'White excellence and black failure': The reproduction of racialised higher education in everyday talk

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ABSTRACT

Since democracy in 1994, much effort has been expended on overcoming the institutionalized racism that characterized Apartheid. The transformation of higher education, particularly with regard to the merging or

incorporation of institutions, is such an example. In this article, we analyze discourses on race emerging in the talk of students and staff during the incorporation of a historically white satellite campus (Rhodes University East London) into a historically black university (University of Fort Hare). We argue, using Essed's notion of everyday racism, infused with insights from discursive psychology, that higher education institutions are racialised through the intricate interweaving of macro-level processes and discourses that recur in everyday talk and practices. In their talk, our participants persistently assigned racialised identities to the institutions (Rhodes is white and Fort Hare is black) and invoked a 'white excellence/black failure' discourse. 'White excellence' folds in on and is re-produced by the desirable, modern, urban space and an appeal to Euro-American standards. Institutions and individuals are positioned as being able to overcome 'black failure' by moving into white space and through intense personal labour.

One of the perpetual conundrums that faces the social sciences is how to understand the mundane everyday practices of individuals in relation to structural or macro-level issues. This has variously been referred to as the individual-society divide (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984), the agency-structure problem (Wight, 2003), and micro- versus macro-level analyses (Gordon, 1991). Discursive psychologists argue that discourse theory collapses the individual-society divide, with discourses simultaneously allowing spaces for certain types of selves or subject positionings while at the same time supporting institutions by validating particular practices and marginalising others (Parker, 1992). In this paper we provide a concrete example of how particular kinds of (racialised and differentiated) institutions are reproduced in the mundane talk of individuals and how this talk allows space for certain kinds of selves.

  The institutions referred to here are universities which, along with all institutions, were racialised as deliberate acts of policy during Apartheid. In 1997, the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997) was passed, the purpose of which was to provide a policy framework with which to redress the disparities that resulted from the segregation of Higher Education (South African Government Communication and Information System, 2001). In 2002, the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, announced plans for the restructuring of the Higher Education landscape, which included mergers of independent institutions and the incorporation of parts of some institutions into others.

  In this article we report on individual and group interviews conducted with staff and students affected by the

incorporation of the satellite campus of Rhodes University located in East London (henceforth RUEL), which was established in 1981, into the University of Fort Hare (UFH). In the nationwide restructuring, the RUEL-UFH incorporation is distinctive as it is the only historically white institution that was incorporated by a historically black institution, thereby affording a unique opportunity for researching issues of race in the change process.

In our analysis we employ Essed's (1991, 2002) notion of everyday racism, which we extend with insights from discursive psychology. Essed introduced the concept of everyday racism in an attempt to connect structural and institutional forms of racism with the routine situations of everyday life (see later discussion). In this article we investigate how, in the wake of structural policy-level changes, the discursive practices of staff and students re-produce institutions as racialised and differentiated spaces. This differentiation is achieved through allocating a racial identity to institutions, a discourse of 'white excellence/black failure' (with 'black failure' being overcome by 'white excellence'), and an appeal to Euro-American standards.

Before presenting our results, we trace a brief history of the entrenchment of and attempts to dismantle institutional racism in South African universities from the inception of the first university to the recent transformation of higher education. We discuss debates around the notion of institutional racism and attempts, through the notion of everyday racism and discursive psychology, to interweave the mundane practices of individuals with structural or institutional issues.

THE HISTORY OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Race has played a pivotal role in South African Higher Education since its inception in 1829 with the establishment of the South African College in Cape Town, modeled on the University of London. In 1916, the University Act (Act No. 12 of 1916, Union of South Africa) was passed whereby the South African College became the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Victoria College became Stellenbosch University in 1918. Both were established for white students. At the same time, the South African Native College, which later became the University of Fort Hare, was established on the site of Fort Hare, a former British military stronghold. Only one university existed in South Africa prior to 1918; this was the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which would ultimately become the University of South Africa. After World War 2, other university colleges began to attain full university status. The Rhodes University College, which was established

in 1904, became Rhodes University in 1951 (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001).

By 1951, South Africa had eight teaching universities for whites and the South African Native College for blacks. The latter espoused a policy of non-racialism and produced graduates from across Africa (University of Fort Hare Prospectus, 2004). Of the eight white institutions, only three provided limited access to black (which included all race groups not considered white) students. After 1946, the University of South Africa (UNISA) admitted students of all races. The University of Witwatersrand and UCT allowed black students to attend lectures but segregation was implemented on all other levels. The University of Natal was seen as less liberal due to the fact that although it allowed limited access to black students, they had to attend separate classes to white students (de la Rey, 2001).

In 1953, Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd passed the Bantu Education Act (Act No. 47 of 1953) and in terms of this, control of black education was no longer in the hands of the provincial governments but was placed in the hands of the central government. In 1957, the Minister of Education, J.H. Viljoen, proposed that integration of education at university level should end (Harrison, 1981). This culminated in the passing of the Extension of Universities Act (Act 45 of 1959). This act was particularly controversial in that it made provision for the establishment of separate universities for different race groups. Furthermore, it served to prohibit the so-called 'open universities' in South Africa from admitting more black students. With the passing of this act, university education was completely segregated after 1959 (de la Rey, 2001). In 1960 the law was amended to allow for some black students to attend white universities by applying for a government permit. Very few of the applications were granted (Nicholas, 1994).

This had an impact in terms of the two institutions featured in this research. In 1951, when Rhodes University College became Rhodes University, the South African Native College became affiliated to Rhodes. This meant that its syllabuses and the conduct of its examinations were subject to the control of Rhodes University's Senate, it had representation on Rhodes University's Council and Senate, and the vice-chancellor of Rhodes University chaired its Council (Buckland & Neville, 2004). However, in 1959, the South African Native College, which became known as the University of Fort Hare, had it affiliation with Rhodes University terminated and was transferred to the Department of Bantu Education. It was viewed by the government as an ethnic college for Xhosa speaking students, although the staff contingent was predominantly white. Despite this, the University developed a distinct, albeit periodic, history of anti-Apartheid struggle (de la Rey, 2001).

With segregation being a priority in the development of the Nationalist Higher Education system, two more white universities were established in the 1960s (University of Port Elizabeth and the Rand Afrikaans

University). In addition to the University of Fort Hare, 'tribal colleges' (which were later to become universities) were established for Sotho-, Venda- and Tsonga-speakers (University College of the North), and for Zulu- and Swazi-speakers (University College of Zululand). The University of the Western Cape was established for coloureds and the University of Durban-Westville for Indians (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). In the 1970s and 1980s, when the government implemented its homeland policies, additional universities were established (Universities of Bophuthatswana, Transkei and Venda) to provide education for the homeland civil servants (Dyasi, 2001). At the same time two urban-based universities (MEDUNSA and the multi-campus Vista University) were established for the growing urban black population (de la Rey, 2001). The homeland universities were dubbed in certain circles as 'bush colleges'. They were established in areas that were close enough to white towns to ensure that white academics who aligned themselves with Apartheid ideology could be employed at such institutions. Incentives (known as danger pay) were created for such staff members.

In 1979, threats were made to implement a quota system to limit the number of black students enrolling at white universities. Although it was never implemented, the Minister of Education promised to keep an eye on the number of blacks entering white universities. In 1991, after a tumultuous period of protest in universities, and after the release of Nelson Mandela, the Universities Amendment Act, in which the first steps towards creating a single education system were taken, was passed (Nicholas, 1994).

In February 2001, Cabinet approved the National Plan for Higher Education. The National Working Group (NWG), appointed to act as an advisory committee to the Education Minister, proposed the reduction of the number of Higher Education institutions from 36 to 21 through mergers and incorporations. Pertinent to this research, it was suggested that Rhodes University (both the Grahamstown and East London campuses) merge with the University of Fort Hare (UFH) and the medical faculty of the University of the Transkei (UNITRA). After a period of comment in which both Rhodes and UFH opposed the merger plans, it was finally announced (along with other mergers and incorporations) that RUEL would be incorporated into UFH. Rhodes University, Grahamstown (RUGHT), was excluded from the merger process to continue as an autonomous institution. UNITRA was merged with other institutions.

INSTITUTIONAL, INDIVIDUAL AND EVERYDAY RACISM

In the previous section we detailed the institutional racism (using a narrow definition of institutional racism in which an organization is racist as a deliberate act of policy) of higher education in South Africa. The notion of

institutional racism has been used in a number of senses, however. In this section we detail some of the conceptualizations of institutional racism, the difficulties attendant on these theorisations and what the notion of everyday racism and discursive psychology contributes to the debate.

Both the 'institution' and 'institutional racism' have proved to be difficult and slippery concepts in social science theory. In the 1960s African Americans began talking of institutional racism to overcome the then dominant understanding of prejudice being located in the cognitive errors of individuals. Institutional racism was referred to as internal colonialism and was used to mean practices within institutions that disadvantaged black people (Miles & Brown, 2003). The many uses of institutional racism since then has led to it being accused of meaning 'all things to all accusers' (Barker, 1999, p. 25). At one level, institutional racism has meant the imposition of rules and regulations that are discriminatory in effect, although perhaps not in intention. At a second level, it has meant the pervading atmosphere of an organisation (the so-called canteen culture). At a third, it has implied the deliberate implementation of racist policy. And at a fourth, it has been conceptualized as institutions reflecting the fundamental racist nature of the society within which they operate (Barker, 1999).

The notion of institutional racism has been criticized from two competing perspectives. On the one hand, with its emphasis on structure, the concept of institutional racism is said to open up the possibility for racist acts to be portrayed as residing somewhere other than in the practices and intentions of individuals. On the other hand, some accounts of institutional racism (e.g. the second one referred to above) are said to reduce to a form of methodological individualism (the tendency to see everything social as the result of the sum of individual actions), thereby failing to locate the structural sources of institutional racism (Wight, 2003). Taken together these criticisms speak to the individual-society or agent-structure divide. It is this precise problem that Essed's (1991, 2002) notion of everyday racism tries to address.

Essed (1991, 2002) argues that the macro properties of racism as well as micro inequities that reproduce the macro need to be acknowledged. The interweaving of the constraining impact of entrenched ideas and practices on human agency and the constant re-construal of the social through everyday practices needs to be theorized. Essed locates this interweaving in everyday life, where, on the one hand, socialisation ensures that available knowledge is internalized and practices are managed according to (sub)cultural (including institutional) norms and expectations and, on the other hand, the system is constantly re-construed in everyday practices and individuals may resist pressure to conform to particular understandings. Everyday racism is thus seen as an active and cumulative process of daily, familiar and repetitive practices that reproduce racial

domination in interpersonal and institutional encounters. It is viewed as 'a complex of practices operative through heterogeneous (class and gender) relations' that 'activate underlying power relations' and 'become part of the reproduction of the system' (Essed, 2002, p. 188).

In this article we utilize this notion of everyday racism but extend it with insights from discursive psychology. In their seminal text on discursive psychology, Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984) not only speak to the issue of the individual-society divide, but also provide a thorough critique of socialisation which Essed (1991, 2002) sees as key to the linking of micro- and macro-issues. Despite being a popular theory within psychology for explaining children's integration into society, Henriques et al (1984) argue that the notion of socialisation is necessarily dualistic in conception. It is unable to theorize the content of information as anything other than something external to the individual, i.e. as existing outside in society. This information is then internalised through individually based cognitive mechanisms. In other words, socialisation theory does not provide an adequate account of the relation between the structure and agency.

Discursive psychologists turn to language to theorise the connection between the individual and the social. Discourse, which has been described variably as 'a system of statements which constructs an object' (Parker, 1990a, p. 191), 'a multi-faceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 47), and '[a] product and reflection of social, economic and political factors, and power relations' (Widdicombe, 1995, p. 107), is viewed as the bridge between the agency and structure. Discourses are seen as constructive as they do not simply describe the social world, but are the mode through which the world of 'reality' emerges. They contain subjects and construct objects as well as knowledge and truth. As stated earlier, discourses construct and constrain certain types of selves while at the same time supporting and constraining certain kinds of institutions by validating particular practices and marginalising others (Parker, 1992). Discourse is thus seen as actively constituting both social and psychological processes (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Discursive psychology has become an increasingly popular model for investigating issues of racism in psychology (e.g. Durrheim & Dixon, 2000, 2002; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002; Painter & Baldwin, 2004). This article extends this discussion in making an overt connection between institutional and mundane practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

The aim of this research was to explore discourses around race, equity, disadvantage and transformation invoked by stakeholders in the process of Higher Education transformation. The research was conducted at

three sites: the East London campus of Rhodes University, the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University and the Alice campus of the University of Fort Hare. Interviews were conducted with academic staff members at all sites. Three staff members were interviewed at the Alice and Grahamstown campuses and six at the East London campus (on the basis that this is the site most affected by the incorporation). These participants were evenly distributed in terms of seniority – one (two in East London) senior-level, one (two) middle-level and one (two) junior-level. For the sake of consistency, all staff were employed in the social sciences. The race and gender profile of the staff interviewees are: three black men, one white woman and two white men at RUEL; one black woman, one black man and one white man at UFH; one white female and two white males at RUGHT. Focus group discussions with students (also in the social sciences) were conducted, three at the East London campus and one at the Alice campus. Grahamstown students were excluded as they are not substantially affected by the incorporation. Each group was comprised of six students. The focus groups interviewed at RUEL were divided according to race (one 'white', one 'black' and one 'coloured' group) on the basis that students may be more willing to articulate their views on race under these circumstances. The Alice group was composed of 'black' students. Interviews and focus group discussions focused on the respondents' reactions to the incorporation, their plans for the future, their personal and academic hopes and concerns regarding the incorporation and their views on equity and disadvantage issues in Higher Education.

The interviews and focus groups discussions took place when the incorporation had been announced but had not yet taken place (October 2002 through to April 2003). The announcement that RUEL would be incorporated into UFH was made on May 30th 2002 though the official date of incorporation was left hanging. Ultimately UFH took full administrative control of the East London campus on 1 January 2004. Thus the research was conducted during a time of transition and uncertainty. This, we argue, put into sharp relief discursive constructions that other circumstances may have allowed to be muted.

An interesting ethical point was debated in the Higher Degrees Committee concerning institutional permission for the research when the research proposal was considered. The Committee agreed in the end that, given the nature of the research and in the interests of academic freedom, the Vice Chancellors of the two universities should be written a letter outlining the purpose of the research and indicating that it was not intended as an evaluation of the incorporation process. However, their permission (which could be withheld) would not be sought. Neither of the Vice-Chancellors raised any concerns with regards to this.

Participation in the research was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. They signed a consent form in which they indicated their understanding of the purpose of the research

and issues of anonymity and confidentiality as well as their willingness to be audio-taped.

All interviewees (including focus group members) were assigned codes to denote their race (B = black; W = white; C = coloured), gender (F = female; M = male), position (S = student; A = acadmic) and the campus (F = Fort Hare, Alice; E = East London; G = Grahamstown) at which they were interviewed. All codes were comprised of four letters. Thus BMAE denotes '**b**lack, **m**ale, **a**cademic, **E**ast London', BFAF, '**b**lack, **f**emale, **a**cademic, **F**ort Hare', WFAG, '**w**hite, **f**emale, **a**cademic, **G**rahamstown', CFSE, '**c**oloured, **f**emale, **s**tudent, **E**ast London'. This was done in acknowledgement that discourses are not produced in a vacuum. The site of their production in this research was consistently an interview situation but these took place within different racialised, gendered, hierarchical and institutional contexts. The acronyms are thus provided in order to assist the reader in locating extracts within the context of their production.

It must be noted that we not saying, in presenting the data, that particular individuals are racist. Rather we are investigating how discourses of race are invoked in particular circumstances. These discourses may equally be invoked by black and white staff and students although their intentions may be different. For example, in invoking a 'white excellence/black failure' discourse, certain black people may be reflecting the internalization of racism that Fanon (1963) talks about. Others may be taking a critical distance and commenting, perhaps from a black consciousness perspective, on the manner in which this understanding plays itself out. Having said this, we have resisted attempting to categorise the statements of our participants into any one of these or other possibilities.

Using Parker's (1990a, 1990b, 1992) method, the transcribed text (see appendix for transcription conventions used) was analysed in terms of what objects (for example, certain kinds of institutions) were being referred to, what systems of meaning are attached to these objects, who the subjects (students, academics) in this kind of talk are and what constraints there are regarding who and what is spoken about. Based on this, the discourses that emerged were considered in terms of what purposes they serve, what kinds of institutions they might support and what ideological effects they may have (Parker, 1990b).

Before turning to the analysis proper, however, a brief reflexive word on the authors is in order, particularly in terms of the politics of race and location. This acknowledges, as Wilkinson (1986) puts it, that 'the knower is part of the matrix of what is known' (p. 13). The first author is a white male, who was conducting this research for his Masters dissertation through Rhodes University, East London. This positioning (white, post-graduate) had complex effects in the interviewing situation, depending on the interviewee. For example, given the 'white excellence/black failure' discourse that was invoked repeatedly in the interviews, perceptions of competence or

expertise were probably played out in different ways with, for example, black undergraduate students at RUEL, white undergraduate students at RUEL, black students at Alice, black staff members at RUEL, and white staff members at Alice. The first author had tutored all the members of the RUEL focus groups. While this meant familiarity with being in a group situation with him, a tutoring relationship (that implies some kind of evaluation and hierarchical relationship) may have brought particular dynamics to the fore. The UFH student focus group, on the other hand, was completely unknown to the researcher. The second author is a white female academic at what was the Rhodes University (now Fort Hare) East London campus. She supervised the research. Clearly, both authors were insiders in the process of incorporation, caught in the cross-currents of debates and reactions to the incorporation. While in certain kinds of research, this would be seen as invalidating our findings, we believe that our insider status enhanced the quality of our analysis as we were acutely aware of the fine-grained dynamics involved.

FINDINGS

The racialised positioning RUEL and UFH

South African higher education was created as a highly racialised space through deliberate acts of policy during the Apartheid era. Duncan (2005) argues that these spaces continue to be racialised not only though the history of higher education, but also through socialisation, staffing composition and the politics of space. Our analysis confirms this, with the two universities involved in this study being discursively constructed in racialised terms. Speakers persistently accorded the institutions with a 'racial' identity, with Fort Hare being black and Rhodes being white. Only two of the 36 participants spoke of these institutions as *historically* black or *historically* white. One is a white male staff member interviewed at RUGHT. He used the term 'historically black' to refer to UFH once only. The other is a white male staff member at UFH. He used the terms 'historically black' or 'historically white' consistently.

Given the changing racial demographics at particularly historically white universities (except in most cases in the staff profile) it is noteworthy that it is not the student body that provides the 'racial' definition of the institution. And despite there being no legislative impediment to full integration, institutions continue to be defined in terms of race. Universities, in and of themselves, take on a racial identity.

Extract 1

CFSE: Ja, it's the same thing with the whole Rhodes/Fort Hare thing. Um, because Fort Hare is black, it's a black university, because Fort Hare is black and Rhodes is white.

Extract 2

WMSE: But then actually, what you're saying is hypocritical, because you're seeing Fort Hare as a black institution.

WFSE: But that is what Fort Hare is seen as … unfortunately.

Extract 3

BMAE: Because being a black institution, black academics teach at Fort Hare.

Extract 4

BMAF: I'm sorry, I hope that I'm not offending anyone but it is because Rhodes is a white institution.

These extracts illustrate the positioning of Rhodes and Fort Hare as racialised institutions. We see how the institution itself is given a racial identity – Fort Hare is black and Rhodes is white. The ascription of a fixed institutional racial identity allows for the deployment of various other discourses (these will be discussed more fully later) and for particular interactive spaces. For example, Extract 1 alludes to it being unfortunate that Fort Hare is seen as black, and thus draws on a discourse of 'white excellence/black failure'. Extract 3 illustrates how the racial identity of an institution has effects in terms of expectations of which individuals will be qualified to teach there (blacks at a black university). Extract 4 foregrounds the pervasiveness of racial markers in interactive space. The black participant feels obliged to apologise to the white researcher for potential offence in ascribing a white identity to Rhodes.

This manner of differentiating institutional identity along racial lines sets up difference as a number of binary opposites 'in terms of temporal and spatial metaphors which fold into each other – for example, Modern/Backward, First World/Third World, the West/the Rest' (Durrheim & Dixon, 2001, pp. 433-434). In particular the urban/rural dichotomy dovetailed with the black/white construction of the institutional identities of RUEL and UFH and was invoked by speakers on all three campuses.

Extract 5

BMAF: We are mainly a rural side than an urban side so I believe that East London can now reach out and improve life in the rural sector.

Extract 6

WMAF: Given our situation with a rural setting, we are much more isolated, being part of a HBU and all the problems that go along with that, you know. And sort of seeing Rhodes East London has….let's call it a First World situation.

Extract 7

> BMAE: They [Fort Hare] have given them access to East London. Fort Hare up to now was a rural university. Who would want to go to Alice and live in Alice? Most of the guys live here [East London].

Extract 8

> WMAG: Fort Hare is not viable out in Alice and that Fort Hare needed access to an urban place and obviously the urban place is East London [ ] they were to be saved by being in East London. [ ] Most of their black staff actually live in East London and commute out….so that's not….not viable. Alice is degrading.

In these quotes, black/white gets folded into urban/rural, First World/Third World, as most clearly seen in Extract 5. The urban (white, First World) is the desirable (where one would want to live – Extracts 6 and 7), the viable (Extract 7), the excellent (that will save or improve the rural – Extracts 4 and 7). This renders the urban environment what post-colonialist writers (e.g. Mishra & Hodge, 1993; Spivak, 1993) refer to as the centre, the ideal against which the rural and black, being on the periphery, are compared and defined.

Competence, 'white excellence/black failure'

The tension of white space as the desirable, urban centre and black space as the undesirable, rural periphery dovetails with a discourse of 'white excellence/black failure'. We coined the phrase, 'white excellence/black failure' from one of our speakers:

Extract 9

> BMAE: It's [the proposed mergers and incorporations] Verwoerdian in the sense that it still recognizes white excellence and black failure and there are mergers that try to get the white institution to come to the rescue.

The speaker refers here to the notorious Bantu Education system instituted by Verwoerd, a system considered by academics on the left as 'part of the overall, well-considered doctrine policy of systematically maintaining white hegemony over blacks' (Mathonsi, 1988, p. 1). The speaker intimates that this hegemony is still in play as 'white institutions' are positioned as rescuing 'black ones'. This discourse of 'white excellence/black failure' with 'black failure' being rescued through 'white excellence' is evidenced in Extracts 5 to 8 ('East London can now reach out and improve life'; 'they were to be saved by being in East London').

 The discourse was invoked specifically in the contexts of choice and fear. Choice emerged as a major factor reinforcing 'white excellence' as a desirable space.

Extract 10

> BFSE: If we had wanted to go to Fort Hare, we would have gone there. But we chose Rhodes.

Extract 11

> BMAE: I don't remember any white students going to a black university whereas black students have always taken a sort of pride in going to white universities. They will come out saying, I am at UCT, I am at Wits as opposed to UWC and all these places.

Extract 12

> BFSE: Because, obviously very few white people are going to go to Fort Hare, hello, especially Alice.

Extract 13

> WFAG: For the past twenty years, no really self-respecting academic would have gone looking for a job at Fort Hare. Once you have a job at Fort Hare, you're not going to get out of Fort Hare. That is a reality.

In Extract 10, a black student indicates a refusal of the black institution. Instead, as the academic in Extract 11 indicates, particularly black students take pride in choosing a white university. The reverse is not true, however. White students do not choose to go to black universities (Extract 12), in particular to undesirable rural spaces, such as Alice (see the above discussion on the dovetailing of the rural/urban, black/white binaries). In Extract 13 the white academic indicates that no 'self-respecting' academic would choose to teach at UFH. Black institutional failure is so pervasive as to render such a person's future (outside of 'black failure') bleak.

The incorporation of historically white RUEL into historically black UFH brought with it the implication of 'black failure' engulfing 'white excellence'.

Extract 14

> CFSE1: Why didn't they make Fort Hare part of Rhodes?
>
> CFSE2: How can they just throw away Rhodes East London like that?
>
> CFSE1: Why did they have to change something as good as Rhodes, the name Rhodes and change it to Fort Hare? I mean what about all the students here?

In this extract students are concerned about the good white institution being cast aside. Having the black incorporated into the white would, according to these students, be acceptable. But the reverse creates tension and fear, as indicated by the last sentence 'What about all the students?'.

Most of the fears around black institutional failure centre around future prospects:

Extract 15

> BMSF: When you go out to look for a job, you find that you are not recognized coming from this university [UFH] where we are not properly trained, not qualified and have no equipment.

Extract 16

> BMAF: Maybe if there was a graduate from Fort Hare and a graduate from Stellenbosch, the graduate from Stellenbosch stands a better chance of getting a job than a graduate from Fort Hare.

These speakers position the racialised institution as defining the graduate that it produces, and the workplace (particularly potential employers) as operating on the assumption of black institutional failure. A tension was set up, however, in the talk of staff and students between the institutionally defined 'white excellence/black failure', and individual competence. This is discussed in the following section.

Overcoming 'black failure'

While 'white excellence/black failure' was invoked persistently by participants, the possibility of overcoming 'black failure' was raised on a number of occasions. Various options are available. The first is individual labour, the second, undoing 'blackness', and the third rescue by white space. The first of these is evidenced in extracts below.

Extract 17

> BMSE: I have never been in a white school in my life. I started here [RUEL]. Most of them [Fort Hare students], they are coming from township schools, just like where I live. But I managed, 'cos, look, I'm in second year now.

Extract 18

> BMAE: I must admit, Rhodes has a good reputation. It's a very good university and it provided me with that challenge, to teach at a good institution, especially being a black academic. [] To be able to teach at Rhodes and not at UFH as expected because being a black institution, black academics teach at Fort Hare.

In Extracts 17 and 18, a student and staff member respectively position themselves as having broken the individual 'black failure' mould by having 'made it' in a white institution. This positioning does nothing to undo the 'white excellence/black failure' discourse at an institutional level, however. It merely introduces the possibility for individual blacks, through intense individual labour, to overcome 'black failure' limitations.

In the second instance, the labour required is to deny 'blackness':

Extract 19

> BMAE: Rhodes University will continue to draw white students and black students but the black students that are middle class, who can't wait to be so far away from their black-ness.

In Extract 19, the academic draws on a black consciousness problematisation of the mimicry of 'whiteness'. He indicates that black students may enter a white institution through being middle-class, a domain historically occupied and defined by whites. The statement unsettles the 'white excellence/black failure' juxtaposition by revealing its racialised nature, but fails to completely undo it.

Just as individuals may be positioned as overcoming 'black failure', so too may institutions. This is achieved through the institution graduating white students or moving into white space.

Extract 20

> WMAG: Sometimes people make racial distinctions. Say a white student and a black student … a white student with a Fort Hare degree and a black student with a Rhodes degree, they might still say that the white student is better. So it's not that easy to say.

Extract 21

> BMAE: So I think it would be good to have a black university in an industrialized area.

Extract 22

> WMAE: Oh, Fort Hare. They've been thrown a lifeline, in a sense. They're going to move down here, probably lock, stock and barrel. They've been thrown a lifeline. Ja.

Extract 23

> WMAG: But we have saved Fort Hare, so that is a major contribution in transforming education in the Eastern Cape and in South Africa. To save Fort Hare they have to give them our campus.

In Extract 20, it is the individual who is positioned as overcoming institutional 'black failure', not through effort or excellence, but merely by being white. In Extracts 21, 22 and 23 the institution is positioned as overcoming 'black failure' by moving into white industrialized space. However, academics from Rhodes (East London and Grahamstown) depict the overcoming of 'black failure', not as something accomplished by the institution itself, but rather as coming from outside. They are being 'thrown a lifeline' (Extract 22) or 'saved' (Extract 23).

Internationalisation undergirding 'white excellence/black failure'

In discussions around academic quality, numerous speakers drew on notions of international recognition. This

echoes Fanon's (1963) notion of the desire for the approval from the 'mother country', in this case the (particularly Euro-American) international community. The following extracts from the focus group discussions with white and coloured students illustrate this.

Extract 24

> WFSE1: It's [Rhodes degree] highly recognized. As a degree, it's internationally recognized.
>
> WFSE2: I think Rhodes will bring up Fort Hare's standard, but it will take a lot of time … for it to be internationally recognized again. []
>
> WFSE1: Is Fort Hare internationally recognized? No-one can tell me yes or no.

Extract 25

> CFSE1: It's [Rhodes] got prestige. Overseas, it's got prestige already. That's why we came here, so the name =
>
> CFSE2: = Is a Fort Hare degree actually recognized overseas. I mean, what if that is an avenue that you would like to take afterwards? I would like to do that. You can't exactly go overseas with a Fort Hare degree. I mean what the hell is Fort Hare to them.

The 'international' community is discursively invoked as a reference point in terms of the quality of a university certificate. The students in Extract 24 refer vaguely to the international community, and it is possible, but not probable, that they were including other African countries in their understanding of the international. However, the students in Extract 25 are more explicit. They are interested in 'overseas' (probably meaning Euro-American, rather than, say, South American or Asian) recognition. In addition to this, this 'overseas' community is constructed as a distant place where opportunities abound. Thus, these students re-produce the intellectual imperialism that casts Euro-American standards as the norm that must be lived up to in order to be allowed access to the resources and opportunities that the centre retains.

Ironically for these students, there is no body that certifies universities as coming up to international standards. Hence, perhaps, their frustration in posing the question regarding Fort Hare. Nevertheless, there are efforts, on occasions, by universities to prove their credentials internationally. Rhodes, for example, undertook an internationalization project in 2001 overseen by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which has 30 member states (notably none from Africa or South America). This process led to relatively vigorous debate within the institution, particularly around the meaning of internationalization, with some academics arguing that it is a short-hand for Europeanisation. Currently, Rhodes has an International Office with a Dean whose task it is to develop and support internationalization at Rhodes. Internationalisation

is defined in its policy as 'The process of developing, implementing and integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of higher education' (Rhodes University, 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

Since as early as 1990, measures have been taken and legislation has been passed that were aimed at redressing the disparity created in higher education institutions by the institutional racism of Apartheid. Tertiary education has thus been an area that has faced substantial structural transformation. And yet, it remains a highly racialised environment.

To understand this we drew on Essed's (1991, 2002) notion of everyday racism that interweaves the macro with the micro through an understanding of the simultaneous constraints placed on human agency by entrenched, institutionalized processes and policies, and the constant re-construal of the social and of institutions through everyday practices. Thus institutionally-based racism is perpetuated not only through the legacy of deliberate acts of policy; it will not be overcome only through legislative processes or structural adjustment. These macro processes are intricately imbricated in people's everyday talk and practices which maintain, re-produce, or undermine institutional racism in complex ways. In this article, we saw how institutional spaces are persistently re-construed in terms of racialised identities which, together with discourses of 'white excellence/black failure' and international standards, set institutions up in differentiated terms.

Given the centrality of knowledge generation and competence to university endeavours, the discourse of 'white excellence/black failure' has far reaching implications. As indicated at the start of this paper, discourses allow spaces for certain kinds of selves and support particular kinds of institutions. Within the 'white excellence/black failure' discourse, in which 'white excellence' folds in on and is re-produced by the desirable urban, modern space, individuals and institutions have to do no more than be white to be accorded with competence. For blacks, however, the situation is more complex. Allowances are made for both the institution and the individual to overcome 'black failure'. This advancement entails, for the institution, either its movement into white urban space or the inclusion of white students. For the individual, movement to a white institution together with personal labour and/or a foreswearing of black identity are necessary.

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Appendix

The following transcription conventions were used:

[   ]: text omitted.

.... : Pause.

=: Speaker cuts in on another speaker

[clarification]: this indicates what was probably meant by the speaker.