linda 178
Alexander, Neville 222; 231
Alexander, Ramon 213
Althusser, Louis 209
Andrews, David 191
Ansell, Gwen 205
Appiah, Anthony 69; 70, n.22; 111
April, Kurt 79
Arendt, Hannah 46
Asimov, Isaac 112, n.3

B

Baderoon, Gabeba 169
Bailey, Randall 135-6
Baker, Geoffrey 213
Ballantine, Christopher John 214, n.5
Bardien-Kruger, Soraya 3
Basson, Wouter 255-6
Behari-Leak, K. 228
Bezwoda, Werner 256-7
Bhabha, Homi K. 112
Bindman, David 59
Black, Edwin 51, n.7
Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich 59; 69, n.5;
125; 253; 261

Boas, Franz 65; 67
Bohlman, Philip Vilas 207
Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo 108
Boswell, Barbara 7; 258
Boughey, Chrissie 223; 227-8
Bouws, Jan 205
Boyd, William Clouser 112, n.3
Breckenridge, Keith 112, n.4
Brekhus, Wayne H. 114, n.33
Bressan, Elizabeth 194
Broca, Pierre Paul 59
Broome, Robert 105
Brown, Lyndsay 178
Bunting, Ian 238
Burden, Matilda 10; 79
Burleyh, H.T. 204
Bush, M.E.L. 112, n.2
Butler, Judith 137; 142, n.20

C

Camper, Petrus 59
Cartwright, Samuel 254
Cezar, Hendrik 169
Chand, Dutee 196
Chikte, Usuf 15, n.5
Claassens, Juliana 6; 141, n.18; 142, n.39
Cleophas, Francois 11
Coertze, P.J. 78
Coetzee, Basil 213
Coetzee, Paulette 207
Cohen, Robert S. 51, n.7
Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams xiii, n.3; 146
Cronjé, Geoffrey 108; 205
Cuvier, George 169-70

D

Daly, Mary 186, n.7
 Dart, Raymond 62; 105
 Darwin, Charles 31; 49; 113, n.6
 De Klerk, Marika 81
 De Villiers, C.G.S. (Con) 62; 192
 De Villiers, Wim 226
 De Wet, Jacques 114, n.30
 De Wet, Wouter 10
 Deist, Ferdinand 133
 Demuro, Eugenia 114, n.29
 Douglas, Mary 152
 Drennan, Matthew 62
 Du Bois, W.E. 65; 110
 Dubow, Saul 112, n.5
 Duma, Sikhulekile 226
 Du Plessis, I.D. 206
 Du Plessis, Sophia 195
 Durrheim, Kevin 178
 Du Toit, Neil 226
 Dvořák, Anton 204

E

Eato, Jonathan 214, n.5
 Eaton, Tom 225
 Ehmann, Annegret 52, n.13
 Eidsheim, Nina Sun 208
 El-Haj, Abu 71, n.31
 Eloff, Gerrie 205
 Erasmus, Rajiv T. 195
 Erasmus, Zimitri 114, n.30; 165
 Erevelles, Nirmala 146
 Essed, Philomena 107; 178
 Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 119
 Exum, J. Cheryl 141, n.16

F

Fanon, Frantz 196-7
 Fantham, Harold Benjamin 41-2
 Fataar, Aslam 15, n.5
 Ferrus, Diana 196
 Findlay, George 64

Fischer, Eugen 4-5; 43; 45-9; 52, n.13; 69, n.12
 Foucault, Michel 179
 Freire, Paulo 241
 French, Sally 155
 Froneman, Willemien 10

G

Galton, Francis 31; 49; 51, n.7; 105
 Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie 152
 Gaulier, Armelle 215, n.23
 Gavroglu, Kostas 51, n.7
 Gee, Paul James 232, n.17
 Gerke, Willem 203-5; 214, n.2
 Giddings, Paula 170
 Gie, S.F.N. 95-6
 Giliomee, Herman 79; 96
 Gilroy, Paul 107; 111
 Giroux, Henry A. 114, n.30
 Glasgow, Joshua 111
 Goldberg, David 107
 Goosen, Adriaan 256
 Gordon, Lewis R. 107
 Gould, Stephen J. 106
 Gouws, Amanda 7-8; 15, n.5; 187, n.21
 Gqola, Pumla Dineo 171
 Grobbelaar, Coert 62
 Grove, I.J. 214, n.4
 Grové, Stefans 214, n.4
 Grundlingh, Albert 8
 Gutin, Iliya 122

H

Hacking, Ian 110
 Harding, Sandra 181-3
 Hartman, Anton 206
 Haupt, Adam 209; 215, n.26
 Hayes, Rol 204
 Hernstein, Richard J. 264
 Hitler, Adolf 4-5; 45; 48; 146
 Hogben, Lancelot 106
 Hook, Derek 112; 114, n.32
 hooks, bell 196

I

Ibrahim, Abdullah 213
 Imada, Adria L. 147

J

Jablonski, Nina G. 70, n.27
 Jackson, Ronald L. 192
 Jacobs, Cecilia 11; 13; 243
 Jansen, Jonathan xi; xiii; 6; 140
 Jansen, Robbie 213
 Jefferson, Thomas 168; 258
 Jensen, Steffen 43-4
 Jokl, Ernst 192
 Jones, Waddy 209
 Jonker, Anita 13
 Josias, Alun 79

K

Kane, Martin 194
 Kant, Immanuel 69, n.5
 Kies, Ben 222
 Kim, Seong-Jin 28
 Kirby, Percival 207; 215, n.13
 Klatzow, Peter 214, n.4
 Klausen, Susanne 32
 Kosek, Jake 107
 Krige, Jannie 192
 Kristeva, Julia 141, n.6, n.16
 Kuklick, Henrika 61
 Kuljian, Christa 113, n.6; 170

L

Lacan, Jacques 109-10; 112
 Lander, Eric S. 29
 Lea, Mary R. 241
 Leonardo, Zeus 107
 Lewis, Desiree 168-9
 Lewis, Gavin 77
 Lewontin, Richard 106
 Ley, Astrid 147
 Light, Edwina 147
 Linnaeus, Carl 44; 58-9; 167

Lithwick, Dahlia 142, n.31
 Lott, Eric 208-9
 Lourens, Jan 256
 Loutzenheiser, Lisa W. 146
 Louw, N.P. van Wyk 205; 214, n.4
 Lüdemann, Winfried 211; 216, n.40

M

MacLean, Malcolm 191
 Maier, Christl M. 142, n.39
 Malan, D.F. 222
 Malan, Jacques Philip 205
 Malan, Jacques Pierre 216, n.34
 Mangcu, Xolela 109-10
 Mann, Geoff 209
 Marais, J.S. 97
 Maritz, Gerrit 94
 Martin, Denis-Constant 208
 Martin, Rudolf 60; 69, n.12
 McDonald, D.J. 75
 McKaiser, Eusebius 178
 McKenna, Sioux 227
 Mendel, Gregor Johann 52, n.15
 Mendieta, Eduardo 207
 Mengele, Josef 45
 Meyer, Piet 205
 Meyers, Bronwyn 195
 Miles, Johnny E. 135; 137-8
 Minear, Andrea 146
 Mitchell, W.J.T. 109-12
 Mohanty, Chandra 177
 Möller, Norma Katherine 79
 Montagu, Ashley 113, n.10
 Moodley, Keymanthri 9
 Moore, Donald S. 107
 More, Mabogo Samuel 109
 Morrow, Wally E. 239
 Morton, Samuel 61
 Mowitt, John 209
 Mtose, Xoliswa 178
 Müller-Nedebock, Amica 3

Muller, Stephanus 10

Murray, Charles 264

N

Naicker, Linda 32

Naidoo, Kammila 86, n.86

Neale, Caroline 94

Nepgen, Rosa 205

Newcater, Graham 214, n.4

Newman, Joshua I. 191

Niven, Penny 223

Noakes, Tim 194

Nott, Josiah 61

Nussbaum, Martha 137-40; 141, n.18; 142, n.31

O

Obholzer, Anton 192; 196

Olusoga, David 51, n.12

Olwage, Grant 207

P

Pandian, Anand 107

Pearson, Roger 49

Pickering, Michael 138

Pittard, Eugène 61

Posel, Deborah 4; 124

Postma, J.W. 193

Potgieter, Z.U. 70, n.29

Prah, Kwesi Kwaa 167

Prosalendis, Sandra 114, n.30

R

Radano, Ronald Michael 207

Rassool, Ciraj 114, n.30

Readings, Bill 211

Renn, Jürgen 51, n.7

Robertson, Michael 147

Robins, Steven 5; 51, n.10

Rutherford, Adam 51, n.7

S

Saini, Angela 4; 49

Sartre, Jean-Paul 110

Schmuhl, Hans-Walter 51, n.7; 52, n.13

Schork, Nicholas J. 29

Scott, Ian 239

Sharp, Carolyn J. 142, n.22, n.39

Shay, Suellen 224

Shepherd, Kyle 213

Shihab, Ibrahim Khalil 213

Smedley, Audrey 261

Smedley, Brian D. 261

Smit, Claude 193

Smith, Helmut Walser 51, n.7

Smith, Jonathan 135

Soudien, Crain 2; 4; 77; 79; 113, n.7; 222; 228-9

Spiro, Jonathan Peter 51, n.7

Steinmetz, George 46

St. Louis, Brett 107

Stone, Kenneth 135

Street, Brian V. 241

T

Thom, H.B. 94; 97

Thorpe, Holly 191

Tobias, Philip 105-6

Tracey, Hugh 207

True, Jacqui 182

Tsai, Jennifer 122

V

Van der Berg, Servaas 195

Van der Merwe, Izak 193

Van der Waal, C.S. (Kees) 80

Van der Walt, Ina 79

Van der Westhuizen, Christi 210

Van der Westhuyzen, G.C.A. 192

Van Rensburg, Schalk 255-6

Van Zyl, Mikki 187, n.21

Venter, Anna Magdalena 79
Venter, Carina 205-6; 211
Venter, Craig 28
Verwoerd, Hendrik 205; 222; 263
Viljoen, Martina 210
Viviers, Etienne 216, n.40
Von Luschan, Felix 69, n.12
Von Trotha, Lothar 47

W

Walker, Alice 245
Walters, Cyrill xiii
Walters, Handri 4-5; 52, n.19
Walton, Chris 211-2

Watermeyer, Brian 146
Watson, James 28
West, Cornel 110
Wiid, J.A. 96
Wild, Sarah 15, n.6
Williams, Walter 194
Winant, Howard 108

Y

Young, Marion 136

Z

Zinn, Allan 222

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