

# **The silencing of race at Rhodes: ritual and anti-politics on a post-apartheid campus**

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## **Abstract**

Almost fifteen years after democracy, issues of ‘race’ still hold daily South African life firmly in its grip. Following calls from foremost South African theorists on ‘race’, such as Sarah Nuttall, this thesis moves beyond a study of crude ‘racism’, to the more complex consideration of ‘race’ as an embedded ideological social formation within the spatial context of Rhodes University. Using analytical concepts such as ‘silencing’ and ‘ritual’ the thesis weaves an understanding (1) of how particular powerful representations of institutional history are produced and made dominant, and (2) how seemingly innocuous performances of institutional identity are key to reproducing ‘racial’ dominance within Rhodes’ student life. This ultimately manifests in the production of a deeply ‘racialized’ commonsensical understanding of the ‘most’ legitimate and authentic representation and ownership of institutional space.

The thesis delves into dominant representations of Rhodes University’s history, considering how these help produce and reproduce ‘racial’ dominance through, for instance, the production of defining apolitical narratives of ‘excellence’. Central to the dominant apolitical institutional history is the production of silences about the past. History, I argue, is less compelling in any revelation of ‘what happened’ than in illustrating the production of silences used to enable the appropriation of a particular history as the sole relevant history. The ‘inheritors of the past’, those who are able to lay authoritative and representative claim to it, it is argued, ultimately claim ownership over institutional space.

I argue too, that the dominant practices and performances of daily institutional life (re)produce the institutional space as a space of ‘racial’ dominance. Ritualized performance of the dominant institutional identity produces ownership of institutional space through making some articulations of ‘Rhodes identity’ more acceptable, legitimate and authentic than others. The dominance of ‘drinking culture’ in Rhodes student life produces a particular ‘racialized’ institutional identity as most legitimate. ‘Racial’ dominance is instituted, consecrated and reproduced through the ritualistic performance of ‘drinking culture’, which ultimately produces a superior claim of ownership over the

institutional space through the reiteration of 'racial' domination that these performances of institutional identity powerfully symbolize.

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## The legitimized (re)production of ‘racial’ dominance

[...] You can’t say that in some ways that they [‘black’ people] don’t deserve these labels case in point: why do the majority of black guys in res[idence] stink like shit, when they have FREE and CONSTANT access to showers? (it must indicate some really different primitive mindset) [...] What I am saying is that black people have these terrible labels because a large part of the time this is how they have behaved and people have picked up on this [...] this is not to say that all black people are as you described above, but perhaps a sizeable portion are, they would have to be to hold such unwavering sway over the ‘black people generalisation! [...] Why are black people said to be incompetent, stupid, violent? well, because a visible portion of them have acted in this way to reinforce this.<sup>1</sup>

A ‘white’ male student made the above statement on the Rhodes University student discussion forums. This was followed by some indifference, but significant anger and resistance. The Vice-Chancellor temporarily suspended use of the Student Discussion Forums, setting up more stringent regulations to prevent the airing of such viewpoints. The forumite was reprimanded and suspended from the forums, and students were warned that their relative anonymity on the forums did not protect them against severe action being taken (even criminal charges laid) for ‘racist’ (or other discriminatory) utterances. The response to the ‘racist’ statements and the manner in which the situation was handled demonstrates the lack of power of this kind of discourse in ten-years-after-democracy South Africa. The statement’s lack of social power resides perhaps most significantly in the fact that such discourse is generally branded ‘racist’ and does not enjoy public *legitimacy* in a post-apartheid moment at Rhodes University, or indeed in most South African contexts. The statement is ‘powerless’ because of its ready dismissal as ‘racist’.

Does such discourse however mark the boundaries and limits of everyday public articulations and displays of ‘racial’ power at Rhodes University? The ‘racist’ forum quote is one of many “visible emissions” of the reproduction of ‘racialized’ thinking and

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited extract from a Rhodes University Student Forum Discussion, 2006, <http://forums.ru.ac.za>

being in a post-apartheid South Africa. To focus on it would be to miss “the construction of existence itself” (Kracauer 1998: 100-101). It would be to confine analysis “to symptoms...to castigate obvious deformations and forget about the sequences of small events of which normal life consists” (Ibid). The following two accounts of ‘black’ individuals’ experiences as entrants into Rhodes life suggest more imperceptible workings of ‘racial’ power in Rhodes institutional life:

“I remember walking in...the whole point of us going to Olde’s was that she would introduce me to her friends...Rhodes was a completely strange environment and I was a complete stranger. So I was looking forward to meeting these new people...I remember walking in and these...white boys are there and they look at Natasha and they are excited to meet her and they turn around. All three of them turn around and look at me and they just turn around back to Natasha as if to say ‘because [...] she’s black there is absolutely nothing I need to say to her’...at that moment I realized *the extent of that separation in this place*”<sup>2</sup>

“A few months after my arrival here I went to the senior common room to see what it looked like and to meet colleagues. I received my coffee and went to sit at a table with three other staff members. I introduced myself and then one of the gentlemen asked me why I had come there...I was shocked, I did not expect it...I said I was a staff member. He then asked me whether I had paid for my coffee. I told him that the lady said that I did not need to pay. The three of them then got up and went to sit at another table, leaving me sitting there alone.”<sup>3</sup>

Are these instances of the *legitimized* articulation of ‘racial’ power? Do they open up the possibility of seeing the exercise of ‘racial’ power and dominance less crudely?<sup>4</sup> In other words, do they provide glimpses into a *daily reality* where ‘racial’ power and dominance

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<sup>2</sup> Extract from 2006 Journalism 2 Radio Course (‘Purple People’) interview with ‘black’ female – emphasis added

<sup>3</sup> Institutional Forum Sub-committee on University Culture: Report on opinions of Senior Black Academic Staff on the Culture at Rhodes University, 2002, page 8.

<sup>4</sup> There is a large body of literature dealing with ‘new racisms’, new ways in which ‘racial’ power is exercised. The continuing force of ‘racial’ categories and differences in a postcolonial, post-apartheid moment has prompted numerous studies and theories suggesting ‘race’ is a constantly evolving ideology, and new kinds of ‘racisms’ keep emerging. The list is too far ranging to cite all relevant works. See for instance Puwar (2004), Solomos and Back (1996), Goldberg (1998), Dyer (1997), Mama (1995). South African studies on the reproduction of ‘race’ include Steyn (2001), Dolby (2001), Vincent (2005), Distiller and Steyn (2004), Ballard (2002), Walker (2005), Dixon (1997), Durrheim and Dixon (2005), Posel *et al* (2001).

work less as “acts of discrimination” or “an abnormality, an unfortunate occurrence which still occasionally happens and must be countered...” than as a pervasive way of being, ‘seeing’ and existing comfortably within social space (Pulido 1996: 153)?

I am exploring in this study the emergence, workings and reproduction of ‘racial’ reproduction at Rhodes University, particularly in student life. The focus of the study is the exercise of ‘racial’ dominance in the struggles for *representative legitimacy* over the ‘true’, most authentic Rhodes (student) identity. Through exploring the historical emergence, construction and reproduction of the dominant institutional identity, and struggles over the *most* legitimate (the most dominant) representation of this identity, a sense is gained of how ‘racial’ dominance is infused and embedded in Rhodes (student) life. Through a focus on dominant representations of the institutional identity, and the exercise of social power central to the emergence, construction and reproduction of this identity (the ongoing struggles for representative legitimacy), the production and reproduction of ‘racial’ dominance is understood as deeply structuring of daily reality – of who one is, of what it means to be a student of Rhodes, of what Rhodes stands for.

To begin to “penetrate the structure of reality” (Kracauer 1998: 100-101) requires taking the more treacherous route, where the interpretation of meaning becomes unsteady and always open to the charge of spuriousness. I am keenly aware of the pitfalls and hazards of such an endeavour, particularly the charge of spuriousness given that I am interpreting ‘racial’ dominance into practices and histories that mostly pass as legitimate and accepted, i.e. un-‘raced’ (contested only by “‘racist’ agitators” or those who play the ‘race’ card, or those who are “stuck in the past” and simply cannot “get over the whole ‘race’ thing”).

Gilroy quotes Adorno: “The person who interprets, instead of accepting what is given and classifying it, is marked with the yellow star of one who squanders his intelligence in impotent speculation, reading things in where there is nothing to interpret” (Gilroy 2001: 29). Using Adorno’s insight, Gilroy states:

the signs of ‘race’ do not speak for themselves and that the difficult work of interpreting the system of meaning they create is always likely to appear illegitimate, ‘politically incorrect’, sometimes treasonable and usually speculative in the most dismissive sense of that term (Ibid).

More than using this as a disclaimer, I am acknowledging that often all we have are competing representations of reality, and staying afloat in the midst of these and not slipping into pitting one representation against another, requires creating and maintaining a particular kind of intellectual space from which the (re)production of powerful knowledge/ ‘truth’ (dominant and powerful social identities) can be adequately critiqued. My own interpretive work is deeply informed by Žižek’s (1994) insights into the functions of ideological power, particularly ideology’s erasure of (inherent) social struggle (struggles of ‘race’, class, gender), in its desire to construct social ‘reality’ as a “self-enclosed whole” (Žižek 1994: 21). The representation of the institutional identity as unified and whole is central to the exercise of ideological power, and the aim of this study is to explore and understand the silences and erasures that sustain this unity.

The thesis considers the emergence, workings and reproduction of *legitimized* ‘racial’ dominance in Rhodes institutional identity through two key concepts: (1) silencing (chapter two) and (2) ritual (chapter three) within the space of Rhodes University where this power is articulated and lived. History and spatial context are crucial to understanding how ‘racial’ dominance works, and the study is therefore very much situated and localized. This is not an empty or routine acknowledgement of spatial and historical context however. Numerous failed attempts to write ‘history/ genealogy’ as a separate chapter eventually led to the realization that history is not and cannot be separate from the ‘substantive’ chapters precisely because history is inextricably intertwined in *present* social processes of silencing and ritual – to treat it as a ‘fixed’ past is to attempt, untenably, to say ‘this is what happened’. Instead, the focus of this study is on the representations of history, the struggles over defining and appropriating ‘what happened’, and the meaning of such appropriations. Dominant representations of ‘what happened’ in the past make sense (become meaningful) in the way they are appropriated in the present (to what social and political effect). Any separation of history, from ‘substantive work’

would therefore be artificially imposed, because the past cannot be spoken about as a discrete, enclosed set of 'facts' that act as a mere background context for understanding the present.

Gilroy is right to complain that 'race' is mostly accorded a "...routine and empty measure of recognition as a social and historical construction" (Gilroy 2005: 54). The past is intricately connected to the present. When acts of 'discrimination' occur, they are generally pathologized and seen as aberrant, isolated instances, and embedded in such a view is a particular view of history. The "...amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable" (Benjamin 1969: 255). History is not a fixed past that we have left behind. It bears down on the present in complex and interesting ways, and perhaps lives on most compellingly in the stories we tell ourselves, the memories we create, in short, within our collective identities.

It is an established 'truth' in social identity studies that identities are 'socially and historically constructed'. History and historical context are routinely emphasized as significant in understanding how individuals see themselves and engage in particular kinds of discourses and discursive practices. The presentation of history, the acknowledgement of its importance in advancing our understanding of social phenomena, has in the midst of this routine emphasis lost its power. When for instance, Amina Mama (1995) presents historical context in her study of the subjectivities of 'black' British women, it reads as a factual account; it is the fixed and static backdrop against which these women construct their subjectivities i.e. this is what colonialism did and it is against this historical backdrop that we can understand the discourses through which 'black' British women construct their subjectivities (discourses of 'black' pride, or of a desire for integration into a 'white' subjectivity etc). While the study is certainly more nuanced than this, the place of history is undeniably one of *background context*. Instead of history as *process* (Mamdani 1996), history is rendered static. History is effectively dead.

Many studies provide a historical picture against which their work is set, so that their 'substantive' work (the 'important stuff') begins with something like: "It is in this historical context that...". Wetherell and Potter's (1992) study of the discourses of 'racism' in the everyday language of Pakeha New Zealanders also presents a history of New Zealand in a neat enclosed chapter, again, as a backdrop to 'the important stuff'. History serves to orientate the reader, to provide context. It is presented as an immutable objective account of the past – *this is what happened*. History, as a series of 'facts' and dates, or history as a chronological account, pretends at an objective recollection of the past – it pretends that history is not *always* constructed and interpreted and then presented in particular ways, with particular emphases and omissions. Worse, however, this fixing of history fails to show history as an *ongoing process*, and in doing so, fails to bring it alive in meaningful ways *as existing* within the present. It does not invigorate the past in a way that *shows how* it is alive in the present, the complex ways in which the "tradition of all dead generations", as Marx contends "weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living".

If history is not a 'thing of the past', then what exactly is its significance? Is it a pseudo-meaningful backdrop against which we must position the present? Understanding the construction and reproduction of the dominant student identity at Rhodes University (what it means to be a 'true' Rhodian/Rhodent) implicates history as more than just background context. To be sure, there are many empirical studies which do not (or do not obviously appear to) rely on history to help 'unlock' the mechanisms through which social identity or ideology is reproduced (Paul Willis' 1977 study of working class identities among British school boys comes to mind). Yet the production and reproduction of a dominant social identity depends very much on its ability to be considered legitimate, and that in turn involves calling powerfully on the past.

We have not learnt all there is to learn about the salience of history in understanding 'race' identity and power. I could simply state that the dominant student identity in Rhodes student life is a historical construction and its 'truth', its common sense and 'naturalness' can therefore be refuted – yet the aim is not to refute a 'truth' as

‘constructed’; it is to provide understanding of *how* truths, meaningful realities, emerge through the processes of history. Instead of simply quoting Foucault: “Truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (Foucault 1977: 364), and leaving it at that, instead of ‘discovering’ truth and then renouncing it as ‘false’ or ‘constructed’, there is a need rather to show its emergence, construction and reproduction as powerful knowledge. The value of actually engaging with the history of representative struggles over identity is in gaining insight into *how* an identity came to be powerful, how it insinuated itself, how it is lived, and the kinds of discourses and discursive practices that empower it.

The way in which history plays into any study of identity is quite importantly a methodological issue. A major difficulty that Mamdani observes in “unilinear”, structuralist social scientific approaches is the manner in which they ‘mythologize’ dominant ideologies and power. It becomes too easy to speak of ‘historical structures of power’ and to attribute social phenomena to these invisible and convenient structures. Such dominant ideologies are “...ascribed a suprahistorical trajectory of development, a necessary path whose main line of development is unaffected by struggles that happened along the way. [In this way, dominant as well as subordinate ideologies and experiences] are robbed of history” (Mamdani 1996: 10).

There is no linear, obvious connection between the ‘racialized’ past (either nationally or globally) and ‘racial’ power as it is exercised in the present. The general history of ‘race’ in South Africa, whilst framing the present, does not illuminate for us the workings of ‘racial’ power in the present with any precision. As Foucault emphasizes, social research that takes history seriously does not attempt “...to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes” (Foucault 1977: 365). In exploring its history through the lived experiences of individuals, the life and power of a concept such as ‘race’, its *constructed reality*, emerges as a reality forged always through struggle and contestation rather than enjoying a smooth, non-contradictory transition through history.

To truly engage with its historical constructedness is to look at how the concept gained importance and was reproduced through struggle in the lived struggles of a localized context.

Above all, Foucault's genealogical approach emphasizes the importance of social research exploring the *emergence* of a concept, the ways in which it became and was *made* meaningful in social life. A genealogical approach is therefore used to elucidate the emergence and workings of 'racial' dominance in Rhodes University student life. Such an approach above all, makes visible the constructedness of reality through showing how that which is considered natural, "immobile" and normal is in fact produced in history.

"A genealogy of...knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins', will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning...The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin...He must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and its unpalatable defeats...History is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideal of the origin" (Foucault 1977: 364).

A historical/genealogical approach thus traces the emergence of a concept in social life (its construction made meaningful, and its reproduction) through the *lived* experiences of social life. Such an approach follows "...a complex course of descent..." in order to explore through empirical evidence what it is "...that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (Foucault 1977: 365). The sense in which 'birth' is given to a concept is not about searching for the 'origins' of a concept (it does not attempt to trace as certain theorists do, the beginnings of the concept of 'race'). Rather, the aim is to study the emergence and transformation of the concept within a network of power; to consider *how* 'race' was *made* meaningful in student life (the discourses and practices through which this constructed concept is lived and reproduced in a particular place). 'Racial' dominance is reproduced through historical struggle and contestation that is at the heart of social reproduction.

The value of the past in understanding the present is not in it *determining* the present. The struggles for representative legitimacy crucially involve appropriating history itself, taking control of it. Central to claims of representative legitimacy over the institutional identity is a simultaneous and contradictory dismissal and embracing of the past – it is through silencing the ‘racialized’ institutional history for instance, that threats to the dominant identity may be *delegitimized*, and yet the legitimation and reproduction of a social identity as most legitimate is based precisely on the appropriation of history, albeit a *particular* history. The appropriation of history, erasure of the past, and control over the recollection of the past – these are all central to struggles over representative legitimacy, and the reproduction of ‘racial’ dominance.

Silences about the past are *revealing* of social power. To understand the power of the past in the present, chapter two explores the relationship between silences in dominant historical productions and the production of a particular institutional identity as dominant. The thesis explores how official and dominant discourses of the past attempt to redefine, reconstruct and reformulate the past in ways that construct the present as legitimate, and effectively silence ‘racial’ dominance, power, exclusion and privilege. The crucial premise is that we have no direct access to the past, only representations of it, so that is where I begin my analysis. The focus of the study is therefore on powerful *representations* of history, of the past, and the silences they contain, as a means to understanding how the appropriation of history operates to construct representative legitimacy over, and ownership of, institutional space.

Historical silences are crucial to the production of places and place-identities. An exploration of the place-identity of Rhodes University is central to understanding the production and reproduction of ‘racial’ dominance; the claim is that institutional space shapes in powerful ways the interactions that occur within it; that its own history and power configurations quite centrally create the conditions of possibility for actions and interactions. The Vice Chancellor’s actions against the ‘racist’ forum post with which this chapter began, communicates a message that Rhodes University is intolerant of ‘racism’. This constructs (or attempts to construct) the institutional space in a particular way. What

of the daily, pervasive practices within the spatial context of the University? ‘Racial’ dominance may mark in a more pervasive way the very character and identity of a place, hence the student quoted above wonders at “the extent of that separation in this place”.<sup>5</sup> How has ‘racial’ dominance emerged and worked in the historically and socially constructed and legitimized dominant identity of a place, Rhodes University? And how is this dominance continually reproduced in and through the practices and articulations of institutional identity?

In its Equity Policy of 2004, the university professes a strong commitment to changing its ‘institutional culture’. It defines institutional culture as the “‘Way things are done’ within an organisation specifically the traditions, customs, values, and shared understandings that underpin the decisions taken, the practices engaged in and those practices that are rewarded and supported”.<sup>6</sup> Under ‘Change and a Culture of Inclusivity’, the Equity Policy states:

“To ensure the effective implementation of the policy, change in the culture, values and practices of the University are necessary. Such change recognises that certain inequities do exist within the University *as a result of Apartheid practices* and that these have contributed to a culture that is experienced by *some* staff and students as alienating.”<sup>7</sup>

While emphasizing the “need to...[realise]...the institution’s vision and mission statement in... our everyday activities”,<sup>8</sup> such approaches essentially avoid asking the difficult questions about *how* ‘race’ really is reproduced within the everyday context of the institution. When for instance, ‘black’ academic staff reveal feelings of discomfort and ‘out-of-placeness’ in spaces such as the staff Senior Common Room,<sup>9</sup> what does this mean about spaces of ‘racial’ dominance at Rhodes University, or indeed about *the institution as a such a space?*

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<sup>5</sup> See Vincent (2005) for an exposition on the pervasiveness of ‘race’ at Rhodes ten years after democracy. The idea that place-identity acts as a structural constraint, making certain behaviours, actions, utterances etc. acceptable and possible, and others not, is discussed by numerous social and spatial geographers (see for instance Puwar 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes University Equity Policy, 2004, page 4.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes University Equity Policy, 2004, page 5 – emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Reflections on Institutional Culture and Transformation, 2003, page 7.

<sup>9</sup> Reflections on Institutional Culture and Transformation, 2003, page 8

There is an acknowledgement by the University of the ingrained 'institutional culture' of 'racial' dominance, but a simultaneous dismissal of it as a result of an external force (apartheid), rather than internally generated and regenerated. The institutional recommendations to deal with 'racism' (or perceptions of 'racism') include the "need to criminalize racism", holding "diversity management type workshops for all staff", "stereotype reduction workshops" and "institutional meetings and seminars on these issues at the institutional level" (Ibid). Issues of 'race' are reduced to problematic 'stereotypes' held by some, and mere 'perceptions' of being discriminated against by others, in a one dimensional approach which attempts to 'manage' a complex social phenomenon (through a 'problem-solution' type approach), thereby silencing and precluding interrogation of the ways the institutional culture may be supportive of and may actually produce a culture of 'racial' dominance.

The thesis looks seriously at the construction of Rhodes University as a space with its own particular 'racialized' place-identity.<sup>10</sup> Particularly interesting is the fact that while this culture is acknowledged to be excluding and the institutional environment that it creates alienating, there is little engagement with where this comes from, with how the institutional space may be constructed and reproduced *as a space of 'racial' dominance*. Whilst acknowledging the entrenchment of 'racial' exclusivity and alienation in the institution (ingrained in its very culture, values and practices), the university simultaneously seeks to distance itself from and externalize this 'racial' dominance (it is "as a result of Apartheid practices").<sup>11</sup>

In 2004, Rhodes University carried out a 'Quality of Residence Life' survey with the aim of ascertaining how the residence experience impacts on Rhodes students' sense of community. A survey of the values and attitudes of students in residence was conducted,

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<sup>10</sup> The importance of place and space in social construction, and particularly the construction of identities has become a widely researched area. One of the foremost theorists on 'race' and its 'spatial' dynamics (social segregation) within South African society is John Dixon (see Dixon [1996]; Dixon and Durrheim [2005]). The studies look at 'racist' discourse and the manner in which such discourses maintain 'racist' geographies (social/ spatial segregation).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly the Vision and Mission statement (2000) erases the university's pre-apartheid past: "The University's African identity will be affirmed through: ...*its acknowledgement of the problems created by the legacy of apartheid...*" (Rhodes University Equity Policy 2004, page 2).

including 'race' attitudes. The survey report states: "Of concern is the number of respondents who indicate having witnessed incidents of sexism (14%), racism (38%), homophobia (25%) and xenophobia (20%) in the residences" (L'Ange 2005: 8). However, for the institution, these incidents are isolated and do not necessarily reflect broader trends. "The majority of students claim that having lived in the University residences has better equipped them to deal with diversity, and the survey reveals that the tolerance of diversity is high amongst students in residence" (Ibid).

The university believes that more research is required to ascertain whether these "are isolated incidents or whether there is a more prevalent and pervasive attitude which needs to be addressed" (L'Ange 2005: 12). Addressing these areas of concern (racism, homophobia etc) will, according to the report, enhance and improve the residence system which is "already an area of excellence at Rhodes University" (Ibid). The possibility of a "more prevalent and pervasive attitude" is not posited as a possibility much less interrogated.

If incidents of 'racism' and 'racial' dominance are frequently brought up as pressing issues facing Rhodes (see for instance Vincent 2005 and the numerous Student Forum discussions on 'race' and 'transformation' at Rhodes), how does the lived 'institutional culture' (and residence culture) bring this into effect? Is there not a need to look into and interrogate social practices in institutional life, particularly dominant identity-producing practices? Chapter three considers how dominant cultural practices in student life help construct 'racialized' 'community' and thereby reproduce 'racial' dominance.

Central to the thesis is the idea that the power of 'race', its emergence and workings through concrete historical events, occur *within a particular place*, a local context. 'Race' is constructed and reproduced through the interaction with a space, its matrix and exercise of power, which in turns makes possible certain articulations about truth and "valid" historical knowledge in that space. While an ideological concept such as 'race' has power that may be demonstrated to be global (Mills 1997), this power has to be *locally* constructed and reproduced to have any real existence within a particular context;

it has to be mediated within a localized space in order for it to be reproduced; it has to be lived and performed within such a space. The normality of ‘racial’ exclusion or separateness is not separate from the space/ place within which it gains its constructed meaning.<sup>12</sup> The point is that the space/place within which social identity is lived and reproduced does not constitute a mere background to lived experiences. Instead, social identities are constructed and lived within a place which shapes in constraining and regulating ways the negotiation of identity between individuals within the place.

‘Racial’ dominance is lived and reproduced, contested and struggled over in the daily performances of student life. The ‘cultural’ is a necessary part of the dialectic of reproduction, as Paul Willis reminds us (Willis 1977: 174). Willis emphasizes the importance of the “cultural milieu” in understanding the *mediation* of ideologies such as ‘race’ – the fact that ideologies are reproduced through being lived, performed and practiced in local contexts by individuals who possess (a degree of) agency. To recognize the mediation of ‘race’ ideology, of ‘whiteness’, through the local cultural milieu (where it is contested, resisted, shaped, formed) then is to recognize the instability and uncertainty in its reproduction – there is, as Willis points out, no inevitability of outcomes (Willis 1977: 174).<sup>13</sup> There is instead contestation and struggle (with different degrees of ‘intent’ and consciousness) in student life. Chapter three thus explores the *workings* of ‘racial’ dominance in student life through reproductive rituals (performances and practices).

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<sup>12</sup> Nirmal Puwar, in her book *Space Invaders* (2004) shows for instance how spaces that are ‘racially’ and gender defined strongly constrain and regulate the construct of identities of people who enter these spaces. In her study of the British civil service, she illustrates how the ‘whiteness’ of the space is constructed through a ‘white’ somatic norm, which then constructs ‘black’ individuals entering this space as ‘invaders’. Numerous other social geographers have highlighted and emphasized the importance of spaces/ places in the construction of social relations and identities. This importance is not an all-powerful deterministic one, but a dialectical one that does not dismiss the power of space. See for instance Hubbard *et al* (2004), Jackson and Smith (1984), Madanipour (2003), Dixon (1997), Massey (1995), Mills (2001), Drainville (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Mahmood Mamdani’s discussion of the reef violence of the early 90s between ANC and IFP supporters provides insight into the mediated and lived nature of social power – how groups respond to social pressures in varied and complex (rather than simple, reductionist) ways, which result in particular outcomes (Mamdani 1996). The point being made is that domination and subordination do not possess a life completely of their own; they are enacted by human beings who make choices and struggle over possible options rather than having their actions determined in a straightforward, predictable manner. It is only through engaging with historical events, treating history as process as Mamdani says, that the struggles that lead to outcomes can be better understood.

### *The problem of 'whiteness'*

To speak of legitimized 'racial' dominance is in some crucial sense to speak *precisely* of 'whiteness' as the contours of its power has been elucidated by so many. Studies of 'whiteness' and 'white' power have 'established' that a key feature of 'whiteness' that enables it to retain a hold on social power is its ability to be seen as normal, natural, un-'raced', and therefore to obtain a position of legitimacy. It would of course be easy enough to piggy-back on the numerous analyses of 'whiteness' (most notably Richard Dyer 1997) and look for evidence within the Rhodes context that tallies with the traits of 'whiteness' that have been 'confirmed' by constructivist/ postmodern/ poststructuralist identity studies, which afford it its power (the invisibility of 'whiteness' for instance, which enables it to be the accepted norm and standard for humanity). In a very significant sense then, 'white' power *is* legitimized 'racial' dominance.<sup>14</sup>

Taking for granted the power of 'whiteness' does not however enhance our understanding of the reproduction of 'racial' dominance. Such an approach does not take seriously either the contested or continuously (re)constructed nature of social power. Legitimized 'racial' dominance is struggled over and actively constructed; it is not a given. Legitimacy must be produced and reproduced, as the stability of a 'racial' dominance depends crucially on the effective and accepted reiteration of its 'normality'. 'White' identity is no more stable and fixed than any social identity; it is not guaranteed by any underlying necessity. Of course, I am aware that naming an identity helps to provide it with some degree of stability, fixing it and rendering it immutable. The dismantling of social power lies in breaking up, fragmenting and disordering that which appears whole and unified. Framing the issue as the reproduction of 'racial' dominance, rather than the reproduction of 'whiteness', is not mere semantics – it takes seriously the fact that a study

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<sup>14</sup> South African studies of 'whiteness' have generally not problematized 'whiteness', mostly finding evidence to confirm what is 'known' about it. See for instance Ballard (2002), Steyn (2001), Salusbury and Foster (2004). Salusbury and Foster (2004) identify the specificities of a White English Speaking South African (WESSA) identity, and it is indeed tempting to take for granted the existence, homogeneity and invisible power of this group at Rhodes.

of ‘racial’ power cannot begin on the taken for granted premise of a powerful, fixed social identity such as ‘whiteness’.

A primary importance of not defining ‘whiteness’ and ‘white’ power in advance of an empirically located study of ‘racial’ dominance is that it allows us to keep open the question of ‘whiteness’ and prevents the foreclosing of its meanings. There is a need to engage empirically, to “...see how ‘race’ works in the imagination and practice of the lives of white people” (Nuttall 2001: 135). As Nuttall emphasizes:

“Although the ‘white condition’ is not so fluid as to detach it from power, privilege, and oppression, the experience of Africans of European origin is a contingent and situated identity. Because it is, it enables us to *keep the question of whiteness open, to resist the tendency to foreclose its meanings... ‘whiteness’ [is an idea] ...lived [experience], and [practice] in the making*” (Nuttall 2001: 136 – emphasis added).

The ‘racial’ order that defined Rhodes University from 1904 the year of its birth privileged ‘whiteness’. This construction of ‘whiteness’ was not distinct from constructions of ‘whiteness’ in national or global contexts. However, to say that the reproduction of ‘racial’ power is simply a continuation of a globally-given “underlying system” of ‘white’ supremacy (ala Mills 1997) is to miss two crucial points in reproduction: (1) that the hegemony or dominance of ‘whiteness’ is *locally* produced and reproduced and must be so because of the inherent instability of the social identity, and (2) that ‘whiteness’ (like any ideological social formation) is not ahistorically defined, homogenous or monolithic in its exercise of power. It does not encompass a taken-for-granted power that can simply be known and recognized prior to study of its emergence and workings in a particular context.

The fact that ‘whiteness’ is locally reproduced (lived and experienced within the everyday life of a local context) means its dominance/ hegemony is not a given and cannot be taken for granted. ‘Whiteness’ has been represented as a globally (and often monolithically) powerful phenomenon (see for instance Mills 1997, 2001). Richard Dyer speaks of the invisible power of ‘whiteness’ as its power to define ‘normality’. “White power...reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and

overwhelmingly because it is not seen as ‘whiteness’, but as normal” (Dyer 1997: 10). While not claiming that this articulation is incorrect, it does not explain how ‘whiteness’ *continues* to exert power within local contexts, the social processes and mechanisms through which it is reproduced and continues to remain powerful i.e. the *lived* reproduction of ‘whiteness’. An interesting illustrative point comes to mind: when a particular event and celebration of Rhodes institutional identity was attacked as “whites day” (on a student forum discussion), the retort was “were they wearing white hoods and setting fire to crosses?” The point here is that the performance of a dominant ‘white’ identity is associated with particular oppressive symbolic representations and that this masks the continued reproduction of ‘whiteness’ as powerful through localized ritualistic practices and performances of ‘racial’ dominance (that are actually not ‘new’ in that context, because they are preceded by a history of constructed meaningfulness).

Peggy Macintosh’s now-famous list of the privileges that ‘whiteness’ confers on her daily existence points to a lived experience of ‘whiteness’, that is neither universal nor eternal. To list generalized criteria of the privileges of ‘whiteness’ fixes the phenomenon, solidifies it, and prevents localized explorations and understandings of its power. Studies that begin with fixed presumptions about the power of ‘whiteness’ simply add to the chorused acknowledgement of its supposedly invincible and universal ability to define ‘normality’. Saying that ‘whiteness’ is normal or invisible and considering it enough to *simply state* that its power lies in these features is to ignore the actual *making* of ‘whiteness’, i.e. its construction, *emergence*, and reproduction through lived experience and practice as a category of power and the ways in which it is rendered meaningful.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Roediger takes seriously the *construction* of ‘whiteness’, exploring its construction rather than stating it as a taken-for-granted truth. Perhaps the most revealing work exploring the making of ‘whiteness’ is Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* which interrogates the ‘racialized’ *making* of the American working class during the nineteenth century. Roediger explores the constructed nature of ‘whiteness’ through discourse (powerful language use) and performance. He explores how Irish immigrants were known as “white niggers” and had no ‘real’ claims to ‘whiteness’. Irish immigrants were barely different to the ‘nigger’, and often comparisons were drawn. In no way did their skin colour provide them an incontestable entry into the privileges of ‘whiteness’. Their skin colour did not in fact mean unquestioned access to ‘whiteness’, which points precisely to the constructed nature of the category ‘white’. The immigrants had to fight for entry into the world of American ‘whiteness’. The treatment of the Irish immigrants in America points to ‘white’ as a category with shifting and changing boundaries that is vehemently struggled over within particular historical circumstances (*and thereby* constructed). The ‘white’ Irish workers desired and valued entry into ‘whiteness’ because the “wages of whiteness” were not just monetary but social and

Any study that takes seriously the historical and social construction of identity cannot but acknowledge that in order for 'white' identity to be reproduced it has to be *made meaningful* in the local cultural context and be articulated, performed and lived in the daily life of that context, through which it is inevitably mediated. Genuinely engaging with 'whiteness' as a constructed category means accepting it as heterogeneous, a category whose meaning and construction needs to be interrogated rather than assumed in Rhodes student life.

The dominant Rhodes institutional identity is produced and reproduced through practices and lived performances that are struggled over. The lived and performed struggles in Rhodes (student) life are essentially contests over hegemony/ dominance, over the reproduction of legitimately representative social power. The social context, occupied by acting human agents, is not a well-ordered site but a "relatively open and indeterminate place where actually existing social forces really do meet" (Drainville 2004: 8). The idea, according to Drainville, is to *see into* social practices rather than *look at them*. There is often a mechanical and (ironically enough) uncritical application of theory to the empirical in social research. Part of a fresh approach to social research, an approach that does not take social orders for granted, is the problematizing of concepts that are generally taken for granted. Maintaining openness and avoiding the foreclosing of meanings, means recognizing that social power is reproduced through struggle and contestation.

### **Methodological considerations**

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psychological as well, and they consequently constructed themselves as 'white' – they *actively constructed*, which means they lived and performed their identities as distinct from 'black' 'niggers', as different from the 'nigger' slaves. Given the class similarities (the same living conditions, the same occupations and the same working class status) how did the Irish working class *overcome* disempowering class similarities through 'racial' distinction? "...since Irish-Americans were in many cases as economically dependent as free Blacks, no 'empirical' case could be made that the immigrants had shown themselves fit for freedom, and Blacks by comparison had proven themselves unfit to be 'true Americans'" (Roediger 1999: 143). Roediger shows how language, performance and violence are used to construct 'racially' distinctive identities. Even though the Irish immigrants saw themselves/ their identities very much as Irish (in opposition to the despised British, who they felt had enslaved them), they found that in America, identity construction as 'white' rather than Irish, was a more favourable option (Roediger 1999: 143-150) because the social context, the *place* valued this identity more highly.

The study does not of course pretend to provide a 'pure' God's-eye view of the workings of 'racial' dominance. Interpretation of empirical data is crucial to meaning making and producing knowledge. There is a determined effort however to theorize in ways that do not subjugate the empirical to theoretical concepts. What was considered important in the 'data', in fact what was *to be* the data, emerged not in some smooth, linear or obvious process of exploration. The primary sources of empirical data were (1) the Rhodes University Student Forums discussions, (2) 'Purple People' stories which were produced for a second year Journalism course in 2006, (3) numerous official institutional policy documents including the Rhodes University Equity Policy (2004), the Quality of Residence Life Survey Report (L'Ange 2005), and, a university report 'Reflections on Institutional Culture and Transformation (2003)', (4) numerous institutional archival documents particularly the student newspapers (first *Rhodeo* then *Activate*) but also student pamphlets and posters, (5) archived articles from national newspapers. 'Secondary sources' were primarily the journal articles published from the university's centenary Critical Colloquium on Rhodes' students experiences of the past, and the two primary texts on the history of Rhodes, Richard Buckland and Thelma Neville's *A Story of Rhodes*, and Ronald F. Currey's *Rhodes University 1904-1970: A Chronicle*.

There was no 'artificial' production of data for this study. All of the data, in some meaningful sense, was produced 'naturally', thus avoiding the pitfalls of 'interview effects'. The Rhodes University Student Discussion Forums provides a 'public space' of articulation through which student opinions about numerous issues including 'race' are openly voiced. Forum debates and discussions have been used to analyze student discourses regarding 'race' at Rhodes, which are vigorously (and often aggressively) voiced. The use of forum material is particularly illuminating given firstly that these discussions occur 'naturally' (avoiding the limitations presented by interviews and focus groups, which are 'staged' social research methods). The relative anonymity of the student forums presents an open and free space for student expression, and prevents many of the pitfalls of doing face-to-face interviews, not least of which is the likely reticence and cautiousness of respondents, which is almost completely lacking on the student forums. This makes it a relatively 'unsullied' medium through which the researcher is

able to access dominant discourses in student life. In a sense, the discussion forums highlights and emphasizes relatively clearly the power dynamics in Rhodes student life i.e. they are more ‘purely’ illuminated than they would be in discussion forums that are contrived, more regulated, censorious and requiring of a particular reserve in voicing one’s opinions.

Central to the research project are a series of works (written pieces as well as interviews) produced by second year Journalism and Media Studies students for a semester course in Radio Journalism. The project was called ‘Purple People’ and involved students telling their own stories (to be presented as ‘radio talks’) about their most memorable experiences of being a Rhodes student. Students also had to conduct interviews with other students and lecturers on campus about their experiences related to their social positioning within the ‘Rhodes community’ (This related mainly to their ‘race’, gender and class positioning). Together the radio talks and interviews provide a series of first hand perspectives on what it means to be a student of Rhodes.

The struggle and contestation over ‘racial’ dominance can only be found through an engagement with the lived experiences of ‘whiteness’. Such an engagement means approaching empirical lived realities without already established notions (theoretical presuppositions and distinctions) that are simply imposed on and used to uncritically over-determine the distinctions in a social setting; it means not merely seeking confirmation of what one ‘knows’ about ‘whiteness’. There is often little interrogation of how particular power-infused identities are made meaningful and are performed, and as a methodological consideration, Drainville suggests that we suspend our presuppositions about these identities in order to more freely engage with what is happening in social life:

“Reasonable on the face of it...[oft-used] distinctions ... have in fact more to do with *ideological presuppositions* than with a serious analysis of the limits and possibilities of...social relations. For that they need to be questioned or suspended for a while...Rather than intuitive certainties, *we need to question what is being taken for granted*” (Drainville 2004: 9 – emphasis added).

This does not mean dismissing concepts such as ‘whiteness’, with all the established knowledge about its power altogether – instead, it means suspending the concept so as to

ensure that established knowledge does not dictate the manner in which the empirical becomes meaningful. It means essentially, that the question of what is significant in social life, though informed by theoretical concepts, should not be over-determined by them – *how* the empirical is made meaningful requires the dialectic between theory and the empirical to be more open and fluid.

An approach that elevates the empirical enables lived experience to in some meaningful sense ‘speak for itself’ without the ‘baggage’ of established theoretical concepts. This does not imply that prior truths cease to exist or hold weight. They should not however, overwhelm in a deterministic way *what* is considered important in the empirical, or how the empirical is made meaningful. Theoretical concepts should not prevent the emergence of new ways of looking at ‘old’ things.

Without suspending, at least for a while, established theoretical concepts, social reproduction is described rather than *interrogated*. Social realities can be easily and straightforwardly explained using given concepts, providing no genuine insight into the *making* of that reality, the lived reproduction of it – the empirical is simply neatly slotted into already-existing concepts. Revealing the *making of meaning* (the making of ‘reality’ and ‘truth’), exposes the instability in the reproduction of ‘racial’ power, what Paul Willis refers to as the “*necessary uncertainty*” underpinning the reproduction of ideology (Willis 1977: 175 – emphasis added). It reveals the inherent struggle and instability in the reproduction of social power. This openness in social research is in contrast with

“structuralist theories of reproduction [which] present the dominant ideology...as impenetrable. Everything fits too neatly. Ideology always pre-exists and pre-empts any authentic criticism. There are no cracks in the billiard ball smoothness of process. All specific contradictions and conflicts are smoothed away in the universal reproductive functions of ideology” (Willis 1977: 175).

According to Willis, any particular society derives its nature (its place-identity) from the “contested settlement” that is a result of struggle and contestation (Willis 1977: 175).

Rhodes University student identity is underpinned by ‘racial’ struggles and contestation that results in its continuous making and re-making. ‘Racial’ dominance is reproduced

through these struggles. To invoke Drainville, there seems absent in many accounts of the reproduction of ideological formations the recognition that an ideological (capitalist/ 'racial'/ patriarchal) order gets *made* and *unmade* and that the 'hegemony' of such orders needs to be examined rather than assumed (Drainville 2004: 53). To state for instance that an 'underlying context' of 'white' supremacy structures and orders the world, or a particular society, is to create a mythical monolith whose power is absolute rather than continually contested and reproduced only through struggle, and which has to actively and continually work to (re)produce its legitimacy.

### **A further note on methodology and method**

In its quest to unveil the simply given 'truth' about a social phenomenon and its pursuit of 'the facts' that are out there about it, survey-type social science research loses and indeed *prevents understanding of* the nuanced complexity and power of social reproduction. The result is that little enhanced understanding emerges about *how* 'racism' operates and why it is able to enjoy a continued existence in the Rhodes student community (or any other context in South Africa or globally for that matter).

In the Quality of Residence Life survey for instance, there are a series of statements such as 'I enjoy the spirit in my house', 'I enjoy the sense of community in my house', 'respect for one another's culture is strong in my house', 'I am interested in learning about other people's cultures, beliefs and lifestyles', 'I believe that in general the attitudes and values of students in my residence are a. sexist, b. racist, c. homophobic, d. xenophobic', 'I have witnessed within my residence incidents of the following during the past year: a. racism, b. sexism (etc)', 'Having lived in a residence in Rhodes University, I feel I am better equipped to deal with a. people of a different culture, b. people of a different belief, c. people of a different sexual orientation (etc)'. Respondents were given a scale of 1-5 to grade each statement, with 1 being 'strongly agree' and 5 'strongly disagree'. This approach makes two significant assumptions: firstly, that 'race' and 'racism' are static, universal concepts, and secondly, that individuals are in possession of a true understanding of their actions and motives.

One of the main difficulties with attempts to measure attitudes towards an ‘attitude object’ such as ‘racism’, or ‘sense of community’ through posing statements such as those above and asking respondents to attach a scale value (1 to 5) to such statements is that in order for the results or measures of attitudes to be valid, it must be assumed that all respondents have the same understanding and definition of the ‘attitude object’, which is rarely if ever the case (Durrheim and Dixon 2005). Surveys do not capture the complexity of social life, and the fact that the human subjects whose ‘attitudes’ and ‘values’ they attempt to capture, often act *unconsciously* – i.e. without awareness that they may be reproducing a system of ‘racial’ dominance, and can therefore not be uncritically (without interpretation) relied on to make truth claims about their own ‘tolerance of diversity’ for instance. Surveys pretend that social reality (‘what is going on’) can be easily and directly apprehended. Quantitative research methods take little if any cognisance of the mediation of ideological concepts in social life, or of any complexity in the reproduction of social power. Hollway and Jefferson argue that “to do justice to the complexity of our subjects an interpretive approach is unavoidable” (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 3).

Asking respondents to clarify the status of ‘racism’ in a community (through their responses to claims about diversity and ‘racism’ in residences), and taking these as ‘true’ of the extent and nature of ‘racism’ in residence life is problematic for three reasons: firstly, it assumes that these individuals are fully aware of where and how they stand in relation to ‘racism’, it assumes a standard definition of ‘racism’ shared by all respondents, secondly, it attempts to *measure* ‘racism’ as though it is an objectively given, quantifiable phenomenon, and thirdly, it avoids the *how* question – how is ‘racial’ power operative in student life; what are the social practices imbued with ‘racial’ power? Can a complex social phenomenon about which there is immense debate and little consensus really be measurable, in a straightforward, unproblematic manner afforded by survey-type questionnaires?

Hollway and Jefferson (2000:1) point out that conventional research methods such as questionnaires, interviews and surveys assume much about a person's capacity to know, remember and tell about themselves. They contend that neither selves nor accounts are transparent descriptions of social 'realities':

Treating peoples' own accounts as unproblematic flies in the face of what is known about people's less clear-cut, more confused and contradictory relationship to knowing and telling about themselves. In everyday informal dealings with each other, we do not take each other's accounts at face value, unless we are totally naïve; we question, disagree, bring in counter-examples, interpret, notice hidden agendas. *Research is only a more formalised and systematic way of knowing about people*, but in the process it seems to have lost much of the subtlety and complexity that we use, often as a matter of course, in everyday knowing. We need to bring some of this everyday subtlety back into the research process (2000: 3 – emphasis added).

This research project does not strictly adhere to any particular methodology. Methodological assumptions can become constraining when one methodological paradigm is inflexibly drawn upon to inform research. Instead the researcher adopts an approach of 'reflexive interpretation'. This approach is in keeping with what Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) have suggested – a critical but open approach to research. They encourage theoretical inconsistency in the sense that a particular ontological and epistemological view does not have to be maintained throughout. "The point of reflection is to break away from consistency and a narrow focus on a particular aspect, as well as to question the weaknesses inherent in a mode of thought that one embraces" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 246). The point is that less can be said about social reproduction and social change prior to actually looking at the empirical situatedness of an ideological social formation and considering its role and function in the daily lives of individuals. The rejection of grand narratives then is the rejection of the need for empirical evidence to necessarily conform in a mechanical way to already-established theoretical concepts.

## **‘100 years of excellence’: Silences in the production of the dominant historical narrative of Rhodes University**

“Any institution that has survived 100 years in South Africa has endured great achievement, happiness and sorrow and has survived bad times and turmoil. Rhodes is no exception and has experienced its highs and lows...”<sup>16</sup>

- Dr David Woods (*Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University 1996-2005*)

“Perhaps when I one day say Rhodes is a different place it will truly be a different place”<sup>17</sup>

- Zubeida Jaffer, 2005 (*Old Rhodian and Rhodes University Council Member*)

It was in 2004, during its centenary year that Rhodes University revealed a split personality. There was a curious-seeming disjuncture as two divergent and opposing pasts emerged from some of the key historical recollections produced for the centenary. *A Story of Rhodes: Rhodes University 1904-2004*, the glossy, ‘not official’ centenary publication produced a 100 year history of the university ultimately as a “democratic model of social justice for South African society”.<sup>18</sup> Old Rhodians and Rhodian academics from the ‘critical tradition’ shared a markedly different view of Rhodes history, which can be summed up by Paul Maylam’s assertion of “...institutional complicity in the South African racial order, rather than opposition to it” (Maylam 2005a: 21). These opposing histories are not created or produced equal. What enables the production of some historical representations as more legitimate than others? Power works to silence particular histories, to render some more thinkable than others.

### *Acts of silencing*

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<sup>16</sup> Woods, D. 2004. ‘Vice-Chancellor’s Report 2004’ in *Annual Review 2004*, page 4.

<sup>17</sup> Jaffer, Z. 2005. ‘Rhodes University: A Different Place’ in *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, page 183.

<sup>18</sup> Buckland and Neville (2004 – inside jacket). The book outlines a history peppered with anecdotes and events reflecting this construction of institutional history.

Over 40 ‘Old Rhodians’ gathered at Rhodes’ centenary celebrations to participate in a Critical Tradition Colloquium, reflecting mainly on their personal histories at the university, and making sense of Rhodes within the broader ‘racial’ order existent in South Africa. Then Vice-Chancellor David Woods responded to these ‘Old Rhodians’ overwhelmingly critical stance on the University’s history thus:

*“In the Rhodes tradition of self-appraisal and open debate, a critical colloquium was held where alumni returned to the University to reflect critically on their experiences at Rhodes. What emerged strongly from this exercise was that despite perceived shortcomings in the past, all participants acknowledged the high quality of a Rhodes education and the commitment and quality of our academic staff”<sup>19</sup>.*

In a powerful discursive act of silencing, Woods subsumes these alternate stories within the overarching framework of the ‘rich and rewarding’ experience offered by the institution. He thus restores order and coherence to institutional history, bringing ‘critical’ representations of the institutional past back under the unifying theme of an institution of ‘excellence’. Through powerful, all encompassing statements such as the one with which this chapter begins, all possible experiences may be reincorporated and made sense of within the overarching historical framework of “great achievement, happiness and sorrow”. This incorporation precludes the possibility of the numerous incidents and episodes illustrating “institutional complicity in the racial order” combining and congealing to provide *an alternative* sense-making framework, an alternative historical narrative.

The Vice-Chancellor claims of the critical Old Rhodian academics: “All had a wonderful life-changing experience at Rhodes”<sup>20</sup>. Their critical representation of institutional history is reduced to and dismissed as mere perception. Further, drawing on the powerful ‘apolitical’ discourse of ‘students come to university first and foremost to learn’, a “high quality education” received by all is used to trivialize other claims made about the institutional experience.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.gorhodes.co.za/> (emphasis added)

<sup>20</sup> Woods, D. 2004. ‘Vice-Chancellor’s Report 2004’ in *Vice-Chancellor’s Annual Review 2004*, page 4.

The fact that the colloquium was institutionally derived and endorsed empowered institutional authorities to define its role, symbolic meaning, and significance. The colloquium was appropriated within the dominant institutional framework for making meaning: “*In the Rhodes tradition of self-appraisal and open debate*, a critical colloquium was held...”. The way in which alternative stories of Rhodes were given expression and freedom to be voiced, within a Critical Colloquium over a specified period (and with specific channels of exposure i.e. publication within an academic journal) is not outside the exercise of power. They are included in a way that silences them more powerfully than if they had been excluded and altogether denied expression.

The very idea of incorporating ‘critical’ (i.e. ‘alternative’) historical representation as necessary (in keeping with strongly held liberal values) *but separate*, as a discrete production of historical knowledge, constructs it as Other to the ‘true’ history of Rhodes. The implication of the Critical Tradition Colloquium is the equivalent of: ‘It is their *duty*, their purpose, to be critical. They’re *obviously* going to have gripes. It doesn’t *actually mean* anything’. This silencing is cemented by the fact that another collection of institutional history, the Old Rhodian Memoirs<sup>21</sup> produces a de-‘racialized’ anecdotal history of institutional life, as part of the dominant and official representation of the past. The effect is a further silencing of the history produced at the Colloquium.

#### *Historical apologies – Formulas of erasure and banalization*

The demand for, and offer of, an apology for alleged past ‘wrongs’ provides an interesting and salient moment of historical reflection, of the denial and heralding of the past. In 2004 Barry Streek, an ‘Old Rhodian’ (1967-1970), wrote a letter to then Vice Chancellor David Woods. According to Streek (2005) post-1994 confirmation of long-held suspicions about the university’s “shameful” collaboration with the apartheid Security Forces, which was made public in national newspapers, required an active acknowledgement and response. In his letter Streek “suggested that as the university celebrated its centenary, consideration should be given to the appointment of a local truth

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ru.ac.za/alumni/Memoirs%20Booklet.pdf>

and reconciliation committee into [the university's] shameful collaboration with the Security Police..." (Streek 2005: 162). Woods' response included the following:

I am not in a position to speak on behalf of, or take responsibility for, the Rhodes University authorities or individuals from the 1970s. I can only apologise for what was a totally unacceptable form of conduct. On the positive side, there is no doubt that the Rhodes University of 2004 is very different from 8 years ago, let alone from the 1970s (Ibid).

Issues of representative legitimacy of the spokesperson and other criteria that the demand for and offer of a historical apology need to meet in order to be truly transformative aside,<sup>22</sup> there is the essential point that an apology creates 'pastness' – it is meant to be a transformative ritual in that it marks the passage from things as they were, to things as they now are, i.e. different. "Apologies are premised on the assumption that the state of affairs to which they refer does not, or should not, obtain in the present of the actors involved. *In claiming a past, they create pastness*" (Trouillot 2000: 174 – emphasis added). This creation of 'pastness' is precisely what Woods is engaged in when he apologizes for the past but simultaneously emphasizes how "very different" the Rhodes of 2004 is from its 1970s incarnation. Here again we have claims and counter-claims, as Zubeida Jaffer emphatically states "Perhaps when I one day say Rhodes is a different place it will truly be a different place" (Jaffer 2005: 183). Jaffer is suggesting that the same state of affairs does in fact obtain in the present of the institution; that the particular past, which is denied any "retrospective significance" (Trouillot 1995: 58) by Woods, lives on in the present.

One of the major reasons for the failure of historical apologies to be transformative rituals, the reason they are little more than empty gestures, is that their suggestion of historical responsibility overlooks the ways in which the pasts they attempt to create are not really behind us at all. "Historical responsibility...needs to take into account the

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<sup>22</sup> Including the need to establish numerical identity across temporal planes between alleged perpetrators and victims, the demonstration of a continuity of historical collectivities, and the establishment of the representative power of a spokesperson to offer and make an apology (to whom? and on behalf of whom?) (Trouillot 2000).

structures of privilege unleashed by a history of power and domination and to evaluate the current losses induced by the reproduction of these structures” (Trouillot 2000: 183).

In claiming that *that* iniquitous past is no longer with us, David Woods denies it any possible significance or salience to the present. Importantly, he is not saying that the institution is altogether untouched by the past, that no part of its past matters. Woods uses the foreword of *A Story of Rhodes* to speak of a “rich and rewarding” last century, of an “extraordinary institution”, of “100 years of dedication and discovery” (Buckland and Neville 2004: xi). The past is not being denied altogether by Woods, it is in fact very important to what Rhodes represents today – an institution of ‘excellence’. *A particular* past is being appropriated, *claimed* and produced as the only authentic past, the only history that matters.

Of course, collaboration with security police is just one in a series of inconvenient facts in the university’s past. The university’s refusal to allow an application by George Singh (an Indian) to study at the university in 1933, heads up a list of “shameful” institutional decisions. ““The Senate regrets that it is not in a position to agree to the admission...of ‘non-Europeans’, as it feels that *the time is not yet ripe for such a change in the policy of the College*”” (Currey 1970: 76 – emphasis added). The awarding of an honorary doctorate (to a standing ovation) to C.R Swart the notorious pro-segregationist apartheid leader, the university’s “reactionary response during the 1969 Basil Moore crisis”, where Reverend Moore was not elected to a teaching post due to his political leanings, and the university’s “excessive caution” in handling residential arrangements at the 1967 NUSAS conference (where ‘black’ NUSAS students attending the conference, including Steve Biko, were refused accommodation on the campus residence), are all addressed alike – as isolated bits of a denied past. The collaboration with security police, like these other historical facts, are treated as *singular* events, aberrant incidents and episodes, which if clumped together are just a heap of irrelevant details rather than providing an alternative sense-making historical narrative. Trouillot (1995) thus speaks of formulas of banalization as powerful means of rendering silent an inconvenient past.

### *Unearthing silences*

History, its appropriation and heralding, is crucial to the production of an institutional identity that is stable enough to be represented as an institution of “social democracy” for instance. For any representation to be presented as ‘reality’, it must have some stability, a necessary wholeness and coherence that enables one to say ‘this is what it *is*’ – an institution of ‘excellence’. How is this wholeness and coherence achieved? How is the dominant institutional history and identity presented as stable and fixed, whole and unified? How are alternative narratives of the kind suggested by the ‘Critical Tradition’ silenced? How are silences and erasures of the past actually produced in the telling of dominant histories?

To better understand dominant and official representations of Rhodes institutional history and identity, it is necessary to unearth the silences permeating this construction.

Unearthing historical silences involves more than the listing of incidents and episodes that would construct a different kind of history. The mere presence of historical facts does not in itself ensure the unearthing of silences – the process by which facts are *made known*, how they are given meaning and endowed with “retrospective significance” involves interpretive work that enables the transformation of historical facts “into a new narrative” (Trouillot 1995: 58). The following section unearths a silenced story within Rhodes history.

#### *The story of NUSAS – ‘silences within silences’<sup>23</sup>*

From the late 60s up until the early 80s (particularly throughout the 70s), NUSAS<sup>24</sup> was highly active at Rhodes. Numerous student referendums were held at Rhodes between 1976 and 1987, to decide whether or not the SRC should be affiliated to NUSAS. While pro-affiliationists saw a strong link with NUSAS as indicative of the Rhodes student community’s vehement opposition to apartheid, anti-affiliationists were adamant that an

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<sup>23</sup> This idea was inspired by Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and the production of history* (1995).

<sup>24</sup> NUSAS was present at English campuses around South Africa from the 1920s. It was only from the late 50s onwards that its role began to evolve into a more ‘political’ one. See Legassick and Saunders (2004).

anti-apartheid stance, though it should be encouraged, should not extend to the SRC being affiliated to NUSAS. The years of NUSAS activism at Rhodes campus, a period during which ‘radical politics’ consistently opposed what it saw as ‘liberal acquiescence’, is a silenced story of Rhodes.

NUSAS is not silenced because there is a complete pretence that it did not exist. It is *present* in dominant historical representations of institutional history. The silencing occurs in the manner in which it is *made known* and given significance in the dominant story of Rhodes.

### *The ‘voice of NUSAS’*

In May 1971, the majority of Rhodes students engaged in a Civil Disobedience Campaign, flouting strict dress and residence rules felt to be archaic. The revolt was led by the SRC, whose president left a list of 22 proposals with the Vice-Chancellor J.M. Hyslop, demanding they be met. The campaign lasted three days. Once the drama had settled, the Rhodes University Council appointed a commission of inquiry into the matter (headed by Justice G. Munnik). The conclusion of this inquiry was “...that the resistance reform campaign was part of a preconceived programme of action adopted by NUSAS...” (Buckland and Neville 2004: 70). Judge Munnik made the highly controversial and contested comment: ‘the hand was the hand of the SRC, but the voice was the voice of NUSAS’.

The mention of NUSAS in this incident effectively silences it. The 1971 Campaign is understood as petty student politics inspired by rebellious student nature.

The campus was seething with excitement and tension when crowds of students packed into the quad where they were exhorted to defy the rule...First-year students thought it was great fun...For three days discipline was undermined and the rebels had a rollicking time disobeying residence rules (Buckland and Neville 2004: 70).

Despite its presence in the dominant historical narrative, NUSAS is indeed *silenced*.

“Mentions and silences are ... active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the

synthesis...” (Trouillot 1995: 48). It is robbed and stripped of “retrospective significance”, of meaning in history. The minimal retrospective significance accorded the organization lies in the fact that even though it receives mention this is in passing; it is not given any broader more encompassing importance or significance. It is associated with the petty politics in which students engaged during an ‘anti-establishment’ era. The meaning of its existence in Rhodes student life is effectively reduced to insignificance.

Unearthing the silence around NUSAS means bringing it to the fore in a manner that affords it retrospective significance. It means giving it new, elevated meaning in the story of Rhodes. This requires more than mere mention. A part of achieving this retrospective significance requires interpretive work.

The silencing of NUSAS within dominant/ official historical representations silences dissent and fragmentation of a supposedly homogenous and unified ‘Rhodes community’. Dominant and official representations of Rhodes history speak of (and often on behalf of) a mythical ‘Rhodes community’ that is not stratified, but rather whole and unified – a community simply of ‘people’, with only “colourful characters” (Buckland and Neville 2004: 39) to distinguish some individuals within this otherwise coherent and cohesive unity.

The university website claims, “Rhodes University is not just an educational institution – it is a community of people”. In the university’s Diamond Jubilee publication *Jubilee Rhodian 1904-1964*, the Vice-Chancellor J.M Hyslop refers to Rhodes’ “basic tradition of a *community of persons* living and studying together”<sup>25</sup>. The ‘community’ theme includes a familial idea, an idea of the ‘Rhodes family’ (captured in notions such as that of the ‘Old Rhodians’, and in *A Story of Rhodes*, which tells the story of Rhodes like a personal, intimate, familial narrative). The university says of its residence system: “One characteristic in particular makes Rhodes a very special *community* – its residence

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<sup>25</sup> *Jubilee Rhodian, 1904 - 1964*: page 3 (Rhodes University) – emphasis added

system...”<sup>26</sup> Through the implicit and sometimes explicit theme of a ‘Rhodes community’ the dominant history of the university is presented as the history of ‘us’, of ‘everyone’.

The homogeneity and cohesiveness suggested by the unifying phrases ‘Rhodes community’ and ‘Old Rhodians’ effect a powerful unification necessary to enable a *single* (most dominant and most legitimate) representation of that community – what it *is*; the essence of its identity. In order to present a history of Rhodes as *the* history of Rhodes, that history must be made universally representative of the ‘Rhodes community’ – the coherence of this community is therefore crucial. Phrases such as ‘the Rhodes community’ and ‘Old Rhodians’ within historical texts, present these entities as *eternal*, static, stable and fixed. They are filled with memories and pasts that then necessarily become representative of *the* institutional history and identity.

The period in Rhodes history during which NUSAS was most active, is when few non-‘white’ students were enrolled at Rhodes University,<sup>27</sup> and as far as it was a period of divisiveness in the ‘Rhodes community’, this divisiveness was predominantly among ‘white’ students. The story of NUSAS is in fact the story of radical ‘whiteness’ at Rhodes – NUSAS was radical ‘whiteness’ *par excellence*. It is intriguing but not surprising that

<sup>26</sup> Rhodes University website: <http://campus.ru.ac.za/index.php?action=category&category=1480> – emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup>

Year	White	Coloured	Indian	African	Total
1977	2568	15	8	9	2654
1978	2671	26	64	15	2776
1979	2649	40	89	31	2809
1980	2728	59	84	43	2914
1981	2766	61	80	75	2982
1982	2879	78	109	135	3201
1983	2903	92	116	182	3293
1984	2902	107	123	282	3414
1985	2903	116	140	374	3533
1986	2884	142	169	454	3649

Table one: Enrolments at Rhodes University, 1977 – 1986

Table one obtained from archival document, ‘Rhodes University and Academic Freedom’, PR 7447, page 3. The figures reflecting the ‘racial’ breakdown of students in 1977 differ slightly from the SAIRR figures for that year, in Jacklyn Cock’s Critical Colloquium paper ‘Reflections on the Relationship between Rhodes University and the Wider Society, 1977-1981’ in *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 89-96.

this story is a chunk of the past that is erased from and silenced in dominant representations of institutional history. The power of this silencing lies not in the erasure of the fact of NUSAS' existence, but in the insignificance accorded NUSAS' existence within the dominant story of Rhodes – it is silenced in other words through being denied *symbolic* significance in history (Trouillot 1995).

Historical struggles within the 'Rhodes community' as represented by the life of NUSAS at Rhodes, begin to fragment the constructed unity of the institutional identity and history. NUSAS represented struggles over representative legitimacy of the dominant student and institutional identity within student and institutional life at Rhodes. The erasure of these struggles of the past in dominant histories erases the fact that what the 'Rhodes community' is defined by, what it dominantly represents, is a *particular construction* that emerges out of historical struggles over representative legitimacy (rather than enjoying a fixed and stable identity guaranteed by some natural inherent-ness). The silencing of NUSAS in dominant historical representations erases struggles over representative legitimacy (of institutional identity) within the 'Rhodes community'.

The erasure of historical struggles presents the institutional identity as a self-enclosed whole. Of course, as Trouillot indicates, silencing occurs *in* history too (1995: 59). The desire to silence NUSAS in history was equally a desire to prevent it gaining representative legitimacy over the student identity. The threat that SRC affiliation posed was that NUSAS would become legitimately representative of the Rhodes student community/identity – it would define the authentic Rhodes student. The SRC president of 1978, also one of the leaders of the anti-affiliation campaign, stated after his side's victory at the referendum, "Those people who still wish to continue Nusas projects on Rhodes campus should be encouraged to do so..."<sup>28</sup> NUSAS' mere presence, 'as a society' was not a threat – the threat was contained in renewed significance being given to NUSAS as a *representative* entity through SRC affiliation to it. The problem with affiliation to the *de jure* seat of representative legitimacy, the SRC, was that NUSAS would be most dominantly representative of the Rhodes student identity.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Rhodes to quit Nusas' in *The Argus*, 15 August 1983, page 6 – emphasis added.

In the 1980 referendum, “Margie Henderson, PFP youth organizer, SRC vice-president and daughter of the university’s principal, Dr D S Henderson...”<sup>29</sup>, as well as one of the leaders of the anti-affiliation campaign, claimed that while her group supported NUSAS’ stand against the Government, one of the basic objections to NUSAS was that “...*they claim to be representative of student opinion, which they most clearly are not*” (Ibid). “...Miss Henderson said *the emergence of liberal opinion on the Rhodes campus as the biggest articulator against Nusas in place of traditional right-wing opposition*, showed the significant difference between liberal and radical opinion” (Ibid – emphasis added). The 1983 vote against affiliation was an indication “...that students were disenchanted with Nusas as a ‘political pressure group’ rather than one *truly representing* student concerns...”<sup>30</sup>

The silencing of NUSAS in the production of history is not disconnected from attempts to silence the organization *in* history. The politicization of NUSAS at Rhodes was met with significant resistance and opposition. Satchwell, who arrived at Rhodes in 1969, was surprised to find: “the majority of students in my residence, and in the courses which I was taking, had been warned-off having anything to do with NUSAS” (Satchwell 2005: 173). A politics of threat surrounded the organization. NUSAS attempts at gaining representative power over the SRC threatened to render it dominantly representative of the ‘Rhodes community’. The organization threatened to *mean something* at Rhodes.

Silencing crucially enables representative power, as it erases historical struggles over representative legitimacy. This erasure (1) creates the façade of, and prevents ruptures in the notion of a homogenous ‘Rhodes community’, and (2) fixes the dominant Rhodes history and identity as natural.

The threat of the rupture represented by NUSAS was a threat against silenced ‘whiteness’. Rhodes University sought to present itself as apolitical/ politically neutral

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Rhodes split over re-affiliation to Nusas’ *The Weekend Post*, 17 May 1980, page 3

<sup>30</sup> ‘Rhodes to quit Nusas’ in *The Argus*, 15 August 1983, page 6 – emphasis added

and un-‘raced’. NUSAS took a strongly anti-apartheid stance, and the opposition to NUSAS itself in history says something significant about the university’s own relationship to the ‘racial’ order of apartheid. The problem with radical ‘whiteness’, as represented by NUSAS, is that it politicized the university’s own identity, that it shifted the focus by spotlighting not the apartheid government but Rhodes University itself. NUSAS emerged as a salient threat in student life precisely because it constructed itself *in opposition* to the ‘liberal’ (read acquiescent) ‘whiteness’ that it considered Rhodes to represent.

Whatever the intentions, sincerity or contradictoriness of the acts of ‘rebellion’ of radical ‘whiteness’ at Rhodes, these acts served to disturb and politicize what had previously been left untouched. NUSAS essentially said ‘we are opposed to the way our institution fits into and perpetuates apartheid structures’ of oppression, and in this way constructed its own ‘whiteness’ *in opposition* to that of the university administration (it audaciously Othered the institution).<sup>31</sup> The essential point to consider is how NUSAS *made itself meaningful*, how (in relation to whom and what) it constructed its own identity at Rhodes.

There was a concerted effort on the part of radical ‘whiteness’ to construct its own anti-apartheid stance *as more authentic than that of the administrations*. The university administration’s own proclaimed opposition to apartheid became increasingly difficult to defend, in the face of this opposition. Its claims of apolitical neutrality were threatened, as charges of political acquiescence and comfort within a system of ‘white’ privilege were laid against it. In that sense then, NUSAS threatened to expose the university’s comfort within the ‘racial’ order as a sign of the institutions own ‘raced’ identity and its exercise of ‘racial’ dominance.

The threat of radical ‘whiteness’, of NUSAS, was a threat against homogeneity of the ‘white’ Rhodes student community. It represented a rupture and fragmentation of that community. In this way, the existence and politics of NUSAS threatened ‘whiteness’

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, the phrase “radical ‘whiteness’” is in itself a construction. NUSAS commitment to ‘radical’ politics was contested in history (see Legassick and Saunders 2004 and Desai 2005 for instance).

itself.<sup>32</sup> By constructing its own anti-apartheid stance *in opposition to what was already dominantly representative of Rhodes*, it made a significantly damaging statement about that dominant identity – it inevitably ‘racialized’ the dominant institutional identity, revealing it as ‘white’. In order to present itself as the true face of moral ‘whiteness’, it constructed itself in opposition to the dominant face of politically acquiescent ‘whiteness’ at Rhodes. When radical ‘whiteness’ sided with ‘black’ workers or students (on issues such as workers rights and RAG<sup>33</sup>), this siding inevitably had the effect of placing those who were being opposed (the university administration and the ‘white’ students who were RAG participants respectively) as perpetrators of a ‘*racialized*’, i.e. ‘*white*’ oppression.

When the university administration fired six of its ‘black’ workers during the early 80s, the response against it was vehement. We see the threat of radical ‘whiteness’ aligning itself with ‘blackness’ in the way this exposes the ‘whiteness’ of the authorities. “The Rhodes University Administration has reacted strongly to allegations that its workers receive a ‘Bum Deal’ ...The Administration felt that *to call the Rhodes bureaucracy ‘white’ and the workers ‘black’ was to create ‘black’-‘white’ polarization*”.<sup>34</sup> In a *Rhodeo* article on Rhodes’ treatment of its ‘black’ workers, a timeline, from 1978 to 1981, covers the administration’s poor treatment of its ‘black’ workers. There is an indication too of the spotlighting of institutional authorities, and the Rhodes identity itself:

“...the SRC executive has twice discussed the matter with the Vice Chancellor, Dr Derek Henderson...SRC President John Campbell, said: ‘As the largest employer of black

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<sup>32</sup> It became meaningful at Rhodes (and indeed around the country) during the 70s, after SASO, the organization representing ‘black’ students, was formed by Steve Biko in 1969. While NUSAS continued to enjoy the support of ‘black’ students at Rhodes, the number of ‘black’ students within the student body only grew substantially during the 80s. Radical ‘whiteness’ was not and is not a well-defined, cogent identity, much like any other social identity. In order to represent it however, and in order to understand the meaning of NUSAS in institutional life, and its silencing in the production of dominant histories, it is rendered some degree of stability. It is difficult to say ‘what NUSAS was/is’ but that ambivalence about its historical identity is precisely partly indicative of attempts to silence it.

<sup>33</sup> Raising and Giving, a charitable event held yearly at South African English campuses involving many festivities and the publication of a RAG Magazine.

<sup>34</sup> Archived pamphlet released by Oppidan, a student publication titled ‘No “Bum Deal” – Admin’.

workers in the Grahamstown area, it is the duty of a liberal university to set an example in employer/worker relations for the community...”<sup>35</sup>

Standing alongside ‘blackness’, *radical* ‘whiteness’ stood opposed to what then inevitably became *oppressive and exploitative* ‘whiteness’.

The actions of radical ‘whiteness’ said “look, we’re not those kinds of whites”. Whether motivated by Marxist influences and/or a global anti-establishment, authority-defying rhetoric (see Hyslop 2007), the actions of radical ‘white’ students at Rhodes had the effect of showing the dominant institutional identity up as a ‘white’ identity. Under a virtual onslaught from radical ‘whiteness’, it became increasingly difficult for the institution to proclaim an apolitical and hence ‘racially’ neutral identity. The silencing of NUSAS is therefore a necessary silence to ensure a superior silencing – that of ‘racial’ dominance at Rhodes University. ‘Whiteness’ has to remain homogenous in order for it to remain invisibly dominant.

In history, NUSAS was a threat to the dominance of ‘whiteness’ itself. Barry Streek, then Vice President of NUSAS at Rhodes reveals that during the commission of inquiry into NUSAS involvement in the 1971 Civil Disobedience Campaign at Rhodes, Judge Munnik asked him “whether we didn’t have a joint executive meeting with SASO – a ridiculous assertion” (Streek 2005: 166). The Judge asked: “NUSAS would like to see a complete change in our society wouldn’t they?...to see the rules completely changed, and black power come...” (Ibid). Equally interestingly, the vice-chairman of the anti-affiliation committee during the 1978 NUSAS student referendum Rob Midgely claimed “Nusas is out of touch with student opinion. Most Rhodes students are PFP<sup>36</sup> supporters and although *white politics may have a limited future, to regard it as irrelevant as Nusas does, is unacceptable*”.<sup>37</sup> The desire to oust NUSAS and delegitimize it displayed a keen fear of, and a defensive stance against the coming oblivion of dominant ‘whiteness’ itself.

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<sup>35</sup> Appel, S. ‘Where have all the workers gone?’ in *Rhodeo*, 1981 (page unknown).

<sup>36</sup> Progressive Party supporters (this moderate political party was seen as being to the right of the Liberal Party)

<sup>37</sup> ‘Rhodes to vote on Nusas issue’ in *Eastern Province Herald*, 26 April 1978

The disbanding, and effective silencing of NUSAS took place at “an historic meeting” in 1991 at Rhodes University (Buckland and Neville 2004: 119). The merging of SANSCO (the later incarnation of Steve Biko’s SASO, an organization representing the interests of ‘black’ students) and NUSAS to form SASCO marked the effective silencing of NUSAS in the history of Rhodes.

On [sic] the first week of September (1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>) 1991, 600 black and white tertiary students from 129 Universities, Technikons and Colleges gathered at Rhodes University grounds to launch the South Africans Students Congress (SASCO) ...Gathered under the banner: “*Towards a single non-racial student organization*”, delegates from SANSCO and NUSAS spent long and arduous hours of heated theoretical exchanges culminating in the launch, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1991, of a gallant student organization...<sup>38</sup>

That the merger ‘poignantly’ took place *at Rhodes* adds a further layer of silencing – as the place where the end to divisiveness between ‘black’ and ‘white’ student organizations was brought about, Rhodes could lay claim to NUSAS, to appropriate and silence it. Its meaning in Rhodes history could thus be rewritten and ‘cleanly’ subsumed within the overall story of ‘excellence’. The reconciliatory moment allows Rhodes to rewrite its own history, as it silences NUSAS but elevates Rhodes as a place where ‘racial’ divisiveness came to an end.

In a story of ‘excellence’ NUSAS remains a mere suggestion, a mere matter of fact. Its silencing is effective. The silencing of NUSAS and radical ‘whiteness’ is “*a silence within the silence*” (Trouillot 1995) in that it helps keep in place the larger, superior silence of ‘racial’ dominance in the story of ‘excellence’. The silencing of NUSAS, which maintains the silence on the university’s position within the ‘racial’ order, occurs within the greater silence about colonial history and Rhodes University’s relationship to that history.

### *Silencing Imperial imperatives*

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.sasco.org.za/aboutus.html>

The silencing of ‘racial’ dominance in institutional history is achieved through an emphasis on apartheid as the generator of an order of ‘racial’ dominance. The university is a victim of the ‘racial’ order in this characterization. There is a general silencing of any pre-apartheid history of ‘race’ at Rhodes University. In its Vision and Mission statement for instance, the university’s stated objectives include its

“...commitment to the social and economic transformation of South Africa; *its acknowledgement of the problems created by the legacy of apartheid*; its undertaking to reject all forms of unfair discrimination; its dedication to the implementation of appropriate corrective measures to redress past imbalances; and its success in realising diversity amongst students and staff”<sup>39</sup>.

Similarly, the Rhodes University Equity Policy (2004) states its recognition that “...certain inequities do exist within the University *as a result of Apartheid practices...*”<sup>40</sup>. ‘Racial’ problems and inequities, it is claimed, were introduced by apartheid. The pervasiveness of this externalization of ‘racial’ dominance is reflected in the opening statement of then Vice-Chancellor Derek Henderson’s 1987 paper on academic freedom at Rhodes: “Rhodes University has always pursued academic freedom”.<sup>41</sup> Not only do these statements help perpetuate the mythical narrative that all ‘race’ problems in South Africa originated with apartheid, it silences through its emphasis on the ‘legacy of apartheid’ the ‘legacy of British imperialism’, to which Rhodes University owes its existence, long before 1948. Silencing the ‘racial’ dominance of this imperial history, the university constructs a benign narrative of de-‘racialized’ apolitical liberalism in opposition to the ‘racist’ Afrikaaner regime.

The dominant history of Rhodes University involves a general silence on its *raison de’tre*, the fact that the institution originated as a part of, and in accordance with the greater imperial project in (Southern) Africa. Established in 1904 in Grahamstown, a British stronghold, Rhodes University was explicitly created to reflect and embody the ideals and pursuits of Imperial Britain’s Empire building. The November 1906 editorial

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<sup>39</sup> Adapted from the Rhodes University Vision and Mission statement – emphasis added (this was obtained from the University website during 2006; the vision and mission statement has since been amended).

<sup>40</sup> Rhodes University Equity Policy 2004: page 5 – emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Archival document, ‘Rhodes University and Academic Freedom’, PR 7447, page 1. Obtained from Cory Library archives, November 2006, PR 7447.

of *The Rhodian* speaks of the hope that the university college “become the Oxford of the Eastern Province” (Currey 1970: 7). The secretary of the Rhodes Trust, which provided the essential funds required to start the university, stipulated at the time of its origins that “Rhodes University College is designed to contribute, and will contribute to, extend and strengthen the Imperial idea in South Africa...” (Currey 1970: 12).

There were numerous statements made showing the explicit link between the establishment of the University and broader imperial objectives. In 1903 one of the UK-based Rhodes Trustees wrote: “I am satisfied that the ideas of Mr. Rhodes will be carried out better than in any other way by building up an institution of higher learning at Grahamstown”, leading Maylam to reiterate the conception of the University “as an imperial university, embodying [Cecil John] Rhodes’ ideals” (Maylam 2005b: 65). The headmaster of Kingswood College in Grahamstown expressed a similar sentiment: “I take it the Rhodes University College is to imply Higher Education under the best of Imperial influences” (Ibid). Envisioned as an “Eastern Cape Oxford”, the university was “...meant to be the engine room of English cultural ascendancy in South Africa” (Maylam 2005b: 66).

Ronald F. Currey’s *Rhodes University 1904-1970*, endorsed by the then Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes, J.M. Hyslop, attempts to silence and dismiss the significance of the imperial influence on institutional place-making, stating that while the university was “unashamedly intended to be a small outpost of British Imperialism in South Africa”, “this aim came, almost from the start, to be forgotten and abandoned...and...Rhodes grew into a heart-whole South African university”<sup>42</sup>. Yet Currey inadvertently reveals at the end of his book that the ‘true’ South Africanness embraced by the university, like the seemingly benign objective of ‘English cultural ascendancy’ was steeped in (an apparently) unrecognized ‘racial’ dominance:

...the young Afrikaner coming as a student to Rhodes is every bit as welcome as the student who speaks English at home. It is important that that should be so; for *it is in the universities that South Africa’s perennial and overriding problem of ‘race relations’...is*

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<sup>42</sup> See inside cover of Currey’s book.

found at its most critical point. For it is there that *young men and women of two [sic] traditions, so alike and yet so different...* have to work out for themselves...how they are to live and work together, sanely, happily and fruitfully... (Currey 1970: 180 – emphasis added).

This quote reveals the glaring silence of ‘racial’ exclusivity and ‘racial’ dominance – of ‘whiteness’ – in defining the prevailing institutional identity.

The colonial heritage that is mutely (certainly not avowedly) celebrated in *A Story of Rhodes* constitutes a particular construction of the Rhodes identity. The following accounts illustrate and reflect the institutional nurturing of a *colonial* identity in the student body. Writing on the period 1961-1965, Webster is worth quoting at length:

“...There was a small group of liberal-minded students...who were sympathetic to the claims of the African majority. On the other hand, *there was a large majority of students who wanted nothing to do with politics* and were, when pushed, sympathetic to a mild form of white domination.

Pressure was building up at a national level where the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was increasingly coming under the influence of people close to the liberation movement. This was to culminate in a speech in 1964, by the President of NUSAS, Jonty Driver, in which he called for NUSAS to become the student wing of the liberation movement...this confirmed the worst fears of *students at Rhodes who were still smarting under an earlier attempt by a liberal-dominated SRC under the leadership of Basil Moore to pass a resolution condemning colonialism. This led to a conservative backlash and the mobilization of the silent majority who flooded the Great Hall in large numbers to defend their heritage.* Evoking the first setbacks of independence in postcolonial Africa they shouted rhetorically and aggressively, ‘What about the Congo?!’” (Webster 2005: 154 – emphasis added).

Jacklyn Cock recounts Rhodes’ responses to the Nationalist Government’s non-‘white’ resettlement camps around Grahamstown (during the early 80s), where poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and starvation were rife. Some staff and students were involved in projects to ensure maximum publicity as they protested against the camps, as well as providing food aid to the people in these camps. A symbolic protest, the erection of a mock squatter camp in the university quadrangle, was staged by some Rhodes students, while other students engaged in a counter-demonstration to the protest:

“The one night squat ended in an open air meeting attended by about 400 students. A counter-demonstration at the time was put on by five law students who, in boaters and striped blazers, played bowls on the lawn and reclined in deckchairs, sipping tea brought by an obsequious African in white clothing. One student later said he was trying to show how good colonialism was” (Cock 2005: 93).

Not only are these stories not present in the dominant historical representations of institutional history, their suggestion of an institutional nurturing and celebration of ‘racial’ dominance and colonialism is silenced. The legacy of Cecil John Rhodes, and its treatment in Rhodes University’s history, is deeply instructive of this silencing.

#### *Silencing through symbols – the Mandela-Rhodes connection*

The entrance of Rhodes University’s main administration building, where a portrait of Cecil John Rhodes can be seen along with a photograph of Nelson Mandela is a significant instance of erasure. History is being rewritten through the symbolic act of allowing Rhodes and Mandela, two opposing symbolic figures, to co-exist comfortably as if to say that the institution can easily acknowledge, accommodate and incorporate the influences of both figures on its ethos and values. As Maylam points out, “The arch-imperialist coloniser of the nineteenth century was being conjoined with the great anti-imperialist freedom fighter of the twentieth century” (Maylam 2005b: 134).<sup>43</sup> The negativity associated with C.J. Rhodes, his crude and subtle ‘racism’ is hardly under dispute. “Rhodes played... a key role in the evolution of racial segregation” which gained both “ideological support and legislative substance during Rhodes’ premiership at the Cape in the early 1890s” (Maylam 2005b: 15). In fact, as one C.J Rhodes biographer, Thomas, claims, the “essential elements [of apartheid] were put in place by Cecil Rhodes 54 years before the Nationalist Government came to power” (Ibid).

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<sup>43</sup> Maylam makes this comment with reference to the link-up between the Mandela Foundation and the Rhodes Trust, which gave rise to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation in 2002, but the statement applies just as well to the way in which Rhodes University attempts to link the two figures symbolically.

How do we understand the connection between the two figures in terms of the University? It is interesting that the institution has not made that kind of explicit link between Mandela and C.J. Rhodes; even in the foyer entrance the two portraits are not placed together but on opposite sides of the passage (separate but equal in their embodiment of the institution's values and ethos?). Seeking to retain the name of the university as Rhodes University (a motion to change the name was "heavily defeated in the university senate" in 1994 "...and the matter has since faded away" [Maylam 2005b: 31]), the institution hoped to preserve its link to a "brand" representing prestige and international currency. The institution has simultaneously cemented the Mandela link through creating (and interestingly, rendering highly visible the name of) the Nelson Mandela Hall (a student dining hall allocated to a collection of residences).<sup>44</sup>

*A Story of Rhodes* also celebrates simultaneously the legacy of C.J Rhodes, as well as Mandela's connections with the institution, with seemingly more implicit emphasis placed on C.J. Rhodes. A bust of C.J. Rhodes that stood at the entrance to the administrative block is depicted in *A Story of Rhodes* (Buckland and Neville 2004: 57). There is little doubt that C.J. Rhodes is anything but a figure of reverence in the history of Rhodes University, as depicted in the book. The book includes an extract from C.J. Rhodes' will and a photograph of Rhodes "choosing his gravesite". The book's own reverence of C.J Rhodes bears testimony to the University's treatment of the figure historically – a picture is captioned, "a tribute to Rhodes from Rhodes University", and another "...the gift of Cecil John Rhodes documents and memorabilia bestowed on the university by Gold Fields of South Africa in 1976" (Buckland and Neville 2004: 64-66).

"In 1970, Rhodes University celebrated the centenary year of the arrival in South Africa of Cecil John Rhodes...senate decided to celebrate the event and to inaugurate an annual Cecil Rhodes commemoration lecture, to be delivered by a distinguished person...The governments of the countries worldwide that received Rhodes scholarships responded enthusiastically to the invitation from Rhodes University to join in the first centenary celebration, which was held on 12 August 1970...The main event of the celebrations was the memorial lecture, and it was fitting that the first speaker should be Mr Harry

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<sup>44</sup> No other hall name has such visibility, which attests to the symbolic power attached to that particular name.

Oppenheimer... With a lecture entitled 'A reassessment of Rhodes and his relevance to the problems of Africa today', Mr Oppenheimer succeeded in giving a penetrating analysis of *the character of Cecil John Rhodes and the vision which inspired his actions* and led him to found the Rhodes scholarships... The lecture was followed by a glittering banquet... The climax to these successful celebrations was a *pilgrimage* by Old Rhodians and Rhodes scholars to the Matopos in Rhodesia, *where wreaths were laid on Rhodes' grave*, about which Rudyard Kipling had been inspired to write a special poem at the time of the burial" (Buckland and Neville, 2004: 64 – emphasis added).

That the poem is included in *A Story of Rhodes* attests remarkably to the reverence to C.J. Rhodes in Buckland and Neville's book (Buckland and Neville 2004: 148).

Ashwin Desai's paper *When Rhodes met Mandela* asks saliently, "And now that Rhodes has met Mandela, what exteriority is left?" (Desai 2005: 232). The Rhodes-Mandela connection, endorsed by Mandela himself, is supposed to display the magnanimity and spirit of reconciliation within the new South Africa. It serves to rewrite the history of the institution, to merge (in powerful ways) the colonial past with the 'liberated', 'non-racial' present, robbing other people, events and stories of possible "retrospective significance" (Trouillot 1995: 48) in the history of Rhodes University. Every engraving of C.J. Rhodes, every monument erected in his honour, every portrait reproduced in books in fact erases and silences the 'racialized' imperial influence in Rhodes University's identity-construction. In a post-apartheid context of non-'racialism' and reconciliation, C.J. Rhodes can be reconstructed and recast not as a 'white' supremacist but like Mandela as a progressive visionary. As a symbol of the colonial past, the re-authoring and reconstruction of C.J. Rhodes, has helped silence and legitimize Rhodes University's own past of 'racial' dominance.

Why are some people and things absent in history? It is at the first stage of historical production, the inscription of traces upon which sources are built (Trouillot 1995: 48), that silences are produced. "Inequalities experienced by the actors lead to uneven historical power in the inscription of traces" (Ibid). That Makana is absent in the history of Rhodes University, that we will never know who Albert was (see Mati 2005), that Cecil John Rhodes will not be lost in the history of the institution bears testimony to the

importance of the first stage of historical production, the inscription of traces.<sup>45</sup> Actors experience “...differential control of the means of historical production at the very first engraving that transforms an event into a fact”, the ability to leave behind traces (Trouillot 1995: 49).

### *Unthinkable narratives*

Mati's (2005) paper unearths the silence of 'racial' domination in the making of an institution of 'excellence'. He places in different perspective the colonial origins of the institution through dedicating his paper to (among others, Steve Biko and Makana ka Nxele and) “...all other men and women from this region and beyond who gave their lives resisting colonisation, conquest, settlement and the colonial violence *that destroyed one way of life and also gave birth to Rhodes University*” (Mati 2005: 196 – emphasis added). Mati thus re-appropriates the colonial history that is implicitly sanitized and celebrated in *A Story of Rhodes*, deploying it instead to produce an alternative narrative of Rhodes University.

Mati states that Rhodes University's existence, the 'very possibility of it being as it is', its 'excellence' is not distinct from the context of 'racial' oppression within which, *due to which*, it flourished. In fact, the identity of the institution depended on, and emerged from the 'racially' based exclusions and inclusions of a system to which it conformed:

“While young white women took their university studies here, young black women were learning to harvest oranges as seasonal labourers. While young white men responded to their army call-ups before coming here, young black men went underground for their university studies into the depths of the gold and coal mines of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State... While the magnates of the Rand lived in glory and splendour, contributing to the coffers of Rhodes University year after year, young men from this region were [...] deep underground creating wealth for this country...” (Mati 2005: 199).

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<sup>45</sup> Historical production involves a process with four stages, and silences and mentions are produced at each stage: at the first moment of production, the creation of sources, during the second moment, the archiving of history (through documents and monuments etc), at the third moment, the retrieval and recollection of archival documents, and at the fourth moment, the interpretative stage which provides “retrospective significance” to certain events and people (over others) (Trouillot 1995).

The identity of the university, its supposedly self-contained, self-obtained ‘excellence’ (implicitly bearing testimony to the greatness of ‘white’ achievements) silences the ways in which ‘white’ *domination and exploitation* in fact produced and made possible this ‘excellence’.

This masking of the ability of a place to be constructed in a particular way can be likened to that of affluent life in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* being represented as simply ‘normal’. The *constructed* normality of this life is revealed only through making connections between life at Mansfield Park and the events/ actions seemingly external to it that are central to *making that kind of life possible*. As Edward Said points out: “the material comfort of Mansfield Park...rests in no small measure on the return from investments made in a slave plantation in Antigua. The very character of the area, *the very possibility of it being as it is*, rests on relations with a place on the other side of the world” (Massey 1995: 62).

In its desire to re-create the Oxford experience in the Eastern Cape, Rhodes University’s identity and character, its place-identity, was constructed through its links with Britain – it was constructed in a way that deliberately dislocated it from its surroundings. As Satchwell, an ‘Old Rhodian’ who came to Rhodes in 1969 asserts:

“An obvious dislocation... is that we never perceived ourselves as being part of Africa...our country was *in* Africa but not *of* Africa. *Our university was similarly positioned*. Rhodes prided itself on the extent to which it had modelled itself upon and had succeeded in mimicking the Oxford and Cambridge experience. *We were certainly the academic legacy of Cecil John Rhodes in Southern Africa*” (Satchwell 2005: 175 – emphasis added).

Mati’s alternative narrative of Rhodes University illustrates the inextricable link between the construction of the university as a particular kind of place/ space and the oppressive ‘racial’ order that gave birth to it and enabled it to be what ‘it is’.

That this narrative is not the dominant narrative defining and making sense of Rhodes University’s past, that it is, and will remain an unthinkable narrative, points to the perpetuation of power relations derived in history. In order for such a narrative to gain

representative power the social relations that underpin it, the same power relations that afford retrospective significance to some and deny it to others would need no longer to obtain in the present of the actors involved.

*Whose greatness? Whose history?*

What is a 'true' telling of history? Where does historical power derive from? Both from the material artefacts that are left behind, that are left standing, that are seen, tangible and therefore more easily remembered, as well as through access to the dominant language (English) which allows history to be published and become a part of the historical record. It could rightly be asked, for instance, what kinds of silences about the history of Rhodes University are enabled through the lack of historical power of Xhosa (the African language of the region)?

The official/ dominant ('white') history of Rhodes is not the history of all those who may have attended the university, or who were in other ways connected to it (as 'black' workers etc). What about 'black' struggles within the institution (of the Black Student Movement, the Phoenix Football Club)? What about those who did not love RAG, who stood opposed to 'racial' sport (and have therefore been denied making a mark on the institutional history, which celebrates its sporting past)? What about the history of resistance to the institution's 'whiteness'?

The production of this particular history (Rhodes University's '100 years of excellence', a century of 'dedication and discovery') is only possible through, and is *dependent on* the silencing of other stories, other readings of the institution's history. It is only possible by disowning the exclusionary history of the institution, through silencing the history of those who could never attend or benefit from the institution (due directly to the origins and making of the institution, and *not despite its efforts to the contrary*). The existence of Rhodes University as it was/is is possible only because of the way other places and people have been exploited and excluded and because of the broader (unequal) context within which the university's flourishing and progress has occurred (to which it silently

acquiesced). The self-ascribed 'liberalism' of the university produces a 'racial' paternalism precisely because these connections are not made (or rather, because the connection between the success of the institution, and the exclusions it fostered to enable these successes are not acknowledged, but in fact powerfully silenced).

In statements about what Rhodes represents today, there is embedded a particular heralding of the past, and simultaneous denial and silencing of an Other past. We see in the struggle to represent the past, different conceptions of what the institution represents, of institutional identity. The struggle over the past is really a struggle over the present. What the past means, how it is made sense of, has significant implications for how we understand the present. Appropriating a particular history, and heralding a 'glorious' past is really a desire to make understandings of the present fit (as a direct and seamless extension of) that past – a construction of the present as void of 'racial' dominance and privilege.

More than that is the fact that the appropriation of history enables a *claim* on the present – it enables the appropriator/s of history to claim *ownership* of place. The celebration of shared memories invokes a powerful claim of ownership that renders some the rightful and legitimate inheritors of a place. It is a claim of rightful representation of history and place always made *against* other claims. The ownership of the institution is thus produced through the appropriation of the past, which implicitly says 'look, we were the original inhabitants of this place, we are its rightful owners, and we rightly speak on behalf of it, and legitimately represent it'. The production of a dominant institutional identity therefore involves crucial claims to the institutional space.

Legitimate representation of the institutional space is reflected in the current discursive struggles in which students engage. The appropriation of history is crucial to the production of legitimate representation through these struggles, as it produces some as the rightful inheritors of the institutional space over others. In the discussions around SASCO on Student Discussion Forums, there is a prevailing dominance of discourses underlining the 'apolitical' nature of Rhodes University (as an eternal, indisputable

characteristic of the institution). Those who espouse this representation of the institution speak as its most legitimate representatives, and even self-appointed *guardians and custodians of the Rhodes identity*:

*...Rhodes has always done very well not having an over bearing political influence, why are we trying to force it in. If Rhodes desperately wanted it, i'm positive that SASCO members would be voted into the SRC, but this is not the case. So maybe we can conclude, that Rhodes does not want SASCO representation at this time. Maybe we will in the future, but as it is a democracy, the students have spoken.*

*...Rhodes is a politically neutral campus and [...] this position is paramount to the Universities [sic] character...<sup>46</sup>*

Not only is the idea of a 'politically neutral' institution dominant, but this dominance is powerfully connected to (implicit) claims of ownership over the institutional space. This chapter illustrated how historical silences produce and reproduce a dominant institutional history and identity devoid of 'racial' dominance. This production of history is in turn crucial to the production of ownership of institutional place. The following chapter looks into the (re)production of 'racialized' ownership of institutional space, and 'racialized' representation of institutional identity, through the *performance* of dominant ritualistic practices in student life.

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<sup>46</sup> Rhodes University Student Discussion Forums, accessed November 2006, <http://forums.ru.ac.za>

## **‘Drinking culture’ – the performance of ‘racial’ dominance in Rhodes student life**

...I have often wondered, how many outsiders need to come to Rhodes before we take over... (laughter) ...how does the centre hold, you know, I mean [in] the face of this onslaught, and so many people over the last couple of days have spoken of their own outsider status in many ways, women, lesbians, black people, poor people, people from you know white trailer trash and all kinds of people who are outsiders in different ways and yet the centre holds in a quite indefinable kind of way.

*- Rhodes University Centenary Critical Colloquium, 2004<sup>47</sup>*

“...Everybody is aware of the drinking culture, but few question why it continues...”

*- Second year student*

The ‘cultural milieu’ of student life, where structure meets agency, is a necessary part of the dialectic of reproduction, as Willis reminds us (1977: 174). So it is to the ‘cultural milieu’ we must look for a more in-depth understanding of the reproduction of ‘racial’ domination and privilege. This chapter does not pretend to provide an exhaustive understanding of the ways in which the ‘race’ narrative is lived and reproduced in the student cultural milieu, since social reproduction is multi-faceted and inevitably riddled with complexities (a thorough elucidation of which is beyond this project). The chapter focuses on a largely nondescript-seeming but in fact dominant and pervasive culture that dominates identity-construction and meaning in student life.

Simon:

*We have all had a moment at Rhodes where we felt everything fall into place... We belong to something unique and untouchable...*

*For me this moment came one Friday night. A group of good friends standing around the small bar at the bottom of Friars. We are toasted in the glow of rapid drunken conversation. The*

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<sup>47</sup> Professor Louise Vincent speaking at the Critical Colloquium, August 2004, page 194 (of transcript).

sounds of our voices merge with the deep base thump of the dance floor. We can feel hundreds of people moving, talking, drinking and laughing in the building around us. This small bar becomes our universe. Time is measured not in seconds but in beers and shooters. The girl next to me falls off her barstool and ricochets off the steps. For a split second there is silence. Then a deep rolling chorus of good-natured laughter. We are relieved. She has managed to save her drink.

The evening stretches out in front of us. Suddenly, it is time to go. Not home but to the next event. **The next celebration of being together.** We gather our many possessions, down our drinks and stumble confidently towards the exit...The road is cast in the sharp glare of streetlamps. Grahamstown is asleep. We are its keepers until dawn. Late-night crusaders gather at Mr Burger, refuelling for the journeys ahead.

... We are completely free. The moment has arrived for us to complete the evening. We have come to bushdive. This is our moment. We are poised on the edge of our destinies. Ready to forge new and exciting lives. What better way to mark this auspicious occasion than to **drunkenly hurl ourselves into some bushes.** We have chosen them carefully. They are soft and rich with life. We tense, hold hands and slowly count down to the moment itself. One. Two. Three. We run, stumbling slightly, towards our bright future. For a split second all four of us are frozen in midair. Mouths open in intoxicated delight at our irresponsibility. Then it is over. We are rolling around laughing. The stars shine above us. There are leaves in our hair. We have achieved something. **We have become followers of a way of life. We are students of Rhodes [...]**

Robert:

When I first arrived at Rhodes I remember feeling lost. I was two days late; I knew no-one, nowhere and nothing. I sat in the corner of the common room while the others excitedly discussed the events of the first two nights; who kissed who, who slept where and who was going to sleep where. I began to think was Rhodes really for me? Would I fit in, would my res[idence]-mates like me, would the girls like me? [...]

Dinner came and went and the plans for the evening were finalised; pre-drinks in Mark's room, and then off to the Union. As we sat, told stories and consumed dangerous amounts of cheap wine I looked around and saw something that changed the way I viewed Rhodes. These guys were just like me; they too were in unfamiliar surroundings. We were a mix of characters thrown together, now living together, and I could either embrace it or fear it.

*And embrace it I did. The weeks that followed were full of ups and downs. Mostly up on the tables at the Union<sup>48</sup> dancing or down in the gutter outside the Rat<sup>49</sup> re-examining my supper. But no matter where I was, or what I was doing, I was loving life.*

*My first year flew by in a haze of parties, some green stuff my friend grew, and of course the occasional lecture. Girlfriends came and went, Friars changed their drinks specials but **the ties I was forming with new friends only got stronger**. We dressed up like babies, farmers and rock stars. We went out when we knew it was a bad idea and worried about the rest later. We embarrassed ourselves horribly and promised to never drink again only to do it all over again the next night. We drank snakebites, flaming Lamborghinis and, after one particularly large night, shampoo.*

*As long as our parents kept sending the money, we kept spending it. And amazingly, we all managed to pass. We were actually learning things, becoming wiser and growing up every day. Leaving Rhodes during the vacs was always a relief, but most of the time I just couldn't wait to get back to good old G-Town and see my **band of brothers in res**.*

Mark:

*Rhodes has a name outside of Grahamstown for the amount of alcohol that's consumed here... A lot of the people that do come to Rhodes are introduced to it through friends or through siblings so they get the vibe and see what Grahamstown is all about. I did hear from a number of people that [name of residence] guys were the big drinkers [...]*

*My closest friends are due to the drinking culture. I believe that 90 per cent of the people that I have met at Rhodes are due to partying at night, having fun at digs parties, in res[idence] with our friends whilst we're drinking.*

*[...]A lot of the first years had their tradition and they were all **initiated** and I didn't get that. I definitely believe that the guys who went in [name of male residence] in first year still **stick to the tradition** and sometimes they do go over board. **There were a number of guys who didn't [drink] and at first everyone had negative views towards them**. You find you click as soon as you get to Rhodes and as soon as you get to res. **People that are alike seem to flock together**. **A lot of the bigger drinkers in [name of male residence] are welcomed with open arms as against guys that don't drink a lot**. There are a lot of different types of guys who go into [name*

<sup>48</sup> The Rhodes Student Union – the only on-campus club – also has the reputation of being a 'white' club.

<sup>49</sup> The Rat and Parrot is a Grahamstown pub which is mostly (though not exclusively) frequented by 'white' people whether students, lecturers or local town people.

*of male residence] and go into all other res[idence]s its just the groups in those res[idence]s that do **click and stick together**.*

*There are a number of people that I know that over the last three years didn't fit into the culture. They have left Rhodes. A couple of them have gone to UCT and back to Johannesburg where the drinking environment is far, far more chilled. I think if you can't beat them join them but if you don't want to join them then I suppose you're going to have to leave Grahamstown like some people have done.<sup>50</sup>*

Dominant Rhodes student culture and identity is dominantly defined by drinking practices and performances. These performances communicate what it means to truly and authentically be a 'student of Rhodes'. 'Drinking culture' at Rhodes refers to the pervasiveness and centrality of a culture of 'getting wasted', and also to the range of *public* behaviours (whether in residences or on the streets) that are *necessary* to its recognition *as* drinking culture – the noise, vomiting, and other public, visible acts of drunkenness that render drinking a *spectacle and exhibition of drunkenness*. The culture incorporates drinking games (funnelling, binge-drinking etc), and the self-definition, sense of pride, respect and even honour attached to participation in the culture. It is the lived experiences of the institutional identity, the lived practices and performances of the most legitimate student identity through which 'racial' dominance is produced and reproduced.

The social power of ritual lies in the production of behaviour that is "conventionalized", unconsciously orienting people to the acceptance of a social identity – a recognition of themselves and their place in the social order. Rhodes students do not consciously *aim* or *intend* to reproduce the social/'racial' order through their participation in the rituals of 'drinking culture'. As rituals, the performances of 'drinking culture' are not to be understood as intentional behaviour. To the extent that ritual is "*conventionalized action*", "this conventionality in turn psychically *distances* the participants from the ritual enactment" (Tambiah 1981: 132). As conventionalized behaviour rituals

People can act meaningfully in stereotyped ways because they have 'learned to learn' ... Thus if we postulate a continuum of behaviour with intentional behaviour at one

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<sup>50</sup> Purple People stories. Obtained from Rhodes University Journalism 2 Radio course, 2006.

pole and conventional behaviour at the other, we shall have to locate formalized ritual nearer the latter pole” (Tambiah 1981 : 134).

The production of ritualized behaviour arises from assigning a social identity, a social essence that tells students who and what to be. ‘Drinking culture’ works as ritual in the sense theorized by Bourdieu (1991), through assigning a social identity, an essence that tells students how they *should* behave. Hence, on a forum discussion, “Drinking is a part of the Rhodes lifestyle whether you like it or not”, or “non-drinking Rhodents? Ha! Can you say oxymoron?!”, or “Rhodes students love to get drunk”. There is an expectation, indeed an obligation to behave in a particular manner in order to become an authentic ‘student of Rhodes’. It is in this sense, through assigning an ‘essence’, that ritual produces social identity and exercises its symbolic power. “...To assign an essence...is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to signify to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence” (Bourdieu 1991: 120).

Ritual has ideological power – it has a knowledge effect in that it produces ‘truth’/ powerful knowledge through performance. The symbolic efficacy of ritual lies in the fact that the person thus consecrated (through ritualistic performance) is truly transformed. It “transforms the representations others have of him...[and] it simultaneously transforms the representation that the invested person has of himself, and the behaviour he feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation” (Bourdieu 1991: 119). The rituals of ‘drinking culture’ thus have real symbolic power – they really do enable students to be transformed by their participation in the culture, into ‘true’ students of Rhodes, a status recognized as we see in the stories above, by the students themselves, as well as by those around them (including those who may not partake in it, or approve of it themselves).

The transformation of students into ‘students of Rhodes’ through their participation in rituals of ‘drinking culture’ can be understood in terms of Althusser’s claim that ideology interpellates individuals as *subjects*; powerful ideology transforms individuals into subjects through hailing them as subjects. Hence, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a

way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing” (Althusser 1971: 49). Ideology’s interpellation or hailing of individuals *as subjects* is therefore its primary function. “There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. Meaning, there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: meaning, *by the category of the subject* and its functioning” (Althusser 1971: 45). It is when students are transformed from mere individuals to ‘Rhodents’ (into true, authentic, representative Rhodes students, that is, into subjects) that this subjection comes about.

*“Drinking culture’ is more associated with white people... ”*

The three stories with which this chapter began are all from ‘white’ males. While ‘race’ does not seem apparent in those stories, it lurks hidden just below the surface:

*His fears and worries turned out to be totally unfounded, life in res[idence] turned out to be very much like life in boarding school. White boys seemed to be the only ones who really stuck together, there was no black popular group which everyone tried to fit in with, instead, he ended up having the same colour friends and **ran around the res[idence] getting drunk and having fun as if he owned the place, just as he would have had he been in a predominantly white res[idence].**<sup>51</sup>*

In sharp contrast are experiences of ‘black’ male students who came to Rhodes, and immediately experienced a sense of alienation from the dominant ‘drinking culture’:

*Since I go[t] to this university i’ve had problems with the ‘culture’ in the residences and dining halls. **When I arrived at Rhodes, I really felt out of place and I am a raging socialite.** Times have changed and I think it’s about time that the ‘culture’ changes...[in response to a question concerning specifics about Rhodes culture that make him*

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<sup>51</sup> Professor Louise Vincent’s discussion of her critical colloquium paper in the transcript of the presentations, pp. 196

*uncomfortable] The disgusting drinking games. [People] drinking from shoes. There being a "chunder" bin in the middle of the bar just in case someone wants to vomit. Then they ask "why don't the black okes come to the bar"?*

*Drinking...acting stupid when you're drunk, doing stupid things like shouting and trying to tackle trees. Broadly speaking, this white culture, they feel you have to be flexible, just take everything...If there is a formal dinner you must be seen to drink that wine big time (laughs). If you don't drink that wine, you're not 'one of us'[...] (Strelitz 2003: 166).*

The production and reproduction of salient social difference, the persistence of the "brutal dualistic opposition" as Gilroy refers to it, between 'black' and 'white', depends on "generative and regenerative processes" through which these 'racialized' identities are produced and reproduced. The assigning of an essence, of a social identity, is always demarcating a line, marking a social difference. The primary function of ritual is the *institution*, the legitimation of social difference. The rites of 'drinking culture' are therefore rites of legitimation – they inculcate and incorporate an arbitrary social limit as a legitimate distinction:

One of the essential effects of rites, namely that of separating those who have undergone it, *not from those who have not yet undergone it, but from those who will not undergo it in any sense*, and thereby instituting a lasting difference between those to whom the rite pertains and those to whom it does not pertain (Bourdieu 1991: 117 – emphasis added).

The function of ritualistic performances of identity therefore is to institute and consecrate fundamental social differences in a way that naturalizes them. It takes a preexisting difference (such as a difference in sex, or a difference in skin colour) and institutes and *consecrates* this difference, producing and reproducing it *as* a salient difference. As Bourdieu states, "differentiated rites constitute a simple difference of fact [skin colour] as a legitimate distinction..." (Bourdieu 1991: 118).

The basic function of all ritual, according to Bourdieu, is a protection and reproduction of the social order. Ritual institutes and consecrates a particular group always and necessarily in relation to some Other group. It is a performance of differentiation that

necessarily separates one group from the other – it tells students where they fit into the social/’racial’ order by assigning to them social identities. Crucially, the orientation towards the social order is unconscious. There is unconscious ideological recognition among participants of ritualized culture. The performance of social identity is by social agents who are *embodied*. Ritual has the precise function of taking (essentially arbitrary) bodily differences (differences that are *written* onto the body) that are (or have become) salient to the social order and instituting and consecrating these, thereby reproducing the social order.

The rituals of ‘drinking culture’ inscribe and reinscribe ‘racial’ difference, and more significantly, ‘racial’ dominance in student life. In instituting a social identity as most legitimately representative of *Rhodes students*, the rituals render silent the ‘real’ division that is in fact being instituted and consecrated:

... *The most important division and one which passes unnoticed*, is the division between all those who are subject to [a rite of institution] ...and those who are not subject to it. *There is thus a hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted group is defined*” (Bourdieu 1991: 118 – emphasis added)

The performance of a social identity is necessarily being performed against some Other, alternative, rejected identity. It is useful to consider when and how the “instituted group” was first instituted and produced in student history, how ‘drinking culture’ emerged as a “meaningful experience” and “experienced meaning” (Turner 1980: 167).

A glimpse into history reveals that the emergence of the dominant student identity as one steeped in ‘drinking culture’ took place against the relegation of another potential defining student identity. The student newspaper *Activate* during this period is replete with examples illustrating the newly-emphasized centrality of ‘drinking culture’ to being a ‘Rhodent’ (an authentic, true Rhodes student). It is particularly telling that the discursive institution of ‘drinking culture’ as the Rhodes student identity is contained most visibly in the *February* editions of the newspaper, which serve as Orientation editions for students new to Rhodes, effectively ‘orientating’ newcomers to the ‘essence’ of being a Rhodes student. The front cover of the February 1998 Orientation Edition

refers to itself as “Rhodes most debauched newspaper” and sports a picture of an assortment of drinks below which (in large font) it says: “So you’re here for your [in caps] BACHELOR OF ALCOHOLISM”. A “B.Alc guide” then refers the reader to inside feature articles including an article on ‘hangover cures’).<sup>52</sup> The running theme of the edition is an introduction to ‘drinking culture’ in the pursuit of becoming an authentic student of Rhodes. For instance, a feature article titled ‘Night spots in the G-spot’ provides short descriptions of each club or pub in town or on campus and rates each one in terms of “number of drinks needed to have a good time”.<sup>53</sup>

The February 1997 issue of *Activate* (also the Orientation Edition) includes a centrespread on “The ABC of Varsity”, meant to introduce newcomers to Rhodes culture.<sup>54</sup> It is a telling signifier of how a Rhodes student was meant to behave through the numerous references to drinking and the constant referral of non-drinking related activities back to drinking: under ‘D’, is ‘drinking’ defined as “More popular than drugs. *Everybody’s doing it so why shouldn’t you...it is said that if you are sober for one instant during orientation week you are doing something wrong. Same goes for the rest of the year. It is also said that Grahamstown has the highest alcohol consumption rate per person in the world, and this is entirely possible*” (Ibid – emphasis added). There is a clear and explicit assigning of identity in these statements as ‘drinking culture’ becomes both an expectation and an imposed way of being a Rhodes student. Under ‘Nightspots’: “Let’s face it, all night-spots cater for alcoholic [sic] students so most of them are just bars”. Many of the other terms refer back to drinking; for instance, under ‘R’, ‘Reality’ is “for people who can’t handle alcohol and drugs” and under ‘S’, ‘Sex’ is the “most common and enjoyable pastime next to drugs and drinking”. Under a section titled “You know you’ve become a Rhodent when...” are listed a series of ‘typical’ activities or practices of Rhodes students among which are “You funnel wine”, “you’ve bushdived at least once” and “you’ve streaked at inter-varsity [later to be known as Triversity]”. The assigning of the true Rhodes student identity was effectively communicated in this way to incoming students, orienting them to the defining culture of Rhodes student life.

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<sup>52</sup> *Activate*, February 1998, Orientation Edition front cover.

<sup>53</sup> De Gray Birch, M. and Lashbrook, G. 1998. ‘Night spots in the G-spot’ in *Activate*, February 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Norwood-Young, J. 1997. ‘The ABC of Varsity’ in *Activate*, February 1997, pp. 8-9.

To better understand the ritualistic function of ‘drinking culture’, it is important to note that its institution as the dominant student culture occurred at the same time as, and therefore against the delegitimization of an event that was seeking representative legitimacy in Rhodes student life – the Rhodes Beauty Pageant. The “hidden set of individuals” against whom a group is instituted is revealed in this delegitimization.

The first Miss Rhodes beauty pageant was held in 1996. The organizers of the pageant envisioned an event that would gain representative legitimacy, as a defining event of Rhodes. Instead, the pageant turned out to be an all-‘black’ affair – the nine contestants, the roughly 200 students who supported the event and the music was all ‘black’. The SRC president is quoted as saying: “The Miss Rhodes I saw was a bit problematic. It was only organized for a particular sector of our population on campus. It wasn’t representative at all...”.<sup>55</sup> An SRC member said: “Nine entrants from a possible two thousand beautiful ladies does not do justice in the name of representation. Compared to Fort Hare, the Miss Rhodes contest was just a room party” (Ibid). But was the Fort Hare comparison the most important one? What had passed “unnoticed”?

The event was unsuccessful in attracting ‘racially’ diverse student participation. It was ‘racially’ marked as ‘black’ student enjoyment, and did not enjoy either participation of or recognition from ‘white’ students. This denied it the representative legitimacy it sought over the student identity. In 1997, the SRC itself chose to host the Miss Rhodes pageant, conferring an automatic representative legitimacy on the idea. However, the goalposts for legitimacy of the event appeared to be shifting. There was a continuation of opposition to the beauty pageant:

“In August last year, a [sic] Miss Rhodes competition was held, causing an uproar on campus. It was organized by students acting independently of the SRC, with the result that the SRC refused to acknowledge or support the winner Wendy Kahla. The reason for all the controversy was the bad organization of the event, and that it only catered for and appealed to one group on campus. This year the SRC has taken it upon themselves to host

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<sup>55</sup> Masuku, P. V. 1996. ‘Do we really have a Miss Rhodes’ in *Activate*, September (October?) 1996, pg 14.

an official Mr and Miss Rhodes contest. Once again, it is a controversial issue, but this time, for the reason that it is a ‘sexist meat market’. In this feature we bring you both sides of the story, opinions from around campus, and a review of what you can look forward to (or not) on the night of Saturday May 24 1997”.<sup>56</sup>

The 1997 pageant was no more successful in attracting ‘white’ student participation than the previous year’s competition – only 20 female and 7 male participants signed up. A concern regarding the pageant was “*the complete absence of white contestants*” (Ibid – emphasis added). The article goes on to reveal just how unrepresentative the idea of a pageant would be: “*Some white students do not intend to recognize this year’s title holders: ‘I’ve got nothing to do with them. They definitely wont be my representatives’, said a white student*” (Ibid – emphasis added). The pageant organizers realised that the participation and endorsement of ‘white’ students was a prerequisite to gaining representative legitimacy for the pageant in Rhodes student life – for it to be *recognized* as a practice representative of Rhodes student life. One of the (‘black’) pageant organizers

“thought it unfair to have an absence of white contestants. ‘Maybe they don’t like black organizers’, she said. ‘We even printed a black and a white face on those posters to make them (white students) enter, but they didn’t’. ‘Last year it was not open to everyone, but this year it was!’ said a concerned Unathi [SRC secretary] when asked to comment on the racial breakdown of contestants...” (Ibid).

The status of the pageant on the Rhodes student calendar is evident from the comments of students in the article. “I don’t think it is a very reported event...it’s quite low-key, not a big event. Nobody looks forward to it...”, and “I think it’s a good idea but apparently there are no white students” (Ibid). The comments reveal a general indifference to the Miss Rhodes beauty pageant, a lack of recognition that was essential for the pageant to gain representative legitimacy.

The delegitimization of the Rhodes Beauty Pageant occurred against the ascendance of ‘drinking culture’ as representative of Rhodes student culture. The emergence of ‘drinking culture’ as “experienced meaning” and “meaningful experience” (Turner 1980:

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<sup>56</sup> Paterson, J., Mashicila, C. and Koseff, J. 1997. ‘The Market Place’ in *Activate*, May(?) 1997, pp. 10-11.

167) cannot be understood separately from the way the culture was instituted in social life – the fact that dominant student culture emerges and is constituted as such against a “hidden set of individuals” that is instituted and produced *as different* and not subject to the dominant consecrating rituals of ‘drinking culture’. This hidden set of individuals is produced not just as different but crucially as *less representative* of the institutional identity. Every enactment and performance of the dominant student identity, of rituals of ‘drinking culture’, is an enactment and performance of ‘racial’ dominance. Rituals of ‘drinking culture’ are instituted to “sanction and sanctify a particular state of things, an established order” (Bourdieu 1991: 119). The ritualistic practices of ‘drinking culture’ since the initial institution of the culture are “so many repetitions of the inaugural act of institution” (Bourdieu 1991: 126). They are incorporated and inculcated behaviours that “are destined to function as so many calls to order, by virtue of which those who might have forgotten (or forgotten themselves) are reminded of the position assigned to them by the institution” (Bourdieu 1991: 124).

To slip back into history, it is intriguing that ‘drinking culture’ emerged from the ‘underbelly’ of the previously dominant student cultural practice – RAG. Three things are significant about the period during which ‘drinking culture’ had emerged as dominant cultural practice: (1) that this period, the late 80s to the early 90s, was the time around which ‘whiteness’ at Rhodes was perhaps most threatened, and the institution was openly being challenged by ‘black’ student societies as a ‘white’, colonial institution, (2) that RAG had gained notoriety as a ‘racist’/ ‘racialized’/ ‘white’ practice at Rhodes, and had attracted significant resistance and opposition from the Black Students Society and the Phoenix Cultural Society during this period (who not only disrupted RAG processions and intimidated ‘black’ participants of RAG, but also released pamphlets condemning the event and calling for a complete boycott of RAG festivities) and, (3) that RAG had ‘deteriorated’ around the late 80s to an event of “drunken debauchery”. It was declared during the late 80s that “...the annual Rhodes University Rag procession through the streets of Grahamstown is to end because it has degenerated into a drunken revelry...”<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Rhodes Rag procession halted’ in *The Argus*, 8 October 1986, page 6.

It is intriguing that the ‘degeneration’ of RAG – its “drunken revelry” – becomes the defining celebratory feature of the dominant student culture from the late 90s; indeed it *becomes the culture*. That “drunken debauchery” had become associated with ‘racial’/’racist’ attacks adds an additional layer of intrigue. RAG was “...a time of drunken debauchery and racial attacks would always increase” (Desai 2005: 220). “Rag festivities at Rhodes have come under fire recently from the university’s black students movement, who have branded it racist” (Ibid). The Black Students Movement and Phoenix Cultural Society called for a boycott of RAG because it serves as “a perpetuation of the system of apartheid and oppression that exists in South Africa...”<sup>58</sup> RAG is described as the ‘enemy’ and seen as “the epitome of the white, bourgeois ethos...I was personally involved in the struggle to dissociate student community work from the ‘decadence’ of Rag” (Naidu 2005: 101). In the context of threat and uncertainty to the ‘racial’ order, drunken ‘decadence’ and ‘debauchery’ intersect powerfully with the exercise of ‘racial’ power, *creating meaningful experience*. ‘Drinking culture’ emerges as meaningful in Rhodes student life as a performance and practice reinscribing ‘racial’ dominance.

The symbolic inaccessibility of ‘drinking culture’ to students of all ‘races’, the fact that the performance of its rituals by non-‘white’ students is never quite able to effect, or be accepted as a legitimized performance, occurs within this framework for understanding rituals and the reproduction of ‘racial’ order. The performance is always awkward; it is always seen as an attempt *to be what one is not*. Bourdieu speaks of the distinction between ‘nobleman’ and the ‘commoner’ thus:

...the poorest nobleman-fencer remains noble (even if his image is tarnished, to a degree that varies according to national traditions and historical periods); conversely, the best commoner-fencer remains common (even if he is able to draw a form of ‘nobility’ from his excellence at a typically noble practice) (Bourdieu 1991: 120).

The guarantee that affords the nobleman a legitimate distinction is based in a biological predisposition (heredity) that is instituted and consecrated as a legitimate difference

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<sup>58</sup> ‘RAG? OUR STAND:’, pamphlet issued by Phoenix Cultural Society and Black Students Society, 1981 (1983?). Obtained from Cory Library, November 2006. (The pamphlet is marked in the archives as 1983, but according to Bekker and Mqingwana [1983] it was released in 1981) – emphasis added.

through ritualistic practice (the maintenance of the social order relies on the perpetuation of these differences). Ritual gives meaning and salience to the preexisting difference, which is itself written onto bodies (based on a fixed difference, such as skin colour for instance). In other words, ritual works to legitimize social differences and reproduce the social order, because it draws distinctions and differences that are ‘obvious’ (anyway). “One only preaches to the converted” (Bourdieu 1991: 126). Ritual does not appear to be instituting and consecrating the social difference that it does because that difference is there anyway. “It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that *it imposes* (without appearing to do so, since these are ‘obviousnesses’) *obviousnesses as obviousnesses...*” (Althusser 1971: 47).

Difference is thus naturalized through “incorporation and inculcation” of the rituals of ‘drinking culture’, which imposes the arbitrary limit and distinction in a lasting manner (Bourdieu 1991: 123). This inculcation and incorporation causes some to “maintain their rank and distance” and “others to know their place” (Ibid). The ‘racialized’ difference that marks ‘drinking culture’ is for the most part not met with shock or disbelief, but calm reasoned acceptance. In fact, it ‘makes sense’ it enters students’ sense-making frameworks lending credence and further evidence for how ‘different’ ‘black’ is from ‘white’. It is not uncommon to find it stated on the Student Discussion Forums: ‘Yes so there are black clubs and white clubs. Yes Rhodes is racially segregated. So what? This is nothing new’. Unsure of what to make of the ‘fact’ of a ‘racially’ differentiated ‘drinking culture’ students generally accept this as further evidence of the already-accepted ‘fact’ of ‘racial’ difference.

*You'll find that it is the minority that drinks to excess, and that minority is loud, brutal, and tends to take over any area where alcohol is served and make it their own.*

The ‘out of placeness’ experienced by some Rhodes students contrasts sharply with *ownership* of place experienced by those who are instituted by ‘drinking culture’. By laying claim to public spaces, by displaying and exhibiting in public the rituals of ‘drinking culture’, the ‘racial’ difference is sanctioned and sanctified “by making it

known and recognized; it consists of making it exist as a social difference..." (Bourdieu 1991: 119). Rituals of 'drinking culture' performed within spaces, construct these as spaces of 'racial' dominance. Embodiment and ritual intersect within spaces to produce 'racial' dominance. Student social spaces at Rhodes (or those spaces frequented by Rhodes students) are not only 'racially' segregated; there are not just 'white' clubs and 'black' clubs. The kind of meaning that a particular place or space acquires and attains is intertwined with 'drinking culture'. How do Friar Tucks, The Rhodes Student Union or The Rat and Parrot, widely considered 'white' student social spaces, garner a powerful perception as the 'most popular places in Grahamstown'? How do these spaces commonsensically become associated with "Rhodes students" in a way that Other clubs do not? It is not that more students attend the 'popular' clubs and pubs. The perceptions around social spaces point in fact to the power of 'drinking culture' in making known and representative those spaces in which its rituals are performed, as *representative* spaces, as authentic spaces of 'Rhodes students'.

Rhodes University itself, the institutional space as a whole, is constructed through 'drinking culture' as a space of 'racial' dominance. Crucial to this construction is the premier event on the Rhodes student calendar, Triversity.

*Triversity*<sup>59</sup> – *fusing 'drinking culture' with institutional identity*

A: I think we firstly need to ask ourselves whether drinking is a "problem" at this university. I personally do not believe that it is. While there are those of us, myself included, who on occasion drink ourselves silly and behave less than maturely, we do understand that we are Rhodes students - we understand the consequences of our actions, and we pay the price when we go too far. Unfortunately TriVarsity is going to suffer as a result of this behaviour being viewed as completely unacceptable and as a "problem". I am not going to convince anyone who doesn't already agree with this point otherwise. But I do believe that this fundamental point needs to be discussed properly before we base any decisions on an assumption. [...] Personally, I came to this university because of

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<sup>59</sup> Triversity is a yearly sporting event in which the three major Eastern Cape universities, Rhodes University, University of Fort Hare, and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (formerly University of Port Elizabeth) meet to compete in various sports.

the social aspect, and most of my friends did too - I am even willing to say that if anything, the drinking (social) reputation has actually benefited Rhodes. [...] I just think that we need to have a fresh look at this topic and question whether A. there is a drinking problem and B. whether it affects our reputation negatively, before we C. question whether we should cancel TriVarsity.[...] I think an apology for the comment [by the Vice-Chancellor, about students' reluctance to have Triversity held at a historically 'black' university] would be appropriate especially after such a united cheer last night after [X's] comment that *TriVarsity was such a wonderful event because it brings the whole of Rhodes together regardless of race*. I felt that Dr. Badat's comment was *responsible for the students leaving divided* on an issue that was not even part of the debate's original intention, and is as far as I am concerned, not even important (emphasis added).

In characterizing Triversity as an event of 'togetherness', this representation masks the event's ritualistic function, and thereby the *actual* point at which division, differentiation and distinction is brought about in the student body. The representation attempts to create a 'wholeness' and unity that is not in fact there.

**B:** [...] I laugh at the idea that Triversity brings the university together. I think it brings a *certain group of students at the University together*, but of course, this group of students is probably all you know and so in your mind it is perfectly acceptable to extrapolate them to *represent "the student body of the university" as a whole*. How arrogant of you to suggest that Dr. Badat should apologise for challenging what you know to be true about the Rhodes/Triversity experience. I think it's about time that the comfort zones of some students on this campus are encroached up and their territory challenged. [...] (emphasis added).<sup>60</sup>

The ritualistic performances of 'drinking culture' at Triversity institute and consecrate 'racial' differences – through their public display and performance, they serve to sanction and sanctify (make *known* and *recognized*) 'racial' differences that are being instituted (Bourdieu 1991: 119). This as Bourdieu reminds us, is a crucial function of ritual – it

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<sup>60</sup> These are extracts from a Student Forum Discussion in 2008, which discussed the Vice-Chancellor's threat to disband Triversity, and look into the irresponsible drunkenness that it had become associated with from Rhodes side. Rhodes University's dominance over the event was also questioned by the Vice-Chancellor, and it was suggested that the event be held at Fort Hare University, a historically 'black' institution. This suggestion was met with a significant amount of resistance and opposition, and a meeting was held by the Vice-Chancellor, with Rhodes students, to discuss their concerns.

serves to remind people of the social order, of the boundaries that demarcate that social order, and are not to be transgressed – rituals thus redraw the already drawn line.

More than just the institution of difference is the achievement of ‘racial’ dominance through Triversity’s appropriation of ‘drinking culture’. In a 2005 student forum discussion, a ‘black’ student started a thread titled “Triversity for Blacks or Whites?” in which he/she raised the issue of the “racial separation and a celebration of being white at tri-varsity”. The forumite complained that coverage of Triversity (on a prominent South African campus entertainment website) mainly depicts ‘white’ students ‘having a good time’. In a provocative statement the forumite suggests that the Triversity event might as well be called “whites day”. A sarcastic retort of one forumite to the accusation of Triversity as ‘whites day’ was: “Were they wearing white hoods and setting fire to crosses?” This attempts to fix the performance and symbolic representation of ‘racial’ dominance/ of ‘whiteness’ (to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century American Ku Klux Klan symbolic representation). It denies the construction of ‘racial’ dominance within particularized contexts, where symbolic meaning emerges and is created, performed and practiced in new ways, with new representative symbols.

The response of one ‘black’ forumite to the depiction of ‘white’ students having a good time is that the photographers probably:

“...had an easier time identifying Rhodes students amongst the white peeps because *they're always far more drunk* (🤪), *they dye their hair purple and prance around in purple overalls*. The vast majority of black people (including myself) dont do this because our culture is alot more conservative [...] *The purple overall thing which white people do (I think) captures the tri-varsity spirit better than we do because we look as we do when we're out any other day anyway*” (emphasis added).

Here we begin to see the emergings of the ‘symbols and stripes’ that provide a particular student culture with a representative legitimacy and dominance in defining social identity.

The appropriation of Triversity by ‘drinking culture’ and ‘drinking culture’ by Triversity enables an inextricable fusing of institutional identity with the culture in a way that allows ‘drinking culture’ to become irrefutably representative of the institutional identity, and thus to imprint ‘racial’ dominance on the institutional identity. ‘Drinking culture’ was able to present itself as a universal, representative culture through its appropriation and ownership of Triversity, the premier event on the student calendar, which afforded it legitimate appropriation of the institutional *colour purple* (the representative institutional colour). The following quote is from an article titled “Saturated Solidarity: Memories of Triversity 1998”:

“...some distinctive trails of puke and mirth let everyone know that the Rhodents had landed. Streams of convoyed cars like army ants trailed into PE on Friday and Saturday to mobilize forces of support on the enemy territory (I saw a few drunken Rhodes Rats on the side of the main road proudly letting their ‘Willies in die Wind Waai’ and marking it for us!). So – picture plenty *pissed purple-haired people* stuffing themselves at the Steers, KFC and the Kasbar and washing it down with copious contents of beer, wine and some nasty concoctions floating around in energade and gymbottles. But still with enough slurred and blurred vision to *recognize other distorted purple people. Solidarity was solid and saturated!*”<sup>61</sup>

An event such as Triversity, which takes place against rival tertiary institutions, provides the ideal stage for a performance of *the* institutional identity. ‘Pissed purple people’, which is the essence of Triversity for (enough) Rhodes students, powerfully fuses ‘drinking culture’ with the institutional identity. It accomplished this primarily through its powerful symbolic appropriation of the colour purple, which signifies institutional representivity. During the weekend of Triversity, students wear white overalls with purple spray-paint, dye their hair purple, paint their faces purple, use the (purple) letters ‘R’ and ‘U’ to imaginative effect on their overalls and faces (“R U pissed?” sprayed onto an overall for instance) and in this way claim comprehensive ownership of the institutional identity. The symbolic appropriation of the institutional identity is accompanied by, in fact *fused with* general drunken behaviour; the Triversity weekend is undeniably a weekend of “drunken debauchery”. The legitimation of a particular student

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<sup>61</sup> Lohmann, E., ‘Saturated solidarity – memories of Triversity 1998’ in *Activate*, 1998 (page unknown) – emphasis added.

identity as most representative is thus achieved – it is difficult to associate ‘Rhodes Rat’ with anything but the popularized figure of a drunken purple R(h)odent.

The masking of this Rhodes student identity as institutionally representative lies in the fact that it is constructed ostensibly in relation to other universities – ‘Rhodents’ display their solidarity *against rival institutions* by wearing the institutional colour. Yet who is this performance *really* for? Rhodes students are the only students of the participating institutions to display such strong ties to their institutional identity (it is not as though the need for such a vehement display of institutional solidarity arises from similar competitive displays from the other two participating universities). Furthermore, the donning of these symbols of institutional identity do not arise primarily from a genuinely competitive *sporting* spirit – it is not considered a failure if Rhodes loses any (or even all) of its sporting events. In fact, for the Rhodes students supporting Triversity, the sports are mostly incidental to the event, whose success is essentially measured by the extremity of the performance of drunken behaviour.

This suggests that the performance of institutional identity, so crucial to the event with its ritualistic donning of purple-sprayed overalls and appropriation of other institutional symbols, is not being enacted for, or in relation to, the rival institutions. The saturated solidarity of ‘plenty pissed purple people’ is not significant primarily as a show of togetherness and strong institutional affiliation to students of other institutions; the display and performance of institutional identity *is for Rhodes students themselves* – it has the function of making known and recognized *this* performance as *the* performance of Rhodes student identity, of reiterating and reminding students of the ‘racial’ order that defines Rhodes. This public event has the function of effecting a recognition and sanctioning of ‘drinking culture’ as *the* legitimate performance of Rhodes student identity. The exhibition of the *true Rhodes* identity is in fact being displayed and performed to *Rhodes students themselves*. Rhodes students *are being reminded* what it means to be a true ‘student of Rhodes’, what the authentic Rhodes student identity is, and *who the authentic Rhodes student is*.

Crucially, the colour purple enables 'drinking culture' to present itself as the representative student identity, as universal, inclusive and un-'raced'. Hence it is not uncommon to read variations of the argument, "black or white, at the end of the day we are all Purple People" during forum discussions on the 'raced' nature of Triversity. Representative legitimacy is claimed by the identity that has appropriated the colour purple *by that* very act of symbolic appropriation. The colour purple plays the legitimizing social function of erasing 'race'/'colour'; it says powerfully "in this culture we are all purple, not white or black, just purple". The dominant student identity of 'drinking culture', celebrated and performed with distinction and distinguished intensity at the yearly Triversity event, and claiming to represent and produce Rhodes students as 'purple people', masks the 'racial' dominance that is in fact being ceremoniously celebrated and sanctified.

## **Conclusion – Winding roads of ‘whiteness’: the changing same?**

How is 'transformation' measured in post-democracy South Africa? What suggests that 'change' has come about and progress has been made? How do we measure and indeed declare the "end of the dark age of white supremacy" in South Africa [Mbembe 2008: 5]? The 'end' of 'racial' privilege and dominance needs to be interrogated in specific contexts within the country, rather than taken for granted (equally, the declaration of a 'reversal' of 'racial' dominance (from 'white' to 'black'?) needs to be interrogated and understood in terms of how it is deployed within a particular context, and what effects it creates). While declaring the "end of white supremacy" Mbembe simultaneously recognizes the continuities of 'racial' dominance and privilege:

...barriers that have operated in the past to favor "whites only" should be removed [...] As evidenced by countless anecdotes in sectors as diverse as higher education, business, and industry, practices and procedures neutral on their face, or in intent, may in fact operate to freeze the status quo and to keep prior discriminations in place under a new guise (Mbembe 2008: 17).

It is presumptive to declare the end of an era, and hail a new one particularly because such a declaration does not interrogate 'newness' and the extent to which the old remains prevalent within the new. Equally, it is not sufficient to merely declare the continuity of an underlying system of 'white supremacy' without a sustained analysis of the structures that keep in place and enable 'racial' dominance. While being aware of the normative power of 'whiteness', the analysis cannot hope to create new knowledge and understanding by taking this power for granted.

To simultaneously and contradictorily claim the end of 'white' supremacy, and the continuity of 'white' privilege and dominance, reveals precisely the complexities of social reproduction and change, the complexities of the relationship between the past and the present as strongly intertwined and not easily distinguishable processes. There is no decisive 'end' to structures of privilege and social difference that have become concretized as salient over time. How can we simultaneously be trapped by the past, laid hostage by it, and yet hope to escape it? Are attempts at emancipation from structures of power and domination doomed to failure? Is all we have the 'changing same'; new guises

for old structures of oppression? Are we doomed to the structures that precede, constrain and regulate our actions and performances in the world?

"To achieve a modicum of social justice...South Africa must dismantle the barriers that were erected against full justice for all", says Mbembe (2008: 15). Yet what precisely is involved in the 'dismantling' of social barriers, and how we are to recognize 'real' change from the variety that merely pretends to be representative of real change, is not in the least clear. It is abundantly clear that the "formal-legal removal of these [oppressive] barriers is not enough" (Mbembe 2008: 17). Mbembe notes, "the racist ethos written in the life of institutions, in the public mind, and in popular culture is the hardest to tackle once the legal and coercive apparatus of apartheid is gone" (Mbembe 2008: 17). It is not simply a question of pragmatic policies that need to be put in place to 'tackle' the 'problem' of 'racial' power and privilege. Yet how do we 'see' or measure change? If evidence of it does not reside in the quantitative measure of met quotas (and it does not) then where can we hope to find it?

Would change come about through a greater awareness of the unconscious performance of rituals? Or through breaking history's silences? Certainly, there is a need to consider the complexity with which truth/ powerful knowledge becomes "hardened into an unalterable form" (Foucault 1977: 364), lived and reproduced as authenticity and truth. Powerful knowledge, which produces ways of seeing and being in the world, is not simply reversed or undone. The enemy as Walter Benjamin reminds us "has not ceased to be victorious" (Benjamin 1969: 255). Powerful knowledge becomes inscribed as 'normality' in daily life; it is the inscriptions of everyday life that need to be interrogated if we are to get to the structures that constrain and regulate it, and hope to overcome and undermine these.

Hence, the preoccupation of this thesis with representative legitimacy of an institutional identity; with how some meanings are created, and reproduced as powerful, to the exclusion of other meanings, other ways of seeing and being. I have explored how the production of representative legitimacy (dominant meanings) over the Rhodes University

institutional space, through silencing and ritual, works to institute and reproduce 'racial' dominance. The production and reproduction of 'racial' dominance requires the production of dominant representations of institutional history and performances of institutional identity that are considered most legitimate and authentic. Using insights from Trouillot (1995), I have shown how silences in dominant representations of institutional history construct an institutional history and identity devoid of 'race' or indeed 'racial' dominance. History is appropriated and heralded and yet simultaneously denied. An 'inconvenient past' is effectively disowned by creating 'pastness', a sense that 'the past (or rather, a *particular* past) is the past' (it has no impact on the present and that things are different now). Yet simultaneous with the disowning of *a* past, is a construction, heralding and appropriation of *the* past that *authentically* represents and defines the institution.

To construct a particular representation of the past as most legitimate, a past of 'excellence', silences any questions about the present as anything but a seamless continuation of the 'excellence' and 'gloriousness' that came before it. Unearthing historical silences reveals that the construction of representative legitimacy requires silencing certain narratives through the production of their insignificance in institutional history. The silencing of radical 'whiteness' in Rhodes University's past, the production of its *insignificance* is crucial to the production of a dominant history that is un-'raced'. Radical 'whiteness' threatened the coherence and wholeness of the institutional identity, and centrally undermined its claims to political neutrality through configuring itself as a particular kind of (non-acquiescent) '*whiteness*'. The representative legitimacy of an institution historically representing "social democracy" demanded the silencing of NUSAS and radical 'whiteness' – this was accomplished both in history as well as in the production of history. The silencing of NUSAS constitutes '*a* silence within *the* silence' in that silencing radical 'whiteness' was and is necessary to maintaining the superior silencing of 'racial' dominance in institutional history and identity.

Silences about 'racial' dominance in institutional history are produced through re-appropriating and rewriting the colonial history of the institution and symbolic

representations of that history (Cecil John Rhodes memorabilia for instance), and rendering that past commensurate with narratives of “social democracy” and ‘excellence’. The meaning of the colonial past, and the university’s relationship to it, is reconstructed and thus silenced. In this way narratives of ‘racial’ dominance in institutional history are rendered unthinkable (the silencing is not a mere ‘leaving out’ or ‘lying about’ but a powerful appropriation and rewriting of colonial history in a way that erases ‘racial’ power from the institutional story through erasing ‘race’ from the *colonial story*. The past involves events and individuals who are un-‘raced’, whether the individual is Cecil Rhodes and his vision of Imperialism which the institution embraced, or the event was rejecting George Singh’s application to study at Rhodes in 1933). In other words, the history of ‘racial’ dominance has not been edited out of the institutional story in an obvious manner; the story has instead been written in a way which makes ‘race’ not even incidental, but irrelevant to the central narrative – herein lies the silencing.

Silencing the past has significant implications for how the present is construed. The production of a particular institutional history as dominantly representative, as *the* institutional history, is not an insignificant matter. The claim and appropriation of history is crucially also a claim and appropriation of *place*; it signifies an *ownership* of place. To claim history, to claim historical identity, is to claim a right to dominantly define institutional space, and to claim authoritative representation of it in a way that excludes and subordinates those who cannot claim that same history as their own. To claim the historical tradition of RAG<sup>62</sup> as ones own for instance (through fond recollection of it, and particularly shared memory of it as in the Rhodes centenary Old Rhodian Memoirs) is effectively to claim ownership of it; to claim RAG as a defining trait of institutional identity is in turn to claim that institutional history as ones own (as the history of a particular group, who enjoined those traditions). The ownership of place is thus produced through claiming authentic, legitimate and dominant representations of it and a central and important way of achieving legitimate representation is through making legitimate claims

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<sup>62</sup> Raising and Giving, a charitable event held yearly at South African English campuses involving many festivities and the publication of a RAG Magazine.

to its history; owning its history (which necessarily excludes and silences those who stood opposed to, and resisted the traditions and practices celebrated by the dominant representation). Appropriations of history which render a particular identity most legitimately representative involve powerful exclusions and silencings.

This thesis has attempted to show the thwarting of social change through silencing 'race' in history. Attempts to produce change, and calls for transformation in institutional 'race' culture and identity appear illegitimate, as attempts to introduce messy 'politics' into an untainted institutional environment that in the words of one student forumite, "has always done well without an overt political influence".

Of course, this thesis has not exhaustively addressed the reproductive complexities of 'racial' dominance in Rhodes institutional life. The institutional life of Rhodes University comprises many more untold stories. The quest for representative legitimacy, which this thesis has addressed, not only fashions a dominant identity that is performed and lived in the broad institutional space of Rhodes University; it also fashions interactions within the *micro-spaces* of the institution – in student residences, dining halls, lecture theatres – as well as within the cultures of various sports clubs, the events held within residences such as 'cheese and wines', hall and society balls etc. The intricacies of interactions within these micro-spaces may in fact reveal much more closely the kinds of structural changes taking place in the reproduction of an ideological social formation such as 'race'.

One of the most visible outward signs of the social reproduction of 'racial' power and dominance is a continued 'racial' segregation. It has become abundantly clear, through critiques of the 'contact theory' (see Vincent 2005 for instance) that students will not 'integrate' and mix freely across 'racial' and other boundaries by merely placing them in contact with one another. Hence Goldberg speaks of a 'new segregationism' (Goldberg 1998), and Dixon and Durrheim (2005) illustrate how new forms of segregation have taken over in a post-apartheid moment. Again, we have to consider with Wilton, that "moments of proximity represent challenges not only to an established spatial order (when someone or something is out-of-place), but also to the integrity of individual and

collective identities" (Wilton 1998: 174). The chapter on ritual attempted to go further than merely confirming 'racial' segregation in social spaces at Rhodes by looking at how ritualistic practice *marks social space*, creating ownership of it through dominantly representative performances.

Yet of course there are many ritualistic practices in student life, and the complexity of the social reproduction of 'racial' power goes beyond the dominant identity-defining practice. How do interactions between students within the micro-spaces of the university construct and reproduce 'racial' differences? Similar questions could be asked about 'racial' segregation among staff at the institution – how do spaces such as the Senior Common Room exclude some, while welcoming others? How do we take the analysis beyond merely confirming Puwar's conclusion that in spaces where the 'white' body served as the somatic norm "black bodies [...] are ultimately unassimilable, as their blackness places them as 'Space Invaders'" (Puwar 2001: 667). How do we achieve a more nuanced analysis that considers more closely how 'black' bodies remain marked within institutional contexts?

Preliminary observations conducted in dining halls, as well as residence culture at Rhodes suggest important and interesting avenues for further study into micro-spatial student culture. 'Racial' segregation abounds in these spaces ('this is the white girls table', 'this is the black boys common room', 'the Indian boys sit at that table'). Language plays an integral part of facilitating and concretizing this segregation, as it can be a means of excluding from conversation certain individuals sitting at a table. Common rooms in residences often become segregated around television programmes - 'white' girls want to watch X, 'black' girls want to watch Y, 'black' guys watch soccer, 'white' guys watch rugby.

Sport is highly 'racially' segregated at Rhodes. During interviews conducted for a campus radio show in 2002, I interviewed numerous soccer players who felt that rugby is given preference at Rhodes because it is a 'white' sport. In one male residence, fights have repeatedly broken out between 'black' and 'white' males over which of the two sports

have preference in the television rooms, because 'white' males feel that televised soccer matches invite too much noise and disruption in the residence and 'black' males claim the same about televised rugby matches. Other sporting codes offered at Rhodes are also 'racially' segregated. How do the micro cultures surrounding these sports perpetuate and reproduce social difference? Of course, with rugby and soccer, the 'racial' separateness of the sports occurs within a broader national context where the sports continue to invite 'racialized' support.

Social and spatial geography has much to offer in enhancing understandings of the reproduction of social difference. "Racist ideologies typically seek to naturalize racist geographies, to make racial divisions appear universal and immutable, to keep people in their 'proper places'" (Dixon 1997: 18). Spaces are discursively constructed, the meanings they acquire and invite are not fixed and immutable, but the inscription of *material* practices, of actual lived experience within spaces, is crucial to its construction as a particular kind of space. These practices reproduce spatial identity, giving institutional space powerful meanings that then invites particular subjectivities as more natural or representative of the institution ('drinking culture defines Rhodes University').

There are many bisecting cleavages that make 'racial' reproduction more complex within the institutional space. For instance, 'class' and the extent to which it intersects with 'race' allowing non-'white' students to 'pass' as 'white'. 'Race' at Rhodes intersects with class in a way that merits further study. There is an intriguing question of how class has enabled new identity configurations that impact on and potentially reconfigure 'racial' power. What does the increasing 'encroachment' of class (wealthy 'black' students for instance) mean for 'racial' dominance? Do middle class wealthy 'black' students gain easier access into dominant institutional culture, spaces and identity? Do these students struggle less to find a sense of belonging? Evidence from the Rhodes University Student Discussion Forums suggests otherwise (though it could be suggested that the institutional space is experienced as more threatening and impenetrable for poor 'black' students – see Strelitz 2003).

Besides the intersection of 'race' and class, how do ethnic and national cleavages among 'black' students operate within the institutional context (large numbers of Zimbabwean students, as well as students from other African countries makes for bisecting cleavages of 'race' and class), how is language and the power of English experienced at Rhodes (by Afrikaans students, as well as 'black' students who come from backgrounds where their exposure to the language was minimal – ELAP for instance, the bridging course for incoming (mostly 'black') students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds has been dubbed English for Lazy African People), what is the role of student societies in maintaining division rather than 'showcasing diversity', how do Indian students at Rhodes university find a sense of belonging through societies such as the MSA/ HSS, and how do these societies create enclaves effecting exclusions and inclusions which reinforce 'racial' separateness as well as a kind of 'racial' subordination. What about the other 'races', other outsiders at Rhodes? How do they negotiate 'racial' identity in the institutional space? How is outsidership felt and negotiated *in daily routines* at Rhodes University?

One of the key claims of this thesis seems to be the continuation of 'white' domination and supremacy. While the analysis of 'racial' dominance is rooted in everyday material practices (rather than abstract notions of 'underlying structures of white supremacy'), the analysis seems ultimately to keep the 'black'-'white' dichotomy almost rigidly in place. A central concern in 'race' and identity studies relates of course to 'transformation' and social 'change'. There is the contention that all the talk about reproduction places too much emphasis on how 'things stay the same' rather than recognizing the spaces that open up for negotiation of 'racial' identity.

The obvious and immediate problem is that this context appears to become fixed. Yes authors such as Mills may go to many lengths to illustrate how and why this context continues to predominate (how 'white supremacy' reinvents itself) but the question that has been asked over and over remains: does it change? And, how does this happen? How is it undermined, and threatened, and transformed? Indeed this work has attempted to show the complexity of processes of reproduction (and dealt with issues concerning the duality of reproduction and continuity, versus transformation and change). Perhaps a

crucial insight required from further empirical study of and closer investigation is what actually happens when individuals attempt to bridge 'racial' divides; for instance when 'black' students engage in performances/ rituals written as 'white' ('drinking culture'). Further, how has 'blackness' positioned itself in relation to dominant 'whiteness' at Rhodes University? SASCO appears to have positioned itself most visibly as the face of oppositional 'blackness' (opposed to dominant institutional culture that is). The organization seems intent on undermining dominant 'whiteness' at Rhodes through gaining influence over the SRC for instance.

Preliminary and anecdotal evidence suggests that there is considerable censorship from 'black'/ non-'white' students when such performances are enacted by 'black'/ non-'white' students (participation in 'drinking culture' results in deriding labels such as 'coconut' being used to censor 'racial' boundaries). Clearly the 'truth' of 'blackness' and 'whiteness', of 'racial' difference, has to be performed and reenacted, daily and within localized contexts, to realize and reinvent itself. These are not arbitrary social processes however. They are historically and socially powerful. One cannot predict what would happen to 'racial' difference as it has become ingrained in student life, should such daily performances of social reproduction be undermined and threatened. The new Vice Chancellor's attempts to regulate 'drinking culture' resulted in a most interesting backlash from some 'white' students, vehement and determined to protect an enactment that is clearly more than an arbitrary performance with deep if unconscious symbolic and social significance.

Meanings may not be inherent in discourse or practice, but the social differences created, constructed and reproduced through discourse and practice are constructed and reproduced as salient rather than arbitrary and easily changeable. Undermining social order (and domination) does indeed require undermining everyday practices that reinforce and reproduce the social order. It should be considered however, that 'black' students protestation of cultural practices such as RAG during the 80s at Rhodes as 'racist' cultural practice, while contributing to the disbanding of RAG, did not fundamentally alter the social/ 'racial' order.

Do structures of domination reproduce themselves endlessly? If a closer study of the ritualistic aspects of everyday life helps us better understand the structures that govern life and create meaning, then perhaps a closer, more nuanced and in-depth study of rituals of the past would help us gain a closer understanding of ongoing processes of social reproduction. The concept of ritual does indeed help us understand how unconscious reproduction of social orders occurs; how fundamental social differences made fundamental, are reinstated and consecrated, through symbolic acts that reinscribe the difference without appearing to do so. Individuals are thus transformed into subjects; they are interpellated and hailed as subjects.

A more micro spatial empirical study of Rhodes University student life may reveal the openings through which the 'determining' macro-space of the institution (inviting as it does particular subjectivities as dominant) may be partially reconfigured to produce newly legitimized identities.

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Much of social order is based on ritual? Ritual governs social orders; they are fundamental to the continuation of social orders. Undermining rituals appears to be a way of undermining oppressive social orders. Yet if rituals are the means through which we gain meaning and identity in life as Bourdieu illustrates, then people need not just be

critical of the rituals in which they engage, but also find ways of creating new identities and engaging in new rituals that emanate from a just social order.

Gilroy's hope for undermining the “brutal dualistic opposition” (Gilroy 2001: 28) between 'black' and 'white' remains an unattained goal. It is not necessarily the intent to perpetuate 'racial' dominance or the lack of enough 'political will' to bring about genuine change that prevents this happening, although indeed at times this may well be the case. Instead there is a need to become more aware of the workings of the collective unconscious in processes of ideological production and reproduction – the ways in which unintentional reproductive processes unleash themselves in the social order.

The ‘legacies’ of oppressive systems, Trouillot (2000) reminds us, can be spoken about only because there are practices in the present through which they continue to exert their power. The past lives on in the present, it haunts the present, in the explicit and implicit appropriations of it that we employ to legitimize and authorize particular customs and traditions as most proper and acceptable, most befitting of an institutional space. A deeper understanding of the ways in which the past continues to exert power over the present, as well as deeper understandings of ritualistic performances and their functions, and how space and spatial identity is crucial to regeneration of the social order, points to the possibility of a more emancipatory future.

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