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'Why can't race just be a normal thing?': Entangled discourses in the narratives of young South Africans

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Abstract

Although apartheid officially ended in 1994, race as a primary marker of identity has continued to permeate many aspects of private and public life post-apartheid. For young people growing up in the ‘new’ South Africa, the terrain of racial positioning is difficult and uneven. Referred to as the ‘born frees’, they aspire to be liberated of the past yet are themselves shaped by and positioned within its legacy. While a number of scholars have explored the racial positioning of students in historically white institutions (or partly white in the case of the merged institutions), little research has been conducted on racialised discourses in institutions which can be described as historically black. This paper seeks to address this gap by reporting on the racial positioning in the discourses of students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. The data consist of six focus group interviews held on campus between 2009 and 2014. Working with Nuttall’s (2009) notion of ‘entanglement’, and using a focus on narrative, in particular ‘small stories’ (cf. Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008), this paper explores how their stories provide insight into the complex and dialogic ways in which they discursively negotiate the racialised identities and discourses of both the past and the present and seek to imagine the future.

Introduction

South Africa is a country with a fraught history of inequality and racial oppression. Racism has been a pervasive feature of the society, first as part of the colonial project, and then entrenched as a legalised system during the apartheid years (1948 – 1994). With the first democratic elections in 1994, the official discourse changed radically from one which promoted a system of racial inequality, to one in which the need for social, political and economic transformation was legitimated. Despite the demise of apartheid, race has continued to permeate many aspects of public and private life (Bundy 2014). While social integration in public spaces has seen some progress, less has been achieved in private spaces, with research showing that South Africans still prefer to associate in groups based on racial affiliation, ethnicity and language (Lefko-Everett 2012, Seekings 2008). For young people growing up in the ‘new’ South Africa, the terrain of racial positioning is difficult and uneven. Referred to as the ‘born free’ generation, they aspire to be liberated of the past yet are themselves shaped by and positioned within its legacy (Bundy 2014). This paper explores how the discourses of ‘born frees’ at a tertiary institution in South Africa both reproduce and transform inherited racial identities and positions. Given that tertiary institutions are a key site for identity formation of young adults, this research aims to contribute to an emerging body of work on race, identity and discourse in educational contexts in South Africa. It forms part of a larger research project which analyses focus group interviews held between 2009 and 2014 on two campuses, one ‘historically black’ and the other ‘historically white’ (Bock & Hunt 2015).

This paper takes up the metaphor of ‘entanglement’ by focussing on the commonalities in these interviews, that is, those moments in which “what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways” (Nuttall 2009:

11). In her book, Nuttal(2009: 1) defines entanglement as referring to “a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with” and she explores the many (often unrecognised) ways in which South Africans have shared a history of interconnection and dependence, from an historical entanglement within the economy (where different races depended on each other for survival) to the kind of biological mixing which recent technological developments in genetic analysis are able to reveal. She argues that a focus on these ‘entanglements’ as well as the ‘faultlines’ along which new alignments and disalignments are taking place, should be given more scholarly focus. Her own work on popular culture is a case in point. By searching out these faultlines, argues Nuttall, we can “begin to meet the challenges of the ‘after apartheid’” (2009:1).

This paper takes up her challenge by asking: what kinds of entanglements, as well as disentanglements, do the students in this study express, and how do these complex identity positions help us understand South Africa post apartheid? The paper uses narrative, and in particular small stories (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2007), as a theoretical lens, because, it argues, these offer insight into the complex ways in which the participants discursively enact their positions and imagine (or fail to imagine) an after apartheid. Thus this paper also argues that small stories provide valued counter stories to the dominant master narratives, and that attention to these brings into focus the complexity of racial ‘entanglements’ in a post apartheid South Africa.

The data are complex, full of ambiguities and contradictions, a web of tangled threads. Many different interpretations and lines of argument could be made, several of which are covered in other papers (Bock 2014, Bock & Hunt 2015). These point to the underlying racism in much of the corpus and argue that despite the participants’ stated desire to move on, and in the absence of an alternative non-racial discourse, they slip back into and reinvokethe apartheid categories and racial hierarchies as explanatory frameworks for their everyday experiences. In this paper, however, the analysis picks up a different thread and explores those points in the data where the different discourses intersect and commonalities emerge. It argues that despite the racial anxiety and fear of discrimination suffusing the data, the participants seek to disentangle from this past and position themselves in a post racial future. Although they are uncertain on how this can be achieved, they primarily identify interracial social interaction as the key.

Race and higher education in South Africa

Although scholars generally agree that there is no biological basis to racial classifications, race, as demonstrated in this paper, was, and still is, experienced by South Africans as very real (Bundy 2014). During the apartheid years, a raft of discriminatory legislation determined the life prospects of South Africans based on their racial classification. In terms of the Population Registration Act of 1950, people were divided into three racial categories: black, coloured, and white. Asian, or Indian, as a fourth category, was added later. This, Posel (2001) shows, was often a relatively arbitrary decision based more on social standing and acceptance into the broader community than on genetic inheritance or descent, but yet it served to fix one’s position within a racial hierarchy, firmly associating ‘whiteness’ with power, privilege and opportunity and ‘blackness’ with dispossession, poverty and lack of advancement. Being ‘coloured’ or ‘Indian’ meant occupying a rank somewhere between the two.

Despite the dismantling of apartheid in 1994, race has continued to have a profound effect on people’s lives. As many scholars have argued, institutionalised racism entrenches structures of privilege and disadvantage which shape families for decades even after the legal system has been abolished (Bundy 2014). One of the ways in which the post-apartheid government sought to transform this legacy was through a policy of affirmative action which requires public and private

sector institutions to ensure demographic representativity in the workplace by giving preferential employment to people from previously disenfranchised groups. To this end, many institutions use racial quotas to regulate admissions or employment. A consequence of this is that all South Africans are required to identify themselves in terms of the old apartheid categories on all official application forms. Thus another reason why race is still so pervasive in contemporary South Africa is that it has been reinvigorated in the name of redress and used to favour applicants who were disadvantaged by apartheid, in particular, black applicants. One of the outcomes of this policy has been a renewed antagonism between the different racial groupings which, in a context of high unemployment (currently 25.5% according to Statistics SA), are set in competition with each other for scarce job opportunities.

Under apartheid, all educational institutions, including universities, were segregated according to race. The better resourced universities were reserved for those classified white (and included separate English and Afrikaans medium campuses), while the rest of the population was accommodated in institutions organised along racial and ethnic lines (Walker 2005a). (In contemporary discourse, the former are referred to as 'historically white' institutions while the latter are *collectively* referred to as 'historically black'). In the early 1980s, however, in defiance of the apartheid laws, several of the more progressive campuses began admitting black students, with the University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Witwatersrand leading the way (Walker 2005a).

Although, since 1994, schools and universities have become increasingly racially diverse, research continues to point to the ongoing salience of race in these settings. Scholars have investigated how young South Africans negotiate their racial identities in ways which either perpetuate or destabilise the essentialised apartheid categories (e.g. Dolby 1999, Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele 2014, Soudien 2001, McKinney 2007, McMillan 2003, Pattman 2007, Wale 2010, Walker 2005a, 2005b). What is common to all these accounts is recognition of the difficulties young people face when navigating this terrain and the strategic ways in which they deploy their repertoire of identity options to enact shifting alignments and disalignments as demanded by a given context.

Research by Walker (2005a, b), Pattman (2007) and Wale (2010) on higher education contexts explores how racialised discourses are reproduced or transformed among students on campuses which, in the past two decades, have undergone considerable transformation including, in some cases, mergers between formerly white and black universities. Walker's study takes place at a formerly white Afrikaans university code-named 'Northern University', Pattman's participants are students on a historically white English campus, now part of the merged University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), and Wale's research takes place on two sites: the former white English campus of UCT, and the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the latter a product of a merger between a former white Afrikaans campus and a black one. All researchers conclude that despite the much greater racial integration and diversity since 1994, these campuses remain socially divided by race. Their studies also show how new identities have emerged based on class or perceived educational advantage. For example, those black, coloured and Indian students who have attended former white schools in the wealthier suburbs, are often derogatively labelled 'coconuts' (i.e. black on the outside, white on the inside) or 'Model C's' (a reference to former white schools) by their peers who attended the less resourced township schools (Pattman 2007).

Wale's (2010) study shows similar patterns at UCT and UJ. On these campuses, she argues, "old apartheid racial boundaries continue to be powerfully policed ... despite new forms of inter-racial diversity and cross-race connection" (2010: 27). This policing takes place both through a "discourse of cultural authenticity" used by some black students to claim that Model C students who have "abandoned" their race should be "'rehabilitated' back to an authentic black identity" (2010: 24),

and through the ways in which white students re-code references to race as “culture”, claiming to feel more comfortable when mixing socially with people of their “own kind”(2010: 17).Where racial integration does occur, argue both Wale and Pattman, it tends to be assimilationist in nature and serves to subtly reinforce and reproduce the greater social and cultural power of middle class whiteness. Whiteness, they argue, is “the norm against which other groups have become racialised” (Pattman 2007: 482).

Walker’s(2005a, b)study shows how in an historically white Afrikaans institution, students draw on a range of discourses and engage in complex webs of acknowledgement and denial, alignment and rejection in relation to their racial identities, creating, she argues, a context in which “race is nowhere and race is everywhere” (2005b: 41). On this campus, racial relations are more strongly polarised into black and white extremes, a legacy of Northern University’s history as a site for the reproduction of racist Afrikaner nationalism. According to Walker, many of her young white participants adopt a range of discursive positions to remain securely within their racial and social positions (white, Afrikaans, Christian). Where they do admit to some reflexivity about race, they do not interrogate their positions too closely, preferring to “otherise softly” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, in Walker 2005a: 134) by using discursive strategies which include denying or minimizing the impact of racism, emphasising the importance of individual effort (not race) as a predictor of success and redrawing the cultural frames to include all those who “speak Afrikaans”, which has the effect of including most coloured students but excluding black students who generally do not speak Afrikaans. In this context, she argues, “racist discourse mutates but does not disappear” (2005a: 140)

While the findings referred to above reflect issues in historically white institutions (or partly white in the case of the merged institutions), little research has been conducted on racial discourses in institutions which can be described as historically black. This paper, then, seeks to address this gap by reporting on the salience of race in the discourses of students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). One of the major differences between this corpus and those referred to above is that the UWC participants talk uninhibitedly about race in ways which sometimes include racial labelling and stereotyping. By contrast, Pattman, Wale and Walker argue that their participants show a reluctance to talk about race. Perhaps the UWC students’ shared historical roles as ‘oppressed’ frees them from the need to adopt the more ‘politically correct’ styles of the white groups whose discourse is notable for its avoidance of talk which could be construed as offensive or implicate them as racist (see Bock & Hunt 2015 for a fuller discussion).

Before proceeding to a description of the research site and data, it is worth reflecting on Erwin’s (2012) cautionary note that research which uses race as an analytical lens inevitably runs the risk of further entrenching those same categories. Thus researchers should work to critique and destabilise these naturalised classifications, particularly given our history and the fact that many people today remain highly sensitive about their usage. In this project, I acknowledge the difficulties of working with the apartheid categories, but hope, through the analysis, to draw attention to the ways in which race is reproduced in discourse and so to raise awareness about how this may shape or constrain progress towards post racist ways of thinking, speaking and being.¹

¹I am aware that my own subjectivity as a white, middle class, female South African is written into the analysis in complex ways. I have, however, worked at the university where this data was gathered for eighteen years and discussed this analysis with students and colleagues from across the racial spectrum in an attempt to understand the many sensitive issues. All failings to do so, however, remain my own.

Research site and data description

UWC was established as a tertiary institution for coloured students in 1963, but, as noted above, it opened its doors to black students in defiance of the apartheid laws in the early 1980s. It has historically served students from more marginal educational and social backgrounds. While the current student body of over 20,000 includes students from all over South Africa and, increasingly, African countries to the north, it still predominantly draws on students from two provinces in South Africa: the Western Cape (in which the university is situated) and the Eastern Cape. As such, the student population reflects the social demographics of these regions (predominantly coloured and black) and the students generally speak English, Afrikaans and/or isiXhosa as well as local mixed varieties of these languages. English is the medium of instruction at UWC and enjoys the status as the language of prestige. Although UWC, as an historically black institution, does not face the same racial issues as those of former white institutions, it has its own set of problems in terms of how different student groupings relate to each other, as well as to the predominantly coloured university administration.

The data for this paper are based on six focus group interviews conducted between 2009 and 2014 at UWC. The interviewers are all students who selected their own interviewees, generally third year or post-graduate students, who were connected to each other, either loosely as fellow students (in the case of the multiracial focus groups – Lebo, Chad, Janette), or more intimately as close knit friendship groups (for the monoracial groups – Dineo, Bianca, Charlene). This differential composition affected the data in that the racially mixed interviews were characterised by more talk which promoted non-racial values, whereas in the racially homogenous groups, the participants clearly felt freer to engage in more ‘frank’ discussions of race (see Lefko-Everett 2012: 133, for a similar observation).

Table 1: Overview of focus groups

Group	Interviewer	Participants	Date	Duration
Dineo*	black female	2 black females 1 black male	2009	2:10 hrs
Bianca*	black female	6 coloured females	2009	55 mins
Lebo	black female	3 coloured females 1 black female 1 white male	2009	28 mins
Chad	coloured male	2 black males 1 coloured male	2010	32 mins
Charlene	coloured female	2 coloured males 3 coloured females	2013	57 mins
Janette	coloured female	1 black female 2 coloured males 1 white male	2014	45 mins

*Note that the groups coded Bianca and Dineo were conducted by the same interviewer, but are given different pseudonyms to distinguish them.

Data were elicited using a number of open-ended questions which asked students what they

knew about apartheid, how they felt about it and how it had affected them. Asking students about apartheid proved to be very generative and stimulated rich discussion about the students' own experiences of racism. The dominant language of the interviews was English, although interviewees in Charlene's interview used English, Afrikaans and code-switched between the two. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using narrative analysis, as outlined below.

Narrative analysis

Given the concern to retain a sense of the complexity and ambivalence of the different voices in the data and to avoid homogenising their positions as far as possible, I elected to work with the concept of 'small stories' as developed by De Fina et al. (2006), Georgakopoulou (2007), Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008), and De Fina (2008). They argue that the significance of small stories is that people use them to "create (and perpetuate) a sense of who they are" both in the interactional moment as well as in relation to the dominant discourses which constitute their context (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 379). They define short stories as referring to those moments of narrative activity which occur in talk when speakers recount something, however small or seemingly trivial, and which do not necessarily fit the structural criteria of Labov's 'big' narratives of personal experience (see Labov&Waletzky1969, Labov1972). Small stories may refer to an event in the distant or recent past, or even to incidents which are imagined or hypothetical; they may serve as "reworked slices of life" arising as participants recount an experience (Georgakopoulou 2007: 150) or they may be offered as a way of elaborating or backing up an argument in conversation with another. They provide a sense of how people interact with the social discourses in their everyday contexts and provide counter positions and ambivalences lost in the homogenising master narratives.

Narratives are, as the oral historian Portelli (1991) reminds us, reconstructions of events, not faithful recapitulations of what happened. "Oral sources", he argues, "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed there were doing, and what they now think they did" (1991: 50). They are always "variable and partial" because "memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings" (1991: 51-52). A key strategy used by narrators to index their meanings and stance is evaluation, which, Labov (1972) argues, is what gives a narrative its significance. Thus analysis needs to pay attention to the ways in which participants frame, evaluate and interpret their experiences rather than simply treating them as factual accounts.

The analysis

During the interviews, participants tell a number of stories which offer a distillation of their own and their families' experiences. These narratives can be organised into four categories depending on the narrating perspective and the predominant concern of the story. In the first, the participants recount their parents' stories of life under apartheid – stories which point to experiences of discrimination and oppression. In the second, they tell stories about the kinds of things their parents told them about other races when they were growing up – stories which can be viewed as evidence of the intergenerational transmission of racial beliefs and attitudes. The third category, which comprises the bulk of the stories, encapsulates their own experiences of being at the receiving end of racist behaviour (or what they interpret as racially motivated behaviours), both in institutions as well as in informal everyday encounters. Lastly, there is a small though significant set of stories which indicates an aspiration for some kind of post-racial future and points towards ways in which these participants attempt to transcend the historical divisions.

Parents' narratives of life under apartheid

In all interviews, participants locate their knowledge of apartheid in their parents' stories of racial subjugation. For example, in Bianca's group, several of the participants recall how their parents lost their homes under the infamous Group Areas Act of 1950 which declared certain areas for 'whites only' and resulted in the removal of millions of black, coloured and Indian people from their homes. Other participants tell stories which recount the indiscriminate violence of apartheid, like being beaten for not having a passbook, the identity document black South Africans were required by law to carry to regulate their movement in white areas. Whites, however, were free to move where they chose, as illustrated by story (1) below, in which one of the participants recalls how her parents were beaten up by the *boere* (a reference to white Afrikaner males, often also used for the apartheid police) who came into the historically coloured area of the Bo Kaap to take out their frustrations when the *Bokke* (a reference to the Springbok national rugby team and a symbol of Afrikaner pride) lost a match.²

- (1) Shamielah: My my mommy grew up in Bo Kaap and she say when when the boer when the Bokke lost their matches then the boers would come and hit them with with the with the what (laughs) it is with the whips and the ropes because they would be so angry because their teams lost (laughs) [*Bianca*]

Note that Story 1 is told with a certain amount of hilarity as indicated by the laughter, certainly not as something painful or difficult to recollect. Here narrative is a means to transform painful memories by turning them into humorous anecdotes, and through laughter, to distance oneself from the trauma of the past.

The stories in this category, then, carry the memories of their parents and indicate how race in apartheid South Africa was all pervasive. They also provide the backdrop for the second group of stories, namely those which point to their parents' negative and suspicious attitudes towards other races, especially whites. The participants use these narratives to express their own complex positioning in the present. As Portelli reminds us, oral narratives tell "us less about events and more about their meaning" (1991: 50). Thus these stories are windows onto the narrators' own subjectivities and positionings.

Intergenerational transmission of racial attitudes and prejudices

In all the interviews, participants recount how they became aware of race through the stories of their parents which generally perpetuated racial suspicions of 'the other'. (See also Jansen, 2009, and Wale, 2012, for scholarship which points to the importance of the family as a conduit of racial attitudes.) The students in this data generally position themselves as having moved beyond these racist attitudes. Within these stories, the discourses of the past clash with their lived experiences in the present, and the participants use these stories to dialogically negotiate the faultline between their racialised inheritance and the desire for a post-racial future.

In story (2), Bongani, who identifies as black, went to a multiracial school (the Model C type) and learnt to mix with other races from a young age. In this story, he sets this experience against the attitude of his parents whose words he recalls as inducting him into their racially suspicious ways of thinking:

² Transcription conventions: short pause (.); longer pause (2.0); latched statements (==); elided material (...); emphasis (CAPS); bolding highlights the part of the extract relevant to the analysis.

- (2) Bongani: You see when we grow up neh ah (.) our parents tell us that “no (.)ah (.)don’t ever trust a white man (.) don’t ever” (.) you see that’s always stuck on my mind but (.) I go to school with them they are my friends (2.0) and I trust them but that voice (.) sticks in my mind “you never trust a white man” I don’t know why. [*Chad*]

This extract represents a small story within a small story: the first, compressed into the quoted words of his parents, is embedded within the second, Bongani’s own account of his relationship with white school peers. The layered structure of the narrative becomes a means for Bongani to negotiate his position in the current context: it enables him to acknowledge his parents’ history while simultaneously disaligning from these racialised views. In other words, the second story is used as a frame to disable the racial suspicions of the first. However, it is significant that he hesitates for two seconds before the affirmation, “and I trust them”, as though this statement contains residual doubt. And indeed, as story (3) below indicates, these interracial friendships were often more superficial than they at first appeared.

Race as a lived experience

In all interviews, participants speak about race as a lived social reality and tell stories in which they were either at the receiving end of racist actions or in which they witnessed others behaving in racist ways. Many of the stories which make up this category are not stories of overt racism; rather they are stories of ‘otherizing softly’ (Walker 2005a) where the experience of exclusion is coded and implicit. For example, in contrast to Bongani’s assertion in Story (2) above, Dan, a fellow participant in the same interview, recounts not being able to be real friends with white children at his multiracial school because they “tended to have that same mentality that their parents had”:

- (3) Dan: like they would be your friend but they would still NOT BE YOUR FRIEND in in in in terms of like ==
Andile: ==jaja = =
Dan: == really like, the way they would be with their other white friends [*Chad*]

Andile’s affirmation of Dan’s sentiment shows that it is a shared one: the friendships with white children lacked depth and integrity and were underpinned, they suggest, by inherited racial suspicions.

Despite UWC’s history as a non-racial institution and more than three decades of integrated admissions, racism is still experienced on campus as very real. In another story of ‘otherizing softly’, Tsepho recounts how the administrative personnel fail to help him adequately, an experience he interprets as racially motivated:

- (4) Tsepho: we experience it [racism] sometimes eruhm they [the administration] just need to explain to you a few things and then they send you back and when it comes to people of their kind that is that is coloured of course they explain and help that person. [*Dineo*]

The use of the present tense in this small story suggests that this is something he habitually experiences, and his claim to speak on behalf of presumably black students, indicated by the use of the inclusive pronoun, *we*, suggests that this is a shared experience. While tensions between black and coloured people in the Western Cape have a long history exacerbated during the apartheid years by legislation which gave those classified coloured certain privileges over those classified black,

experiences such as Tsepho's are perhaps also indicative of a sharpening of the racial polarities post 1994 in a context of affirmative action.

Palesa also complains of preferential treatment for coloured students on campus. She recounts how one of the student residences, Liberty, which is more "modernised", "beautiful" and "organised", is mostly occupied by coloured students, while the "more ghetto" residence of Ruth First is home to many black students. She then recalls a story about a coloured student, to whom she rather condescendingly refers as "this other child":

- (5) Palesa: I remember this other situation this other child they wanted to move her from Liberty to Ruth First she cried actually she fainted and then they had to put her back in Liberty.
[Dineo]

In this story, Palesa uses narrative action to express her stance: she does not need to explain the feelings of horror she attributes to the young student who was placed in a "ghetto" residence with black students; rather her reference to her crying and fainting does the evaluative work for her. Here, once again, we see the potential of narrative to express a range of emotions without the speaker having to state them explicitly or claim them as his or her own.

Not only do the stories in this category show that all participants are acutely aware of race and their own racialised positions, they also show that all participants share experiences of discrimination (or what they perceive as discrimination) on the basis of their race. Even though most of the participants in this data fall into categories officially designated for redress (with the exception of the two white males), they fear that their chances of admission to tertiary programmes or future employment will be negatively affected. For example, in the following extracts, the participants discuss the racial quotas used by a local historically white university to regulate admissions. Not only are they misinformed about the quotas, but they construct their own racial group as *the* most discriminated against. Note, however, that Joshua (Story 8) later evaluates his exclusion from UCT as having a positive outcome.

- (6) Dineo (black female): They are practising that at UCT and that **they are not supposed to have more like more than 20 percent black** they are supposed to have 20 percent black and then maybe 40 white and the remainder coloureds. [Dineo]
- (7) Adeline (coloured female): But the majority there there by UCT (.) maybe (laugh) **I don't see a lot of coloureds** there I see a lot of Indians I see a lot of blacks and I see a lot of whites!
[Bianca]
- (8) Joshua (white male): Well ja my race might have held me back at UCT when I WAS REJECTED LIKE TWICE FOR UNDERGRAD (...) so I think in that way **I was definitely uhm at a disadvantage because of my race.** [Janette]

These same fears extend to their perceived job prospects. Palesa (in *Dineo*), for example, believes that her chances are curtailed by the fact that "normally they would look at the white people first" even when the white applicants are less qualified. She cites as evidence her father's experience of working on the mines where he, a plumber, was called in to fix a water problem that his supervisor, who was white, could not. She frames this story as part of a structural inequality which persists where "most of the people that are high up there [on the mines] it's whites and they don't even have a certificate and most of the black people neh the they are low like for example our dads our dads". Although fifteen years into democracy at the time of her interview, and within a context of workplace affirmative action, she perceives this inequality as structurally entrenched.

For many coloured students, affirmative action represents just another form of (reverse) discrimination as it tends to promote black applicants above those identified as coloured. In Charlene's interview, Bernadette tells the story of a friend and colleague who was overlooked for a permanent position at the bank even though she was more experienced. Note how in this small story, as in Bongani's story (2), the racialising position is carried by the quoted words of another and has the effect, as above, of enabling the narrator to contrast two voices, her own and her friend's against that of the manager's and the new official discourse of black empowerment.

- (9) Bernadette: And then we asked our manager look what can she do right for next time to make sure she gets the position "sorry we had to choose someone who's black" that was his exact words "sorry we have to choose someone who is black". [Charlene]

She later adds:

- (10) Bernadette: So for me the biggest fear is going into the working world finding myself either not white enough to make it to the top position or not black enough to make it to the top position.[Charlene]

In this category, then, there are a number of stories that speak to participants' lived experience of racism and their fear of being discriminated against on the basis of their race. Data from our larger study show clearly that white students on the historically white campus share this same fear (Bock and Hunt 2015; see also Walker 2005a). Thus, across a number of campuses and racial demographics, young South Africans fear discrimination and construct their own racial group as *the* most discriminated against. This, I would argue, is a point of intersection that needs attention and work on a national scale if it is not to have the effect of further reassembling and entrenching old racial divisions and animosities. In the next section, this paper explores the small but significant group of stories which point to moments when the participants experience the potential for social transformation.

The desire to 'move on' into a post racial futurity

The desire to 'move on' and leave the past behind is another sentiment common to all the interviews, perhaps as a result of the fears referred to above. (Similar patterns were found in the data from white students in the larger corpus as well as in Walker (2005a) and Pattman (2007).) When asked whether they thought it was important to learn more about the past, most of the students responded that while it was important not to forget, it was time to 'move on', as indicated by the extracts in (11) below. The last quotation in the list is the source for the title of this paper: here Clint expresses his passionate desire to disengage from the emotionally charged history of race:

- (11) Ayesha: You can forgive (.) but you don't even have to sometimes (.) forgive you just need to **move on**[Bianca]

Tsepho: **It's not relevant anymore** [Dineo] [It refers to knowledge of apartheid]

Grace: I don't like to be associated with it [apartheid] as much because like uhm it it feels like we're going back to the past all the time and I hate that you know what I mean like you need **to move on** (...) I'm sick and tired of hearing from black and white and whatever I just wanna

get done with the crap and I just wanna you know I want to **set the colour aside** I don't want that anymore [Lebo]

Palesa: Right now **it's just taking our souls back** [Dineo]

Clint: **WHY CAN'T IT JUST BE A NORMAL THING? WHY CAN'T RACE JUST BE NORMAL?**[Janette]

So while these participants acknowledge the importance of remembering the past, they also express a desire to be free of it. They suggest various means of disentangling themselves, including one reference to interracial marriage as a solution: "maybe a black person marries a white person and a bloody blah marries the other thing and so ja I think that's the only way to end it" (Palesa, in *Dineo*).

In the project of social transformation, academic learning also has a role to play, both in terms of deconstructing the essentialised nature of the racial categories and by encouraging debate on how racial histories are more entangled than any of the master narratives have allowed us to understand (Nuttall2009). For example, in the following extract, the evolutionary story of the shared genetic ancestry enables Bongani to reimagine all people as belonging to one human race:

(12) Bongani: You see I don't believe in race. Sometimes I wonder why the government ah ah forms (.) us to to to write your race there. I don't believe in race I believe that we all one and then (.) you know mos ah (.) what is this (.) 'Out of Africa' theory, I believe in that theory so we are all one. [Chad]

Here Bongani questions the value of the official practice which requires all South Africans to self identify racially on all official forms. Note also that this is the same participant who claimed somewhat hesitantly that he trusted his white school friends (story 1). He is clearly searching for ways to transcend the inherited binaries of black and white and the stories he tells are his ways of imagining a post racial futurity.

Most significantly, however, a number of participants point to the importance of social integration as a way to break the apartheid mould. Andile, for example, speaks of the highly successful World Cup 2010 when, for one month, South Africans of all races were united in their support of 'the game':

(13) Andile: If you see the youth of South Africa, they are mingling, they are mingling together like for example this World Cup everyone was (...) united in the spirit of *ubunye* and all of it. [*ubunye* translates as 'we are one'] [Chad]

Such examples are, however, few and far between, as the participants acknowledge: Carla, for example, asks "how many people in the Caf[eteria] do you see sitting together in multiracial groups?" and Neels, one of the two white participants, argues that people should make more effort to get to know each other because that is where "the whole apartheid thing (...) is still lingering we haven't learnt anything from each other" [Lebo].

However, several stories within the corpus are given as evidence of the transformative potential of social interaction. Interestingly, these stories emerge in the multiracial focus groups and are embodied in the experiences of the two white male participants, Neels and Joshua, who at the time were part of a small minority (4%) of white students at UWC. Their presence on campus has enabled them to break with their inherited socialisation patterns and to form friendships across the racial divides. Neels, who describes himself as from a conservative white Afrikaans background with a

father who was a general in the former apartheid defence force, relates how his family have stopped telling racist jokes in front of him because “they know how I feel”. Joshua, who self identifies as white and Jewish, shares how he appreciates the racial diversity of UWC after being in a school which he describes as a “bubble” because the majority were “white”: “I felt like I didn’t belong in that bubble so I was uncomfortable and I was so grateful to come here [to UWC]”. Later he tells a story of how, whilst attending a birthday party at the home of a coloured friend, he had the strange experience of suddenly finding himself the outsider, not because he was one of the two white people present, but because of his religion:

(14) Joshua: I went to a friend of mine’s birthday party and uhm she’s coloured and we (.) there were like two of us who were white and uhm but what was really interesting was that uhm it wasn’t a coloured event it was a Christian event so my friend who’s Christian was completely chilled (.) was so comfortable (.) was used to everything and I’m not saying I wasn’t chilled but I didn’t know what was happening (.) suddenly everyones’ heads were down when they were praying and I (.) it caught me off guard. [*Janette*]

This small story is a reminder that identities are multifaceted, something which the focus on race often eclipses. It also reminds us that new alignments (and disalignments) across racial barriers are possible on the basis of other shared social characteristics, such as religion or gender. In this small story, the evaluations (i.e. “what was really interesting”, “I didn’t know what was happening” and “it caught me off guard”) index the narrator’s stance, giving the events their significance (Labov 1972) and meaning (Portelli 1991).

Pattman, Wale and Walker also talk about the importance of real social interaction as a way of moving forward but Wale cautions that this focus should not imply that there is not a lot of work to be done in terms of transforming structures of entrenched racial privilege and power. It is noticeable, however, that with one or two exceptions, the participants in this study do not raise the structural nature of racism as an issue. Nor do they reflect on their own racialising talk. Clearly, part of moving forward is also becoming aware of the ways in which talk reproduces racist attitudes and positions; and all South Africans need to engage with the structural nature of racism and the inherited patterns of privilege and disadvantage. But, as suggested by these participants, part of moving forward must also involve meaningful social engagement with people from across the racial divides as it is these experiences which enable us to explore our interdependence and allow new ways of speaking which destabilise the rigid categories and implicit hierarchies of the racialising discourses.

Thus the small stories in this data capture the concrete nature of experience and give tangible form to the feelings and attitudes the participants are trying to articulate, revealing moments when awareness or change become evident. They also provide a lens onto the tangled web of racial positioning in the broader corpus and indicate how and when participants find spaces and interstices which enable them to imagine themselves and their fellow South Africans differently. As recounted in their stories, these moments occur through academic learning, when they witness or are part of integrated public events, like the World Cup, and, most importantly, in meaningful social interactions. What these experiences offer the participants is a way of disentangling themselves from the prejudices of the past and a means of imagining new ways of relating as fellow human beings. As Nuttall argues (2009: 1, 12), entanglement implies a “human foldedness” and a return “to the concept of the human”.

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