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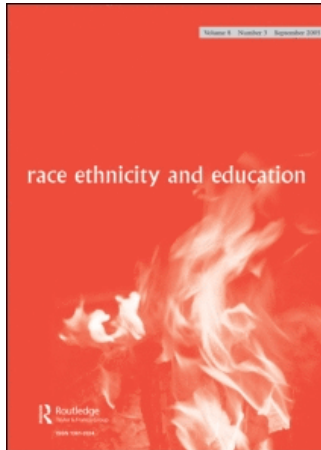
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Caught between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’? Talking about ‘race’ in a post-apartheid university classroom

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This paper explores difficulties in talking about ‘race’ and difference in a post-apartheid university classroom. The data come from classroom-based research conducted in a first-year undergraduate English Studies course at a historically ‘white’ and Afrikaans university in South Africa. Drawing on poststructuralist ideas on discourse and the self, discourse and society, I analyse moments from classroom discourse and argue that the ways in which the students talk and think about ‘race’ and culture echo both resonances of the past as well as discourses in current circulation. I draw on the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia in order to understand why ‘race’ is simultaneously a taboo topic and an important self-identifier (the product of both apartheid discourses of discrimination and post-apartheid discourses of equity and redress) and argue for the need to deconstruct essentialist notions of ‘race’ and culture in the post-apartheid classroom.

...the word is the most sensitive index of social changes, and what is more, of changes still in the process of growth, still without definite shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularised and fully defined ideological systems.... The word has the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change. (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 19)

Language is more than a crucial indicator of social change; following Bakhtin/Voloshinov, it is in looking at language that we can discern change in process, or ‘changes still in the process of growth’ and it is the words we use and choose which shape and organise our experience.¹ Of course it is not just words but meanings, or, discourse, ‘ways of organising meaning’ (Pennycook, 1994, p. 128) which shape our experience. Our choices in the words we use are, however, constrained by the discourses available to us. This paper draws on such poststructuralist ideas on discourse and the self, discourse and society (see Davies, 1990, 1991; Weedon,

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1997). It is thus set against the view that language, or expression, and lived experiences are intimately connected and that discourse is central in constructing identity and in constructing as well as reflecting social change. In Stuart Hall's words, it is only 'within the discursive and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities' that 'events, relations and structures' can be constructed 'within meaning' (Hall, 1992, p. 253). Such a view of discourse implies that discourse is an instrument of power (Fairclough, 1992; Blommaert, 2005). Thus discourse reflects and constructs unequal power relations and can also be mobilized to transform these.

'Race' in post-apartheid South Africa

More than 10 years after the first democratic elections in South Africa, racial classification terms, which simultaneously contain past and present meanings, are as prevalent in public and private life as they were during apartheid. Posel (2001a) notes the continued identification of social actors by 'race' in conversation and the media as well as the use of the apartheid 'race' categories in the Employment Equity Act.² Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) took the lead in the population censuses of 1996 and 2001 using the apartheid racial categorisation system of Black/African, Coloured, Indian and White to classify 'race'. There are compelling reasons for the use of racial categories to fulfil goals of redress and equity. However, while equity goals drive the continued need for racial categorisation and identification, it is interesting that the decision to use the categories of Black/African, Indian and Coloured (all of whom represent designated groups for Equity purposes as do females), instead of an overarching category of Black, was not ultimately resisted. To a great extent, continuing 'race'-based social inequality in South Africa precludes us from being able to 'exit' 'race' or even from being able to think about 'race' differently. Furthermore, since there is no specific legislation that defines the racial categories in common use, this means 'that the legislation continues with a reliance on the common sense of the existence of the four races of the past' as Maré (2001, p. 84) points out. Such terms then continue to perpetuate the use of racialised language and thinking and 'brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads' with apartheid meanings (Bakhtin, quoted in Morris, 1997, p. 76). As Posel argues: 'Previously the locus of privilege, race has now become the site of redress. And it has taken a form that gives renewed significance to the catalogue of race established under apartheid' (Posel, 2001b, p. 68).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that research on 'race' and identity in schooling in South Africa (Soudien, 1998, 2001; Carrim and Soudien, 1999; Dolby, 1999, 2000), has pointed out that 'race' has continued to be the most significant factor in post-apartheid identities.

The study

Previous work on 'race' and identity in South African education has generally been conducted from a sociological perspective focusing on schooling as a site for the

continued production of racialised identities (see Soudien, 1998, 2001; Carrim & Soudien, 1999; Dolby, 2000). In contrast to this, my research focuses on pedagogy (and thus classroom discourses) in a higher education setting. This paper is concerned with difficulties in talking about 'race' and difference in a post-apartheid South African university classroom. The data discussed come from a study conducted in 2001 at a South African university that can be described as a privileged institution historically linked to 'white', Afrikaans culture. In 2001, it still had a large majority of 'white' students, who mostly spoke Afrikaans as a first language, but with an increasing number of English first-language students and a minority of 'black' students (among these, an even smaller minority of 'black' African students).³ The study was undertaken against the backdrop of higher education policy (notably the Department of Education's (1997) White Paper on higher education which emphasized the role and indeed the obligation of higher education in achieving social transformation. To this end, the white paper outlined one of the four purposes of higher education as 'to contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens' (Department of Education, 1997, 1.3). Linked to this, universities were given responsibility to play a crucial role in the 'uprooting of deep-seated racism and sexism' (2.32) and in 'developing a campus environment that is sensitive to racial and cultural diversity' (3.42). The emphasis then is on changes in institutional culture as well as in curriculum which will work against racism and sexism and which will help students develop a strong sense of social responsibility. Since my research took place at a historically white university, which was relatively untransformed in 2001, having only recently begun to admit black students to the campus, I was interested to explore the extent to which it was possible to work towards such policy aims as discussed above in the absence of formal programmes of curriculum change in the institution.

Methodology

I researched my own practice teaching a group of 17 first-year undergraduate students, all but two of whom were 'white' and most of whom were Afrikaans first-language speakers. I taught two South African literature courses, which were part of the general English studies curriculum: South African short stories and South African poetry. In conducting practitioner-research, I drew on ethnographic tools (Gillborn, 1998; Spindler & Hammond, 2000) as well as a limited form of action research (Carr & Kemis, 1986) particularly focusing on the reflective aspect of the latter. I collected data by video-recording my classes (later transcribing significant moments from these), keeping a teaching journal, which included field notes, collecting students' journal writing and more formal written assignments completed during the course, as well as through interviews with 6 of the 17 learners towards the end of the course.⁴ My teaching journal enabled me to reflect on each class taught as well as interactions with students outside of class and helped me to navigate my way around the video data during the process of analysis. Data were analysed using an ethnographic and interpretive approach (Denzin, 1997; Barton & Hamilton, 1998), through which I

identified common discourses as well as anomalies and ruptures. In some instances my thematic discourse analysis is supplemented by a more linguistic form of discourse analysis, for example in analysing positioning through pronoun use and metaphor. At times there were tensions in combining what sometimes felt like three different roles: researcher, teacher-researcher and teacher; I explore these in detail in McKinney (2005).

In both my teaching and the research, I aimed at a critical analysis of the social issues and representations of South Africa in the texts we were working with, as well as of the socially constructed nature of students' reading responses. I thus took a social justice approach, informed by critical pedagogy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 2001). Of course, dealing with social inequality in South Africa inevitably means dealing with the oppressive apartheid past and its continuing effects in the present. However, many of my students, though not all, found it difficult at times to deal with the apartheid past as represented in the South African literature prescribed. Elsewhere, I have analysed the way in which students' resistant responses are tied to the undesirable ways in which they felt positioned by the texts under study. I have argued that they resist such positioning (whether real or imagined) when it threatens their own subjectivities, or that aspect of their identities that they attempt to construct for themselves as 'new', post-apartheid South Africans (McKinney, 2003, 2004).

Teaching South African literature, I noticed the difficulties both the students and I experienced in talking about 'race', and began to consider how such difficulties might be related to the problems students experienced in engaging with texts dealing with the apartheid past. I became convinced that finding productive (including non-essentialist) ways of talking about 'race', culture and difference was central to intervening in their resistance and to dealing with these issues in the classroom. In this paper I analyse different moments from classroom discourse which illustrate the students' struggles in talking about 'race' and culture. I will argue that the ways in which the students talk and think about 'race' and culture reflect how they are caught in the 'inbetween' period of present-day, post-apartheid South Africa. My analysis explores how far 'old' meanings live on in the students' discourses and how far new ones might be emerging. I begin by examining hesitancy and avoidance in the use of 'race' terms at different moments in the course, and then move on to examine how 'race' and culture are often used in essentialist ways through the lens of a particular tutorial discussion which focused on the notion of 'culture'.

Hesitancy and avoidance in the use of 'race' terms

'Culture' as 'race'

A recurrent way in which students talked and wrote about difference, and more specifically about 'race', was in terms of 'culture'. Early on in the short story course, I asked my students to respond to the following questions in their journals: (1) How would you describe being South African? (2) Do you think there is a collective South

African identity? In their responses, many students wrote about difference in terms of 'culture'. For example:⁵

- Liesel: (...) It's exciting being South African (...) There [is] so much potential because we have such a lot of cultures...
- Riana: In South Africa (...) you can enjoy *boerevors* rolls and Malayan curries and *mieliepap* and an English breakfast all in one town. And you can enjoy this with people from the original culture.
- Irma: In South Africa (...) we have learned how to cross the cultural barriers...
- Jaco: There [are] still too many cultural differences (...) that are a thorn in the flesh of SA becoming more unified.

On some occasions, students were explicit about conflating the constructed categories of 'race' and 'culture' as Liesel is in her journal writing on the same entry: 'there's more interaction between racial/cultural groups than ever before.' Looking at possible reasons for this way of talking about 'race' and culture, one finds a complex pull between past discourses of 'race' and culture during apartheid, and present attempts to avoid 'race' and embrace non-racialism. Students may be using the term 'culture' because it is a euphemism for 'race'; 'culture' then helps them to avoid the term 'race' with its overt apartheid history as well as its connection to the word racism. Ironically, while culture may enable students to avoid the term 'race', it was also a term [ab]used during apartheid (along with 'race', nation, ethnic group and population group).

In a deconstruction of the use of the term 'culture' (and specifically 'cultures') in apartheid South Africa, anthropologist Robert Thornton wrote:

Virtually everywhere, from all sides, in law and politics, in the press and from the public channels of communication, we hear that South Africa is composed of many cultures, and that these cultures are the products and properties of different peoples or *volke*. (Thornton, 1988, p. 17)

Historian, Dubow (1995) argues that culture played a crucial role in the segregationist discourse of apartheid. Dubow points out that in the wake of strong anti-eugenics ideas post-Second World War, 'the theoreticians of apartheid studiously adopted ambiguous attitudes towards scientific racism and they were most careful to couch their explanations of racial difference in culturalist and religious rather than biological terms' (Dubow, 1995, p. 288). Dubow thus refers to the 'cultural essentialist discourse of Afrikaner nationalism' (1995, p. 290) which underpinned apartheid. He further points out that 'cultural differences' were the ultimate justification of apartheid: 'culture represented a means of insisting on *difference*—crucially without the need to define precisely on what grounds that difference was predicated' (1995, p. 358, original emphasis). Thornton and Dubow thus show how saturated the discourse of apartheid was with references to cultural differences. Ironically, the use of culture as a euphemistic replacement for 'race' in the 'new' South Africa thus has powerful apartheid resonances. Although there were no such attempts to avoid references to 'race' during apartheid, the cultural difference argument was used to posit that it was necessary to segregate different 'cultures' (collectively 'white' from 'black'; and specifically intra-'black' 'groups' such as Zulu from Xhosa) in order to prevent seemingly inevitable violent conflict.

My own students would have been exposed to both this apartheid 'culturalist' discourse, as well as to newer discourses of non-racialism and culture as an attempt to move away from 'race'. The use of 'culture' instead of 'race' at present must be read against the fact that 'race' is still a divisive factor in South African society and that racism is still clearly on the agenda as a significant problem which makes students particularly sensitive about the use of the term 'race' and often of racial terms in general.

Hesitancy

On some occasions, students showed particular hesitancy in their use of 'race' terms, and attempted to rephrase what they were saying explicitly to avoid such terms. This supports my argument above that the students may be using culture euphemistically as an alternative to the use of 'race'. What follows is one example of this from a seminar on the second short story in the course ('Nocturne' by Alex la Guma, set in District Six⁶). It involved an exchange between one of the male students, Alistair, and myself while the other students were working individually with the text.

- Alistair: What nationality do you think they or um c-can you s-say that they're [pause] co-coloured? [said very hesitantly]
- CM: um, yes you cou//
- Alistair: in both 'Rain' and this ['Nocturne'] that they're mostly coloured people
- CM: yes except that in 'Rain', Solly is described as//
- Alistair: // *ʒa*, Solly's described
- CM: white and Jewish, Siena sees his face so we've got that [pause]
- CM: nationality, obviously South African//[Alistair: yes, laughs] but in terms of race [lifts hands up]
- Alistair: I was trying to be politically correct
- CM: *ja*⁷, well (pause)
- (Tutorial 5, 05/03/01)

In this exchange, Alistair clearly demonstrates his hesitancy in using the term 'coloured' as well as the word 'race', but is brave enough to check out his usage with me, hence his question. Initially it may seem that he is asking a purely factual question: what 'nationality' are most of the characters in the two short stories? However his reference to 'nationality', invoking the old apartheid discourse of separate nations in South Africa that accompanied the Bantustan policy,⁸ means that I, correctly, read his use of 'nationality' to mean 'race', before he even mentions the word 'coloured'. Concerned to make it clear that it was acceptable to talk about 'race', I affirmed his usage of 'coloured', and overtly replaced his term 'nationality' with that of 'race'. The fact that I was not able to carry off this usage without any sense of discomfort myself shows in my half-hearted attempt to place 'race' in physical scare quotes. (The video shows me raising my hands here but not actually making the finger gesture that I would use to indicate such quotations marks.) While my scare quote gesture would have signified for me that the term 'race' is a social construction and thus not unproblematic, the gesture would probably have

signified to Alistair that it is not 'politically correct' to use the term (and thus to speak about) 'race'.

Both Alistair's hesitancy over the use of the term 'coloured' as well as my endorsement of the term connects to complex (and ambivalent) post-apartheid discourses of 'race'. The term 'coloured' as one of the categories in the Population Registration Act of 1950 used to classify people of 'mixed-race' descent has generally been viewed as an apartheid construction, thus an example of 'ethnicity from above' (Pieterse, 1992, in Zegeye, 2001a, p. 3), and was rejected by the United Democratic Front (a liberation movement) during apartheid who used the term 'black' inclusively and politically. A broad generalisation might have been that politically conservative people classified 'coloured' (or those who would later choose to vote for the National Party) used this term in self-description, but that 'coloured' people aligned with the African National Congress (ANC) and liberation movements rejected the term. However, the term 'coloured' has persisted in the post-apartheid era, as pointed out above, and its usage cannot simply be equated with political conservatism. For example, Erasmus and Pieterse (1999, p. 178) argue that 'not all assertions of coloured identity are racist' and that 'coloured' amounts to more than an externally imposed term. In support of this, they cite research by South African historian Bickford-Smith on the use of the term 'coloured' as a self-descriptor by slave descendents in Cape Town in the 1890s to distinguish themselves from indigenous people.⁹ The two students in my class who would have been classified as 'coloured' under apartheid, Irma and Ricardo, both self-identified as 'coloured'. For example Ricardo, in a discussion of change in post-apartheid South Africa, says:

... and us coloured people, I don't know, we feel that the system [apartheid] was not good, we just feel that ... I think the coloured people is in the worst position, because in the past we didn't benefit from the system, and in the present people still get—still don't benefit. (Ricardo, Interview, 28 April 2001)

It would be considered offensive by Ricardo and Irma then if one used the prefix 'so-called' before 'coloured' or placed 'coloured' in scare quotes without doing the same for other terms such as 'black' and 'white'.

The echo of past discourses in the present?

Thus far I have discussed hesitancy and avoidance in the students' use of 'race' terms, including the way culture is often used to stand for 'race'. I have also suggested that the latter may be a form of euphemism, a reaction to the discomfort felt in talking about 'race'. Bakhtin's view of the dialogic nature of language as well as his notion of heteroglossia, 'a perception of language as ideologically saturated and stratified' (Morris, 1997, p. 15), and thus as highly intertextual resonates in the hesitancy and discomfort with which both the students and I used 'race' terms as well as referred more generally to 'race' as a concept. Bakhtin is particularly eloquent about the difficulties of seizing words and using them for one's own purposes:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language..., but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294)

While Bakhtin suggests that it is possible to 'appropriate' other's words and to 'populate' them with one's own intentions, he also points out that '[l]anguage is ... populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process ... [which] ... many words stubbornly resist' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). This raises the question of to what extent it is possible and, importantly, to what extent it is desirable, to appropriate the discourse of 'race' in South Africa. While it is a discourse that is necessary to use in order to talk about the past and to make sense of the present, it is at the same time a discourse that can distort the present and prevent us from truly moving beyond the past. This issue illustrates the complexities of moving between the past and the present in South Africa; old apartheid discourses—the resonances of culture and 'race', can trap one in the past even while one is attempting to move beyond this. In the current appropriation of apartheid racial terminology which is now forced to serve the new ends of redress, it is not easy to overcome the 'intentions and accents' of apartheid engineers.

The resilience of essentialist notions of culture and 'race'

Difference whether expressed explicitly in racial terms, or in euphemistic terms such as 'culture', was clearly an important part of the students' thinking about South Africa and, about themselves. This was particularly evident in the students' resistance to my attempts to de-essentialise culture and 'race' in different discussions. Here I focus on one class where the notion of culture was discussed at length.

In this class, which took place at the end of the South African short story course, I wanted to address the way in which students had stereotyped 'black' and 'white' cultures in their writing on the short story 'Music of the Violin' by Njabulo Ndebele. I had also planned to address the confusion (and discomfort) that had become apparent in relation to students' writing about 'race', but the entire class was taken up in a discussion on culture. Ironically, considering how frequently students were using the term 'culture' for 'race', it may well be that they thought I was attempting to deal with 'race' in an indirect way in the task I set them, which was to produce definitions of culture in small groups. Even if this were not so, given the students' ways of talking about culture, and the use of culture in apartheid ideology, it is likely that in working with the term culture, 'race' is always present. Students worked on their definitions in four small groups and then chose a spokesperson to present their definition to the class. This was followed by a whole class discussion.

- CM:¹⁰ your group's first, ok (...)
- Sunel: Ok, Keith came up with the bright idea [group laughs] 'culture is the way in which different societies express themselves and there are um different ways in which they express themselves, like traditions, food, clothes, morals, lifestyles, music, religion and entertainment um religion, we don't really know, we're not certain because different cultures, *one* culture can have different religions
- CM: ok, ok can you give me an example of that?
- Sunel: like, the Afrikaans culture, some are Buddhists, some are um Christian some are [group laughs] Hindo [sic], whatever, Moslem
- CM: right, Ok, I think if we can just comment on that quickly, that's an interesting one because you might find, if you talk about culture as these things that's all very well but when you start to, I'm jumping ahead of myself; ok I'll shut up, you carry on.¹¹
- Sunel: well, that's all, ok religion different, but music also and all those
- CM: example?
- Sunel: ok, *boeremusiek*¹² and uh the music we like or uh different kinds of music [CM:ok] and lifestyles, morals, all of them, clothes, but the traditional ones like the sari for the Moslem people [sic], and um, food, like Yorkshire pudding for the English people and *ja*, that's about all
- CM: ok, alright, next um, the next group [unclear] who's it, it's your group [points to Ricardo's group] (...)
- Ricardo: ok, you can say culture is the way people live and their traditions and um and like say, how much they drink and how much they eat, but you can also, lifestyles like people's lifestyles of the different [word 'racial' crossed out on poster but visible] groups and their beliefs basically it's people's habits and their morals
- CM: right, ok (...)
- Karel: we went and first made those little points, then we put it into a sentence 'culture is the lifestyles and traditions of different groups of people which help them establish their values' [unclear] Then we, asked us to define lifestyles and we had the Zulu lifestyle for instance, like African cultures, they have tribes and they believe in their ancestors and their forms of art differs [CM runs both hands through hair] from the Western culture, like the music and the traditional dances and uses bongo drums, drums and stuff but (?) Western society likes classical music and art and Shakespeare and ballet and more (brief pause) sophisticated stuff [students all facing forward, looking at the newsprint on the wall, but Riana turns to look at me immediately after this is said; soft 'shuuuu' exclamation sound, from me]
- CM: ok, I think that's very tricky, what you're saying here [Someone:mmm] but I think that what, the other group said, I mean, they're all tricky, I'll come back to this, now I'll just let the last group go quickly and then and then I'll see what I can do, *ja*
- Trevor: [Inaudible. Written group definition follows.]
'What different groups of people do [give examples] that distinguishes them from other groups and giving them an identity. Their beliefs and religion form part of their foundation which they, as a group, can always fall back on. Creates a sense of belonging for the individual who shares in this culture. Tradition forms a part of culture and it reminds the group of their roots.' Extract from Culture discussion (Tutorial 14, 18 April 2001)

All four groups emphasised culture as being different according to group belonging; that is, none attempted to define culture in more universal terms as, for example,

South African academic Neville Alexander does in defining culture as ‘the common core of humanity’ and the ‘practices that all human beings engage in’ (Alexander, 1989, in Zegeye, 2001b, p. 342). In their definition, and in the discussion that followed, students emphasised a view of culture(s) as discrete, generally homogenous entities, not dissimilar to that which Gilroy critiques as at the heart of the ‘new racism’ in Britain:

[c]ulture is conceived along ethnically absolute lines, not as something intrinsically fluid, changing, unstable, and dynamic, but as a fixed property of social groups rather than a relational field in which they encounter one another and live out social, historical relationships. When culture is brought into contact with race it is transformed into a pseudobiological property of communal life. (Gilroy, 1990, p. 266)

The students’ definitions of culture thus echo the multiculturalist discourse that celebrates diversity and emphasises cultural difference, which is critiqued for reifying culture and ignoring issues of power and structural inequality (Gillborn, 1995; May, 1999).

Ricardo’s group was convinced that culture differed absolutely for ‘different racial groups’. This idea was strongly expressed by Ricardo himself, possibly based on his own perception and experiences of being ‘coloured’ in a ‘white’ neighbourhood, but another student in this group, Pieter, supported the idea as well giving an example of ‘black’ culture in the circumcision rituals marking entrance into adulthood for boys. While this was easy to deconstruct (circumcision rituals are not universally practised by ‘black’ Africans in South Africa, e.g. uncommon among isiZulu speakers), Ricardo and Pieter were still not completely convinced by my argument that not all ‘white’ people share the same culture and not all ‘black’ people share the same culture. After some discussion during the group work, Ricardo decided to draw a line through the word ‘racial’ in the group’s definition (though it was still clearly visible on the presentation newsprint), but this was more because he was not sure he could argue his point convincingly, than because he was convinced by my position.

Karel’s group was less direct in its linking of ‘race’ and culture, and yet it seemed clear that the group was using the terms ‘Western’ to mean ‘white’ and ‘Zulu’ to mean ‘black’ or ‘African’.¹³ In fact, the group wrote ‘African cultures’ next to Zulu in their definition. This was confirmed later in the class when we were debating the homogeneity of groups and Alistair spoke about ‘white’ people sharing a ‘similar global culture’ and ‘black’ people sharing a ‘similar global culture’. The lingering myth of the superiority of ‘white’ culture also came through in this group’s presentation, where Karel presents ‘Western culture’ as more ‘sophisticated’ than African culture. At the time I did not refute this, deciding rather to comment at the end of the four report backs, and with the exception of Riana, who shot a worried glance in my direction, none of the students showed any indication that what Karel had said might not be acceptable, even with my show of disapproval in ‘that’s very tricky’.

I attempted to deconstruct the group’s essentialist characterisation of ‘Western culture’ by asking the students (all of whom would have considered themselves part of western culture) how many of them had recently been to a ballet, classical music concert or to see a Shakespearean play. While the numbers were few, Alistair

continued to argue for an essentialist conception of culture by saying that culture is based on people's pasts:

Alistair: but aren't you looking at the generalisation. If you look at that generalisation *society has made available to you*, you look at the generalisation, you say ok, that's the culture that's and the past, and that's sort of where, you don't say y'know the people of today do that but that is where//CM: no, but I think// values are established from. [emphasis added]

Alistair's emphasis on what 'society has made available' is significant. These kinds of generalisations or cultural stereotypes are certainly what apartheid discourses made available to South Africans.

The last group's definition emphasised identity, group difference (culture 'distinguishes them from other groups') and belonging. This definition seems to draw on a metaphor of culture as a refuge which is echoed in Herman's comment later on in the discussion:

Herman: *ja*, but you still, um, nowadays still say for instance, like the Xhosa or the Zulu they still know about their nation's traditional, stereotyped culture and that still gives them a sense of belonging to that group//CM: but I think// *they still have a place to go back to when all fails*. [emphasis added]

Herman's use of the term 'nation' here in referring to Zulus and Xhosas calls up the apartheid rhetoric of separate nations according to apartheid imposed ethnic groups, referred to earlier as 'ethnicity from above'. Here culture is represented as a place of retreat in the face of disaster 'when all fails'. This notion of culture as a refuge of course presupposes a threat. Perhaps it is Herman's sense of threatened group identity (in this case Afrikaner identity because he uses the example of Afrikaner culture throughout his group's definition and presentation) which leads him to assert the homogeneity and difference of cultural groups so strongly here.¹⁴

Alistair and Herman's coupling of 'race' and culture, and their resistance to my attempts at deconstructing homogenous cultural groups, seems to follow the simple logic that cultures are homogenous and different because 'white' people and 'black' people in South Africa are so different. An expression of this logic can be seen in the exchange below which came at the end of the class after a lengthy discussion of the hybrid nature of culture and the 'messiness' of group-based cultures. Feeling that we had made some headway around these issues, I returned to the students' writing on 'The Music of the Violin' to problematise the notions of 'black culture' and 'white culture':

CM: ...some people were talking about a white culture and a black culture and I think that, I found that quite [pause] that's difficult, you have to be careful about that, because we can't, that then assumes as I was saying to this group [points to Ricardo's group] that all white people have the same culture, which is absolute nonsense, and that's//

Alistair: //but it's assuming they have a similar *global* culture (CM: well, that's right) whereas the black have a similar global culture as well

CM: which which is not true

Herman: but black, black culture and white culture are definitely different.

While my initial affirmation of Alistair's statement that 'white' people have a similar global culture seems strange, not paying careful attention to his adversarial 'but', I assumed that Alistair's 'they' referred to both 'black' and 'white' people together. Considering the discussion we were having prior to this where students were giving their own examples of hybridity, or cultural heterogeneity (especially using the example of Afrikaner culture), I was not expecting Alistair to return to the original binary division of 'black' culture and 'white' culture which I was attempting to deconstruct. Herman's statement then reinforced Alistair's argument and his discursive move took us right back to where we began in the class by reproducing the very position of completely separate and homogenous 'black' and 'white' cultures which I was problematising.

Cultural difference or racism?

In the data discussed above, we see strong essentialist views expressed by both 'black' students (e.g. Ricardo) and 'white' students, both English first-language speakers (e.g. Alistair and Keith) and Afrikaans first-language speakers (e.g. Herman and Karel). Thus, while it would be tempting to relate the students' discourses of 'race' and culture to struggles over Afrikaner identity in the context of an Afrikaans university, such a move would merely produce a falsely homogenous category of Afrikaner identity. That all the students produced such essentialist views on culture and 'race' is perhaps unsurprising when seen against the South African apartheid history. In my view, the essentialist belief that 'racial groups' in South Africa are homogenous, share the same culture, and are fundamentally different from each other is not only erroneous, but is a direct expression of apartheid ideology as it has morphed into the present. Such beliefs lead to strong 'othering' and continue to construct divisions within society.

In Carrim and Soudien's (1999) research on student identities in desegregated schools in the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces in South Africa, they write about the tendency they found amongst students and teachers 'to portray people of different "racial" groups as being culturally different'. Significantly, their research highlights the way in which cultural difference is given as the reason for continuing segregation among students in racially desegregated schools. For example, one 'coloured' student explained that 'coloured' and 'black' African students don't mix socially because: 'they have their own culture and we have our own. They do things differently from us. So they stick to themselves. And, we stick to ourselves' (Carrim & Soudien, 1999, p. 162).

Carrim and Soudien emphasise that difference was almost always negatively perceived and almost never spoken about as a strength. Wieviorka explains the relationship between such views on difference and racism in his argument that racism is the outcome of the relationship between two main discursive strategies, 'that of inferiorisation and that of differentiation' where 'difference refers to the rejection of the other, and therefore to the idea of incompatibility of cultures' (Wieviorka, 1997, p. 149). Thus strong beliefs in homogenous difference may not be racist in

themselves but it is not a big step from asserting this kind of difference to asserting incompatibility and, as Wieviorka argues, differentiation is one of the main discursive strategies involved in racism. One can see the echo of this 'incompatibility' view in the student's comment from Carrim and Soudien (1999) quoted above. We can also see it in Karel's contrasting of 'African' and 'Western' culture cited above as well as Herman's assertion that 'black culture and white culture are definitely different'. While one cannot ignore difference in South Africa, asserting the kind of cultural essentialist views of difference which were developed during apartheid, and which emphasise 'different cultures' as incompatible, is not only inaccurate, but dangerous.

The students' discussion showed little knowledge of cultural practices outside their own racially homogenous family and friendship networks. Thus while the 'white' students did not find it difficult to recognise heterogeneity within 'white' cultural practices after some class discussion, they struggled to make the leap to seeing all forms of culture as dynamic and heterogenous. It seems that the way these students have constructed their own identities through discourses of difference is deeply destabilised when the discourses of difference they draw on to do this are undermined—thus they resist my attempts to deconstruct culture. This was also the case with my attempt in a different class discussion to deconstruct 'race' in order to enable the 'white' students to identify positively with the anti-apartheid struggle, and not exclusively with the uncomfortable position of 'white' oppressors. However, complicating their attempts to maintain rigid definitions of culture and 'race' is the students' own undermining of this process. For example, the same student (Karel) who presents culture as essentially different for 'Western' ('more sophisticated') people and 'African' people expresses his frustration on a different occasion at the intrusion of 'race' into every aspect of South African life and as desiring of non-racialism: '...I would like it if all races would join hands in the race to be equal as human beings.' And Ricardo, the 'coloured' student who insisted that 'people's lifestyles' differ according to their racial categorisation, on another occasion produces a defensive discourse of non-racialism in response to my question of whether it bothers him that there are so few 'coloured' students at the university: 'Your skin tells nothing about you. What you look on the outside, that tells nothing. (...) but inside, that's what counts' (Interview, 28 May 2001). Such contradictions are found in the discourses of all the students. Thus current essentialist discourses are not a mere replication or continuation of apartheid ideology, but are part of the continual shifting, slippage, between the old and the new which has yet to fully emerge.

Conclusion

'Race' as a taboo topic, and as difficult to talk about because of its 'overpopulation' with apartheid meanings and uses, raises problems for a course that attempts to deal with the apartheid past, including issues of 'race'. The students' desires to live in, and to construct, a new post-apartheid era in which 'race' no longer dominates are often thwarted by old apartheid meanings of 'race' and culture which still live on in the

present, including in their own thinking. While I have analysed patterns in the students' ways of talking and writing about 'race', their discourses of 'race', culture and difference are often also ambiguous and contradictory, as are discourses in the broader South African society. Thus students may be strongly asserting racial difference in one context and arguing for non-racialism in another.

In this respect, the discussion on culture was both disturbing (in the resilience of cultural essentialism and apartheid ideology in the students' thinking) and encouraging (in most students' ability to recognise hybridity at least in their own cultural practices). It seems that boundaries between 'cultural' (and 'racial') groups are both erected and broken down, depending on the context and the interests at stake. Ultimately, such boundaries need to be broken down, and such categories deconstructed, so that apartheid ways of thinking and talking about 'race' and culture can be replaced and 'white' and 'black' people need no longer be trapped in apartheid meanings of whiteness and blackness as well as their consequences.

As the data discussed in this paper shows, my own attempts at deconstructing such boundaries met with mixed responses. However, in my experience, such resistance does not necessarily prevent productive engagement; on the contrary, it can provide powerful teaching moments. While not part of a linear progression, resistance may be a necessary part of the process of anti-racist pedagogy for some students and may be the only way that they can engage with particular texts at particular moments. What we need to do is to find ways of engaging productively with students' resistance. Enabling them to reflect on their views is one way of doing this. While I was not able to take transcripts of their own classroom discussion back to this group of students, we spent one class discussing some of the (transcribed) comments that students from the previous year had made, as well as a recent media article which explored reasons for many South Africans' (both 'black' and 'white') reluctance to deal with their apartheid history. The latter approach enabled me to position the problem of talking about and thus dealing with 'race' as not one particular to my group of students, but as one that all South Africans need to deal with. Positioning students in such less confrontational ways is key in moving beyond resistant responses.

Of course, pedagogy cannot be divorced from its broader social context. We need to recognise that it will be particularly difficult to redefine identities and deconstruct differences when the essentialist discourses of apartheid are still so prevalent in society. While 'old' ways of talking and meaning are being used for new purposes, they are not being replaced by new discourses. In a recent discussion of 'race' in present day South Africa, Erasmus implies that South Africans are not yet 'clear about what they want in place of race thinking' (Erasmus, 2005, p. 28). While this may be true, the co-existence of contradictory essentialist and non-essentialist ways of talking about difference may also be cause for optimism. That is if we accept Weedon's argument that 'it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it' (Weedon, 1997, p. 31).

Notes

1. I assume that Bakhtin and Voloshinov's work are authored by the same person but retain the published authors' names in my references. See Morris (1997) for a discussion of this issue of authorship.
2. I signal my understanding of 'race' as a social construct by using quotation marks for the term as well as for colour terms such as 'black' and 'white'.
3. This predominance of 'white' students is unusual in South Africa where universities generally had a minimum of 50% 'black' students enrolled, even in 2001.
4. All students gave their written consent to being participants in the study; this was negotiated in the second week of the course where the research project was explained to students and they were given letters whereby they could reflect their choice to participate or not, assured that they were under no obligation to participate; they were guaranteed confidentiality, hence my use of pseudonyms.
5. Notes on transcription: I have used conventions of punctuation to make the transcription of spoken language into writing more readable, conveying my understanding of the spoken words. // indicates overlapping speech and/or interruptions. Words in italics indicate the emphasis of the speaker. (...) indicates a gap, data omitted. Square brackets [] are used for additional transcriber's comments and minimal responses are included in brackets in the main speaker's texts; xx(Carolyn:ok)xx
6. District six in Cape Town is well known as an area that was redesignated as 'white' under the apartheid Group Areas Act. Most of the infrastructure and housing in the area was demolished in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the predominantly 'coloured' inhabitants were forcibly removed to townships on the Cape Flats (geographical periphery of the city).
7. *Ja* is the Afrikaans word for 'yes' but is also commonly used in South African English.
8. The Bantustan or homelands policy was an attempt by the apartheid government to create separate geographic areas for so-called different ethnic groups. Thus several homelands were created, including the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC), so-called 'independent' states within South Africa which were not recognised as separate states internationally.
9. See also James *et al.* (1996) and Erasmus (2001) for debates on the use of the term 'coloured' and 'coloured' identity.
10. CM = Carolyn McKinney, the researcher and teacher.
11. While there is much to say about my own discourses and responses, as well as my dual role of teacher and researcher, space precludes me from dealing with them in this paper. See McKinney (2005) for a discussion of this.
12. Literally 'farmer or Afrikaner music', a particular genre of popular, traditional Afrikaans music.
13. The choice of 'Zulu' to stand for African can probably be explained by the fact that Alistair, who was dominant in this group, comes from Kwa-Zulu Natal, an area where the majority of 'black' people are isiZulu speaking.
14. In an interview with me, Herman articulates his perception that democratic post-apartheid South Africa poses a threat to his future successes because of the rapid deterioration, economic and social, he perceives in the country.

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