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'Its just taking our souls back': discourses of apartheid and race

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Abstract

Although apartheid officially ended in 1994, the issue of race as a primary identity marker has continued to permeate many aspects of private and public life in post-apartheid South Africa. This paper seeks to understand how youth at two South African tertiary institutions position themselves in relation to race and the apartheid past. Our data include four focus group interviews from two universities, one which can be described as historically 'black' and the other as historically 'white'. Given the complex nature of the data, we elected to use a combination of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis as our methodological approach. We explore how words such as black, white, coloured, they, we, us and them feature in the interviews. Our analysis shows that the positioning by the interviewees reflects a complexity and ambivalence that is at times contradictory although several broader discourse patterns can be distilled. In particular, we argue, that all groups employ a range of discursive strategies so as to resist being positioned in the historical positions of 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. Our paper reflects on these findings as well as what they offer us as we attempt to chart new discourses of the future.

Introduction

Nearly two decades after the dawn of a democratic South Africa, questions of race are still as contested as they were twenty years ago. Although the official discourse has changed radically from one which, under apartheid (1948–1994), promoted and legalised a system of racial oppression, to one in which the need for social, political and economic transformation is legitimated, the reality of negotiating this terrain for many young South Africans is complex. It requires that they navigate their way through the range of discourses associated with the 'old' and the 'new' in search of spaces and identities which allow them to articulate their complex subjectivities and positions.

This paper explores the ways in which university students at two South African tertiary institutions speak about the past and the present, and position themselves in relation to these discourses. The data are drawn from four focus group interviews held at the two institutions, one of which could be described as historically 'white' and the other historically 'black'. While the positioning by the interviewees in our data reflects a complexity and ambivalence which is at times quite contradictory and difficult to distil, larger discourse patterns do emerge. The most significant of these is that students from across the racial spectrum, though trapped in discourses which include stereotyping and 'othering', resist being positioned in the historical racially defined roles of 'victim' and 'perpetrator'.¹ Our paper reflects on this finding as well as what insights it offers us as we chart our way towards a post-racial futurity. In this paper, we work with a Foucauldian notion of discourses as structuring frameworks of meaning or ways of thinking, speaking and behaving that constitute, reproduce or contest particular social entities and relations (Fairclough 1992). We adopt the critical discourse analysis imperative to contest power relations by doing social analysis via language analysis (*ibid.*). This approach is ideally suited to unravelling the representation of identities so intimately bound up with power and race in post-apartheid South Africa.

Race and identity in South Africa

Post-structuralist perspectives of race view it as a social construct, an outcome of the colonial project which sought to categorise and rank people in a hierarchy naturalising a view of whites, or 'Europeans', as superior to other races and which relegated 'blackness' to the lowest rung (Harris and Rampton 2003). Although scholars generally agree that there is no biological basis to racial classification, race, as demonstrated in this paper, is still experienced by South Africans as a 'lived reality' (Bundy 2014, Lefko-Everett 2012). This is hardly surprising given that, after the enactment of the Population Registration Act of 1950, South Africans were ascribed a racial category based on what Posel (2001) argues were often

arbitrarily assigned signifiers relating to 'social acceptance' into a racially defined community. These classifications fixed a person's position within a racial hierarchy, firmly associating 'whiteness' with power, privilege and opportunity, and 'blackness' with poverty, dispossession and inferiority.

Although apartheid officially ended in 1994, race has continued to permeate many aspects of private and public life as debates on equity, whiteness, redress and transformation weave through our public discourses (Bundy 2014, Mbembe 2008, Steyn and Foster 2008). Ansell (2004), for example, explores what she terms the 'two nations of discourse' that suffuse written submissions on race to the South African Human Rights Commission in 2000. The first, carried predominantly by self-identified black authors, reflects a view of racism as structurally entrenched and argues for redress measures such as affirmative action (This perspective is shared by international scholars working within Critical Race Theory—see Tate (1997) for an overview). The second view, expressed mostly by white respondents, presents racism as primarily attitudinal and argues for the universal right of all people to be treated equally. According to Ansell (2004), the latter respondents also tend to reject any acknowledgement of structural white privilege or the need for redress measures, focussing instead on the importance of nation building, interpersonal exchange and the need to 'move on'. This, she argues, is typical of what is referred to in the international literature as 'new racism' with its 'colour blind' discourse—a discourse which works to invisibilise racism and naturalise inequitable institutional structures and practices. Black Consciousness scholars have also criticised this kind of 'colour blind' liberalism as a ploy which deflects attention from the entrenched and racialised structures of power (Hook 2011). Thus, from these perspectives, the assertion of racial categories is still an essential element of social transformation. However, other scholars, such as Alexander (2006) and Lefko-Everett (2012), take issue with the continued salience of racial classification and argue for the need to reinvigorate debates on non-racialism, an ideology which gained prominence in the anti-apartheid movement and emerged as a defining value in the South African Constitution of 1996. While they acknowledge there is little consensus on what it means or how to achieve it, they both define it as an active 'opposition to racial categorisation, segregation, discrimination and inequality' (Lefko-Everett 2012: 127). While strongly arguing for the need for government policies to address historical inequalities, Alexander (2006) strongly critiques the use of apartheid-era classifications for redress and argues instead for socio-economic indicators to replace race as the primary criterion.

Growing up in a context shaped by these discourses is challenging and a number of scholars have investigated how young South Africans in schools and tertiary institutions navigate this complex terrain, in ways which both perpetuate or destabilise these essentialised categories of race (cf. McKinney 2007; 2010, McMillan 2003). Soudien (2001), for example, examines how pupils at two schools are trapped between inhabiting identities shaped by their apartheid pasts and simultaneously resisting them. He argues that for these pupils, 'racialisation as a social process is a reality' (2001: 313). Walker (2005a, 2005b) shows how in an historically white tertiary institution, students draw on a range of discourses, both official and informal, and engage in complex webs of acknowledgement and denial, alignment and rejection in relation to their racial identities. Within this institution, she argues, 'race is nowhere and race is everywhere' (2005b: 41).

While many scholars have explored the ways in which the youth are trapped within inherited discourses of race, Dolby (1999) and Nuttall (2009) investigate how young people transcend these historical boundaries and rework their racial identities, particularly within the domain of global popular culture. Dolby shows how, within the rapidly shifting demographics of a single high school, tastes in music and fashion become sites within which pupils remake their racial identities and positions, albeit for brief periods of time. Nuttall explores the rise of a youth style, Y Culture, in the late 1990s in Johannesburg and argues that it offered urban (black) youth a new post-racial identity based not on signifiers of race but rather on appearance, branding and accessorisation, thereby enabling them to locate their identities within an emerging lifestyle of middle-class aspiration as opposed to the historical politics of black resistance and struggle. What is common to all these accounts is an acknowledgement of the ambivalence and complexity of navigating race and identity in a post-apartheid South Africa, and the strategic ways in which young people may deploy their repertoire of identity options, so as to index shifting alignments as demanded by a given context and to enact flexible and hybrid identities in a rapidly transforming society. Researching race is a daunting task in a country already steeped in pervasive discourses of difference. Erwin (2012: 94) urges researchers to reflect on how 'our current research epistemologies and methodologies are writing future understandings of race'. Research which uses race as an analytical lens inevitably runs the risk of further entrenching those same categories and, Erwin argues, researchers should work to critique and destabilise these naturalised classifications. In this research paper, we acknowledge the difficulties of working with the apartheid labels of black, white, and coloured, but aim, through our use of a critical discourse analysis, to uncover some of the ideologies that underpin our data and so raise awareness about the ways in which these continue to shape or constrain our progress

towards new post-racial ways of thinking, speaking and being. The focus of this paper, then, is on how the students in our focus groups speak (or avoid speaking) about race and racial positioning, both their own and those of other groups in South Africa, and the underlying themes and motifs which shape these.

Research design and analytical approach

The data for this research paper are based on recorded focus group interviews conducted between 2009 and 2012. The interviewers are students who selected their own group of fellow student interviewees. Although eight groups in total were recorded in the original data collection phase, the data from only four will be reported on here (see also Bock 2014). This is because the group composition affected the data: in the racially homogenous groups where the relationships were closer and more established, the participants clearly felt able to express more racially motivated views and positions. Because our focus is on representations of race and personal racial identification, the data in this paper come only from these groups. While there is a substantial amount of race-talk in the four groups now excluded, it is of a qualitatively different kind, with speakers sometimes clearly conscious of the need to promote a 'rainbow nation' discourse and to avoid giving offence (see Lefko-Everett (2012), and Verwey and Quayle (2012), for a similar finding).

The interviews from the historically black university were conducted by a single black female student: the first group, referred to as 'Dineo's group', consisted of the interviewer and three of her friends, one male, two female, all self-identifying as 'black'. The same female interviewer also interviewed the second group, which we have called 'Bianca's group' in our paper. In this case, the six participants were only known to her as fellow students, although the interviewees, who were all female and self-identified as 'coloured', knew each other well: they described themselves as a 'clique'. The interviews from the historically white university were conducted by two different student interviewers and all participants self-identified as 'white'. 'Michael' conducted a discussion with three female friends, while 'Amber's' friendship group comprised four female students, including herself. Both white groups comprised firmly middle class students, as evidenced by their secondary education and experiences related in the data. Although there is diversity across groups in terms of racial identification, we acknowledge the possibility that the predominance of female speakers may have affected the data. However, we feel it is significant that all groups are based on friendship groups of students who have known each other for at least two years, most even longer, especially in terms of the authenticity of the data and its legitimacy as a reflection of the views of the speakers. The longer periods of friendship suggest a greater likelihood of openness and honesty in the discussions. (Note that Verwey and Quayle (2012) report no significant gender differences among their respondents.)

Data were elicited using a number of open-ended questions which asked students what they knew about apartheid, how they had acquired this knowledge, and what they knew about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In all the discussions, the students displayed surprisingly little historical knowledge, finding it difficult to name any struggle heroes besides Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Despite this, the question about apartheid proved to be very generative and stimulated rich discussion about the students' own experiences of race.

Our analysis of the transcribed data was based on a blend of quantitative and qualitative techniques, namely Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with the presentation of the data focussed by means of thematic analysis. The combination of CL and CDA is recognised as mitigating the shortcomings of each, while maximising the potential for drawing out key features of the data and interpreting it in its social context (Baker et al. 2008). One of the most frequent critiques of CDA has been that of 'cherry-picking' (Widdowson 1998): the claim that researchers may, in all good faith, choose texts, and elements in texts, which bolster their assumptions and support their arguments, while absences and contradictory evidence may go unnoticed. Corpus Linguistics supplies the antidote to that flaw, locating and producing statistically derived evidence for patterns and emphases in the textual data. CL forces the researcher to pay attention to what is undeniably in the data, in terms of frequent collocations and lexical patterns. For its part, CL is often said to be devoid of context, to the extent of being a meaningless exercise, due to the fact that the data is usually stripped from its natural setting without contextual features (Mautner 2009). CDA remedies this defect by tying descriptions of lexical tendencies to their social meanings in context, and interpreting findings in terms of how they reflect the social constructions of the text producers. CDA links patterns of choices found in the micro-analysis of the text to the text producer's assumptions about the world and the ideal intended reader, and enables the researcher to 'read off' the discourses and attendant ideologies supported by such assumptions in a broader social context (Fairclough 2001). The following section details how these approaches were combined in the research design of the present study, enabling us to interrogate the data rigorously and meaningfully in answering our key questions about how race and apartheid are viewed by the young speakers in our focus groups.

After the conversations were transcribed, the data were saved as .txt files for processing in Anthony's (2014) freeware concordancer AntConc. Initial wordlists were built for each conversation, ordered by the frequency of the types, and each of these was compared to the other three combined, in order to generate keyword lists: lists of words which are statistically significantly more prominent in a particular data set compared to another. In AntConc, keywords are generated using Log Likelihood as the statistical tool, and scores over 3.84 are regarded as significant at the level of $p < 0.05$ i.e. at the 95th percentile (Rayson n.d.). Examining both the individual wordlist for each conversation and the keyword list for that sub-corpus gave us useful starting points for investigating the representation(s) of race in the data. We found that the apartheid-style terms of racial classification were well represented overall, although with different distributions in the various groups, as will be explored in our analysis below. Pronouns often reflecting the construction of an 'us and them' view of South African society also varied in terms of their keyness in the four sub-corpora. In considering speeches by politicians, Fairclough (2000: 31) notes a 'a constant ambivalence and slippage between exclusive and inclusive "we"', and the subtleties of a shifting deictic centre in our data proved equally significant.

After identifying which terms were significant, we investigated their use in the broader linguistic context of the conversations in which they occurred, using the concordance function of the software. Using a KWIC (Key Word in Context) sort, one is able to view the search terms in the text in which they occur, with a variable amount of context on either side (usually 50 characters), one instance per line, and sort them according to the words in the positions on either side of the search term. This concordance view enhances the visibility of patterns of representation and frequent collocations. Collocation is also explored statistically via the collocates function, which calculates which words occur in the vicinity of the search term to a significant degree. As the meanings of words are coloured to some extent by their regular collocates, exploring which words occur together regularly in a given sub-corpus tells us about the constructions of reality that these words participate in in the particular text.

The application of corpus linguistics processes to the data formed an important point of entry into the talk which was then examined critically for ideologically interesting patterns. We were informed in our analysis by the broad approach of CDA, the commitment to critical enquiry with reference to power and context, rather than any specific set of features. Focusing on the terms of racial classification and pronouns enabled us to access the students' ways of representing race and group identity, while looking also for expressions of variable evaluation. The KWIC sort function mentioned above was particularly useful in sorting instances of similar themes in representation. Having identified both common patterns and noticeable absences, we interpreted these in terms of the representations they set up both in the immediate context of talk, and the South African social context in which they were located. Our overarching concern with race meant a constant reflection on how the representations uncovered relate to existing discourses of race, racism and non-racialism, and whether these were relationships which contested or normalised existing discourses and power relations.

Results of Corpus Linguistics analysis

As a preamble to the more qualitative ideological analysis of the students' conversations, we present here the overall quantitative results generated by the concordance software. The highest occurrence for each search term has been bolded.

The frequencies of the search terms, normalised for comparison to tokens per 10 000 words, are shown in Table 1. Here the racial terms are grouped as lemmas, with both singular and plural forms of the labels counted together. While most terms are found in all four transcripts, exactly half (five out of ten) are most frequent in Dineo's transcript, particularly the racial labels.

In order to show the significance of the clustering of these terms, the rank and keyness scores are given in Table 2 below. A Log Likelihood (LL), or keyness, score higher than 3.84 shows a statistically significant relationship between an interview group and a type. We have indicated pronouns in italics, while terms of racial classification are in plain text. The display indicates, for instance, that you, a pronoun, is particularly prominent in the conversations led by Bianca and Michael, with keyness scores well over the threshold in both cases. In Michael's group's data you is the 13th most key word, out of all the words found in this sub-corpus, significant to the $p < 0.0001$ level, meaning that it is especially characteristic of this data set, where in 50% of instances it is used as part of the conversational device

Table 1: Frequency of search terms

	Dineo's group	Bianca's group	Michael's group	Amber's group
black(s)	51	20	20	26
white(s)	41	12	10	16
coloured(s)	32	18	2	3
African(s)	6	13	0	3
Indian(s)	1	8	0	3
They	243	210	85	98
Them	33	11	28	16
We	82	62	154	69
Us	13	7	13	9
You	161	263	331	198

Table 2: Rank and keyness scores of search terms

Rank	Dineo's group		Bianca's group		Michael's group		Amber's group	
	Type	Keyness	Type	Keyness	Type	Keyness	Keyness	Type
11	<i>They</i>	48.303						
12	coloureds	47.289						
13					<i>You</i>	35.866		
15					<i>We</i>	34.318		
19	whites	32.777						
23	blacks	29.983						
42			<i>You</i>	15.124				
80	<i>them</i>	12.476						
91	white	11.706						
140			Indians	7.404				
141	black	8.124						

you know. In Bianca's group you ranks 42nd, with a LL score only marginally below the level found in Michael's. It is important to bear in mind that this fairly dramatic representation does not mean, for instance, that racial terms and pronouns are not used at all in Amber's group, just that they are uncommon in this conversation, relative to the other interviews.

Amber's group is noteworthy for having none of the search terms emerging as particularly characteristic (i.e. key) of their talk at all, and, apart from you, Michael's group has only the inclusive pronoun, we, as a key term. However, as Petersoo found with Scottish media data, the referent of we is flexible: in her study we could be used to refer to several different national groupings; in ours the spread of the deictic centre also varied tremendously, as will be explored below. Significantly, Michael's group always used the attributive form of the racial terms as opposed to their plural forms (i.e. white people as opposed to whites)—a practice that is often regarded, in South Africa at least, as more 'politically correct'.

All four interview groups used the racial labels black(s) and white(s), but the majority of the racial terms (except Indians) are proportionally much more frequent in Dineo et al.'s conversation; these, together with they and them, are key in this group. In the qualitative analysis, we trace the referents of this pronoun usage and the extent to which the participants were using they and them to 'other' racial groups. The strongest key terms, ranked 11 and 12 respectively, are they (LL48.3) and coloureds (47.3). This indicates an extremely strong statistical relationship, with whites (32.7) and blacks (29.9) not far behind. Interestingly, these forms are all plural, indicating a relatively bald reference method, as opposed to the attributive, more politically correct, adjectival forms white and black (as in 'white people', 'black people'). These last two are also strongly key to Dineo's group, but they are ranked lower than the plural forms.

The labels coloured(s) and African(s) were predominantly used by the groups which consisted of coloured or black students. Similarly, the only reference to Indian(s) was from the coloured group, which is not surprising given that one of the students in this group claimed a mixed racial inheritance. The preponderance of racial labels in Dineo's group, and the relative lack thereof in the other groups, suggests an openness to talk about race bluntly in the context of the first group, which led us to consider how the other groups were able to talk about apartheid, and thus race, without using as many classificatory terms. We were also interested in why the remaining three groups avoided these terms. The qualitative analysis, which we present below, enabled us to explore in more detail the discursive constructions used by the different groups of students to speak (or avoid speaking) about race. These varied across the different interview groups, with the white groups preferring to avoid much racial labelling. By contrast, the black

and coloured groups used these labels freely to refer to groups of people; they were also more inclined to speak in ways which perpetuated a number of racial stereotypes and prejudices. Our analysis therefore reflects on why students might be using these particular discursive constructions and the ideological purposes these may be serving. By way of structuring this part of the analysis, we consider first the interviews conducted at the historically black university (Dineo's and Bianca's groups) and then those from the historically white institution (Amber's and Michael's).

Dineo's group and Bianca's group

We discuss these two interviews together as they share a number of thematic concerns which make them more similar than different. Although the interview questions generally elicited discussion on topics such as struggle heroes, parents, schools, the TRC and the present government, the open-ended nature of the interviews meant that participants also discussed a range of issues about which they felt strongly, in particular their own experiences of racism—or what they perceived and interpreted as racism—at the hands of different institutional authorities (e.g. university admissions, residence allocations, academic assessments, administrative assistance, job opportunities).

While the corpus analysis shows that all four interview groups use the racial labels black(s) and white(s), this was markedly more salient in Dineo's group in which the racial labels coloureds, white(s) and black(s) and the pronouns they and them showed up as key. The corpus analysis also showed that the participants who self-identified as coloured or black used a wider range of apartheid race labels (also African(s) and Indian) more frequently. In other words, participants in these groups used explicit racial labelling, in both attributive and nominalised forms, to treat people uncritically as belonging to race groups. Another distinctive feature of this talk, also evident in the extracts below, is the way both groups invoke the apartheid racial hierarchy as an explanatory framework:

Extract 1: Bianca's group

A lot of coloured people say — they say like back in the day it was the white people versus the black people and the coloureds are just in the middle now they say it's the blacks versus the whites and the coloureds are still in the middle.

Extract 2: Dineo's group

H: Bona né [look here] where do the coloureds fit in? Like it's blacks against whites and whites against blacks

G: They are blacks, that thing they should get it they are too dark to be white

T: <laughs> Wow, if I was coloured I would have taken offence, but thanks God I'm black

G: They are too they are too dark to be white and they too white to be black.

Related to this is the fear, expressed by both groups, of being unfairly discriminated against on the basis of their race. In the following two extracts, the participants discuss the racial quotas used by a local historically white university to regulate admissions. Not only are they misinformed about the quotas, but they both construct their own racial group as the most discriminated against:

Extract 3: Bianca's group

But the majority there there by UCT ... maybe! <laughs> I don't see a lot of coloureds there I see a lot of Indians I see a lot of blacks and I see a lot of whites!

Extract 4: Dineo's group

They said they are practising that at UCT and that they are not supposed to have more like more than 20 per cent black they are supposed to have 20 per cent black and then maybe 40 white and the remainder coloureds

Perhaps because of the perceived competition with 'the other', their talk slips into racial stereotyping, with the coloured students generally othering 'blacks' and the black students essentialising 'coloureds'. The focus of their respective othering can perhaps be explained by their institutional context: while the student body is largely coloured or black, the administration is historically dominated by coloured staff. Within this context, each race group perceives the 'other' as more favoured or advantaged.

Extract 5: Bianca's group

Students even here on campus they feel like they have they should have first privilege because they always say that ... the black people were impoverished, the black people were uhm oppressed, the black people but they forget that in between black and white there's coloured and we were also ...

Extract 6: Dineo's group

So in terms of the administration ... yes we experience them we experience it sometimes er uhm

they just need to explain to you a few things and then they send you back and when it comes to people of their kind that is that is coloured of course they explain and help that person.

Note, however, that this kind of ‘othering’ is also a feature of ‘backstage talk’ (Verwey and Quayle 2012) or the kind of ‘frank talk’ that emerges within the perceived ‘safety’ of a racially homogenous group. So too are insulting and derogatory comments about the ‘other’, as evident in Extract 7 below, where Bianca’s group co-construct ‘politicians’—the referent of they—as incompetent, corrupt and wasteful of public money.

Extract 7: Bianca’s group

E: They even steal! They even steal!

A: Ja

D: and corruption?

E: They even steal from the your taxes and whatever D: They wrong

E: They thieves

From the larger interview context, the politicians referred to here can be understood as ‘the ruling ANC politicians’, who are predominantly black. Thus references to ‘corrupt politicians’ act as a code which indexes ‘black ANC politicians’. This link between political leaders and race is further evident in Extract 8 below, where the participants distance themselves from Zuma (the ANC leader and president at the time) and his party (referents of they, their, them) and co-construct their own racial group (we, our) as ‘getting nowhere in this country’—overlooked as a result of affirmative action policies:

Extract 8: Bianca’s group

C: D’you wanna be like Jacob Zuma who want permission for bullshit? A: Exactly

B: Now if they can get away with it ... why can’t we? A: Look here

C: Do you wanna stoop to their level? ... are we so low like them? B: We getting nowhere in this country <laughs> just improvise

C: Yes but we are our own person we are proud of who we are ... D: Exactly!

C: Our morals our values and where we come from

Dineo’s group is similarly scathing about other races. In Extract 9, they accuse coloured people of strategically aligning themselves with whichever race group they believe will give them the greatest advantage.

Extract 9: Dineo’s group

H: Okay [...] see BEE empowers black people, what about the coloureds, weren’t they also struggling in apartheid? Why are they =

G: = The thing is okay fine the coloureds né I think after this apartheid era thing instead of coming together with the blacks since well they fought together they trying to separate themselves from blacks so that’s the reason why they don’t involve them coz they think they are too better to be blacks

T: That’s that’s why I made a statement that when it suited them coloureds were blacks

T&G: And when it suited them they were white

It is this discourse pattern of ‘othering’ that partly accounts for the keyness of racial labels in Dineo’s group and the high frequency of they in both groups. A close analysis of the referents of they in both interviews is revealing. It is used almost exclusively to refer to human groups, which represent either a particular institutional authority (e.g. the government, politicians, the TRC or the university administration) or a racial group, the effect of which is to frame the topics of discussion as the outcome of their intentional actions (i.e. who did what to whom). In the case of Bianca’s group in particular, more than 60% of these referents refer to groups of black people (e.g. the government/those in power, black students on campus, struggle heroes or simply black pupils at their former schools), and a number of these references slip into negative evaluations of the referent and explicit racial stereotyping as illustrated above.

In both groups, then, the participants talk easily about explicitly labelled race groups, displaying little anxiety about perpetuating racist stereotypes of the other and uncritically evoking the motifs of race and difference to explain and justify their positions. They appear to be operating within historical discourses characterised by discursive constructions such as explicit racial labelling, the invocation of the apartheid racial hierarchy as an explanatory framework and the use of stereotypical and

derogatory comments which denigrate other race groups. Perhaps their shared historical roles as 'formerly oppressed groups' free them from the need to adopt the more 'politically correct' discourse styles evident in the white groups in this data. Or, as Leftko-Everett (2012) and Verwey and Quayle (2012) argue, it is also likely that this discourse style is typical of racially homogenous groups within 'safe, intimate' contexts.

So far, then the analysis above has also shown that both groups tend to recount anecdotes about the racist behaviour of others (or what they interpret as racially motivated behaviour), illustrating their experience of racism as a lived reality. It is therefore surprising that both groups are also at pains to assert that they (and their parents) are (and were) 'not affected by apartheid', as articulated by participants from Dineo's group below:

Extract 10: Dineo's group

H: How do you think your parents feel about the past or talking about the past?

T: Well I I I don't know uhm my dad was born in '56 so he was probably 20 in '76 so perhaps he felt a bit of it or or he didn't feel it at all. I think at that time he was still in the Eastern Cape and I don't know the Eastern Cape is an area which experienced much of apartheid, but I'm not sure. But I don't know how they really feel but my dad was was uhm a young adult at that time so was my mom so perhaps it didn't affect them that much.

Given the centrality of the Eastern Cape in the struggle against apartheid and the repression that young activists and whole communities in this region experienced, this is a surprising perspective, particularly given that Participant T is a Politics major.² Similarly, Bianca's group also describes their parents as 'not affected' even though a number of them recount being forcibly removed from their homes under the infamous Group Areas Act of 1950:

Extract 11: Bianca's group

H: So why why do you think your parents don't talk about it? F: coz maybe they weren't uhm

D: as as

F: affected by it coz my of their race coz my father is Indian and my mother is Malay so maybe they weren't like...

D: that affected

F: affected by it coz

A: or maybe they just weren't that active in D: the struggle

A: the riots

C: Maybe they just listened to when they had to move out they just moved out they didn't fight

D: er All: mmm

A: they just accepted

This desire to position oneself as 'not affected' may be because they associate 'being affected' with being politically active or physically hurt so they do not recognise the long-term structural effects of apartheid on themselves and their own families. It may also be that they are working with a distinction between apartheid and racism and see the former as 'over' (and therefore not affecting them) but not the latter. However, in this paper, we argue that their rejection of a construal of themselves and their parents as 'affected' is a way of resisting their historical roles as the oppressed victims of racism. This argument is supported by the fact that both groups express a reluctance to learn more about the past, preferring rather to 'move on' beyond the apartheid past (see Extracts 13 and 14 below). Once again, this is interesting given that both groups can claim a positive identification with a struggle history:

Extract 12: Dineo's group

H: Okay, do you think that that apartheid should be talked about more in families or schools or?

T: Not necessarily, if people feel that they they they want to they can but it bores the youth because they say so it happened so what? ...

T: We went through it, people died and people cried but now we have to look to the future.

Extract 13: Bianca's group

You can forgive ... but don't you don't even have to sometimes ... forgive ... you just need to move on

In both groups, then, the participants are reluctant to position themselves as 'affected' and express a

desire to 'move on'. While they may strategically claim a position of 'formerly disadvantaged' when they think it might facilitate university admissions or employment opportunities (see Extract 5 above, for example), it seems that both groups do not wish to be 'held back' and burdened by the apartheid past. Instead, they choose to assert a construction of themselves as agentive, competent and deserving of jobs on their own merit. Just as Nuttall's (2009) participants sought to escape their historically defined roles of black struggle youth through the consumption of brands and style, so these participants express a desire to move beyond apartheid discourses. Their talk thus reflects a complex interchange of simultaneously invoking and rejecting racial discourses in their efforts to resist being positioned as historically disempowered subjects or 'victims' in their own discursive constructions.

In the section which follows, we turn our attention to the talk of students who self-classify as 'white' to explore how they navigate this complex terrain and avoid being positioned as 'perpetrators'.

Amber's group and Michael's group

These two conversations were collected at a historically white university and the participants all self-identified as white. As has been already discussed above, in quantitative terms, these conversations are marked by the relative absence of racial terms and even the group pronouns *us* and *they/them*. Of the first and third person pronouns, those typically used to reference 'in' and 'out' groups, only *we* is key to Michael's group. How is it possible then, for these students to talk about apartheid and race without using these terms, and why is it ideologically important for them to do so? It seems that the discourse being constructed in both groups is carefully non-racial, in the sense that little othering work is evident. In this way, their discourse typifies what Steyn and Foster (2008) refer to as 'white talk', a way of speaking which enables white South Africans to defend their continuing privilege without opening themselves up to the criticism of racism or the need to acknowledge their inherited privilege. Instead, their discourse is rather overwhelmingly preoccupied with rejecting the role of perpetrator frequently associated with white South Africans. A close look at the ways in which these participants construct their own and their families' relationship to apartheid reveals a constant objectifying and distancing of apartheid, in an attempt to negate culpability. We discuss these two groups separately as they show quite different discursive strategies in achieving this aim.

Amber's group

Unlike the groups discussed above, especially Dineo's participants, the speakers in Amber's group seldom use racial terms and their usage of *they/them* tends to refer to groups which are remote from the self more in terms of time, power and social institutions, rather than race, although the latter is not entirely excluded. Overall, they are parents, the new government and the old government (but these groups are not as explicitly racialised as in the first two interview groups), military conscripts, particularly their own fathers, black people, school authorities and learners, court officials and criminals. The group members also reject essentialising statements and assumptions of homogeneity among white people:

Extract 14: Amber's group

But I think the most frustrating thing is when they group all white South Africans into that group of you did this and you were bad

The degree of bald reference to race found in the previous groups is simply not found in this discussion, and yet race, and their awareness of themselves as white, permeates their talk.

Despite their attempts to resist overt racial classification for and by themselves, these participants indicate in several concrete ways that they identify as white, perpetuating the classification scheme of race. For instance, they suggest that there should be a monument for those (white soldiers) who died on the border; they complain that 'no one' can pronounce the new (African) street names; and they discuss the case of a soldier from the UK who fought 'on our side' in the apartheid war. They also point out that they 'went to school with them' from a very young age, referring to black classmates as 'them', and thereby identifying themselves as 'not black', but implicitly as white, in terms of the racial binary implicit in so much race talk in South Africa. In apparent contradiction to their indirect naturalised positioning as not black, and yet underlining it, the bulk of the ideological work they do in the talk is to claim distance from apartheid, and those responsible for it, thereby refuting any implications of culpability. This, we believe, shows that they are acutely aware of race, and of their whiteness, and the social meanings of race in contemporary South Africa.

One of the most prevalent strategies to emerge in Amber's group is an appeal to time and a lack of synchrony with the 'old South Africa'. This is reminiscent of Steyn and Foster's (2008) discussion of amnesia/silencing/distortion where white people engaging in 'white talk' are said to ignore or reframe the past. For Amber's friends, apartheid ended abruptly in 1994 and has had no after-effects, structural or individual, since then. The integration of formerly white schools is held up as proof of this, as is their

closeness to individuals from other racial groups, specifically domestic workers (although these are infantilised in their representation through the use of first names and the way their naïve response to the world is described as ‘cute’). The temporal border for apartheid enables them to claim that they were either not alive or very young during the apartheid years and therefore not responsible for it. The speakers also claim to have received no benefit from the historically dominant position of white people in South African society, and thus are not culpable in terms of the disadvantages experienced by other South Africans. Indeed, they refute the legitimacy of claims of disadvantage by young black South Africans, because they too have lived most of their lives in a post-apartheid country.

Extract 15: Amber’s group

A: It’s just it didn’t even happen in our generation and so much of our generation are hung up on it

C: Ja that excuse aah you know aah it’s coz I’m black, and then? A: Ja

C: It’s like you’re my age and we were born after flippen everything else so how is it because you’re black?

Resentment of past injustices, or of structural deprivation since 1994, is rejected by these speakers because, for them, apartheid is over. This is an important mechanism whereby the speakers reject any association with the role of perpetrator often attached to white South Africans as a group: without victims of apartheid, there can be no perpetrators. Concurrently, however, they do construct black South Africans as ‘other’, through the pronoun usage (they) mentioned above. Imbued with especially negative value by them are those black South Africans who supposedly cannot claim to have been disadvantaged by apartheid due to their youth, but also, according to these speakers, by the fact that they are currently among the social and financial elite.

Extract 16: Amber’s group

but I’ve found it’s mostly the uh if I dare say it the black elite, they have like a chip on their shoulder and they use it as an excuse more than anyone else like no one seems to bring it up but like the black eli elite sorry ... they kind of um they kind of it’s an excuse for everything and

I’m like what is wrong with you you’ve got like millions of rands you’re flippen driving Porsches and Ferraris and you’re a good successful businessman what is your problem you know?

This, together with ‘using apartheid as an excuse’, is seen as antithetical to a society which they believe should reward its members on the basis of merit. By rejecting claims of disadvantage, they simultaneously refute any accusations of their own privilege, and thus disconnect themselves from the dual role of beneficiary-perpetrator in the apartheid system.

The students in Amber’s group also distance themselves from responsibility by claiming a disjuncture between ordinary white people and the policy of apartheid. In other words, the political leadership of the old South Africa are seen as solely responsible for apartheid, which they set up in isolation from the will and knowledge of the ordinary white people, thus absolving them from any blame:

Extract 17: Amber’s group

I didn’t like it at school as well coz I found that also the textbook was quite racial towards, more towards white people than to black people coz it was like oh empower the black people because all the white people in South Africa were like cruel to them, and you’re like well not the, like it was just the leadership at the time

Their own fathers, conscripted into army service to maintain apartheid, are also seen as powerless at that time, although whether or not they were aware of the system they were complicit in is not addressed. Again, the conscription experience is used to show how ‘ordinary people’ did not support apartheid but were at the mercy of those in charge, the exceptions:

Extract 18: Amber’s group

C: Ja but um, that’s sorry it just makes me think that’s that was the problem during apartheid is those who had power

B: abused it

C: just went a little bit crazy

The fathers are constructed as voiceless now, with all of them apparently refusing to talk about their experiences in the army. The claim that speaking about it would be too traumatic implies that their fathers are and/or were also powerless victims of the regime, which means that they cannot be assigned

the role of perpetrator either.

Extract 19: Amber's group

C: Ja my dad doesn't like to talk about it because he was there. Yeah B: My parents have never mentioned it (laughs)

C: Ja like in high school you know we start learning about apartheid so I asked my dad one or two questions all an- and my mom, but my mom obviously didn't grow up in the country so she doesn't know much. But my dad doesn't like to talk about it at all [...]

C: like my parents lived through apartheid and you know what I learnt that my dad didn't have a choice, there was conscription back then and they had to join the police force. It's not that he wanted to, he had to. He didn't want to go to the Soweto uprisings he was kind of like aah umm, you know he had no choice but now I feel like it's still my fault

B: Ja

C: and I'm like I wasn't born then A: Yeah

C: I didn't see anything, I went to school with black people and didn't hate on any of them

The speakers are protective of their fathers' reputations: while they reject any culpability themselves for 'the sins of the father', they also claim the right for their fathers to be victims too. This kind of 'victim-perpetrator' reversal is characteristic of the discourse of white participants in other studies (Steyn and Foster 2008, Verwey and Quayle 2012, Walker 2005b). In addition, their 'equalising rhetoric' (Steyn and Foster 2008: 31), explicit distancing of themselves from apartheid which they construct as 'over' and their 'power evasive colour blindness' (2008: 29) makes their discourse typical of white participants in other studies, both locally and internationally (see also Twine and Gallagher 2008, Wale 2014, Walker 2005a).

Finally, Amber's group uses the concept of 'black-on-black violence' to break the link between apartheid and race. By focussing on acts of violence by black people against other black people, violence by white people is subsumed into a larger category, and thus whites alone cannot be blamed for it: if violence is not race-based, then once again their roles as members of the class of perpetrators cannot be established. Thus this group co-construct a world in which they are not in any way obliged to other members of their society, either because of temporal or social distance from the nexus of discrimination, or because the class of perpetrators cannot be racially determined. Their solution, as for Bianca and Dineo's group, is for all South Africans to 'move on' from the past:

Extract 20: Amber's group

I think it should still be acknowledged but like people should move on from it because even like ah I've heard conversations outside the library about people who are like oh well your grandfather did this to us in apartheid and I'm like dude we didn't even live through it!

Michael's group

In contrast with Amber's group, the group recorded by Michael is distinguished by considerable hedging and disfluency, reflective of the generally more abstract and less emotional nature of the talk. It is as if the students are engaging in an academic discussion, similar to one that they might have in class, which leads us to suspect that they may, to varying degrees, have been aware of the researchers as delayed overhearers who would later listen to, and possibly judge, their opinions. Indeed, the irreverent ebullience they show immediately after they think the recorder has been switched off suggests that theirs is generally a more self-conscious display of academically reasoned responses, frequently using 'politically correct' terminology. This less personal, academic style of talk seems to be an attempt to construct themselves as rational, reasonable and, above all, not racist, as will be demonstrated with the data below. Nonetheless, in discussing broad social topics like theatre, academic articles and university policies, the assumptions behind their statements and the examples they provide to contextualise their views reveal how they construct race and their place in South Africa.

In some ways this group is similar to Amber and her friends, in that both tend to compartmentalise apartheid and to play down its continued influence on South Africans today, although this group is better informed and has a more nuanced understanding of both race and apartheid, acknowledging that apartheid existed before it was legally enacted. Whether or not there are residual effects is a topic they explore:

Extract 21: Michael's group

C: that brings it brings it to another question is why're we still dealing with it? Why do we still have to deal with it?

M: but 10 years isn't a lot of time, like we like we World War Two like it was pretty big, I'm not going to equate apartheid to World War Two but like 10 years after World War One I mean you're not gonna get like crazy plays and comedies about it

L: but you don't look at it in terms of how many years, look at it in terms of how many elections we've had. We've had like what? How many elections? elections we've had elections

C: well 1994, 1998, 2002 3

L: actually in terms of that we're a 4-year-old democracy, we've had 4 M: that isn't a lot!

L: we've had chances to change, that is nothing! M: exactly!

L: that is minimal!

M: I feel it's more a generation thing F: it is more a generation thing

M: I feel like you need a few generations to move on L: yes ... yes

F: I think that the reason it's not only — what you have to look at it's not only the effects of apartheid that we're dealing with, this is like like before apartheid, there're like years and years and years of like colonial rule and oppression and stuff like that.

Like Amber's group, they invoke the relevance of time, of living in a period after apartheid, but they do not relate it to the culpability of white South Africans. Rather, they relate it to the ability of the country as a whole to move beyond the pain. This is a standpoint in which they construct themselves as part of the larger group of South Africans, not specifically white South Africans. They consider time with reference to the whole country, the enactment of democracy in terms of the number of elections held, rather than their own experiences or those of their families or racial group. In this way there is no question of individual blame or responsibility, and the after-effects of apartheid and the ways in which they have benefitted from it structurally are elided. The students discuss the importance of remembering the past, but in a characteristically general way:

Extract 22: Michael's group

but I think they should you know. I mean it's like one of those things like you know you can't have um ... you have to remember these things so you can learn from them

Knowing about South Africa's history is seen as personally enriching, with one speaker saying that she would like her children to grow up aware of the suffering of others and the contributions they have made, although not to experience it themselves, because she sees it as character building. They emphasise several times that while remembering is important, commemoration should not be sad, but a celebratory contribution to the future. By focussing on the potential for positive outcomes, both individual and collective, maintaining the roles of victim and perpetrator is explicitly rendered inappropriate, damaging even, in the current context:

Extract 23: Michael's group

F: if you had to have this institutionalised thing like and now we're fasting and mourning over you know everyone who was lost in the tragedies in apartheid like I think that you would have kind of, some sort of social instability

C: what would that achieve? What would that achieve? F: exactly! That's what I'm saying

L: well you know I think one of the good things that we have, I think, my one of my favourite things as well, not that I've ever really actually done it but I want to still, is uh Nelson Mandela day. You know I think that's a really really GOOD way of doing it because ... you know it's sort of you remember it, you doing something good you feel good about yourself ... and ja you actually helping

In a similar way, they debate Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and admission policies at universities, questioning if there will be an end point for affirmative action. Comparing the South African situation with other countries where similar policies have been implemented, the students raise the intersectionality of disadvantage in South Africa: the notion that race alone is inadequate to determine a person's access to employment, education and other benefits:

Extract 24: Michael's group

the thing is ... race is no longer it's it's not enough to define a person by

They problematise notions of race by pointing out counterexamples to the usual essentialised stereotypes: black people with a good education and white people who took part in the struggle

against apartheid. However, the only personal scenario related to this is held up as a defence against the expectation of white guilt:

Extract 25: Michael's group

F: I don't think it's fair that my aunt who you know was detained and was do you know what I mean? was like subjected to interrogations and stuff like that for associating with the wrong people and being a part of the ANC, you know should now have to sit like ten years later and be like oh wow I feel guilty for being a white person like I don't think that feels fair?

Elsewhere, the participants do acknowledge a sense of guilt as white people and recognise their structural advantage (in contrast to Amber's group, who work so hard to negate any suggestion that they ought to feel guilty) but also convey frustration with how long affirmative action still has to exist. They also report their black friends' supposed frustration at success based not on their own merit but on skin colour, and display exasperation with this themselves as those systematically excluded in the interests of redress. Once again, these arguments signal a desire to move forward, unencumbered personally by the past.

Extract 26: Michael's group

M: but also like with like with the BEE thing and and like with this whole race thing, like how long will it have to be until you you like you don't like you don't have a BEE thing, isn't BEE justifying the wrongs of the past?

L: yes, how long is it going to last for?

M: but then like like how many years do you carry on this like until you've wronged the past? I mean righted the past?

The sense of debate in this discussion is very strong, and issues are generally dealt with impersonally and academically, with reference to theoretical constructs, academic terminology (such as the construction of narratives as a healing resource) and scholarly resources (such as a public lecture on the role of Nelson Mandela in contemporary South African politics). They ask many questions of each other, creating hypothetical situations and sometimes playing devil's advocate.

Their fluid, as opposed to racially determined, identities are evident in the use of pronouns. For example, we is used to distinguish groups on multiple levels: we the discussants, we South Africans, we white people, we drama students. Similarly, they is used for black people, but also for white people, for people in the past and their future children, even for objects, administrative bodies and the like, and never with particularly strong negative values. Pronouns are not used, then, to perform the same in-group identification, out-group 'othering' that they are in Dineo and Bianca's groups, or even Amber's. While pronouns do identify groups, their changeability in terms of referent means that their meanings do not coalesce into rigid, polarised groups.

In terms of topic, unlike the other groups, these participants do not consider how they have been positioned by either the old or the new South African governments, neither do they reveal strong racial identification or loyalty. These various ways of talking serve to distance them from the perpetrator role historically associated with their racial identity, and thus protect them from charges of racism or the need to engage with their own inherited privilege, instead enabling them to represent themselves as rational and reasonable New South Africans. Thus, while the talk is qualitatively different in many respects to the discourses of the other three groups, our analysis shows how the participants in this group also put considerable effort into distancing themselves from the 'perpetrator' role associated with white South Africans.

Conclusion

Our main concern in this paper was to explore how students from a range of different demographic groups speak about apartheid and race. The analysis shows that while the first two groups were quite uninhibited in their talk, drawing on a range of strategies which overtly label and stereotype racial groups, the white participants generally employed strategies which distanced them from the issue, to the extent that in one group, their talk adopts a more academic account of 'the subject' in which references to race are avoided. But while the corpus analysis indicates an avoidance of racial talk within the white groups, the CDA analysis shows how race is still an underlying motif. In this sense, this paper confirms and elaborates similar studies on white talk. However, it adds to the existing literature by showing how racialising discourses structured by old apartheid hierarchies and stereotyping also permeate the talk of participants who self-identify as black and coloured.

We have further argued that another commonality between all groups is the desire to leave the past behind and we have suggested that these sentiments could stem from their desire to avoid the historical

positions of victim and perpetrator. This is a new contribution to the existing literature which tends to focus on 'white talk' and the shame of whiteness in relation to the perpetrator/beneficiary role. For black and coloured students, we have argued that their disassociation with the role of victim (or 'affected') may be motivated by a desire to avoid being positioned as in any way inferior or powerless. Whatever the reasons, all participants express a desire to 'move on'. But what holds them all back, we would argue, is the absence of an alternative discourse to imagine themselves outside the essentialised apartheid categories of race. They lack the vocabulary to speak of themselves as anything other than racial subjects. As Mbembe argues, 'the country is still caught between an intractable present and an irrecoverable past; things that are no longer and things that are not yet' (2011: viii). This desire to escape this historical interregnum and 'move beyond' is poignantly expressed by one of the participants in Dineo's group, the extract from which the title of this paper is drawn:

Extract 27: Dineo's group

H: Are you interested in learning more about the TRC? G: Nah

H: Why not?

G: I don't wanna go back <laughs> H: And you?

G: No because it would hurt me to find out that

T: No no its not relevant its not relevant anymore it was relevant then G: Ja, but right now it's just taking our souls back

Notes

1 The binary of 'victim versus perpetrator' entered public discourse during the period of the TRC (1996–1997), which was established 'to provide for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights' under apartheid (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995, cited in TRC Report 1, 1998: 59). It is strongly collocated in public discourses with the racial binary of 'white perpetrator' and 'black victim', although the TRC did try to problematise these definitions.

2 The Eastern Cape, home to many struggle leaders, such as Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe, has a long history of struggle against apartheid. In the 1980s, for example, the inhabitants of many small towns were mobilised through the building of community organisations, school and consumer boycotts, and action against local authorities, to which the security forces reacted violently with the imposition of a state of emergency, the detention and killing of resistance leaders (e.g. Cradock Four, Pebco Three) and the crushing of local civic organisations (TRC Report 3, 1998: 116)

3 This is factually incorrect. National elections are held in South Africa every five years, thus by the time of the interviews there had been 4, but in the years 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

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