

# Racist sexualisation and sexualised racism in narratives on apartheid

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**Abstract** In an effort to disentangle the threads of the complex, interwoven fabric of apartheid sexualities, this paper draws on narratives of the Apartheid Archive Project to explore the sexualizing force of racism and the racialising force of gendered sexuality. We do this by isolating three key dynamics operating on both the material and the psychical terrains of apartheid: the construction of the black male body as physically and sexually dangerous; the white 'neurotic' desire for the black 'other', a desire shaped by the historical conditions of apartheid; and white masculine power and entitlement. Our analysis suggests that it is the very demonization of the black male body that facilitates in white females a desire for that which is terrifying and forbidden and that both dynamics are ultimately in the service of entrenching and rationalizing white male power and privilege.

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## Introduction

Drawing on a corpus of narratives collected by the Apartheid Archive Project (2010), we argue that the intersections of racism, gender and sexuality in apartheid South Africa are evident in the memories of those who lived during this period. We assume that the way in which apartheid was sexualised and sexuality racialised lives on in current social constructions and regulatory practices regarding sexual intimacy and that it continues to be reinscribed in new ways in post-apartheid South Africa. Applying a Freudian psychoanalytic frame, predominantly informed by a Fanonian approach to a psychology of colonial oppression, we delve into narratives

that speak to the complex ways in which stories about sexuality and stories about racism are enmeshed and enacted at multiple levels. We are particularly interested in exploring the way in which these processes are enacted through what is imagined and the fantasy of what the 'other' is thinking or feeling. Key is the realization that development of gendered sexualities, the construction of femininity and masculinity, is powerfully racialised. White femininity, for example, is constructed as submissive and vulnerable in relation specifically to black, dangerous masculinity. We argue that a psychoanalytic lens helps to raise questions about the psychical reproduction of racism through and in sexual desire. In the context of the racial and sexual distribution of transgressions of the laws against sexual congress across the racialised division, the question of whom the sexual prohibition – written by white male legislators – was intended to discipline emerges as a complex one. We try to show that, even though the overarching aim of apartheid was to make white males dominant, it appears as if it was males from the same group as the legislators who were more troubled by the sex laws and whose sexual desires needed disciplining.

A relatively large number of persons were convicted of breaking the South African colonial and apartheid legislation against carnal intercourse between members of different 'races'. It is possible that many more whites would have liked to have sex with blacks, coloureds or Indians, and vice versa, had it not been for the law. It has been determined, for example, that 'from about the middle of 1959 to the end of 1969, [South African] courts prosecuted 4,787 and convicted 2,422 whites for unlawful carnal sexual relations with people of other races' (Ratele, 2009a, p. 170). That many white persons were prosecuted and convicted for having sex with unacceptable 'others' can be taken as one of a set of facts that reveals the exceptionality of South Africa as one of a few places where sexuality was flagrantly entwined with legislated race ideology and policy. There were other, not dissimilar slave and colonized territories wherein similar legal prohibitions obtained, but the peculiarity of South Africa is the repressive energy expended on the problem and, of course, one of temporality; the country was the last in the world where these sexual prohibitions remained on the statute books.

We suggest that the moment all sexual intercourse between 'Europeans' and 'non-Europeans' (as whites and blacks were defined at some point in colonial and apartheid South Africa; see Union of South Africa, 1950, p. 217) was criminalised should be grasped as psychoanalytically, not only politically and culturally, of much more significance for South Africans today than it appears to be. In spite of the rational political, legal and policing machinery established to control the impulses of sexual life, these remained clearly uncontainable. Further, until the complex intersections of sexuality and racism are unpacked, brought to consciousness, so to speak, such 'othering' processes will continue to sustain and reproduce racist and sexist practices. Indeed, intimate relations continue to be a key site for the reproduction of racism and binaristic discourses

of 'us' and 'them' in contemporary South Africa as can be seen in current research on constructions of sexuality and desire among young South Africans (for example, Bhana and Pattman, 2010; Botsis, 2010).

In twentieth-century South Africa, the proscription of interracial sex was crystallised by the 1927 Immorality Act (Union of South Africa, 1927), amended in 1950. This act is one of the distinct moments when racism showed itself to be underpinned by psychosexuality and found its way into the life of desire of black and white women and men in South Africa. Although not exhausted by the law *per se*, it is in the particular laws against immorality that racist ideology – evident in black disenfranchisement, a whites-only parliament, unequal pay for the same job for different race groupings, segregated schooling, a sham independence for different 'homelands' for different African ethnic groups, and separate public amenities – achieves carnalisation. By carnalisation we mean that not only the sexual materialisation of race, but also the racial embodiment of sex were difficult to miss. On closer scrutiny, it appears that colonial and apartheid legislators were appreciative of the psychosexual meaningfulness of their laws. An analysis of the Immorality Acts shows that there was a uniquely South African idea of immorality, which was superimposed on the notion of immorality as predominantly defined in terms of its sexual content (Hawkes, 1996). According to Ratele (2009b), in South Africa immorality came to be equated with the failure to inhibit 'certain behaviours, behaviours which [were] given racial content and which in the end mean[t] that a so-named European person or native needed to learn to inhibit certain behaviours which the leaders of his or her race found unacceptable. In other words, sexuality [came] to discipline race identification, and similarly, race classification [came] to shape sexual relations' (p. 294).

To analyse how racialization and sexuality pass through one another, it is imperative that we also consider how sexuality is profoundly gendered and gender sexualized. As with sexuality and race, we cannot fully follow the workings of sexuality outside gender nor of gender outside sexuality because the regulation of sexual desire is the domain of relations of the gender order, not just a private affair (see Carrigan *et al*, 1985, p. 596). In analysing the relations of race to sex, it is useful to keep in mind the idea of gendered sexualities and sexualized genders, in contrast to thinking of gender and sexuality as if they were two mutually exclusive categories (Edwards, 2005, p. 54). In racially structured societies, racial fantasies, insults and policies should never be read outside of their enmeshment in sexuality and gender. It is, of course, difficult to make sense of sexuality or gender while neglecting the life of race.

There is vast international feminist literature, much of it emerging from analyses of gendered contexts of slavery and the continued racist North American context, highlighting how sexual denigration has been central to racist practices (for example, Davis, 1982; Spillers, 1984; Gilman, 1985; hooks, 1990; Marshall, 1994). In South Africa, some authors have reminded us of the powerful way in which the oppression of blacks and privileging of whites were

sexualized, which has been referred to as *apartheid sexualisation*. Ratele (2001) foregrounds the way in which apartheid appropriated sex and human corporeality 'to build its house of race on bodies' (p. 200). Apartheid was entrenched through laws and discourse that went further than the imposition of geographical separation; it insisted also on placing taboos on sexual intimacy and bodily connection between those of different races. We argue, however, that such regulatory legal and discursive divisions not only were about the apartheid ideology of white supremacy but also were interwoven with patriarchal authority for the dominant group of men. Thus, key to apartheid was the entrenchment of white male entitlement through the regulation of everybody's life. Further racist sexualisation is endemic globally and among all subjects in racist and patriarchal societies, not only in the construction of whiteness and blackness, but also in the dialectical relationship between white and black subjects and through their racialised fantasies of the 'other'.

The sexualization of apartheid lives on in current constructions of intimacy and in the field of community and self-regulative practices with respect to desire and racial identification and continues to be reinscribed in new ways in post-apartheid South Africa. Raced constructions of sexuality are, for example, more than evident in the stigmatizing discourses on HIV/AIDS, 'the symbolic bearer of a host of meanings about our contemporary culture' (Weeks, 1989, p. 2). The HIV/AIDS stigma reflects a complex web of 'othering' and 'blaming' discourses bound up with local and international racist and sexist representations of sexuality, such as the European fantasy of 'uncontrollable' African, black sexuality (see, for example, Patton, 1990; Seidel, 1993; Hogan, 1998; Jungar and Oinas, 2004).

Here we analyse the racialised sexuality and sexualised racism that is evident at multiple levels in the narratives of those who remember living under apartheid. While we are interested in deconstructing such narratives at the level of the *conscious* drama of apartheid, we also attempt here, following Fanon (1967), to read for the understanding of the destabilization of agency, of the way in which the unconscious interrupts such agency, is always present in the text of the narrator. Constantly aware of the forces of history, we argue the importance of the unconscious, of fantasy and of projection in the reproduction of racialised sexism and flag the importance of such understandings and analysis in our attempts to challenge racism and its sexualised representations. We have sought to understand the psychoanalytic future of the historical legal moment when sex across racial lines was proscribed, and we analyse the ongoing and lingering implications of racist sexualisation and sexualised racism.

## Narratives and Method

This paper is based on an analysis of 124 narratives written by a group of 65 academics, most of them currently living in South Africa, some residing outside

the country in recent years; a group of 35 students; and 21 others written up on the website of the Apartheid Archives Research Project (2009). The Apartheid Archives Project aims to examine the nature of the experiences of ('ordinary') South Africans under the apartheid order and their continuing effects on contemporary South Africa. The project is premised on the understanding that experiences, both material and psychical, from the past will constantly attempt to reinscribe themselves (often in masked form) in the present, if they are not acknowledged, interrogated and addressed.

The beginning point of the analysis was to identify those narratives which address in any way gender and sexual identities and practices in the memories related by participants. It became evident that memories reflecting the bodily and sexualized experience of apartheid are interwoven in many of these narratives. In our presentation, we draw out three thematic threads that speak to the dynamics of the complex interweavings of race and sexuality as they emerge in the narratives: (1) the construction of the black male body as dangerous, in a physical and, more specifically, a sexual sense; (2) desire for the 'other'; and (3) white power, male privilege and sexual entitlement.

### Constructions of the Black Male Body

One must not underestimate the deeply embedded fear of the black man so prevalent in white society.

The overall success of the white power structure has been in managing to bind the whites together in defence of the *status quo*. By skillfully playing on that imaginary bogey – *swart gevaar*<sup>1</sup> – they have managed to convince even diehard liberals that there is something to fear in the idea of the black man assuming his rightful place. (Biko, 1979, pp. 77–90)

A strong thread running through the narratives was the white construction of the black male body as dangerous, both physically and sexually. This notion is encapsulated in the lesson for white women (and no doubt for white men, too) that men must fight and protect, while women must fear:

My memory of hiding is a memory of fear, more terrifying than child-eating crocs, snakes or spiders. My father was away in the bush a lot of the time, fighting the Terrs, keeping us and our country safe. I didn't really mind this except when we had to hide in the shower. Periodically, the village alarm would sound in the middle of the night and we would have to creep, quickly and quietly, into the shower and close the curtain tight. This was because we had to hide away from the Terrs who were coming to kill us. (female, white, 30s)

Is that white woman's memory of her fear of terrorists about mortality also unconsciously about sexuality? While the race and gender of the Terrs are not mentioned by the narrator in this extract, it is well known from Africa's history of liberation struggle that the terrorists were nearly always black and overwhelmingly male (Suttner, 2008). The white woman's sexual fear and its racial colour is suggested by the fact that, although the narrator states that she 'didn't really mind' the absence of her father, her fear of the shadowy figures of black male Terrs is betrayed by the line, 'My father was away in the bush a lot of the time'. As we know, fathers are not only figures of authority but are oedipally important in the sexual development of children. The narrator might really believe that it would have made no difference to her even if the father were present. More interesting is how the remembered experience of hiding in the shower allowed her not only to deal with imminent danger but also to nourish the idea of racial apartness and sexual threats.

However, the unspoken injunction, *Hide from [the black male] terrorists!* could not be adequately enacted by white South Africans given the nature of South African economic and social arrangements, even after the introduction of legally segregated residential areas in the 1950s. There was, as it were, nowhere for a white person in South Africa to hide from black males specifically and black people generally – which may have been the tacit motivation behind the creation of white areas distant from black urban areas and the removal of blacks from white South Africa to specially created 'Bantu homelands'. Here we are arguing that a psychosexualised racial fear possibly underpinned residentially based segregation. Despite the many different forms of material separation and segregation, the fantasmatic threat of black men remained omnipresent, even in (particularly in) the most private recesses. Then, as now, it must be remembered, much of the labour that went into the maintenance of white homes, villages, suburbs and towns was almost exclusively done by black men and women. How, then, was that constant presence of black bodies processed by white psyches? That is, how did white society live with the fact of fearsome black bodies while it needed black labour to cut the lawn, clean the yard, cook the food, pick the garbage, raise white children and generally support its comforts?

A similar discourse of fear is evident in the next extract. In this one, though, the terrorists are now clearly identified as black men. Black men wanted to hurt whites, according to white authority – and, from the question of the narrator, seemingly for no reason.

[O]ne day at break ... the teachers and school staff elected to teach us what to do if 'terrorists' with guns and bombs ever attacked the school. We were told to hide under desks and instructed on how to leopard crawl across the playground. At the same time this way was scary – why would people want to hurt us? *Of course the terrorists were made out*

*to be black men – as were all dangerous persons.* (female, white, 20s, italics added)

The question that narrator asks is an important one for us: why would black men want to hurt white children and teachers and school staff? Part of the answer is revealed to us by the next narrator: because the men *were black* and this is what made them fear inducing.

As I turned the corner a black man was walking along the street. This must have been relatively unusual, or I had simply been brainwashed by my very racist Rhodesian father, and the general separation of whites and blacks, at the time, I froze in absolute fear and immediately thought that he was going to steal me, or do something terrible to me. His response was to reassure me that I was safe and he would not hurt me. (male, white, 40s)

In that anecdote about a white boy and a black man we glimpse how, as Fanon (1967) observed, identification of oneself and the ‘other’, that is, of one’s body by the ‘other’, reveals that the historico-political is at times powerfully accessible psychoanalytically; how in thinking about a narrative such as this we realise, as Diana Fuss (1994) says, racial and sexual ‘politics do ... not oppose the psychical but fundamentally presupposes it’ (p. 39). Moreover, this story about the ‘black man ... walking along the street’ also tells of the way psychical representations of the ‘other’ are coconstructed and reproduced in representational dialogue and through infinite repetitions so that they are ‘true’ in the lives of subjects. In the story of the young white boy told by the white man we find a pathway through which one is either enabled or hindered in making meaning of one’s own body and self by seeing oneself in the other’s eyes. Here is how Fanon (1967) famously put it:

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by ‘residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, visual character,’ but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more. ‘Look, a Negro!’ It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. ‘Look, a Negro’. It was true. It amused me. ‘Look, a Negro!’ The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. ‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’ Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. I could no longer laugh, because I already knew there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*,

which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. ... I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'". (p. 109)

In that extract, we detect something that we already observed, that is, how white anxieties are repeatedly generated in response to black men's bodies, which have been specifically demonized as mortal and sexual threats to white subjects. The insecurities are fixated on physiological features. However, as we see in the next extract, the anxieties of whites are also directed at the imagined forms of black men's cannibalising desires:

I entered the world of work as an intern in a small conservative town in Zululand. After a few months, I was forwarded a humorous pornographic email by a White middle-aged receptionist. I noticed that she had 'forgotten' to include the only Black African member of staff so I duly forwarded the email to him. She found out and in a fit of anger declared that 'Blacks should not watch blue movies because it gives them ideas about how to rape White women' – in the presence of the Black co-worker (I still do not understand why she had forwarded it to me in the first instance). I was shocked by this over the top reaction to an email. Her husband came to collect her at closing time and he felt the need to reinforce her sentiment through screaming and racially insulting me. (male, coloured, 30s)

Similarly, in the next narrative, the psychical repetition of white female sexual fears of black men (see, for example, Allen, 2002) are felt and responded to by the black male narrator's own anxious fantasies of what his physical presence triggers:

Even just being in the same lift with a white woman who may look unsettled by my presence in the same space conjures up a lot of ideas for me. Is she unsettled by my race and all the stereotypical ideas that come along with it? Is it my demeanour or the colour of my shirt? (male, black, 30s)

What the 30-something-year-old black male narrator tells of substantiates our speculations about the fear-inducing (yet, crucially, reassuring) 'black man ... walking along the street' the 40-something-year-old white male narrator told of in the earlier extract. Here is a black man who experiences his presence as upsetting to a white woman. Seeing the unsettled look in the woman's face, the man is forced to assume that something about himself is disturbing to the

other. If he has not done so before, he learns to identify himself as not just a 30-something male, but as someone who provokes apprehension in others. One might ask why he looks at the white woman, or, if that cannot be helped, why he has to take her and her fearful response seriously? It is because, in racist contexts, blacks and whites need each other to recognize and name themselves. He cannot look away, yet he cannot look without seeing. If he looks away, he does the very thing racist power wants him to do, that is, avert his gaze; yet if he looks and wills himself not to see, he might as well be an object. Consequently, a black man cannot but question himself when he observes the look of fear in a white woman's or white man's face. He is an anxiety-inducing object and so may try instead to be a reassuring man; if he is included in white company because he is not like the other 'others', he may still need to reassure himself that he does not desire to be white. White racist sexualisation or sexualized racism, that is, all but immobilizes black subjectivity.

Although the fear of sexual violence was understood in apartheid South Africa as the preserve of white women, the sexual anxieties were part of the trusses that ultimately supported white patriarchal power, with white women as conduits in the capillaries of white male power. In the next narrative, the white male author describes how his mother was critical of his father's racism yet unconsciously reproduced such racist heteronormative constructions in her own performances of domestic protection:

[F]iltered through my mother's experience, the big black marauding man was a murderous, terrifying, sexually violating animal – never in so many words, but through a *vigilant paranoia*. ... the dangerous other in my mother's imagination. (male, white, 30s, italics added)

It was a different matter for colonialism and apartheid when a white man wanted 'to have' a black woman, as opposed to when a white woman wanted 'to be had' by a black man. This dissimilarity is often parsed in the recurring motif of black penis size, notions of monstrous genitalia, reducing the black male to nothing but sexual threat. In his analysis on sex in racist societies, however, Lewis Gordon (1997) convincingly argues that to understand whites' complex about (black) penis size it is important also to pay close attention to the meaning of the colour of the penis. A black penis of the same dimensions as a white penis is likely to be imbued with a different social, cultural and political significance and certainly acquires undue weight where one is talking about black male–white female heterosexual intercourse. Actually, any black penis, irrespective of size, accretes more weight in a white racist environment. In an antiblack world, a black penis, even though its actual size is unknown, comes to mean danger in the racist sexual fantasies of white females and males alike. The main reason for the ever-present threat of a black penis to white racist patriarchy is that its demand of manhood is unacceptable to white males; a

black penis is disturbing and represents a psychical threat, not just physical and political danger, whatever its size:

He came towards me, heading into the cafe, in his blue overall. This was always a bit of an anxious moment, where one needed to obey the right rules of disinterest, to maintain a measured distance, nothing by way of confrontation. A kind of professional distance, in short, suitable for interactions with those who worked for you. I only realized afterwards what had happened. He had moved his hand awkwardly, putting something away, obscuring something. His overalls had been open all the way down to the waist, open too low, and he had tucked himself back in. This was the first time I had ever seen (but had not seen, because it was black), a black penis. That question, never quite resolved, had come back once or twice after glimpses of black men in pornography: how could they not have a pink head, a pink glans, how could that flesh be black too? A question which seemed to suppose that actually, as when you saw a black man's, a black woman's hands, the less dark side, their palms, their fingernails, their bodily difference was minimal. The lightened areas, fingernails, that zone of the body closest to pink, to pale, those places could have been the opening possibility, the anxiety-deflating proof that ('they'), black people, seemed similar – similar but different too, no doubt – that there was a kind of reassuring, common-denominator similarity. That those parts of the body were more absent than present became the proof of difference. As a boy at school said, a Jewish boy who loved movies, and who I'd always assumed to be more progressive, 'liberal' than me: 'Remember, Whoopi Goldberg's gums are black'. (male, white, 30s)

The importance of genitals in the sexualizing processes of racism has also been noted by Stuart Hall (1996), who argues that Fanon's work on white women's desire for the 'other' contains 'some important insights into the way projective sexual fantasies become racialised and racialised fantasies become "genitalised" (rather than simply "sexualized")' (pp. 29–30).

In the next narrative, as the author points out, black men are conflated with the body, assumed to be inherently tough and hardy, further reinforcing and building on white fantasies of the dangerous black man:

[T]here was often recourse to the idea that black men were some how more hardy: thicker skulls, tougher bodies, more robust. If the prospect of playing rugby against Afrikaans boys was frightening – a sense there too of their being impervious to physical damage – the prospect of playing rugby against black guys was unthinkable. I am not sure I can disentwine this theme: the fragmentary memories of seeing black men in damaged states (stabbed in one instance, hit by a car in another), whereby they seemed to

endure despite the attack – almost as if the racist assumption was that they were ‘more body than spirit’, and hence far tougher, stronger, and hence will endure. I think the assumption there was that there is less psychological damage experienced by way of the injury (its not really traumatic), or perhaps simply, a remarkable inability to identify with a black suffering body. (male, white, age not provided)

### Desire for the ‘Other’

Theorising sexualities and intimacies in racist and patriarchal societies, and in particular how desire and intimate relationships are shot through with complexities and power, has been foregrounded in a wide range of critical psychological and postcolonial work. Fanon’s (1967) work was a ground-breaking acknowledgement that sexualities and desires are a key part of the psychopathology and discourses of oppression. Contrary to Stopford’s (2007) misreading, Fanon was aware of the pathological forms of racialised fantasies in sexual practice across the colour divisions as well as the historico-cultural conditions that give rise to such fantasies. As has been remarked by others in regard to what can be termed racialised upheavals in colonial settings, so with sexual ones: none can be explained only as individual madness, personality disturbances or neuroses but must simultaneously be approached from the direction of the history of colonization, as outcomes of the historico-political process of making society (Gibson, 2003; Hook, 2008).

In apartheid South Africa, the regulation of intimate practices was foundational to the overall apartheid strategy of *divide and rule*. Arguably, the incorporation of sexual regulatory practices was not only about the conscious extension of white power over black lives from the personal to the political. This racial power was also powerfully gendered, reflecting the old patriarchal notion of women as men’s possessions. Thus the potential and actual sexual possession of white women by black men is *felt* by some of the narrators, as it was conceived by apartheid legislators, as an invasion of the entire white ‘nation’ since it represents black male control over white male possessions and possible destabilization of white male power. Furthermore, the feared sexual possession of white women by black men has affective resonance rather than constituting a ‘real’ threat.

While Fanon does not fully explore the way in which male power intersects with racial power, his story about what these relationships mean is told from the perspectives of men and signifies that women are a means to an end rather than agents of power themselves (McClintock, 1997). Thus black men in the colonial experience narrated by Fanon sexually desire white women as a part of the larger wish to attain the position of the privileged, powerful master race whereas white men desire black women as representing their extension of control and power

over black men. Similarly in apartheid, the narrative of white women's anxiety of black men's sexuality flags the apprehensions of white men about the loss of their power and privilege. Likewise, constructions of black sexual prowess signal white male anxiety with respect to loss of power and privilege in which women figure primarily as sexual objects of possession and as mothers who carry forward the name (or race) of the father. That desire for the 'other', evident in apartheid South Africa, is also a strong thread in the narratives:

[H]ighbrow authors could not compete with *The Cosby Show*. My mother used to say, if black people could be like the Cosbys, then sure, they can stay next to us and be our friends! But my eyes were trained on the erotic force that was Denise Huxtable, the feisty teenage daughter in the show. How many young, white South African males of that time can seriously claim never to have fantasised about Denise?! The inevitability of adolescent lust for Denise destroyed the logic, and the obsession, of apartheid on a weekly basis. The government had no idea what they had unleashed in the minds of a million horny young white boys! (white, male, mid-30s)

Two things are happening there. The *Cosby Show* represented internationally a safe and sanitized black middle-class identity, which is what the mother of the author reproduces and which is currently a part of the continued classist reinscription of racism in contemporary South Africa. On the other hand, the author is showing how white men desired black women even though their desire transgressed apartheid's restrictions. The black women who were desirable were precisely those who fit the Eurocentric, middle-class *Cosby Show* notions of beauty. Even then the desirability of black women/femininity disrupted racist regulations of 'suitable' intimacies while reproducing the symbolic structure of white patriarchy.

Drawing on a wide range of postcolonial psychoanalytic thinking from Fanon to Bhabha to reflect on an essay by J.M. Coetzee, 'The Mind of Apartheid', Derek Hook (2008) argues that the context of apartheid and post-apartheid where extreme inequalities of power and access to resources continue to be played out is 'a context which ... cannot be grasped outside the consideration of affective economies of desire, anxiety, and fear. Such a radically asymmetrical and divided world, moreover, cannot but induce a virulent order of fantasies' (p. 270).

Key to such fantasies is a complex ambivalence towards those constructed as 'other' to each other in binaristic racist societies, so that both desire and denigration are integral. Desire for the 'other' is always there – existing as the corollary of the hatred of the other – even if this desire is sometimes to be interpreted in struggle politics as a form of resistance.

The sexualisation of racist practice and the racialisation of sexuality in apartheid was also evident in narratives that could be read as resistant or challenging responses to apartheid and its human rights abuses. Indeed practices

of challenging and destabilising the taboos of apartheid emerged in more constructive terms by revealing the shakiness of the foundations of the system. In narratives across different historical classifications, there was reference to sexual practices that challenged the apartheid prohibition on 'interracial' relationships and sexual intimacy. Disapproval by both black and white communities was documented, foregrounding the power of apartheid sexualisation discussed earlier. There was, however, also always some sense of victory in these narratives – that apartheid could not so easily order desire, that desires flagrantly overrule words on a legal document.

Thus, in the next narrative, the author's aunt's relationship with a white man is reportedly somewhat disapproved of by the community in which they live, although the author goes to some length to posit other reasons for the community's 'disapproval' as well:

Speaking openly of the 'strange' relationship that Corinne's uncle, Dawie van Jaarsveld, had with Auntie Dulcie, one of the favourite adults amongst the children in our community was also proscribed. Auntie Dulcie was indulged but not very positively viewed by the rest of the community. In retrospect, this was perhaps because of *her weakness for a regular tippie* (which I suspect accounted for the fact that she was the least uptight, the funniest and the most indulgent of all the adults in the community, and hence the local kids' unwavering fondness of her). *Or perhaps it was because of the fact that she, a 'coloured', had chosen to breach the community's self-imposed (defensive) boundaries by having a relationship with a white man, in flagrant defiance of the bizarrely labelled Immorality Act.* Or was it because of the fact that *she regularly beat up her partner* when they had too much to drink? (I can still vividly hear his high pitched plea: 'Dulcie, stop it, you're hurting me'. Auntie Dulcie's preferred method of tormenting Uncle Dawie was to grab his family jewels between her long nails and viciously pinch them.) To a certain extent, we liked Uncle Dawie merely because of his association with Auntie Dulcie. (male, coloured, 50s, italics added)

Interestingly, both other reasons proposed for the community response to Auntie Dulcie arguably speak to a rejection by the aunt of traditional gender roles. Thus Auntie Dulcie, in spite of community disapproval, also undoubtedly made an impression on the collective imaginary and was at some level admired, by the author at least. By her 'bullying' behaviour towards her partner, she transgressed not only racialised restrictions but also gender stereotypes in a racist, patriarchal society by taking on what would be expected of a man in a normative heterosexual relationship. In so doing, she also succeeded in subverting what might have been expected to be the typical power relationship between the couple with Uncle Dawie's double privileging as white and male.

In another narrative, in a novel she wrote in adolescence, a white woman writes of her fictional relationship with a black activist. The desire for the relationship links with her growing alignment with the national democratic struggle and her challenging apartheid constraints on her relationship and life; but it is also linked to her memory of walking into the bedroom of her domestic worker and witnessing her being sexually intimate with her boyfriend. The latter experience exposes a further transgression that she realises only in retrospect with guilt at having assumed she had a right to enter the room whenever she pleased, whereas intruding into her own parents' room when the door was closed was probably taboo to her.

The scene on the bed is a surprise to me, I live in the sexually repressive days of apartheid. These scenes are 'cut' from the movies that I watch at the cinema. The beautiful tall man enmeshed with Phyllis [author's domestic worker] becomes the hero of my novel written into a lined exercise book in the long hours of the weekend and evenings before lights out. Of course I am the heroine, but I am myself, not Phyllis, a bit older though as I want to be enveloped in his arms too. We are having a relationship across the 'colour bar'; he is a young activist, organising in [name of township], a stone-throw away from where I live. (female, white, 40s)

A certain politics, arising from a particular kind of history and found in distinctive societies, facilitates a white woman's constructing that kind of object of desire. The white female takes the black male away from the black female domestic worker, again (impulsively) reflecting white entitlement over black bodies. At the same time, while she imaginatively seizes the black male activist in what can be seen as a show of aggression and control, she uses that appropriation to challenge apartheid patriarchy (and thus her father as a symbol of that) and absolve her own sense, in her growing political consciousness, of being a beneficiary of apartheid. The narrative may be viewed through a classic Freudian oedipal lens, reflecting the young girl's ambivalence towards her father. However, this is not the end of it if Fanon (1967) is to be believed:

Here is my view of the matter. ... At this stage ... the father, who is now the pole of her libido, refuses in a way to take up the aggression that the little girl's unconscious demands of him. At this point, lacking support, this free floating aggression requires an investment. Since the girl is at the age in which the child begins to enter folklore and the culture along roads that we know, the Black becomes the predestined depository of this aggression. (p. 179)

The desire narrated by the 40-something-year-old white female must be for 'the beautiful tall man enmeshed with Phyllis'; that is, it must be located within the history of apartheid. This view, offered to us by Fanon, of how to understand such

desires in situations like apartheid is shared by Nigel Gibson (2003). In his reading of Fanon's investigations into the black person's so-called inferiority complex Gibson says, 'The colonial White woman's neurosis, her attraction and repulsion to the native, seems to correspond to the importance that Lacan places on the decline of the image of the father'. However, this is incomplete. As he elaborates, '[I]n the colonial situation, (the white woman's) sense of guilt and wrongdoing becomes entwined with the image of the native. The native that she strikes, the powerful, muscular man who becomes her house servant and gets closer and closer as her husband becomes further removed, is the real Other and desired object' (p. 45).

These narratives highlight the nuances of the symbolic processes by which sexuality was politicized and politics sexualised in South Africa, hinging on the racialised taboos on desire (Ratele, 2001). We are reminded how key to the geographical divides of apartheid were the bodily divides with respect to intimacy and how people transgressed these divides in the name of desire but also resistance. Nonetheless, such divides also served to put a lid on desire for the 'other', to criminalise and pathologise it, force it underground, make it unimaginable. Both of these complex outcomes of psychological and social regulations over desire and intimacy are evident in the fabric of contemporary South Africa as in other postcolonial societies (see, for example, Allen, 2002; Jansen, 2009; Pattman and Bhana, 2009; Bhana and Pattman, 2010; Botsis, 2010).

Recent South African work on interracial relationships and on constructions of sexuality and race among young people (Pattman and Bhana, 2009; Bhana and Pattman, 2010; Botsis, 2010) similarly speaks to the way in which racist discourse and notions of the 'other' continue to operate in young people's construction of their desire. In this way, sexual desire continues to reflect more insidious, less agentic racialisation of identities and reproduces more subtle forms of racism in contemporary South African contexts. Sexual practices continue to operate as sites for the entrenchment of racial boundaries, even though no longer legalized. HIV/AIDS has arguably played a large role in the racialisation of sexuality in South Africa with youth constructions of 'risk' being particularly racialised (Soudien, 2007; Botsis, 2010), demonstrating how 'sexuality in South Africa is a hotbed for the covert setting up of boundaries which reproduce prejudice, using new social circumstances to reinstate old ideologies' (Botsis, 2010, p. 43).

### **White Power, Male Privilege and Sexual Entitlement**

Black people are the mainstay of white men's sexual preoccupations and racialised desires, the storehouse of white fantasies and the screen on which every manner of anxiety is projected. In a country such as South Africa it is not the white woman but the black object that is the real 'other' for the white man; and for the white woman it is not the white man but the black 'other' that counts in her

symbolic world (Fanon, 1967; Fuss, 1994). In the next extract, the author highlights the inexhaustibility of the entwinement of racism with sexuality.

So back to the Eskom camp. I had my eye on a young coloured woman, probably about two years older than me. She was tall, her legs shone like polished wood and I could not take my eyes off her cheery breasts. The guys I shared a bungalow with played cards at night, smoked cigarettes and spoke about her in admiring but fairly disrespectful ways. I was too timid to join in, but I was thinking similar thoughts.

It was at the beach that the girl I had been eyeing came to stand behind me. We were all standing in a group listening to one of the caretakers talking about some aspect of the fauna and flora, or about the history of False Bay, and she pushed up against me. At first I thought she bumped up against me accidentally, but minutes passed and not once did she pull back. I felt her breasts against my back and my arm like a persistent vibration. We did not say a word; when the group dispersed, I merely gave her a sheepish look, scuttled off. I had no idea how to flirt, or how to communicate desire and sexual intent. I was lost for words, lost for action. I spent years completing the story in my head: it would end with a stolen kiss, at other times with me caressing her breasts in the dark while the others played cards inside, or sometimes with us having sex in her bungalow or down at the beach, and frequently with me taking the train from Brackenfell to Bellville South to visit and hang out with her at the Sanlam Centre or N1 City.

This incident is not where I first became aware of race, racism and apartheid, but in no other personal experience before this were issues of race so vividly accentuated and at the same time so thoroughly demystified. After all, what was it more than just another teenage fantasy? (male, white, 30s)

In the first instance, the story of the teenager reveals not only how desire is hemmed in by political structures but also the uncontainability of libidinal energy. The story troubles the 'normal' teenage fantasy since it is a fantasy also of the black 'other'. Importantly, however, the political organization of desire works in favour of white male privilege, since such an organization is not just raced but also gendered.

As Fanon (1967) noted in regard to colonialism, blacks had every reason to live in fear, to hate and to wage war; but blacks were being terrorized, despised and constantly assailed for the sake of white privilege. Whereas white women in apartheid were constructed in the white imaginary of racist patriarchy as vulnerable and in need of protection from black men, black women and black men, in reality, suffered white power and needed protection. In addition, the relations between white men and black women were clearly inflamed by

multiple layers of power inequality. Intersections of racial power and gender facilitated coercive sexual relationships and white male control over black female bodies, which was evident in a number of the narratives. Given the powerful intersection of white privilege and power over black bodies and male privilege and power over female bodies, it could be argued that the story of white male sexual violence towards black women has not even begun to be told in South Africa, that what we know and what we hear from these narratives and other sources is merely the tip of the iceberg:

My mother was carrying my younger brother on her back, heavy bags in her hands, pulling me and my other brother while trying to board the departing train from Dordrecht to Matatiele. A white train guard saw her struggling and with unexpected generosity invited her to enter one of the first-class coaches of the train. We were obviously highly excited by this and felt very special. Rushed, my mother pulled us and shouted at us for dragging our feet when we were being accorded such a favour. What she did not realise at the beginning was that a white man always expected something in return for any favour done to a black person. ... He instructed my mother to leave all of us children in one of the other compartments and join him in the other. The reason for his inexplicable generosity then dawned on her. We were all sent packing from the first-class coach to the third-class coaches at the rear of the train when she refused to obey his commands. (female, black, 30s)

As the narrator avers, a favour was not something to be expected by a black person from a white man; any generosity could be explained with reference to something the white man wanted. The notion of a commanding white man is an interesting one as far as sexual relations between white men and women of other races were concerned, particularly in view of the political and social context that frames the foregoing narrative. White males, such as the guard in the narrative, it will be recalled, were the authors of the legal prohibition of sexual intercourse between whites and others. At the same time, white males were by far in the majority among the offenders of sexual prohibition. Ratele (2009a) observes that, during some years of apartheid, for every prosecution of a white female for sex with a male of one of the three other races, defined by South African law, there were 27 such prosecutions of white males. For every black<sup>2</sup> male charged for sex with a white female, there were over 19 white males charged for sex with black females.

In addition, a number of court rulings indicate prejudicial treatment in favour of white males involved in transgression of the sexual prohibition. In a number of cases, the accused black, coloured or Indian female was convicted but the co-accused white male was discharged. Whereas white women who had sex with men of other races were tainted by the discourse of miscegenation and

were viewed as racially disgraced, white males' sexual offences were represented as less offensive and less of a threat to the race. There is also evidence to suggest sexual coercion and violence (see Horrell, 1966) by white males against females of other races. The courts, underpinned as they were by the sexualised gender order, conceived of females of other races as hardier and less traumatized when violated by white males, while the same courts treated sexual violence of white females by males of other races differently. The project of constituting South Africa as a society composed of different races favoured whites, but more precisely the whiteness project was a masculinist mission. The sex laws of colonial and apartheid South Africa not only were central in the creation and reproduction of racism, but also were significant in supplying the content of a sexually entitled, racially belligerent white manhood and a yielding, subordinate, purportedly less sexual white womanhood.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to show the sexualizing force of racism and the racialising force of gendered sexuality, an effort simultaneously aimed at disentangling the threads of the complex, interwoven fabric of apartheid sexualities. This we have done by flagging three key dynamics operating at both the material and the psychical terrains of apartheid: the construction of the black male body as physically and sexually dangerous; the white 'neurotic' desire for the black 'other' shaped by the historical conditions of apartheid; and white masculine power and entitlement. Our analysis suggests that it is the very demonization of the black male body that facilitates white female desire of that which is terrifying and forbidden and that both of these dynamics are ultimately in the service of entrenching and rationalizing white male power and privilege.

The narratives from the Apartheid Archive Project flesh out the multiple intersections of the psycho-sexualising and racialising processes that troubled apartheid South Africa. It is interesting to note that participants were never asked to reflect on sexuality and intimacies. Given the history of the public repression of sexuality in the Christian Nationalism of apartheid South Africa and the very specific racialised component of prohibited relations with those categorized as 'other', it is unsurprising that sex bubbles to the surface in so many places in the text. These processes were often consciously troubling, but perhaps even more interesting for post-apartheid South Africa, were also represented through complex and contradictory layers of unconscious fantasy. We have sketched the background against which the sexualisation of racism and racialisation of sexuality, as evident in the narratives, have to be read. The psychoanalytic lens has helped to raise questions about the psychical reproduction of racism through and in sexual desire. In the context

of the race and sex distribution of transgressions of the laws against sexual congress across the racialised division, the question of whom the sexual prohibition written by white male legislators was intended to discipline emerges as a complex one. We have tried to show that, even though the overarching aim of apartheid was to make white males dominant, it was the males from that same group who, as the legislators, were most often in contravention of the sex laws and whose sexual desires needed disciplining. Why, though, would white males, whose dominance and privilege the law upheld, introduce legislation that so troubled their own desire? We have argued that, given the dominant view of the Christian rational man that underpinned apartheid, the law was never quite able to anticipate or deal with the irrational disruptive aspect of sexuality.

We have suggested that perhaps it was males from the other race groups – not white males (whose transgressions were somehow admissible and forgivable) – who were the real object of the law. This is the most plausible of answers. The apartheid narratives suggest that it is the stereotypical big, hard, terror-inducing, marauding, raping and murderous ‘other man’ whom the law had in its sights. If black males, and therefore the unacceptable desires of white females for black men, were what had to be controlled, apartheid sexualisation seems to have worked admirably, the numbers of transgression by white males really indicating the success of white men’s sexualized gender ascendancy over males of other races as well as over the regulation of the sexual and gender lives of white females.

From these narratives, it is clear that racism is shot through with psychosexuality and that sexual relations are useful for the reproduction of racism. But the relationship is also inexhaustible and shows both the intractability of racism and gender power but also the spaces for destabilising both whiteness and male power. For desire for the inadmissible is endemic to regulatory practices that disallow certain practices; desires are therefore always ‘breaking out’ (if only at the level of fantasy) of the shackles that contain them, while also always ensuring the very reproduction of the structures that hem them in. Arguably it is imperative for post-apartheid South Africa to reveal more honestly the hidden cards in the pack of apartheid memory, to bring to public consciousness the desires and their transgressions that could not be spoken but *were* enacted, mostly in ways that privileged those apartheid was meant to serve and that continue to shape and legitimise problematic social practices.

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## Notes

- 1 Afrikaans term translated as black terror.
- 2 Here we use black in the political sense to include all those disenfranchised by apartheid.

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