

Essay

Colonisation and the Genesis and Perpetuation of Anti-Blackness Violence in South Africa

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Abstract: The narrative of the colonisation of South Africa that prevailed and continues to prevail in certain segments of contemporary South African society is that of the white coloniser as an industrious, noble, peaceful and innocent being, divinely tasked with the project of bringing civilisation to the country's indigenous Black tribal people—people bereft of religion, cognitive competence and incapable of responsible land ownership. In this article, I reflect on the genesis of anti-Blackness over three and a half centuries and argue that despite Black resistance over this period, the systematic orchestration of anti-Blackness through repressive violence, constantly morphing policy legislation and relentless propaganda machinery has imprinted on the psyche of South Africans in particular ways. Black academe in South Africa has been systematically frustrated with Western Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies and struggle to engage in any substantive epistemological or ontological delinking. Inspiration from decolonial theory is invoked to offer an analysis of the paralysis of the new Black political, economic and academic elite, as they occupy a zone of being co-opted into the stranglehold of white economic and cultural hegemony.

Keywords: anti Blackness; apartheid; decolonisation

1. Introduction

However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. (Fanon 1967, p. 10)

This profound observation by Frantz Fanon just over half a century ago has drawn multiple interpretations and analyses and has been used to substantiate sometimes contrasting arguments in extant literature on decolonisation and anti-Blackness scholarship. It is not my intention in this article to profess yet another interpretation, except to argue that the proclivity for the construction of Black as inherently and immanently negative has been a sustained and deliberate orchestration that has reified the denunciatory stereotype of blackness, aligning blackness with inferiority, deficiency and lecherousness, so much so that attempts at reclaiming blackness as a positive connotate, expose the argument to the risk of expedient critique, namely that of re-instigating an essentialism. Implicit in this kind of critique is the inevitability of whiteness as a preferred aspiration. It is thus pertinent for this article to trace the genesis and perpetuation of anti-Blackness sentiment in South Africa with a view to analysing the dense and layered complexity that sustains its perpetuation in the post-apartheid and post-colonial eras.

The construction of Black that I subscribe to is that of the Black Consciousness Movement led by the late Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, who was killed while in detention by the South African police in 1977. For the movement, Black was an inclusive construct, offering for all who were subjected to white oppression, including Asians and Coloureds (Coloureds being a white imposed racial category of people of Khoi, Malay and white coloniser ancestry). My designated category is that of Indian, belonging to a group of people shipped to South Africa as indentured laborers. As I write this article, I remain acutely aware that, as a person of Indian descent, while the Indian community also faced oppressive apartheid laws, I did not bear the same burden of Blackness as indigenous



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Black people, as Majavu correctly reminds us (Majavu 2022). In scripting this piece, my intention is to remain respectful and consciously aware of my positionality with the view to bringing into the contemporary academic space the history and current perpetuation of anti-Blackness, which liberals are reluctant to engage with in the South African academe (Sithole 2016).

Anti-Blackness, as a socially constructed phenomenon and legislated for centuries, has been powerful in sustaining distorted conceptions of Black people. Dumas, in his reflection on the contemporary condition of Black people in America (Dumas 2016), reminds us that while it might appear anachronistic to dredge up the past (the period of legislated slavery in the US), it is only through a profound understanding of how black as demonic was constructed and reified over time that we might come to understand why intense negativity endures towards anything and everything associated with Black. This anachronism also holds in the South African context, as it remains particularly perplexing how, after three decades of democracy and Black political emancipation, Black enslavement, poverty and destitution remain a shameful feature of South African society (Mokhutso 2022). While new legislation denounces colour racism as it existed under apartheid, there is a need for a deeper analysis of contemporary Black suffering. This article advances the argument that three and a half centuries of anti-Blackness and Black misery at the hands of white colonisers have been so deeply internalised that Black persecution and subjection have assumed a normality—Black trauma as having attained a naturalness, a relegation to a state of perdition, so much so that even the new Black political, economic and academic elite, while empathetic to the cause, have somehow acquiesced to the notion of Black trauma as optically unpleasant but a tolerable destiny. There is little contention that colour racism was the brainchild of colonisation, as will be discussed in the section that follows. What has become evident though, is that “settler colonialism . . . survives apartheid” (Veracini and Verbuyst 2020, p. 259). As such, the intensity and the protracted nature of anti-Blackness dogma should not be underestimated, given the visible contemporary effects of its sinister work.

Writing from an American perspective, Dumas asserts that “Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity. . . (t)he Black cannot be human, is not simply an *Other* but is *other* than human” (Dumas 2016, p. 13). As such, humiliation and violence meted out to Black subjects ought not to raise unwarranted concern. Anti-Blackness, according to Wallace “determines the function and meaning of blackness as the antithesis of what it means to be human. . . to be Black is to not be human and, despite its gradations, to be human one must not be Black” (Wallace 2022, p. 377). The implication then is that no amount of activism or policy legislation will alter the material conditions and lived experiences of Black people in societies like America. It thus begs the question as to whether Dumas’ assertion holds for previously colonised societies like South Africa, where whites no longer have political control. To extend Dumas’ argument then, one might contend that political emancipation in societies like South Africa accompanied by anti-racist legislation might be somewhat benign in radically altering centuries of anti-Black constructions.

To make sense of how Black oppression persists under Black governance, Frantz Fanon’s powerful constructs, namely the zone of being and the zone of non-being, have particular salience. Decolonial theory, inspired by Fanon’s philosophical insights, has been taken up by writers like Ramon Grosfoguel, who argues that “. . . people classified above the line of the human are recognised socially in their humanity as human beings and, thus, enjoy access to rights . . . , material resources, and social recognition. . . (while) . . . people below the line of the human are considered subhuman or non-human; that is, their humanity is questioned and, as such, negated” (Grosfoguel 2016, p. 10). Pillay cautions that the issue with Latin American decolonial theory is that it is located in the discourse of assimilation, and is somewhat limited in analysing settler colonialism, in which the colonial project was one of enforcing difference (Pillay 2021). It is particularly the aspect of enforced difference that I pursue in this piece, namely difference along the lines of race, where Black was systematically relegated to the bottom of the racial hierarchy. In post-apartheid

South Africa, the emergence of a small political and economic Black elite suggests that such subjects have ‘progressed’ into the zone of being, as their affluent middle-class status gives them access to high-end privileges like prestigious education, private health care and opulent lifestyles. Anti-Blackness theory, however, asserts that despite their political, economic, or intellectual standing, Black subjects, even as they occupy the zone of being alongside other race groups, cannot escape the default race hierarchy and construction of Black as inherently corrupt, misguided, irrational and cognitively wanting, and are always relegated to the bottom of the racial status ladder. Black subjects in the zone of being, given their endowments, are better positioned to attempt to rebuff and resist white dominance of social and cultural spaces, but are not likely to alter in any significant way, the hegemonic hold of whiteness in these spaces.

Anti-Blackness theory reminds us that Black subjects in the zone of non-being, also experience a race hierarchy in this socioeconomic space, enduring daily aspersions and humiliation—their economic status being that of perennially underemployed or unemployed. White poverty and harm to whites, command greater media and political attention and rectitude than Black destitution, suffering and brazen atrocities against Blacks (Majavu 2022). Evidence of this can be traced back to the Carnegie Commission (1927–1934), which was specially set up to investigate the phenomenon of poor whites at the time, with a view to developing a scientific basis for addressing the plight of this group—people not destined to live in poverty (Ntshinga 2016). In contemporary times, the refugee crisis created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a despicable example of selective European and American empathy for white Ukrainians (Bajaj and Stanford 2022), relaxing complex legislation designed to curb immigration, yet on a daily basis, refugees of colour, including Black refugees, are literally blocked, even as they risk life and limb in search of safe havens for their families. Vaccine apartheid that reared its immoral, ugly head during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bajaj et al. 2022) was another instance of how the rich white nations of the world closed ranks, hoarded vaccine supply and indecorously served up the residuum to poor, especially Black nations of the world—inhabitants of the zone of non-being deemed not deserving of or entitled to immediate medical rescue.

Anti-Blackness, then, is a conscious attitude that automates actions by whites that might receive open condemnation, but gets deflected and is seldom tolerated in white-dominated spaces for the discomfort that it causes to white people. Anti-Blackness is at play in both the zone of being and the zone of non-being. It thus raises the question as to how, whether, or the extent to which Blacks, in the zone of being, assume responsibility for the well-being of those in the zone of non-being. This is a particularly pertinent issue in the South African context, as it provokes the extent to which the African National Congress, the Black-led party in the new democratic government, has in fact demonstrated the will to alleviate the suffering of people in the zone of non-being, which in the SA context is predominantly Black. The paralysis of dealing with Black poverty in South Africa will be taken up later in the discussion and relates to the complicity of new Black elites with white bourgeoisie capitalists and the flagrant adoption of neoliberal economic principles in post-apartheid South Africa (Mtyalela and Allsobrook 2021).

This article examines the genesis of anti-Blackness, with particular emphasis on the deliberative moves in South African history that contributed to an enduring anti-Black sentiment. A useful point of entry is a description of the South African historical landscape, with particular reference to the scourge of colonisation, the emergence of white supremacy, militarily enforced racial segregation and the deliberative, systematic creation of conditions for the establishment, legalisation and entrenchment of a racial hierarchy.

2. The Spectre of Apartheid and Colonisation in South Africa

While there are several watershed moments in South Africa’s history that galvanised and consolidated anti-Black sentiment, it is not possible to address all of these, except to illuminate certain selected defining moments that contributed to the current shape and

texture of contemporary South African society, starting with the early incursions in the southernmost part of South Africa.

In the mid-1400s, the first Portuguese sailors rounded the southern tip of Africa, which they named the Cape (of storms)—cape being a promontory or geographically coined elevated piece of land that extends into the ocean. It was, however, the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652 that marked the actual invasion of this region by Europeans—an incursion that led to bloody conflict between the native Khoi-Khoi and the invading colonisers at the time (see [Laband 2020](#)). This region was ironically renamed the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch—ironic since it unfortunately represented the commencement of 340 years of violent colonial oppression by European colonizers. The governance of South Africa as a European colony shifted several times between the Dutch and the British. Both imperial nations were able to effectively subdue the indigenous people mainly due to their superior military (guns and canons) ([Stapleton 2010](#)). This military puissance rendered relatively ineffective the weapons of indigenous peoples in Africa and other parts of the world. In fact, the domination and subjugation of large numbers of indigenous peoples by small numbers of invaders is a direct result of military brutality and the unrestrained mutilation of Black bodies. It must be emphasised that the dominant literature on South Africa's colonisation has been scripted and deliberately manipulated by the white political and academic fraternity ([Majavu 2022](#)). As can be expected, the narrative (both pictorial, written and spoken) is of friendly, congenial colonisers who happened to arrive at the Cape with unselfish good intent, seeking out mutually beneficial partnerships with local indigenous folk. The civilisation of the perceived savage was deemed a moral, spiritual duty of the European coloniser—a kind of saving of the Black from their wretchedness by divinely bestowed superior whites. Such distorted discourses became the epistemological fodder that saturated school and higher education curricula for centuries ([Da Cruz 2005](#)), having the effect of an indelible etching in the psyche of both white and Black people, with whites consolidating their belief in their superiority and Blacks being indoctrinated into subservience and incapacity.

A defining feature of South African society is that anti-Blackness remained legislated up until 1994, commencing with early legislation like the Masters and Servants Act of 1856, which was designed with the intent of criminalising the behaviour of Blacks that was reckoned to be disruptive to the well-being of whites. While European colonised nations in Africa and across the world had acquired independence from their imperial masters in the post-World War II period, colonised South Africa remained under the imperial stewardship of the British government until 1960, when it was declared an independent republic. Its governance, however, remained in the hands of the economically and militarily superior white minority. The process of forced land dispossession and military control thereof had begun since the first arrival of Europeans, and was enforced through seminal legislation like the Natives Land Act of 1913, an act that marked the physical segregation of people on the basis of race. Of significance is that this piece of legislation decreed that indigenous peoples would be entitled to less than 10% of the country's land in designated reserves, on tenure, and were not allowed to purchase land outside of earmarked territories. The effect was to render the indigenous to that of an alien or outcast in his native land, and according to Modise and Mtshiselwa, is a valid explanation for the genesis of the condition of systematic and sustained poverty extremity, especially among Black people in South Africa ([Modise and Mtshiselwa 2013](#)). Wealthy whites in contemporary South Africa continue to perpetuate discourses that justify accumulated white wealth and portray Blacks as lazy, incompetent and incapable of rising above their economic status as whites have done ([Wale and Foster 2007](#)).

The fact that Black people in South Africa are more susceptible to vulnerability as it relates to food security, malnutrition and health impediments is no coincidence. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act No. 21 of 1923 gave white authorities powers to restrict the movement of Blacks, enforce and pass laws and forcibly remove Blacks from urban areas reserved for whites. The Group Areas Act, Act No. 41 of 1950, a notorious piece of

legislation, was the cause of untold misery. It declared geographically separate residential areas for different race groups, with expansive prime property earmarked for whites. Blacks had no choice; they were uprooted by force and compressed into areas, all of which were severely under-resourced in terms of infrastructure (running water, electricity and sewer systems), education and health care provision since the inception of this act. The Bantu Homelands Act of 1970, another despicable piece of apartheid legislation, was specifically designed to strip Blacks of any right to citizenship in white South Africa. It legislated that Blacks become citizens of designated Bantu homelands, tracts of land located outside of the county's lucrative economic zones. Such homelands were 'ruled' by white-appointed Black puppet leaders who had bought into their own subjugation. Although these Bantu homelands were incorporated back into South Africa after 1994, these zones continue to be plagued by underperformance as it relates to educational outcomes and still suffer from deficient health systems and crumbling infrastructure.

The concept 'swart gevaar', which translates into black peril, was a powerful ideological tool as it actively promoted the idea that whites were at risk and in danger of being overpowered by Blacks, given the Black population size and the perceived inherent treacherous and evil qualities of Blacks (Maistry and Le Grange 2023). The fear of contamination of the white race manifested itself in the promulgation of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, Act No. 55 of 1949, and the Immorality Amendment Act, Act No. 21 of 1950. These acts made sexual relations and marriage across the colour line illegal. The Black body, blood and genes were constructed as adulterate, toxic and feculent. As such, it represented a real threat to white purity and the preservation of whiteness (Hyslop 1995). These acts condemned sexual relations across races as 'immoral' and sanctionable if transgressed. The main intent though, was to declare unlawful, any sexual relations between white and Black people. Black men in particular, were presented as the greatest threat and as having to be restrained by law (Hyslop 1995).

The phenomenon of objectifying Black bodies—bodies as mechanisms or artefacts for economic and sexual exploitation—can be traced back to what Maldonado-Torres describes as misanthropic scepticism (Maldonado-Torres 2016), namely the first encounters by white European settlers with the exotic Other—the demonically mystical Other, deemed devoid of a recognisable religion, namely, Christianity. Decolonial theorist Ramon Grosfoguel's analysis of the origins of race as a concept, argues that the incipience of this social identity construction has its roots in the systematic and orchestrated genocides of the 16th century (Grosfoguel 2013)—genocides against indigenous peoples of the Americas and Asia and the lucrative trans-Atlantic slave trade. The encounter with the non-Christian, soulless Other presented what might be considered a dual opportunity for the coloniser. Firstly, to assume a self-ascribed saviour complex—a moral obligation to rescue the savage from his alienation and non-affiliation to a Christian god, giving effect to a mass missionary agenda. The second and more sinister opportunity was to expediently declare that those not subscribing to a Christian religion, as soulless and therefore, not quite human, subhuman or less than human, akin to animals—a conscious deletion from the category of human (Grosfoguel 2013). This misanthropic scepticism, that is, European doubt as to the humanness of the exotic Other, fueled the second opportunity and had far-reaching implications. It instantaneously created a category of exploitable being, namely the slave being, 'legally' without (human) rights and held to a lower standard.

Grosfoguel argues that religious racism was the first distinctive marker—a construction of a hierarchy, a differentiation based on the unfounded assumption of a lack of spirituality on the part of indigenous peoples of conquered territories. This differentiation hinged on the notion of the religious inferiority of people of colour. Religious racism, the denial of fellow humans of different religious and spiritual proclivities the same status, constituted the advent of religious prejudice. The perception of religious inferiority, conveniently mutated into hierarchy on the basis of phenotype, with the composition of epidermal melanin as a defining differentiator of racial identity. At the risk of essentialisation and linear compression of centuries of social encounter, except to make the point, what was

evident was that religious racism and the assumption of white Christian superiority had morphed into a ‘naturalized’ conception of Black, areligious (soulless) inferiority. Of particular note is that racial identity ascription was in fact the handywork of Western modernity and the European colonial capitalist project.

Interest in South Africa as a colony increased exponentially in the mid-1800s with the discovery of gold and diamonds. For many years, South Africa has been among the leading gold and diamond producers in the world. In fact, the Anglo–Boer War (1889–1902), an intense conflict between Dutch settlers and the British was precisely over control of the newly discovered lucrative goldfields of the country. The British, under the ruthless leadership of Cecil John Rhodes, were instrumental in the formation of arguably the most powerful mining consortiums in the world, whose legacy and dominance for over a century continue in present times (Magubane 1996). In an egalitarian context, the discovery of these sought-after precious metals might well have been considered fortuitous, in the sense that income generated from mining would be shared by the citizens of the country. South Africa’s nefarious history of the ownership and exploitation of its natural resources, however, can be described as large-scale, brazen proverbial rape of the land of the indigenous people, with the financial rewards of such exploits accruing to a small white coloniser elite. Indigenous Black people, given the social constructions of them described above, were deemed not worthy of, or not deserving of a share of any of the spoils.

In essence then, when news of South Africa’s mineral bounty spread, what followed was a mass influx of European colonisers eager to stake their claim to the land’s wealth. Of significance is that the wholesale exploitation of gold and diamonds and the growth and development of the lucrative corporate mining sector happened on the back of indigenous slave labour (Legassick 1974). Mining equipment and machinery were rudimentary in the 1800s. The physical effort and risk to life and limb were shouldered by indigenous Black slave labour (Stuckler et al. 2013). Policies on labour safety were nonexistent. As such, the exploitation of Black bodies was as machines for extraction, enduring perilous underground conditions. Given the dispensability of Black bodies and the classification of Black people as animal-like slaves, records of the numbers of Black mineworkers that perished in the mining industry are not a statistic that white colonisers considered important. European prosperity and the expansion of capitalism were direct functions of the availability of cheap/free slave labour (Wolpe 1972), accompanied by the self-accumulation of profit/wealth by militarily powerful colonisers.

The exploitation of Black mineworkers is a shameful legacy that continues to haunt the South African mining industry (Clark and Worger 2016).

3. The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism: Oxymoronic Ethnic Identity Construction and Anti-Blackness

The South African history oeuvre is replete with a spectrum of versions of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa (Marx 2008), its intentions and impact, ranging from conservative Afrikaner perspectives to liberal white English academics’ analyses, to critical Black scholarship in this field (see Ramutsindela 1998, for a more detailed account of the debates). That the somewhat abbreviated account of a complex process (tracking the rise of Afrikaner nationalism) offered in this article might be subject to critique, is to be expected. The fact that this phenomenon has generated such intense examination suggests that it has been a significant factor that has contributed to the shape of South Africa’s history of anti-Blackness (Giliomee 1983; Thomas and Bendixen 2000).

The concept of Afrikaner nationalism might well be considered oxymoronic given the context in which this phenomenon came to seed itself. Nationalism as an ideological concept speaks to allegiance or loyalty and devotion to the nation-state, where the interests of the collective supersede the interests of the individual. Afrikaner nationalism, however, was a reaction by Afrikaners, especially in the period following World War I, when poverty levels and ‘landlessness’ amongst white Afrikaners became a problem for white-controlled South Africa at the time (Dubow 1992). The brutality and violence of the British (Van Heyningen

2009) in their warfare with the Dutch settlers was also a telling factor in rallying support for a people who had decided that South Africa was a place that they belonged to and that belonged to them. What was indeed ironic was that when the Afrikaner government came into power in 1948, the application of heavy-handed military violence to control the Black indigenous people (Payne 2008) appeared not to be an issue of consideration, as anti-Black sentiment was a key strategy to galvanise both English-speaking and Afrikaner people to hold Black people in subjugation.

The construction of a purist, sacrosanct Afrikaner identity, depended on the construction of the Other as anything but, by the Afrikaner propaganda machine, with its theological anchor in the Dutch Reformed Church (Longford 2016), was responsible for developing a narrative that Afrikaners were a unique and special people, that they were the chosen people of God and racially superior (Giliomee 1983). Furthermore, they believed that the land they forcefully occupied was a divine gift that they were entitled to (Geertsema 2006). Arguably the most profound self-arrogation of title, was the idea that the Afrikaner people had become *indigenous*. This was a particularly compelling socio-geographical warping, as the Afrikaner had reclassified himself native—as a natural inhabitant of the land. Afrikaner fascism, inspired by Nazi fascism, the extent of which has been subject to debate (Furlong 1992), marked the advent of strong central state control and the development of a powerful military and police force that maintained the Afrikaner Nationalist Party in power for a period of almost five decades (Schieber 1976). The Afrikaner Nationalist Party's coming into power and remaining in control of South Africa from the period 1948 to 1994, was premised on the notion of apartness or apartheid—that the different race groups in South Africa be kept strictly physically separated. In ascribing to Afrikaners a self-declared superiority, the Afrikaner government then proceeded to implement an affirmative action policy, taking steps to protect white workers and help poor whites (Johnstone 1970). Over time, this resulted in the creation of an affluent Afrikaner and white English population that continues to hold on to affirmatively acquired wealth even in present times, at the expense of the indigenous Black people of South Africa (Maistry 2021). Piketty asserts that the disruption of patriarchal capitalism and the generational transfer of accumulated wealth by the economically powerful is highly unlikely (Piketty 2014), as is evident in the case of South Africa, where the minority white population continues to have a stranglehold on the economy.

4. Black Resistance to Colonisation and the Anti-Blackness Campaign

The risk of offering an analysis of the consolidation of anti-Blackness is the construction of the Black condition as that of helpless and hapless victims, handicapped and unable to offer any counter-offensive to colonial power. Evidence from the history of struggle politics in South Africa is a clear indication that meekness, weakness and subservience were certainly not traits of indigenous Black folk. If anything, resistance to coloniser occupation dates back to the first arrival of white colonisers in South Africa (Marks 1972). As explained above, the narrative created by the white propaganda machine was that of savage, merciless and marauding Blacks, intent on massacre, unjustifiably attempting to invade white-owned land. History books were replete with stories of white heroism and Black treachery (Morgan 2012). The Battle of Blood River (armed conflict between the colonisers and the indigenous Blacks over land) in 1838, for example, has been described in white-scripted materials as a triumphant military conquest (Ngobese 2018), in which over 3000 Blacks were severely and deservedly defeated by a small number of whites, yet little attention is paid to the vast difference in combat equipment (Dlamini 2001) of both sides. This battle was further glorified as being the result of divine intervention and the will of God, and that the land in dispute was destined for white occupation and not for Black infidels. White savagery, such as the random shooting of 67 Blacks during a peaceful protest march in 1960, an atrocity that became known as the Sharpeville Massacre, has received little critical attention by local white scholars, but has been documented by international white scholars (see Lodge 2011).

The 1976 Soweto uprising was another significant event in the history of Black struggle in South Africa in which school pupils revolted against the marginalisation of African languages and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (Ndlovu 2006). This was yet another move by the white government in their attempt at devaluing and eradicating indigenous languages (linguicide) (Maistry and Le Grange 2023). Extreme white police and military action resulted in the murder of over 65 Black children, and more than 700 were wounded (Khangela Hlongwane 2007). This atrocity received widespread international condemnation. Despite this, the white apartheid government intensified its control and suppression of Black people, instituting curfews, arrests and imprisonment. The killing of Steve Biko, an iconic Black leader after physical torture by white police, was reported by the apartheid government as a death caused by a hunger strike. It was later revealed that Biko died from brain injuries as a result of physical assault while in custody (Bucher 2020). In essence then, Black resistance has always come at a price. The Black body as an object of scorn was deemed dispensable, disposable and extinguishable—bodies that needed to be made extinct in the eyes of white colonisers.

The project of Black rejection and Black exclusion from mainstream South Africa gained further momentum in 1983 with the fabrication by the apartheid government of a distorted and flawed architecture of political participation that would include the other two race groups, namely the Coloureds and Indians, but still be under the overall control of the ruling white government (Taylor 1990). The Coloured community (a white coloniser race category) comprised people of mixed race, whose ancestors were indigenous Khoi, Malay and white colonisers. Of significance is that white male colonisers willfully abused (and discarded) their female slaves for sexual gratification, spawning a Coloured population of about 8 million people. The Indian community comprised predominantly slave labourers imported from British-controlled India to work on the sugar cane plantations in South Africa. Of significance is that these two population groups were accorded a higher status than the Black indigenous population, which comprised about 75% of the population at the time. The rejection and contempt for Black people were thus overt and brazen (Maistry and Le Grange 2023).

5. Discussion and Concluding Comments

I want to briefly reflect on my early declaration of positionality as a Black South African of Indian descent. My analysis, interpretation and choices made to lead my arguments are a direct outcome of my positioning. I am also well aware of the suffering imposed by the British on imported Indian slave labour ‘contracted’ to work on the sugarcane plantations of South Africa in the 1800’s, and of the ‘shared suffering’ (Du Bois 2008) alongside indigenous Black peoples. It is not unreasonable to assert that the anti-Blackness ‘campaign’ has affected the community of Indian descent in different ways (see Maistry and Le Grange 2023 for further elaboration on this issue).

This article engaged the concept of anti-Blackness, with the view of reflecting on its genesis in colonisation and its particular applicability in analysing selected events in South Africa’s long history of oppression of Black people. Capturing a comprehensive account of the South African experience in this short article has distinct limitations, given the extensive duration (over a 340-year period) of the anti-Blackness project. That this project was by no means smooth nor linear, is evident by the periodic inflection points of resistance by various constituencies at different moments in the country’s history. The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, for example, was a distinct attempt at reclaiming Blackness, which suggests that anti-Blackness as social orchestration did in fact produce counterpoints that disrupted the doctrine. While discontinuities in the trajectory did occur, through multiple inflection points, their effects have to be weighed against the well-oiled propaganda machine that was the apartheid regime.

What is ‘unique’ about South Africa’s colonisation is that it occurred in what might be described as two phases. The first was the occupation and control as a colony with firm control and direction from the British motherland. The second phase began with the

assumption of sovereignty and autonomy from the British, described as internal colonisation. This phase was characterised by the intensified consolidation of various facets of the country by a white coloniser minority, by securing amongst other things, almost all agricultural land and industrial property, the lucrative mining industry, the bounty offered by the country's marine resources, the tourist industry and the commercial and banking sector. The agenda was clear: divide (the races) and rule, with separate but unequal development, with deliberate legislation that affirmed whites. The more sinister agenda was the continued forment of an anti-Blackness sentiment, a systematic psychological brainwashing that projected Black as genetically inferior. This orchestration had generations of whites believing in their superiority and entitlement. Fear of the Black person as savage, violent, untrustworthy, as not deserving of, or entitled to (human) rights and privileges was also cultivated in the minds of the other race groups through education and religious platforms, so much so that segments of the other race groups subscribe to the view of a superiority to Blacks, but not quite on the same level as whites, and are nostalgic about the period of white rule in their inner circles.

Elements of the new Black economic and political elite operating in the zone of being, appear mesmerised by neoliberal-inspired narcissism, where individual economic and social advancement trumps the welfare of the Black collectives who occupy the zone of non-being. What has become evident is that white capitalists in South Africa, who accumulated centuries of wealth on the back of Black hatred, have co-opted a new Black ally, the new Black political elite, who have demonstrated weak will to fully embrace a wealth redistribution policy that might restore the dignity of the Black subject.

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