

Why the Racial Politic of Colour-branding should be Discontinued

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Abstract

I examine colour-branding of humans, a phenomenon I denounce as leading to a dangerous “politic.” My lead questions shall be: Is it correct to profile or brand different peoples with colours? Do the symbolic meanings of different colours correctly describe the attributes and attitudes of peoples they are used to categorise? I argue that the mainstay colour descriptions of peoples amount to contradictions. The contradiction arises if we take into consideration the symbolic meanings of such colours on the one hand, and the human attributes on the other hand. A positive way of reading the colour-branding of peoples would be to suggest that colours are used to denote racial variety and not racial hierarchy. This suggestion is arguably a strong point, but when we take the semantics of colour and the events of history seriously, we might understand that racial subjugation is the inspiration behind colour-branding. I label the preceding “colour politic” and discuss it as the last frontier of racism.

Keywords: colour; race; politic; colour politic; colour-branding; racism; Africa

Introduction

In a review of Kwesi Tsiri’s *Africans Are Not Black*, I began by asking: Is there any human in the world whose skin pigmentation could be described as black or white or yellow or brown or coloured or red (Chimakonam 2018)? The answer is none. Why then do some people categorise fellow humans with colours, even when they know that different colours have symbolic meanings, both negative and positive? The answer is simple; politics of division, discrimination and subjugation! Moreover, do these meanings correctly describe the attributes and attitudes of different peoples they are used to categorise? For example, the colour “white” used in categorising Europeans signifies purity, and the colour “black” used in categorising Africans signifies that which is demonic or evil. One may ask, in what ways are Europeans pure



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and not evil, and in what ways are Africans evil and not pure? These questions compel us to re-think our presuppositions that humans are black or white because we have no grounds for holding such in the first place. To put it succinctly, either we are uncritical in holding the views that people are black or white, or we are acting immorally by holding such views.¹

It must be admitted that not every colour-branding of humans in history identifies racial hierarchy as its purpose. Friedrich Blumenbach (1999) claims that colours can only be used to denote human variety.² In the contemporary time, various nations employ the colour index in categorising people for administrative, policy and resources management and allocation purposes. In South Africa and the United States of America (USA), for example, racial statistics built on colour are gathered for equity in resource distribution, at least, as the official documents claim.

In South Africa, there is, however, a curious twist. It is common to see official forms list the human variety as white, African, coloured, Indian, and so forth. The curious thing here is that the racial categories “African” and “Indian” are not listed as black and brown. The preceding is because, with the fall of apartheid, the Europeans lost political power, and those who took power decided to *right* a few wrongs. It is simple; there is the recognition that these colours are intended to subordinate because they have negative symbolic meanings. However, two of the apartheid colour categories continue to be retained in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and eSwatini today, namely white and coloured. To the first category, if the countries mentioned in the preceding continue to categorise a section of their citizens as white, which symbolically means purity, superior or spotless, then they affirm the inferiority of those whom they categorise differently.

Regarding the second category, it is perhaps one of the greatest shames of the post-apartheid southern African democracies to continue categorising a section of their citizens as coloured. This is the worst of all colour categorisations. If one is categorised as coloured, it simply means that they are neither here nor there. It is a polite way of saying that those who are grouped under such a category do not have strong genetic ties to the rest of humanity. They can perhaps be likened to hybrids. For example, when the geneticists want to create a new breed of plant, they travel to Africa or South America to source the traditional species that have been around for millions of years. From such species, they create a new breed in their labs with all kinds of complications, vulnerable to a range of pests, and have to be supported and

1 By uncritical I mean we hold such positions without knowing the semantic import, and by acting immorally I mean that we understand the import but prefer to hold such incorrect presuppositions anyways—perhaps for some racist reasons.

2 But let us not forget that Kwame A. Appiah (1985) has creditably problematised the issue of racial variety. For him, there is just humanity. Skin pigmentation and other superficial features that form the basis of racial division are clearly not strong enough. Those who insist on racial division of humanity are mischief-makers!

shielded with a range of chemicals from planting to fruiting and beyond. It is in a similar fold that the category coloured places a section of southern Africa's citizens. In the animal kingdom, a coloured could be likened to a mule which is a hybrid from a male donkey and a female horse. It is usually sterile and used exclusively as a beast of burden.

In today's world, people freely use colours to describe themselves either as whites or blacks, or even coloured. Once, I met someone from Sri Lanka who described himself as brown. So, from one perspective, it does appear that colour-branding might not be racist in all cases, after all. But this perspective is an ignorant one. Those who use colours with negative meanings to categorise themselves are uncritical. They are simply ignorant of the symbolic meanings of such colours. There is also a certain group who adopts the ideas of Stokely Carmichael, Marcus Garvey and even Steve Biko who valorise some of these negative colours, especially black.³ They scream the line "black is beautiful." I have met a South African who believes that it is important for them to continue to identify as blacks. For him, identifying as blacks would enable them to highlight the injustices they suffered and continue to suffer in South Africa as a result of racism. For this person, identifying as black highlights the privilege that was and still is white in South Africa. The implication for me is that as long as they continue to identify as black, it is not only the privilege of those who identify as white that cannot be glossed over, but it is their guilt as well, as the perpetrators of apartheid. This guilt would continue to be inherited by their offspring for many generations. The white face would then remain the face of monstrous apartheid, whether in 2020 or 2080. In this way, those who perpetrated apartheid would never be forgiven. The lines of hate and disgust would continue to run deep from generation to generation until the whites all leave South Africa. Intelligent strategy one might say, but at what cost? If the whites do not leave South Africa, then what happens? There is an ongoing plan by Trade Union Solidarity to build parallel institutions for Afrikaners.⁴ Is the nation ready to sacrifice the wellbeing and happiness of many generations fighting a racial Cold War? Diversity always presents itself as a source of tension, but we have seen in a handful of places that if positively harnessed, it could be a source of indomitable strength. It is a task for philosophers to set the strategy for the positive harnessing of the energy embedded in South Africa's diversity. Valorisation of blackness is self-delusion. If one is happy to give oneself a tag that devalues one to have a pound of

3 See the *Black Power Speech* by Carmichael (1966); Garvey (1986); Biko (1987).

4 See, Staff Writer. "Solidarity is launching a R4.5 billion project—including an alternative Afrikaans school system and university." *BusinessTech*. 6 June 2019, Accessed Nov 17, 2019. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/321827/solidarity-is-launching-a-r4-5-billion-project-including-an-alternative-afrikaans-school-system-and-university/>. Many Afrikaners in recent years feel, and perhaps, justifiably so, that the government of South Africa is perpetrating a systemic programme of discrimination against them. There is widespread suspicion that the programme of affirmative action is not only being abused, it is now being deployed as a weapon.

flesh, what are the consequences of this, especially for future generations? These consequences appear to be overlooked. The philosophers who have been mouthing *ubuntu* have been unable to mechanise it into a proper tool for bridging the hiatus created by South Africa's diversity.

Even those who belong to the white group accused of the evils of apartheid are not helping matters. Some of them seem to have a self-delusionary strategy.⁵ Most boldly identify as white and categorise those on the other side as blacks. I met someone who boldly said to me: "We built this country, what did the blacks contribute? Nothing!"⁶ Now they have the political power, what are they doing with it? They are destroying what we built because they cannot build. They cannot even help their people or lift them out of poverty. They are looting public resources and inciting their people against us and foreign nationals. But I tell you this, even without political power, the white people are still doing well for themselves." I have been at conferences where some colleagues were quick to declare and impress it on others that they were white. They advertise it as a laurel of superiority,⁷ and others are quick to do the same by impressing it on you that they are blacks as a game of victimhood.⁸ As someone from another country, you are shocked to learn how deep these self-delusions run. But the healthy truth is that in the end, we are all humans with frailties. No one is superior as they think, if not for certain advantages like the development of a high culture before others, which is something other peoples would eventually reach. Those who designed apartheid wanted it to be a permanent reality. They did not know it would not survive a century. If they thought the other group was not intelligent enough, how come they torpedoed apartheid in less than 70 years? The preceding calls for mutual respect and the admission that we may not be as different as we thought. My quest in this work is that it is time to drop the colour categories that divide humanity into superior and inferior stocks.

It can be argued that most people who are quick to evoke colour to describe fellow humans have neither knowledge nor moral conviction concerning the appropriateness

5 The scandal of Orania, an Afrikaans-only town in South Africa, has yet to dissipate; and an Afrikaans-only university is being established in Pretoria. If these two strategies are not legacies of apartheid, they, at least, advance Afrikaner nationalism and remind people of apartheid. These are dangerous apparitions of apartheid.

6 I interrupted by asking, who contributed most of the labour? And he replied, "well, those where not the intellectual aspects." And I reminded him that all aspects were equally important.

7 Once I asked someone, "Can we take a practical example? Both of us are in the same profession, you are older and have been in it longer plus more privileges, but when you read your output and read mine, who would you say has a better mind?" He smiled shamefully and said, "Well, you are different." "That is where you got it all wrong," I said. "No one is different, not even me."

8 I once asked someone, "How long would you continue this victim narrative?" For me, as long as a people continue to see themselves as victims, they would continue to treat the other as villains. A line would continue to divide them meaning that apartheid would continue to manifest in different forms. The primary orientation of people caught between this line is aggression, where everything is interpreted through the straw lens of racial prejudice or reduced to the context of racism by some Africans or reverse racism by some Europeans.

of colour-branding. They are simply uncritical. Innocent as that may be, it should not be condoned. Besides this veil of innocence, there is a politic that underbellies colour-branding. The journey of colour politic began centuries ago in 1684 in the work of Carolus Linnaeus (Blumenbach, 1999), who first used colours to categorise races. But this practice of categorising peoples with colour became popular in the anthropological studies conducted by a German anatomist and physiologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Blumenbach developed a five-fold typology of human variety in his book *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* with three editions, 1775, 1781 and 1779. The typologies he mapped out are Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malay. Blumenbach then committed a slip that was later to become the bastion of racism in the modern world. In outlining the features of these five human varieties, he brought in the category of colour. He identified the Caucasian with white, the Mongolian with yellow, the Ethiopian with black, the American with copper-coloured, nowadays called red; and the Malay with tawny-coloured, nowadays called brown (Blumenbach 1999).

Although Blumenbach (1999) argues for the full humanity and equality of all races, his idea of racial degeneracy is suspect. He is of the opinion that some races—notably the black, yellow, red and brown—have suffered degeneracy due to environment and climate. He also identifies the white race as the purest and the original race from which other races not only descended but eventually degenerated. Even though he goes on to state that this degeneration does not involve moral and intellectual descent, the twin ideas of white being the original and purest race, and others suffering degeneration, set the stage for racism later in modern history.

Philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, David Hume and others eventually appropriated the colour-branding which Blumenbach had popularised in racial and political ways to elevate the European and subordinate the rest of humankind. In their uncritical attitude, they paid less heed to the morphological inaccuracy of colour-branding and instead, chose to emphasise subjective attributes and meanings which ultimately have no basis in science. Indeed, on no other subject have philosophers been as uncritical as Kant and his followers on the subject about colour racism. It is as if the spirit of the time⁹ demanded that it necessarily must be so, whether it is or not—a point which highlights the precision of my concept of “colour politic.”

My goal in this work is to demonstrate that colour-branding of humanity into white, brown, yellow, black, red, and the use of colour qualifiers like people of colour, coloureds, blacks, whites, and so forth, are 1) mischievous and political; 2) uncritical and factually incorrect; and 3) constitute discriminatory strategies which are immoral.

In this paper, I will seek to establish that the use of colour categories, whether positive or negative, could amount to “colour politic.” Colour politic for me, is “the use of

9 Slavery was crucial to the building of modern West. To admit that all humans are equal would be to bring down the system of slavery. A desirable option would be to justify it.

colour as a symbol to describe and categorise humans.” Colour politic is further characterised by intrigues and mischiefs that hierarchise and draw a discriminatory racial line between the superior and the inferior. To establish this as a fact, I will question the various ways in which this intrigue is practised and demonstrate that as symbols, colours have meanings, some positive, others negative. Also, as a specific example, I will seek to expose the racially discriminatory undertone of categorising some people with the colour black and others with the colour white. I will argue that the description of humans in terms of colours has nothing to do with the pigmentation of their skins. Since no human anywhere in the world is black, white, yellow, brown, coloured or red, using colours would be inappropriate. This research will seek to conclude that although colour-branding could be a harmless attempt to denote human variety, it can also be a racially and politically discriminatory strategy.

Racism and Colour Politic

Some scholars describe politics as a game of intrigues and manipulations or a rule-guided socio-legal activity aimed at taking advantages of a situation or dealing with people in an opportunistic way to advance interests and govern the society (Gaus 2000; Goodin and Klingemann 1998; Munroe 2002). In this work, I describe colour-branding of peoples as a politic. Could the colour-branding of people, which one may justly call the last frontier of racism, be a game of intrigues and manipulations—politics? It is the burden of this section to establish the fact or fallacy of these suppositions. I will discuss racism and colour racism. In discussing the latter, I will ask: When does colour-branding become political or racist?

Racism is one of the most difficult subjects to be discussed with honesty. This difficulty is because it is at the root of what divides and shapes humanity in the modern world. Both those who are victims of racism and those who benefit by it, come to the table with a measure of psychological commitment, either bent on condemning or vindicating. No group appears unaffected enough to approach the matter with considerable balance. Even the philosopher is a member of a group. As a result, the plainest definition of racism can easily be shown to be one-sided or representing one perspective. It is thinking like this that sparked the emergence of what is now called reverse racism.

Reverse racism refers to a strategy generally employed by those who describe themselves as whites to deny the claim that they oppress or discriminate against non-members and enjoy certain privileges. They employ the strategy of reverse racism to mount a counter-claim that when government policies support the so-called affirmative action, they make the white people victims of reverse racism. So, we see that for this group, racism would not be a one-directional act, from those called whites to the rest described as black, red, brown, coloured or yellow as the case may be. It could also be construed as an unnecessary and unjustified attack from those called black, red, brown, coloured and yellow; a lopsided award of preferential treatment to black people over white people, all to the disadvantage of those called the whites. In

South Africa, for example, race scholars are beginning to show the existence of this ideology of reverse racism (cf. Bosch 2007; Langston 1997; Nel 2011). If this case is controversial enough, then it might be safe to say that any definition of racism is perspectival. Even this conclusion is bound to spark controversy in the two camps revealing the deep-seated difficulty about the subject of racism.

Nevertheless, of the two perspectives: racism and reverse racism, the former is widely accepted as doctrinally correct while the latter is viewed largely as mischief-making or reactionary. It is, however, important to observe that there might be ways in which reverse racism could become a serious problem in society. One of such ways is when affirmative action celebrates mediocrity and discourages merit, or when it is used as a weapon to discriminate a group. The goal of affirmative action is to give more (not all) opportunities to qualified members of a marginalised group who otherwise would have competed for such opportunities. I will not go deep into this discussion on reverse racism here for lack of space and because it is strictly not the focus of this work.

But how may we define racism? The *INTER Group*, an association of scholars committed to a fight against racism, defines racism as an act of discriminating against a person because of their colour or race (*INTER Group* 2017). Another, perhaps, more extended definition can be found in the online *Dictionary* resource, which conceives racism as: 1) “A belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one’s own race is superior and has the right to rule others; 2) A policy, system of government, etc., based upon or fostering such a doctrine; discrimination; 3) Hatred or intolerance of another race or other races” (Dictionary.com 2017). Also, for Carlos Hoyt Jr, racism is “the belief that all members of a purported race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or other races” (Hoyt 2012). Hoyt’s definition above is the same as that offered by Matthew Clair and Jeffrey Denis (2015) in which the notions of superiority, inferiority and discrimination feature prominently. From the above definitions, we can see that the idea of discrimination or mistreatment on the basis of morphological differences is central to the understanding of racism (see Charles et al. 2015; Hutto and Green 2016). Thus, one can firmly conceive racism or any racist act as a systemic subordination of a people and privileging of another using the inferior/superior framework based on erroneous beliefs such as skin colour and ethnicity. In most cases, the racial mistreatment of people because of their skin colour affects their performance in their workplaces. James Jones (2017) employs the notion of “black nod” to characterise the adaptive strategy Africans, for example, resort to for survival in America’s raced institutions. Although as Jason Shelton (2017) cautiously observes, racial inequality in America’s institutions may be interpreted differently by people of different races. The fact remains that, at least, there is a minimal consensus that such inequality exists. In recent articles, Michael Robinson (2017) and Dale Craig Tatum (2017) discuss in detail the thriving of racism in American institutions. While

Robinson shows how racism inspires repeated police killing of unarmed African American males categorised as black, Tatum shows how Donald Trump won the American presidential election by simply appealing to racist tendencies of those who categorise themselves as white. Granted the above definitions, it is not difficult to see the centrality of skin colour in the whole endeavour of racism. The influence of colour is what this section is set to investigate. How did the colour-branding of people begin and how does it manifest today?

Margo Adair and Sharon Powell in their book *The Subjective Side of Politics* (1988), explain that the concept of whiteness as attributed to the European was first introduced in the USA by Virginia slave owners and colonial rulers in the 17th century. Before then, they argue, concepts such as “Christian” and “Englishman,” which suggest the religious, cultural and linguistic categorisation of peoples, were used. But with the introduction of the concept of whiteness or simply white, a distinction was drawn between European colonists and Africans as well as the indigenous peoples, which introduced the superior/inferior dynamics. However, earlier as Adair and Powell observe, the European colonial authorities introduced white as a legal concept. This legal distinction of white was to separate the inferior race through skin colour. Adair and Powell go on to declare that “The creation of ‘white’ meant giving privileges to some while denying them to others with the justification of biological and social inferiority” (Adair and Powell 1988).

Thus, we can see that there is something hideous about the colour concepts employed to categorise humanity. The idea behind colour-branding especially, and since the modern time, arguably is one that is aimed at subordinating if not an outright denial of full humanity to some people. Concrete proof is the high spate of racism in the world today. Moreover, it cannot be gainsaid that the motives are primarily economic and power play. Why did some people desperately want to establish that fellow humans are inferior to them or are not human enough? It is because they wanted cheap labour, raw materials and the power to control sections of the world to themselves alone. For all this, human beings had to create the idea of race divisions and from it created racism to achieve ambitions which otherwise should be unacceptable. Ronald Chisom and Michael Washington put it succinctly that “[A] specious classification of human beings created by Europeans (whites) which assigns human worth and social status using ‘white’ as the model of humanity and the height of human achievement for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power” (Chisom and Washington 1997). The preceding position is a firm corroboration of my idea of colour politic.

So the question is: At what point did colour-branding begin? Despite many scholars attempting to gloss over this historical moment, it must be stated that the colour-branding of peoples began with Homer. It only achieved a re-birth in the modern time in Blumenbach and those before him before exploding in Kant, Meiners and Jefferson.

It was Homer (700–800 BC) and in the ancient Greek literature generally that we first read the description of Africans as *Aethiops* which means burnt-face (see Goldenberg 2009; Verkerk 2001). Africans are believed to live in the hot climate, and the sun is thought to have charred their skin into blackness. Although some may argue that Homer’s categorisation has no clear racist intent, it cannot at the same time be absolved of colour-branding. We know that when something is burnt, it becomes charred and the naming of the African along this line amounts to colour-branding.

In 1492, the foremost idea of racism was created by the Spanish Inquisition to chase out the Moors who have ruled the Iberian Peninsula since 721 AD and occupy the territory (see Smeldly and Smeldly 2011). Interestingly, this creation of racism was done by the Christian kingdom of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella using the notorious cliché: “blood lens testing or *limpieza de sangra*.” Thus the Inquisition established the racist practice of “*limpieza de sangra*” which means “testing the blood and family line.” Dark blood of the Moor signifies non-Christian. During the period, every Moor was sent out along with all the people in whose family tree at least one “dark” blood was found (see Smeldly and Smeldly 2011). It remains to be explained how being an African logically makes one a non-Christian or one who could never be a Christian. Contrast the Spanish model of “one dark blood” with the United States’ model of “one-drop rule,” which was a social grouping in which any person who has an African root was considered a “Negro” and a slave in pre-abolition times (Davis 2001). Again, it remains to be explained how being an African makes one a slave. But these two similar historical events tell us about an order enmeshed in the tactic of dichotomising humanity and creating inequality amongst humans using colour categories for economic benefits. It is a politic of some sort.

Despite the two cases above, Charlotte Reading (2013) tells us that “[T]he concept of race as a category of identity did not emerge until Europeans began to colonize other continents.” This claim is also obvious in Charles Loring Brace (2002). The preceding suggests that colonialism is directly responsible for the creation or emergence of modern racism. This position may be incorrect if we take into consideration other, more compelling factors. For example, the 1400s to 1600s AD was noted for great adventures in sea navigations. These travels led Europeans to become aware of other lands and peoples. The historians and people of letters inevitably had to do their jobs by documenting findings and knowledges from these exotic lands. Some of the things they wrote have now been faulted in modern time. For example, the idea of “race” has been shown by some modern researchers to have no basis in science (Appiah 1992; Brace 2002; Holladay 2000).

We have also observed other knowledge contributions from the past like the idea of navigational “cardinal points” which—and it must be granted—have been very useful for the advancement of human civilisation. It is in this context and with the resources supplied by these travellers that the anthropologists of that time wrote about the varieties of humans in our world. The first travellers to sub-Saharan Africa, beginning

with the Portuguese (Ross 2002), were not colonisers. Most of them were traders who unfortunately decided somewhere along the line to include humans among their choice merchandise. Thus began the slave trade; and then much later, they decided to set up permanent trade posts which eventually led to colonisation. It would be a misrepresentation of history to blame the creation of the spurious idea of “race” on colonialism, as Reading (2013) and Brace (2002) have done in the above. What we may grant under this circumstance is that colonialism exacerbated the ideas of race and racism. What happened in the Iberia Peninsula in 1492 AD, where the King of Spain expelled the Moors who were inhabitants of the land on the basis of dark African bloodline, was racism, but it was not influenced by colonialism. Indeed, if anything at all influenced racism, the type we have come to experience in our time; it would be slavery and slave trade. Of course, before the Spanish landed the first batch of slaves in the New World taken from West Africa in 1526, the Arabs had gained notoriety for slave trade. It strikes the mind more pungently that enslaving other humans, which is dehumanising, was the likely impetus to the idea of race gradation and consequently, racism. One could even argue more straightforwardly that slavery, besides economic factors, inspired colonisation of other lands where peoples deemed inferior to the European stock were found. One wonders why those who blame colonisation for the emergence of race and racism choose to leave out a more obvious evil, slavery. Here again, we must underscore some politics.

However, not all race projects in the past were aimed at racism. Research shows that some of those who first theorised on race did so as a knowledge-creating endeavour rather than for the advancement of colonialism as supposed by Reading (2013). Blumenbach (1999) reports that a certain anonymous writer in a work of 1684 was the first to produce a division of humankind into four races. As he put it:

First, one of all Europe, Lapland alone excepted, and Southern Asia, Northern Africa, and the whole of America; secondly, that of the rest of Africa; thirdly, that of the rest of Asia with the islands towards the east; fourthly, the Lapps. (Blumenbach 1999)

Blumenbach did not know who authored the work he was quoting. Modern documentation system and cross-referencing technologies may have been of help to Tzvetan Todorov (1993), who in his book *On Human Diversity* cites the same anthropological source as did Blumenbach but credits it to a man called Francois Bernier. So, I want to believe that this was the same person Blumenbach had referenced as anonymous in 1795 and credited with the first known racial division of humanity. After Bernier, Leibnitz was next to divide humanity into four races of two extremes, Laplanders and Ethiopians; and two intermediaries, Eastern (Mongolian) and Western (European) (Blumenbach 1999). After Leibnitz, it was the turn of Carolus Linnaeus who, in a work of 1735 classified people based on geographical differences. As Blumenbach put it: “Linnaeus, following common geography divided men into: 1) the red American; 2) the white European; 3) the dark Asiatic; and 4) the black Negro (Blumenbach 1999). According to C. L. Brace (2005), Linnaeus further

classified Europeans as cheerful, Asiaticus as melancholy, Americanus as aggressive, and Africanus as sluggish. These scholars, it must be admitted, did not betray any intentions of racial subordination. Articulating theories of human physiology and variety seems to have characterised their research activities. But Blumenbach (1999) further gave a list of many others who provided racial division for humanity after Linnaeus. This list includes; Governor Pownall, Abbe de la Croix, Immanuel Kant, John Hunter, Zimmermann, Meiners, Klugel and Metzger. Some of these people, like Meiners, Kant, Hunter and Metzger cannot be absolved from racial intent completely. Some of these characters provided as many as seven divisions and as few as two. What is common among the various racial divisions they provided is the idea of colour. Concepts like black, white, red, brown, yellow, Negro, Ethiopia, were recurrent, except for Meiners who used the more insidious terms, ugly and handsome. These colour symbolisms and categorisations were also prominent in the five racial classifications Blumenbach eventually provided. He describes the Caucasian with the colour white; the Mongolian with yellow; the Ethiopian with black; the American with red and the Malay with brown (Blumenbach 1999).

Expectedly, these racial divisions eventually influenced attitudes in modern time and sparked off various acts of discrimination among humans. Some societies enacted laws and made policies affecting fellow human beings based on race. Perhaps, it should be stated that what made “race” so notorious arguably, is colour-branding. Colours have symbolic meanings, as Kwesi Tsri (2016a) tells us. White means purity, just as black means evil or demonic. These are two extremes. Every other colour falls within these two. To employ any colour as an insignia of a people is tantamount to categorising and describing such people in terms of the meanings associated with such colours. So if one is described as black, dark or categorised as a Negro or Ethiopian, then that gestures toward an inferior human stock and inspires discriminatory attitudes towards the person or people.

But this seems to be all politics! First, scientists and biologists have established that race is a spurious idea (see Appiah 1992; Fairbanks 2015). Second, no human being in the world is white or black or yellow or brown or red in skin colour. If these two positions are correct, then why is there colour-branding of peoples? If the idea of colour is deleted from all the racial divisions presented above, it would be difficult to see how “race” could have become such a powerful instrument of oppression in the world. For example, Blumenbach describes the Caucasian as follows:

I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighbourhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian; and because all physiological reasons converge to this, that in that region, if anywhere, it seems we ought with the greatest probability to place the autochthones of mankind. For in the first place, that stock displays, as we have seen, the most beautiful form of the skull, from which, as from a mean and primeval type, the others diverge by most easy gradations on both sides to the two ultimate extremes (that is, on the one side the Mongolian, on the other the Ethiopian). Besides, it is white

in colour, which we may fairly assume to have been the primitive colour of mankind, since, as we have shown above, it is very easy for that to degenerate into brown, but very much more difficult for dark to become white, when the secretion and precipitation of this carbonaceous pigment has once deeply struck root. (Blumenbach 1999)

Even though Blumenbach distanced himself from racism, it is descriptions like the one above that enabled racism to take root in modern time. His description of races suggests differences amongst peoples of the world. And it is this description that colonisers, uncritical scholars and mis-informed politicians like South Africa's apartheid leader, P. W. Botha cashed out on to theorise an ideology about the superiority of some and the inferiority of the rest in modern time (see Botha 1985a; 1985b). Audrey Smeldly and Brian Smeldly (2011), in the 4th edition of their book, talk of this spurious ideology, trumped up in the academia and by policymakers as something that depicts racial categories as exclusive, natural and enduring. This depiction is, however, incorrect as it arises straight out of a baseless worldview inspired by centuries of the gradual transformation of the racial divisions into hard-core racism (Smeldly and Smeldly 2011). To make things clear, Daniel J. Fairbanks (2015), in a recent book, *Everyone is African: How Science Explodes the Myth of Race*, not only describes race as a myth but uses the results from the study of the human genes to show that the idea of race is false. It has no bases in either biology or psychology. So, according to Reading (2013), the likes of "Georges Buffon, Petrus Camper, Christoph Meiners and Thomas Jefferson who promoted a more oppressive ideology in which Caucasians were generally viewed as superior to other races, and particularly to people who had been classified as Negroid or American Indian," were grossly mistaken and political.

The preceding point, it must be stated, was emphasised by Blumenbach who reviewed the works of some of these early promoters of racial difference. He had argued quite forcefully that race was about human variety and had no bases in the idea of superior-inferior dynamics. For example, he writes that the Ethiopian is in every way the same as other humans and shares similar characteristics with other humans. He criticised those who drew this framework of biological difference among humans as ignorant and misguided (Blumenbach 1999).

However, the point we want to make here is that there might be political overtones to the colour-branding strategy in today's world; and this strategy has economic and political goals. People want more money and power to themselves. To obtain money, there is a need for more resources, and to get a hold on this size of resource, one needs more power to control fellow human beings. These two objectives drove the slave trade, and when it was outlawed, colonialism was established to replace it. When colonialism expired, neo-colonialism was devised to sustain these two goals. It looks pretty difficult to have a world where some people want what belongs to others and a world where all humans are treated as equal. Cashing out on the racial divisions to

promote racism was a strategy to justify the maltreatment and deprivations that deny, rob and usurp what belongs to other peoples.

The reason why colour-branding has been such a huge success in fanning the embers of racism is because of the symbolism of colour. One can easily employ colour innocently to present a hideous message. This is the effect all other strategies like ethnicism, clannish orientation, racial propaganda, privileged and less-privileged framework, sex, language, culture, religion, and so forth, lacked. Colours have underlying meanings which are, for the most part very powerful as they evoke “very powerful” mental images. “White” for example, appears very simple on the face value but it is the meaning it carries that straightforwardly dehumanises those categorised as non-whites. “Black” on the other hand may appear very innocuous, but it is its underlying meaning that places an eternal curse of segregation, subordination, discrimination and, which is worse, inhumanity on anyone or people categorised as black(s) or indeed, in any of its cognates. In the next section, I will attempt to question the moral basis of this colour-branding of peoples.

Interrogating Colour-branding of Peoples

In his *Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois declared more than a century ago that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (Du Bois 1989). This declaration has become eponymous not only for the twentieth century, but for the twenty-first also. Everywhere in the world today, we see colour-line determining policies and actions, some of which are divisive. Take the example of Israel and Palestine, West and Arab, The world and Africa, European Americans and Native Americans as well as African Americans; the list is long. It is hard to comprehend, but it is true that “colour” stands as a wedge between peoples of the world who believe in the reality of race—and it is race that gives birth to racism. According to Clair and Denis (2015), we cannot comprehend racism without first comprehending the idea of race.

Almost every book on race tells us that racism was not an issue in the ancient times—that the ancients categorised and described peoples with language, culture and religion (Hannaford 1996). The point it seems is to establish that race became an issue when Europeans began to colonise other lands. I have, however, rejected this conclusion earlier in favour of the historically correct facts about European greed and desire to usurp the resources of other lands and acquire more power to control, necessitated by the waning resources in Europe at that time. Colour-branding as a strategy was employed to justify the inhuman measures undertaken by European nations to achieve the twin goals of resources and power. But colour-branding is as spurious as it is despicable. This is because these colours were used symbolically. I have my reservation with this popular timeline in which colour racism is placed within the modern period by some scholars. For example, Kwesi Tsri has informed us that in the centuries before Christ’s era, the Greeks, as Homer recorded, referred to the people from the African sub-continent as *Aethiops*, which means burnt-face (Tsri 2016b).

Even though scholars like Gay Byron (2002), Mason Hammond (1948) and some others acquiesced to the absence of colour categories in the ancient times, others like Robert Hood (1994), Frank Snowden (1971) and Lloyd Thompson (1989) recorded that Homer, the revered ancient Greek poet, was the first to employ colour categorisation for Africans when he described them as *Aethiops* or sun-burnt-face or sun-darkened face. Well, it can be argued that whatever is burnt by fire, or in this case the blaze of the sun, is bound to be dark or charred or black. No one would say that the appellation “burnt-face” is racially complementary, let alone colour neutral.

We may even have to rewind to the 13th and 12th centuries BCE, a couple of centuries behind Homer, to see the first recorded artistic colour representations of humans in ancient Egyptian tomb paintings. David Goldenberg in his book, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Goldenberg 2003), referred to the ancient Egypt where tomb paintings were excavated to reveal that Egyptians represented different peoples with colours. What is different, however, is that none of those artistic paintings betrayed racial intent. The Egyptian was painted in the red-brown. It shows that all they wanted to do was to identify nationalities rather than to construct a racial hierarchy for different peoples.

Aside from all these histories, what is the moral burden of colour-branding? If colour-branding of peoples is immoral, why is it so? Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann in their book, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (1996), make some eye-catching assertions. For Appiah, race does not exist. It is something some people have created to draw a line between humans. On the basis of colour alone, some people torpedo the democratic ideals of equality and freedom in the human society. Appiah concludes by saying that “there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves; while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism, I shall argue, if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities” (Appiah and Gutmann 1996). Appiah’s submission is an ethical position similar to ethical naturalism, which is a doctrine that upholds “objective moral properties of which we have empirical knowledge, but that these properties are reducible to entirely non-ethical or natural properties, such as needs, wants or pleasures” (Mastin 2008). It is a moral doctrine like naturalism that compels us to look beyond the surface scratch of racism, and see deeper into its hideous consequences as it affects everyday needs and desires. We do not want a violent and unstable society. It is difficult for a society to be just, stable and safe if racial discrimination denies some equality, freedom, humanity and rights, based on colour categorisation.

In her contribution, Gutmann (in Appiah and Gutmann 1996) reckons that the ideals of a democratic society include equity, freedom, human rights, integrity and justice for all citizens. She agrees that this cannot be the case where racism prevails. Racism makes it possible for a section of the people to discriminate, subordinate and treat the rest inhumanely. As a result, in the American society, which she regards as a prototype

of a racist society, there is an imbalance. She then engages with the dilemma of colour-blindness and colour-consciousness with regards to public policies. She argues that in order to actualise the goal of a democratic society, which is the equitable treatment of all citizens, it may be necessary to set colour-blindness aside and enact colour-conscious policies such as affirmative action. This strategy will make it possible to leverage the section of the population who have suffered the brunt of racism. Although colour-blindness may be the policy that best represents the democratic ideal, in the context of racism, a carefully guided colour-conscious strategy may be what is best to balance the existing anomaly created by racism (Appiah and Gutmann 1996). Again, like Appiah in the above, Gutmann goes for a moral position akin to John Rawls's justice as fairness. Recall that Rawls, in his *A Theory of Justice* (1999), prescribes two prominent principles of justice, namely the principle of equal liberty and that of difference. Rawls states them as follows:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls 1999)

Together, these principles undergird Rawls's conception of justice as fairness which describes a system of just allocation of primary goods. The principle of difference in particular appeals directly to Gutmann's (in Appiah and Gutmann 1996) recommendation about colour-conscious public policies. In a way, Gutmann's recommendation implies doing what may not be consistent with democratic principles to achieve the goal of a democratic set-up. Appiah (in Appiah and Gutmann 1996) would not have this, even though the achievement of the ideals of democracy is something he cherishes above all else. But denying race and enacting colour-blind public policies, as his position tends to suggest, is most likely going to keep the racially marginalised down for a long time. Here, therefore, is the dilemma.

From the above, one can see that the politics that stem from colour-branding have become a moral issue that gives birth to at least three problems, namely:

1. The dilemma of colour-blindness and colour-consciousness.
2. Categorisation of human (attributes) with colour symbolism.
3. Categorisation of human (attitudes) with colour symbolism.

Addressing these problems shall be the high point of this section. There is a dilemma created over colour-blindness and colour-consciousness. Should the policies of a once racist society that now wishes to take steps to transcend racism be formulated colour-blind or colour-conscious? If the former, then those people who had been subordinated and marginalised to a level of great disadvantage in the past would have no respite and would not be leveraged out of disadvantageous position. If the latter, then it seems that racism in that society has not been stopped but has only been transformed. For the

danger of perpetuating racism in different forms, Appiah (in Appiah and Gutmann 1996) tends to favour a colour-blind strategy. And for the respite of those who have been devastated by racism and who need some salvaging, Gutmann (in Appiah and Gutmann 1996) crafts a strategy of colour-consciousness that aids the achievement of the goals of colour-blind strategy. Straight-up colour-blindness, it appears, has its critics. One of the most vociferous in recent scholarship is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. It was Bonilla-Silva (2006) who drew the attention of race scholars that colour-blindness could be a strategy that racists exploit to talk nasty about blacks, for example, without sounding racist. The point raised is that there are several ways to make colour-conscious remarks by using any colour cognates. Thus mere abolition of colour-conscious racism may not stop racism. In fact, Benjamin Bowser (2017) argues in a recent paper that what colour-blindness does is lead to colour-blind racism. It does not stop racism. What stops racism are positive actions not only to punish but to redress the moral ills, harms and rots which racism has created in the lives of its victims. And if this entails using a strategy of colour-consciousness, like the type advocated by Gutmann in the above, then that deserves consideration.

The second fallout from our discussion is the categorisation of human attributes with colour symbolism. Again, this carries an enormous moral burden. Colours are symbols which have meanings. The symbolism of colour is so powerful that it can be used as a communication mechanism like signs. Humans tend to capture the meanings of different colours quite easily and almost without ambiguity. Granted that in various societies, different public agencies that make use of colours to communicate to citizens, have programmes and leaflets which explain the meanings, it is a natural tendency in humans to glean the meaning of colours when used in any context. Some of these colours have positive meanings, like white and its cognates, while others have negative meanings like black, red, and their cognates. It ruffles no skin when black or red is used to designate nuclear waste. Humans have to have a way of warning themselves about the presence of danger. This approach is a symbolic use of colour, and there is nothing immoral about it. It is the categorical use of colours that carries a moral burden because it is employed to describe human beings. So, a moral problem arises when humans are categorised with colour, especially when positive colours are used to categorise some people and negative ones are used to categorise others. The former is like a neatly printed sign “mind the glass,” while the latter is like a thickly painted warning signpost “danger, keep off.” This approach becomes a case of colour-conscious racism. The colour-branding of some people as black or red or yellow, and so forth, is like hanging a stay off sign around a human being as he walks on the street. Racism, in this way, is one of the most disgusting inventions of humanity. Incidentally, those guilty of this hideous act of colour-branding want to give us the impression that colour-branding is a way of representing the attributes of different variety of humans. Some of such actors contend, for example, that the person from sub-Saharan Africa has a black skin (Brace 2002). Others go on to explain, as if being professional, that this was due to the heat of the sun (Goldenberg 2009; Verkerk 2001). Some try to be a little patronising that this blackness is only surface-deep

(Blumenbach 1999). But the question is: Are Africans black? Tsri (2016b) has argued that Africans are not black. Indeed, it is obvious to common sense that no human being has black skin. Tsri argues that:

... the use of the terms “black” and “white” as human categories, together with the symbolic use of these terms, help to sustain the perception of Africans as inferior, because their categorical use was accompanied by a long-standing set of conceptual relationships that used the terms symbolically to connote a range of bad and good traits, respectively. This set of associations creates an underlying semantic system that normalised the assumed superiority of those labelled white and the assumed inferiority of those labelled black. The use of this dichotomy as a human categorising device cannot be separated from its symbolic use. (Tsri 2016b)

Based on the above argument, Tsri (2016b) urges egalitarians to abandon either the symbolic or the categorical use of colour-branding as we pointed out above. He supports the abandonment of the categorical use of colour to brand peoples since the negative use is deeply embedded in the English language and Christianity.

The third is the categorisation of human attitudes with colour symbolism, which is a moral issue. Racists, especially beginning from the 18th century, wanted to give the impression that skin colour was a sign of behavioural and mental traits. If your skin was white, then you were intelligent, morally upright and humane. If your skin was black or degraded, then it was proof that you were unintelligent, morally debase and wild as a beast (see Bartlett 2001; Bernal 1987; Snowden 1971). Meiners, for example, had a vulgar way of classifying races as earlier stated. For him, all nations can be divided into two; handsome and ugly, while the former refers to whites; the latter refers to blacks (Blumenbach 1999). Thus, for Meiners, everything about the attitudes of those whose skins are described as white, including morals, is beautiful and nice, whereas, for those whose skins are described as black, their attitudes necessarily have to be ugly and evil. A confirmation that this trend of thought is dominant in the mainstream of European scholarship, beginning from the Enlightenment, could be found in the views of David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel.

The African philosopher, Tsenay Serequeberhan reports that “Hume and Kant held the view that Africans, in virtue of their blackness, are precluded from the realm of reason and civilization” (Serequeberhan 1991). By any standard, this is a moral judgement. According to Hume, “I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general, all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any complexion than white” (Popkin 1977–1978). For Kant, “[s]o fundamental is the difference between the two races of men, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color... this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Popkin 1977–1978). Georg Hegel, the German philosopher, was perhaps the one that made the most of associating skin colour with attitudes. In his *Lectures on the*

Philosophy of World History (1975), he made a handful of controversial remarks. For example, Hegel claimed that:

*Africa proper ... has no historical interest of its own, for we find its inhabitants living in barbarism and savagery in a land which has not furnished them with any integral ingredient of culture ... it is ... the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of night ... they behaved with the most unthinking inhumanity and revolting barbarity ... The characteristic feature of the negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity—for example, of God or the law—in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being ... All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism, and he remains in this state to the present day. The negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness ... Thus, in Africa as a whole, we encounter what has been called the *state of innocence* ... This primitive state of nature is in fact a state of animality. (Hegel 1975)*

From the above, it is easy to read the mainstream European mind of the Enlightenment Age that assumed quite in error that skin colour which they have assigned to various peoples, bears witness to the contents of peoples' characters.

However, this categorical representation of peoples with colour has no substance in reality, as both biology and science generally have not been able to establish character and intellectual differences amongst peoples (Holladay 2000). Where does this leave us? Clearly, it shows that a racist mindset which draws the superior-inferior line between peoples based on colour is not only mistaken, but immoral. Even though Theodore Allen (1994), in his *The Invention of the White Race*, explains that the idea of the concept of race is to create and sustain hierarchical boundaries in human species, those hierarchies are not real; they are mere illusions and as such constitute an immoral strategy. So, in essence, the Western world feeds on illusion to sustain the perpetuation of the evil of racism on other peoples. The immorality associated with colour-politic is exactly the main reason colour-branding of humans should be discontinued.

Conclusion

One country, in which colour-branding and the politic that results from it are strong, is South Africa. The politic of colour determines almost everything, including philosophical discussions. It appears that the only discussion that is not taking place, at least seriously, is the one on colour politic. In South Africa, Europeans are comfortable retaining the label “white” because it makes them superior, and Africans are comfortable retaining the label “black” because it makes them victims and the other, villains. However, we must talk about this colour politic and the devastating consequences it has for all sides.

In today's South Africa, due to the consequences of apartheid, a wide range of topics has been sensationalised—even in academic circles. The philosopher is no longer at liberty to inquire about any topic that catches his/her attention. The social thinker has no freedom to think about any subject that generates questions without running the risk of being given a damning label or accused of one thing or another. Even the classroom, which is the best training ground for young philosophers, is tensed. Many topics, examples and thought experiments are tabooed. "Reason" is under siege! It is in captivity of colour politics! Some female students would interpret everything the teacher, or indeed, fellow students say through the lens of feminist apartheid. The same goes for students on different sides of racial divides; everything is processed through the prism of racialism. The teacher faces a panel of partial judges instead of curious students. Amongst themselves, students face enemies rather than their peers. It is like a game of rugby, the tackles lack empathy, and the engagements are hardly objective or constructive. Pitiably is the condition of non-South Africans; they must carefully choose their words, examples, thought experiments, and so forth, or be caught in a crossfire. As a result of colour politics, some students are so racially charged that they do not know how to ask questions or even enjoy productive interactions in a class. What these students know is confrontation. Philosophy, for them, is a weapon not against ignorance but a fellow human being. Unfortunately, no one, no philosopher wants to write about these things because the extreme has become *right*, and the forbidden has become the norm. But, are we no longer philosophers? Do we no longer owe certain debts and obligations to our societies? It is hard to see how a society like South Africa can rise from the ashes of apartheid if colour politics is not vanquished and the *freedom to think* universalised.

Apartheid may have ended, but there is a racial Cold War fuelled by colour politics which is ongoing in South Africa. You see it everywhere. Residential neighbourhoods are still very much segregated. High electric fences and a myriad of private security companies dot the cities. The streets are lit in fear. Even the university campuses are centres of colour tension: European, Indian and African students congregate separately, sometimes they sit along colour lines in the classrooms. It is obvious, there are no universities in South Africa, or, at least, the universities fail in upholding the values and ideals of a true university.¹⁰ Show me the universities in a country, and I will describe the soul of the country to you.

Colour politics is the last frontier of racism. With it, one can make a lot of racist remarks without using any of the known slurs, for example, identifying as a colour discounts others who could not be so identified. But worse than this, it draws a

10 A true university is international not merely in the sense of diversity but in collaboration. It is a universe, a coming together and a working together. Its goals include learning, research, nation-building, but above all, promotion of collaboration and freedom of inquiry. Banding together along racial lines, as we see in South African universities, defeats everything a university stands for. And regrettably, the orientation of the university, most often, determines the orientation of the society it is situated.

divisive line which might have damning meaning for those on the other side. If one identifies as “white,” which symbolically means pure, they are calling others “black,” meaning demonic, or “red,” meaning dangerous, or “coloured,” meaning lacking in originality. In the post-apartheid South Africa, if one identifies as “black,” they are calling those who identify as “white” villains, monsters or architects of apartheid. In this way, white becomes a badge for apartheid evils. I am not sure anyone in their right mind would love to wear this horrendous badge, much less pass it on to their offspring. So, when one identifies as black, white or coloured, they are fostering colour-branding and perpetrating colour politics, which is the last frontier of racism.

There is a manifestation of the self/other problem in every country of the world. But it is in South Africa that the colour line seems to have found its most hideous expression. Apartheid was a despicable system which brought generational hardship on so many people. The preceding truth must sincerely be acknowledged by all and measures to redress it must be taken. But we must also know that, even if all the actors of apartheid were to be lined up and hanged, it would not atone for the evils of one of the most terrible systems humankind has ever seen. The evils of apartheid are simply too much, but we cannot afford to allow it to shape our future. The point is that in learning from the past to construct the future, we must endeavour not to allow the past to model the future. The post-apartheid period has become an era of racial Cold War instigated by colour politic. We must talk about these things rather than taboo them. The philosopher must not sit on the fence or be committed to one side. There has to be a conversation, a philosophical one. The consequences of colour-branding and politic are some of the topics we must discuss. We must tear down colour politic wherever in this world it exists, set reason free from its current captivity, and let humans be humans again.

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