

‘There is a racist on my stoep and he is black’: A Philosophical Analysis of Black Racism in Post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

In the history of South African racial relations, perpetrators of racism appear to have been largely white while the victims have been largely black. In post-independent South Africa white people appear to condemn racism and all practices and institutions that seek to defend or promote it. The end of colonialism and apartheid together with the introduction of equality among all citizens, the successful debunking of racial difference and the attainment of power by black people – levels the race field so to speak. While it would have been unimaginable to think of a black person as a racist in the past – particularly against white people – it has now become common both in the public political sphere and in private interactions, for white people to accuse black people of being racist. This article seeks to appraise the charge of black racism. I seek to investigate whether as a concept the notion of black racism is sound. Secondly, since racism is an act that is offensive to the victims, I seek to establish the kind of impact that the assumed black racism might have on white people.

Keywords: White racism, effective racism, black racism, racial hierarchy, South Africa

Introduction

I think it is useful to start with a disclaimer as to the scope of the article. Whilst racism is a universal problem, my article seeks to restrict its investigation to the South African context. I have two reasons for that: firstly, it is generally agreed that apartheid was a very vicious form of racism and

blacks suffered immeasurably under this system – even up to this day there are good reasons to think that some black people still suffer as a result of the effects of apartheid¹. Since the end apartheid in 1994, with some of its perpetrators and beneficiaries still around, it is important to investigate whether the victims have sought to mete out the same racism to their former oppressors and where they have been accused of attempting to do so, it is equally important to investigate what effect their assumed black racism have had on the white population. Secondly, much against the spirit of racial reconciliation advocated by South Africa's well-known iconic and spiritual leaders, former president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, there have been growing complaints emanating from the white section of the population, about certain important black political figures in this country. These complaints have largely charged that certain utterances by important black leaders either amount to racism² or racial incitement. In other words black people are seen as being racist against white people. Closely related to this some white people feel that policies such as affirmative action and broad-based black economic empowerment are racist as they seek to exclude white people from benefitting from job and business opportunities (Herman 2008: 6; Goga n.d.). It is against this background that this article

¹ The kind of suffering I have in mind is that which was caused by the systematic denial to black people of access to social goods such as education, decent housing, water and electricity supplies, health and any other social goods that would have not only made their lives enjoyable but would have provided a platform for black people to improve their lives and secure their own future and the future of their own descendants (see May 1998: 2-4; Christopher 2001: 459; Fiske & Ladd 2004: 17-39).

² The most intriguing case of a charge of black racism was made by an important minister in the presidency in charge of the National Planning Commission against an important civil servant who heads government communication. In an open letter Minister Trevor Manuel described Jimmy Manyi as the worst kind of racist comparing him to the architect of apartheid HF Verwoed; this after the latter had made unsavoury remarks about the need for coloured (mixed race) people to move to other parts of the country instead of confining themselves to the Western Cape Province. To read the actual letter see: <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656?oid=224062&sn=Detail> (Accessed 4 September 2013.)

seeks to investigate whether black people could be racist and if so what kind³ of racists they could be. Another concern that the article does not cover, is that of racial incitement and how we need to approach this matter⁴.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first section I sketch what I take racism to mean philosophically speaking. In the second section I look at the possible scenarios in which black people could be said to be racists. In the third section I look at the role of historical and social factors in the impact that the victim may feel or experience as a result of the perpetrator's racist behaviour. But first I need to set out my methodological procedure of my attempt at investigating the plausibility of the charge of black racism.

Method

In this article I eschew an approach that involves explicitly assessing or investigating the racist connotation of known black practices/ cases against white people. On the contrary, I seek to follow a philosophical method known as thought experiment(s). My reasons for following this route are twofold.

³ My use of the word 'kind' is very specific. It refers to the histories and legacies of racism as experienced during the periods of colonialism and apartheid over more than three hundred years. It is not simply about whether one's actions are of a sort that has a harmful effect or not in the present. Since racism is essentially harmful to the victims in terms of the racist systems and institutions that were created for white advancement at the cost of black well-being, it is this legacy that makes white racism of a different kind.

⁴ An organisation known as Afriforum, that appears to be largely white and that has arrogated itself the task of defending what it takes to be white interests, took Julius Malema, the former leader of the Youth League of the African National Congress Youth League (which is not only the ruling party – but the party that was at the forefront of fighting apartheid), to court for singing a song that was sung during the struggle against apartheid. Afriforum interpreted some of the words in that song as hate speech targeted at white people. The judge in the case found that some of the words did constitute hate speech and ordered that they not be used both in public and private. (See the decided case of *Afri-Forum and Another v Malema and Others* 2011 (12) BCLR 1289 (EqC) (12 September 2011.)

Firstly, it appears to me that it is difficult to make the necessary philosophical argument I seek to advance if I were to consider in a case-by-case way – or a myriad of known cases of – white complaints against black racism. My argument is that while these cases may be seen either to merit the charge or not to merit the charge of black racism, my argument might get bogged down in delineating the exact instances in which the said racism is taken to have arisen or not. I argue that such an investigation is not particularly useful as it fails to cover the range of theoretical considerations that I think important to account for what we may term racism. Secondly, I wish to set out, in line with the purpose of my article, a broader outline of the conditions under which black racism can be said to have obtained – hence my method of thought experiments. My intended project is succinctly captured in the description of the challenges and purposes of thought experiments as stated in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

The primary philosophical challenge of thought experiments is simple: How can we learn about reality (if we can at all), just by thinking? More precisely, are there thought experiments that enable us to acquire new knowledge about the intended realm of investigation without new data? If so, where does the new information come from if not from direct contact with the realm of investigation under consideration?⁵

While there may be objections to the efficacy of the method of thought experiments, Simon Beck (2006: 29) provides justification for this method when he writes:

Although it is by no means the only method available to philosophers, the use of thought-experiments to argue for a position seems a particularly *philosophical* way of going about things. It is not a peculiarly philosophical way (although many of those used are extremely peculiar, as are some of the positions they are used to defend).

⁵ Cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thought-experiment/> (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

I do not wish to pursue the merit of thought experiments in philosophical discourse. What I wish to achieve by using thought experiments is invoking instances in which it could be argued that black people would have behaved in ways that are patently racist or at the very least appear to be racist. By so doing we can begin to capture a sense of what it may mean in reality for a black person to be said to have acted in a racist manner against, for instance, a white person. In all the imaginary cases that follow below, my attempt is to capture and draw out some of our intuitions about the possibility or efficacy of black racism. Thus my article generally follows two strategies; firstly it engages philosophical debate on the nature and efficacy of racism by one racial group and, secondly, juxtaposes that discussion with what we may imagine to be instances of black racism.

Racism

As Paul C. Taylor (2004: 33) notes, defining

‘racism’ is difficult in part because we use the word to describe many different things. Some of us speak of racist people, actions, attitudes, and beliefs; others speak of racist practices, ideologies, and institutions. Some of us refuse to complain of racism unless there is some intentional discrimination; others are willing to set aside intentions and focus on consequences. Some of us want to think of racism as a matter of prejudice in individual interactions; others insist that it is about social systems and structures of power.

It is not my intention to go into the details of the debate around the definition of racism. That is beyond the scope of my current concern. For the purposes of my article I will accept Taylor’s (2004: 33-34) definition of racism that,

[W]en we complain of racism in any of these senses, we seem to be complaining about an ethical disregard for people who belong to a particular race. ‘Disregard’ in this context means the withholding of respect, concern, goodwill, or care from members of a race. We might do this because we dislike people with certain traits, and

because we believe that membership in the race in question involves possessing these undesirable traits.

He further explains that this disregard may be based on either extrinsic or intrinsic racism. Although the term disregard may seem quite tame, Taylor argues, its use has several advantages.

First, speaking of disregard (and of disrespect and the rest) allows us to cover a range of attitudes all at once, from outright hatred, to the simple failure to notice that someone is suffering, to the related failure to notice that there is a person in front of you, as opposed to the personification of a pre-existing stereotype. I disregard you when I assume that racial stereotype accurately describes you (Taylor 2004: 34).

I suggest that it is possible for us to imagine this disregard coming in different forms. An individual may, for instance, come to exhibit that disregard as a result of prejudices that she has acquired. She may believe that certain races or a certain race is inferior to her own. She may then proceed to act in ways that show a disregard for the welfare of the members of that particular race. She may think less of them, dislike or hate them, discriminate against them or have ill-will against them. Disregard, let us imagine, may also occur at the institutional level. At this level racial discrimination, either overtly or covertly, is against a particular racial group. If it is overt it would be supported by discriminatory policies or legislation that would bar members of the victimised group from either participating or fully benefitting from the services and products of that institution. If it is covert it relies on a number of social structures and reality to ensure that the members of the victimised group are kept out of the concerned institutions. Johannes Andreas Smit, for instance, gives a detailed description of the machinations of segregation and oppression perpetrated and perpetuated by the apartheid state at the institutional level. Smit shows how all facets of life were regulated by various pieces of legislation that sought to disadvantage blacks while advantaging white people (Smit 2010: 12-20).

At the core of interpreting racism as disregard is the idea of exclusion. People of other races or of a particular race are excluded from partaking and benefitting from either interpersonal relations or institutional

services on the grounds that they are different by virtue of their skin colour. In recent times, race has come to refer to skin colour, while in previous historical epochs, race referred to a wider range of indices of difference: of ethnicity, language, nationality, etc. (Reiss 2005: 17; Boxill 2001: 1). The usage I deploy in this article refers to discrimination based on skin colour (Zack 2001: 47 – 52). The difference in skin colour is then taken as proof of inferiority. Perpetrators of racism will take it to be the case that every black person (or whatever different race) is likely to exhibit certain key character or behaviour traits. Normally these traits are taken as undesirable and to represent the inferiority of the black person. This may lead to the formation of the belief that blacks are genetically predisposed to be of such an inferior nature. That belief in itself may lead to two possible reactions which need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Firstly, it may be believed that because of that inferiority black people ought to be treated as second class citizens who are not deserving of any respect and recognition. Secondly, it may lead to the belief that black people are poor souls who cannot escape their terribly handicapped station and hence ought to be pitied. However, the pity is not identical to the pity that one feels for another person of her racial group. It is a depraved and scornful form of pity that decries blackness seeing it as a pathetic station – a sad reality for anyone to be black. Effectively, either way blacks – who are people of another race in that instance – are excluded from the full definition of humanity. They are seen as lacking something, as inflicted by inadequacies and unqualified to be taken as equals. Scientific explanations and empirical evidence are then sought to explain the black condition. For instance Charles W. Mills (2005: 172 -183) provides a detailed analysis of David Hume and Immanuel Kant's so called scientific racism, which led to the latter's dubious conclusion that humanity comes in varying degrees with whites being more able to attain full humanity. On the other hand Lucius Outlaw (2001: 63 - 70) provides a detailed outline of how and why racial classification and its associated racial traits grew out of the sciences and how it was later to be successfully debunked.

The notion of disregard can also be explained in terms articulated by Lawrence Blum when he considers racism to be essentially about inferiorisation and antipathy. Blum shows that there are many meanings and usages of racism. However, he argues, all forms of racism can be related to one of the two general paradigms of inferiorisation or antipathy (Blum 2008: 8). He claims that inferiorisation is linked to racist doctrines and systems

such as slavery, segregation, imperialism, apartheid and Nazism. In these systems other groups are treated as inferior to the dominant group by virtue of their biological nature. Antipathy, on the other hand is currently understood to be less related to the original concept of racism. It is understood to encompass racial bigotry, hostility and hatred (Blum 2008: 8). Further, he adds that there are three other general categories of racism which he outlines as follows:

Personal racism consists in racist acts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour on the part of individual persons. *Social* (or sociocultural) *racism* comprises racist beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes widely shared within a given population and expressed in cultural and social modes such as religion, popular entertainment, advertisements, and other media. *Institutional racism* refers to racial inferiorising or antipathy perpetrated by specific social institutions such as schools, corporations, hospitals, or the criminal justice system as a totality (Blum 2008: 9).

According to Blum each of these categories interacts in a complex manner with the other categories. Blum then seeks to further elaborate the nature of inferiorising and antipathy racism:

Inferiorising personal racism is expressed in various attitudes and behaviour-disrespect, contempt, derision, derogation, demeaning. It can also involve a developed set of beliefs about a biologically based hierarchy of races, but it need not do so. For one thing, an individual may be racist against only one racial group and have no views about others. An individual can be contemptuous toward another racial group without really believing that it and its members are inferior (Blum 2008: 10).

Hence, he holds, an inferiorising racist is one who thinks that a person of another race is inferior to her own group. Antipathy, on the other hand, is quite distinct from inferiorisation. The major difference lies in that inferiorising racists do not necessarily hate the targets of their beliefs. They may have paternalistic attitudes towards their targets. They may even have feelings of concern and kindness for persons they consider to be their

inferiors. Antipathy, in contrast, is characterised by feelings of resentment and fear. However, these two types of racism do not operate in entirely separate forms (Blum 2008:10).

Blum's intention is primarily aimed at not only defining racism but at showing that characterising certain acts as racism is problematic for two important reasons. Firstly, he suggests that certain acts are not racist in essence – they could exhibit a certain ignorance or some misconception that the perpetrator has against the other racial group. From this Blum argues that a perpetrator of racism based on his or her own ignorance or misconception should not be condemned as racist. For Blum such condemnation would impoverish the efficacy of identifying a person's actions as racist. Thus for him the term must be used only in instances where a person has shown clear malice against persons of another race. Secondly, using the term racism to instances that are not racist reduces the power that the rebuke of truly identifying racists as such has. Blum argues that when we call someone a racist we are pointing to the manifest moral failure of that individual. Being called a racist must ideally make people very uncomfortable as it points to something serious about their failures. Using the term loosely or erroneously erodes the condemning power of the word. Thus he seeks to define a racist strictly as follows:

A racist *person* is not merely someone who commits one racist act or acts on a racist motive on a small number of occasions. Motives and attitudes such as bigotry, antipathy, and contempt must be embedded in the person's psychological makeup as traits of character. In this sense, being racist is like being hateful, dishonest, or cruel in implying an ingrained pattern of thought and feeling as well as action (Blum 2008: 14-15).

He claims there is a difference between saying a person is a racist and saying that some of her actions are racist. I take this to mean that a racist is a person who is deeply embedded in her ways that mark her as a racist. These ways and feelings are so central to the person's identity that if she were to give up such thoughts and feelings we could say she would have lost her identity.

I suggest that for our present purpose, in order to understand whether blacks could be racists, we could combine Taylor and Blum's definitions of racism to go thus: Racism is a disregard for another person on the basis of

that person's race. Such a disregard involves historically entrenched beliefs, prejudices, systems and structures that construct and propagate the other person's inferiority hierarchically which leads to actions that actively discriminate against the racial other. Such discrimination may lead to the victim suffering either from institutional exclusion or interpersonal disregard. On the institutional front, the victim is denied social and other amenities that are received and enjoyed by other members of the same society. On the interpersonal front the individual is denied the benefit of full and meaningful interaction with other members of society as she is seen as an inferior other. Hence she could be denied the benefit of care, concern and even friendship on the basis of her skin colour.

With this definition in mind, I wish to shift my discussion to what form black racism in post-apartheid South Africa could take. Secondly, I will seek to investigate whether black racism is of such a vicious nature that it can be considered to be historically effective to cause serious harm to white people.

Black Racism

On the face of it, the question whether blacks could be racists or not appears rhetorical. Of course any human being of any race can be a racist. Some black people could even declare themselves to be racist and might as well fit the profile of racists through their attitudes towards whites or people of other races. For example, black people could form organisations⁶ that seek to

⁶ For example in South Africa the Black Management Forum states, on its website under the who we are section, that they are a non-racial organization that is non-partisan; under their mission section they state: 'The Black Management Forum stands for the development and empowerment of managerial leadership primarily amongst black people within organisations and the creation of managerial structures and processes which reflect the demographics and values of the wider society' (see http://www.bmfonline.co.za/?page=who_we_are) (Accessed 1 October 2013). This can effectively be taken to mean that they are pro-black by virtue of seeking to animate accurate demographic representation in managerial positions. That being the case, we can imagine, they will seek to defend and champion the black cause and not a non-racial cause.

promote 'black causes'. Such organisations would not admit to their membership any person of any race, or particularly white people. Routinely they might reflect on the black condition and come to the conclusion that most things that are wrong with the black condition is directly traceable to white people's history of oppressing the black race. They, again routinely, could blame whites for the condition of black people and, routinely again, profess their hatred for white people. The ties that bind them could be based on their hatred for white people. But interestingly their hatred would only be based on their sense or understanding of history. They merely associate whiteness either with a history of being the oppressor or being associated by race with oppressors. They could even extend their reasoning to conclude that all white people would be oppressors if given the chance.

A second sense in which black people could be racists would be cases where black people engage in acts of violence against white people. An easy example would be that of an individual or group of individuals who engage in criminal activity. They could decide that their victims are going to be drawn solely from the white population⁷. Thus they will frequent white areas and scout out their victims in such areas. They might also execute their theft or robbery with violence that clearly sends a message to their victims that they have been chosen and treated in such an awful manner because they are white⁸. The criminals may deliberately spare blacks who live in white areas from experiencing their criminality and brutality. These criminals may even go to the extent of letting their victims go or withdrawing from a house they intend to rob once they discover that their intended victims are black. In this case they could or could not have an elaborate theory or explanation of

⁷ Although the claim is disputed, the popular and controversial Afrikaans performer Steve Hofmeyr believes this to be the case (see Brodie 2013 at: <http://www.africacheck.org/reports/are-white-afrikaners-really-being-killed-like-flies/>) (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

⁸ See <http://www.censorbugbear.org/farmitracker/reports/view/1192> with the dramatic title 'Hatecrimes summaries in South Africa: Black Aggressors against White South African Victims archived from Jan 2012 to July 2013'. This website seeks to provide detailed information ranging from legislation that discriminates against whites, to ANC policies of discrimination and crimes perpetrated by black people against white people. (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

why they target whites. I imagine that on one hand they could come up with an explanation that seeks to argue that white people have been oppressors and beneficiaries of the country's wealth⁹ hence it is only fair that they (the criminals) engage in some kind of Robin Hood exercise in the redistribution of wealth. They could argue that their hatred for white people is based on what they perceive to be the essence of white people – an essence that expresses itself as oppressive, greedy, accumulative and arrogant.

The theory might even end with a detailed historical account of black oppression at the hands of white people and the criminals concerned might just as well use that to justify why they target white people¹⁰. On the other extreme, the criminals, being rightly of little education and grossly lacking in historical accounts of oppression, might only see white targets as worthwhile targets simply because they tend to have lots of money and other valuables in their houses and on their person. They might simply say targeting a white person is a sure way of getting a valuable return in every criminal venture. Chances are much higher that you will get something valuable from targeting a white person as opposed to a black person or any person of another colour. As a result they choose white people; when they act violently towards white people, in the course of committing their crimes, they do so because they do not care about white people. They have a sort of disregard for the welfare of white people, they do not care about it, and it means nothing to them whether white people suffer or not. When the criminals, for example, pour boiling water on their white victims to obtain pin numbers to bank cards or secret numbers to safes, they do so because they have a certain disregard for the well-being of white people. They might not even see them as deserving of any mercy. They might only see them as people who must be shocked into cooperating with their criminal schemes. In both instances we could say there is a deliberate disregard for the well-being of whites based on the historical experience of their race. They are targeted for it, are victimised for it and the violence meted against them is driven by the belief that they are not worthy being treated with dignity in the same manner that the criminals would treat

⁹ This seems to be the case with white farm attacks (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_African_farm_attacks) (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

¹⁰ See Mann (2013) available at: <http://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/red-october-to-protest-against-genocide-of-white-south-africans-in-london.htm> (Accessed 1 October 2013.)

members of their own race. This in a sense can be said to be reciprocation – ill-defined as it may be – in the face of the devastating legacy of white racism.

The problem with the two foregoing examples is that they fall foul of a definition of racism that sees racism effectively as historically produced prejudice plus power. Indeed the members of the exclusive group of blacks have power to form their own organisation and guide their plans and projects for the benefit of black people. They also have the power to exclude other races from joining their organisation. In the same vein it can be said that the criminals, in the second example, have power over their choices of their victims. They may decide who to target as victims as well as the nature of their violence against their victims – to merely humiliate them or to treat them viciously and inhumanely. However, we may say this is not real power. There could be some amount of prejudice¹¹ involved against white people and it could be justifiably said that the black protagonists, in both instances, might hold some convictions (though varying in sophistication) against white people. Though this is power, it is only so in a very limited sense. It cannot affect those beyond the immediate reach of the protagonists and if the perpetrators are found, particularly in the second instance, they are likely to be punished severely – even by black authorities. In the first example, it is hardly implausible to imagine other black sections of society objecting to such exclusive construal of membership based on race. In both instances, and in each case for its own reasons, this is not real power.

Hence I propose a third consideration of black racism. Let us suppose that there is a black person or a group of black people, who either in their official capacity effect official policy that seeks to discriminate against white people or as a result of their positions seek to discriminate against white people. In the former, we assume that there is a government that, much like the apartheid regime, openly states that it advocates separate development that favours blacks and discriminates against white people. Its policies and laws may be formulated in a manner that openly states their objective as oppressing, excluding or disenfranchising white people in order to advance and give in preferential treatment to black people. All its public officials

¹¹ Later I will seek to assess whether black prejudice has the same force as white prejudice in racism. While it may appear easy to say prejudice is the same the situation is not as simple as it appears.

routinely make statements to explain, support or justify such a policy. In the latter, we can imagine a public official who deliberately resolves and then acts in ways that discriminate against white people. Such a person could have power to do so. In the course of executing her duties, the public official may animate her prejudices against white people by talking them down, refusing them public service positions or promotion which is due to them, denying them justice or humiliating them or even taking time to insult them for being white. The white people, or the victims, may not have recourse to the ill-treatment because of reasons such as fear, poverty, and a sense of powerlessness or may give up pursuing their abusers merely because they think that it is time for blacks to be racist, immoral and corrupt.

I wish to argue that all the foregoing senses of black racism are not well positioned to qualify as instances of effective racism. In order for racism to be effective, it must be of such a nature that the victim and other members of her group feel the impact of the perpetrator's behaviour as truly significant to cause them genuine discomfort, fear or feelings of real exclusion. I think that in order for racism to be effective there should be other historical social dynamics that work to support the racist behaviour that any of the individuals above exhibit. Since it is widely accepted that the notion of race is a social construct – racism has to be understood in the context of the social dynamics at play that may either be in favour or against it. The reason for this is well articulated by Taylor (2004: 83) when he writes:

We have for a long time valued different races differently, and we have expressed and refined this valuation in a social mythology of stereotypes and stock images. You know the system of ideas that I'm thinking of. Whites, at the top, are civilised but soulless, with rational men and beautiful women; blacks, at the bottom, are physically gifted but oversexed brutes; American Indians, sort of in the middle but really off the scale, somewhere to the side, are noble savages, virtuously free of civilised impulses but childishly incontinent; and Asians, squarely in the middle, are a model but irreducibly alien and perhaps devious minority, composed of asexual men and submissive women. More broadly, whites embody Reason and Beauty, blacks represent The Body and Ugliness, American Indians are Primitive Nature, and Asians are the Inscrutable Other.

The same point of the inferiority of the social position of blacks is also made by Wasserstrom (2003: 273). On the other hand, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze aptly shows how the black race is dismissed from modern philosophy by some of the most influential modern philosophers (1997; 2001: 5-25). Although Taylor's characterisation may be said to be restricted to the American experience, it holds true for whatever situation where there are different races. In other words in any society where there are different races there will be a hierarchical organisation and understanding of the importance of each race. I suggest the same applies to the context of South Africa which is the main concern of my article. I also suggest that at no stage of the existence of South Africa, as a society with various races, has the black race ever found itself at the top of the order. Morally, financially, socially and racially – blacks have had to deal with being valued as the worst kind of race.

Further, there were and still are differences made between the so-called black races¹². For example the Indians are seen as cunning and rich, the coloureds are generally seen as an oddity, and Africans are seen as lazy and corrupt. These perceptions are confirmed and animated in the social structures such as the economy, housing and health provision. Even during apartheid Indians and coloureds were afforded minimal privileges that served to distinguish them from Africans and inferiorise Africans. Through a systematic housing programme that created Bantustans and townships exclusively for black people, not only was the institutional discrimination physical and dehumanising but it also served to affirm the different valuations of races that Taylor refers to.

When the majority of black people look at their living conditions in comparison to those of white people they can't help but be filled with admiration for the lifestyle of white people. When white people occasionally venture into the townships and are faced with the grim reality of black existence – the poverty, squalor, filth, deprivation, and lack of services and basic infra-structure – they can't help but develop a range of negative reactions. They may feel sorry for the black population and may even blame the black government for concentrating on furthering corruption and self-

¹² Black in South Africa has been taken during the apartheid period to encompass people of Indian origin, Africans, mixed race/ coloured people – but here it must be understood to primarily refer to Africans. Chinese for example were classified as white.

enrichment at the expense of improving black living conditions. They may hold black people responsible for their own condition due to their lack of personal virtue, hard work and thrift. Or they may conclude that a combination of these factors has led to the black condition. Or they could shrug and simply say blacks are savages – an aberration of true humanhood. When black people look at the achievements of white society, their material possessions, their sophistication, their culture (encompassing religious and social practice), their achievements (academic, financial, leadership, influence), their standing in society, their restrained behaviour, their apparent meaningful care for each other, their general sophistication in worldly affairs ranging from knowledge of fine cuisine and wines to their knowledge of history, the sciences and other issues – they can't help but admire whites for being whites. When white people look at the culture of black people; their traditional religious practices, their dances, their food (tripe/offal), their conversations (both the content and ability to express their thoughts), their practical living conditions (township and rural), their rampant sexuality and diseases (HIV/AIDS), their political parties, their work ethic, their lack of knowledge in worldly affairs, their profligacy, and just the way they are as black people – whites can't help but notice that blacks are radically different from them. And the difference is of such a nature that it makes the black standard compare very badly to the white standard¹³.

Although this unfavourable outcome of the comparison between the two groups should not lead the white to formulate racist attitudes towards black people – what it does is that it might lead white people to develop either a scornful or condescending attitude towards black people. They may come to genuinely believe that they are rather superior to black people. That belief in itself need not necessarily lead to any discrimination against black people or hatred of blacks or a disregard of black people. It may only see black people as not quite a match to white people. Such a view then leads

¹³ While a plausible objection may run thus: these are mere stereotypes about so-called black people, they should not be taken seriously as they run foul to what has been scientifically proven about the non-importance of differences in race and they should be merely seen as stereotypes of sorts – my argument seeks not to dismiss race as improperly grounded. Rather I seek to secure a more fundamental point that seeks to show race as a serious moral and social philosophical conception and problem as it is produced institutionally.

white people to form the opinion that black people cannot be taken seriously as they are not equals. They might have power, they might have prejudice and they might say things that have been reflected on to deliberately harm white people – but all these utterances and actions have little weight since whites perceive them as somewhat occupying an inferior position on several fronts. Whites may see the ways of blacks as somehow less refined and in need of enlightenment or advancement. They may precisely come to see black racism as an occasional rant or act from a politician doing what black politicians do best – trying to blame others for their misdeeds.

The point I seek to make here is that society has been structured and institutionalised in such a manner that people do not only see the differences that exist between white and black people. They also see those differences to be determinants of who is at the top and who is at the bottom of the social scale. When people interact with each other they tend to respect and take seriously the words and actions of those who are their equals and peers. If, for example, a word of ridicule or praise is uttered by one of my colleagues in my school, I am most likely to be either positively or negatively affected by that word in a far much more significant manner than when the same utterance is made by most brilliant first year student. If a first year student ridicules my teaching that has very little impact on me compared to the same ridicule being made by one of my colleagues. If my first year student praises an article I have written as the most brilliant piece she has ever read and glorifies my intelligence – that adulation has limited impact compared to the same adulation being made by an erudite colleague. This is not to suggest that I see the first year as less of a human being than my colleague. It simply shows that I don't think a first year remark on the quality of my work as worth of serious attention as my colleague's remark. The reason for that is simply that I take my colleague to be my peer, a person of sophistication and experience far removed from the first year student's knowledge. I take my colleague far much more seriously than my first year student.

I suggest that the same applies to the dynamic of the relation between white and black people and how they view each other not as racial groups but how each group understands the importance of the reflections and racial utterances of the other group. If white people do not take black people seriously in all other issues, by virtue of white belief that blacks are inferior, they are not likely to take black racism that seriously. Even if they were to take such racism seriously and even if there were visible damaging

consequences, white people would take it as an aberration of sorts or the madness of the perpetrator. A person who occupies a superior position is normally not bothered by what those in inferior positions really get up to including their views of her.

The perpetrator of black racism also seems to be at a distinct disadvantage in her quest to be racist or achieve her racist ends. If we return to Taylor and Blum's terminology above, we find that the black racist's position in our conception of the racial structure effectively incapacitates his desire to be an effective racist. It appears as if the black person cannot develop any disregard for the white person based on inferiorisation or antipathy without running the risk of bad faith (Satre). Racist theories that backed inferiorisation as expressed in slavery, colonialism and apartheid seem to be a white creation specific to those times. For example, we do not have an equivalent to Humean, Nietzschean and Hegelian rants coming from blacks targeted at whites. If anyone was to utter equal rants, that is attempting to develop a theory that would show the inferiority of the white person and the superiority of the black person such a person would not be taken seriously. The reason is based on the evidence we have thanks to the history of race and because the proposal would be completely ahistorical and backed by no evidence save misguided speculation. Erroneously blacks have always been made to believe whites to be somewhat at the top of the racial structure. White civilisation and achievements are largely responsible for the modernisation and lifestyle that we now know and all enjoy – albeit to varying degrees. Even this, though is the result of the history of white racism to varying degrees.

If a black person was ever to complain about ill treatment by white people, particularly if she is close to them, this could cause offence. They may complain that white people do not take black people seriously or are patronising towards blacks or they are pretentious towards black people or that they do not want to befriend black people¹⁴. I think we must understand this complaint for what it precisely is – it is a complaint about racial difference or a complaint about how the two races fail or fake their

¹⁴ Again this must be understood as a general sketch of the nature of perceptions of the black race of the white race. It does not mean that there are exceptions to the described state of affairs for there are many white people who exhibit attitudes and behavior that is contrary to the ones described.

interactions. It is a complaint that says things would be much better if we could remove these hindrances to effective and equal interaction. It could be a middle class and educated black person's complaint claiming that even though she has done as well as whites and moves in their circles, she still feels excluded by virtue of her race. This complaint could just as well be justified or a result of a misperception on the part of the black person. That is beside the point, but the most important thing to note here is that such a feeling and complaint do not lead to the development of the black inferiorising the white. The black does not develop any theories that then seek to subjugate the white person or to change the white person into more of a human being. The black does not develop a mission to civilise as many colonial authorities sought to do with black people. Neither does the black person develop antipathy towards white people as a result of her observations or in spite of those observations. The black person does not develop bigotry, hatred or intense dislike for white people. To my mind antipathy is based on the belief that the targeted group is inferior or somewhat inadequate and less of human beings. It is probably based on the belief that the targeted group must be eliminated in order to maintain the pristine essence of humanity which is encapsulated by the other race(s) besides the targeted group. Such bigotry as suffered by black people during slavery, apartheid and colonialism is of such a serious nature that even the most self-proclaimed black bigot will never come close to its status and effects. If the black person was to develop such bigotry and even act on it not only would her actions be isolated but also quite meaningless as they run against the current of the power of the history of white bigotry. The reason for this is that the social construct of the hierarchical nature of races denies the importance of black racism. While white racism is taken seriously because it is seen to be emanating from the top of the racial structure, black racism of any form lacks the proper ingredients of disregard, inferiorisation and antipathy. The black person does not have the social history of being effective racists.

If we return to the examples I provided above of possible instances of black racism, we see that they are all eerily similar in that they are driven by the black person's perception of white history of injustice against black people. While this may be seen as racism, we must also see it for its kind. It is not of the same kind as for example, the racism defended and perpetrated in systems such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Blum suggests that what is normally described as racism on the part of blacks is only prejudice, hatred

and bigotry. ‘Inferiorising forms of racism are rarer among groups lower in the racial status order’ (Blum 2002: 36). Further, Blum notes that while prejudice and bigotry are bad, their badness is incomparable to that of inferiorising perpetrated historically by white racism.

My argument is slightly different from Blum’s in two respects. While I would agree with him that bigotry, prejudice and hatred are bad, I would argue that these instances of prejudice, hatred and bigotry are also rare among black people. Wherever they arise they seem to be mostly associated with what is believed to be some problems with white people either in the history of white interactions with black people or how they continue to behave indifferently towards black people. Secondly, these prejudices, hatred and bigotries sometimes arise mainly because of black people’s impatience with what they perceive to be a lack of transformation, slow transformation, or hijacked transformation. In essence while black people are actively agitating for serious changes not only in racial relations and perceptions but in other important social, economic and education fronts – white interests may be perceived to be blocking such efforts. Blacks then feel disenfranchised, in South Africa, in a country of their own birth and a country bequeathed to them by their forefathers. As a result they come to resent and hate whites not for being whites but for what they represent and the perceived greed they have become associated with. At times black people seek to make a distinction between their hatred for a particular action and their lack of hatred for the actual perpetrator of that action. Many freedom fighters and revolutionaries on the African continent declared that they did not hate whites but only hated the system they represented. This makes the prejudice that black people may have remarkably weakened by the fact that it is formed by their understanding of what they perceive to be white oppression. Such prejudice is understandable and in the context of where it occurs it could be said that such prejudice would not have arisen were it not for the fact that white people instigated a system that privileged their station to the exclusion of black people. Now that black people demand a redress they are met with resistance and an attempt at preserving white privilege without regard to the conditions of the black wrought by social injustices of historical white racism.

Blum’s Moral Asymmetries

In this third section, I reflect on the significance of the historical and social

factors in the impact or results of a perpetrator's racist behaviour on a victim. I wish to especially refer to Blum's work on what he calls moral asymmetries. It is important to note that Blum argues that not all racism is equal as well as that not all acts or beliefs or racism are the same. For example, murder is not equal to name calling. Hence he argues that he shall work with what he calls asymmetries between equivalent acts among the races; for example we shall take murder as equal to murder. However, he rejects this view as incorrect arguing in fact that the identity of the victim and the perpetrator are the most important.

Everything else being equal, greater moral opprobrium rightly attaches to racism by whites against people of colour than the reverse. This is the most important moral asymmetry in racism (Blum 2002: 43-44).

He claims that there are four sources of moral asymmetry among forms of racism differentiated by perpetrator and target groups.

The *first* is historical legacy. Blum argues that acts that remind the victim of the legacy of racism are the worst kind. Although whites can be victims of racism they do not have a historical legacy of being victims of racism, hence they do not carry the burden of such victimhood. For African Americans, on the other hand, the history of slavery and segregation is real and an undeniable part of their history. This history is something that no African-American can deny or escape. Analogically, the same can be said of blacks who have suffered under the racist regimes of colonisation and apartheid in (South) Africa. There is a historical legacy of the social and cultural victimhood and marginalisation of black people. This legacy is something that underlies much of the racism still perpetrated by whites – who continue to see themselves as superior – and the black experiences of racism, even after the end of apartheid.

Secondly, Blum argues that positional inferiority is important in these asymmetries. He notes that whites have superior positions, politically and economically. Their racism directed at inferior groups has greater power to shame the victim than vice-versa. 'It shames by reminding the target that the inferiority declared in the message is reflected in the social order itself' (Blum 2002: 46). For many blacks the positional inferiority is evident in their daily experiences of inferior social and cultural positions, their inferior job

opportunities, and the general inferior living conditions and opportunities for improving the quality of their lives.

The *third* is the pattern and prevalence of racist acts. Blum argues that subordinate and vulnerable groups are more likely to experience racism than dominant groups. In the American context some marginal groups such as Norwegian Americans, when they experience racism, are most likely to shrug it off while blacks as vulnerable group are not likely to be able to do that. In comparison with vulnerable groups in South Africa, we may refer to the different groups of African migrants who experience xenophobia in South Africa. These different migrant groups to various degrees experience certain forms of racism – not only from the legacy of white superiority but also from fellow South African blacks. In addition – and to pick up on Blum's argument on racial hierarchy – Polish immigrants in South Africa, for example, may receive less ill-treatment at the hands of white people than black South Africans who are fellow citizens. Polish immigrants, similarly, will also not receive any ill-treatment from black South Africans.

The *fourth* and final asymmetry is the contribution to the maintenance of racial injustice that acts of racism have. Racism that is directed towards a member of a subordinate group is much more objectionable compared to one directed at a member of a dominant group. From this perspective, Blum holds that what the moral asymmetries show is that not all racisms are equal.

More specifically, racism of whites against people of colour is, everything else being equal, of greater moral concern than the reverse. It is closer to the historical systems of racial oppression and injustice that provide the defining context of 'racism' (Blum 2002: 50).

In evaluating racist acts, Blum contends that because of the social and historical legacy attached to racism, when perpetrated by a white it should be of much greater moral concern than when perpetrated by a black. The main reason is that blacks just do not have the historical and cultural capital that is associated with racism that white people have. In the interests of the nurturing of equality, white racism should therefore be treated much more seriously than black racism – if it exists.

Blum then urges that the discourse of racism must be put in its proper

social and historical context¹⁵. He also notes that passing legislation that is anti-racist will not necessarily result in the elimination of the barriers that black people face.

The four forms of moral asymmetry work the same way. Though a white individual is not more racist or more morally evil in harbouring racial prejudice than is a black individual, the moral asymmetry makes the consequences of her prejudices, and of the acts expressing them, worse than those of the black individual. In this sense they are worthy of greater concern (Blum 2002: 51).

While I agree with Blum's argument I wish to reiterate that my project here has not been aimed at dismissing black racism on account of white racism. What I have sought to argue, which is also close to Blum's claims is that the act of racism by a black person against a white person faces considerable impediments to make it a successful and effective act of racial discrimination in the senses of my integrated definition above. Acts of racism by black people against white people are of such a negligible nature as they lack the historical and social infrastructure to be effective.

Conclusion

My argument has not sought to define or analyse the terms of race and racism. I have also not aimed at analysing and evaluating specific instances of so-called black racism. What I have sought to do is to analyse how these terms are understood and used as social constructs of the differences in skin colour and appearance. I have sought to argue that these terms are effective when understood against the background of how different races are seen in a hierarchical form, for instance in terms of the legacies of racism in the world.

¹⁵ Although Blum's work is primarily conceived as relevant in North America it also has relevance in South Africa. His categorization may be seen as more pertinent to the American situation, yet, since a hierarchy of races exists in all places, it is also applicable to South Africa. By virtue of the fact that certain races were regarded as superior in the past such a residue remains alive even after the demise of the structural ordering of the hierarchy of races, such as came about due to the end of apartheid.

Historically, the black race has not known a position that is superior, in social and cultural standing, to the white race. From this brute historical and social fact I have sought to argue that however black racism is conceived, it does not succeed in attaining the same level of racism as white racism since it stands at odds with the notion of racial hierarchies and the historical legacies of racism in the world. Even when implemented on an official scale (as was the case of Uganda under the dictator Idi Amin for instance), because of their unprecedented nature and the accepted lower position of black people in the hierarchy of races – such acts become nothing more than short-lived somewhat amusing buffoonery. Hence in conclusion we may say while blacks may be racists they can only be ineffective racists if not altogether a strange kind.

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