

Race and South African Universities

The explosive news and video clip of four white male Afrikaner students at the University of the Free State coercing black hall-of-residence cleaners into a rugby-oriented initiation ceremony last year, including urinating on food the cleaners were made to eat, sparked outrage in South Africa and around the world. It has been held up an example of how many whites are still stuck in the apartheid era and of lingering racism in universities and society. The story received blanket coverage nationally and globally, including special reports on international television channels such as CNN and the BBC.

Meanwhile, the murder of University of Limpopo student Nkosinathi Mhlongo, by three fellow students following a Sasco-organised protest in Gauteng, barely made the news. There appear to be two strands of human rights violations emerging from these incidents, and the media and society's responses to them: racism by whites against black people prompts disgust, as it should, but not the killing of a black student by other black students. At the same time, for the past 14 years South African universities have crammed more than half a million students a day – of all races – into classrooms and campuses virtually without incident: it is quite extraordinary, in some ways, that there have not been more instances of overt racism such as that at Free State, though covert racism remains pervasive.

Reporting on these and related issues of race in South African higher education has been weak and there has been a singular lack of serious analysis of what it all means for universities and for the country. The public response of

universities has also been weak, fueling perceptions of a sector that is at best scrambling to respond coherently to an unexpected event at Free State and, at worst, should have expected such an incident but has instead been sweeping the whole issue of racism under the carpet for the past decade.

In this Special Africa Edition of *University World News*, leading intellectuals in South Africa and abroad tackle the topic of 'Race and South African universities', examining questions that have been missed in the media and exploring issues of racism on campuses, impacts of the Free State debacle and how higher education might go about mending the lingering damage to the South African psyche of four decades of apartheid – both on campuses and in broader society.

Academics speak out

Citizenship, racism and campus culture

Condemnation by the local and international media of racist initiation practices at the University of the Free State raised very serious and interesting questions about the state of, and the responsibilities of, higher education in South Africa. The media – ranging from local print and television to BBC, CNN and *The Economist* – with one or two notable exceptions beat a drum of outrage and 'back to the old South Africa'. Politicians and parliament tried to 'out-outrage' each other or, like the Freedom Front, deny any responsibility. The decision to devote a *University World News* Special Africa edition to the problem of racism in higher education is partially based on the fact that these

outpourings shed little light on what was actually going on, and even less on how to move forward. This article deals with three recently reported incidents on campuses: racism at Free State, exploitation of students at Vaal University of Technology, and violence at the University of Limpopo. It concludes by looking forward and recommending an expert group to study the state of citizenship in higher education, with a focus on race issues, and the adoption by more universities of the many 'best practice' programmes already in place at individual universities to support students.

The first two academics we approached to contribute to this edition surprised us with their responses. The first, a media-prominent black vice-chancellor, asked: "Are you not in danger of perpetuating racism here? Would it not be misconstrued as racist that two white people request an African to write about racism when the issue is so hot to handle?" The second, a media-shy senior white academic, commented: "I have nothing interesting to say about this, except that it is a major f...up." In some ways these two responses reflect aspects of the problem, such as: who should legitimately talk about it? Is there anything interesting to say about it? And, should we talk about it all?

To start on a positive note, it must be remembered that from the early 1990s higher education has had, on a daily basis, about 500,000 young people of all races mixing with each other in close quarters, and at least some of them living in mixed-race residences. The Free State case is the first major racial incident to hit the news.

This is quite remarkable for a country returning from the brink of a race war and 300 years of pent-up race hostility – or what Jonathan Jansen evocatively calls 'bitter knowledge'. This must be seen in the context of a society in which a white boy randomly shot black

people in a township only a few months ago, and where the Human Rights Commission recently declared schools the most dangerous place for children to be (where last year alone numerous learners of different race groups fought and, in some cases, stabbed each other with scissors and knives). It is also quite remarkable, when compared to experiences in the United States for example, with its random shooting sprees and numerous racial incidents on campuses, that there have not been more reported incidents of racially-motivated physical conflict and abuse in South African institutions.

Ostensibly then, in comparison with the rest of society, higher education has done surprisingly well, and it is rather ironic that it is this sector that will now be investigated through a commission. Surely the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, should start with schools? No doubt, many academics will argue that if schools did their job properly, universities would not have a problem. But it could be argued that universities have done 'so well' not because of their efforts to address racism on campuses, but because they draw on a pool of young people who have been socialised in post-1994 private and integrated middle class schools.

But does it mean, since only one racial incident has been captured on video over the past 13 years, there is little or no racism in higher education? The answer, of course, is no. One suspects that, as was the case of torture by US soldiers in Iraq, the video footage could represent only the tip of the iceberg. (Another similarity with US soldiers in Iraq is that in both cases it was the perpetrators who provided the evidence, after they had fallen out with each other.)

Over and above the racism that was entrenched during the apartheid years, another factor played into the incident at the University of Free State; namely

the tradition, particularly at Afrikaans universities, of student initiation. When I entered a men's residence at Stellenbosch University in 1967, initiation had just been 'banned' at the hostel. The previous year, the practice had degenerated into a drinking binge. One student was partially paralysed when he dived, blindfolded, head-first into a mud pool which he had been told was a swimming pool.

It is difficult to comprehend how the physical and psychological demeaning of students contributes to the socialisation of these students into scholarly life. The fact that 40 years later management at some universities still turns a blind eye to this 'cultural practice from the past' or, as in the case of the warden at the offending Free State residence, actually defends it, is simply unacceptable. For this, the warden and the vice-chancellor should take direct responsibility. How could they not have foreseen that bringing black students into this so called 'cultural practice' from the old South Africa was not an accident waiting to happen? But, in a country where you only have to confess to be absolved from apartheid crimes, or where management of the electricity utility can collect 'performance' bonuses when half the country is in darkness, the university officials will probably 'confess' to racism on the campus and then collect annual pay increases.

If universities want to play a leading role in society, some actions against senior officials need to be taken, including the chair of the governing council of an institution that waited 12 years after 1994 before they tried to integrate a residence, and then did so in such a clumsy manner. The suggestion by Free State's management to close the residence and turn it into a 'transformation shrine' is bizarre, apart from being a pathetic attempt to deflect the source of the problem from the inhabitants to the building.

Another incident relating to residence life was highlighted recently in an episode of Special Assignment (screened by the South African Broadcasting Corporation on 11 March), but received no other press coverage. The television programme showed how lecturers at Vaal University of Technology, near Johannesburg, acquired houses in a previously white suburban area and rented them to black students. The programme started by raising the problem of poor health and safety conditions in the residences. For example, in one case there were 30 students living in a standard suburban house. Apart from open electricity points and sewerage overflows, one corner of the ceiling was sagging because some students were living in the 'loft' – mattresses on an unreinforced ceiling accessed by a ladder.

But the real focus of the programme was the running battles with the white neighbours. The lecturers and the students claimed that the neighbours were racists who did not want the (black) students there. An elderly white woman denied this. She complained about the noise, saying that students were partying every night, with sound systems at full volume, and with lots of liquor and drugs. The (white) neighbours would then call the police who would, on occasion, arrive and cart off some students. The video footage showed some very drunk looking male and female youngsters. A telling comment by a white neighbour, who sounded very working class, was: "What kind of students are these who party every night?" The programme ended with two of the (black) lecturers proclaiming loudly that they were not exploiting the students and, instead, made the counter accusation that whenever blacks engage in Black Economic Empowerment, whites try to stop it.

A much more serious issue was the murder of a student from the University

of Limpopo, who was travelling in a bus with other students following a South African Student Congress (Sasco) protest meeting. The meeting started (problematically) with the University providing three buses for students to travel to the meeting: one bus for ANC Youth League supporters, one for Sasco supporters, and another for a Christian student grouping. According to one newspaper article, on the return journey, three Sasco students, who had missed their bus, boarded the bus for the Christian group. The Sasco students apparently started an argument which ended in the killing of a member of the Christian student group, allegedly because they were singing religious rather than 'struggle' songs.

This incident, which was reported in small columns in a few newspapers, did not make national or international television. Perhaps this was because there was no video or cell phone camera footage. Or more sinisterly, in violent South Africa, when blacks kill blacks it is not television news, even if it is a university student. The Limpopo incident happened on the same weekend that the newspapers and other media were abuzz with the Free State story. During the following week, the principal of the University of Limpopo issued a statement to fellow vice-chancellors saying that: "We should admit, if not to society at large then at least to ourselves, that this issue [racism] has always been hidden. It is to our shame" (Sunday Times, 16 March). No mention was made of the murder of one of his institution's students. Nor was there any statement on the university's website, which declares proudly that it is "A world class African university – continuing the tradition of empowerment".

The above three stories raise issues of racism, lack of tolerance for different beliefs, violence, exploitation of students by their lecturers (not the 'traditional' sexual type), and the lack

of an academic culture. In beginning to address these problems, it could be important to think of them as issues of citizenship, and to consider the role of universities in citizenship (human rights) education. In some countries there have been attempts to 'infuse' citizenship into the curriculum. In others there are deliberate interventions in campus social life, and residences in particular are targeted for inculcating values of tolerance for differences, and individual responsibility when living in collective (hostel) communities and scholarship. But it must be remembered that, at the end of the day, citizenship and scholasticism is best inculcated during serious academic work (students and staff), which is the fundamental task of the university.

The National Commission on Higher Education of 1995 did not address these issues, partly owing to its shortened time-frame, partly because of a lack of expertise, and partly because this was a minefield that transgressed into the micro-management of institutions. Does this mean South Africa now needs a commission into citizenship education in universities? It could be argued that a group of high-profile, highly-opinionated commissioners are much more likely to raise the 'social temperature' and obfuscate the issues, than to bring clarity to the situation and offer clear action plans.

Much more constructive could be an expert group of social scientists undertaking a study into the state of citizenship education in higher education, with race issues occupying an important focus. Such a study could identify bad practices that should be discontinued, and suggest some good practices that institutions and government can implement. For good practices we do not have to look 'overseas' – there are individual institutions with excellent programmes in different areas, such as registers

for private homes that meet certain standards before they can rent to students, residence programmes that provide mentorship and academic support, social programmes that foster human rights and health awareness, and so on. A major problem seems to be that bad practices are mimicked more easily among institutions than good practices.

Before a study group prescribes that all academics must also be citizenship educators and transformation agents, it should take cognisance of the fact that the average South African academic already has to deal with large numbers of under-prepared students from the school system, respond to government pressure to increase throughput (pass) rates, publish in order to receive government subsidy and be part of global academia, and be involved in community engagement activities. Perhaps a five-year moratorium could be placed on the latter while academics engage with their own campus communities? A group that should be looked at much more closely is the burgeoning layer of directors, deputy directors, executive deans and deputy vice-chancellors who have 'business-like' packages, even 'performance' contracts. The roles and responsibilities of this well-endowed strata to make South African university campuses human rights sites, need to be spotlighted.

While taking a break from writing these comments I visited a restaurant in Cape Town's Kloof street. The audience was unbelievably mixed, with about 100 people of a wide variety of shades from north, west, and southern Africa, interspersed with visitors from at least three other continents. And fashions ranged from 'business rasta' to Bo-kaap chic (Cape Malay with jeans, flamboyant costume jewellery and colourful turbans). The band, suggestively called The Restless Natives, represented every major racial category

in the country, and the music was totally integrated.

Sitting in a crowd that was more mixed and casually integrated than I had ever seen in New York, London or Dakar, the first question that occurred to me was, is this in the same country as Reitz residence in the Free State? And then, why are these types of gatherings, with a lot of university types present, and even a professor or two, not held up by parliament, the education minister and the media as the New South Africa? Is it because we are more familiar with the 'old South Africa'? And finally, do we address the race issue by going backwards, with the apparently endless cycle of shame and blame, and the familiar counter-responses of guilt and defiance, or do we 'pull' students forward into the global community by focussing on the almost endless opportunities for integration that the new South Africa offers for the young educated middle class?

Dr Nico Cloete is the director of the non-profit Centre for Higher Education Transformation in Cape Town. CHET mobilises trans-disciplinary skills for tertiary development projects, coordinates a network of higher education researchers and provides a forum for dialogue.

Bitter knowledge

How is it possible that young white students, born around the time of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, could hold such firm views about the past, such rigid views about black people and, especially among the boys, such fatalistic views about the future? This was the question that dogged me during my early years as the first black dean of education at the historically white University of Pretoria. It made no sense. These white students had no direct experience of apartheid; they did not live as masters and madams

through the worst years of racial oppression; they did not police the townships during states of emergency; and the boys did not have to face the trauma of compulsory military service on and often beyond the borders of South Africa. Despite the fact that these were, technically speaking, post-apartheid children, their beliefs and behaviours mirrored those of their parents – the people who upheld, supported and benefited directly from white domination in the decades before they were born. The more I listened to my almost all-white undergraduate class of more than 2,000 students, the more this question besieged me. After seven years as dean I resigned to complete a book that seeks to answer that question. *Knowledge in the blood: How white students remember and enact the past*, should appear in late 2008. In many ways it predicts the recent racist behaviour of white male students at the University of the Free State.

The answer to the opening question first emerged in one of my regular visits to a Pretoria bookshop with my teenagers, where I stumbled across a new book by the acclaimed author, Eva Hoffman, called *After Such Knowledge*. Hoffman poses the question personally: how is it, she asks, that as second generation Jews, who did not live through the horrors of the Holocaust as did our parents, we nevertheless behave as if we were there? The author of *Lost in Translation* (the book, not the movie) names this phenomenon "the paradox of indirect knowledges". She attributes this indirect knowledge to the inter-generational transmission of spoken and unspoken knowledge from the parents who were there, to the children who were not. The consequences are devastating for the second generation, for they bear and express the bitterness and the loss of their parents long after the initial terror was actually lived. I knew immediately that this insight stretched way

beyond the trauma of the Holocaust; it explained the beliefs and the behaviours of my white students.

For those seven years I tried to immerse myself inside the lives of my white students. I attended and spoke in their different Afrikaans churches. I visited their homes. I spent time with their parents, often talking about adjustment and change to the promised non-racial order. I observed teaching and learning in white Afrikaans primary and high schools. I did speeches at Afrikaans cultural festivals and workshops at Afrikaans cultural associations. I did training with principals and teachers from the Afrikaans school community, and did endless talks about sameness and difference at school events such as prize-givings. I took the students to malls and the movies, and accepted their invitations to watch them run, box, jump and play rugby and netball. We ate together, we cried together and we prayed together. In their university residences and in bush camps, we talked for countless hours about race, identity and the transition into a new country and a changing university. And this is what I found.

The single most important finding from this intense experience working with white (mainly) Afrikaans students is that like all South African youth, they are decent, idealistic and committed to their country; and that they are capable of change. These young people are not, in general, wide-eyed racists going about the residence halls seeking out black people for racial attack and humiliation. This is not my experience. There is however a serious problem. They carry within them the seeds of bitter knowledge that, left unchallenged, can easily germinate into the most vile and vicious racial attacks on and outside the university campus.

In the case of white Afrikaner youth, how is this troubled knowledge transmitted? It is channelled through

five influential agencies: the family, the church, the school, cultural associations and the peer group. In itself, such an observation about knowledge transmission is hardly novel within sociological observation. The problem is that these agencies transmit the same dangerous messages in all-white social circles over and over again; worse, these messages have not been interrupted over the period of transition despite the spectacular changes in the formal institutions of democracy. To be sure, some of the potency of these messages might have been diluted as a result of the collapse of some of these historical agencies of socialisation – such as the state media under apartheid. But by and large, the three core messages of transmission have remained intact.

The first message is about racial exclusivity (we belong by ourselves); the second is about racial supremacy (we are better than them); and the third is about racial victimisation (we are being targeted by them). What reinforces these messages in the hearts of young white people is the threat of social collapse around them through things like rampant crime, electricity failures, corruption in government, and affirmative action. In the belief system of white youth, these social events are interpreted through a singular lens: black incompetence, black greed, black barbarism, and black retaliation.

It is not hard to understand, therefore, why white students stepping into their first integrated experiences in the undergraduate university years would revolt against learning and especially living together with black students. It is also not hard to grasp why right-wing political parties, without any chance of prominence within broader society, would exploit the bitter knowledge of white students. This has been the primary strategy of the Freedom Front Plus as it infiltrated the white Afrikaans universities to wreak racial havoc on them.

The strategy of the Freedom Front Plus was brilliant in its perversity. It would not appeal to ‘race’ to purvey its inflammatory ideas; it would appeal to ‘rights’. Students should not be forced to live together; they have rights of association. Students have the right to learn in their own languages, implying Afrikaans and therefore largely if not exclusively white classes. Students who pay for their education (erroneously implying only white students) should have the right to choose where they live on campus and in what language they are taught.

For institutions that for many years ran their student elections along party political lines, like the University of Pretoria, the Freedom Front Plus sailed into the perfect storm. It won every student election by substantial margins with election posters that contained the most grievous racial insults. And on campuses like the University of the Free State, where this bitter knowledge was fed through separate residences long after other institutions had deracialised their living arrangements, the advent of the Freedom Front Plus was like fire attracted to an oiled rag.

What does this mean for transformation? It means recognising that the students are not the enemy and that as teachers and leaders in schools and universities, we have failed white youth by not interrupting their troubled knowledge – the consequences of which are now painfully visible throughout the country.

Our educational policies since 1994 have had as their presumptive audience black students in schools and universities – as the revised national curriculum and the proposed pledge of allegiance for schools so clearly demonstrate. Our national policies do not speak to engaging and disrupting the bitter knowledge of white students; from a policy standpoint, it seems as if this knowledge either does not exist,

or that by some miraculous feat, white and black thrown together in the same educational spaces would simply find each other despite the rival knowledges they bring into the learning commons.

Within universities, this problem is compounded by the fact that institutional knowledge, beyond simply syllabic knowledge, has not been the subject of a searching national review of what counts as worth teaching and learning and knowing in the first place. The social, psychological and epistemological bases of an essentially white knowledge remain undisturbed inside universities. Even though the exoskeleton of the institutional curriculum shows ready compliance with regulatory demands from bodies like the South African Qualifications Authority, the endoskeleton of institutional knowledge remains firmly intact. Students therefore achieve mastery of technical knowledge in engineering, economics or education, for example, without ever being intellectually challenged about the nature, history, politics and purposes of knowledge in their disciplines in the wake of apartheid.

The white students in this essay do not have a memory problem; they were not there, so to speak. They have a knowledge problem, and it remains a bitter knowledge that must be interrupted. Little can be done to disrupt what a white child learns on his mother’s knee or in the church’s pews. It can however be eroded by insisting on the integration of all-white Afrikaans public schools. And by the time white students reach university, there has to be a direct recognition of and compassionate engagement with the bitter knowledge of these learners – or we place at risk not only black staff and students at former white universities. We threaten the very foundations of social cohesion in a still fragile democracy.

Jonathan Jansen is an honorary professor of education at the University of the Witwatersrand and scholar-in-residence at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in Johannesburg. His most recent books are Knowledge in the blood: How white students remember and enact the past (in press) and Diversity High: Class, colour, character and culture in a South African high school (2008, with Saloshma Vandeyar). He is a recent Fulbright Scholar to Stanford University (2007-2008), former dean of education at the University of Pretoria (2001-2007), and Honorary Doctor of Education from the University of Edinburgh.

Looking for consensus

Race is an issue on every university campus in South Africa. How can it be otherwise when we are less than three student cohorts away from legally enforced segregation, when race and class are coterminous for a large majority of the population and when the demographics of the staff of some universities are the inverse of the demographics of the country as a whole? The issue is not whether or not race is a key signifier of identity, or whether there is unfair discrimination on the basis of race. It is rather the absence of an adequate and appropriate language to identify and argue through the issues – a route to effective interventions that will take us beyond the salience of race. A lasting impression of the University of the Free State video is the inanity of the students involved, the fact that they can only express themselves through urinating in food and forcing humiliation on those who clean for them. If all discourse is metaphor, then the UFS video is emblematic of a failure to find any means of communication beyond the scatological. If this has in turn

become a metaphor for the state of our universities – or for the state of the nation – then this is indeed the nadir of the South African dream.

What gets lost in these polarised moments is the ground in-between. Those who deny that race is an issue on their campus, or who argue that colour blindness is a democratic obligation in the ‘new South Africa’, contribute to such polarisation and court disillusionment when, indeed, it turns out that something similar to the UFS incident has happened on their campus. This has been a fallacy of both ends of the political spectrum in first reactions to the University of the Free State’s plight; both by those who denounce universities such as UCT for taking race into account in admissions and also those in the ANC who call for the University of the Free State to be ‘nationalised’ to cauterize the problem, as if cutting out the cancer on one campus would heal the system. More considered responses – hopefully to an outcome of the Commission announced by the Minister of Education – will look beyond such simplified dichotomies at both the deeper issues and at the interventions that have been tried with varying degrees of success.

At the University of Cape Town, recent concerns with race have clustered in three areas: admissions, employment equity and institutional culture. There is often polarisation on these issues, sometimes constructive debate, rarely consensus and – occasionally – a breakthrough. In this UCT is little different from any other large public body responding to legacies of the past in a time of change and seeking appropriate policies and interventions in a situation where the right thing to do is invariably apparent well after the moment has passed.

The question of taking race into account in admissions is acute for selective universities. For many

academic programmes at UCT there are 10 or more applicants for every available place. In a situation where there is profound inequality in the school system the matriculation examination cannot be regarded as a neutral measure of the potential to succeed in higher education. Despite the rise of the black middle class in South Africa and the increase in intra-racial inequality measured by indices such as the Gini Coefficient, study after study has shown that race, family income and educational attainment are tightly correlated. Comparison of school leaving results with subsequent performance has shown that race affects the performance of black and white students who attended the same high school. There will always be exceptional individuals who buck the trend, but such cases cannot be used to determine the admissions policy for a public university as a whole.

Given this situation, UCT has differential admission requirements based on an applicant’s self-declaration of race. This is of course controversial and subject to unintended consequences. We would much rather use a more robust indicator of comparative opportunity, such as a fair means test for all applicants, or a classification of all high schools in terms of their educational qualities (which is still in preparation by the Department of Education). But at present, self-declaration of race is the only proxy we have to correct the ways in which prior opportunities distort our evaluation of an applicant’s potential in higher education.

Looked at another way, what would happen if UCT stopped taking race into account in admissions? (Remember here that selective universities have a particular problem – for universities or campuses where the number of qualified applicants is much the same as the number of study places available, there is no issue). In effect, we would

be reinforcing prior privilege in the high school system. When there are more than ten applicants for a place at university, the difference between at A and a B+ in a single subject makes all the difference – our data show that black (African) applicants in private and ‘Model C’ schools would often lose out to white applicants. Admissions of African and coloured (mixed race) applicants from schools on the Cape Flats would fall dramatically. Despite taking race into account in admissions, 40% of UCT students are white – more than four times the overall proportion of whites in the South African population as a whole. A ‘race-blind’ admissions policy would be, in effect, the continuation of affirmative action for students from already-privileged backgrounds.

The issue of the use of race in admissions is debated intensely, and almost continuously, at UCT – in council, senate, faculty boards, blogs, listserves and tearooms. Many disagree with current policy and say so. There is little doubt that policies will change. What we cannot do, though, is to pretend that race is not an issue.

The question of race in employment is equally significant and has been as controversial as the use of race in admissions decisions. The basis of UCT’s employment policy – as with all organisations in South Africa with more than 50 employees – is the Employment Equity Act and the requirement that the university sets equity targets on a three year basis. In itself, this embeds the use of race descriptors for reporting purposes: the legislation requires that each staff member self-describes in terms of given racial descriptors or, if he or she refuses to do so, that the university provide the description. Many find this legislated requirement offensive.

Further dialogue within the university has been on transformation objectives that are in addition to

the basic legal requirement. Should employment equity be based on redress – the correction of previous inequity – or should it be guided by the benefits of diversity? Is diversity a benefit? To what extent do prevalent stereotypes result in unfair discrimination in appointment and promotion? Does the use of mandatory racial descriptors perpetuate the culture of apartheid? Is the pursuit of excellence in opposition to the goals of equity? Has excellence been sacrificed for the purposes of equity?

These issues were extensively debated at UCT as well as in the local and national media following a provocative inaugural lecture in which it was argued that affirmative action has no place in a university. Many aspects of the debate were disappointing and were conducted in an atmosphere of incivility, indicating that we have yet to find appropriate ways of talking about race and its relationship to power and opportunity. While some argue that the time has come to take a race-blind approach to staff appointments and promotions, the more cogent position must be that such a policy would be profoundly damaging. UCT must attract and retain talented individuals from the South African population as a whole if it is to retain its competitive national and international position.

There are many indications that we are not succeeding in these objectives to the extent that we should. Again, the point here is that race is not just a ‘Free State problem’. If there were to be a ‘winner’ in the debate about affirmative action at UCT, the subsequent discourse would remain immersed in the issues of race, either because race would continue to be taken into account in making staff appointments, or because the university would have to defend a return to a staff profile similar to the 1980s and earlier. Race is an unavoidable topic, and finding a better way to talk about it is an urgent priority.

Institutional culture – the traditions, practices and norms of behaviour that together define the university’s character – is to a large extent a function of both student admissions and staff recruitment. As students and staff from diverse backgrounds challenge established ways and bring in new attitudes and attributes, so the institutional culture will change. Inversely, a range of surveys and interviews conducted at UCT have shown that students and staff who find themselves to be minorities, or marginalised, within the UCT community may be rapidly alienated.

While UCT has still to conduct a systematic survey of student attitudes, we did complete a second Institutional Climate Survey in 2007, which has provided a basis for refining interventions and focusing on key issues. The findings of the survey are sobering. A range of detailed responses indicate the continuing saliency of race in individual experiences of university culture. Thus 50% of white males and 52% of white females agreed that they have not been treated differently because of their race and gender. However, all categories of black staff had the inverse response. Similarly, asked whether staff members of different identities are equally valued and respected at UCT, white males and females agreed while black staff disagreed. This polarisation began to break down with perceptions of the wider institutional climate, with a significant number of white staff expressing concern. Thus 53% of all respondents saw the lack of racial diversity at UCT as a problem and 37% of all respondents regarded racial harassment as a problem. Eighty respondents (7.7% of the sample) reported that they had personally experienced racial harassment at work.

UCT’s 2007 Institutional Climate Survey repeats the broad patterns identified in an earlier, comparable,

survey carried out in 2003. Following this first survey – and a traumatic incident in which a lecturer was killed by a colleague, and discussions with representative staff organisations, caucuses and student leadership – the vice-chancellor launched a major intervention, known as Khuluma (to speak out), in which groups of 20 staff come together in an intensive three-day workshop to confront internalised racial stereotypes of superiority and inferiority. To date, more than 650 UCT staff have attended Khuluma workshops which have been regarded by a significant majority of their participants as successful in enabling deep conversations about race and its implications. The challenge for UCT is to extend participation in such programmes to a greater number of academic staff, and to translate the insights and energy generated by the Khuluma dialogues into meaningful change.

If UCT has been successful in anticipating the events at the University of the Free State it has been through launching Khuluma and similar programmes (such as a major intervention in the Health Sciences Faculty) that have identified and interrogated the sort of derogatory racial stereotypes that can lead to active discrimination and outbursts of rage and violent abuse. However, we have yet to develop an effective way of reaching the far more transitory community of some 20,000 students including each year's intake of some 3,500 new students. While there have been a number of leadership programmes and pilot projects in diversity education (both in South Africa and in a number of US universities), I know of no Khuluma-type model that could be viable from an entire student intake. To this extent, universities must remain passive barometers of society at large.

So where are we at UCT? Some 20 years after UCT introduced policies and

programmes designed to recruit and support educationally disadvantaged students and to increase the diversity of our staff, we are beginning to find a language to talk and argue about race and its associations with position, power and opportunity, about stereotypes and assumptions that limit our ability to move on as a institution of learning in a changing world. Many of these dialogues are stimulating and constructive and point to new possibilities. But to argue that what happened at the University of the Free State could not happen at the University of Cape Town is to miss the point that we are still far from understanding the antinomies of race, or achieving a consensus as to how the constitutional principles of redress and fairness can be given their full substance.

Sources for the policies and reports mentioned here can be found at www.uct.ac.za and www.hall.uct.ac.za

Professor Martin Hall stands down as deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town in August this year. He writes here in his personal capacity

The enduring legacy of apartheid in education

There is now an established radical tradition in educational scholarship which accepts Richard Shaull's assertion: There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present

system, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women participate in the transformation of their world (Shaull in Freire's 1993 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). However, the promises of radical education in South Africa remain under threat. It could be argued that education policy after apartheid has not addressed the cultural and ideological impressions stamped on the minds of black (and white) South Africans by the Verwoedean curriculum of apartheid. Instead, the shift has been towards placing emphasis on accountability, efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

It is important to remind ourselves that the apartheid curriculum was used effectively as a tool not only to reproduce and promote the values, cultural norms, and beliefs of apartheid society but also as an instrument to maintain and legitimise unequal social, economic and political power relations. By controlling and maintaining dominant beliefs, values and oppressive practices, the curriculum shaped the mindset of the population to sustain the apartheid system. A point eloquently stated by Professor Malegapuru Makgoba (1997):

“...what is common between a judge, a doctor, a politician, a policeman, a priest, a journalist, or editor and the ordinary citizen is the type of education they received or the curriculum that provided the foundations of their education.”

Given this experience, any honest appraisal of the apartheid educational system should not only centre on the material and economic aspects of the system but should as a matter of priority address the social, cultural and spiritual devastation visited on the African community. Failure to do this will lead, and indeed has led, to advancement of technicist approaches or solutions to combat the legacy of apartheid

colonialism. The focus on technical aspects often narrowed to issues of material provisions.

Put differently, African students are subjected to social, cultural and political alienation in South Africa's institutions of higher learning – this alienation cuts across the spectrum of white and black institutions. Alluding to this Mahmood Mamdani (1999) commented:

“Both the white and black institutions were products of apartheid, though in different ways. The difference was not only in the institutional culture, that the former enjoyed institutional autonomy and the latter were bureaucratically driven. The difference was also in their intellectual horizons. It was the white intelligentsia that took the lead in creating apartheid-enforced identities in the knowledge they produced. Believing that this was an act of intellectual creativity unrelated to the culture of privilege in which they were steeped, they ended defending an ingrained prejudice with a studied conviction. The irony is that the white intelligentsia came to be a greater, became a more willing, prisoner of apartheid thought than its black counterpart.”

In approaching the matter of race in education in South Africa one must locate it within the context and logic of apartheid colonialism. People's responses to events and challenges of transformation are invariably mediated by the socialisation and indoctrination they have been subjected to through apartheid education.

The video clip showing four white male University of the Free State students urinating on food that black cleaners were told to eat speaks to the contempt with which certain sections of the white community still regard black people.

It is unfortunate that the killing of a black student by three black students did not receive equal coverage. Owing to our history, “racism by whites against black people prompts outrage, as it should, but not the killing of a black student by other black students.”

In our reading of events, we should not confuse acts of criminality with racism. The killing of a white person by other whites would also not receive the same treatment as racial abuses. However, the fact that these events happen in the higher education environment speaks to the school and higher education to inculcate civil and moral decency. The racial attacks reflect badly on the sector representing the most privileged in our society. Most fundamentally it speaks to poverty of intellect. The crises in our universities are a consequence of the intellectual and moral crisis afflicting the sector.

It also reflects on the absence of leadership. Higher education is supposed to reflect the apex of thinking in our society. The higher education sector is expected to take a lead in the identification and resolution of our social and political problems. In this regard, it has been found to be woefully wanting.

Fourteen years into a political democracy South African higher has failed to fully grapple with the intellectual and practical realisation of the creation of a non-racial and non-sexist society. Transformation in the sector is largely driven by the political elite in government. The higher education sector has failed to lead in the struggle for economic, social and cultural liberation.

The failure of higher education leadership to speak in one voice on what transpired at the University of the Free State simply reflects the enduring legacy of apartheid and the loss of what one may call intellectual leadership expected from the sector.

Condemnation was received from

every sector – from students, unions, political leaders, government, society, but very little from within higher education. If anything, within higher education, there is a refusal to deal with racism as well as a racial divide: part of this is because higher education was instrumental in perpetuating apartheid. We should remind

ourselves that it was in this sector that apartheid masters sought theoretical and theological justification. The increase of black students in historically white universities notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that the sector still perpetuates racial inequalities.

The African contribution to knowledge production is miniscule. Figures from the Human Science Research Council indicate that despite constituting about 80% of the population, the contribution of Africans is a miserable 3.6% of all scientific publications. Whites dominate the entire knowledge generation landscape with 92.5 % while they constitute about 10% of the population. The situation is not any different in the economy.

There is a “thrust that places blacks in the pathetic position of beggars for participation in the white academic world” (Jansen 1991). And as I have indicated elsewhere, the whiteness of the social and cultural location, which may be alienating to black researchers, remains unproblematised.

Advocating for different approach, Jansen argued for a “dignified and incisive vocation for the black scholar, one which does not simply seek participation in an established structure, but seeks to redefine the racial terms and the territory on which research takes place”. The point being made here is that the issue is not merely of participation but is epistemological in nature. In this set-up, an artificial distance is created between knowledge and experience. So far the whiteness of institutions and research practice

have alienated black scholars and has as a result limited scholarship from advancing and incorporating multi-faceted dimensions. To do this, we will be advised to heed Jansen's advocacy for;

“Recognising that educational institutions are primarily vehicles for the production, dissemination and evaluation of knowledge, Africanisation and transformation should of necessity entail an interrogation of the curricula and language of instruction, its relevance and appropriateness in addressing itself to national objectives and societal demands. It is about the grounds for knowledge, about epistemology, and about objects of our intellectual inspiration.”

South African universities have not lived up to the promise of being sites of freedom. They have not embarked on the de-racialisation project where it matters most. Whites dominate the research process and this may itself be regarded as one of the objective mechanisms that sustain racial domination (Evans 1990).

Change has largely come at the behest of the government rather than from within, and government has had a very limited and narrow understanding of transformation. Up until now the so-called transformation of Higher Education has been viewed and implemented as a purely restructuring exercise devoid of a radical transformation agenda that would bring about fundamental change of the status quo.

The irony is that in recent years attempts by black intellectuals to organise themselves onto platforms for deracialisation have been scorned by their white counterparts. Whereas the concentration of contestation in the country was on matters political, other sites remained untouched by change. The struggle for intellectual

independence remains. Until this struggle has its champions, our universities will continue to harbour racists and racist practices.

Dr Siphso Seepe is president of the South African Institute of Race Relations and a leading socio-political commentator.

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Free State Responses

Reflections on Reitz incident implications

The emergence of the now infamous Reitz residence video at the University of the Free State (UFS), and the worldwide reaction to it, has shocked the higher education community in South Africa. For us as a university – for students, staff and management – it has been traumatic. It has been strongly and publicly condemned by the Council and the management of the university. We have also apologised to all those affected and traumatised by the video. As an institution, UFS is dealing with the Reitz matter as quickly and fairly as possible. Council and executive management have already adopted a programme of action to address this specific matter as well as deeper issues raised by the incident. The fact that the video was produced as part of resistance by some white students to our new policy to increase diversity in residences – that is, the racial integration of residences, which is part of our broader transformation agenda – is even more troubling for us. Sadly, protest behaviour by some black students and student leaders in their reaction to the video has also not been free of racist talk and racist threats.

Significant polarisation has occurred.

Indeed, the video incident has highlighted the existence of a wide range of differing perspectives, especially among our students, about race relations and transformation. Racial fault lines and stereotyping, perhaps dormant or invisible for some time, have come to the surface again. For us this has been a great disappointment, given how hard UFS has been working for the last 15 years to build a campus community characterised by non-racialism, non-sexism, diversity, multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism.

As early as 1993, UFS introduced English as a medium of instruction alongside Afrikaans. This parallel-medium tuition policy opened the doors of learning to all, leading to a major transformation of the university as evidenced by black students making up approximately 60% of total enrolment at UFS. Five years ago multi-lingualism was extended to the administration. Official meetings are conducted in English and Afrikaans with the necessary professional interpreting services, and with all documentation in both languages. At some student leadership meetings Sesotho is also included in the interpreting service. Most direct service points dealing with the public deal in three languages.

In the late 1990s the university also integrated student residences for the first time, though that effort – perhaps too early? – led to violence and did not bring the results management had hoped for. That is why we have once again made an effort to integrate residences as from 2008. The rationale for this step was educational: that is, to prepare students for a non-racial workplace, to provide them with the necessary diversity skills, to help them appreciate the enriching effect of working and socialising with people from different backgrounds, and so forth.

But we see transformation in a much broader sense as well. The academic core of UFS has been transforming regarding what we teach and how we teach, bringing in an African orientation among other things – albeit slowly.

For many years we have been providing diversity workshops for staff and students, including all first year students in residences (though this is clearly something that we need to revisit). UFS also is one of the leading universities when it comes to community engagement. This means our students must not only learn in a classroom situation but in a community context as well through assignments, practicals, research etc.

UFS has also been debating a draft Institutional Charter as part of efforts to change the institutional culture of the university. A key goal is to create a sense of belonging for all – whether white or black, male or female, speaking English, Afrikaans or Sesotho or another language, South African or foreign national. This goal is embedded in a broader effort to develop a culture of human rights, respect and human dignity.

It is sad that resistance to our renewed integration efforts by little more than perhaps 1,500 white residence students (out of a total enrolment of more than 25,000 students) can so obscure this sincere and ongoing transformation effort. (In this they have been supported materially and emotionally by the Freedom Front Plus, a small political party on the right of the political spectrum.)

UFS is being looked at through lenses that are clouded by the video. Old stereotypes of this institution, its people and its province are being revived. Moreover, our country appears to have been polarised yet again, with racial fault lines coming to the fore in many forms. Questions are being

asked about how thorough our efforts at nation-building and social cohesion really have been, about how we relate to each other as individuals, about our attitudes and prejudices.

An opportunity

Amidst the pain and embarrassment caused by the Reitz video incident, there is a real opportunity for UFS – and for other universities. It is an opportunity for our country to really develop a common vision of the future and to embrace that vision. It forces all of us to go into deep introspection and confront the realities of race, racialism and racism in South African society, and how this reality is reflected on our campuses. It also forces us to think about the role of universities in addressing this very South African reality.

In a sense, the Reitz video has made it too easy for many individuals and institutions to sidestep the real issues. It is too easy to say: “We are not like that” – and move on to other things. Perhaps this is what our society has been doing with racist incidents, or with the broader issue of race and non-racialism. Perhaps we are in denial? Meanwhile, covert and more subtle forms of racialism may still be deeply embedded in our psyche and behaviour – together with other dimensions of intolerance, discrimination and bigotry. This is the sad legacy of our past, the real legacy of apartheid (and of world history).

To what extent do people in South African society – and staff and students on campuses – still think in terms of groups, still see individuals as ‘representatives’ of a racial, language or cultural group, still make generalisations about groups based on the behaviour of individuals, still think in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’? (Come to think of it: how many people or organisations branded the entire University of the Free State and its management as racist because of the

behaviour of four students out of 25,000, behaviour of a kind which could have happened at any other university in South Africa?)

To what extent are these attitudes an ingrained part of institutional culture at universities? And what are the social mechanisms that cause the perpetuation and 'social reproduction' of such attitudes and behaviours? To what extent do residences, residence culture and initiation practices serve as socialisation mechanisms? What part do teaching and learning (and curricula) play in the socialisation of students?

If it is true that such attitudes and such kinds of institutional culture still are prevalent, in some form or another, on many or all of our campuses, what are universities to do?

One question may be whether it is the task of universities to change the attitudes and behaviours of their students, to re-socialise them, to guide them towards non-racialism and respect for human rights. Some may ask: Shouldn't universities stick to the academic and career education of students?

My view is that this could be the case in normalised, stable societies. However, given our huge transition and social transformation, and given the highly diverse nature of our society, universities cannot wash their hands of such tasks. We must play our part in the socialisation of students, while recognising that students are significantly pre-formed in their families, schools, churches and communities before coming to university.

This task of universities is encumbered by the fact that the student body, and student leadership, turn over so quickly. Universities have but three or four years to impact on students, and but a year for each generation of student leadership.

Nevertheless, South African universities now have an opportunity

to tackle issues of racism head-on. We must show the intellectual leadership to consciously and purposefully take up our part of the responsibility of shaping a new generation of leaders and citizens who can move this country towards non-racialism and non-sexism.

We must help to analyse and unpack the concepts of racism, racialism and non-racialism and to build a deeper understanding of these complex matters. We must teach students to live non-racialism, non-sexism and non-discrimination. We must teach students to embrace and value diversity. We must teach them to respect differences in language, culture, gender, perspective, social and economic background, and so forth.

We must increase diversity, and sustain sufficient diversity, on our campuses and in our residences. We must also engage with communities and other societal institutions about their formative role regarding the racial and other attitudes and behaviour of children and young people. This is the only way to construct the South African rainbow – that common vision of our future.

Frederick Fourie is the Vice-chancellor, University of the Free State

Racism at Free State – anticipating the future

If we consider ideological blindness, we recognise that there are always exceptions to the rule. Recent events at the University of the Free State, taken as evidence of the participants' attitudes, suggest to us that white and black, especially younger South

Africans living in our region continue to battle with the legacy of the past. Their perceptions are that they have been used, abused and conveniently forgotten: indeed, black and white youths feel they have been invalidated and abandoned in a fast-changing, demanding and globalising world. These perceptions feed dynamics which are then reinforced by indoctrination and prejudice within their homes, churches and schools, as well as by their political leaders and community organisations. As construct psychologists like Cummins (2003) have argued, individuals who feel invalidated and-or wilfully abandoned will experience anxiety, anger, hostility and violence. We add another consequence: racism.

These dynamics have to be viewed against the backdrop of overwhelming media reports on murders, rapes, corruption, political parties persistently skewing difficult issues for opportunistic political gain, the frustrations of non-delivery in almost all spheres of life, and the perception that our living spaces have become hostile and life-threatening, to name a few. Everyone is appalled, except the leaders and managers who escape being held accountable for their non-delivery.

In a recent article in *Rapport*, Professor Willie Esterhuysen used the elephant metaphor to depict the syndrome of racism which is part of the lives of white and black South Africans in very different ways. In Esterhuysen's view: "Almal weet daar is 'n olifant. Hoe kan jy dit miskyk? Maar hulle wil liewers nie daaroor praat nie." [Translated: Everyone knows that there is an elephant. How can they not see it? However, they would rather not talk about it.]. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) refers to this attitude as colour evasiveness, which implies that stakeholders actively avoid confronting the nature and scope of the problem.

Race-related constructs are so

contentious that some stakeholders at UFS seem unwilling to confront the meanings that they assign to this very prominent dimension of their experience, especially in the public domains of both the workplace and student life. To date, management at the institution has not sufficiently interrogated these meanings, nor have they actively pursued strategies so that staff and students may generate shared meanings (common ground and visions) in shared spaces within the institution.

This problem is exacerbated by the political polarisation that has been taking place in South African society, to the right and the left, driven by extreme and highly vocal groups. Universities are increasingly becoming battlegrounds for political gain, and this process creates a polarised atmosphere on campuses, crowding out the moderate middle ground, and subverting the role and function of the university in its specific context. These dynamics impact on institutions both in their local and global connectedness.

Capacity constraints

Next, let us consider capacity constraints in higher education. Firstly, unrealistic expectations captured in higher education policies, developed by the government, have set up the higher education system and universities for policy implementation overload and possible failure. Policies become impracticable when the human and financial constraints at all levels of higher education compromise success. This factor is specifically relevant at the University of the Free State where, from a resources perspective, the institution belongs in the category 'poorest of the poor'.

Universities such as UFS were isolated during apartheid from international trends. This meant that, with the exception of some academics and researchers, many of them did

not change their higher education practices for a very long time during and then after apartheid. They were not prepared for new approaches, for example, to teaching, learning and student life in post-1994 South Africa. This lack of new knowledge and information about higher education trends and factors created a vacuum that was filled by a range of political agendas opposing change, especially outcomes-based approaches. The lack of capacity today, one of the consequences of apartheid, implies that higher education may again be exploited by political opportunists whose objectives are either overtly or covertly attuned to subverting change, instead of their contributing to developing the system based on sound higher education theory and practice.

There are many of these trends and factors in the debate on higher education such as:

- Demographics: skills shortages, 'massification' and so on, which impact on higher education.
- Economics: funding, global competition, ranking and rating aligned with third stream income etc.
- Environment: climate change, environmental degradation, student migration, 'brain drain', an increasing gini coefficient, global needs-interests in conflict with or aligned with local needs-interests in education.

In the South African context, these contentious issues have been marginalised as priorities in favour of debates on issues such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and accountability, as well as higher education policy positions referring to a 'single coordinated education system', 'cooperative governance' and the firm 'steering' of the higher education system by government.

Anticipating the future

Bearing in mind these capacity constraints, is there a way forward for UFS? We believe, in anticipating the future, that we should begin with the re-conceptualisation of this university as an institution in our specific context. We have to consider the positioning of the university in its environment, and how its specific context promotes (or should promote) a specific institutional culture. Importantly, we have to consider how this process is complicated by a multitude of sub-cultures in academic (faculties) and student life (Reitz residence). These sub-cultures often tend to develop outside the institutional culture, prompting management to maintain a myriad of communication channels which have to be, often under the most difficult circumstances, to manage these groups' activities.

Firstly, UFS should address the issue of governance, and we have to question whether members of council, senate, the institutional forum, the student representative council and top management have the competencies to deal effectively and efficiently with the changed and changing demands of the post-1994 higher education landscape.

Regardless of capacity constraints, governance structures at all levels (academic and otherwise) in the institution have to establish shared spaces where staff and students (of diverse backgrounds) may actively engage one another to combat ideological blindness, build common ground, and disabuse themselves of dysfunctional race-based reasoning. One of the negatives to be addressed in the current scenario is parallel-medium instruction which has had a disparate impact: unintentionally, this policy has segregated students on the grounds of language. This is specifically relevant in the light of the changed demographic composition of the student population.

It is astonishing, if not overwhelming,

to consider the problem-solving and decision-making tasks that face higher education governance structures in the context of their core role and task as universities. This list is endless: students and learning; opportunity and inclusiveness; scholarship and research; community and connectivity; partnership and outreach; integrity and stewardship; quality and excellence; equity, diversity and redress; financial sustainability; regional cooperation and engagement; outward thrust, nationally and internationally; global pressures for and against change in higher education; strategic contingency plans to circumvent financial disaster; responding to competitive threats; visionary leadership; threatened markets; organisational pressures; benchmark performance; organisational inertia; comfort zones; the impact of fear on stakeholders; lack of knowledge and skills in multiple domains; lack of pay-off; day-to-day focus in decision-making; stakeholder arrogance as they push specific agendas; and so forth.

It is clear that these challenges require exceptionally high levels of proven competence in an equally endless range of higher education domains. Governing a university, DW Leslie (2003) states, requires that academic managers at all levels have to be able to deal with the following broadly formulated, yet formidable tasks:

- Balancing legitimacy and effectiveness.
- Leading along two dimensions: getting work done and engaging people.
- Differentiating between formal university structures and the functions of universities as they adapt and evolve.
- Bridging the divergence between cultural and operational imperatives of the bureaucratic

and professional sides of the university.

Research on these potential 'fault lines' at UFS (and any other institutions) would significantly contribute to improving governance not only at the institution, but elsewhere in the country, the continent and globally. The Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET 2007) has been pursuing these issues in practical terms in the context of research on performance indicators within two focal areas.

The first encapsulates a standard profile of each of the 23 public higher education institutions in South Africa. Their research also considers ways in which 23 institutions can be clustered into peer groups enabling university councils to compare the performance of their institutions to the average of performance at similar institutions.

This research by CHET can be of immense value for UFS to engage in efficient and effective governance.

The second issue relates to a range of related processes: diversity, diversification and differentiation, desperately needed at a university such as UFS. According to Frans Van Vught (2007), universities have to be open systems, responsive to their environments; thus, the diversity within a university system has to reflect the external environment from which it receives its inputs. His critical perspectives are captured in the following four assumptions and two propositions (Van Vught 2007, 8-12):

Assumption 1: Organisations for higher education receive inputs from, and produce outputs for, their environments.

Assumption 2: In order to survive, higher education organisations need to secure a continuous and sufficient supply of resources from their environments.

Assumption 3: When scarcity of resources exists, higher education organisations compete with each other to secure a continuous and sufficient supply of resources.

Assumption 4: Higher education organisations both influence and are influenced by their environmental conditions.

Proposition 1: The larger the uniformity of the environmental conditions of higher education organisations, the lower the level of diversity of the higher education system.

Proposition 2: The larger the influence of academic norms and values in a higher education organisation, the lower the level of diversity of the higher education system.

There is evidence of these processes of diversification at UFS, including a highly successful Career Preparation Programme, an academic literacy project aimed at promoting access, numerous community projects, a host of community service learning initiatives, and various capacity development initiatives to promote equity and redress, aligned with performance management. These initiatives are aimed at diversification and differentiation. UFS management should intensify their attempts to build and extend this reciprocal relationship between the university and its environment.

Van Vught's reasoning is appealing, and should be an imperative of a university such as UFS, and other universities in this region: they could benefit from diversity because it offers better access to a wider variety of students; provides more social mobility through multiple modes of entry and forms of transfer; better meets the diverse needs of the labour market; serves the political needs of a larger number of interest groups (and creates political stability); permits the

combination of elite and mass higher education; increases the effectiveness of higher education institutions (allowing for institutional specialisation); and offers more opportunities for experimenting with innovation. These processes should prompt participants at all levels to seek opportunities to generate and celebrate valued and shared meanings in shared spaces in the institution.

Finally, in its history of more than a century, UFS's role and function have been defined and redefined at various stages of its and the country's development. As before, the institution needs a new vision of excellence, equity and redress, optimally synchronised with the demands of its region and its environment (it cannot be all things to all people). It needs to realise that if it does not focus its efforts as an institution and what it stands for on the needs of its specific context, environment and this period of history, the broader ideological differences of radical groups may destroy the progress we have made, and cause more frustration and polarisation.

A new vision at the UFS should recognise its new 'majority' profile, consisting of mainly bilingual, first-generation students within the majority community who have very specific needs-interests. UFS has the opportunity to position itself not as "the Harvard or the University of Cape Town" of the central, mainly rural, region of South Africa, but as an excellent university optimally responsive to and grappling with contentious issues (such as racism), and profitably engaging peers globally and locally on these and other issues.

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Professor Kalie Strydom is head of the Centre for Higher Education Studies and Development at the University of the Free State.

What students say

Living with racism at two universities

The recent obnoxious and racist video by four white students at the University of the Free State has generated a furious hullabaloo on racism in South Africa. This has, in the main, been characterised by condemnations, threats and, to some extent, the homogenisation of white people as racists – notwithstanding the fact that the dastardly video has been roundly condemned by whites as well. A tourist visiting South Africa at the time the video surfaced would be forgiven for thinking that racism was long since dead and buried in this country, and

that the four students were awakening an unwelcome ghost. The tourist may also have been tempted to believe that the video incident was an isolated case. How else would s/he take it, as it has been 14 years since racism as a state doctrine was discarded. Unlike the tourist, I have lived in the 'rainbow nation' for almost four years now, located in both an historically advantaged and in an historically disadvantaged university. I have experienced racism all through these four years, both within and outside the two institutions. In restaurants, shopping malls, supermarkets, taxis, on the streets, in the neighbourhood where I live, on the beaches – all over.

The racism I have experienced, especially in the two institutions, is the covert, insidious and subliminal type. I come from Africa (as I'm always told, especially by some black South Africans). I am a black person – and a very black one for that matter. I also speak English with an accent that is unfamiliar, if not strange, in this part of the world. These two features, especially my pitch black complexion, have always marked me out as the 'other', or as 'that black guy' as some local 'Africans' at the historically advantaged university (HAU) preferred calling me. Again, because of my dark complexion, I've been asked several times whether I come from the North – Limpopo, where dark people in this country supposedly come from.

At both institutions some white colleagues often told me "you are not like them [local blacks]". And this is supposed to be a compliment. In their estimation, my apparent 'unlike them' grasp of English, and average cognitive endowment set me aside from local blacks. According to them, I don't neatly fit the script hence the surprise and the 'compliment'.

I usually keep quiet when I experience these covert acts of racism. In some cases I smile sheepishly and

walk away – lest I’m told, “you are being over-sensitive”. But on one occasion I was forced to behave differently. I’d gone to find out my fee balance at the HAU and I was ordered by a middle-aged white woman to write down what I wanted because, apparently, she could not understand my accent. I responded in kind. I requested her to start first by writing down what she was telling me. Of course she suddenly understood my accent and served me – with a smile!

One question that I am almost asked on a daily basis, especially by some African and coloured (mixed race) people at the historically disadvantaged university (H DU) is where I ‘originally’ come from. Having answered this question many times, I had resolved never to answer it again. This was probably a blunder. On two occasions, after refusing to answer, I was told: “You cannot hide. I know where you come from. You are an illegal [immigrant]!” What I found annoying and incomprehensible was not the response per se but the haughty laughter that accompanied the response and the immense sense of self-satisfaction with the ‘discovery’ that I was an ‘illegal immigrant’.

I have also encountered racism among South Africans, against each other. On several occasions, some of my South African friends, acquaintances, students and colleagues at the two institutions have made racist comments about their fellow South Africans. In one incident, a white auxiliary staff at the HAU asked me: “Do you think these students [local blacks] will pass Professor X’s course?” The black students had turned up to register for the (white) professor’s course. She took pity on them. I have also heard racist comments being made by black South Africans about whites, ‘coloureds’ about blacks, and whites about Indians. Generally, the racist comments are stereotypes: blacks and coloureds as good for nothing and incompetent;

whites as ruthless and ‘racist’; and Indians as crafty and exploitative. These stereotypes are usually presented as though they were genetic traits.

Linked to racism is the phenomenon where race is mobilised to silence divergent views. This I have observed at several seminars where certain government policies are criticised, especially by whites. Not infrequently, the responses to the criticisms have been ad hominem. An example will suffice. At a seminar on HIV-Aids at the HAU the speaker, a white man, and a prominent researcher on the subject criticised government policies on HIV-Aids. In response, a black student asked: “Are you trying to incite us against a democratically elected black government?” I know several white colleagues at both institutions who prefer to keep the peace rather than being labelled anti-government or anti-black.

What I’ve listed above are just but a few illustrations of my encounters with racism (and race thinking) in two institutions. Overall, there seems to be a problem with being different – it is as if being pitch black is a sin, something to be detested and caricatured. Being black, averagely fluent in English and ‘intelligent’ is seen as an oddity. Difference is seen as inferiority, and as epitomising certain negative intrinsic traits or strange behavioural dispositions. Notions of inherent superiority to the ‘other’ still abound. The ‘other’ is not seen as a unique and valued being.

Racism is to South Africa what ethnicity is to many African countries. Like racism, ethnicity also goes with stereotypes. In Kenya, for instance, a certain ethnic community is regarded as loving money more than the average capitalist, and their predisposition to stealing is considered to be above average. Another one is thought of as being sexually insatiable. One other community is said to comprise of cooks

and watchmen. The list is endless. Not unlike the rest of Africa, South Africa is also a country of stereotypes – many of which are racially motivated and demean the ‘other’. Not surprisingly, these stereotypes have also permeated the South African academy.

Dr Gerald Ouma is a Kenyan postdoctoral fellow. His research interests include higher education policy and financing higher education. He would prefer for his institutional affiliation not to be revealed.

Students protest a range of grievances

South African students reacted sharply to revelations of racism at the University of the Free State, organising marches there and on campuses around the country. The South African Students’ Congress has been at the forefront of protests against racism which, as its president David Maimela has pointed out, is not a new issue for black students. Last week he welcomed news that Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, has decided to appoint a commission of inquiry into racism and other forms of discrimination in universities. However, he said in a statement that “we believe it a rather late response” based on reaction to the embarrassing incident at Free State. Students would only celebrate when they saw the “heads of complacent and incompetent people” roll. Sasco was invited to write an article for this Special Africa Edition of *University World News*, but instead referred to statements that it has produced on the issue.

The Sasco view, according to Maimela, is that the Minister of Education and leaders of the University of the Free State should

be fired: "There is no reason why the perpetrators of racism must remain in the system. Here we need not wait for the outcomes of the commission; there is a clear instance of transgression of our constitution and an insult to our social fibre. Besides the courts, which we observe and respect, the education system and its leaders must take strong action against perpetrators of racism in our universities. Racism is a crime against humanity and therefore punishable. If universities can impose banishment for students who plagiarise or cheat in exams, what about those who commit a crime against humanity? Of course, we want natural justice to be observed but at the end people must account for their actions."

On 12 March more than 300 students gathered in central Tshwane (formerly Pretoria) and staged a protest march against racism and the slow pace of transformation in higher education. On the same day, workers at Free State demonstrated in front of the main building of the university. These are but two of many university-related protests this year, over a variety of issues including increases in student fees, lousy conditions in residences and more recently the Free State race case.

The students who marched in Tshwane handed in a memorandum of grievances and demands to the Minister, including for her resignation, expulsion of the vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State, an end to the "victimisation" of student leaders, and reviews of university mergers and institutional autonomy. The following is the text of the memorandum:

SASCO's Memorandum of grievances and demands to the Minister of Education Ms Naledi Pandor and the Executive Cabinet of the Government of the Republic of South Africa

12 March 2008

WHEREAS, we are the students of South Africa from all walks of life organised under the leadership of the South African Students' Congress (Sasco).

WHEREAS, we are fully supported by our allies, religious organisations, non-governmental organisations, the labour movement, the union of South African students and other campus based student formations, our friends over the seas, the general public and the media.

WHEREAS, we are gathered here in Tshwane having given up our studies for a day, we rightfully claim to have genuine and justifiable grievances about fundamental issues of transformation in higher education.

WHEREAS, we have taken up the major step to raise our grievances through this solidarity protest march to a government that must serve the people of South Africa including its youth and students.

We wish to declare for the country and all her people to know that higher education is in crisis and needs urgent and thoroughgoing attention from the ANC-led government!

Our Grievances

We duly make the following correct observations:

- Racism and racial discrimination continues to be one of the defining features of our higher education system, our universities. The demon of racism is not dead. Racism is rife in our universities affecting in the main, black students and workers. Racism is today disguised as "institutional culture and tradition", racism is a disastrous cancer especially in the historically white institutions (HWI). Racism manifests itself in various ways, racism is systematic and institutional in our campuses.
- Government support in terms of allocation of resources continues to favour white universities over black universities and this perpetuates

inequalities of the past in the system. White universities continue to be the model centres of academic excellence whereas black universities are gradually disappearing in the face of the earth. In this way, government perpetuates racism!

- Institutional autonomy and academic freedom continues to be used-abused as a defence mechanism by reactionary universities that refuse to transform. Universities have abused their autonomy and have not been fully accountable. The Ministry has allowed unfettered autonomy in the system. As a result, universities have become islands isolated from the reality of the new South Africa.

- The policy of mergers and incorporations has violated rights of students and workers alike. It has negatively affected access to education, and decent and secure jobs for workers. Both the idea and the implementation of the policy of mergers have proven to be a disaster. The mergers have become a source of tension and turmoil in our campuses. The mergers have not achieved their intended objectives. Campuses are closing down against our wishes and lives are being destroyed. The mergers have certified the racist idea that universities cannot be universities unless they are located in the cities!

- Academic and financial exclusion accompanied by poor student services continues to violate the right of students to education. The Student Enrolment Plan by the Ministry has increased the pace and the casualties of exclusions. The Ministry has failed to regulate fees and has been sending wrong signals about free education for the poor recently.

- There is widespread victimisation of student leaders by managers in our universities. This happens in various forms. This constitutes a violation of our civil rights. The victimisation of student leaders is intended to

silence the gallant voice of students and thereby turn our universities into conformist dictatorial fiefdoms of unscrupulous vice-chancellors who are mostly incompetent and reactionary.

- We also note the crumbling of our former University of the North under the leadership of Professor Mokgalong as vice-chancellor. The Independent Assessor Report has proven him and his team to be incompetent and unfit to run the new University of Limpopo. The University of Limpopo is rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth.
- We also note the poor leadership of the Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor. She has failed without reason to institute a commission of enquiry into racism in our campuses in 2005. Higher education and its stakeholders do not seem to be a priority to the Minister. The education system can hardly be called a system and yet no strong leadership is forthcoming!

Our demands

- We demand strong leadership from government, racism is repugnant, backward and inexcusable. For the second and last time, we demand a full scale investigation and remedies to the ongoing racism in all our universities. Racism must end. This matter must be a priority!
- In UOFS in particular, we demand proper support for the victims. The Vice-Chancellor and the EXCO must be fired. The students must be expelled and refused further enrolment in all SA universities for an extent period of time. The culprits must go to jail. Racial integration will and must continue!
- We demand an end to all humiliating initiation practices and other human rights violations in our universities, without further delay.
- Institutional autonomy and academic freedom must be redefined in a manner that makes universities fully accountable. The current status quo is not acceptable. We need to review the

procedure to appoint Vice-Chancellors and Councils and other governing structures. We want democratic universities!

- We demand a government funding policy that will affirm and uplift black universities and re-establish them as centres of academic excellence and we need genuine and thoroughgoing redress of the disparities between black and white universities. The Ministry must publicly embrace the resolution to introduce free education for the poor!
- We demand a comprehensive policy review of the mergers with a view to repair the damage caused so far. We demand without delay that all closed campuses be restored as sites of delivery. Our townships shall be proud locations of world-class universities. Down with racism!
- We demand an end to the victimisation of student leaders. The Ministry, the student organisations, security agencies and university principals shall enter into an agreement to end victimisation including, academic terrorism!
- Professor Mokgalong and his Esco, the Council of University of Limpopo must all go, it is too late already. University of Limpopo has no leadership!
- The Minister of Education has two options: either to voluntarily resign or be fired by the State President. She has not provided sufficient political oversight in higher education. The system is in crisis. The Minister has undermined and failed to work with student and worker organisations. The Ministry has no understanding of the challenges facing the sub-sector!
- We demand transformation in higher education, we demand the establishment of a dedicated separate Executive Authority at the Ministry level to exercise political oversight in higher education!

These demands shall be responded to within seven, days failure of which we will protest again! Away with racism

away. We want leadership now. We want strong and decisive leadership now!

News from abroad

Racism – an event or a way of life on campuses?

Another racial eruption on a campus in South Africa. Is it just one event involving the gross mistreatment of some human beings by others who happen to be of a different shade? Media coverage, national and international, has put pressure on the University of the Free State to attend to one event – but not to get to the root of the problem. So is this a solution to racial tensions that still exist in South Africa? What does it take to get people to scrutinise racism? Must individuals be degraded and human rights sacrificed before we pay attention? An attack on a white citizen by black criminals might draw some attention too, but not as much due to high crime levels: an incident can be written off as just another criminal act. At what point is that act not seen as a racial attack? How do we explain an attack by black criminals on a black person? Is that not a violation of rights just as much as a racially motivated act is? Does racism only exist on campuses, or is there racism in broader society committed by people from both sides of the colour line? Is racism not a violation of the human rights that so many died for, and that Nelson Mandela upheld when he stated that never, never again would one racial group oppress another in South Africa. What about individuals oppressing other individuals? There

are more questions than answers. But answering questions about different understandings of racism requires deep reflection and sharing of ideas, so that the different understandings can be brought closer together.

The problem of racism exists in society as well as in universities, which is no surprise because universities reflect society. University communities are made up of members of society who bring with them, as capital, values acquired long before they arrive on campus. As one of my colleagues often says, students arrive on campuses as damaged goods, but institutions do very little to repair that damage. Should awareness of racism issues not be part of the curriculum in schools that are now integrated but have no programme to help them deal with racism? Should there not be appreciation of difference and diversity at school level, so that kids challenge and work out for themselves what they believe as they grow older? Learning to appreciate difference could continue at university, with the foundation laid earlier. A colleague from the University of Pretoria talks about how much damage control he has had to do, especially with young white males entering the system – but with a bit of effort, they are able to integrate into the university community. The same could be said for young black males.

Generalisations are dangerous, so I would not like to be interpreted as implying that all institutions are at the same level in terms of addressing racial issues. What I have found to be amazing is that universities, with their capacity to stimulate debates and critical thinking, seem not to be doing well in addressing sticky issues in society such as racism. Raising the issue is not easy for most people – indeed, it is almost taboo to express an opinion about racism or sexism.

A week after the University of Free State event was reported in February,

there was an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about a racial incident at Oregon State University. Institutions in the US and South Africa are all facing racial tensions that result from the integration of students from different racial groupings. Some actions are planned and meant to be malicious, while others happen due to lack of sensitivity or even ignorance of what certain actions might lead to. In the Oregon case, the choice of black out of the two school colours (orange and black) by the student governance as a way of celebrating a homecoming game led to interpretations that the choice was made to mock black students and led to serious tensions. Was this an interpretation or was it intentional? Did students run amok over something that was meant to be neutral, and took it too far? Is the emergence of nooses on campuses or at doors of staff members a signal that racial issues are not being addressed? Was the now forgotten Makgoba affair at Wits a racial act or not?

The numbers of questions that arise out of such eruptions call for universities to seriously address the issue of race. South African universities do not have as part of their strategic plans a component that is aimed at addressing diversity issues and the cultural capital that inhabitants – students and staff – bring to institutions. There is a Human Rights Commission in broader society charged with tackling human rights violations. But should universities not have offices that proactively address the issue and make an attempt to harmonise human relations on campuses? Such offices exist on US campuses and they at least try to deal with problems, before they even arise. There have been mixed successes but at least something has proactively been done. What South African institutions do have in place are Employment Equity offices, some placed strategically in the highest

office, others mostly within a human resources function. These offices were set up in response to legislation; universities did not proactively create them. As long as the top administration at universities, consisting of blacks and whites, co-exist in a pseudo harmonious way and nobody rocks the boat, then all seems fine – they feel they can focus on the ‘real issues’ of navigating the Asmal oceans (former Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, initiated sweeping higher education changes).

Violations of human rights on campuses, rape of local or foreign students on campuses, murders on campuses, and other violent crimes call for action by university leaders in a more structured manner than on a case by case basis. Do institutions keep records and report statistics of violent crimes committed by students or on students? Government keeps the statistics even though they are often not released to the public. Are institutions imitating government or just ignoring the situation? If we do not keep nor record criminal activities, how can we have data that indicates to us the seriousness of the problem? What knowledge will inform policies that are needed to address problems like race and rights violations?

Racism in South Africa will not just disappear on its own – as we have seen in countries like the US, that are still struggling with race issues. Many decades after the Jim Crow era, the electorate for the current presidential elections is not focusing much on issues and who is best suited to address them, but on the race and gender of the candidates.

Higher education needs to provide leadership in addressing societal issues such as racism and many other problems that plague our society. Transformation is an ongoing process. A lot has been achieved and lot more has to be done. Laws have been repealed to enable integration to

take place. In the same way that the Human Rights Commission's report once revealed how much racism exists in schools after the implementation of integration policies, the same kind of racism exists at university level too. There are more black students at historically white institutions but the reverse is not true.

Asmal's strategy of changing the landscape of higher education by merging institutions has not addressed the issue of integration.

There are still residences on campuses that are mainly white – in most of these cases, race is not openly used as criterion for selection; instead, the more palatable 'culture' is used for self-selection in the assignment of residence places. A year ago, when I was applying for places for my son at some formerly white institutions, and he had to apply to stay in a residence too, he was warned by other students that he should be careful which residences he chose because he would not be 'welcome' at white-dominated residences, even though the university might place him there. The reverse applies too, where there are residences that have more black than white students, and white students do not feel comfortable staying there. One of the major changes in housing on campus has been in the number of white students who are opting to stay in private housing rather than in residences that accommodate black students too.

Transforming institutions need to play their role as leaders in transforming society. If students become accustomed to debating and engaging with so-called 'other cultures', they will challenge their parents to think about how they set children up for failure in this country. There have been some attempts, on a small scale, to conduct workshops for students as part of orientation, to get them to learn about each other and address

basic issues such as stereotypes and to respect difference. Some activities at those orientations are unfortunately juxtaposed with 'ruling cultures' within institutions linked to unacceptable initiation practices. Such practices actually contribute more to feelings of alienation and fear among students who are already entering a new system. Some of them are first generation university goers and have to deal with issues of separation from families that have no idea what goes on in universities.

I believe South African universities could learn from some of the models that exist in the rest of the world. Based in the US, I would offer some knowledge of what exists here. A concept often used in US institutions is that of 'learning communities' within residences. Residences are not used as power houses for those who have power over others, but as a place for continuation of learning and an extension of the lecture room. Students are organised into learning communities in the residences, to learn together whilst living together. Staff are appointed to stay in the residences with students to extend the academic culture. Learning communities foster a sense of learning together and develop common values and beliefs among members of that community. These practices are informed by theories of learning that believe that learning is a cultural practice of a group of people learning together.

Residence life in the US is highly professionalised and is organised under institutional departments of Residential Education. Faculty Fellow-in-Residence positions are created and offered to professors who live with students so that they can continue interacting beyond the classroom. Parents or guardians are also encouraged to get involved in students' education, with parent visit days and many other services offered through workshops

on conflict mediation, discussion of roommate agreements or contracts, how to live with a roommate etc. In South Africa parental involvement is limited to paying fees, or being called to a university when the institution has either expelled or is about to expel their child.

Lack of discussion or attempts to come to a common understanding of what racism is, is in itself ground for potential conflict that is not addressed in society. Incidents of racist acts are seen and interpreted as isolated, and are not seen from a broader perspective. When a white male goes on a rampage, killing blacks, or throws a black male into a lion's cage, those occurrences are seen as isolated and not a broader problem that society needs to tackle. The same goes for incidents on campuses, which are not seen as a broader issue for the university or for the higher education system.

How can you just put people together who for generations were taught and forced to live apart, and not see that as ground for conflict? Institutions, just as society, have not put in place mechanisms to promote appreciation of and respect for difference. At institutional level in the US, offices are set up with different names but a common mission.

New York University has a Centre for Multicultural Education and Programs which provides programmes to support students and address challenges brought about by putting students of different backgrounds together, and which educates the university community on the benefits of cultural diversity. Appointments are made at the high level of deputy vice- chancellor to pay attention to diversity issues, and policies are put in place to ensure that the curriculum addresses the issue. The programme I teach in offers a compulsory course for masters students on Diversity in Higher Education, as

part of their training for positions as administrators in the universities.

In South Africa a lot is assumed by administrators on campuses with regard to how integration will take place – you just put students together and hope for the best. The position of Deans of Students is held by a black person in some institutions, which assume that by virtue of being black the person will know how to deal with black students when trouble erupts. I was once offered a similar position, and when I declined the council chair, an Afrikaner woman, without flinching said: “Oh, it’s a pity that you will not take the job because you are such a motherly figure”. I was stunned, and wondered what made her think that with my interest and skills in higher education policy, I should not rather be a position where I could play a role in transforming the institution.

The self-interest of people running institutions is evident in ways that they have – or have not – focused on addressing diversity and equity issues among faculty and staff, or challenges facing students. Understanding the potential human time bomb that is ticking away in South Africa is critical – and universities should be leading efforts to diffuse it.

Teboho Moja is a South African professor of higher education at New York University. She has served as an adviser to two Ministers of Education in South Africa, as well as on the National Commission on Higher Education during the 1990s.

Racism revisited in South Africa

Over the last few weeks, having returned to South Africa after a long absence, I have been struck by the sharp contrast between the racial situation in the country now and that

when I first visited in 1992. One of the most striking aspects of the last years of the struggle against apartheid was the successes in responding to racism. Given the repression, violence, and humiliation perpetrated by apartheid, as well as the misinformation and myths it fostered, the aftermath of the elections in 1994 was amazing for the calm that followed, the reconciliation, forgiveness, confidence, eagerness to move forward, and what seemed to me a collective commitment to transform the nation. To be sure, there were some white South Africans who felt they could not live in a system of equality and many of them left the country. And there were some victims of apartheid who demanded retribution and eschewed reconciliation. But that was neither the tone of the country nor the norm.

I was one of the election officials working on verification of the count during the 1994 election, and I remember walking into the streets outside the Carlton Hotel on that night of 5 May after the results were announced. The streets were overflowing with a multi-racial throng of thousands cheering, hugging each other, dancing and singing. It was a striking contrast to the predictions of those who feared strife and it was a preview of the reconciliation that was to come.

I had been working with twelve historically black universities and technikons since 1993 – a project that continued until 1997. After the elections, I was struck by the fact that even supporters of apartheid among the university and technikon faculty members, staff and students, seemed to be relieved. Some apologised for not understanding the depth and violence of racism, others for believing government propaganda about the ANC, others regretted their doubts about the future.

During the struggle period, race had

not defined who opposed apartheid, and it did not define my experience as a white outsider. The question was not one of race, but of what you believed, how you treated people, how you acted in a context of repression and violence against the black population. And for the majority population following the elections, there was a phenomenal graciousness toward those who had not joined the struggle, a willingness to forgive and move on.

Those who listened to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as I did driving between historically black institutions from one end of South Africa to the other, could not help but be struck by the fact that it did promote reconciliation, that it did allow many people to put their fear, loss and anger behind them. It was the most remarkable period of awakening, new understandings, generosity, and civility I have ever heard about or witnessed. This was a period of amazing transformation for many whites who had supported the apartheid government, a wonderful period of forgiveness and openness among the victims of apartheid, and a commitment to work together to make the new order in South Africa a success.

Much of this happened on university and technikon campuses – at Fort Hare, Peninsula Technikon, University of the North, Pretoria, Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, University of Natal, ML Sultan Technikon and many others. I do not want to overly romanticise this period; there were detractors, efforts to create white racist redoubts, to subvert the progress made. And not all people, white or black, embraced the new order of reconciliation. Nonetheless, the level of reconciliation and the collective efforts of all races to build a new South Africa, were extraordinary.

It was a powerful lesson to me, coming from the United States, which has still not overcome its history of

slavery and racism. Though there has been great progress, we still have racist incidents at our universities and elsewhere – cross burnings, nooses hung to intimidate, racism in some workplaces. And it is a constant struggle. The young do not remember the civil rights marches, Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream”, or the horrors of slavery, lynching and the ravages of racism. Some schools, colleges, and universities have learned that multiculturalism must be retaught, that avoiding racism is a constant battle that requires ongoing education programmes, reinforcement of norms of equality, fairness and justice, and overt action when racism appears.

What struck me on returning to South Africa in February 2008 is that some of what was learned the hard way in the mid-to late-1990s seems to have been forgotten. Much of the civility and graciousness of that period has been lost. For some of the white population the lessons of forgiveness and openness also seem to have been lost and in their place a new racism has emerged, especially among the young who did not experience the struggle. Notions of superiority long suppressed are re-emerging; a sense of entitlement is evident once again among some parts of the white population, and there seems as well to have been a loss of civility in some quarters.

During this trip I have witnessed racism toward black students in Cape Town. And then there was the press coverage given the incidents at the University of the Free State and other demonstrations of racism that have been reported in its wake. Most people took these seriously. But for others it was a ‘joke’, ‘boys will be boys’, ‘this has been taken out of context’, ‘these young men are being used as scapegoats’. I think not. The young men knew what they were doing – they were trying to maintain white elitism in their residence halls, they intended

to humiliate and demean, they were trying to assert white dominance. Yet the context, as Jonathan Jansen astutely writes in another piece in this issue, suggests the need for a new engagement – renewed efforts of the sort that were fostered a decade-and-a-half ago.

That the university allowed this residential housing to be segregated at this late date is amazing. That the issue of racism has not been focused on as well as it should be in education, on an ongoing basis, is less surprising but tragic. Perhaps after the trauma of the struggle, amid the euphoria of majority rule and real success in breaking down many barriers and fundamentals of a culture of racism, including at most universities and technikons, people did not realise that the task was incomplete, that defeating racism has to be an ongoing struggle, one in which each new generation must be involved so that they too come to understand the terrible carnage of apartheid and the destructiveness of this period to ideals of justice, fairness, and equality.

If young people do not learn about this past, those who still harbour racist ideas and hopes will find fertile ground in new generations. Perhaps the lessons of the incidents at the University of the Free State are that the struggle must continue. The history of apartheid, racism, inequality and repression, must be understood by all South Africans – by all people – and a culture of understanding, civility, equality and justice must become part of the lives of everyone. Those who can not operate in such an environment must accept the consequences and be held responsible for their actions.

Dr Fred M Hayward is a specialist on higher education with more than 25 years of experience as an educator, scholar, and senior administrator. He has taught at the University of Ghana, Fourah Bay College and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he

was professor of political science, department chair and dean of international programmes. He was executive vice-president of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation and was senior associate for the American Council on Education for more than 10 years. He has been a higher education consultant for the World Bank, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, Academy for Educational Development as well as for ministries of education, higher education commissions and universities on higher education change, governance, strategic planning, quality assurance and accreditation. Dr Hayward has written extensively on development issues and higher education.

Ban contacts with University of the Free State

This month a video shot in a student residence on the campus of the University of the Free State made headlines the world over. In the video four strapping young Afrikaner males are seen humiliating, degrading and assaulting black female cleaners and an elderly black male cleaner in a ‘spoof’ aimed at UFS’s halls-of-residence racial integration policy. They were members of the ‘Reitz’ residence, named after a former Boer Republic president. The content of the video is too disgusting to recount. Save to say it shamed all South Africans everywhere. The fall-out from the events at Free State has revealed truths about the institution and apartheid’s die-hards, for the white students shooting the video did not do so in a vacuum. They did so because they attend an old-style Afrikaans university which at least tacitly, and at times expressly, condones racism and racial segregation. What happened at UFS was not just shocking in its own right – it strikes me as an attack on the most fundamental rights of all South Africans, myself as an academic working

in Australia included.

The UFS is a traditionally Afrikaans-speaking institution with all that goes with that: deeply conservative, almost completely white, Dutch-Reformed protestant Christian. Traditionally, it was a university serving the predominantly white Afrikaans-speaking farming community – the heartland of Afrikanerdom and Afrikaner-nationalism whose most salient feature was the policy of racial segregation.

The UFS was not the birth-place of apartheid or even its intellectual home. That title was one all the Afrikaans universities competed for with pride and vigour: Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Rand Afrikaans (now University of Johannesburg), Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University), and possibly the most far-right wing of all, the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (now University of the North-West). But UFS did nonetheless make a noteworthy contribution to apartheid, and wholeheartedly supported, and was supported by, the previous apartheid government.

Old South African universities like UFS were white, Afrikaans speaking and openly refused to admit people of colour. It is in this context that we must judge the present-day activities of the UFS management, because it is these historical factors that best explain why it has for 15 years, since the advent of South Africa's new constitution, failed to uphold the rights of black students on campus not to be discriminated against.

English-speaking universities by contrast had as their policy, by and large, to undermine apartheid. When I was a first-year at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg in 1990, I lived in a racially integrated university residence approximately split 40:60 white to black.

That had existed for some years

before my arrival and was repeated in the halls-of-residence at all the English-speaking universities in South Africa by 1990: Cape Town, Natal, Wits and Rhodes all had integrated residences.

Yet such integration was in fact illegal in the early 1990s. It contravened at least the Group Areas Act of 1966, as amended, and may also have contravened the specific university enabling acts, in so far as those acts made provision for particular universities to serve particular (racial) communities. None-the-less, these provisions were ignored by English-speaking universities because their prevailing ethos was that racial segregation and racism generally was irrational and unjust, and therefore not befitting of a 'scholar'. So in spite of the threat of sanction by the State, residences at these universities were integrated some time before apartheid left the statute books.

When Nelson Mandela was elected President we were led to believe apartheid was dead. Yet 14 years after democracy in South Africa, the University of the Free State has still not integrated its hostels. Instead they write and talk about how they are trying as hard as they can, and are trying to go as fast as they can, to achieve integration. They say these things cannot be rushed, although 15 years hardly seems to be a rush.

But Afrikaner racism in South Africa is not limited to race. It is bound up with a general angst about the prospects for survival of their language, Afrikaans, their culture, their identity, their very survival, as they perceive it. Consequently one must not assume that because a university leader is highly educated, he is not racist. Educated Afrikaners, perhaps more so than others, fear the demise of their language and culture. They may very well see their actions, in disproportionate support of the needs of Afrikaans students over the legal

rights of black students, not as racism but as simply their efforts to protect their language and culture.

That may be so for them but it is not so for those against whom the protection is sought. Their rights, enshrined in the constitution's Bill of Rights, ought to take precedence over everything else. Considering that the UFS is a public institution funded by the public purse, black students denied access to university residences because of the colour of their skin are being denied their inalienable constitutional rights.

Leaders of the University of the Free State appear to have been more concerned to pander to the sensibilities of white students, and their demands their residences be kept white, than they have been to uphold the inalienable constitutional rights of black students to be given fair and equitable access to the university's facilities, including its halls-of-residence. So if management of the university does not regard black students as citizens of the Republic, equal to white students before the law, then an ethos is created of racism, racial vilification, racial segregation, and then finally the conditions are created which gave birth to that video.

Evidence of these attitudes became apparent the first time I visited UFS in 1998: staff boasted of how their online learning arm would swell the ranks of black students without bringing them onto campus. They were satisfied at this scheme to keep their campus white.

On that visit I was led into the office of an academic in the law faculty. Her office walls were plastered with posters extolling far right-wing organisations. The dean of the law knew this because he was in her office at the time. I felt then that it was entirely inappropriate to have posters in support of white supremacist organisations on view in a university office. It struck me that this was not protected 'free-speech'. It

was political speech as it was so clearly partisan and should not have been broadcast from a public institution. On my second visit in 2005 she had been elevated to the level of professor.

The head of the residence where the attack on black staff was conducted and callously filmed for sport, Pieter Odendaal, is quoted in *The Star* newspaper as saying the whole thing had been taken out of context. What then is the appropriate context in which to view white male students feeding food to black workers into which they secretly urinated?

Management at UFS has sat back and for years done nothing about right-wing Afrikaner-supremacist organisations on campus that engage at times in overt acts of racism and racial vilification. One such organisation, the Freedom Front Plus, now controls the Students Representative Council.

But when black students and workers wished to march on the university's management to present a memorandum, vice-chancellor Professor Frederick Fourie immediately sought and obtained not one, but two court injunctions. It seems UFS is litigious if you are black and supplicant if you are white. Fourie was also quoted in the South African *Sunday Times* as describing the video as "good clean fun that was badly packaged". The parents of the perpetrators have complained that the media attention has violated the human rights of their sons, and their lawyers have threatened that if charges are laid against the white students because of what was portrayed in the video, they will counter-charge the university with malicious prosecution.

The UFS management has now set out to determine the future of the residence in question: Reitz. Their website says submissions have been called for regarding the future of Reitz from current inhabitants of the residence (who are all white

male Afrikaners), their parents and former residents. One wonders if these three constituencies will offer much divergence in view. It would not surprise if the short version of their response is "the blacks brought this on themselves".

That is not significantly different from what the head of campus security is alleged to have said to black students being physically threatened by white students, and who had called security for protection. He is reported to have said: "You black students must stop causing so much trouble" and then dismissed their request for help.

I found the conduct at UFS so deeply offensive and so antithetical to every principle of scholarship and collegiality, I felt I had no alternative but to request my colleagues at universities in Australia and elsewhere not to make contact with UFS, not to maintain links with them or to cooperate and collaborate until and unless the university administration demonstrated a change of attitude and a sincere commitment to uphold the rights of all South Africans.

Evidence of such disapproval may have a profound affect on the top management of the university, which is overwhelmingly white and male. Should academics around the world be willing to take such steps, UFS should be informed of that outcome. Notification of the disapproval of some of their colleagues elsewhere in the world may spur those in charge at UFS to re-examine themselves critically, and to reform their conduct and civilise their views.

Andy Schmulow graduated in arts and law from the University of Witwatersrand and was admitted as an advocate of the South African High Court in 1998. He now lectures in law at Victoria University in Melbourne.

Political perspectives

From racism to valuing diversity

What the racism incident at the University of the Free State demonstrated was not only the lack of transformation in tertiary education but also the limited impact of reconciliation among people who were born a few years before the democratic transition. Both situations are cause for serious concern. What is shocking is the blatant and banal nature of the racism captured in the *Kousies* (the university's nickname) video, when we have started to think that these types of incidents are isolated and limited to right-wing thugs, not university students. It therefore begs an analysis of the limited nature of integration at historically Afrikaans universities, but also of the meaning of integration. When is a campus 'integrated'? When students of different race groups sit together in the same classroom or stay together in the same residence, yet do not mingle outside these spheres? Or when they respect each other's differences even when they do not live in the same residence? The complexities of historically Afrikaans universities are tied to what is referred to as the 'language issue'.

It is very difficult for Afrikaans universities to diversify their students and staff components and keep Afrikaans as the language of instruction. Not a single historically Afrikaans university has managed to come up with a satisfactory model to accommodate both Afrikaans and English-speaking students at the same time. It seems that a large part of the problems at *Kousies* stems from parallel medium teaching where English students are taught separately from Afrikaans students and apparently no

cross-fertilisation of ideas takes place because black and white students do not get an integrated education.

The University of Stellenbosch's model is more complex, with different options of which the T-option (*tweetaligheid* or bilingual teaching) is the most challenging for lecturers and students. The T-option means that lecturers have to use both languages equally at the same time in the same class. This is also unsatisfactory because both groups of students think that their language of choice is not used enough and many become confused when the lecturer shifts between languages. But at least students have to sit in the same classroom. The only other alternative is to become English medium universities, which is problematic since language is linked to cultural expression and claims that Afrikaans will disappear if not spoken at university level. This is of course debatable if we take into consideration that no other African language is a medium of instruction on tertiary (or school) level.

The even bigger challenge for transformation on these campuses is the institutional cultures that are steeped in an apartheid past, being white and male dominated with invisible rules that may alienate and marginalise groups from other cultures. While blatant racism is an indication of attitudinal racism based on stereotyping and prejudice, structural racism embedded in institutional cultures is far more insidious.

As Philomena Essed (1996) argues, "racial prejudice has an element of common sense, based on false generalisations of negatively valued properties attributed to racial groups other than one's own. Common sense should not be understood as a product of deliberate, systematic, and consistent thought. It is derived from and designed to cope with routine activities of everyday life [in the institutional culture]...Moreover, the

dominant common sense about race... does not necessarily imply an awareness of an underlying race ideology... nor does it explicitly adhere to a goal of confirming and perpetuating inequality, but neither does it include elaborate notions of opposition against racism... Thus racial discrimination is defined in terms of acts and their consequences even when actors do not intend or realise, let alone pursue, the social consequences of their actions."

I quote Essed at length because she makes it clear that racism takes on subtle forms far more difficult to deal with than the very extreme forms of 'old racism' experienced at *Kovsies*. As Essed furthermore argues, people can explain very well that racism is wrong but when you ask them what racism is, they will be inclined to associate it with extremes, such as the nauseating video made at *Kovsies*. But while this type of blatant racism lurks on every historical Afrikaans university campus, in most cases racism is much more subtle and encoded in the norms and behaviour of institutional cultures that are notoriously difficult to change. The fight against this type of behaviour is so much harder because it is so intangible. But it is at the heart of what should be transformed at Afrikaans universities.

No tertiary education institution is devoid of racism (and that does not mean that historically Afrikaans universities should not reflect deeply about the problems of racism on their campuses). But the debate should be steered in a different direction – that of tolerance of and respect for diversity. You cannot have non-racialism in tertiary education unless lecturers (and parents of students) at universities make students understand what diversity entails, that cultural differences exist and that we all have to tolerate (and embrace) these differences.

At the core of this diversity approach is tolerance of difference, not a

homogenisation of cultural differences or an 'othering' of those who are different. Tolerance means to 'put up with' those things that we may not agree with or accept. Integration does not mean that cultural specificities should disappear.

The incident of blatant racism at *Kovsies* has polarised South Africa along racial lines to the extent that anger floats just beneath the surface. Anger is a positive response in the face of racism, but countering with racist sentiments and slogans such as black students at *Kovsies* are doing now will only harden attitudes on both sides. Essed argues that those who are angry should go beyond anger to be assertive. Three types of assertiveness are important. First, political assertiveness – recognising relevant channels and using them to protect group and individual rights. Second, cultural assertiveness – the capacity to expand one's possibilities by using key elements of the norms and values and other culturally specific skills of one's own. Third, psychological assertiveness – the ability to value elements in the dominant culture without loss of self-esteem, expressed with confidence. It requires a critical view of culture and tradition.

This view puts the responsibility on those who feel victimised to act in a positive way, but I also think that the perpetrators of racism should reflect on exactly what the ingredients of their cultures are that makes it possible to dehumanise others.

We should, however, not underestimate the impact of class differences. Class as a variable that can explain difference is relatively under-researched in South Africa, but it is quite possible that differences between students are also related to white students who come from middle-class backgrounds while many African students may be first generation university entrants not from a middle-

class background. We know far too little of how class differences are reflected in reality on campuses, and this should be investigated.

It is clear that there was a climate on the *Kovsie* campus that made it possible for students to make the racist video that they did – and that climate led to very angry retaliations. Once a campus enters this downward spiral, it takes a lot of hard work to get it back on track. One of the things that other historically Afrikaans universities should learn from this incident is not to tolerate the type of climate in which racism festers.

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Amanda Gouws is a professor of political science and chair of the department at the University of Stellenbosch.

Face race head-on

Our problem is not that we talk too much about race – it is that we do not talk about it enough. Recent racial incidents have again prompted some to ask why race is still an issue here. But the only thing surprising about the fact that race is still our major problem is that anyone is surprised. Those who insist that we should have stopped talking about race in 1994 seem to be under the odd impression that to get rid of a system in which one group dominates another is also automatically to end the attitudes it produced. But where has this ever happened? Not in the US, which is debating whether it is ready for a black president almost 150 years after slavery was scrapped and about 40 years after black people in the south gained their civil rights. Not in Australia, where parliament has finally

apologised to the country's original inhabitants for the wrongs done to them ages after formal discrimination ended. Nor, indeed, anywhere else. So why are we surprised that the attitudes that sustained apartheid are still with us? asks Steven Friedman in *Business Day*.

Despite a tendency to lump together all incidents that confirm that race is still our central divide, we can, at the risk of generalising, group racial attitudes here into two types – those that justified domination and those that reacted to it.

If people are used to seeing their group monopolise top jobs in government, business and the professions, many are likely to ignore the fact that this is a result of discrimination and to believe it is because only they know how to perform skilled tasks. This explains why people assume that electricity outages must be caused by promoting black people, or why so many businesses are still unhappy about allowing black people to take real responsibility.

It is also why the deep-rooted white fear that things go wrong when black people are in charge is still very much with us. And it is this that explains the wave of gloom sweeping the country. Because many white people believe that a black-ruled country must come unstuck, setbacks are invariably seen not as problems but as harbingers of inevitable disaster.

Black reaction to being dominated takes many forms – inevitably, not all are productive. But, where black people get together to fight discriminatory attitudes, this is, in principle, not a problem but a potential solution. Yes, a history of race domination can be used for personal advancement, to deflect criticism and deny accountability. But, where black people are still on the receiving end of prejudices, to form organisations in which those who experience this problem try

to do something about it does not perpetuate prejudice – it combats it, because we are never going to deal with our inherited attitudes unless we acknowledge them and try to deal with them.

This points to the most important lesson the racial incidents should have taught us – that we need urgently to revive some of the strategies and activities that were in evidence before 1994.

The last years of apartheid saw a host of activities designed to change racial attitudes. The purpose, of course, was to try to prepare white people in particular for an end to minority rule: even the state media joined in to an extent because the National Party was trying to wean voters off the white right wing. In 1994, most of these programmes stopped: those who ran them and the donors who supported them seemed to conclude they had served their purpose.

It is clear now that this was an error. Because the attitudes that underpinned apartheid did not disappear just because the system died, so activities to challenge and seek to change them were needed when we became a democracy and are desperately needed now. Like other societies with a history of racial domination, we will be dealing with racial attitudes and behaviours for decades. But, if we want to minimise their damage, we need to revive and extend the active attempts to combat prejudice that were shelved 14 years ago.

Dr Steven Friedman is a research associate at Institute for Democracy in South Africa, visiting professor of politics at Rhodes University and a columnist for the national newspaper Business Day.

Original column on the Business Day site <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/topstories.aspx?ID=BD4A725157>



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