5

WAYS OF BEING

“Race” as common sense;
non-racialism as humanist necessity

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Introduction: From here to there

There are so many ways in which race continues to be accepted as the essential and predominant explanatory tool in social life. There are probably as many reasons that are, and can be, advanced for groups living through racialism. But, if questioned, explanations would not always be easily forthcoming: common sense acceptance removes the need for reflection – why does the sun rise every morning? Surely it is presumptuous, and even insensitively condescending, to suggest that such a state of affairs has to be challenged, never mind deliberately undermined? As specimens of a category, as it is with all such constructed groupings, means not only being born *into*, but also *with* “specimendom”. However, driven by historical and contemporary knowledge of the effects of simply accepting the status quo of social identities, I will argue why each one of us has the obligation to question such common sense, even desirable and desired, way of being. The most important motivations for my argument relate to the gross effects on personal and social relations, and how racialism and consequent racism obscures the full complexity of global problems

humanity experiences at local levels. We are in this together, whether we like it or not. The “small blue dot” will survive without us, but let us destructive humans at least try to be part of it.

But where to start?

There is the story – often told with variations on a common theme – of the person lost, asking for directions, and after listening to several attempts to explain many routes is told “No, you can’t get there from here”. Then there is Rebecca Solnit – *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006) – making the case for questions, deliberately being in the unfamiliar, because that demands confronting the unknown, and not just accepting apparent (selfish) certainty. There remains also Rick Turner’s argument for an imaginative journey through utopian thinking towards creating a world beyond the apparently unchanging social relations that exist (1972/2007). I unapologetically return here to issues that have concerned me over decades since the 1970s, and unfortunately seem to be more relevant by the day – fortunately I am not alone in these concerns, and I pay respect to some of the fellow-travellers – some who have died in the struggle to question and argue for a very different world.

Here

Who would have thought that some 60 years later I would personally be confronted daily with the real possibility of nuclear devastation – then a scratchy news film item, now two warped immensely powerful men slinging insults and threats? Who could have imagined that human responsibility for extreme climate uncertainty and global extinctions would be denied against scientific evidence – at times *because* it is scientific? To bring it home, who would have imagined daily race classification in a democratic inclusive South Africa? No, you can’t get there from here.

However, this is where we are, with the responsibilities that it brings. I present my understanding of the here and now, in respect of one small, but important to millions, aspect of the big social picture: “race”, “racialism” and “racism” in twenty-first century South Africa. We have to address the continuation of the notion of “race”, living through racialism, and confronted with racism. “Race” operates frequently, in many societies, as an ideological element in meeting social, economic, and political needs. It is also claimed existentially as essential in being human in distinctively culturally rigid ways. However, I argue that, whatever the need expressed, race is an obstacle to be overcome because of the unavoidably destructive consequences of its existence, employment and deployment, towards whatever ends. In such an approach, “race” can obviously not be addressed in isolation from historical socioeconomic, political, and existential contexts.

The *past* we have to understand, in its complexity and consequences; doing so in critical ways that allow us to be in the *present* as active, engaged citizens; with imagination and sense of moral engagement and social responsibility, confidently to work collectively towards a desirable *future*. All too obvious when it is put like that.

Maybe the most challenging question surrounding civic engagement and action is, first, honestly to address “why” it needs to be undertaken, at the social and personal level. I put forward reasons, but the question ultimately demands that we perceive and confront the obligation to step out of false security, or fatalistic belief that change is not possible. Discomfort has to encompass not only the material boundaries set by race – a grim reality for the majority or large minority of citizens in racialised and racist societies – but also to disturb the cognitive, the sense-making of what is around us and hence our capabilities within it.

Discomfort raises not only the need for change, but also the concomitant need to imagine a utopian future in the sense that it speaks to all as a desirable goal, even if it does not convince most in the moment. Social action here refers to collective action as well as action within and acceptance of socially shared space; it demands acknowledgement of shared humanity and also the differently experienced responsibilities that go with that from multiple locations; it requires a notion of involvement beyond the power of individual desire.

What

In this chapter, I accept the challenge of “it is not possible to get there from here”. I do it because, as I tried to warn in relation to ethnic mobilisation some decades ago, not to take the unclear alternative route since it carries with it horrifying consequences. I do so by disentangling and re-entangling terms, calling for their contextualisation by posing the “why” and the “how” questions, with suggestions of the “what” of a motivational goal.

However, any goal requires conceptual clarity of the need for distinguishing between “race”, “racialism”, and “racism” – what should we escape – but also the manner in which they exist, function, and articulate in society. This last point is crucial – “race” can be looked at in isolation from any expression of the belief only if perceived and accepted as a biological fact. Otherwise it exists and can be understood only as a human created and deliberately maintained sense-making element, in sociopolitical, spatial and historical context, entangled with other social processes, beliefs, and structures. At times, religious or cultural beliefs are essential to justifying race-thinking, often we have to explore power and class relations to make sense of its continuation.

The STIAS project, *Effects of Race*, where my writing takes place, uses the summary word “race” in the *English language*. Even if project members, including myself, may have operated within several first languages, we have not drawn attention to the implications for social analysis. I understand “race” to refer to the specific categorisation of humans into putative biological groupings (called “races” or various euphemistic equivalents). It is a powerful socially constructed perspective on the world within which we still find ourselves. It has been subject to alteration, adaptation, and to a variety of justifications and uses since the time of creation and first employment – its reproduction ensured by those with power and means to do so. For example, the specific understandings of how to distinguish between races, and hence the meaning of the word, has changed over time, even if not in essence then at least in significant emphasis. In its first use, it was applied on the basis of appearance, which effectively overlapped with geographical location, and was shaped by who did the initial labelling of whom, also reflecting inequalities of power expressed in various ways.

In addition, various explanations have been given for the existence of human racialised diversity in appearance, culture and modes of life, such as the powerful Christian call on the story of Ham; definitions of “civilisation” from specific perspectives; or the might of the sword or the gun in the creation of empires and subjugation of people. Especially during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, social Darwinist “scientific racism” provided explanation with focus on the measured body, in its outward appearance and proportions, and internal constitution to provide evidence of unavoidable biological difference (Malik, 1996:90-91; Dubow, 1995; Walters, 2019). Race allocation served to prove a hierarchy of evolutionary progress and “intelligence” and attributes associated with those terms, and allowed specific treatments. More recently, a biocultural approach dominated such as during apartheid, with the stress on ethnic aspects of race differentiation along with the always-present biological. It continued to imply evolutionary justification, with progressive gaining of abilities, in preferably separate spaces. With the genome revolution, there have been attempts to use the existence of genetic populations to confirm notions of race distinctiveness. This runs against the predominant genome proof of the fallacy of such distinctions as “races” as the continuation of what had been thought to exist historically (Fields & Fields, 2012). “Race”, as concept and focus of research, is operative especially in the academic/intellectual field where questions are asked and arguments developed. Maintaining “race” always has a purpose and justification.

Racism or *race-thinking* refers to a variously shared understanding amongst many humans that races exist, as part of “being human today”, with a variety of ways in which cognitive proof is found – we “think” race, but the idea is already present. It refers to the actions (at every level, and not only at the personal) that are informed

by such understanding as well – we operationalise our thinking, attaching race labels all the time in practises. This refers then to the common sense (racecraft), the ideological existence of race as everyday. The variety of contexts demand investigation of the processes through which the ideology of race is produced, employed, and operates, as well as where it is (or could be) undermined. Again, historical change, political location, and personal variation in such thinking, are essential dimensions to include. Processes of socialisation and mobilisation, and template creation lie at the core. Actions that flow from racialism are, in some cases, claimed as innocuous and even essential to well-being – in cases where race is thought *about* and not just *with*.

What I have not mentioned directly, except in passing, is the reason why race-thinking should be so powerful. I acknowledge here a book important in my own thinking, namely Kenan Malik's *The Meaning of Race* (1996:5; see Maré, 2017:149-152). Malik argued throughout that "the creation of a race is the product of social need, not biological fact". Hence, as the social changes, so the need shifts; and as the creation changes so it, in turn, affects the social world. For example, in South Africa the templates of race continue from apartheid to post-1994 democracy, but the needs demand different formulations of justification with different effects. To put it in a different way, the relationship power – ideology shifts.

Non-racialism, in the manner I conceptualise it, refers to challenging and rejecting "race" as referring to essential (natural) recognisable human groupings (for a fuller discussion, see Maré, 2014:130-149). It does *not* mean colour-blindness, a nonsensical claim for anyone seriously combating racism and racialism; nor does it deny the power and historical and contemporary effects of the construct "race" – quite the contrary.

Finally, *racism* refers to the attribution not only of relatively benign characteristics through racialism, captured by the frequent soft and obfuscatory employment of "diversity" instead of "multiracialism", but of degrading and always hierarchical attributions to members of races. This can range from denial of shared humanity to such labels as uncivilised, unintelligent, sexually promiscuous, disease bearing, amoral, etc. In this extreme form, it comes with personal and social consequences that psychologically degrade and may result in physical or material harm, even death and genocidal annihilation. Racism, the largely rejected social scourge, is but the extreme form of racialism, which serves as the bedrock of the former.

Keeping that distinction in mind – between the three easily and often synonymously used terms – is essential to any attempts to overcome the effects of all three. In South Africa, the notion of non-racialism is frequently also expressed as non-racism, revealingly misquoting the Constitutional commitment to "non-racialism and non-sexism".

What is always at work in discussing and defining all three terms is classification: races, racialism, and racism do not exist without such allocation. It is a social construct for purposes. The categorical – in both senses of the word – allocation of groups of human beings, formally and informally, into putatively pre-existing constructed groups determines the unambiguous essence of every “specimen” of the category – whether “blacks”, “whites”, “Zulu” or any other. In addition, the category that is my first concern here, “race”, has extreme effects and extensive uses, albeit often existing as banal common sense.

It is essential that the social construction and its effects be located within a wider context, within which it features with various degrees of relevance to its maintenance and employment. What importance should be granted to race? I have recently grappled with the implications of such a question in writing about race and inequality (Maré, 2017). Does race *cause* resource inequality? I suggested there that “race” (including racialism and racism), the name which is the construct, is to be seen as useful – even essential – in ordering social life and in its effects: firstly, in *justifications* (for forms of exploitation, domination, and distribution of goods and values, and hence features in templates of race) (for discussion of templates see Alexander, 2007; Maré, 2018). Secondly, it plays a major role in providing *obfuscatory explanations* hiding the manner and who benefits from racialism, and thus delays and even avoids effective measures to address social issues – such as inequality, as Fields and Fields argue (2012). And, finally, it can be linked with a range of context and time specific direct *effects/consequences*. This approach is necessary against one that sees race as the cause of much that is claimed can be addressed only, or primarily, through measures employing the very construct, such as proportionally equalising races (deracialising capitalism in South Africa), improving “race relations”, or providing worth to actually divisive social identities.

In other words, to combat race in its use as an instrument and to avoid the trap of objectifying the phenomenon, it is essential *to confirm the term as a social construct* with original and subsequent ultimately disastrous negative effects, one which needs explanation in every discussion of effects. Not for one moment should accusation of devaluation or avoidance – for that is what it is perceived to be by many, such as through the accusation of “colour blindness” – deflect from the horrific effect of the employment of and mobilisation through the construct. Instead, it provides the very reason why its continuation, in whatever form, needs to be subjected to intense questioning, as well as actions towards separating it from its claimed essentialist existence. It carries the violence, humiliation, and dehumanisation of centuries with it.

Why?

Should the world, never mind South Africa, not be content just with improving “race relations”? Why want to do away with a social construct that is there because it met and meets social needs? I have in part already given an answer, even if I still need to convince you. Its dehumanising effects on the individual and group, where Bauman’s argument of turning individuals into specimens of the categories to which they have been allocated (Bauman, 2000), should be enough – but it clearly is not. Race-thinking’s daily practitioners include many whose moral arguments and beliefs are discarded, adapted or put on hold in the interest of not rocking the boat; or in meeting the requirements of those in power; or of sensitivity to present-day identity politics of race. The belief that it can be employed for positive reasons, and thus effectively confirmed and maintained, can easily be illustrated, with South Africa being simply one of the recent entrants. It is also a vivid example of how such use fails in its ostensible positive outcome. Elsewhere, such as in Brazil and the United States, the failure of such an approach, of clinging to race, to address inequality, and the effects of its categorising practices, are equally clear. The way in which it deflects, in its immediate day-to-day obviousness, to such catastrophic dangers as climate change and to the central cause of inequality, namely capitalism, is there to ignore. It suits the powerful that they be ignored.

The immediate answer lies in the vehement rejection of acceptance – of race, racialism and racism, as above questioning, by anyone, anywhere; it lies in efforts to critically examine the conditions that maintain inequality in its expanded sense (Therborn, 2013), and to work towards addressing such conditions in small ways; to confront climate change in a similarly cumulative manner, and through personal life choices. My commitment is to exploring, understanding, and tackling not only the vicious operationalised effects that the term race always carries with it, but also to explore its existence and employment as the very effective obstacle in the way of dealing with real concerns of existence – of survival, actually, for most global citizens.

There are, surprisingly it would seem after apartheid, more and more calls in post-1994 South Africa for the valuing and retention of race, not only as a state-driven template, but also as an organising principle of social action and interaction. The calls could be multiplied if taking into account, in addition, such racialised notions as “identity”, “victimhood”, “our due”, “ethnicity”, “culture”, “minority”, “majority”, “biology”, “indigeneity”, “nation”, “patriotism”, “civilisation”, “settler”, “transformation/redress/affirmative action/empowerment”, “revenge”, and so forth. They are all held together by an identity of “us” (and hence of “them/they”, or more directly “you”), shaped already and increasingly by biological or pseudo/faux/

near-biological ideas of essences. Each can also be extended by looking at the essential attributes that come into play from within and from without, or are implied, when the terms serve as explanation, justification, mobilisation, rejection, denigration, etc. Apartheid truly lives on in ways that were seen as abhorrent by all progressive forces under its vicious and all polluting rule. “Race” rules out shared responsibility for addressing local expressions of global issues.

Of course, looking back, some of the signs of what was to come were there, before, during and after the transition in 1994: race nationalism (from the white far right and from radical right Africanist voices); “tradition” openly demanded and fought for (especially as claimed from the KwaZulu Bantustan, but then confirmed as desirable continuities for the country); and with capitalism defined as something to be invaded and captured, made “ours”, rather than subjected to intense scrutiny after the fall of communism and of apartheid. In addition, the institutional arrogance that typified the African National Congress (ANC) during the transition continued. It was embedded, in part, out of necessity to keep on claiming sole legitimacy in “the struggle”, and in large part essential to claim an exclusive right to define what exists, what is good and desirable, and what is possible (Therborn, 1999), even if limited in terms of morality. This has been aggravated, especially since 2007, through an approach of (race) majoritarianism to democracy itself – an absurd description when race statistics indicate 80% “black African” population. How can racialism remain the new “honour code”, when it is so clear that it was presented as such under apartheid; blessed then, as it is now, through Christianity. Why is it not a code of dishonour when held post-1994?

In summary, the answer to “why”, in this case, relates to the all-too familiar horrifying examples of the consequences of the creation and retention of any notion of essentialised putative human categories (from genocides based on race, ethnicity, nation, and religion), and the opportunities lost through the blinkering or blinding effect of such categorisation. What I write here is, in most ways, simply a reminder of the point made by Neville Alexander in the concluding chapter, “Enough is as good as a feast”, in his *Thoughts on the New South Africa*, published posthumously in 2013. He refers there to the

sincere, indeed naïve, belief in the values of freedom, equality, solidarity and democracy, which drove all of us in the decade of the 1980s, [and which] has been systematically eroded by the irruption of the narcissistic, dog-eat-dog virus that is spreading across the globe ... [A]gainst this backdrop ... I want to put the spotlight on the question of whether it is possible for us to ‘return to the source’, to borrow an exhortation from Amílcar Cabral – that is, once again to place at the centre of our vision, our plans and our behaviour the values on the basis of which we hoped to build the non-racial, democratic republic after the demise of apartheid capitalism. (Alexander, 2013:189)

How

Let me state, without fudging the issue, the “there” I have in mind cannot be contained through addressing certain aspects of race, racialism and racism (such as through legislation against racism, or public naming and shaming – necessary as that might be). It needs to be informed by an interlinked response, at all levels of society aimed at the various dimensions of race in its everyday existence as racialism and racism, and by refocusing on *shared* problems to be *collectively* addressed. It could never succeed through a focus only on the direct expressions and maintenance of racialism, abhorrent as that may be. The goal of a non-racial society must be investigated, theorised, and acted upon as an essential dimension of inequality, and through collective action against other global problems. It is necessary as part of a strategy towards “enough”, within which the demise of capitalism as it exists is core. Instead, the focus should be the ongoing investigation of alternative systems of production and consumption, and other measures of performance (Fioramonti, 2013). Forms of economic structure, in turn, relate inextricably to environmental effects, and thus social responsibilities. The non-racial utopia in this social formation, and many others, effectively means a future of “enough” – the one is intimately linked to the other, not, however, in the redistributive racial approach that dominates post-1994. This not to imply that the political and ideological are simply reflections of economic systems – they function in relative autonomy; but at the same time ideological change is only made possible if economic systems alter, with fresh possibilities (and demands) for human interaction.

In the primary focus of the Effects of Race Project, and thus the goals addressed in this chapter, racialism and racism exist as major obstacles in themselves, and as concomitant to addressing inequality. There can never be serious commitment to “enough” – the “feast” that has to include the 99%, for it to have any meaning – while we are distracted and even prevented from addressing inequality through wrongly and partially attributing cause and effect. Side-tracking is possible because race is real in its consequences, real in its multiplicity of interferences, in its desirable presence (for some), in its functions as “racecraft”. Racialism is to be rejected in its essentialised maintenance and employment. Barbara Fields and Karen Fields draw attention away from just the emotionally-charged issues of racism to link racecraft to the effective, even if not always deliberate, avoidance of dealing with inequality, of obscuring “the intimate interaction between inequality and racecraft ...” (Fields & Fields, 2012:16).

In relation to the specific focus addressed here, the future, if it is to be liveable, has to lie beyond the categories, beyond *just* race, of hierarchy, of essentialism, of what undeniably facilitated hatred, inequality, violence and extermination in the past, and continues to do in the present. Here too it sounds so simple and obvious: the

“beyond” is one of human solidarity, under whatever name. Paul Gilroy appeals to accepting that “beyond the corrosive power of racial categories”, lies “a more substantive human commonality” (Gilroy, 2010:64). However, that notion of “human commonality”, if it is in any way to be an attraction, an alternative to the clear value that racialism and racism holds for those in power or desiring power, will have to be clearly linked to a collective project, a democratic project, that mobilises those whose equality lies in striving and achieving in resource, vital and existential fields. The scale of such a task demands flights of utopian imagination, and mobilisation, requires an escape from what exists. Gilroy again, drawing on a Fanon that is rarely heard in the cacophony of selective claims:

He [Fanon] directs us to the costs for both victims and perpetrators of operating in an ‘epidermalised’ social and political environment where any common humanity is ‘amputated’ and authentic interaction between people becomes almost impossible. (Gilroy, 2010:157)

In summary: expressing and working towards the utopian goal of equality, as captured by “Enough is as good as a feast”, and drawing on analysis and action in the three fields proposed by Therborn (2013) – resource, vital, existential inequalities – is already required of us. The need will intensify as socioeconomic and environment-related conflicts intensify, creating conditions that make it impossible to maintain exorbitant life for some – unless through even more extensive policing and exclusion – and misery, starvation and migration for the overwhelming majority. The role played by racialism and racism in hiding and deflecting attention from shared concerns, a role with its own consequences as mentioned above, also means that these readily available and embedded constructs of social categorisation serve as the obvious ideological support for race-populist mobilisation in times of local crises. Examples abound, here and elsewhere.

Recognition of the obstacles

Confidently describing the “how” of de-legitimizing, invalidating and refuting the common sense of racialism, is a near-impossible task. It is a contest against the historically accepted social vision and experience; against those who directly benefit from its maintenance – and it is still capitalists; against those who are led to believe that racialism can be inverted in its effect of oppression – “using the tools of the oppressor”. However, at the same time there are also aspects of society, arguments and experiences to call on that can strengthen the case in South Africa.

The most pervasive obstacle is racialism as ideology – the manner in which a social construct, a term and a system created by humans, is turned into and maintained as valid to “being human today” through ideological power. Hence, the most appropriate theoretical approach is to analyse it as ideology; and here, once

again, I turn to Therborn's argument in *The Power of Ideology and the Ideology of Power* (1999). He offers an approach that sees ideology as constructing two kinds of subjects – the first through subjecting individuals to ideologies, and the second to construct ideological subjects accepting notions of what exists, what is good, and of what can be achieved (what is possible). In each case, it implies the opposite as well – for example, presenting what is undesirable, and what impossible to achieve. In each case, it implies that those with power create and maintain ideological content to their benefit. Ideology works, through interpellation, in its call on people to live their lives as specific kinds of subjects. Ideologies do not change rapidly, but are reproduced in large part by drawing on prior knowledge and a “prior vocabulary.” Brian Fay uses that term in a way that is worth noting – he draws attention to “facts” and their use. In much of the world, what has been constructed, “race”, has become fact:

Note here that it is never phenomena themselves which are the facts but *phenomena under a particular description*. Facts are linguistically meaningful entities which select out from the stream of events what happened or what exists. But this means that in order for there to be facts at all there must be a vocabulary in terms of which they can be described. Without a prior vocabulary which a describer brings to a situation there would be no facts whatsoever. (Fay, 1999:73, emphasis original)

Ideological construction of the social world takes place through words, a language that tells us the “facts” of “what exists”. This explains also why there might be variations in the words and the races. South Africa still has four.

We are born into systems of thought, captured in words, and not only social structures. Because of the embeddedness of certain ways of seeing the world and acting in it, Kwame Anthony Appiah examined remarkable occasions when “honor codes” of approved social behaviour change fairly rapidly, when what seems irreversibly “good” loses its value and what had seemed impossible become achievable (2010). Colonialism and subsequent systems of domination and exploitation, globally, ensured that we became race subjects. Apartheid built on and adapted such prior knowledge, of belonging to races, knowledge already shared by oppressor *and oppressed*. We are stuck in a racialised world, until ... that is what *exists*. This the core acceptance required by any successful ideology, certainty about the world as it is described and lived and apparently required by *us* to be “comfortable”. We have been subjected and become specific kinds of subjects – racialised in this case.

That certainty is also reinforced through structural and organisational forms. What exists and is promoted with vigour, are formal and state-driven templates of capitalism and race. This project, *post-1994 South Africa*, for example, requires race classification and the equivalent of “race classification boards”, and to put a

firm stamp of approval on capitalism! The benefits of race classification in the distribution of profit and of posts in the capitalist system ensure the maintenance of the practices (for examples see Maré, 2014). There seems to be absolutely no chance in the foreseeable future for any change at the level of state templates, the army of practitioners, and of direct beneficiaries – both willing and reluctant. In addition, the ideological ether (the stink?) of race-thinking envelops the social formation. However, debate around, research into, analysis of, clear and convincing theorising, and making use of many spaces available are, and should be, employed towards disturbing what exists as common sense. Racism allows the hardly noticed use of race labels to be everyday discourse, and not only in media, social or other, but also in daily conversation, teaching and lecturing, conversations in public spaces.¹

However, there are also aspects of society that can be advanced to strengthen the case of undermining the construction “race”. In South Africa, there are many, amongst which: first and central, the successful end of apartheid, a prime historical example of formal and oppressive racialism and racism, in favour of a democratic, “post-apartheid” society. I cannot use “post-apartheid” as an unqualified descriptor, for reasons already presented: the continuities of racialism, capitalism and tradition, in their present expressions do not justify using the prefix “post” in any unqualified way. However, it has meant, in the inevitable racialised terms, that “black Africans” (four-fifths of the census category) are in political, ideological, and social control, with the opportunity, for all, still, to create a truly human society.

Second, the Constitution of 1996, no matter how neglected as a shared goal, commits citizens and the state to “non-racialism and non-sexism”. Regular lip-service is paid to “non-racialism”, retaining the term in what should exist, if fictional in claims for what does exist.

Third, the use of race ostensibly to create an equal society, one in which “enough” drives thinking, is failing miserably, ensuring the continuation of despair for millions. The goal remains, but the means have to be changed drastically, away from the belief in race as foundation for achieving equality. The demand for austerity, from below, will ultimately serve as that challenge.

Fourth, a perception of what it means to be human, beyond greed and consumerism, lies to be explored and claimed. It will be articulated from beyond racial dehumanisation, and even notions of human rights, which at present are largely left to the powerful to formulate and ensure.

1 The extensive archive of clippings around race, racialism and racism is being integrated into a collection at the Historical Papers collection at the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand (also see Maré, 2014:49-52).

And fifth, class-based theorising and social action offers a powerful alternative that has to be rediscovered and revived. It dominated South African struggles against apartheid, it lives in many memories and expressions, cultural, political and organisational. Whether in religious, trade union, artistic, and other forms, *post-apartheid* carried commitments other than race. What they shared was a collective vision of another world, beyond the apparently immovable racist system. Where is that collectivity in the twenty-first century? It is there in understanding of and responses to the multiple effects of inequality and climate change, challenges that can be tackled in multiple ways, under a shared imagination of what needs to be. This argument is also clearly made by Ian McQueen, reflecting on activism under apartheid (2015). He concludes: “There are signs, ..., that the 1970s are resurfacing as a sounding board to test alternatives to the current status quo. History may serve as a lesson, though, that these movements have to find viable ways of confronting the powerful force of populist nationalism.”

Such “viable ways” may well lie in the deliberate call for an “honour code” that does not rely on race, but on notions of humanity; one that does not shy away from confronting the massive problems facing South Africa and the world, but calls for innovative thinking and collective mobilisation and action; for structural as well as ideological change. Appiah describes “honour codes” as going beyond an individual sense of morality. At the end of his book, he says: “It takes a sense of *honor* to feel implicated by the acts of others” (2010:204). At the beginning, he wrote: “To care for your honor is to want to be worthy of respect.” Honour lies in both giving and receiving respect (2010:xviii, xix). Is it worthy of respect to hold on to racialism, never mind racism?

Part of that discomfiting honour code that needs to come into effect, I argue, lies in the recognition of the “entanglements”, as Sarah Nuttall described this much neglected dimension of any social formation (2009). It has been referred to by Dave Haslam, after the 2016 Bataclan shooting in Paris, as the “grey zone”:

Islamic State literature talks about a ‘grey zone.’ Originally the phrase was used with reference to Muslims who live happily alongside their neighbours of all faiths and types. Now it can be more generally applied to any space (social, cultural) where views find common ground. Islamic State wants a world without ambiguity, a world of binary choices. Their stated aim is to foment conflict and destroy the grey zone. An extreme response is exactly what Islamic State wants. A growing zone of coexistence is their biggest fear. (Haslam, 2016)

It is such that those who benefit from upholding race also fear. The grey zone has also to include critical thinking on patriarchy, masculinity, tradition, nation, religion, and on humanity’s central responsibility as *part of* nature.

One would have thought that the “entanglement” facilitated by social media would increase existential proximity and recognition – however, while certainly extending communication beyond imagination it has also fixed views and identifications, and allowed the wide distribution of insult, mobilisation (for the good at times), distribution of false news, labelling, and more. Silos of difference, silos of confirmation of difference once within them, flourish. Restricted, constricted, blind to all but what is shared within the ideological space – an anti-social media it frequently is. I grant that this is too extreme a statement, because there is so much diversity, rather than just difference, so much intimacy in our lives. But can be seen only if the blinds of certainty are lifted.

Conclusion

Hopefully I have made it clear that to address race, racialism and racism requires a complex approach, multidimensional in what is included, and multidimensional in what is proposed to counter its deplorable existence and effect in policy and daily life. Kenan Malik confronted the issue of resistance, revolt, in a piece published soon after the Manchester, UK, bombing (2017):

One answer may be that, as an individual, I possess a moral compass that Abedi or Khan [two of those involved] did not, which guides me away from such ideologies and from committing such barbarous acts. That may be a comforting thought for me, but the problem cannot be dismissed so simply. The difference is not just one of individual morality – it is generational too.

It was that last sentence that immediately drew my attention. Much is made of the unproblematic, selective and decontextualised cut and paste of what Steve Biko said in select written form (and why only him of his time); and of what Fanon wrote, slotted into the present, most often as simple confirmation and justification rather than contextualised understanding. Malik wrote a recent book on “the quest for a moral compass”, informing his personal note in the response, as a Muslim, to the Manchester terror. But his book ends with the acknowledgement that the clarity that religion claimed for providing direction during various periods over the past centuries no longer applies for many, if not most, on the globe today. “Today we require such comfort [as religion historically offered across the world] because we have lost faith in our ability to be moral cartographers ... The human condition is, however, that of possessing no moral safety net. ... It can be a highly disconcerting prospect. Or it can be a highly exhilarating one. The choice is ours” (Malik, 2014:344). I would add that the challenge is ours. A position on racialism is centrally a moral one; accepting a life shaped by a construction is after all is a matter of choice.

But is that morality to be located in race? Malik responds to this argument: “It is not progressive politics that gives shape to contemporary disaffection but the politics of identity, which, over the past three decades, has encouraged people to define themselves in increasingly narrow ethnic or cultural terms” (2017).

The “progressive politics” to which he refers in his response is captured thus, as is social identity formation. It is worth presenting it at some length – and note the sources:

The institutions that [historically, in the UK] shaped what are now called ‘Muslim communities’ were not mosques, but secular and political organisations such as the Indian Workers’ Association and the Asian Youth Movements. [see Malik, 2012] The struggles of Asian communities were intimately bound up with wider working-class struggles. Migrant workers were at the forefront of industrial action, from the first significant post-war ‘immigrant strike’ at Red Scar Mill ... when Asian workers took action against the practice of forcing non-white workers to work more machines for less pay, to Grunwick ... where in 1976 black and Asian women went on strike for more than a year, demanding union recognition ... the first dispute of black workers that attracted mass support from the trade union movement.

This history provided the grounding for the struggles of my generation. We recognised the commonality of values, hopes and aspirations that bound together Asians, blacks and whites. Organisations of the left and of the labour movement provided us with the vehicles to give grievance a political form and the mechanisms for turning disaffection into the fuel of social change.

I was drawn towards politics by my experience of racism and politics [which] made me see beyond the narrow confines of racism. I came to learn that there was more to social justice than the injustices done to me and that a person’s skin colour, ethnicity or culture weren’t guides to the validity of his or her political beliefs. Through politics, I was introduced to the Enlightenment and to concepts of a common humanity and universal rights. I discovered the writings of Marx and Mill, Kant and Locke, Paine and Condorcet, Frantz Fanon and CLR James.

But let me return to concluding the task at hand: first, the points made about the distinction “race”, “racialism”, and “racism” need to be factored into research, analysis, and suggestions for interventions. Second, the various levels at which the issues of race operate need recognition and foregrounding in suggestions for intervention – state templates obviously need policy work at a national level, but personal perceptions and ways of living need more dispersed attention, from the social to the interpersonal. Third, the articulation of racialism and racism with social justice more widely than the race issue, with inequality addressed more widely than the core resource inequality, with imagining a future, inclusive of the shared projects that we need to undertake collectively, has to be at the core of thinking

and action. To call on Malik for a final time, he writes: “In an age in which anti-imperialist movements have faded and belief in alternatives to capitalism dissolved, radical Islam [or radical race essentialism, in the case addressed here] provides the illusion of being part of a global movement for change” (2017). What should that “global movement for change” mean for humanity and for our small part in it here on the southern tip of Africa? How do we factor race, racialism and racism into that wider demand?

Race is employed and exists and is reproduced under different conditions, towards various ends, and redress should, therefore, take this into account. The alternative, claiming race as the basis for all corrective action, leads nowhere, starting as it does with acceptance (gleeful in some instances, expressing a need for security in others, but also revengeful and blind to its always vicious consequences) of the biological fixity of the very construct of race – it had been done before and will continue to be done, albeit for different reasons and with different epistemologies.

Certainly opportunities have been lost, here too. In the United States, such a moment was identified in the 1967 Supreme Court case of *Loving v Virginia*, which “invalidated state laws ... that restricted interracial marriage.” A *New York Times* editorial comment, 50 years later, notes:

The legal scholar Dorothy E. Roberts argues that the court had all the evidence it needed to find that the racial claim underlying Virginia’s [the USA state] law was scientifically invalid – and so arbitrary as to be unconstitutional – and that the justices missed the opportunity to refute ‘the validity of race as a biological category.’ Had the court taken that approach, the Loving decision might well have been a more enduring strike against white supremacy – and changed the way the country talks about race. (Staples, 2017)

We need to recognise, create whenever possible, and grasp those moments, small and big, when they arise.

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