In this paper Neville Alexander explores the meaning, for post-apartheid South Africa, of the historic *Brown* v *Board of Education* judgment that formally ended segregated schooling in the USA fifty years ago. Written from within the radical tradition of anti-racist struggle, the paper considers the implications of the judgment for the shaping of social identities and education in the 'newSA'. It argues that social identities are constructed, not given, and warns against the dangers of perpetuating apartheid-era racial categories in the pursuit of affirmative action. With regard to education the paper avers that deracialisation should extend beyond formal desegregation to school integration, as exemplified in the non-racial ethos of the new curriculum. The eradication of racial thinking is identified as the next historic task facing the new South Africa.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Implications of
Brown v *Board of Education*:

A Post-Apartheid South African Perspective

Neville Alexander

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anti-racism in South Africa.

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Isishwankathelo

Eli phepha likhangela intsingiselo esinayo isigwebo setyala laseMelika eliyimbali, nelaziwa njenge*Brown* v *Board of Education* kuMzantsi Afrika emva kwemo yocalu-calulo, sigwebo eso sathi saphelisa iyantlukwano kwezemfundo eMelika kwiminyaka engama-50 egqithileyo. Njengokuba libhalwe kusetyenziswa isikhokelo somzabalazo ochasene nobuhlanga, eli phepha liqwalasela ifuthe elinaso esi sigwebo ekubunjweni kobuni babantu ngokwentlalo nakwezemfundo kuMzantsi Afrika omtsha. Libonisa ukuba ubuni babantu ngokwentlalo buyabunjwa, asiyonto idaliweyo, okanye azalwe nayo umntu. Likwalumkisa nangengozi enokudalwa kukuqhubekeka kokwahlulwa-hlulwa kwabantu ngokobuhlanga njengoko bekuya kuba njalo ngexesha localu-calulo, kuba kufunwa ukufezekiswa inkqubo yokuvulela amathuba kwabo bebefudula bengawafumani, *i-affirmative action*. Xa kubhekiselwa kwezemfundo, eli phepha libonisa uluvo lokuba ukupheliswa kweyantlukwano ngokobuhlanga kufuneka kungapheleli nje ekupheliseni iyantlukwano kwezemfundo ngegama, koko kuphumele ekuhlanganisweni kweentlanga ngeentlanga esikolweni esinye, nto leyo iboniswa kwikharityhulam entsha njengomzekelo wokulungathatheli ngqalelo uhlanga lomntu. Ukupheliswa nya kwendlela yokucinga ngokobuhlanga kubonwa njengomsebenzi olandelayo oyimbali ojongene nawo uMzantsi Afrika omtsha.

Opsomming

Hierdie referaat ondersoek die betekenis, vir Suid-Afrika na apartheid, van die historiese *Brown* v *Board of Education* uitspraak wat vyftig jaar gelede formeel segregasie in die skole van die VSA beëindig het. Geskryf vanuit die radikale tradisie van die stryd teen rassisme, oorweeg die referaat die implikasies van die uitspraak vir die skepping van 'n nuwe sosiale identiteit en onderwys in die nuwe Suid-Afrika. Die skrywer voer aan dat sosiale identiteite gevorm word, en nie gegewe is nie, en waarsku teen die voortgesette gebruik van 'ras'- kategorieë, kenmerkend van apartheid, in die strewe na regstellende aksie. Wat post-apartheid onderwys betref, word aan die hand gedoen dat blote desegregasie van skole nie voldoende is nie, maar dat gestreef moet word vir volle integrasie by skole, soos verteenwoordig in die nie-rassige etos van die nuwe kurrikulum. Die uitroei van ras-georiënteerde denke word geïdentifiseer as die volgende historiese taak wat op die nuwe Suid-Afrika wag.

Abstract

This paper explores the meaning, for post-apartheid South Africa, of the historic *Brown* v *Board of Education* judgment that formally ended segre-gated schooling in the USA fifty years ago. Written from within the radical

tradition of anti-racist struggle, the paper considers the implications of the judgment for the shaping of social identities and education in the 'newSA'. It argues that social identities are constructed, not given, and warns against the dangers of perpetuating apartheid-era racial categories in the pursuit of affirmative action. With regard to education the paper avers that deracialisation should extend beyond formal desegregation to school integration, as exemplified in the non-racial ethos of the new curriculum. The eradication of racial thinking is identified as the next historic task facing the new South Africa.

State actions were highly consequential in shaping the template of modern race relations. Where and when states enacted formal rules of domination according to racial distinctions, racism was reinforced … Where racial domination was not encoded by the state, issues and conflicts over race were diluted. (Marx 1998: 267)

A biographical note

Although I knew very little about the detail of *Brown* v *Board of Education* as a legal matter when I read about it as a young second-year student at the University of Cape Town in 1954, the US Supreme Court's verdict had a direct influence on my political perspectives for the rest of my life and on my aspirations as a would-be teacher.[1]

With rare exceptions, any black university student in South Africa in the 1950s was a highly conscious political being. In one way or another, s/he was inevitably involved in what was ultimately the political struggle of resistance against the racist policies and practices of the ever more self-confident and aggressive apartheid ideologues and bureaucrats of that period.[2] In 1953, I had joined the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) as a 17-year-old student associate and I was to receive my intro-duction to the politics of the liberation movement by dint of participating in the meetings and discussions and, above all, reading with great care the literature of that unique organisation of dedicated professionals who, in their own minds, constituted 'the vanguard of the struggle'.

The TLSA, as far as its specific political and professional concerns went, was, like so many organisations in colonial and neo-colonial contexts, lamentably parochial. However, it was led for some three decades by men and women – some of whom had studied in Europe for short periods – who, because of their paranoically masked Marxist, indeed Trotskyist, leanings, were intent on being all the more visibly 'internationalist', i.e., cosmopolitan. As a consequence, its members were regularly regaled with copious references to international, espe-cially European, events and literature. This had a magical impact on the readership and membership of the organisation, since it projected onto our unschooled minds a kind of Vygotskyan zone of proximal develop-ment, an aspirational space, which was electrifying as a source of moti-vation. In any event, it was in this context that I read about and came to discuss the implications of the famous case. The killing off by judicial fiat of the myth of 'separate but equal' which was, rhetorically, the *raison d'être* of the policy of apartheid, was for black South Africans (we called ourselves 'Non-Europeans' in those days) akin to a ritual of profound emotional and spiritual significance.

Coming as it did at the very moment when the notorious Bantu Education Act was being implemented for the first time, the judge-

ment in *Brown* v *Board of Education* armed the opponents of this nefarious legislation with additional weaponry, and because it derived from the leader of the 'free world' it was all the more potent. South African liberals had a field day in attacking the evidently stone-deaf neo-Nazi apartheid regime from the position of the moral high ground. Left-wing opponents of the regime, such as the members of the TLSA, had a more ambivalent position since, in their view, which was slanted by both a class-struggle as well as an anti-Western angle of vision, it was always advisable to examine carefully any gifts borne by the ruling class of the United States of America. For, even though we were stridently anti-Stalinist and consistently critical of the authoritarian and tyrannical rule of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, we were even more ardently and implacably opposed to the enticements of what to us was the imperialism of the West. In the Cold War, we tended to side with the USSR and against the North Atlantic Alliance on most concrete issues. In reflecting on the dynamics of that period, I find that we were decidedly myopic in not making much more of the political propaganda value of the US Supreme Court's judgement. However, living as we did in one of the most oppressive and racist states in the world at the time, I understand why we were not, as it were, overwhelmed by what to us was the obvious fact that no social system based on the separation of people into 'groups' could result in an equal or just sharing of that society's opportunities and resources. Moreover, in the throes of a life-and-death struggle, mere constitutionalism or legalism, useful and necessary as it is, is certainly not enough. Twenty years after the Court's ruling, a pseudonymous writer in *The Educational Journal*, the organ of the TLSA, while appropriately lauding its historic significance, summed up our evaluation of the Court's judgement as follows:

> It is seldom appreciated or recognised that *Brown* came out of a particu-larly-structured society at a particular time; it came from a Supreme Court which, like the schools it made a decision about, was and is an inseparable part of that society, reflecting and interpreting its changing needs and policies and Administrations. To start with an illusion that the U.S. Supreme Court could fundamentally alter the U.S. school system, because of an ikon [sic] called the Bill of Rights, is to end up with a delusion that it can eliminate the vested economic, political and social inequalities in American society generally. (Titus 1974: 7)

'From Brown to Bakke'

So much for what are, I hope, relevant reminiscences. Four years after the above-mentioned celebratory but critical article appeared, the same author penned a piece under the title I use here as a sub-heading. Its import is obvious to those who have followed the attempts in the USA to work out in practical terms the implications of the *Brown* decision. S/he reminds us sarcastically that with reference to the Court's injunction that the Board of Education of Topeka and, by extension, all other segregationist school authorities had to '… make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance … (and to proceed) with all deliberate speed' to admit children to school on a non-discriminatory basis, the phrase 'with all deliberate speed' had come to be equated with 'any percep-tive[3] movement' (Titus 1978: 6). The resultant frustration and disillusionment among black people as well as among other minorities in the USA were among the elements that fuelled the dissatisfaction and the militancy that flared up in the form of the Civil Rights movement and its various spin-offs. S/he correctly demonstrates how President John F. Kennedy's administration proactively introduced the first affirmative action measures with a view, among other things, to heading off precisely this militancy.[4]

In this essay, I am not, however, going to discuss the dynamics of affirma-tive action in the USA, or even go into the debates concerning this agonising issue in any detail.[5] My focus is specifically on recent developments in South Africa, where we are in certain respects going through a replay of what happened in the USA during the period stretching from the 1950s to the 1980s. Specifically, I pose the question: how optimistic can we be that

> [though] … minor disturbances had broken out at schools across the country, when contrasted with America's decades-long struggle for desegregation that spilled blood in cities across the nation, South Africa's experiment with equality in the schools was proceeding swimmingly. (Cose 1998: 69)

Further, I go on to consider the deeper implications for the shaping of social identities and for the cohesion of the society inherent in the imple-mentation of an affirmative action strategy under the social and historical conditions obtaining in post-apartheid South Africa.

The argument of this short essay rests on two theoretical propositions and is driven by a specific political objective. As my point of departure, I take it to be a fact that in spite of the tenacity of social identities, they are historical phenomena and, thus, changeable, always changing and at bottom fluid. I also take it for granted that prejudice and discrimination, viewed as collective behaviour, can only be changed fundamentally if social policy is approached in a holistic manner, i.e., if the material bases on which they thrive are consid-ered to be necessary components of that which must be changed. Ultimately, it is my view that, in the South African context, the promotion or entrench-ment of racial identities holds within it the danger of genocidal conflict.

Limits of comparative studies

South Africans, of course, have learned from the experience of the USA. However, some of the trajectories we are being made to follow are eerily similar to those which the people of the United States have, in the best cases, already left behind or, in the worst cases, apparently got stuck in. I am particularly concerned about the unproblematical manner in which the discourse of affirmative action in the USA is replicated in the completely different historical and social context of what we sometimes call the NewSA. For, while it is perfectly true to maintain that '… the uniqueness of a political culture can only be understood in comparison with similar situations else-where' (Adam et al. 1997: 8), it does not follow at all that the conceptual and discursive tools one uses in order to draw the comparison are totally sym-metrical. Or, to put it differently, what is unique is by definition not compa-rable. In the present case, apart from the different historical trajectories, there is one fundamental point of difference which gives rise to two completely different social dynamics in the respective countries. While it may be a trite observation, it seems to me essential that we bear in mind that in the case of the USA, we are dealing with a situation in which the black people are a minority in both the numerical and the social senses of the term, whereas in South Africa, we have a newly enfranchised black majority imbued, generally speaking, with a historically evolved ethos of humanistic tolerance ('ubuntu') and a keen desire for inclusive national, indeed continental, unity. This difference is, as I have said, vitally important precisely because of the fact that the state has what I call the paradigmatic prerogative to establish and impose the 'template' which Anthony Marx refers to in the epigraph to this essay. The fact that the current South African government is exercising this preroga-tive in a manner that I believe could easily boomerang on the next genera-tions is a matter of grave concern.

Let us dwell on this difference between the national templates for a few more sentences. In the USA, since the assimilationist melting-pot discourse made way for the pluralist or multicultural discourse of the mosaic or of the salad-bowl, roughly in the second decade after the end of World War II, a distinctive ethnic paradigm has systematically and decisively informed all decisions pertaining to inter-group relations. While it is a fact that, as James Baldwin observed acidly, African-Americans never even made it into the melting pot, in the current hegemonic discourse of hyphenated citizenship, on the surface all appear to be equal and operating on the proverbial level playing field because race and ethnicity have been conflated. I must confess that the taken-for-grantedness of this ethnic frame of reference never ceases to amaze and at the same time to alienate me. This is undoubtedly the conse-quence of the undiminished radical fervour with which I believe that racial identities can and should be deconstructed. Our South African experience

warns me that a social construct based on supposed biological, including for most people intellectual, difference, is more dangerous than any other marker of social difference. And, unsurprisingly, many USA intellectuals share the same sense of unease at the thought that 'race' and racial prejudice may be with us forever. Ellis Cose (1998: 244), for example, writes:

> … [Racial] color blindness is a fantasy, something that exists only in the unreal world of the imagination. … [Certainly] at this moment, one would be hard pressed to dispute the point. Yet the goal of race neutrality is one we cannot afford to abandon – not if we believe that America can achieve its potential, not if we wish to keep alive faith in the triumph of good ideas over bad.

In every society tainted by racist policies and practices, the approaches to eliminating racism will necessarily be different. That much is indisput-able. Comparative studies help us to identify those areas that require special care and attention and also to anticipate problems and avoid unnecessary dilemmas.[6]

Because of the general character of this proposition, it is essential that I point to the equation of 'race' and gender as biologically based markers of difference. I believe that this is a discussion that is still in its infancy but will not canvass it here. Suffice it to say that the actual dynamics of race- as opposed to gender-related struggles against oppression and exploitation are very different in pivotal respects. Consequently, it is a mistake to read off mechanically tactics and strategy deriving from one domain of struggle for purposes of applying them to the other.

The experience of the USA since the *Brown* decision fifty years ago represents for post-apartheid South Africa an entire archive from which we can learn a great deal if we study it carefully. However, we can also choose to ignore it or, worse, misread it, with the result that we might find our-selves repeating history and wasting another two generations as we did, perforce, during the forty-five years of apartheid rule.

The role of the state in the evolution of racial identities

From among the host of relevant issues that ought to be canvassed, I shall foreground for discussion only three matters of paramount concern, espe-cially to the current and the next generation of South Africans. These are: the role of the state in the formation of racial identities; the best approaches to redressing the imbalances inherited from the apartheid-colonial past; and the modalities of the realisation of a non-racial education system.

I begin by taking it as given that in the first decade of the 21st century any lingering belief in 'race' as a valid biological entity is anachronistic. Similarly, there ought to be no reason to question the social reality of 'race'. These are matters on which scholarly consensus can be said to have been

reached even though there are many different theories about why these propositions are valid.

The bibliography on the formation of racial identities, viewed as a subset of social identities, is a very long one.[7] However, the crucial issue I want to focus on is the fact that in modern times, it is the state that possesses the paradigmatic prerogative, in that social identities are inscribed, as it were, in the hegemonic discourse of those who wield economic, political, military and symbolic power. This is not to deny the equally well-attested fact that the subaltern groups co-determine the set of social or collective identities that eventually come to characterise the particular social formation. They do so by contesting, rejecting or assuming (accepting) the 'prescribed' identities.[8] Often, they also initiate such identities through self-labelling. Such labels, in turn, are sometimes 'accepted' and perpetuated by the dominant strata, if they are deemed to reinforce the promotion of the vested or perceived interests of these strata. In the final analysis, it is the state, by virtue of its monopoly on the deployment of legitimate force, that imposes or reinforces the identities that crystallise over time.

The modalities and technology of racial classification by the state are demonstrated most clearly in the early history of the implementation of apartheid. One of the few scholars who have made a detailed study of these processes concludes that

> [t]he architects of apartheid racial classification policies recognized explicitly that racial categories were constructs, rather than descriptions of essences. (Posel 2001a: 109)

She teases out the almost caricatural irony that precisely because of the life-and-death seriousness with which the apartheid strategists and ideologues viewed the issue of 'race', their attention to detail brought them face-to-face with the anomalies and idiosyncrasies of racial identities. She also traces the real trajectories by which these nefarious and totally fantasised notions became internalised to a large extent among the vast majority of the people of the country.

> If constructs, these categories were powerfully rooted in the materiality of everyday life. The ubiquity of the state's racial designations, and the extent to which they meshed with lived hierarchies of class and status, meant that apartheid's racial grid was strongly imprinted in the subjective experience of race. … [It] would be difficult to deny the extent to which the demarcation of South African society into whites, Indians, coloureds, and Africans has been normalized – for many a 'fact' of life. (Posel 2001a: 109)

Given that social identities are historical, not primordial, phenomena, the proposition that the state or, less globally, the ruling elites, have the power to create the 'template' from which such identities are derived and shaped over time, devolves a heavy responsibility on those who are placed in charge of overseeing the evolution of a new historical community in a distinctively transitional and, indeed, transformational period. To take the attitude that the question of social identities is best left alone or, worse, that the inherited identities should be allowed to perpetuate themselves, is to abdicate the responsibility of leadership and to commit oneself to maintaining the old order in all but name.

Social revolutions are by definition periods of radical transformation in all, or most, aspects of a society. A glance at what happened in Cuba after the 1959 revolution should, therefore, give us useful pointers to what is possible, taking into account that one of the most fundamental objectives of the revolutionary leadership was the eradication of racism and racist attitudes and behaviour.[9] With reference to the role of the state in the pre-1959 republican period of modern Cuban history, De la Fuente (2001: 336) in his authoritative and exhaustive study of this question, states that

> … [more] often than not … it is the failure of the government to act that has contributed the most to the continuing significance of race in Cuban society. The state's limited intervention in 'private' social spaces has meant that racism has been allowed to operate virtually unhindered in this sphere.

After 1959, there was a concerted effort 'to socialize younger generations in a new egalitarian and color-blind social ethic' (De la Fuente 2001: 337). The same author gives an account of the advances that the Cuban revolution made in this respect and, in his own words, concludes that '[the] impact of this radical program of social engineering should not be underestimated' (De la Fuente 2001: 337).

On the other hand, he points to the 'paradoxes' that emerged in the process. In particular, he is critical of the way in which the colour-blind ethos invisibilised 'race' and thereby rendered it difficult and even impossible to track positive (or negative) change or to launch serious public discussions of the issue.

> Thus the ultimate irony is that the same government that did the most to eliminate racism also did the most to silence discussion about its persistence (De la Fuente 2001: 338) … [and] [d]espite its antidiscriminatory position and egalitarian social policies, the revolutionary government failed to create the color-blind society it envisioned in the early 1960s. (De la Fuente 2001: 322)

These conclusions have a salutary ring for even the most starry-eyed South African optimist in regard to strategies calculated to eliminate racism and racial prejudice. For, if in a society that had undergone such a profound social transformation as post-revolutionary Cuba, it is a fact that after forty-five years, racial prejudice has not been eliminated and, worse still, that under conditions of the re-marketisation of large sectors of the post-Wall Cuban economy even exploitative racist labour practices are becoming 'normal' again, it is self-evident that in post-apartheid South Africa, where

no such social revolution has taken place, we are faced with an inordinately more complex and difficult challenge.

That the attenuation and eventually the elimination of racial prejudice and discrimination will take many decades is almost self-evident. However, what the Cuban experience underlines is that the state has ample room for creating conditions in which the salience of 'race' and the rigidity of racially defined identities can be reduced and gradually changed in a more positive direction. It also raises the very difficult question, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa of how '… formerly excluded communities [can] be recognised without perpetuating apartheid categorisations …' (Abebe 2001: 2). Franklin (1993: xxiii) reminds us of the real challenge we face on the ground. With reference to the USA, he writes that

> African-American biological features, when associated with class and cultural differences, are more indissoluble than ethnic differences in the absence of biological ones. Race ideology as it applies to African-Americans … is ever-present and 'helps insiders make sense of the things they do and see – ritually, repetitively – on a daily basis' … Race thinking and interpretations of events, even when incorrect, provide coherence to both whites and blacks, albeit for different reasons … *Breaking away from the perennial patterns of activity is a necessary precondition to eliminating the ideological categories that explain and justify the animosities embedded in everyday practices*. [Emphasis added.]

I shall address this issue in the final paragraphs of this essay. For the moment, however, it is necessary to underline two related questions that I believe require of us an unequivocal commitment, especially in South Africa, where a new historical community is coming into being. The first of these is the fact, to which I have referred above, that social identities are inherently unstable and malleable, within definite but generally unknown limits.[10] The importance of this proposition is that there is no barrier in principle to any attempt to create conditions in a conscious and planned manner that will facilitate the strengthening of certain kinds of social categories rather than others. This obviously raises the range of ethical questions connected with the notion of social engineering. In my view, all governments are involved in social engineering to some degree or another at all times. The real issue is to ensure that through open, democratic debate in the media and in other civil-society forums an authoritarian political culture does not become the norm.

The second issue, which has also been touched on earlier, is whether or not a raceless society is possible or even desirable. Ellis Cose (1998: 26) puts the crucial question in the following terms:

> … whether it is possible to divorce any system of racial classification from the practice of racial discrimination, whether a nation splintered along racial lines – a nation that feels compelled to rank people on the basis of race (aesthetically; professionally; socially; and, most insistently, intellectually) – is capable of changing that propensity any time soon.

In the South African debate, the one side of the argument is put very clearly and firmly by, among others, Abebe, who argues that the majority of South Africans place much greater weight on their 'primary' identity, determined by 'race' or 'ethnic group', than on the national (South African) identity:

> To deny this is to repeat the common mistake, especially on the part of the Left, to underestimate the ontological commitments to racial and ethnic identities and their role in shaping historical struggles. (Abebe 2001: 14)[11]

As against this, on the side of the so-called Left, we have to record increasing ambivalence. As the ANC-led government's vulnerability to a social paradigm that includes centrally the continuation of the notion of racial identities takes ever firmer hold on the consciousness of the population, reinforced by the cynical, profit-orientated and consumerist practices of the Establishment media, ever fewer people are willing to speak up for the possibility of that different world, the raceless and, let it not be forgotten, the *classless*, society that was the lodestar of the liberation struggle. I myself continue to take as my compass the views elaborated in their seminal study by Balibar and Wallerstein (1991: 228) in which they assert, among other things that all social identities are 'historical constructs' that are 'perpetually undergoing reconstruction'. In recent years, because of the hegemony of 'race thinking' in the 'new' South Africa, I have become more conscious of the significance of the caveat they added at the time:

> That is not to say they are not solid or meaningful or that we think them ephemeral. Far from it! But these values, loyalties, identities are never primordial and, that being the case, any historical description of their structure or their development through the centuries is necessarily primarily a reflection of present-day ideology.

The affirmative action conundrum

The strategies of the post-apartheid governments to achieve 'historical redress', variously referred to as affirmative action, levelling the playing fields, redressing the imbalances of the past, corrective action, and other such elegant variations, are restricted by as many material as ideological constraints. In a sentence, the dilemma of the South African government, which was placed in office as the result of a decade of recurring waves of mass mobilisation for fundamental social transformation during the 1980s, is constituted by the fact that because there was no social revolution, it has to find constitutional and peaceful means to effect a gradual transfer of power to, and a redistribution of resources in favour of, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills by 'the people', whom they represent. Power is instantiated in many different guises in any given society. However, in a modern industrial state, control of the armed forces and of the capacity to create employment

and wealth are the critical loci of such power. In the compromise that gave birth to the new South Africa, one of the crucial elements was the agreement to integrate the armed units of the previous regime and of the liberation organisations. This latter process has been taking place in a manner that can only be described as the *absorption* of the former guerrilla combatants by the standing army of the apartheid regime, in spite of all the outward trappings of a different entity. The relevance of this observation is to be found in the fact that it is this new South African National Defence Force that is the ultimate custodian of the constitution. The point is that it is as much devoted to upholding the continuity of the capitalist state, stripped of its apartheid trappings, as it is, for symbolic purposes, to highlighting from time to time the discontinuity between the post-apartheid and the apartheid dispensations. The cohesion of the state and the society as well as the guarantee of normality that comes from a working economic system are the essential elements that have to be defended by the integrated Defence Force.

Symbolic power, it can be said, is almost completely under the control of the leadership of the African National Congress and its allies. Those who control military and economic power have, by and large, come to terms with this fact. In the present context, it is pertinent to point out that the very same individuals who were financing the divisive 'multi-national', i.e., racist, policies of the Afrikaner National Party are today financing the 'non-racial', nation-building strategy of the African National Congress.

In the context of the 'negotiated revolution' or of a 'regime change', it is obvious that if there were to be any sudden or rapid redistribution of economic resources (wealth), the confidence of property owners, and especially of investors, in the stability and sustainability of the new dispensation would vanish overnight. The consequences of such a development are, in the hackneyed phrase immortalised by John Vorster, too ghastly to contemplate. For this reason, affirmative action programmes similar to those undertaken in the USA have come to be the preferred mode of 'levelling the playing field'. With the exception of a fringe group of irredentist Afrikaner ('Boer') racists, there is not much disagreement among most South Africans that historical redress is essential if peace and progress are to prevail during the next few generations. How, and how rapidly, this process should happen, remains a national bone of contention.

Four anchor laws have been passed in order to effect the gradual change in favour of what are incongruously labelled 'the *previously* disadvantaged'. These are the Employment Equity Act, the Public Service Laws Amendment Act of 1997, the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levy Act.[12] In a nutshell, these laws are calculated to make all workplaces and all state or state-aided institutions representative of the 'demographics' of the country, i.e., to ensure racial proportionality. The relevant 'races' are exactly

the same four categories entrenched during the forty lost years of apartheid, namely, so-called Africans, whites, coloureds and Indians. The rationale for this approach is quite simply that we have to use the same categories that were differentially treated then in order to both determine the quanta of preference that will incrementally reduce the supposed handicaps (or head starts) of the different groups and at the same time also enable us to 'measure' the fact and the rate of change that it is assumed will be effected by these means. In Posel's elegant turn of phrase, '… [previously] the locus of privilege, now race has become the site of redress' (Posel 2001b: 17).

This is not the place to discuss the effectiveness or even the overall desirability of the specific strategy adopted by the ANC-led government to ensure the redistribution and the augmentation of economic resources, knowledge and skills. Suffice it to say that this discussion is the very stuff of parliamentary politics in South Africa today and though it is my opinion that we have here the typical emission of much sound and even more fury both of which signify nothing, it is precisely these theatricals that ought to convince us that South Africa has become what I have dubbed 'an ordinary country' (Alexander 2002). My concern is rather with the formation and entrenchment of racialised identities in a situation and in a period where precisely this eventuality might be avoided. Posel (2001a, 2001b) and Maré (2001), among others,[13] have spelled out in some detail the paradoxes and the possible unintended consequences inherent in the application of this particular approach to historical redress.

The issues that arise are obvious to all but those who will not see. And the apparent unawareness of the implications of continuing the racial typecasting of apartheid's grey men in order to eliminate 'racism' is reminiscent of the cavalier approach to the HIV/AIDS pandemic displayed by some of the leaders of the ANC. For, from the point of view of the civil service (and even of large civil-society organisations), the question, 'Who does the racial identification?' obtrudes itself. As Posel (2001b: 18) points out,

> [i]mplementing the Employment Equity Act, along with other more informal strategies of redress informed by the same racial logic, presupposes the capacity to distinguish, once again, between 'Africans', 'Indians', 'Coloureds' and 'whites'.

And Maré (2001: 7) describes the Orwellian universe of mundane but none the less humiliating procedures that universities, among other parastatal institutions, are compelled to follow, in order to discover whether they are approaching the optimal 'demographic' proportions in respect of their student, academic as well as service staff complements. I know from personal experience exactly what he means when he refers to the banality of the fact that

> [t]o meet with the requirements of the Employment Equity Act, to gain admission or be refused permission to Universities, to claim travel allowances, to play in sports teams … each requires a statement of race belonging.

There is no opportunity in these forms to avoid the issue. At every level there is an official, from the government minister .. to the company personnel officer or employment equity manager, to monitor adherence or compliance or progress. No provision is made for alternatives to the basic 'four races'[14] of apartheid South Africa, or to reject such classification … Where race is 'legally' … required and it has not been provided, citizens are allocated to a category by line managers or human resources personnel.

This unthinking (?) continuation of apartheid-style racial categorisation allegedly in order to get beyond apartheid and even beyond racism is all the more reprehensible in the context of 'post-apartheid' South Africa, because there are very obvious and completely feasible alternatives. What is required is attention to detail in specific domains of life and a national commitment to redress all disadvantage at all levels of the society, regardless of colour, creed or gender. This would mean, for example, a principled decision to problematise all racial categories and prioritise class as a measure of disadvantage.[15] There are many ways of doing so but a simple example will suffice. On the assumption that there is an actual reason for doing so, anyone who would have been older than 16 years in 1994 could be required to say how s/he was classified racially under the apartheid system. Anyone younger than that could be asked to indicate, if s/he knew, how one or other of her/his parents had been classified at the time. Or, to take another obvious example: in the civil service or in any relevant private-sector situation, where knowledge of an African language is already or will become an increasingly important skill, by virtue of the coincidence of home language and apartheid racial classification, more emphasis on linguistic skills would provide an organic self-correcting mechanism. This would, moreover, provide the incentive to Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans themselves to learn and to encourage their children to learn one of the indigenous African languages. This materially-based practice of prioritising multilingualism, in turn, would constitute one of the main pillars on which cultural and symbolic unity would be based in the future.

A further issue of principle, certainly for the next decade or so, would require a clear commitment to prioritising a massive training programme as against a token 'representivity'. Of course, we should not underestimate the importance of changing managerial and administrative front-line staff in terms of the genuinely inspiring dimension of social transformation. However, this should never become a practice of merely 'putting black faces in white places'. Front-line people should not simply represent African masks worn by unreconstructed apartheid apparatchiki. The very jobs will have to be reconceptualised in terms of a more authentic African clientele and an African reality, at the beginning of the 21st century, that takes into consideration, for instance, the primacy of oral media – without letting up on the expansion and deepening of literacy, especially in the

African languages themselves, a multilingual as opposed to a monolingual habitus, co-operative forms of action as opposed to the universally assumed instinct towards individual aggrandisement and gratification, and so forth. But, as long as jobs continue to be formulated only in terms of their inherited qualities and functions, it is axiomatic that the most likely people to fit the profile are English- and/or Afrikaans-speaking males. To move away from this, clusters of jobs should be advertised such that, for example, a trainer is appointed together with two juniors or apprentices and part of his/her job description is the requirement that s/he train the other members of the team over a three- to five-year period to become fully competent in the job.

Back to school integration

In a recent radio panel discussion on the subject of school integration after '10 years of democracy', one of the panellists appealed to South Africans to stop believing that 'education can carry the entire burden of transformation' – a point which brings us back to where we started and to the implications of *Brown* v *Board of Education*.

At the important National Conference on Racial Integration and Racism in Schools, which was held in Randburg, Gauteng province on 4–6 March 1999, to discuss the report of the research team appointed by South Africa's Human Rights Commission to investigate the state of racial inequity in the schools, a formal statement was issued in which the report's main findings were summarised. The report was extremely critical of the performance of the central as well as of the provincial departments of education. Among other things, the research team slated the Department(s) for their

> … failure to understand the complex manifestations of racism [which] has resulted in the absence of a systematic programme of transformation of the learning and teaching spaces and the elimination of all forms of racism and racial discrimination. (Vally & Dalamba 2002: 153)

Coming as it did, only five years after the formal introduction of the new system, this was unquestionably a harsh judgement. Space does not permit any analysis of the contradictions, tensions, ineptitude and downright sabotage with which the Department of Education (DoE) was confronted in the first few years of the attempt to establish a formally integrated system of school and higher education. A complicating issue in the South African case was the fact that in the first years of the new dispensation, very few analysts made the distinction between 'desegregation' and 'integration'. For, whereas the repeals of racially discriminatory legislation and official practices were, if not straightforward, none the less overtly evident and measurable interventions, getting school communities (parents, teachers and students) to implement the evolving new curriculum consensually – which is what 'integration'

translates into on the ground and especially at the chalkface – was and remains a very different order of challenge.[16]

Five years later, on the eve of the celebration of 'ten years of democracy', Salim Vally of the Education Policy Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, who was one of the authors of that report, told the *Sunday Independent* newspaper in an interview that

> … the country is as divided as before. … He … [said] racism is as rife at an individual level and heavily entrenched in democratic South Africa at an institutional level. Schools and tertiary education providers had done little to promote integration, although they had become desegregated … (Naidu 2003)

Vally went on to lambaste government for not even attempting to implement some of the central 'concrete, low-cost initiatives' recommended by the conference five years earlier and referred to the relevant legislation and regulations as 'fairy-tale laws'. While conceding that some units in the DoE were making ad hoc attempts to deal with the question of racial prejudice in schools, he insisted that there was an absence of any systematic, long-term approach and that

> … eliminating racism requires restructuring power relationships in the economic, political and cultural institutions of society and creating new conditions for interpersonal interactions. (Naidu 2003)

What could 'integration' mean in the South African context? In my view, quite apart from any generic meaning the term might have, the demographic reality of the country is such that deracialisation of public institutions must imply and make possible the attainment of equity in all domains, i.e., the possibility of comparable life chances. 'Race' or colour, like gender or disability, is only one of a range of markers of difference on which discrimination and marginalisation can be, and usually is, based. This is another way of saying that deracialisation under the prevalent conditions is not primarily concerned with 'integration' or even 'assimilation', whatever that might mean. These are questions that have to be left to the organic processes of social evolution which, let it be said, include contestation and conflict. In this connection, it is useful to refer to the bitter experience of the USA where people have learned, after five decades of 'integration' that

> … desegregation is not the same as integration … black students don't necessarily achieve more in integrated environments than in largely black environments; … [and] the mixing of black children and white children, in and of itself, does not automatically reduce prejudice or black students' sense of academic and social inferiority. (Cose 1998: 72)

By way of a final statement on this central question of school integration, I want to state simply and clearly that in South Africa, the centuries of colonialism and segregation capped by the forty-five years of formal apart-

heid have culminated in a racial-caste system at the socio-cultural level of analysis. This system, regardless of the underlying economic system and power relations will take decades – if we are to be optimistic in our prognostications – to dismantle and even longer to be displaced by a system of social relations in which 'race' will no longer be significant in any societal domain. In the educational domain, there are certain technical moves that will facilitate these developments in the short to medium term. One of the most important of these, whatever our professional reservations and critique may be, has already been instituted. I refer to the new curriculum[17] which, theoretically and as far as the administrative capacity of the DoE can guarantee, is consistently non-racial.

The colour-coding of wealth

In conclusion, in respect of the central question of this essay, i.e., the making and unmaking of racial identities, there is a ray of hope that has begun to light up a sky that otherwise seems to be full of foreboding.[18] In an ironic twist, what I refer to as the colour-coding of wealth by working-class people in the townships of South Africa may be heralding the end of racial identities in the usual biological sense, at least in South Africa. This is the opposite of the well-established practice of referring to certain types of work as 'black', regardless of the colour of the person so occupied. The 'social blackness' of prostitution or of drug-dealing as an occupation, for example, is embedded in the subconscious of probably most people in South Africa.

I have myself observed and often hear others confirm that it is becoming customary to refer to wealthy middle-class black people, especially those who move around in flashy motor cars, as 'umlungu'[19] or some other variant of the word meaning 'white man' or 'white woman'. This could, and probably does, mean that biologically based racial identities are viewed as rooted in a past where only 'white' people were wealthy. This transposition of 'class' onto 'race' on the ground, as it were, is the final, if paradoxical, vindication of those of us who, like Posel (1983: 62), believe that both class- and race- reductionism are analytical dead-ends and that

> … what is fundamental and distinctive about the South African case is the *unity* of class and race as the source of structural differentiation in the society.

'Non-racialism' is the founding myth of the new South Africa. This essay, I hope, has demonstrated that, speaking generally, the political class has not yet begun to understand all the implications of this slogan. Those who have done so but continue to act in a manner calculated to perpetuate racial identities are, clearly, manipulating the popular mind by using the term to signify no more than a 'myth' in the usual meaning of the term. As

a consequence and because of the genocidal potential of a social grid of racial and of competitive, reified ethnic identities, anti-racist leadership in government and in civil society have to be clear that the struggle continues and that the next historic task that faces us is the eradication of racial thinking, the most deadly of viruses, from the body politic. In order to do so, we have to undertake the necessary preventive measures in the economic base and in the cultural assumptions and practices of society so that the virus cannot thrive. In a globalising world where soon even Martians will no longer be aliens but in all likelihood in fact United States citizens, and where there are virtually no barriers to the free flow of ideas, goods, capital and, under increasingly paranoid conditions, even of people, it is high time that we plan for a second Copernican revolution. This is a revolution in the conceptual universe that will populate the heads of the coming generations, no longer cluttered with superstitions such as 'race', caste and reified 'ethnicity'.

It is a task, the initiation of which many people inside and outside South Africa optimistically believe to be possible for those who brought about the 'miracle' of the new South Africa. But miracles are in fact terribly mundane phenomena once one begins to look into their genesis and it might be more realistic to take the view that in spite of very favourable historical conditions, future generations will not know for many long years whether such a revolution is possible.

Notes

1. This paper was delivered as a keynote address and as a panel contribution at the 50th Anniversary Conference on *Brown* v *Board of Education* held at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign on 3 April 2004.

2. The Afrikaner National Party had been in power for only six years in 1954.

3. Probably intended to read 'perceptible'.

4. In retrospect, it is not surprising, of course, that a Court ruling that granted equality of treatment in respect of education had to eventuate in some kind of affirmative action strategy, since it inevitably drew attention to the fact that the 'playing fields' were far from being level. The passing of the Civil Rights Act ten years after *Brown*, especially its Title VII non-discrimination provisions, represent the formal acknowledgement of this trajectory.

5. The most readable summary of the debates and their implications is Cose 1998.

6. Frederickson 2001 is an excellent example of this understanding.

7. Useful starting points are Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Marx 1998, Reisigl and Wodak 2000, Hamilton et al 2001.

8. In the South African context, recent examples of such contestation are the labels 'Bantu', 'Coloured' and, at the time of writing, 'Afrikaner'.

9. Cuba has a special significance for South Africans and Namibians because of the unwavering support which the revolutionary government gave to their respective struggles for national and social liberation. In spite of foreign policy differences, there continues to be a special relationship between the ANC-led government of South Africa and the government of Cuba.

10. Space does not allow me to discuss the fascinating debates currently being conducted in South Africa about what it means to be an 'African' or an 'Afrikaner', among others. Suffice it to say that in the social laboratory of post-apartheid South Africa, we are able to observe first-hand the remaking of apparently immutable social identities.

11. Also, see Greenstein 1993 and O'Malley 1994.

12. For the purposes of this paper, I do not consider the recent preoccupation with so-called (Black Economic) Empowerment Charters in major economic sectors, since these affect, generally speaking, only a tiny layer of upwardly mobile black middle-class individuals.

13. The History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand and the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research fashioned a timely forum for many of the country's intellectuals and activists to discuss these and related issues in a high-profile conference under the umbrella title: The Burden of Race? 'White-ness' and 'Blackness' in Modern South Africa (5–8 July 2001).

14. The equivalent forms of the University of Cape Town do, however, have a slot for a racial category that is labelled 'Unknown'.

15. At the level of detailed implementation, of course, all such suggestions throw up countless problems. Cose (1998: 121-124), in the US context, shows that this approach is not necessarily the panacea that many people believe it to be. He summarises his own position as follows:

'A system that intelligently tried to take the totality of one's experience into account and to select and nurture those who are truly most deserving would not eliminate questions of race from the admissions process, for race is a fact of life and, for some people, a component of the barriers they have had to overcome. It would, however, mean that race is not inappropriately taken into consideration, that Latino or black is not, ipso facto, taken as a surrogate for deprived.'

In my view, we are able, in the South African context, to approach the matter somewhat differently because of the balance of power on which the new dispensation rests. In fact, as I demonstrate below, we can use affirmative action to problematise and undermine racial identities, instead of entrenching them.

16. In the 1999 Report (published officially only in 2002) of the research team appointed by the SAHRC to investigate racism, 'racial integration' and desegregation in South African public secondary schools, the authors tend to stress mutual social acceptability and tolerance as indices of 'integration'. However, they arrive at the damning conclusion:

'If we understand integration to mean fundamental changes not only in the personal attitudes of learners and educators but also in the institutional arrangements, policies and ethos of the school then this is absent from almost all of the schools studied.' (Vally & Dalamba 2002: 24)
This study remains the most authoritative of its kind yet undertaken in post-apartheid South Africa.

17. 'The curriculum' is, naturally, never the same for any two students and certainly not for students who come from more, or less, advantaged strata of any social formation.

18. Cose (1998: 132) refers to racism as '… one of the most Byzantine – not to mention sensitive – issues of the current age, and one made all the more difficult by the fact that there is no conceivable solution that will not leave some group feeling resentful and betrayed.'

19. The singular form in isiXhosa of a generic Nguni word. Chinua Achebe, in his clairvoyant novel, *A Man of the People*, almost forty years ago already referred to this class as 'the black white-men of Africa'.

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