

Ebony and Ivory in imperfect harmony - Re-experiencing music education at the University of Cape Town

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In this paper, I re-experienced my time as a music education student from 1973 to 1976 at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I used an autoethnography, based on autobiographical memory work, interviews, archival visits, and literature reviews, to re-experience my life as a Coloured² music student at a former White higher education institution during apartheid. A critical, reflexive, and interpretive-analytic paradigm informed this autoethnographic study, which was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). My study was analytical and interpretive of the self but simultaneously culture, society, and the institution, with its racist and hegemonic practices, were critiqued. My contestation of my Coloured identity at UCT in the mid-1970s was underpinned by the philosophical and sociological conceptualisation of the intersections of race, racism, class, and music. As such, in this paper, I regard normalised and taken-for-granted White supremacy as a powerful force and argue that it played, and continues to play, an active role in perpetuating structural inequality at higher education institutions.

Keywords: autoethnography; Coloured; music education; race; racism

Introduction

This study was inspired by John Dewey's notion of the centrality of experiential learning and lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Our lives are filled with stories of our personal lived experiences, telling us who we were, who we are, and who we strive to be. Our identities and actions are multiple, complex, and complicated as we are positioned differently along various axes of power and within a nexus of shifting relations and contexts. As such, lived experiences do not occur in a social

² The term Coloured in South Africa refers to a phenotypical group of people with varied cultural and geographic origins due to slavery and racially-mixed sexual relationships. During apartheid, the racial classification system in South Africa distinguished between Whites, Coloureds, Africans (Blacks), and Indians. In South Africa, the racial denomination 'Coloured' has a different meaning from what it means internationally. However, the conceptualisation of Black is, at times, used to refer to Coloureds, Africans, and Indians. It does not mean Black in dominant and popular discourses historically and contemporaneously.

and cultural vacuum. Responses to the world in which we live are not individualistic (auto) but relational (ethnographic) as they mirror and affect the social and cultural context in which we exist. Since we are not isolated from the world in which we live, we are influenced by our family, peers, colleagues, institutions, and the structures of society. In the same manner, our educational struggles cannot be isolated from the societal, cultural, and political contexts in which we find ourselves (Apple & Buras, 2006). Hence, we construct knowledge of ourselves experientially through past, present, and future experiences of life (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This autoethnography unfolds within the South African racialised context, which Soudien (2009, p. 146) describes as a ‘social laboratory’ rooted in pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial apartheid ideologies. In the first instance, South Africa experienced imperialism and colonisation by the European settlers from the 17th century. This led to the appropriation of resources and the disruption of the indigenous cultures of the region and was complemented by the brutal exploitation of those who were not White. This was motivated by the Fanonian concept of Whiteness as a fantasy created by the European imagination, and Black³ men and women as figures and objects. The fantasy of Whiteness became a reality, dogma, and form of desire, which had to be ‘cultivated, nourished, reproduced, [and] disseminated by a set of theological, cultural, political, economic, and institutional mechanisms’ (Mbembe, 2017, p. 45). In other words, Whiteness became a powerful tool to rule and manifest control over Black objects almost with a sense of fascination and terror. This was further entrenched through the creation of White institutional and legal ivory towers where the ebony was not tolerated and could hardly gain access. Through this exclusion, the voice of the Black object was often silenced in research and instead regarded as an object to be studied.

³ Black in this instance refers to African, Coloured, and Indians.

The end of the 20th century brought about an epistemological and ontological crisis, which Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 12) describe as a ‘turning point’ or the ‘seventh moment of inquiry.’ With the emphasis on decolonisation, it became imperative that social research required a reconfigured approach that would challenge authority, representation, and research practice in an unjust post-colonial context. This turning point had implications for what was to be accepted as truthful and how research should be conducted ethically. In the case of South Africa, this meant a scholarly engagement with colonialism and apartheid with its associated discriminatory practices. Research thus required that social issues such as race, racism, gender, and class had to be foregrounded. Consequently, the emerging feminist movement and Black philosophers contested White-owned Western and orthodox epistemologies with their presumed neutrality on issues such as race and racism. Critical researchers called for critical and radically performative research that contested the problems surrounding race, oppression, inequality, and injustice (Conquergood, 2003a, 2003b). This resulted in epistemological, methodological, and ethical introspection (Conquergood, 2003a). The decolonisation of research therefore demanded situated research in which the researcher became embodied in the research site and the research condition and in which the researcher could not be detached from the research process. In this regard, autoethnography, as a research methodology, serves to contest the notion of a simplistic and cultureless scientific approach to race and racial oppression. This is done by allowing an authentic discussion of issues of race through the voice of the Black oppressed itself.

My autoethnography as a music education student at UCT is deeply influenced by the ‘dark and bitter times’ (Denzin, 2003, p. 257) of apartheid and the oppression that Black people experienced. Against this backdrop, Soudien (2012) and Erasmus (2017) postulate that the South African individual is confronted with two significant post-apartheid predicaments: firstly, one has to develop the ability to know and take care of oneself, and

secondly, they hypothesise that South Africans are faced with the challenge to appreciate other human beings and take care of their well-being. In this regard, Erasmus (2017) regards humanity as being a verb, that is, something that we should do to others. Hence, she believes that we should humanise in order to create a better society. In this autoethnography, I am attempting to take care of myself and my story at UCT during the period of 1973 to 1976, and, in so doing, hopefully take care of others.

My route towards studying music education at UCT

My mother gave birth to me in our two-roomed rented house in Verlatekloof (meaning lonely ravine in Afrikaans), a Coloured area as per apartheid legislation, in the small agricultural town of Wellington in the then Cape Province (now the Western Cape). I was the youngest of seven children of my working-class parents. I was born into a working-class Coloured family, with a nominally-literate father and a mother who was working in the kitchens of White families. As a child, I was exposed to different styles of music in the Coloured community of Wellington, such as Christmas bands, Coon Carnivals, ballroom dance bands, as well as church and community vocal and choral groups. My father, a self-taught musician, played the banjo, an instrument generally associated with the 'lowbrow' (Nuccio, Guerzoni, & Katz-Gerro, 2018) and aural-tradition Coon Carnival music of the Coloureds. My siblings performed self-taught 'doo-wop' vocal music in isicathamiya⁴ style, which could be described as a type of creole music because of the mixing and borrowing of various music styles such as jazz, popular music, and African music. The educated middle-class Coloureds stigmatised the music of people like my father and siblings as 'boorish, disreputable, and even depraved' (Adhikari, 2005, p. 16).

⁴ Isicathamiya is a type of a cappella vocal style of music which originated in the 1920s and 1930s amongst the Zulu-speaking people of South Africa.

My aunt, a kindergarten teacher, had a piano which epitomised her middle-class status. She could not play the instrument but probably acquired it as a covert form of resistance to apartheid and the inferior education that Coloured children received. She formed part of the Coloured petite bourgeoisie who believed that education, especially higher education, and class would shield the oppressed from the brutality and discrimination of apartheid (Adhikari, 1993, 2005). Among the Coloured professionals, there was the perception that the acquisition of the knowledge and skills of Western classical music and the arts such as ballet and drama, which were associated with Whiteness, were essential to be considered a cultured Coloured who deserved to be assimilated into the dominant White population and consequently to be regarded as being better than Black Africans (Adhikari, 1993). Being influenced, especially by the female members of my family, that Western classical music constituted a critical distinction between civilised and barbaric, I was encouraged and chose to learn to play classical music on the piano as a bourgeoisie instrument.

The apartheid education system, which was based on the Christian Nationalist Education racist principles of separation and inequality, excluded me from the sophistication and elitism of music education in the schools that I attended. By means of private piano lessons through the British Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), which conducted their music examinations globally, I was initiated into the conservatoire style of music education. This was a giant step towards my music education studies that I would pursue at the South African College of Music (SACM) of UCT.

Although I did not study music at school—it was generally only offered at White schools—I was invited as a prospective music education student to an audition at the SACM. The director of the college recognised my potential to succeed and obtain a music qualification at the college and accepted me as a student, on condition that I passed the Grade

7 piano examinations of the ABRSM. I also had to obtain special permission from the National Party government to register as a Coloured student at an 'open' White university. This was required as per the Extension of the Universities Act No. 45 of 1959, which prohibited Blacks from attending White universities. The liberal UCT Council declared the institution an 'open' university, but they stuck to the legal rules and regulations of the apartheid government for fear of financial and other forms of victimisation by the National Party government.

In 1973, at the height of apartheid, having met the criteria set, I arrived at UCT. Ministerial permission was given to me as a Coloured to register as a student. The permit read as follows:

Consent has been granted to you
to attend the University of Cape Town
in terms of Section 31 of Act 45 of 1959.
The consent is valid only at the University of Cape Town
and or the degree and the subject indicated above.

The creation of UCT, like other White South African universities, was rooted in White supremacy. UCT was established as the South African College (SAC) in 1829 (Phillips, 1993). Professor W. Ritchie (1918), when recounting the first years, wrote that the institution could not be compared to the ancient history of the famous European universities, but that it already had its own 'respectable antiquity' (Ritchie, 1918, p. 5). When the SAC gained official university status as UCT in 1918, thanks to the bequests and financial support from, amongst others, mining magnates, it became the natural home of the middle-class White English-speaking communities in Cape Town based on the principles of 'broad South Africanism' and a 'united white South-African nation' (Phillips, 1993, p. 114). Within the political and racial context of South Africa, the perceived liberal race consciousness of UCT was regarded as anti-patriotic and in opposition to the conservative Christian Nationalist

ideology of separatism of the National Party and its apartheid policies. However, anti-apartheid political activism, though restricted to a minority of politicised and energetic students, served to irritate the university management (Phillips, 1993) and was often nothing but ‘guilt-intergenerational conflict’ (Davie, 2015, p. 194).

There was thus a hidden message within the meritocratic culture at the UCT that I entered, namely that Coloureds who were not successful had to continue their studies at the ‘bush college’, the University of the Western Cape, created specifically by the National Party for those designated as Coloured. The SACM compared well to some of the best music institutions in the world at the time. The handful of Coloured students (there were no Black African students at the college), according to the SACM, needed special attention. Hence, we had to do bridging or elementary courses in music content that we had supposedly not covered before. I opted for the education stream of the B.Mus. degree because it provided me with access to a government bursary and a teaching post after I would qualify after four years of study. I was acutely aware of the fact that a full-time music performance career was out of reach for Coloureds and only available when emigrating to Europe, Canada or America.

I was assigned to a part-time piano teacher, a Catholic nun. It seemed to me as though she was appointed to teach the backward Coloured students who needed special attention so as to fit into the ivory tower. She treated me as if I were a beginner pianist and I was subtly made aware in a patronising way that I was not yet ready to be at the College. Although she intended the best for me, my development did not satisfy me, which ultimately forced me to request a change of lecturer in my second year. I was assigned a British immigrant who set higher standards and challenges, which enabled me to win a music competition and a bursary to further my studies.

My four years at the SACM exposed me to the privilege and sophistication of the White ‘charming little universe’ (Dawjee, 2018, p. 38). In the little universe of UCT, the

White English-speaking students regarded themselves as the 'chosen' ones. Hence we all aspired to speak, dress, and behave in a manner to enable us to fit into the culture of Englishness and its related global tenets of Whiteness. I had a natural affinity with the few White Afrikaans students with whom I shared a common language and aspects of culture and who likewise were seen as outsiders and strangers and who were 'tolerated and not welcomed' (Phillips, 1993, p. 192). Both the perceived minderwaardige (inferior) Afrikaners and I were carrying the dormant contestation of the norm of language and its associated culture which separated us from the White English-speaking students. In short, there existed a disharmonious existence between the ivory world of UCT and the ebony Coloured and cultured intruders.

Due to the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act No. 49 of 1953 and the Separate Amenities Amendment Act of 1960 which prohibited the sharing of public spaces, Coloured students were not permitted through legislation to stay in the UCT university residences or even close to the campus. In addition, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act No. 49 of 1953 made it illegal for the integration of races in public spaces such as government buildings, beaches, trains, buses, halls, bars, and hotels, with public roads being the exception. Hence, the use of concert halls and theatres specifically demarcated for the use of White people were out of bounds to me and my fellow Coloured students. As a consequence, Coloured students hardly participated in the extracurricular activities offered by UCT and the SACM and we generally got stuck into our studies and socialised with one another. Although I loved choral music and was conscious that my participation in the SACM choir would later benefit me, I refrained from going for an audition. It was just too overwhelmingly ivory White, disharmonious, and intimidating.

In a visual sense, the disharmony between ivory and ebony can be gleaned from the photograph taken of the SACM staff and students in 1975. I was in my third year as a

student. The few Coloured students initially contemplated not being present but in the end did so reluctantly. We positioned ourselves in the back row on the right, with me standing second from right in the back row.



Figure 1. **Staff and students of the SACM.** The photograph was taken in my third year (1975) at the SACM. I am standing at the back, second from right (Akkersdyk Photo's)

Additionally, you had to be exceptional to be noticed by the all-White academic staff. There were some excellent Coloured student musicians, but there was often the suspicion that they would not be regarded as better than the White students and that they were not yet ready to participate, let alone win the big music competitions. Our Coloured music students' achievements at UCT were seldom made public, and hardly found a space in the local White-dominated media, hence, our music achievements were mostly celebrated as a 'comradely bond' with our families, friends, and in the Coloured communities. Our music performances were confined to segregated school halls and churches reserved for Coloureds. These concerts served as an encouragement to other young people in our Coloured communities.

At this juncture, it would be fair to ask why am I revisiting my past as a music education student during the period 1973 to 1976 at UCT? Why not forget, or remember it in

a nostalgic manner? In the more than 40 years since I have left UCT, the institution and other former White universities are still beset by what some would call the ‘old struggle’, namely the challenge to transform the institution as it relates to race and class so as to help it shed its yoke of exclusivity. The conflicting, dualistic, disharmonious ebony-and-ivory relationship seems to persist at UCT, which often operates with self-interest within a liberatory praxis but fails to deliver real change (Pillay, 2016). UCT and other similar institutions seem to struggle to take claims of racism and privilege and the demands for change by Black academics and students seriously and often counter these accusations with meritocratic rules and regulations or with an ‘institutional silence’ (Vandeyar & Swart, 2019, p. 157) about race. Consequently, the post-apartheid era for former White universities became volatile at times as these institutional silences manifested into violent protests demanding the decolonisation of all facets of higher education (Andrews, 2018; Jansen, 2017; Kwoba, Chantiluke, & Nkopo, 2018; Vandeyar & Swart, 2019). As a Coloured lecturer at a former White university between 2015 and 2019, I often had to ask myself whether I should speak out against White privilege and racism or be complicit by keeping quiet about injustices and the struggles of the university to deracialise itself and decolonise its curriculum. However, in most instances, we resist participating in ‘transformational narratives and dialogues that destabilise, problematise, and confront hegemonic practices that maintain divisive status quos’ (Vandeyar & Swart, 2019, p.157) and so I did not ...

With reference to the above, since the demise of apartheid in 1994, the demographic profile of historically White universities in South Africa has changed dramatically. This is especially true of UCT, where less than 25 per cent of the student population was Black in 1989. However, by 2011, Black students constituted more than 50 per cent of the total number of students (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). At the same time, there was a resurfacing of the discourse of racialisation that portrayed Black students as incompetent, not deserving to be at

a university, and contributing to the lowering of standards (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). The notion existed that Black students had to prove themselves through hard work in defence of their place at prestigious former White institutions. Hence, Black students became passive recipients of a veneered and artificial transformation process at these institutions where White values and exclusivity remained cemented. In other words, a disharmony between ebony and ivory continued to exist.

The decision to re-experience my life as a music education student was also influenced by contemporary student mobilisation and the call for the radical transformation of higher education in South Africa since 2015 (Jansen, 2017; Kwoba, Chantiluke, & Nkopo, 2018; Pillay, 2016). The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements were sparked by the demand for the removal of symbols and statues that celebrated White supremacy and colonialism, and a call for the decolonisation of university curricula (Jansen, 2017; Kwoba, Chantiluke & Nkopo, 2018; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Pillay, 2016). On 9 March 2015, students at UCT demanded the removal of the statue of the arch-colonialist and imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, to be removed from the campus as part of the decolonisation of the institution.

The #RhodesMustFall movement spread beyond UCT and soon targeted other universities. The movement found international exposure when Black students dared to take the campaign to the 'heart of whiteness' (Andrews, 2018, p. ix) and exclusivity, namely Oriel College at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. After violent protests, the UCT Council voted for the removal of the Rhodes statue from the campus (Andrews, 2018; Kwoba, Chantiluke, & Nkopo, 2018). However, there was more behind the drive for the removal of the statue of Rhodes at UCT (Jansen, 2017). Students were rejecting colonial education, which, according to them, was embodied by the statues of Rhodes and other colonial and apartheid figures (Andrews, 2018). The real campaign was against the institutional structures and symbols which promoted White supremacy, racism, and exclusivity at UCT. Against this

backdrop, I am using my autoethnography to re-experience my student years as a Coloured student at UCT under apartheid and, in so doing, construct knowledge of myself through past, present, and future experiences of life (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Doing my autoethnography

By doing an autoethnography, I was able to look inward (auto) and outward to understand the broader socio (ethnography) context of being a Coloured student in the South Africa of the 1970s (Denzin, 2014, 2018). Autoethnography has multiple layers of autobiographical consciousness, but it is also about the culture and society in which the lived experiences occurred (Ellis, 2004; Denzin; 2014). I used ‘multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). I did this by retelling and re-performing meaningful autobiographic events, experiences, and moments from my time as a music education student (Denzin, 2014, 2018). I wove autobiographical details through the layered strands of my student life which I then took apart, analysed, and recontextualised to rediscover new meanings and ways to perform the events of 1973 to 1976 (Denzin, 2014, pp. 28–29). Consequently, the past was viewed in a new light and re-interpreted using present insights. Denzin (2014) explains that to represent the past in the present means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up and to see the past not as a succession of events but as a series of scenes, inventions, emotions, images, and stories. In bringing the past into the autobiographical present, I inserted myself into my past as a music education student at UCT. This in itself became a form of ‘sociological introspection’ and an ‘emotional recall’ (Ellis, 1999, p. 678; 2004, p. 18) and was based on archival materials, artefacts, and interviews with former fellow Coloured students. This prevented me from running the risk of ‘narrowing my lens’ (Luvaas, 2017, p. 7) or becoming too narcissistic, a common criticism of autoethnographic work (Giorgio, 2013, p. 69). Through the research process, my re-

experiencing became shared and was sharpened, after which selection took place and my story was sequenced. Personal photographs, such as the class photograph of 1975, served as a type of ‘long-term impression’ (Chang, 2008, p. 109) and also provided me with a ‘visual autoethnography’ (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 15) that filled empty and demolished spaces in my memory by means of prompts related to specific colours, regalia, and other scenic details.

My story as a music education student at UCT brought into conversation race, racism, and class and this helped me to develop an understanding of myself as a self-identifying and state-identified Coloured studying at a White institution under apartheid. Hence, I grounded the re-experiences of my time at UCT in CRT, as will be discussed below. I specifically utilised the research on Coloured identity by Adhikari (2004, 2005, 2006, 2008) and Erasmus (2001, 2011, 2017) and on CRT, as lenses to re-experience my time at UCT. Through these lenses, I adopted critical-interpretive and contestation modes of analysis to understand the imperfect harmony between ebony and ivory that I had experienced as a music education student between 1973 and 1976.

Framing my autoethnography theoretically

CRT emerged out of the United States in the mid-1970s, at roughly the time that I was studying at UCT. CRT focuses on two significant issues, namely the concept of White supremacy and the centrality of race and racism. It challenges race neutrality, colour-blindness, and meritocracy (Gillborn & Youdell, 2009; Han, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2003; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). CRT commits itself to social justice through an agenda that promotes the liberation and transformation of individuals who have been oppressed on the grounds of race, gender, and class. In this regard, my autoethnography relates directly to the CRT notion that the experiential knowledge of those at the margins is

acknowledged as being essential in strengthening those who have been oppressed (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009).

My autoethnography is performative and political as it straddles the context in which it occurred (Denzin, 2003, 2018; Spry, 2001, 2011, 2018). Additionally, using CRT allowed me to expose how race and racism were articulated at UCT during my time as a student (Parker & Lynn, 2009). This was possible because CRT engages with historical-sociological problems and makes provision for ‘counter-storytelling’ and ‘naming one's own reality’ or ‘voice’ (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 20). Counter-storytelling, such as my autoethnography, challenges White and mainstream positionalities that silence the voice of the oppressed and those at the margins based on neutrality, objectivity, universality, and meritocracy. As a discourse of liberation, CRT considers the majoritarian and dominant mindset with its presuppositions, received wisdom, and shared culture as the primary impediment to racial transformation (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Critical race theorists recognise the counter-storytelling by the oppressed as ‘psychic preservation of [the] marginalised’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 21). They allow the augmentation of the voice of the oppressed by revealing their racial sacrifices through, amongst others, counter stories such as mine.

Crenshaw (2011) posits that there is a secure link between race, class, and gender. Race played a significant role in the stratification of class in South Africa during apartheid. White people were supposedly civilised and Black people were presumed to be uncivilised and barbaric. In this regard, hooks (1994, p. 172) avers that class was central to the construction of contemporary Black identity and that it determined how Blackness was commodified and how political standpoints of solidarity to end racism were shaped. Class, coupled with material possessions, were perceived to free oppressed people from the stereotyping of poor Blacks and racial aggressions (hooks, 1994). In South Africa, it was

commonly accepted that class, coupled with material wealth and education, would shield and liberate oppressed Black, Coloured, and Indian people from apartheid.

Within the South African racial-categorisation context, skin colour was an essential line of separation that generally trumped class. Soon after the National Party came to power in 1948, they legalised racial categorisation through the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, which formed the backbone of apartheid. The Population Registration Act specifically drew a distinction between the Whites, Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians by specifying the normativity for Whiteness, namely hair texture, skin colour, and facial features. The Act defined a Coloured person as a person who was not a White person. It described a White person as ‘a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person (Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950).

The term ‘coloured’ originated as early as 1890 when the more than 50 per cent of the half-castes and mixed-race people of slavery origins born in the Cape Colony referred to themselves as ‘coloured’ (Adhikari, 2005, 2006, 2008; Erasmus, 2011, 2013, 2017). The novelist Kole Omotoso described the diverse physical appearance of a Coloured as varying from ‘charcoal black to bread-crust brown, sallow yellow and finally off-cream that wants to pass for white’ (Adhikari, 2005, p. 2). In time, Coloured became the ethnonym which the National Party apartheid government used to classify the mixed group of people who were neither White nor Black.

Colouredness in the South African context is often rejected and met with reticence, discomfort, and awkwardness especially by middle-class, educated Coloureds. The tension is often based on the notion that their identity originated out of slavery, rape, and miscegenation between White settlers, the Khoi San people, indigenous Black races, and the imported slaves

(Adhikari, 2005; Erasmus, 2001). The discomfort is compounded by the reductionist analyses of Colouredness, based on racist and stereotypical conceptualisations of their identity which was clouded in shame, sexual promiscuity, impurity, drunkenness, and immorality (Adhikari, 2005, 2006, 2008; Erasmus, 2017).

In light of the above, Johnson (2017, p. 4) refers to Coloureds as a ‘middleman minority’ and ‘semi-privileged proletarians’ who have occupied a social, political and economic gap within the racial hierarchy in South Africa since the 1940s. Consequently, according to Sparks (2016, p. 70), Coloureds found themselves ‘trapped between white and black nationalism, between privilege and oppression, between today’s and tomorrow’s power’. The ambiguous position within the essentially Black–White binary afforded them neither full citizenship nor complete subject status (Erasmus, 2011). Being regarded as ‘not only not white, but less than white, not only not black, but better than black’ (Erasmus, 2001, p. 13), they found themselves as a vulnerable mixed-race group at the periphery of the socio-political-economic dispensation of post-apartheid South Africa. Their intermediary position has shrouded them in ambiguity and ambivalence through their long-time struggle to be integrated into Whiteness and reject Blackness (Adhikari, 2005).

It is against the above theoretical backdrop that I re-experienced my time at UCT as a music education student and I told my story by means of an embodied narrative.

Making sense of re-experiencing my time at UCT

In this section I work with my story as a music education student at UCT so as to present contextual and ‘culturally meaningful explanations’ (Chang, 2008, p. 126). At UCT, despite the existence of apartheid legislation Section 31 of Act 45 of 1959, I was allowed to enter the ivory world of White privilege, opportunities, acceptance, and equality to study music education. This was a far cry from the world of Verlatekloof, my humble place of birth,

where the ‘ebony’ world of apartheid represented rejection and brutality. What my being at UCT did was to, at the outset, create a double consciousness in me. I did not always know where I belonged and who I was. I was the classical Coloured ‘middleman minority’ and, unlike Africans, experienced a semi-privileged proletarian status by being allowed into UCT (Johnson, 2017, p. 4), although I was never fully assimilated into the Whiteness of the institution. I did not have the feeling of UCT being my alma mater or being an Ikey, the nickname used for UCT students. I expressed this discomfort by only posing once for the college photograph and by not participating in extramural activities offered by SACM. This was the case because I felt tolerated rather than accepted and a covert sense existed that my ebony presence could, at the very least, create disharmony. After all, musically speaking, I was an interloper in the world of Western classical music from the world of ‘lowbrow’, aural Coon Carnival music of the Coloureds, which was stigmatised as ‘boorish, disreputable, and even depraved’ (Adhikari, 2005, p. 16). The nun who first taught me music at UCT made this abundantly clear in a very overt manner.

My sense of a double consciousness was reinforced when I returned home for weekends and holidays to my community. From their ebony worldview, I was regarded as becoming ivory by studying Western classical music in English at UCT, the epitome of Whiteness under apartheid. As a result, I became systematically culturally dislocated from my community. In this regard, my experiences resonate with those of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor of the Royal College of Music and one of England’s most famous composers in the early 1900s. Born of a Black father and White English mother, he could be regarded as an example, by dint of his race, to play a role in music identity transformation. (Cook, 2017; Green, 1990). Despite Coleridge-Taylor’s giftedness, he was often derided because of his black skin by the aloof English community, the music academy, and the British press. Like him, my Coloured identity had to co-exist alongside Western classical music. I had to, and

was able to, reconstruct my identity through creolisation. Social constructivists perceive mixed-race identity as a product of the ‘processes of creolisation’, that is, through ‘cultural borrowing’ and ‘cultural creativity’ (Adhikari, 2008, p. 95; Erasmus, 2001, p. 14), that has been shaped by White supremacy. The contention of Erasmus (2001, p. 16) is that Coloured identity is not characterised by ‘borrowing per se, but by cultural borrowing and creation under the particular conditions of creolisation.’ This is what I did during my our-year stay at UCT.

Studying at UCT also led to creolisation in terms of my cultural, linguistic, and musical assimilation into Westernised manners and the aesthetics associated with it. I acquired a deeper taste for Western classical music and was allowed, as an ebony-coloured outsider, to look and associate with White high culture. My acculturation allowed me to inhabit a privileged knowledge space that was generally reserved for Whites. My acculturation, which implied a certain loss of my Coloured musical culture, served as a vehicle for my eventual integration into a Coloured middle-class status which protected me from the extreme forms of economic and political oppression associated with apartheid (hooks, 1994). I could earn the respect of my community, and even of some Whites, although I did not have the basic rights that even so-called low-class Whites had.

Class, race, and musical taste display varying and often conflicting conceptions about its influence on social stratification. Aharon (2012) postulates that the sociology of culture influences social inequality, social stratification, and power relations in society. She argues that upward mobility from a marginal position is assumed to be possible through the attainment of ‘established modes of cultural expression’ (Aharon, 2012, p. 447). Western classical music, taking its strength from being universal, is, is considered as, a ‘stamp of social and cultural acceptability, existing at the pinnacle of the social order ... and presented as a respectable cultural mode’ (Aharon, 2012, p. 453). UCT thus enabled me to acquire

'high culture' and 'legitimate culture' (Aharon, 2012, p. 453), which was presumed to be White and universal, and, in the process, I secured my integration, be it as an ebony-coloured outsider, into highbrow Western culture (Nuccio, Guerzoni, & Katz-Gerro, 2018). In re-experiencing my music education studies at UCT, I also drew on Pierre Bourdieu's notion that cultural consumption is linked to social status and the gaining of greater cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Dwyer, 2015; Van Eijck, 2001). Through cultural consumption I started a journey at UCT which gave me some cultural domination over other Coloureds who did not have such an opportunity (Van Eijck, 1997).

My study of music education at UCT thus served to complicate and challenge Coloured essentialism. My presence at UCT opposed the racist, apartheid, and essentialist interpretation whereby Colouredness was associated with miscegenation and a lack of culture. This opposition to a negative perception of Colouredness gives credence to the work of Erasmus (2001, 2008, 2017), Adhikari (2005), and Martin (2006) who oppose superficial analyses of 'Coloured' as a social identity based on racist grounds and understood through an essentialist lens that focuses on race mixing, miscegenation, racial oppression, and protest politics lacking in culture and full citizenship. This resonates with Duncan's (2002, p. 117) notion that in South Africa race was a significant 'maker of social, political and economic entitlement and organisation'. In my re-experiencing, race was, for me, about social, political, and economic power relations that were created to exploit and exclude the other through the reification of a meritocracy founded on racism, thereby constructing unequal power relations and discrimination in the education that I received. However, Erasmus (2017, p. 79) perceives the engendering of life as 'making something new from that which is already there' and producing a 'new and different being.' In re-experiencing my music education studies at UCT, the blending of my Colouredness with Whiteness between 1973 and 1976 led not only to a double consciousness, creolisation, and cultural borrowing but to an ambiguous position

within the essentially Black–White binary of being ‘not white, but less than white, not only not black, but better than black’ (Erasmus, 2001, p. 13).

My privileged stay at UCT was temporary because legally my study permit did not allow me to enjoy partial White privileges beyond my four-year term of studies. It was also a time of preparation for the long struggle towards my personal liberation and emancipation. At UCT I did not allow myself to be deterred from reaching my personal goals, despite being subjected to the meritocracy and colour-blindness of White liberalism. My presence at a White institution that propagated colour-blindness was covertly and overtly controlled through a meritocratic system which identified me as academically backward and incompetent. I knew that if I did not commit myself, the system would throw me out and direct me to the apartheid-created ‘bush college’ of the University of the Western Cape. Based on meritocratic principles, I would be blamed for my own failure.

Studying at UCT also greatly shielded me from the instability of education that prevailed in Black, Coloured, and Indian schools and universities during the 1970s, especially in terms of the Soweto uprising in 1976. I found myself in an ambiguous and ambivalent situation, both in a societal sense but also as an individual. I was studying at a White university that was very stable and generally unaffected by the student unrest on Black and Coloured campuses. This was the case because studying at UCT was, at face value, perceived to be ahistorical and apolitical, although outside my little ivory tower there was a political consciousness and history-making which centred around the violent resistance to the racial discrimination of apartheid. In a way, I was divorced from what was happening outside my little ivory tower during the 1970s.

What my studying music education at UCT also did was to contest my legislated Coloured identity. It was a contestation of the normative of power and control associated with Whiteness. I contested my Coloured identity by applying for and being allowed to enter the

powerful and White physical and educational space of UCT, which exposed me to the privileges that Whites enjoyed. I adopted and internalised Western culture and aesthetics whereby I grew culturally closer to Whiteness in terms of education, language, music, food, clothing, and even religion which, in a way, could be interpreted as taking away some of their power. In short, I had ‘arrived’, despite the realities of apartheid. In a way, through my presence, I disrupted the normative of Whiteness.

However, my racial classification as Coloured predetermined my life pathways, in spite of the educational opportunities and social status that I would occupy. In the first instance, my actions empowered me professionally through music education. Secondly, the knowledge and skills of music and education that I gained at UCT would later contribute to the empowerment of others as I performed my duties as a teacher, subject advisor, and curriculum specialist in my professional life. My contested collaboration and partial transcendence of apartheid made me different from the norm – a middleman, not Black but also not White.

My re-experiencing of my studies at UCT resonates with Erasmus’ (2017, p. 17) notion that physical appearance determined whether a person was a ‘rights-bearing subject.’ In other words, rights were assigned to people based on race. Physical appearance was a management and negotiation tool which racist White and certain Coloured people used in their interaction and dialogue with people who were different (Erasmus, 2017). My physical Blackness made me different from the normative Colouredness which motivated others to humanise or dehumanise me in dialogue through racist aggressions directed at me, either overtly or covertly. The culmination of this was at my graduation; the audience recognised my difference and otherness by applauding me longer than usual when I received the B.Mus. degree from the Chancellor of UCT, Sir Harry Oppenheimer who was a mining magnate at the time.

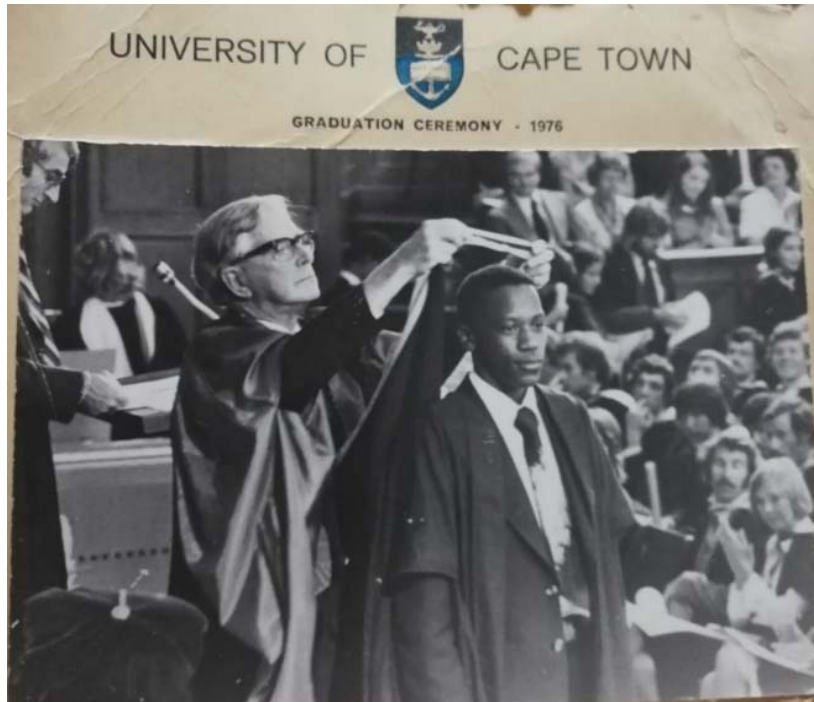


Figure 2. My graduation at UCT. I received my degree from the registrar of the university at the graduation ceremony in the Jameson Hall on 7 December 1976. Photograph: Akkersdyk

Conclusion

At the outset, I asked whether it was necessary to re-experience my time as a Coloured music education student at UCT between 1973 and 1976. My doing so could easily be construed as having a ‘chip on the shoulder’ and opening old wounds that were supposed to be healed by the reconciliatory processes that followed in the post-apartheid era. However, I felt it necessary to do so for Coloured identity is still deeply contested, just as it was in the past (Adhikari, 2005). The marginality of the Coloured population is strongly connected to their intermediary position within the South African socio-political-economical context during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. This I cannot change, however, what I can do by means of my autoethnographic re-experiencing of my student days under apartheid is to know myself, take care of myself, and to get to know myself better and, secondly, to appreciate the struggles of other Black South Africans in higher education.

The imposition of a Coloured identity on me under apartheid left me with a dichotomy and a struggle between my personal and social identities as I struggled to articulate my identity as a student at UCT. My identity was further fraught with racial ambiguity and ambivalence as I found myself first not white enough during apartheid, and later not black enough after the collapse of apartheid. This was further troubled by the fact that I realised I had more privileges under apartheid when compared to my African peers who could not enter UCT as a student as I did. In short, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was regarded as ‘not only not white, but less than white, not only not black, but better than black’ (Erasmus, 2001, p. 13). Furthermore, my intermediary middleman position of being Coloured is also troubled by the long-time struggle to be integrated into Whiteness and reject Blackness (Adhikari, 2005).

I attempted to deal with this by constructing knowledge of my student days at UCT experientially, viewing my past in a new contemporary light, and re-interpreting it using present-day insights. In the words of Erasmus ((2017, p. 79), I engaged in ‘making something new from that which is already there’ I did this using CRT as a lens to engage with White supremacy and the centrality of race and racism to UCT and South Africa and by challenging the ideas of race neutrality, colour-blindness, and meritocracy which bedevilled. and continue to bedevil, South African higher education institutions.

Telling my story was possible because CRT encourages engagement with historical-sociological problems and counter-storytelling. As such, my re-experiencing holds deep meaning for me as I am still continuously engaging with my Coloured identity and the forces, such as UCT, that shaped and constructed it. On the one hand, I had an ascribed Coloured identity by the apartheid state but I also achieved and constructed my own identity as it relates to Western classical music and culture and middle-classness, thanks to me being allowed to enter the White 1970s’ world of UCT (Brisk, Burgos, & Hamerla, 2016). In the

process I was ‘Westernised’ and formed an allegiance with Whiteness. This alliance happened despite the apartheid barriers that were created to make racial border-crossing difficult. I contested the fixedness of my imposed Coloured identity by breaking down the walls of Whiteness. However, my contestation was not an outright rejection or an objection to my Colouredness. Instead, I collaborated with Whiteness within a complex racial context through processes of deliberation, arbitration, and justification in which I retained my Coloured identity.

Currently, numerous stories like mine exist as tens of thousands of Black students and staff members are entering former White universities and are, at times, still experiencing Whiteness and colonial and apartheid pasts. In this, the ‘old struggle’ to decolonise and racially integrate former White universities is, many a time, still plagued with meritocracy and colour-blindness and Black students and staff have to conform in order to survive and succeed. Demands to change this status quo is often considered as disruptive of the historical and cultural ethos of these long-established institutions. This notion has turned Black students and academics to violently contest the perceived White supremacy symbolised by colonial statues and symbols and curricula that perpetuate Western aesthetics and thought. However, in most instances, this contestation is, as Wiener (2017) avers, a combination of arbitration, deliberation, contention, and justification of one’s reaction to Whiteness and colonialism, instead of an outright rejection of the status quo, as it was in my case. Despite all of this, I am still holding onto the dream that ebony and ivory can exist in harmony at former White South African universities.

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