Re-examining the Nexus between Race and Higher Education in Post-colonial and Post-apartheid African Contexts

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Abstract

Throughout the African continent, the development of higher education was predicated on race or showed racial overtones on either side of the political divide. The colonial government wrestled with this challenge. At independence in the 1960s and 1970s, Africa's nationalist leaders invested in the reconfiguration of the higher education sector. Meanwhile, they unwittingly sustained the endemic race/higher education symmetry. The difference was that unlike their erstwhile oppressors who privileged Whites, they put Africans first. South Africa is no exception in this regard. The apartheid government allocated more resources in White higher education institutions at the expense of Black institutions. During the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African political and academic leadership faced the challenge of reconfiguring the higher education landscape without being fixated on race. However, reality dictated that race could not be removed from the equation. Consequently, deciding on the number of higher education institutions, student and staff profile, curriculum content and resources allocation could not leave out race as one of the determining factors. As White South Africans cried foul, arguing that they were being side-lined or forced to accommodate Black students thereby diminishing the status of their higher education institutions, Black students welcomed the new development. More than five decades since the end of colonialism, and more than 25 years since the demise of apartheid, race and higher education remain inseparable. Against this backdrop, this article revisits the metamorphosis of race in higher education, appreciates the sustained nexus between the two phenomena and proffers recommendations.

Keywords: Apartheid, colonialism, higher education, politics, race, resource allocation.

Introduction

Race as a concept is not confined to the African context, it is a global phenomenon (Montagu 1964). Even countries like America and the United Kingdom still find themselves wrestling with this issue. Writing with specific reference to South Africa, Ruggunan and Crri (2010: 7) opine that 'while discussions of race in South Africa often take on normative overtones, they are also often portrayed in sensationalist terms'. This points to the relevance of race even in the present political context. The nexus between race and higher education in Africa is a known fact – especially in those countries that were inhabited by Whites from Europe such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Race has been part and parcel of the global body politic for years. Anyone who tries to challenge this view would be disappointed on the realisation that such a counterargument could not be sustained given the plethora of evidence confirming the efficacy of race in shaping African politics in general and African higher education in particular. This happens when inclusivity does not happen.

It is important to note that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 speak to this theme, approaching it from different angles but actually carrying the same message. For example, SDG Goal 4 talks about the need for quality education while SDG Goal 10 talks about the resolve to work towards ensuring that there is reduced inequality, which includes racial inequality, in order to ensure social cohesion. Agenda 2063 links access to education to broader human rights, equality and budgeting (Onuora-Oguno, Egbewole & Kleven 2018). All these mechanisms point to the nexus between race and education.

Starting with Social Darwinism (Dickens 2000), the baseless view that Black and White people are not equal has been sustained in different contexts – including the education sector in general and the higher education sector in particular. The fact that in certain parts of Africa there were schools reserved for White children and others that were earmarked for Black children is clear evidence of this assumed racial difference, which was deeply ingrained in the colonial mind and was sustained by the colonial government throughout its existence across Africa (Olukoshi 2004). The same practice was replicated in terms of settlements. Whites and Blacks lived separate from one another. As affluent Whites enjoyed better life in better resourced areas, Black people lived in squalor.

With regard to the higher education sector, race became even more

visible. This did not come as a surprise given that this level of education marks the apex of education in any country and thus attracts everyone's attention. Throughout Africa where White communities were found, the number of White students at African higher education institutions was very small. While it is true that in a way this was a reflection of the small White population residing in Africa, there was also a political agenda in the countries with White settlers such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa to keep Black and White students separate. The quality of education provided in these racially divided schools was different. The same principle applied to resource allocation. As Black students received education of low quality, their White counterparts were exposed to better quality education. As African students struggled to get the necessary resources to enable them to study properly, their White student counterparts had more than enough resources at their disposal. The scales were tilted in favour of the White minority students.

In South Africa, the situation was even worse over many decades. Following the intermittent change of guard between the British and Dutch administrations from 1795, African students became the victims of the power struggle between the two colonial powers. They had to bow to each colonial administration. The effect was felt in all spheres of life – including the education sector. Racial segregation which culminated in the 1948 adoption of apartheid as a government policy meant that henceforth, higher education would be planned and developed along racial lines with the blessings of the national government (McKeever 2017). As Ramdass (2009: 112) recalls, 'Tertiary education reinforced race and class differences under apartheid. Disparities in resource distribution and the curricula offered maintained the apartheid mentality'. This trend continued until the dawn of democracy in the 1990s.

Given that most African countries have been free from colonialism since the 1960s and 1970s; and given that South Africa has been free from apartheid since 1994 and yet racism remains an issue in different magnitude, it is imperative and opportune time that the nexus between race and higher education be revisited. The rationale for doing this is twofold. Firstly, it is important to see how far the African continent has gone in terms of making race dispensable in higher education. Secondly, the African political and academic leadership needs to chart the way forward in terms of planning the future of higher education on the African continent in a holistic manner devoid of race and ethnicity – both of which have been used in the past to sustain the bifurcation of the student population in the African continent, albeit in different

scales given that not all African countries hosted a big number of Whites. In East Africa, for example, Kenya was a settler colony. However, the same cannot be said about Uganda and Tanzania. As would be expected, the discussion cannot happen outside of the political context. Therefore, the ensuing discussion will consider the political context so that the arguments on race and higher education do not happen in a vacuum.

This article primarily interrogates the nexus between race and higher education in the post-colonial and post-apartheid context. To achieve this goal, it traces this relationship back in history and looks at how it has metamorphosed or evolved over time. Various examples from specific countries in Africa are used to bolster the arguments advanced about Africa in general and specifically about the South African context. While it is true that South Africa is part of the African continent, it is somewhat unique in many respects – one of which is the fact that colonialism happened in more than one wave (Oliver & Oliver 2017). Having achieved this goal, the article proffers some ideas on the way forward as the African continent in general and South Africa in particular begin to invest time and resources relentlessly and consciously in the reconfiguration of the higher education sector while also trying to achieve the African Union's Agenda 2063, SDGs and the much-revered UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This approach is in line with the focus of this journal's volume on **clinical sociology**, which is broadly defined as a practice-oriented science whose focus is on both diagnoses and change. Within this context, the article provides diagnoses of the impact of race on higher education from a historical context and then proposes changes that need to happen if the current status quo is to change. In the context of the inter-disciplinary approach of the journal, the article draws mainly from academic disciplines such as education, history and political science in order to formulate and substantiate key propositions made below.

Politics, Race and Higher Education in Africa: An Overview

Politics and higher education are indissolubly inseparable (Mngomezulu 2012). The assertion that the two concepts are inextricably intertwined and interwoven is predicated in history. Examples could be traced from across the African continent – including North and West Africa where there was dual identity of African/Arab as in the case of countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya

and Morocco, and African/French identities, as was the case in counties such as Senegal, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire (Brooke 2012). In the context of East Africa, apart from the religious motive propagated by the missionaries who were the forerunners of the colonial government after the explorers had criss-crossed the African continent, the development of higher education was based on *race* and *politics*. For its part, the colonial government was unwilling to provide higher education opportunities to the Black people. The reasoning behind this calculated decision was that once African children obtained higher education, they might pose a challenge to the colonial administration and could even render their countries ungovernable once they had been exposed to foreign ideas (Mngomezulu 2012).

In response, colonial administrators (especially in Anglophone Africa) opted for a two-phased programme. Firstly, fearing the potential contamination of the African students who would have travelled abroad, the colonial govern-ment resolved to build higher education institutions within Africa so that young African students could not travel abroad for higher education purposes where they might be exposed to politicisation. According to this plan, East African students would be confined to these local institutions where they would be taught a cogently crafted curriculum by the expatriate staff. Secondly, whilst these local institutions were being established, African students would be sent to carefully selected countries in Europe where they would further their education in a controlled and closely monitored environment. Those institu-tions were deemed 'safe' as they would not get involved in the politicisation of the African students (Mngomezulu 2004; Mngomezulu 2012).

It is now part of history that some African students still found their own way abroad to attend institutions of their choice for various reasons. Some of them were able to secure scholarships which enabled them to fulfil their dream of pursuing higher education abroad. In a bid to curtail this option, the colonial government denied many students study visas in countries like Kenya and Uganda in the late 1950s (King 1971). But, instead of 'taming' the students as colonial administrators had thought, this move actually 'radicalised' them even more (Mngomezulu 2012). By the time the colonial government changed its mind on this issue, the damage caused was already irreparable. Therefore, it is correct to assert that, indeed, the development of higher education in Africa was a political affair and that the struggle between various parties was built on race.

As mentioned above, on their part, African students (together with

their parents) devised their own strategies to access higher education. Firstly, they approached progressive institutions such as the Tuskegee Institute established by Lewis Adams and Booker T. Washington in Alabama in America and applied for spaces for East African students. Some parents even sold their cattle to pay for the education of their children whenever they were unable to secure scholarships (King 1971). Secondly, these students put pressure on the colonial government to provide higher education facilities within East Africa during the 1950s. Their political argument was that once they had obtained higher education they would be able to take over local administration, run their own affairs and thus render the White expatriate staff from Europe expendable. Protection from politicisation as contemplated by colonial administrators was not in their mind, although they were open to new ideas. This confirms the nexus between race and higher education.

Two institutions propelled East African students to sustain their fight for the provision of higher education facilities. The first one was the envisaged Federal University of East Africa (UEA), which was going to serve Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. After many processes, this institution eventually came into existence from 1963 but was disbanded in 1970 for various reasons – the most important of which was nationalism. They wanted this university to be run by Africans and also expected African academics to replace their White counterparts from Europe (Oanda & Matiang'i 2018; Southall 1974).

The second institution which encouraged East African students to demand higher education was the East African Community (EAC). This regional institution was established in 1967 but had to be disbanded ten years later (in 1977) for reasons similar to those that led to the disbandment of the UEA (Mngomezulu 2013). The argument in this regard was that there was the East Africa Legislative Assembly (EALA which was supposed to be led by African leaders. Similarly, EAC institutions had to be led by Africans, not White European staff as was the case at the time. Without access to higher education, East Africans felt disempowered, hence the call for the establishment of higher education institutions locally.

What is clear from this synopsis is that race and higher education found a point of convergence. Arguments for and against the provision of higher education facilities in East Africa were predicated on *race* and *politics*. East Africans were quick to notice that the way to occupying leadership positions in both the EAC and the UEA depended on their easy access to higher education facilities. Wittingly or unwittingly, they saw a clear relationship not

only between race and higher education (important as such a relationship was) but also linked this relationship to politics as the anchor point. Armed with this knowledge and analysis presented above, they fought for and eventually obtained higher education facilities. These came in the form of the University Colleges of Nairobi in Kenya, Makerere in Uganda and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (following the merger between Tanganyika and the Island of Zanzibar in 1964).

Therefore, we can safely say that any discussion on the development of higher education in East Africa would be incomplete if it did not capture *race* and *politics*. The situation changed somewhat between 1961 and 1963 when Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya obtained political independence from Britain. During this time, race dwindled but politics and higher education remained intact and even became stronger. Nationalism took centre-stage. Eventually, the UEA was disbanded. In its place, national universities were established in all three countries. These were: University of Nairobi in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda and University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (Southall 1974; Mngomezulu 2004; Mngomezulu 2012).

Similar developments took place in other parts of the African continent albeit in different degrees. Regional competition as evidenced in East Africa was not well-pronounced in West Africa although it was also present there too. Countries like Nigeria and Ghana fought for the establishment of higher education institutions in their region (Adeyemi 2000). While the relationship between politics and higher education remained clear, race was not so much of an issue. However, a similar call was made that African graduates had to replace expatriate staff. As was the case in East Africa, here too, higher education was seen as the vehicle through which Africans could gain their full independence and thus determine their destiny.

A quick look at the history of the development of higher education in some African countries shows more similarities than differences. For example, in all of them, race found expression in the arguments made on either side of the debate (those who revered expatriate staff and those who despised them and wanted Africans to take over from them). Secondly, both parties saw a clear link between higher education and politics – with the latter also encapsulating race. Thirdly, they all saw a direct link between access to higher education and job prospects which ensured upward social mobility. In that sense, what started off as an academic debate about the provision of higher education facilities inevitably transformed itself into a political debate. In other

instances, such transformation was not even necessary since the academic and political debates happened concurrently within the broader political context. Race was always part of that discussion. Sadly, to date, race has not disappeared from the radar.

Politics, Race and Higher Education in Africa: The South African Focus

Some authors have challenged the idea of South African exceptionalism (Mamdani 1996; 2018). While this view has credence and can be buttressed by hard evidence, it is an ineluctable fact that there are areas in which South Africa is indeed exceptional in many respects. Some authors agree (Oliver & Oliver 2017). For example, having been exposed to colonial rule between the British and the Dutch since 1795, the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910. Between that year 1910 and 1947, White segregation policies which were initiated and implemented by the people of Dutch descent became dominant. From 1948, following the victory of Dr D.F. Malan's National Party, apartheid was adopted as a government policy. What had been racial segregation became institutionalised racism. Therefore, from 1910, South Africa experienced what has become known as 'colonisation of a special type' (Hirson 1992). This was due to the fact that unlike in other African countries, here the coloniser lived within the borders of South Africa. Moreover, it was the former victims who were now the perpetrators, or 'killers', to borrow from Mamdani (2002). This situation was to continue until 1994 when South Africa eventually became a democratic country.

Throughout these enumerated phases, the development of higher education in South Africa was characterised by *race* and *politics*. Black students had limited opportunities to access higher education compared to their White counterparts. The promulgation of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 made it clear that education at lower levels would henceforth be planned and implemented along racial lines. This was clearly a political decision with no academic merits whatsoever. With regards to higher education, a similar controversial racial Act, ironically known as the Extension of University Education Act (No.45 of 1959), was promulgated. This Act showed beyond doubt that race, politics and higher education were inseparable.

According to Section 2(1) of the 1959 Act, the Minister of Education, in consultation with the Minister of Finance, could establish, maintain and

conduct University Colleges for Bantu persons. Section 2(2) stated *inter alia* that the Minister of Education could also be entitled to establish, maintain and conduct University Colleges for non-White persons other than Bantu persons (Extension of University Education Act 1959). What became evident here was that both race and ethnicity were used as determinant factors on the basis of which higher education in apartheid South Africa was to be planned and developed to serve different racial and ethnic groups. Its expectation was that these racially and ethnically organised University Colleges would at a later stage be transformed to become fully-fledged universities. The envisioned universities were to serve different population groups in South Africa in terms of both race and ethnicity. Therefore, the nexus between race and higher education was palpable.

What can be gauged from the discussion above is that, as if race was not enough as a divisive factor, ethnicity was brought into the equation to further divide the South African population – this time focusing on the Black race so that it could not be united. This phenomenon became known as 'divide and rule' (Bethke 2012; Anderson 2003). Black people had to be divided along ethnic lines so that they could not see themselves as a homogenous group but as separate entities. This would enable the apartheid operatives to target each ethnic group alone with no support from other ethnic groups who would consider themselves as 'the other'. As such, higher education institutions were planned according to both race and ethnicity.

The creation of the Homeland or Bantustan system between the 1960s and 1970s formalised this ethnic division. In the higher education sector, universities such as the University of Zululand, University of the North (Turfloop), University of Fort Hare, etc. were designated for specific ethnic groups, e.g. Zulu and Swati, Sotho and Tswana, as well as Xhosa students.

At the same time, White universities were divided into Afrikaans and English-speaking. For example, the University of Stellenbosch and Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit [Rand Afrikaans University] were meant for Afrikaans-speaking Whites. English-speaking Whites found a home in universities such as the University of Cape Town and the University of Natal in present-day KwaZulu-Natal Province. The dominance of the coloured population in the Western Cape saw the establishment of the University of the Western Cape which was going to serve the coloured population. The University of Durban Westville in KwaZulu-Natal became home to the Indian students. Here, the resources were better than those found in Black universities.

Therefore, it is irrefutable that ethnicity and race became the determinant factors on how higher education was going to be developed in South Africa. The curriculum content and resources allocation were all informed by the nature of the university. As would be expected, White universities were the most resourced; they received the lion's share of the national budget. The coloured university of the Western Cape was supposed to have better resources than Black universities. However, the university's decision to oppose apartheid resulted in it falling out of favour. Instead, it earned the label 'intellectual home of the left' (Lalu & Murray 2012; Soudien 2012) due to its political orientation which supported the oppressed masses. By this time, it was clear that higher education in South Africa was by all accounts a racial project.

Reflecting on this Act of 1959 and its aftermath and legacy, Prof. Kader Asmal who became Minister of Education in 1999 after Prof. Bhengu had the following to say:

> The origins of the current institutional structure of the higher education system can be traced back to the geo-political imagination of apartheid's planner, Hendrik Verwoerd and his reactionary ideological vision of 'separate but equal development' (Asmal 2002: i).

This quotation elegantly captures the importance of race in understanding the history of South Africa's higher education system. Speaking with specific reference to the 1959 Act, Asmal (2002: i) argues that the Act 'was far from extending access to higher education on the basis of the universal values intrinsic to higher education'. It did not intend leaving no one behind.

Against this backdrop, there is an observation that the establishment of Historically Black Universities (HBUs) and Historically White Universities (HWUs) was not an accident. Conversely, the decision was cogently thought through by both the political and academic leadership of the apartheid era. It was subsequently meticulously implemented by those who were saddled with the responsibility to ensure that the apartheid policy became a reality and that it was effective. At the core of this decision was the determination by the apartheid government to sustain social *classification* and social *stratification* (Seekings 2003; Crompton 1993; Mngomezulu 2010). These two processes meant that South Africans were to be classified by both race and ethnicity. Once this goal had been achieved, they would be ranked in a hierarchical order

(stratified) with the White race at the top and the Black race at the bottom. The other two races (Coloureds and Indians) would be somewhere in the middle. They were deemed not advanced enough to join the White race but were also not degraded enough to join the Black race at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This racial divide reverberated in all spheres of life – including the higher education sector.

The historic announcement by then President F.W. de Klerk that his government was going to release Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 and unban liberation movements turned a new leaf in South Africa's beleaguered history. The implementation of this decision on the scheduled date set the wheels of democracy in motion. Given the link between education and politics alluded to at the beginning of this article, higher education could not be left out in this transformation agenda. Accordingly, the reconfiguration of the higher education sector began in earnest. By the time the country went to the polls on 27 April 1994, plans were already under way on how the education sector in general was going to be re-engineered.

After the results of the 1994 first-ever democratic election, the African National Congress (ANC) emerged victorious with 62%. In the context of reconciliation, President Nelson Mandela who became the first democratically elected President of South Africa presided over the Government of National Unity (GNU). Under this set-up, Thabo Mbeki became the First Deputy President, with F.W. de Klerk becoming the Second Deputy President. Although the GNU had a short lifespan, it set the trend which other African countries were to emulate years later – including Mozambique and South-Sudan as some of the latest examples.

When South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, education was one area which needed serious attention. As expected, the transformation of HBUs posed a huge challenge (Mngomezulu 2020). This was due to a number of factors. One of them was the fact that, unlike their White counterparts, these HBUs were under-resourced, with some of them having a debilitating infrastructure. This was a direct contrast to HWUs which had all the resources they needed and also boasted of huge financial reserves to tap into should a need arise. This was the racial legacy.

It is worth noting that during this time there was no difference between Basic Education and Higher Education. The two were run by the same ministry and thus had one Minister. As such, Prof. Sibusiso Bhengu who became the country's first Education Minister was responsible for both levels (Basic and

Higher education). Moreover, he was tasked to preside over both HBUs and HWUs. It became impossible to remove race from the equation. Any attempt to upscale HBUs so that they could come closer to their HWUs counterparts invariably invoked race as a variable. This became clear when government resources were allocated to these institutions. Any catch-up programmes meant to bring HBUs up to speed with their HWUs counterparts were frowned upon by White students and embraced by Blacks (IEASA 2014).

Having just become a democratic country, South Africa had to be guided by legislation in all its activities. Where apartheid laws were in place, these needed to be repealed in line with the new political dispensation. Where no laws existed, they had to be promulgated so that the democratic ethos could be reflected. The Interim Constitution of 1993 had already started giving pointers on the direction the post-apartheid government was going to take in terms of deracialising the higher education sector. The formal adoption of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) confirmed this new trajectory. Various authors have been thinking aloud about these changes and attempts made to render race obsolete under the new political dispensation (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017; Goldschmidt 2003; Mngomezulu 2020; Mnguni 2000; Moloi, Mkhwanazi & Bojabotseha 2014; Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2013).

In terms of progressive legislation, several laws were passed by the post-apartheid government to address the wrongs of the past. The establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education (N.C.H.E.) in 1995 marked the first step towards addressing the impact of race in South African higher education (CHE 1995). This Commission was given the responsibility to come up with clear proposals and guidelines that would ensure that higher education was viewed as a national project as opposed to it being a racial issue. In retrospect, there was a gleeful reflection that 'by 1997, key higher education policy and legislation informed by the work of the Commission was in place to enable the systematic programme for the transformation of higher education to unfold' (CHE 2009:1).

Having executed its responsibility, the CHE produced a report, which was titled An Overview of A New Policy Framework for Higher Education. It was this report that marked the first phase in the process of reconfiguring the higher education landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. By the time this report was produced, there was already a semblance of hope that sanity would eventually prevail in South Africa's higher education sector devoid of the racial

divide. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to assert that the CHE Report instilled optimism among South Africans that at long last race would be rendered outmoded under the new political climate. The winds of change had started to blow thus bringing about new hope.

Following the Report of the CHE of 1995, the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 was published. Its political objective was made explicit from the onset. This objective was encapsulated in the view that the transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa had to 'reflect the changes that are taking place in our society' (The White Paper 1997:2). In other words, the political mood at the time had to reverberate in all spheres of life, including higher education. Speaking with specific reference to the racial divide in higher education, the White Paper (1997:2) did not mince its words. It stated *inter alia* that '[t]he higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities'. No one had to be left behind.

In a nutshell, the White Paper held the view that it would be illogical to continue to have institutions of higher learning that were organised along racial lines at the time when the country was forging national unity. Within this context, universities had to serve South African students in general, not students from a specific racial group as had been the case under the apartheid dispensation. Therefore, the White Paper stated that the higher education system in post-apartheid South Africa had to be planned, governed and funded as a single national co-ordinated system. The time of planning education at this level in silos (determined by racial and ethnic overtones) was over. Everything had to be done to ensure that fragmentation, inequality, exclusion and inefficiency were things of the past.

In line with the National Constitution and the CHE Report, the White Paper espoused the view that the transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa had to be 'part of the broader process of South Africa's political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity' (The White Paper 1997:29). Put succinctly, given the politics of the time, the transformation of higher education was a *necessity*, not an *option*.

The thematic areas in which changes in the higher education sector were contemplated included but were not limited to the following: structural changes, efficiency, mergers of academic institutions, the forming of one

national higher education system and institutional compliance in terms of redressing inequality (which included among others: accessibility, equality of race and gender, demographical representation of staff and students, etc.) (Du Preez, Simmonds & Verhoef 2016:3). Implicit here is the view that higher education had to be transformed in all its areas. As such, the racial character of the higher education sector could no longer be tolerated. Race and racism had to be rooted out in order for the sector to be run as a single unit.

The promulgation of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) marked the first clear and concrete step towards addressing the transformation of the higher education sector through legislation. This Act covered wide ground in terms identifying the areas in which the envisioned transformation agenda was to happen. After the passing of this Act, the way forward became even clearer. The foundation was in place and real work had to begin.

Attempts Made to Remove Race from Higher Education Institutions after 1994

Having adopted the Constitution, the Report of the CHE and the Higher Education Act, South Africa was ready to embark on the process of removing race from higher education. The institutional restructuring of 2001 'provided the opportunity to reconfigure the higher education system so that it was more suited to the needs of a developing democracy' (Moloi *et al.* 2014: 472). Discussed below are some of the attempts made by the South African post-apartheid government to deracialise higher education.

(a) The Merger of Higher Education Institutions
Building on the process outlined above, in 2003/2004, Minister Kader Asmal initiated the process of merging higher education institutions in South Africa. As part of this merger process, higher education institutions were reduced from 36 to 21. Although the number was later slightly increased to 23 and then moved to 26 with the prospect of another university as well as Technical, Vocational, Educational and Training (TVET) colleges being on the pipeline, the message was clear. Minister Asmal's argument was that it did not make sense to have three or four universities in close proximity serving different racial groups. These had to be merged so that they would accept students regardless of their race. It is correct, therefore, to argue that mergers 'were

politically motivated' (Mouton *et al.* 2013: 285-286). To buttress this view, those who had benefited under apartheid did not embrace these changes. As a result of these mergers, there was resistance to change and low levels of trust between government and different stakeholders (Eloff 2009). But change was inevitable. Gradually, this change has been embraced, albeit not entirely.

(b) Addressing Racism within Higher Education Institutions

More than ten years after the dawn of democracy in 1994, racism still remained a challenge at South African higher education institutions. Part of the reason was that some of the education reform initiatives only involved superficial changes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi 2016). In a resolve to address this scourge, government took a firm decision to face it head-on. In 2008, the Higher Education and Training Minister appointed the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education institutions (MCTHE). The primary objective of this Committee was to specifically address the issue of racism at South Africa's institutions of higher education. While racism had been an endemic challenge for decades, it was given currency and impetus by recent developments that had taken place at various higher education institutions. One of them was a racist incident which took place at the University of Free State (UFS) in 2007, which the media dubbed as the 'Reitz saga'. This incident was widely reported in the media. Suransky and Van der Merwe (2014:1) elegantly capture it thus, 'The incident shook the university's institutional culture to the core and became a catalyst for change for universities across the country'.

Presenting its Report in 2008, the MCTHE took a broader approach. It stated *inter alia* that 'the transformation agenda includes the necessity to examine the underlying assumptions and practices that underpin the academic and intellectual projects pertaining to learning, teaching and research' (The MCTHE Report 2008: 11). The Report was warmly welcomed by those who conducted research in higher education. For example, Du Preez *et al.* (2016: 3) comment that 'The MCTHE Report (2008) marks a shift from research on structural transformation to a broader ideological discourse of transformation'.

But this move did not mark the immediate end of racism at higher education institutions, nor did it briskly remove the racial profile of students and staff. It is for this reason, therefore, that more than five years later, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014: 96) still assert that the skewed participation

according to the race of students as well as academic staff at higher education institutions 'is accompanied by skewed output, also according to race'. This was a tacit admission that more than five years after the release of the MCTHE Report race was still a problem at South African higher education institutions. The only positive development was that unlike before, this time around government had started doing something about it. This should not come as a surprise. It would have been a miracle to destroy the foundations of racial higher education overnight. The entire mind-set had to change. Years later, some changes have come about in terms of the staff and student profile which has begun to be mixed as well as curriculum changes which are currently underway. But this is still work in progress.

(c) The Student Profile at Higher Education Institutions

The student profile at an academic institution has a racial undertone. This is so because students are normally classified according to race, gender and age, among other variables. Across the African continent, the majority of students at higher education institutions have been (and still continue to be) predominantly Black (Mngomezulu 2012; Mukhwana & Kande 2017). This is not surprising because the African population is predominantly Black. In South Africa, however, the student profile at academic institutions (including both lower and higher levels) has invariably been historically determined by the designation of each institution. This is despite the fact that there are many White students in South Africa compared to other African countries. The very notion of HWUs and HBUs bolsters the argument that race has been the deciding factor in establishing institutions of higher education in South Africa. Within this context, higher education institutions reserved for Whites, Blacks, Coloureds and Indians reflected this student racial profile. Coupled with that was the language factor. At HWUs students had the option to use their mother-tongue, which was either English or Afrikaans. Black students on the other hand could not use any of their home languages. This placed White students at an advantaged position academically.

Ideally, the advent of democracy in 1994 was supposed to have ended this racial bias – both in terms of students and staff as well as in terms of language. Indeed, giant strides have been made in this regard. Even the admission policies of South African higher education institutions have since been revised to be in line with the changed political atmosphere. The staff

profile has also changed somewhat from what it used to be under apartheid. All these are commendable efforts which are progressive in nature – although each higher education institution has moved at a different pace in terms of transformation which is meant to ensure that these changes do occur.

While the changes alluded to above are welcome, it is a known fact that remnants of the old order (the apartheid legacy) still prevail (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017). For example, in KwaZulu-Natal's five campuses, Westville campus, which used to be the University of Durban Westville meant for the Indian population, still boasts of a high number of Indian students compared to the other four campuses. HBUs such as the Universities of Fort Hare, Zululand, Venda and others still continue to have more Black students while Universities such as Free State, Pretoria and Cape Town have high numbers of White students compared to their Black students' counterparts (South African Human Rights Commission Report). Part of the reason is the spatial arrangement such as the homeland system and township/urban setting. Students tend to attend universities closer to where they live. Another factor is the issue of tuition fees. Some universities are more expensive than others. The third factor is institutional reputation. Some universities have a better reputation compared to others. Other factors compound this issue. This means that more work still needs to be done before we reach a stage where we could confidently say that race is no longer an issue at South African institutions of higher education.

(d) Race and the Staff Profile at Higher Education Institutions

The racial profile of staff at higher education institutions across Africa has been a bone of contention. In many African countries under colonial rule, especially in East and West Africa, the expatriate White academic and administrative staff dominated. After independence, a call was made by both the academic and political leadership for the Africanisation of staff (Mngomezulu 2012). This was the case, for example, at the Federal University of East Africa and in many West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. Once independence was obtained, gradually, the academic and administrative staff profile changed.

In South Africa, the same situation prevailed under apartheid. Even HBUs were dominated by White staff. But unlike in the rest of the African continent, the post-apartheid government of South Africa discouraged racism at higher education institutions. As such, White staff continued to hold senior positions at most South African universities and other higher education

institutions. However, government's call for transformation saw this situation gradually changing somewhat. The transformation agenda meant that those Africans who qualified to take up leadership positions had to be given such an opportunity. It was in this context that academics such as Professors Nongxa, Jansen, Ramphele and many others were appointed as Vice-Chancellors at universities like Wits, Free State and Cape Town. This would never have happened under apartheid. Similarly, deserving Black academics were appointed as lecturers, senior lecturers, Associate Professors and even Full Professors at different universities. These measures gradually changed the staff profile of the country's higher education institutions.

But, despite these commendable efforts, race remains an issue when it comes to staffing at South African higher education institutions. For example, there are still more Coloured staff members at the University of the Western Cape at all levels (Thaver 2003; SAHRC Report). Similarly, universities such Zululand and Venda are still biased towards Black staff. Whether this is by choice or by default remains debatable. On a positive note, universities such as UCT and North-West University (NWU) have made some effort to accommodate Black staff (UCT Annual Report 2019; NWU Profile 2019/2020). Surely, more still needs to be done so that de-racialisation of staff is not done simply to tick-off the boxes but should be a greased machine which runs smoothly for all to see. By the year 2018, Stellenbosch University had tried somewhat to change the staff profile. However, the figures show that there is still a long way to go (Stellenbosch University Statistical Profile 2018). Government can either be punitive or rewarding in order to accelerate change, but transformation has to happen to ensure unity.

Addressing the Race Issue at Higher Education Institutions

Knowing that a problem exists is not as important as doing something to address it. The first step towards finding a cure for any ailment is for the patient to admit that he or she is sick. As Africa continues to face racial challenges, it is of cardinal importance to admit that race remains a menace at higher education institutions. Collectively, Africans need to join hands and work towards addressing this endemic problem.

In so doing, Africa should draw lessons from other countries that had a racial mix but suppressed racism. In her study on African-American students' study abroad, Sweeney (2014: 16) observes that 'Early African Americans

who travelled to the United Kingdom and continental Europe did not experience the discrimination that was typical in the United States'. Here, we have two cases, one being fixated on race (America) and the other (United Kingdom) trying to remove race from academic institutions. Africans can learn from such experiences on how racism could be suppressed. Within Africa, many countries have been wrestling with race at different levels. Among them is Kenya and Zimbabwe. South Africa could learn from their experiences. While it is true that contexts may differ (e.g. population size and racial composition), this does not mean that no points of convergence could be found.

Equal distribution of resources among university students would assist in addressing this scourge. To achieve this goal, a single higher education authority institution or body is a *sine qua non*. For this to work, education should be controlled from lower levels so that by the time higher education is brought into the equation, systems would have matured. South Africa has tried to go this route but the fact that there are still private schools and private academic institutions means that challenges will continue. Collaboration is key in this regard.

Changes in the curriculum could also assist in addressing the race issue without interfering with students' academic freedom and university autonomy. This could be achieved by designing the curriculum in a balanced manner such that there is no racial bias which privileges one group of students against the other, or gives more options to one group of students. If students across racial groups are exposed to such a curriculum, this would ensure that the 'us' and 'them' syndrome becomes irrelevant, thereby tacitly debunking Social Darwinism referred to at the beginning of this article. Related to this would be the promotion of all languages so that students have a leeway in deciding the language of instruction they prefer as well as the language in which they would like to be tested or examined. Promoting English and Afrikaans only does not help the course. Universities could also assist by ensuring that all their documents (including application forms for admission) are available in different languages. When putting up messages, they should cover all the official languages instead of privileging either English or Afrikaans, as this creates the wrong impression that other languages do not matter. Fortunately for South Africa, the Constitution states that the country has eleven official languages.

Certainly, none of these proposals would be easy to implement. What is needed is collective effort whereby everyone takes full responsibility for any

action taken. The government needs to provide guidelines and monitor their implementation. Secondly, the government needs to provide resources where necessary for all institutions to be competitive. On their part, universities should appoint visionary leaders who will not be the stumbling blocks. Students should refrain from perpetuating racial comments which set them apart. Parents should watch their tongue and actions and refrain from sawing divisions. In a nutshell, winning the fight against race and racism in higher education should be everybody's business. No single solution can be panacea for uprooting this deep-rooted scourge. America is still wrestling with it after many years.

Conclusion

Higher education constitutes the apex of education in any country. Race poses a threat towards bringing harmony in the higher education sector. History shows that the race issue is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the encounter among different races. Moreover, there is enough evidence to suggest that the race problem is not only an African problem, it transcends geographical boundaries. That alone means that Africans have to look beyond their continent for answers on how to address the race issue. One indubitable fact is that the nexus between race and higher education is an ineluctable fact. Given the ubiquity of this challenge, concerted effort should be made to address the issue. Changing the spatial arrangement could take long. However, certain things could be done immediately.

Firstly, the government should take a firm stance that no racial elements at higher education institutions shall be tolerated. University Councils must ensure that they root out the scourge. Student admission and staff employment policies must be monitored and evaluated by the CHE so that transformation does not only happen on paper. Non-compliance should be reprimanded. All institutions that have poor resources should be supported by both government and the private sector so that they improve their profile and reputation.

One issue which sets higher education institutions apart is that of salaries. Financially stable institutions attract the best students and the best staff. Government should work with university administrators to find a way of addressing this issue. Once salaries are standardised, the best students and staff will be spread across higher education institutions. This would result in better

student throughput rate and improved research outputs, thus improving institutional profile. Government legislation and university policies can only give guidance. What is needed most are people who would be the implementers of such legislation and policies. The human factor is therefore critical.

In a nutshell, everyone should appreciate that higher education is the apex of education all over the world. As a result of this fact, there is general interest in what happens at higher education institutions. The second point which no one should lose sight of is that these higher education institutions do not exist in a vacuum, they are part of society. Therefore, some of the changes that would happen inside higher education institutions would have to reflect what is happening in society in general. It is for this reason that the state and the university as an institution should speak the same language and read from the same script. If the end goal is to unite society, it should not be difficult for the two institutions to work together. Surely, there will be challenges along the way but the task is not insurmountable.

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