Raced Repetition:
Perpetual Paralysis or Paradoxical Promise?[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with key contemporary questions about the extent to which the obstinacy of racial formation processes, as well as the apparent global resurgence of raced thinking, represent a paralysis of the global anti-racist project or signal an important analytic opportunity for revitalising critical race scholarship and anti-racist praxis. To this end, it is incumbent upon critical race scholars and practitioners to take stock of their historical, current and future contributions to addressing the vexing nature of race and racism. The article mobilises three main illustrative arguments in this regard. First, we have to deploy our analytic tools more thoughtfully and robustly in the service of understanding the current historical period in which

race seems to have an infinite elasticity globally as such analyses have a great deal to offer us in thinking through the contemporary relationships between race, materiality, histories, politics and populism. Second, writing from South Africa, the article focuses on the historically racialised nature of the social formation as an exemplar of how the deployment of race and resistance to it did not simply reflect an unprocessed repetition compulsion of the raced binary over time but actually represented incremental gains for a productively antagonistic and adversarial anti-racist political project. Third, the article also surfaces alternative ways of approaching the question of race today, by examining elements of the post-race paradigm, raced embodiment and affectivity, and more diverse conceptions of what it means to be human as part of the anti-racist project. The article concludes that thoughtful analyses of the histories of anti-racist praxis, contemporary manifestations of race and racism, and an openness to new approaches to addressing the histories and continued legacies of race are paradoxically promising and hopeful in a seemingly despairing time when race thinking seems to be on the ascension once more.

Introduction

One of the key characterisations of the current historical period is the continued impingement on human freedoms, despite popular dissenting voices articulating the need for alternative forms of social life that are more democratic, just and equitable. Alongside the dysfunctionality of neo-liberal economic policies and the impervious nature of political systems that continue to breach the intended reciprocal social compact between citizens and political leadership are heightened forms of *Othering* that have returned. Here, modes of alterity have not only been accepted but also been embraced and actively mobilised in the service of political projects (Omi & Winant, 2015) that have as their outcomes forms of marginality that recapitulate and extend upon previous systems of exploitation. Under these circumstances, it would be unsurprising to think of the current juncture through the lens of despair. However, Fine (2016) suggests that in this moment, it is important to rely on critical analyses and forms of praxis to resurrect what Edward Said refers to as *lost causes*—causes with a social justice inflexion that are now looked upon despairingly because we are unconvinced about their future potential to yield some of the transformative outcomes that had once been beacons of humanistic hope. One such terrain can be found in the apparent recalcitrance of race as an organising social and political construct, its concomitant race thinking, and questions about whether this represents a paralysis of the global anti-racist project or signals an important analytic opportunity for revitalising critical race scholarship and anti-racist praxis.

Fine's (2016) injunction to resurrect *lost causes* is similar to Zizek's (2002) request for faith in a cause as an ethical act and is thus a call for all of us to constantly engage the past and the present and to imagine futures that are yet to unfold, through lenses of critical

hope, thought and action that are directed towards a more just and critical humanism. To this end and in the context of attempting to understand the recrudescent nature of racial formation processes (Omi & Winant, 2015) and to provide a more hopeful appreciation of the contributions of critical race scholarship and praxis, the article surfaces three major illustrative arguments.

The first is that we have to offer greater consideration to, and deploy our analytic tools more thoughtfully and robustly in the service of, understanding the current period in which race seems to have an infinite elasticity as such analyses have a great deal to offer us in thinking through the contemporary relationships between race, materiality, histories, politics and populism. It is not sufficient for us to simply claim that mainly White working class voters in Europe and the United States today vote more conservatively because they are simply bigoted, xenophobes who thumb their noses at the mainstream political establishments in London, Paris, Washington or Amsterdam or to say that White, conservative, right-leaning political organisations or parties simply come to represent racist Whites who are relics of the twentieth century and who are pursuing an agenda based on restorative nostalgia or that left-leaning political organisations or parties who are mobilising through a racialised agenda are merely doing so for populist political entrepreneurship gains. While all of these may be partially accurate in some instances, this is not a complete analysis, and we should endeavour to deepen such analytics if we are to truly understand the nature of the historical period in which race is being mobilised, to what racial project ends (Omi & Winant, 2015), and what our potential responses could be as critical race scholars and practitioners. A robust analysis of the historical moment allows us pathways out of what appears to be an intractably despairing moment.

Writing from South Africa, the second argument examines the historically racialised nature of the social formation as an exemplar of how the deployment of race and resistance to it did not simply reflect an unprocessed repetition compulsion (to borrow from Freud, 1990) of the raced binary over time but actually represented incremental gains for a generatively antagonistic anti-racist political project. This of course runs counter to a linear and systematically progressive view of history and is premised on histories of combative and adversarial critical race theorising and praxis that are sites for hopeful engagement.

The third and final argument surfaces alternative ways of approaching the question of race today, by examining elements of the post-race paradigm, raced embodiment and affectivity, and more diverse conceptions of what it means to be human as part of the anti-racist project. With regard to the latter and drawing on the work of writers such as Alexander Weheliye (2014), conceptions of the human that integrate race with who is defined as human, less than human and non-human create alternative ways of approaching questions of race that extend beyond the binary of blackness and whiteness that are in constant opposition to each other and that often keep us locked in tautological analytics.

Understanding the Morbidities of Our Time

Antonio Gramsci (1971), in his *Prison Notebooks* in the 1930s, suggested that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (pp. 275–276). Of course, Gramsci was

appropriating the term that was normally utilised to define the period of political transfer of power from one monarch to another but nevertheless utilised it to describe

> *the extraordinary situations in which the extant legal frame of social order loses its grip and can hold no longer, whereas a new frame, made to the measure of newly emerged conditions responsible for making the old frame useless, is still at the designing stage, has not yet been fully assembled, or is not strong enough to be put in its place (Bauman, 2010, p. 201)*

—a period where one arrangement of hegemony is waning, but prior to the emergence of another.

This characterisation remains apt in our most recent history, where there have been waves of political formations and social movements that have rolled across so many diverse contexts across the globe, often explicitly and sometimes implicitly activating and relying upon deeply racialised binaries. In many instances, we had once imagined that these forms of racialisation had been vanquished, albeit sometimes replaced by more nuanced and mutated forms of symbolic or cultural racism, or on the contrary, anti-racist and non-racist lexicons at least.

We have witnessed the shock of a Trump victory that actively mobilised against marginalised *Others* and minorities, we have seen the apparent voting against self-interests in Brexit that seemingly revealed a deep xenophobia in the United Kingdom, and Europe has seen its fair share of anti-immigrant political entrepreneurship in Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and of course, Frauke Petry's and Alexander Gauland's Alternative for Germany party. Islamophobia has been on the rise since 9/11 and has been increasingly conflated with anti-immigrant sentiment in response to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean; although we also observe political Islam deploying populist and spectacular strategies, we note the rise in both Black and White nationalism, and closer to home in South Africa, we have witnessed calls for ethnic essentialism, and of course, Bell Pottinger's mobilisation of the populist discourse of White monopoly capital.

In the present period, we are also witnessing an array of organic social movements that have vented discontent and resisted the unprecedented and unfettered global levels of exploitation, marginalisation and inequality. Cutting a swathe across a range of social contexts, these sustained impulses have been characterised by calls for decolonising education, science, language, the imperial canon, the economy and social institutions. This current impulse has its origins in the vast number of decolonial theorists' arguments about race being central to the colonising turn in the North or West—the paradigm of discovery that also culminated in the propagation of capitalism, racism and systems of gender inequality. The rise of Western modernity converged with European expansionism, slavery and colonialism, and race and violence were central to its birthing and to the naturalisation of racial alterity over the next 500 years (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, 2011). This contemporary decolonial moment has birthed striking exemplars such as #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Landless Peoples' Movements across Africa, and emerging political formations among the precariat in Latin America and parts of Asia, but of course, its traction has extended beyond these contexts.

In such a fractious context, it will be important to find the analytic tools that offer up some way of overcoming the paralysis and despair of the There Is No Alternative (TINA) mantra but simultaneously to avoid the ahistorical claims that there are simply infinite

possibilities out of the current morbidities of our time. This has to be done through an examination of both the contemporary conditions of possibility and the historical crucible from which this moment emerges in various contexts.

For example, writers such as Tietze and Humphrys (2015) and Mair (2013) suggest that a significant historical shift has occurred in which the mode of politics that was distinctive in the twentieth century has been replaced by what they refer to as an *anti-politics*—modes of political engagement that are either deeply cynical or profoundly opportunistic. They argue that, on one hand, there is an increasingly dispassionate and even antagonistic response from citizens to politicians, political parties and the political process that is articulated through organic eruptions of protest and electoral volatility but tend to become diffuse in the absence of political direction from an increasingly anaemic traditional left. On the other hand, they suggest that political projects from across the ideological spectrum have also mobilised this sentiment for their own political ends—from Trumpism and Brexit on the right to the likes of Syriza and Podemos on the left—each arguing for the need to apparently enact a different form of politics that is closer to the will of the citizenry. Rather than simply analysing these moments as a consequential outcome of a citizenry that is fundamentally racist, conservative, populist and so on, they argue for a need to appreciate the erosion of the social compact between old political orders and the citizenry, as well as the importance of new forms of social movements that have often not been fully appreciated as an innovative mode of political organisation.

Taking this line of argument further in the context of the political mobilisation of race in the United States, Coates (2017) argues that this has exposed the historical centrality of whiteness to nationhood, which has been concealed beneath what he refers to as a *patina of decency*. He also suggests that simply blaming the White working class as a group of thoughtless bigots and racists is a low hanging analytic fruit that does not jeopardise the hegemonic intellectual project and belies the fact that whiteness, White supremacy and White privilege have been at the heart of the United States as a social, political and economic project since slavery. However, in moments of relative economic prosperity, this centrality of whiteness was obscured from sight and hidden behind discourses of multi-racialism, carnivalesque notions of diversity, and colour blindness. But austerity and increasing economic pressures on Whites have yielded a return to the foundational values of the United States—White supremacy, privilege and prosperity. With hindsight, this was perhaps an easy political rebound for the likes of Trump and others to literally and figuratively weaponise and capitalise on. The point here is that rather than counterfactually viewing the current circumstances as a mere reflection of an unthinking citizenry, it is in fact a reflection of a resurgence of a set of political continuities that have been premised on raced binaries, fractures and fault lines but have been cloaked since the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

Similarly in countries such as South Africa, elements of populism on both the right and the left of the political spectrum have reverberated throughout society. While these moments allow for the possibility of a radical shift in our politics and our actions as citizens and institutions, we should always be mindful that populism can also open up spaces for race being deployed in the service of racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2015)—potentially accompanied by the tragedies of anti-intellectualism, pragmatism, opportunism, authoritarianism, and

repression and the suppression of ideas and peoples. However, it would be an analytic error, in my view, to once more think about those constituencies being mobilised as unsophisticated political cannon fodder with a false consciousness, whether on the left or the right. Calls for free, quality, decolonised education reflect longstanding challenges around access to education—a pivotal site which is considered a proxy by many to mean access to the economy in the future for Black South Africans. Likewise, the question of land expropriation without compensation, irrespective of the technicist arguments about whether the land is arable, whether it is likely to be optimally utilised, and so on, not only is both a real manifestations of a desire for Blacks to reclaim land and to be involved in the agrarian economy, but also signals a symbolic desire for historical restitution and belonging in a country in which they have been historically dispossessed of land and a sense of rootedness. While these seemingly disconnected political calls may run the risk of being catalysed around narrow and reactionary forms of Black Nationalism, ethnicism and Africanism, they also simultaneously reflect a set of inter-related historical, social and political exclusionary realities that have not been adequately redressed in the national transformation agenda over the last two and a half decades. Grosfoguel (2011) emphasises that complexifying our understandings of these kinds of historical moments is not simply a form of elevating a phenomenology of social experience but takes seriously that all knowledge is also epistemically located and can therefore offer us alternative and deeper understandings of the workings of power in local social contexts—understandings that do not simply rely on a set of universal Western logics.

On the other side of the spectrum in South Africa, discourses and practices of White protectionism continue to reveal not only how the loss of political and class privilege remains met by resistances but also how whiteness in South Africa was historically premised on coalescing around notions of threat—ironically generating the perfect storm in which contemporary White loss of privilege is also once again associated with White threat perception. In this instance, resurgences in modes of White nationalism are perhaps all too easily projected onto *Other* racist Whites rather than being seen as core to the history of whiteness in our social formation. In addition, while whiteness in South Africa certainly shares elements of White global normativity, it is equally true that it has a set of situated particularities that has also meant that it is internally fractious, precarious and unstable, and therefore prone to certain intransigent and resistant responses (see Straker, 2013, for example).

In both the above instances, on-going analytics of the current historical moment then also illuminate the extent to which the ideologies of racial tolerance and pacification that were inaugurated through processes such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its attendant discourses of rainbow nationism continue to be exposed for the race–class elisions that they have contributed to.

To be clear, this type of analysis is not merely a knee-jerk defence of identity politics but is an attempt to appreciate how different epistemic locations can offer us multiple perspectives, can deliver new analytic insights, and can open up the possibilities of plural understandings of modernity (Grosfoguel, 2011). As we attempt to understand the renewed activation of racial alterities across various contexts today, we have to be mindful to avoid the pitfalls of analytic hubris, where the simplest stock explanations are turned to in efforts

not to jeopardise our own established analyses. These are sites of intellectual despair and a refuge for unreflexive scholars who are often trapped within a universalising logic and should be avoided at all costs if we are to re-affirm and re-animate critical race scholarship and anti-racist praxis with the required degree of perspicacity.

Non-Linear Histories in Making and Resisting Race in South Africa

Key to contemporary debates about critical race theorising are recurring questions about the intractable paradox of much of race scholarship—on one hand, generating theoretical and political gains that ultimately contribute to the demise of the fallacy of race and its per-nicious sequelae, but on the other hand, seemingly underwriting its very reproduction by theorising it as much more embedded in, and material to, social life. Here, critiques of social constructionist approaches to race (Nayak, 2006), and the emergence of the post-race para-digm in the last two decades (Fuss, 1989; Gilroy, 2001, 2010), are illustrative exemplars of this ontological debate. However, this debate also draws on intellectual strands that speak to the challenges of re-racialisation when utilising race as a proxy and heuristic construct in social research (Bowman, Seedat, Duncan, & Burrows, 2006), discursive reproductions of race in language and text (Goldberg, 2009; van Dijk, 1993), the re-naturalisation of race and the neutralisation of social constructionism (Soudien, 2012), and so on. Each of the critical debates listed above deserves much greater justice but falls beyond the scope of this article— suffice to say that each of them often represents a view that is critiqued for its reproduction of race or is pejoratively evaluated for its erasure of the real effects of race. Irrespective, what does seem apparent is that critical race scholarship and praxis never quite escape the gravi-tational forces of their own internally contradictory political registers. Nayak (2006) suggests that this may not be a problem in and of itself as these positions may be brought into a productive relationship with each other. Similarly, Erasmus (2017) has made the argument for a double politics around race—one that addresses both the lived consequences of being raced and its ephemeral nature within the temporalities of history. In this way, she suggests ways of understanding in which we are not enslaved by race being reified but also that we are certain not to be complicit in the erasure of its material and corporeal effects.

    South African society perhaps offers an apt illustration of these complexities, in which critical race scholarship and praxis is an outcome of the cut and thrust of combative politics, of entangled lived experiences of race, and of on-going local and global theorisation—all of which reflect a waxing and waning of non-linear histories but nevertheless reveal hard earned gains for anti-racism.

    At present, and perhaps understandably so given our history of racialised excesses with all its accoutrements under colonisation and apartheid, there remains a deep preoccupation with race at many levels of South African society. This includes questions pertaining to the continued use of racial labels as proxies for forms of redress in the service of a more equita-ble post-apartheid distributional regime; as a way of thinking through contested social relations across groups formerly differentiated by institutionalised racism within the body politic; in the context of employment equity or affirmative action and Black economic empowerment; and so on. This preoccupation has left many in a malaise about the apparent

impasse in moving beyond the fixities of race in post-apartheid South Africa, especially given the antagonistic forms that many of these debates take within the public domain. But these apparent fixities belie the complex nature of the raced subject, both historically and in our contemporary social reality. Non-racial and anti-racist projects have not simply collapsed in on themselves in the service of re-inscribing racial hierarchies (see, for example, Gillespie, 2010; Goldberg, 2009). Rather, even though historical instantiations of race making and resistance to it may be interpreted as a socio-political form of repetition compulsion (Freud, 1990), closer analysis suggests that each of these moments may in fact be read as an incremental anti-racist attempt at the mastery of the historical and collective traumata of racism embedded within colonisation and apartheid.

Historically, by the late 1800s and early 1900s, wealthier and more educated "Coloured" males were granted a limited franchise in the Cape colony, which was partly due to dependency on their skilled labour supply, and political concessions were thus made (Goldin, 1989). However, the imperatives of newer forms of capital accumulation associated with mining facilitated more fixed and distinctive forms of racial ordering and the creation of differently raced subjects. The increasing competition between Black and White labour led to pressures on White labour, and the proliferation of what then became known as the "poor white" problem. The Carnegie Commission of 1922 was established to address the "poor white" problem and highlighted the importance of institutionalised racism as a potential solution for the protection of the White minority, shifting the emphasis away from the limitations of scientific racism to institutionally supported racism to prevent miscegenation and to ensure the interests of the White population (Suffla, Stevens, & Seedat, 2001). During this period, there was a growing awareness that the only way in which South African capitalism was to flourish along its chosen developmental pathway was if it was even more racially ordered. Up until 1948, segregationist policies were instituted much more formally, discursive practices reflected the underlying material differences between distinct racial categories and affected all sectors of the Black population, suggesting that a clear trajectory towards the complete disenfranchisement of all Blacks was becoming apparent.

But, at the turn of the twentieth century, there was already a developed and growing awareness of the common economic plight and social position that provided the impetus for "Coloureds" and "Africans" to forge significant alliances in organisations such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union and the African National Congress. Despite imposed racial divides, these political thrusts were influenced by forms of multi-racialism and Black Nationalism—signalling early (albeit limited) resistances to a growing institutionalisation of a racially segregated social formation (Callinicos, 1987).

The racialised nature of South African society in the 1940s and the National Party's election victory in 1948 saw the foundational elements of apartheid being established over the next 15 years. While the "Grand Apartheid" legislative processes were clearly important, it was also through the quotidian experiences of this regulation that citizens' subjectivities were shaped through ideological interpellation and reproduction in the acts of everyday incivilities, as well as through the generation of increased White threat perception and defensiveness in the face of the stereotypical constructions of Black threat. By the 1960s and 1970s, an organic economic and social crisis arose internally, suggesting that while racism

had been functional and imperative to capitalist accumulation in South Africa, it was rapidly reaching its ceiling and did not possess an infinite pliability (Saul, 1986). Apartheid policy could no longer ensure the long-term interests of both national and international capital, and while the state responded more repressively, it also attempted to maintain the system through an ideological onslaught that involved the buttressing of institutionalised racism with increased forms of symbolic and cultural racism and subject formation (e.g., through education, religion, the racialisation of ethnicity/culture/tradition, and even the discursive recalibration of racial categories such as "Native" to "Bantu" to "African" to "Black"). This was later also accompanied by attempts to reform the apartheid political system in the 1980s, allowing for greater levels of physical mobility into urban areas by Blacks, new voting systems to co-opt sections of the Black population (through the Tricameral Parliament), the relaxation of certain "Petty Apartheid" laws, and so forth (Alexander, 1985; Terreblanche & Nattrass, 1990).

But, collective forms of political resistance that emphasised non-racialism, Black consciousness and anti-racism opened the way once more for different constructions of the raced subject. By the 1940s, several organisations representing the interests of various Black groupings in South Africa coalesced to form the Non-European Unity Movement. As a central principle, non-collaboration was adopted as a means of resisting all segregationist policies and institutional structures that were increasingly coming into being, to generate an unworkable system. This "boycotting" strategy was accompanied by the principle of non-racialism and placed the idea of opposing racial categorisation and classification in the context of resisting a system that was not simply racially hierarchical but was ordered in the service of economic exploitation. In her critique of Goldberg's (2009) argument on the ways in which non-racialism obfuscated the ability of progressive movements to visibilise racism, Gillespie (2010) notes how non-racialism was in fact also connected to specific left-leaning, anti-oppressive political movements that were politically productive. These need to be distinguished from the call to non-racialism by White liberals from the Torch Commando, to the Liberal Party and the Congress of Democrats—a current that was critiqued by Lembede and Sobukwe in the development of Pan-Africanism, and Biko in his espousing of Black consciousness (see, for example, Biko, 1988). Instead, Black consciousness employed a mode of strategic essentialism as both a political and discursive practice that acted to unify Blacks across racial boundaries but was also premised on a metaphysics of blackness and an active opposition to the deleterious effects of apartheid racism. Even later in the 1980s, elements of non-racialism, Black solidarity and anti-racism were deployed in the historical period in which the boycott and non-collaboration practices were increasingly being relied upon once more in resisting apartheid—in political sites such as the Tricameral Parliament, for example—but also combined with anti-exploitative calls amongst left-leaning resistance movements in the Leninist–Trotskyist tradition, more specifically (Soudien, 2016).

Several points can be gleaned from the aforementioned. The first is that the nature of the raced subject changes over time, not only categorically but also discursively and in terms of social and political identities. The second is that within these historical processes, strands of continuity and discontinuity are clearly evident in traditions of making and resisting race. Thirdly, while this illustrates the treacherous adaptive potential and perilous mutability of

race, it also suggests that it is not static and fixed as a social construct or lived reality, and therefore, a contestatory politics remains a mainstay of critical race scholarship and praxis. The cursory history referred to above perhaps reflects how political gains were nevertheless made, despite the intractable paradox referred to previously—that critical race scholarship and praxis were driven by the ethical and political imperatives to address the effects of the changing nature of race on our lived experiences, but simultaneously worked towards its fundamental dismantling.

Of course, we have to be cognisant of the analytic contributions of the post-race paradigm, in which writers such as Gilroy (2001, 2010) suggest that the historical conditions for the emergence and maintenance of race have changed so fundamentally, that even resistances to race have increasingly been co-opted into newer forms of racial neo-liberalism. But, we also need to be mindful of the continued valence of race in its relationship to modes of exploitation and ways in which its currency as a mode of difference and inequality remains largely visible within many parts of the globe today. Under these conditions, the logics of the post-race paradigm are yet to be fully tested, and we have to consider Goldberg's (2015) assertion that the post-race paradigm may also itself be deeply implicated as part of the contemporary lens through which race is now being refracted.

New Frontiers of Race and Critical Humanism

In the concluding section of this article, I would like to highlight three particular avenues of inquiry that present promising new frontiers for race scholarship, praxis and critical humanism. These include some of the analytic prospects of the post-race paradigm, the possibilities within the emergence of a politics of raced embodiment and affect, and the potential in studies on the constitution of the human.

First, while a contestatory politics has been central to critical race praxis, it has not been without its challenges. As mentioned earlier, within the discursive turn as well as the deep critiques of social constructionism, questions as to whether it was possible to undo race, yet continue to reinscribe it through speaking and doing it, abounded. At the same time, the post-race paradigm introduced the possibilities of thinking about race as a market identifier within neo-liberalism and as a site for the cultural commoditisation of blackness and whiteness (beyond the material realities and metaphysics of race). While I have argued that the continued valence of race in many contexts today may mean that a post-race paradigm does not fit snugly as an analytic point of traction, we should also not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Gilroy (2001) makes the point that we need to be cautious and vigilant of the ways in which resistances to race may lose credibility through being appropriated into the market in particular, resulting in critiques of race moving forwards and backwards simultaneously.

Fanon (1963) of course raised cautions about this early relationship between race, rapid upward class mobility and the market, in the newly independent ex-colonies, and noted that within the Black comprador bourgeoisie,

> spoilt children of yesterday's colonialism and of today's national governments, they organize the loot of whatever national resources exist. Without pity, they use today's

> *national distress as a means of getting on through scheming and legal robbery, by*
> *import-export combines, limited liability companies, gambling on the stock exchange,*
> *or unfair promotion. They are insistent in their demands for the nationalization of com-*
> *merce, that is to say the reservation of markets and advantageous bargains for nationals*
> *only. As far as doctrine is concerned, they proclaim the pressing necessity of national-*
> *izing the robbery of the nation. (p. 47)*

Gilroy's (2001) cautions are clearly still pertinent today:

> *where blackness reaffirmed itself physically, the market adjusted through the creation*
> *of personal hygiene, health and care products for Blacks; where Blacks agitated for*
> *economic parity, the market adjusted for this by introducing aspirational products to*
> *signal black social mobility; and where blacks called for a recognition of their lived*
> *experiences, Blaxploitation as a cultural phenomenon emerged. (Stevens, Bell, Sonn,*
> *Canham, & Clennon, 2017, p. 467)*

Clennon (in Stevens et al., 2017) makes the point that the

> *disavowal between blackness and whiteness over the centuries has been transformed*
> *into market obscuration and segmentation via the mechanisms of "market freedom"*
> *and "individuality," in so doing, becoming more about market relations than race per*
> *se, where individuality becomes a market proxy for whiteness. (p. 464)*

The injunction from within the post-race paradigm to repudiate and disavow race because of its potential appropriation into neo-liberalism is a site of critical inquiry at both the local and global levels that has to be further explored. While local markets are adept at such appropriations, we also need to be cognisant of the ways in which even resisting raced subjects can also be co-opted in the service of new forms of imperialist penetrations into Africa and other locations in the South, especially when these mobilisations come in the guise of discourses of North–South relations of various kinds and forms. Understanding such new logics will be important in extending the lineage of critical race scholarship and praxis in this period of late capitalism.

Second, and in returning to race in a context such as contemporary South Africa, it is apparent that a politics of embodiment and affective inflexion in relation to the unfinished business of race has also begun to emerge more prominently. Rather than understanding this as running counter to the historico-materialist analyses and politics of race and racism that tended to dominate critical race theorising for much of the twentieth century, this perhaps opens up newer sites for the analysis of subjectivity and may thus hold political and ethical promise.

On one hand, writers like Canham (2017) and Stevens (2016a) both explore the operations of racism and the manifestations of rage on and in the Black body. Canham (2017) makes the argument that embodied Black rage can be positively construed of as agentic, a form of solidarity or affective resonance, an articulation of historical trauma, and an expression of self-love (see also, Erasmus, 2017, on the translation of political love into public life). Stevens (2016a) suggests that this is all possible because it is within the body that subjectivity

itself is materialised. Of course, within Western modernity, codifications of the body have been and remain central to processes of alterity and marginalisation—the use of physiognomic features, accent, language, dress code and skin colour have all been markers of difference in the convoluted process of *Othering*. As such, the body is the quintessential psychosocial zone (Saville-Young, 2011), the interface between the individual and the social, as it is critical to the formation of the Self as well as being simultaneously socially inscribed. The import of this analysis for studies of race, embodiment and affectivity should of course not be lost on us, as the bodily realm comes to represent a site in which the individual and the social converge, where the social is translated and enacted personally and interpersonally, and the Self is mobilised or activated within interactional moments: "Here, the body can be seen variously, for example, as a canvass, as an instrument of power, as a communicative tool, as a mode of reinstating citizenship, and of course, as means of reconstituting obliterated psychic space" (Stevens, 2016b, p. 94). Fanon (1963), eloquently argued for how Black subjects are transformed into objects or things within conditions of coloniality, by reductively collapsing entire histories of colonised peoples into their Black bodies and then onto their Black skins. The conjunction of the Black soma and psyche is not only perforated but the psychic lives of Black subjects are increasingly declared absent and are eventually obliterated. Within the context of current social movements, foregrounding the historical trauma and "pain" of the Black body can be legitimately interpreted as an attempt to overcome the soma–psyche binary and to recover these sequestered psychic components of Self. Rather than thinking about embodied enactments merely as psychologically regressed states of functioning or a relegated form of politics because of its apparent distance from language and traditional political argumentation, the body is a profound site of materialised psychic expression and subjectivity (Stevens, 2016b; Stevens et al., 2017). While certainly not romanticising or valorising embodiment and affective states such as rage, especially when they may be translated into forms of reactionary violence, this approach offers us an opportunity to tether these phenomena to historical and material conditions—opening up the realm of a politics of embodiment and affect that is also socially situated beyond traditional intrapsychic and individualist analyses.

On the other hand, much has also been written on the affective dimensions of whiteness in contemporary South Africa. Straker (2013), while recognising the historical instability of whiteness, also points to additional forms of unsettled whiteness today. Drawing on Eng and Han's (2000) ideas of racial melancholia as a complicated form of mourning losses pertaining to one's racial identifications, resulting in sadness, alienation and confusion, she suggests that this unsettled nature of whiteness is important to confront as it may allow Whites to live more productively with their own limitations. Living with a potential powerlessness, despite relative privilege, as well as a sense of betrayal by one's own group of the ideals that one imagined that it embraced, may be partly related to why so many Whites now publicly express shame about racism (Straker, 2013). Others such as Eagle (2018) and Stevens (2018) have both engaged with moments in which White privilege, subjectivity, and whiteness are the conceivably legitimate recipients of anti-White sentiment and Black rage in a climate of Afrocentricity and a renewed decolonial impulse. Both suggest that hatred may be a mechanism through which to surface in the White perpetrator, bystander or beneficiary, a shame

and complicity at having been the historical beneficiaries of a racist dividend—especially in contexts of on-going racialised inequality. While this is often experienced as paralysing and unresolved for White subjects, it is perhaps precisely in the apparent irresolvability that the possibilities of psychosocial reorganisation, recalibration and change continue to be pursued and grappled with in ways that are uncertain and open ended. These are important pathways to thinking through how one addresses self-alienation associated with race, while at the same time being careful not to recentre whiteness (Stevens, 2007). The latter is an important caveat, given that the global normativity and historical hegemony of whiteness have perhaps engendered in it an implicit drive towards recognition-seeking—even if through the gratuitous pathos of complicity, shame and self-hatred—and so we need to be mindful of such a potential pitfall.

Approaches such as these open up the possibilities for re-animating our understandings of the complex relationships between affectivity, embodiment, subjectivity and materiality. In addition, they may trouble our taken-for-granted analyses of race and racism and extend our horizons of theory and praxis even further. Re-engaging with embodiment and affect has the potential to re-humanise critical race scholarship and praxis as the human has often ironically been disembodied and evacuated in crude identity politics in favour of essentialised race categories in many instances.

Finally, there are also interesting developments around the relationship between race and critical humanism. Here, I draw on Alexander Weheliye's (2014) book, *Habeas Viscus*, as an exemplar. Weheliye (2014) suggests that Western modernist thought has missed the centrality of the role of race in crafting the distinctions between humans, not-quite-humans and non-humans and that rather than race being an effect of these conceptions of humanity, that it is in fact central to the birthing of modern, Western, liberal conceptions of man/woman—in other words, that race has helped to define precisely who we consider humans, not-quite-humans and non-humans.

He takes issue with the ideas that many contemporary writers on the human all take as their point of departure: that who is considered human or non-human is defined by relations and systems of power that we are either inside or outside of. Thereafter, they illuminate race as a mere instantiation of these relations of power, where race finds fertile ground on which to land and then becomes an illustration of how the ideas of human and non-human are played out. In other words, the modern, Western idea of human and non-human predates processes of racialisation for many of these writers. But Weheliye (2014) inverts this and suggests that race has been central to defining the modern, Western conception of what it means to be human and sees racialising assemblages as part of the processes of disciplining humanity into humans, not-quite-humans and non-humans, right from the onset of Western modernity itself. Stated differently then, Weheliye (2014) cites Dorothy Roberts' profound assertion that

> . . . *race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that is disguised as a biological one.* (p. 51)

Weheliye's (2014) audacious argument has two consequences for us: the first is, that if this genre of human and non-human that characterises our thinking today can be approached differently, especially if we pivot and speak from the perspective of those who

are considered non-human, then perhaps we can start to rethink what the very idea of human means and challenge the very nature of the raced binaries of our world today. How could we conceptualise being human if we asked the question from the vantage point of those who have been excluded from this domain of human? When, for example, we study Black subjects, we often try to re-assert humanity, but is there a potential for a new imaginary of what the human may look like outside of this recuperative conception? The second consequence is very much aligned to the current decolonial moment, which also calls for adopting a sceptical epistemic attitude towards Western modernity and its associated forms of knowledge, power, being and praxis. As Kundera (1996) notes,

> [t]he first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster. (p. 4)

If a central tenet of decolonial thinking is also to pursue modes of epistemic justice, then the recovery of subordinated knowledge must be a crucial act in which we seek to expand the archive and challenge the colonial and imperial canon through the pursuit of the archival slivers that expose us to alternative imaginaries. Already, we see these possibilities in epistemes that are not attempting a recuperative idealism in relation to an essential Black subjectivity that was uninterrupted by coloniality but are foregrounding newer African feminisms that have ruptured from strands of Black feminism in the United States, embodied politics that are both real and metonymic, new organic social movements, standpoint approaches to life and death in the quotidian and so on. Such an approach suggests that at the level of social subjects, we have to continue to illuminate the spaces between the fixed binaries of Black and White that highlight more plural forms of humanity that reveal greater levels of heterogeneity in our societies.

So as we stand on the precipice, poised to step into a despairing social abyss today, we are also confronted with the promise of new vistas on our horizon. As Stevens (2016b) notes, for those of us who constantly think

> about bending the curve of the moral universe towards the ideals of emancipation, egalitarianism and collective well-being, . . . we will have to avoid recoiling into nihilism, fatalism, and narrow essentialisms, and seriously [recover meaningful histories] and begin crafting new forms of critical humanism based on complex subjectivities. (p. 95)

NOTES

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