

## **Decolonising the Conceptions of Race in South Africa: A Fanonian Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This article claims that racism is undoubtedly the foundation upon which colonialism prospered and assumed its nature and characteristics. Hence, a rethinking of issues associated with conceptions of race is simultaneously a decolonisation process. It is impossible if not inconceivable to think of racism in post-apartheid South Africa without making reference to the colonial nature of the practice. It is beyond dispute that the issue of race and identity is still a bone of contention in post-apartheid South Africa. A lot has been written and done in this regard but this article argues that from what has been accomplished no effective and workable recommendations have been successfully put forward. The article challenges the prevailing recommendations and proposals to be revised beyond anger and emotion. Such an endeavour does not perceive anger and emotion as irrelevant but pushes to re-channel them in ways that support emancipatory strategies that serve to unlearn racial stereotypes. It proposes not a solution but a foundation of a thinking process – inspired by Fanon – which seeks to understand the problem before we attempt to propose a solution.

### **1. Introduction**

In everyday language, race has been used to describe the pigmentation of different people, but more nuanced definitions add culture to categorise race. These seemingly innocuous ways of differentiating people assume negative connotations when one's skin colour is deemed representative of an individual's mental capacity or his/her humanness. This article argues that using neutral tools for identification, merely as operative specifications of the individuals being discussed, is an innocent and convenient strategy that is not demeaning to people who are of a certain skin colour. However, history has revealed how these qualities, which are accidental to human persons, have been treated as essences that stratify human beings. Famous intellectuals such as Immanuel Kant<sup>1)</sup> Thomas Jefferson<sup>2)</sup> and David Hume bought into the perception that skin colour indicated the depth of one's degree of being a human being. In more recent times psychologist Richard J Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray claim that blacks are genetically less intelligent than whites

(Fischer *et al* 1996).

In *Race, Culture and Identity* (1994), Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that in order to understand the meaning of race in the contemporary discourse, it is helpful to first examine two other topics of central concern to democratic theory: linguistics and science. Appiah's (1994) systematic investigation of the manner in which intellectual and political elites in the Western history deployed the term 'race' throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, demonstrates how at the core of this account are a chain of connected assertions about the inherent relationship between certain morphological characteristics of human beings and the moral, intellectual, or physical 'essences' of those who display these traits. Wilkins (1996: 8) concludes that contemporary meanings of 'race', like those of the 19<sup>th</sup>, are parasitic on "submerged but nevertheless powerful claims about the scientific foundations of racial divisions".

In South Africa, issues of race have proven protracted and intractable. Racial confrontation, in its current understanding, could be traced to the incipient interactions between European sailors and the indigenous people of Southern Africa. South Africa had a uniqueness of racial dynamics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many do not appreciate. After the tragedies of Nazi Germany, there was a rush to dismiss racial theory as pseudoscience. The term racist, which had hitherto not provoked ire, became a term of condemnation and judgement (Dubow 1995). However, it is curious to note that while the rest of the world was retreating from racial theory, the assumption of the National Party (NP) to power in South Africa in 1948, a mere three years after the Second World War, instituted a policy of apartheid, one of the most deliberate and thoroughgoing enactments to separate people by the colour of their skin. Though its defenders were arguing that apartheid championed separate but equal development (Klotz 1995), its more sinister policies like the Immorality Act, which outlawed marriages and sexual contact across colour lines, betray a well calculated plan to maintain racial purity (Matambo and Ani 2015). This paper argues, through a Fanonian analysis, that the credibility that has been given to conceptions of race were overrated because the arguments associated with the conception of race/racism give it an ontological significance. Race in this case becomes a deciding standard of who is human and who is not. Fanon recognised that the discourse of race has been given undue credibility. For this reason, any rational discussion on race should bear in mind that racism is nothing but a construct; it is an artefact of human imagination and perception with no bearing on the essence of humanness.

The following section gives an illustration of how race has been (ab)used in South Africa. Occasionally, white people have pandered to attitudes that are racist but at other occasions, black people who consider themselves victims of racism have used racism to stave off criticism that comes from other races, even though

this criticism might be founded.

## 2. Racial tension in South Africa: A brief history

It is easier to point out the genesis of racial discrimination. In South Africa, the arrival of Europeans brought a new dimension to interactions between the new arrivals and the natives. The first people that the Dutch arrivals encountered in South Africa were the Khoikhoi and the San people formerly called the Hottentots and Bushmen (Marks 1972). From the onset, the natives were treated as inferior human beings, with Jan van Riebeeck (McCrone 1957) referring to Hottentots as lazy, stupid, of a diminished intellectual capacity and as a people that cannot be trusted. McCrone (1957: 122) reports that the Bushmen were taken as “incorrigible banditti” who are incapable of both education, in the Western sense, and assimilation into Western mores. Apart from these stereotypes, the Khoikhoi and the San people have suffered another fate: they have received increasingly diminished attention in South Africa and this handicap in historical treatment, though time-honoured (for example, see Hallett 1970), still continues to this day. In *Running with Horses* (2009) Alan Boesak decries the cursory recognition given to the Khoisan people in South Africa. His point is that, though policies like affirmative action have been framed with the intention of establishing some measure of political, social and economic parity across races, the perquisites of such post-1994 initiatives have mainly benefited black South Africans who form part of the ruling dispensation. The foregoing has been added to show the obscure standing that the Khoisan are perpetually given in South Africa. In a country where issues of race are invariably and dangerously close to the surface, the foregoing does not help matters.

Like any form of identity chauvinism, racism is a slippery slope. Indeed, the attitude is so amorphous that even within people who are generally regarded as one race, racial prejudice and confrontation can still inhere. The Dutch, who were the chief perpetrators of racial injustice in their interaction with the native Africans they found in South Africa were once victims of British Europeans, a group that settled in South Africa afterwards. The influx of the British, having started several decades prior, was prompted by the discovery of promising deposits of diamond and gold in South Africa in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the two European groups enjoyed the status of being simultaneous colonisers. However, difference, premised on culture and language among others, weakened the apparent unity that the two groups had forged (Davenport 1987). The Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, though having been prompted by a confluence of factors, contributed to uniting the Boers under one monolithic identity as the persecuted chosen people of God, the *volk*. The concept of concentration camps, which became more popular during the Second World War, was present at the time of the Anglo-

Boer War and it was used to confine people of Afrikaner extraction.

The fervour with which Afrikaner politicians promoted and maintained policies of racial exclusivism after 1948 could partly be explained from the humiliating experience they had with the British. The Great Trek was a retreat from British expansionism and the creation of the Orange Free State was an establishment of a fiefdom that the Boers could call their own, away from British domination. The year 1948 was a milestone in the history of the Afrikaners in South Africa. The National Party (NP) came to power having used the policy of apartheid as the mainstay of their campaign. The policy was mostly based on a formal separation of races. In principle, Hendrik Verwoerd, the man often referred to as the architect of apartheid, sold apartheid as separate but equal development among races. On practical grounds, however, the policy was grotesquely skewed in favour of Europeans to the detriment of native Africans, mixed race people and Indians. That the policy was sustained for decades and that it took almost half a century for the NP to be dislodged from power, proves just how determined the adherents of apartheid were to maintain a system that was both anathema in a hugely non-white region and was inevitably destined for doom. However, while apartheid still held sway as national policy, it gave the Afrikaner mind some semblance of racial contentment. It should be added that Verwoerd and those of his ilk embraced racial essentialism in their politics. They held to the view of black people as being more qualified for menial labour rather than tasks that were deemed more intellectually demanding.

While apartheid gave Afrikaner esteem some respite, it simultaneously reinforced the resolve of the disadvantaged races to fight for equality. It is also politic to state that from the inception of racial confrontation in South Africa, rebellion from the victims has always been present. The formation of trade unions to represent black workers and the establishment of political organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) all happened decades before the formalisation of apartheid. This fact justifies at least two arguments: the first being that racism, especially against non-white people, was present and that the Afrikaners who came to power in 1948 were not the only racial oppressors. Secondly, the aforementioned establishments prove that native Africans were apprised of the fact they were oppressed, mainly because of race, and that they had the responsibility to fight against such a *status quo*.

The struggle against apartheid, when put in context, was not confined to political ambition on the part of black people. Anti-apartheid rebellion was not solely tailored towards putting black people in power and giving them the suffrage they had been denied. Of essential importance was the fight for human dignity and the inculcation of the fact that ascribing essences to people based on the hue of their

skin, the language they speak or the culture they adhere to was morally offensive. Another telling reality about anti-apartheid agitation was the number of Jews who joined the side of the oppressed. Some of these, like Joe Slovo and Ruth First, had fled their countries in Europe after the accession of Hitler to power which was the prelude to the Jewish holocaust (Slovo 1997). The sensitivities of these exiles to racial persecution were already inflamed, providing them with a moral basis from which to fight any system that was racially unjust.

African Americans, who continue, in some quarters, to grapple with racial injustice, and other African nations, with their own dehumanising history with colonialism, joined in the rallying crusade to end apartheid, not only on political grounds (Nesbitt 2004). Thus, while political ambition is the goal of many political organisations, liberation movements in South Africa had to include another dimension in their struggle; the fight for the restoration of true personhood to black people and any other people who suffer injustice on racial grounds (Ngcukaitobi 2018). As will be seen, however, the issue of racism in South Africa is protracted and intractable with history offering evidence of victims becoming perpetrators; at other times, the issue of race has become so fluid that different races could assume different and concurrent roles (of victim, perpetrator and bystander) at one time.

The following section will look at how race has weaved its way in post-apartheid South Africa and how it has been used as both a weapon and an excuse. Those that use it as a weapon have employed racist rhetoric or inveighed against it by accusing those, of different races, who call them to order. Those who have used race as an excuse have often argued that South Africa's current woes are either a product of longstanding stratification along racial lines and on the opposite side are those who argue that the quality of the current predominantly black leadership proves that black people are inherently inhibited from certain qualities. A reminder is in order; this article argues that descriptions based on skin colour, when used as a tool for practical description or operationalisation, is neutral and devoid of any moral value. Race only becomes racism when value is attributed to it. To this extent, the article supports the view of Appiah (1994) who argues against race as being biologically and intellectually influential. The ensuing section will be more precise in that it will give a few particular instances when race was used in the ways described above. The application of Fanon to these instances that will follow will expose whether or not there is justification in the sentiments of the people written about in the following section.

### **3. The (ab)use of race and racism in post-apartheid South Africa: A survey of contentious instances**

The long struggle against white domination and apartheid reached one of its defin-

ing moments in 1994 when South Africa, for the first time, held democratic elections, with all eligible voters accessing the franchise without hindrances based on colour or other factors. The ANC came to power, 82 years after its formation. The new political leadership was confronted with the task of establishing equality after centuries of protracted racial injustice (Matambo and Ani 2015). It is almost indubitable that the transition of power from the NP to the ANC did not automatically obliterate the suspicions that the two parties held against each other; nor did it mechanically erase racial prejudices that were a crucial dimension to relations among South Africans for more than two centuries. One of the reasons for F W de Klerk's decision to lift the proscription of liberation movements and to call for the release of some political prisoners was economic. The campaign for sanctions against South Africa was very successful and left South Africa with fewer options to use it to sustain its economy (Levy 1999). Another reason was political. All of Southern Africa had been decolonised and the majority were in power, leaving South Africa in a very awkward position. These pragmatic reasons do not indicate a change in the mind-set of the white citizens on what they thought of black people; nor did it suddenly imbue black people with the assurance that white people now perceived them as equals. What follows in this section are instances of how race and racism still feature as crucial components of politics in South Africa after 1994.

In *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (2009), Mark Gervisser uses the "one good native" concept, popularised by Thabo Mbeki, to highlight the notion that after 1994 only Nelson Mandela was a capable black leader. This allusion indicates how black South Africans, leaders included, appreciate the continued influence of race on politics and society in general. Seekings (2008: 1) goes further to assert that "South Africans continue to see themselves in the racial categories of the apartheid era". For Mbeki's part, the stated notion came as a reaction to his criticisms, from whites especially, that stemmed from comparisons between Mandela's rule and Mbeki's. Mandela's five-year rule was characterised by attempts to bring about racial integration and synergy through initiatives such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 1996 Soccer Africa Cup of Nations, whose finals were both hosted and won by South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was also a Mandela-era initiative aimed at facing South Africa's racial violence of the past by a collective atonement on the part of the perpetrators from all race groups. At the risk of exaggeration, the Mandela years could be considered as the honeymoon years of South Africa's attempt at racial equality. In one of his speeches in parliament Mbeki argued that South Africa was comprised of "two nations", one white which was characterised by economic, educational and technological advancement, and the black nation which was characterised by the gamut of privations (Nattrass and Seekings 2001). Though this assertion is not racist, it points to how racist com-

merce, education and politicking divide racially diverse nations.

In *Framing the Race in South Africa* (2010), Karen E Ferree notes how post-apartheid South African elections bear an unmistakable “racial imprint”; Africans vote for one set of parties, whites support a different set of parties, and, with few exceptions, there is no crossover voting between these groups. These sharp “racial contours” have earned South African elections the “dubious distinction” of being “racial censuses”.<sup>3)</sup> Ferree (2010) argues that racial-census elections in South Africa reflect the successful execution of a political strategy (party labels) designed by the ruling party to discredit and delegitimise its primary competitors. Voters use party labels, the general ideology, values, or attributes associated with it and the groups it is believed to represent, as cognitive shortcuts to guide their voting decisions. While this accounts for a covert form of racism, there have been incidents in South Africa after 1994 that have been overtly racist.

Phillip Roodt of Limpopo described black people who patronised the beach as “cockroaches” that he wished would drown one after the other. His comment was not as public as a comment that came a year before, from Penny Sparrow, a Durban-based estate agent, who described black beachgoers as “monkeys”. Sparrow vowed to “address the blacks of South Africa as monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same, pick and drop litter” (Lujabe 2017). Judge Mabel Jansen (2017) opined in a post on Facebook that rape was a usual component of black culture and that black women existed for the pleasure of their male counterparts (Lujabe 2017). Andre Slade, at the time the owner of a guest house, provided one of the most racist remarks when he refused to accommodate black guests, his reason being that you cannot mix apricots and peaches, hinting at the idea that black and white people are so diametrically different that any mix between them is unfathomable and impossible (Gumede 2014). Slade remains an ardent supporter of apartheid and the view that black people are destined to be at the service of white people. His comments also point to one of the cores of apartheid propaganda that people of different colours are so clinically immiscible that any interaction across racial lines is near impossible. In Hout Bay, Western Cape, Vanessa Hartley warned about the influx of black people to Hout Bay saying “they [are] like stupid animals who should be tied to a tree”. The foregoing, as many others of their ilk, are racist comments that ascribe certain behavioural tendencies to people of a certain colour. The examples given also illustrate that the legacy of historical racism continues to vilify people of darker colours, perpetuating what has been variously referred to as white privilege (Gumede 2014).

The fact that racism endures to this day in South Africa cannot be gainsaid. History reveals that darker races have been more victimised than people of the white race, especially in Africa. This is because the notion that white people are better

than black people has been sponsored, as seen as above, by people who are politically, intellectually and economically powerful. In the context of South Africa, however, this history has also been used by black people to shield themselves from criticism, however meaningful and credible, that is deemed as emanating from the white section of society. An illustration of how black South Africans have conveniently used race to fend off criticism is Jacob Zuma's characterisation of protesters who criticised his leadership.

After South Africa's President Jacob Zuma made a startling cabinet reshuffle in March 2017, thousands of protestors took to the streets across South Africa to demonstrate against his decision and to call for his resignation. The protests came as a climax of a situation that had been building up since 2015 when Zuma surprisingly fired Nhlanhla Nene, his minister of finance, replacing him with Des van Rooyen. After much pressure from both the public and Zuma's own party, the ANC, Zuma replaced Van Rooyen (less than a week after his appointment) with Pravin Gordhan, who was Nene's predecessor. Apart from Zuma's mercurial decisions, his presidency was tainted by allegations of corruption, mismanagement and abuse of state funds. More telling was the finding of the Constitutional Court of South Africa that Zuma had failed his duties to uphold, observe and withhold the Constitution of the country by failing to mitigate the expenditure of state funds at his Nkandla private homestead. The above illustrations give more basis on the protests that were undertaken in April. However, in the speech commemorating the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Chris Hani, the slain leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP), Zuma stated that the protests calling for his resignation "show that racism is real" (News24, 2017).

His accusation was partly based on the fact that some of the people who called for his resignation were white. However, an even-handed analysis of the anti-Zuma protests should indicate that some of the people who called for his resignation were not only his fellow black people, but members of organisations linked to his party. For example, the ANC is in a tripartite alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the SACP; both COSATU and the SACP called for Zuma's resignation and the SACP had actually threatened to withdraw its members from the cabinet if Zuma had acted on allegations that he planned to sack Pravin Gordhan, the former finance minister. Zuma eventually fired Gordhan and, while the SACP did not withdraw its members from the cabinet, their threats nullify claims that calls for Zuma's resignation were racially motivated. His allegation that the protestors demonstrated that some people regard black people as sub-human is not sustainable when one considers the fact that people expressed support for Nhlanhla Nene and Pravin Gordhan, none of whom was white.

An earlier incident that a famous black South African used to stave off credible



criticism happened in 2010 at Luthuli House, the head office of the ANC. The incident involved Julius Malema, then President of the ANC Youth League and Jonah Fisher, a BBC journalist. Malema had just come back from a trip to Zimbabwe where he heaped praise on Robert Mugabe while vilifying his opposition as a “Mickey Mouse” factor that was ensconced in the comfort of Sandton, a wealthy Johannesburg suburb, rather than opposing Mugabe from Zimbabwe. The implication was that the Zimbabwean opposition, while claiming to fight for the poor, was living a luxurious lifestyle in South Africa. This prompted Fisher to comment that Malema also lived in Sandton. In lieu of explaining how he could also live in Sandton while claiming to have the poor at heart, Malema took the offensive and before ordering the ejection of Fisher called him “a small boy” and a “bloody agent” who had come to the revolutionary house with white tendencies (The Guardian 2010).

#### 4. Fanonian analysis: Rethinking racism

This Fanonian analysis is drawn from Frantz Fanon’s book *Black Skins White Masks* (1986). A critical and close reading of this book reveals how Fanon intelligently dealt with the issue of race(ism). He dismisses the conceptions of race as a product of human culture, thereby rendering it ontologically bankrupt – regarding it as nothing but a cultural artefact. Hence, he saw race theory as unnecessary because the issue of race(ism) is nothing but a mirage. Of course, it is important to note that Fanon never denied the existence of different colours or races but the meaning which the society attach to them. The hypocrisy of racism lies in the fact that it seeks to determine the ontological status of humanity because the essence of humanity is beyond racial categorisation and profiling. The above explanation is summarised by the declaration of Fanon in chapter 7 when he said:

There is no Negro mission; there is no white burden ...there is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more that there is a white intelligence ... In a world that I travel I am endlessly creating myself .... I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it .... No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free ..... The Negro is not. Any more than the white man .... Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible .... At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognise, with me, the open door of every consciousness (Fanon 1967: 178-181).

Fanon is thus unveiling the way whiteness has been falsely essentialised as a determinant of humanness. On the contrary, blackness is reduced to non-being, a symbol of evil, an essential negative. Fanon (1986) points out that blackness is only re-

cognisable in relation to whiteness. Thus, no wonder a black person wants to be a white person to be whole and belong to a white world to be complete. This Fanonian analysis seeks to rethink and redefine this racial myth.

This article is of the conviction that the way the issue of race has been dealt with in South Africa is inappropriate such that it will exacerbate the issue. This is compounded by the reaction which was recently brought forward especially by the black population. In as much as we cannot totally dismiss these reactions as unnecessary, we argue that a critical way of looking at this issue can bring about not a solution but a process that will help to effectively deal with this issue. Due to the reaction of the black population, which conceived themselves as victims of these phenomena the government saw it fit to enact a legislation, which rendered the expression of racist remarks illegal. It should be recognised and acknowledged that such a response highlights the emergence of the matter or issue on one hand, but on the other hand it highlights a gross misunderstanding of this matter.

### **5. Why is it a gross misunderstanding of the issue?**

First of all, the issue of race cannot be regulated by law because it has been ideologically imprinted deep in the mind of people for centuries such that it cannot just be shaken off so easily. Building on the previous point is the fact that a person who is a racist sometimes does not even realise the offensive nature of the practice; instead, he/she will see it as second nature if not a natural attribute. The third point is that you cannot force a person to stop being a racist, even through legislation. The fourth point is that the reaction of those who consider themselves as victims can actually fortify racist attitudes. What exacerbates the racist attitude is the tension which different races express through vicious remarks towards each other. South Africa has recently witnessed considerable racial tension through social media. A general racist atmosphere can easily be discerned in the way people easily associate most situations which express racial dynamics as tantamount to racism.

### **6. How can we look at this issue differently?**

We need to rethink the issue of race and unlearn some of our convictions regarding the matter. The way in which we look at race should be revised. The issue of race is seen in terms of black people *versus* white people; we think it should be understood not on the basis of people of different races but on the basis of a system which is deviously designed to exalt one race to the detriment of the other. The issue of race should not be conceived as black *versus* white as humanity *versus* inhumanity. We should learn not to see black as the only victims but all races as victims of an evil system which seeks to privilege one race at the expense of the other.

This is similar to what Paulo Freire (1970) means when he avers that oppression enchains both oppressors and the oppressed. The issue needs to be understood as complex but not impossible. The possible solution to the issue of race has to be understood as a process which races need to undergo, and a process which recognises that being inferior is just as unhealthy and as demeaning as being superior.

## 7. Fanon and the issue of race and identity

Fanon has published three books namely *Black Skins White Masks*, *The Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Of the trio, *Black Skins White Masks* was his first book. Fanon wrote *Black Skins White Masks* as a dissertation which was rejected as academically inferior because it questioned the very foundation of French psychiatric norms. It is also important to note that *Black Skins and White Mask*' is autobiographical in tone but does not always refer to Fanon's personal life. Hansel (1977) highlighted that the book is an attempt to understand the predicament of a black person's life through introspection. Fanon provides a frame of reference for explaining the oppressive conditions of black people in a white-dominated world (Hansel 1977: 4). Wyrick summarised *Black Skins White Masks* as a:

Sociodiagnostic – that is, a clinical study of group racial identity. Its fundamental assumption is that the juxtaposition of the black and white races has created a very real form of collective mental illness. Both races are locked within the constraint of color, but Fanon's emphasis here is on the formation, meaning, and effects of blackness (Wyrick 1998: 24).

Chapter eight of *Black Skins White Masks* concludes with Fanon explicitly declaring that he no longer wants to be a black man but a man or a human being. Being either white or black is nothing but a prisoner of history, a history essentially defined by oppression of one race by another. Fanon categorically rejects the past. He does not avoid the past as if it never existed but what he does is that he problematises and critically exposes the hypocrisy of racism which defined the foundation upon which the conviction of colonialism was built. From the foregoing, the relevance of Fanon to South Africa's situation becomes more telling. Race permeates most social domains in South Africa to the point that it precludes rational debate devoid of *ad hominem* attacks. Examples have been given of how Mbeki, Zuma and Malema, in order to avoid confronting difficult and candid subjects, used the excuse that white people thought themselves superior. Their attitude somewhat goes athwart to what Fanon would describe as the quest for humanity, not a quest for racialised humanity. Because of the history of racism in South Africa, black people can easily fall prey to what Freire argues is the need for an alienated population to be pitied.

Fanon exposes the way colour has been manipulated and given an ontological

significance and attributes which determine humanness. His rejection of Negritude is a sign that he did not want to be identified with any philosophy/ideology that is centred on colour. He emphatically denies belonging to either a black or white world. Fanon is not denying the fact that he is a black person but denies to be identified with erroneous conceptions attached to colour. He also denies a world divided between superiority and inferiority. A close reading of Fanon reveals that he perceived either being superior or inferior as constituting one form or the other of mental illness, which disrespects the dignity of humanity.

The state of being inferior/black and superior/white can also be seen in the light of the oppressor/white and the oppressed/black. Hence, colour becomes a determinant of a person's social and economic class. What is important about Freire is not the naming of either one as being oppressed or being oppressive but his suggestion that the oppressed or victim has an obligation to free him/herself. Fanon (in the *Wretched of the Earth*) and Freire agreed that the one who needs emancipation has a duty to change the situation. Freire argues that it is the responsibility of the oppressed or victim to humanise themselves as follows:

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it ... The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption ... This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (Freire 1970, 1993: 42, 43, 54).

Freire encourages the oppressed to take initiative to deal with all the elements which entail the undermining of one race by another. Freire (1993), especially in the first chapter of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* tries to warn those perceived to be victims that it is a process to break out of dependency on their oppressors and familiarity with oppression. He likens the process of emancipation to the pangs of "child-birth".

In similar fashion to Freire (1993), we draw attention to the fact that the oppressed race has to be aware that even oppressors have been socialised into believing that they are superior just as black people were socialised to be inferior. Furthermore, as much as black people need to shed their inferiority complex, in the same vein white people also need to realise that their colour holds no special ontological human qualities. Instead of the races to clash against each other they should

in fact come together to fight a system or ideology or myth that undermines their dignity as human beings. What makes legislation irrelevant is that such a process of deracialisation cannot be forced out of a person but the persons involved have to be conscious enough to realise and consent to the need for change. If white people do not want to change, black people should not entertain them by assuming the victim position; such whining feeds and affirms racist stereotypes. For example, those who refer to blacks as baboons or monkeys should be pitied their infantile and inhuman conduct rather than with a countervailing racial attack, threats or knee-jerk legislation.

## 8. Conclusion

The article set out to present the influence of racism in South Africa, especially as it continues to play out in the country more than two decades after the end of formal racial separation which was in essence racial stratification. It argues that the continued influence of race in South Africa is not surprising because of how long racism influences all facets of life in the country and indeed in the world. Drawing from a general understanding of racism, the article zeroed in on South African racism and went on to give a few examples of blatant racist remarks that have shocked the country, with emphasis on remarks that are recent. Moving away from these, however, the article also argues that black South Africans have used accusations of racism to shield themselves from remarks, questions, or comments especially those that come from the white population even though such opinions have merit. By employing this impulsive defensiveness, black South Africans continue to lose the opportunity to attend to the real issues raised and therein lies a gag for members of the white population who might still have more helpful contributions in building post-apartheid South Africa. Fanon's quest for full humanity, as expressed in *Black Skin, White Mask*, was used as an illustration of how more concentration on attaining full humanity might help overcome the racialised nature of society.

## Endnotes

1. One of the most famous quotes depicting Kant's racism was his conclusion when he saw a black man. He concluded that the man's skin colour was a clear indication that anything he said was stupid. For the purpose of this article, attitude such as the one ascribed to Kant are what amount to racism (See Mills 2005).
2. Jefferson linked to moral traits such as truthfulness or bravery to skin colour
3. Voters line up with their racial groups, seemingly without thought to issues, performance, or any of the other politics-as-usual factors that drive elections in other countries.

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