



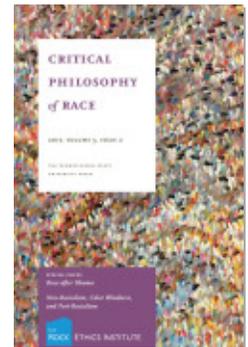
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**RACE TROUBLE AND
THE IMPOSSIBILITY
OF NON-RACIALISM**

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Abstract

What is the compulsion that keeps race and racism in play? This article considers how the struggle for non-racialism, color blindness, and post-racialism can work to keep racism alive. Ironically, ideas about racism are often kept current by attempts to avoid or criticize racism. In previous work, the author has defined race trouble as the “implicit or explicit use of constructions of ‘racism’ for accountable conduct.” We use ideas about racism to conduct ourselves accountably in racialized worlds. Ideas about what constitutes racism help us to live as decent human beings, criticizing racism and avoiding acting like racists. This article will provide an analysis of a high-profile and widely condemned archetypal incident of racism in post-apartheid South Africa, namely, the video made by students at the Reitz Residence at the University of the Free State in 2007, which depicted scenes of abuse against black cleaners by white male students. It will use these materials to show how racism can be perpetuated by antiracist discourse, thus making the argument reflected in the article title.

Keywords: racism, race trouble, discourse, dialogic repression

Everyone wants to move beyond race and racism, but we don't seem to know how to do so. As hard as we try to uproot racism, identifying and criticizing instances of the disease, and avoid being racist ourselves, the ideals of non-racialism and color blindness seem elusive. There are so many good reasons to forget about race. Most centrally, we now know that racial classification has "virtually no genetic or taxonomic significance" and "no justification can be offered for its continuance" (Lewinton 1995, 397; Goodman 2000). Moreover, as a social construct, race has been put to pernicious use, shoring up white privilege at the expense of black culture and black people. For these reasons authors such as Gilroy (2002) have argued "against race," because race is "central to the way in which the objective interests of the worst-off are distorted" (Appiah 1992, 179).

Nonetheless, as Gerry Mare (2011, p. 65) laments, we continue to be "broken down by race." Racial categories are used in the census and in decision making in employment, education, housing, and other contexts; and ordinary people rely on race thinking as they go about their everyday lives. The bureaucratic use of racial categorization takes its justification from the requirements for social change. The implementation of affirmative action necessitates a racial consciousness (Habib and Bentley 2008). From this perspective, the color-blind "refusal to see race" is rejected as a neo-liberal—or "neo-conservative" (Winant 1997)—strategy that "acquiesces to the racial status quo . . . by consigning blacks to a twilight zone where they are politically invisible" (Steinberg 1995). It is convenient for the privileged to forget about race when affirmative action programs use race categories to effect and monitor the undoing of racial privilege.

Debates about the merits and possibility of color blindness and non-racialism persist. Instead of directly entering this debate about the social construction and use of ideas about "race," I would like to contribute to the debate by exploring the social construction and use of the concept of "racism." This is a risky move. Whereas progressive thinkers are often willing to treat "race" as a social construction, they want to maintain that racism is something more: It is real, and has real effects (see Durrheim, 2016). I do not deny this, but I will argue that racism is real in the same way that race is, that is, as a social construction that shapes everyday human conduct, social dynamics, and personal and collective outcomes.

Race Trouble and Domestic Labor

Race trouble is experienced as a personal sense of having been, being, or an anticipation of being racialized, that is, treated stereotypically as an instance of a racial category (Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown 2011). Because the nature of race trouble reflects the content of racial stereotypes, the experience depends on the kinds of racial categories and the associated traits that are *salient* in any context (Spears et al. 1997). Race trouble is evident in the comments extracted below, which come from an online discussion about domestic labor by two white South African women. Joanne Phyfer (2015) had asked members of a book club to share their experiences and thoughts about domestic labor in a Google circle, where they could also comment on each other's posts.

It is difficult to write anything about domestic workers without sounding like an arrogant, spoilt, white South African madam. (Christine, Group B, Day 1)

It's hard to speak of certain subjects freely for fear of sounding offensive or hurtful. (Anna, Group A, Day 9)

Race trouble is not primarily, or even necessarily, an experiential concept. It is first and foremost a discursive—or more properly, rhetorical—phenomenon (Billig 1987; Edwards 2003). In these extracts, personal experiences of expressive difficulties are being deployed in a preemptive strike. The utterances anticipate an audience and a critical reception. The writers are concerned about sounding racially hurtful, arrogant, or offensive, like a “spoilt, white South African madam.” This is a meta-stereotype, a belief about the stereotypes that others have about you (see e.g., Klein and Assi 2001). In this case, the writers know that certain ways of talking about domestic workers can raise the specter of the racist white, a stigmatizing identity category that they want to disavow. Expressing discomfort about speaking is part of the way that the disavowal of racism is accomplished.

This kind of rhetoric expresses the spirit of non-racialism and color blindness. The women articulate a wish to be heard as individuals expressing their honest opinions, not as arrogant and spoilt whites. To achieve this, they must be careful not to express themselves in stereotypical white-racist ways. This is particularly difficult when conversing about race and

domestic labor—"it's hard to speak . . . freely" on the topic. Instead, one needs to speak in ways that are designedly "not racist." To do this, one needs to have a fairly good idea about what constitutes racism—so as to avoid it (Durrheim, Greener, and Whitehead 2015). And so—ironically—ideas about the nature of race and racism form the ground for nonracial, color-blind "framing" (Goffman 1974) of people and practices as being "non-racist."

However, it is not possible to know definitively what constitutes racism before speaking or acting. In part, the judgment of "racism" depends on how actions and utterances are received and treated by others. One person's fair comment is another person's racism, and it is thus common to hear people vehemently denying racism amid equally strong accusations that they are racist. Situations like this show that definitions of racism are in fact developed in argumentation in the cut and thrust of social interaction. It is here that the meaning of racism is negotiated and where the identity of actors as "racist" stand or fall. Nonetheless, even though the meaning of racism can be firmly established only after one acts, such meanings need to be anticipated in order to participate accountably in the social life and avoid possible censure (Durrheim, Quayle, and Dixon 2016).

I thus define race trouble as the construction of "racism" for accountable conduct. There are many ways in which this can be done by racialized black and white actors in different situations. In the following section, I consider events surrounding the Free State University, Reitz residence students' initiation video (henceforth referred to as the UFS video)¹ to demonstrate why it is necessary to shift analytic attention to the construction of "racism" rather than demand non-racialism.

"Racism" as Collaborative Accomplishment

The 2007 anti-integration video shot by a group of male residents of the Reitz residence of the University of the Free State has become an archetypal event of post-apartheid racism in South Africa. In the video, four white students directed five black cleaners in a series of events that mimicked a "fear factor" initiation ritual among university students. The workers drank "down-downs," danced to *boere* music, and participated in a sprint race and rugby training. At the conclusion of the activities the students presented the cleaners with a bottle of whiskey. The most controversial scene was of

a student who appeared to urinate into food that was then served to the workers. It is noteworthy that all events took place in the context of good humor, fun and games, and with lots of laughter. It is noteworthy too that the power relations between these young students and the older cleaners were skewed as the students directed events, presented the whiskey as a gift, and had control over the way the participants were represented. Finally, the humiliating lack of dignity with which these young (white) students treated and portrayed the much older (black) cleaners of their parents' age is shocking, and is one reason why the video is viewed as a prototypical instance of racism.

The following comments show widespread agreement across that political spectrum that the video and the actions represented therein constituted racism.

“. . . students' actions was inexcusable" (Kallie Kriel, CEO of AfriForum)

“. . . atrocities screened on a video" (Freedom Front Plus youth leader Cornelius Jansen van Rensburg)

“. . . racists . . . who can't differentiate between a dog, baboon and a human being." (African National Congress Youth League)

“. . . barbaric act" (Bantu Holomisa, United Democratic Movement)

“. . . horrendous humiliation" (Njabulo Ndebele)

Why then choose to focus on race trouble instead of joining the chorus condemning the racism? What is the value of studying the construction of "racism"? In this article I argue that accusations of racism (1) abstract "the phenomenon" from social life, (2) produce new kinds of social life and subjectivities, and (3) in the process, misrecognize "the phenomenon." Thus, ultimately, there is a political reason for analyzing race trouble: Such analyses help us to understand the way non-racialism, and even antiracism, can silently contribute to the maintenance of racial privilege, oppression and inequality.

I illustrate these arguments by way of an analysis of a Times Media news video (henceforth referred to as the Times Media video)² that reported on a legal briefing conducted at the University of the Free State in February 2008, in which the cleaners made a statement, through the university's lawyer, claiming that they had been deceived by the boys:

They were not aware what they were participating in. They were misled to believe that it was just a competition. They were told that “please help us, we want to record a video . . . we are going to use that in a competition.” So they didn’t see anything wrong with that. They were misled. (Lesley Makgoro, University of Free State lawyer)

The Times Media report also showed footage from the original video, and included an interview with a fellow student, Pieter Odendaal, who spoke on behalf of the accused students.

The lawyers representing the university found it necessary to argue that the workers were deceived because the banter, laughter and fun-and-games recorded in the original video did not look like racism. There was an absence of hate (cf. Dixon et al. 2012). All participants appeared to be engaging willingly in the activities, and with obvious pleasure. Also, the cleaners and students watched the video together afterward, and all reports indicated that this same spirit of friendly banter marked this occasion too. So the question arises: Is it possible to be a victim of racism while willingly participating in it and enjoying yourself to boot? This was the basis of the students’ defense. They denied perpetuating racism by arguing that the cleaners were not victims of racism but willing participants in the events. To eliminate this possibility, and to make the event fit a recognizable definition of racism, the willing participation of the workers is explained by the deceit of the perpetrators of “racism.”

What we witness here is a struggle over the meaning of racism. Is it possible to be a willing participant and also a victim of racism, or were lies and deception even more evidence of the students’ racism? A definition of racism is being worked out in argument about specific events. The definition of racism being developed here is thus *occasioned*. It is fit for purpose of explaining and accounting for *these* events, whereas the issue of deception would have no relevance to other events and debates about racism. The definition of racism developed here is also *interested*. The meaning of “racism” is being worked out by parties with investment in the outcome, and who are countering one definition of racism and version of events with another in order to accuse and excuse.

By means of this occasioned, interested interaction, the definition of what counts as racism is developed as a “collaborative accomplishment” (Condor et al. 2006, 458). Different versions of racism are pitted against each other in fractious debate by interested parties who seek to gather

others to their side. What counts as racism are instances that people can be persuaded to agree are racist. One thing is clear though: all parties engaged in the arguments about racism are committed to the value of non-racialism and color blindness. They employ contending definitions of racism, disagree about the nature of particular events, but agree that racism is unacceptable.

The Social Life of “Racism”

The Times Media video also reveals a sharp contrast between the forms of social life that were enacted in the fun-and-games of the UFS video production and the deadly serious and painful accusations and denials of racism and the recriminations and legal proceeding that followed. The workers are shown in the Times Media video looking sullen and glum and they are reported as having needed trauma counselling. We have no view of the boys, but we know that they are now the unhappy subjects of disciplinary and legal proceedings. The contrasting forms of social interaction and subjectivity are evident in Table 1, which arranges the Times Media video representation of the social life, interaction and subjectivities in three time periods: before the event, during the event of making the video, and after the event.

TABLE 1 TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF EVENTS DEPICTED IN THE TIMES MEDIA VIDEO

Before the event	The event	After the event
<p>“We trusted these boys and treated them like our own children” (worker, through lawyer)</p> <p>“The relationship between the students who made the video and the workers, they actually have a very good relationship” (Pieter Odendaal, speaking on behalf of Reitz students)</p>	<p>“That moment was something humeristic” (Pieter Odendaal)</p>	<p>“Deceived into participating” (narrator)</p> <p>“They were misled” (lawyer)</p> <p>“We feel betrayed” (worker, through lawyer)</p> <p>“Five black cleaners performing humiliating tasks” (narrator)</p> <p>“The cleaners are currently undergoing trauma counselling” (narrator)</p> <p>“They watched the video afterwards with them and they thought it was very funny” (Pieter Odendaal)</p>

This contrast illustrates a general and fundamental point: accusations of racism rupture social life. They produce new forms of interaction and accompanying subjectivities. In this case, happy collaboration was changed into traumatizing argument. The transformation occurs as an event is abstracted from social life and made to stand apart as an exceptional and blameworthy instance of “racism.” The process is illustrated in Figure 1. Accusations and denials of racism are accomplished by providing explicit demonstrations of acts or actors that meet the criteria for being racist. The debate revolves around specific events, which are deemed to be racist or not. As the aftermath of the UFS video demonstrates, such debates often focus attention on events that are abstract from everyday social life and treated as exceptional. In the process, I will argue, the features of ordinary social life that make the exceptional instances doable recede from view, where they form a partially obscured underbelly of implicit racism.

Before discussing the implicit, silent underbelly of “racism” in everyday life (in the next section), we may well pause here to reflect on some features of the explicit constructions of “racism.” First, they are developed in fractious social interactions which divide people into opposing camps of like-minded individuals. Each camp promotes its own definition of racism to portray the event or actors as “racist” or not. Of course, these definitions of racism are interested constructions of the phenomenon that are developed to fit the rhetorical and identity demands of the situation. Consequently, we expect to find people using different definitions of racism in response

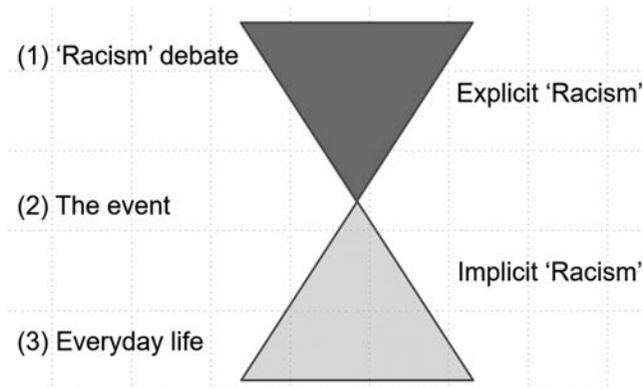


FIGURE 1
The social lives of 'racism'.

to the identity and rhetorical positions they have in different situations. Second, in addition to these interactional features, explicit debate about racism marks a distinct form of experience. In this instance, the debate was traumatizing, both to the victims and the perpetrators of the “racism.” On other occasions, such as when condemning enemies, the identifications of racists and the diagnosis of racism might be gratifying. Whatever the affective tone of the accusation and denials of racism, it vanquishes the forms of subjectivity that characterize everyday life. The goodwill and mirth that is so evident in the relations between the students and cleaners was replaced by recrimination, stone-faced silence, and trauma. Finally, the UFS case shows the investments that different players have in defining events as racist or not. The definitions have consequences for the cleaners and the students, for the university, and for the political commentators and others who try get mileage out of their opposition to racism. Overall and most centrally, definitions of racism are resources for identification that are needed so that others can be criticized while we can be seen to be against it (Durrheim, Quayle, and Dixon 2016).

The Work of “Racism” in Everyday Life

What makes interaction such as that recorded in the UFS video enactable? What made it possible for the boys and cleaners to collaborate in making the “racist” video? After all, the events recorded therein are exceptional. The video sets out to ridicule racial integration; and it does this by casting the cleaners out of role (and failing) as they participated in student activities of drinking “down-downs,” dancing to *boere* music, sprint racing, and playing rugby. This representation ridiculed the cleaners, but it was a limited ridicule that was evidently treated by both parties as a joke. The cleaners were shown to be no good as students, drinkers, sprinters, and rugby players. But who would expect them to excel at these activities? However, the cleaners were not being ridiculed as workers or as decent people. These reputations were kept intact throughout the making of the video, as was the reputation of the boys as students and decent human beings. How was it possible for an event that would later be portrayed as the archetypal event of post-apartheid racism to proceed with so little trouble?

The answer lies in the way the exceptional was framed and participation was rendered meaningful. One of the frames used was derived from

the Fear Factor reality TV show, which pitted contestants against each other in performing outrageous or disgusting stunts.³ Similarly, the workers participated in the activities as contestants. By this framing, the activities could be viewed as outrageous pranks of university students, and the appropriate way of conducting oneself would be to go along with the spirit of playfulness and humor. The most salient identity category for the workers was being a “good sport,” and to play along with the pranks of the boys.

A second, more pernicious, framing roots the exceptional in the ordinary. Echoes of the mundane reality of domestic labor and the roles, identities and subject positions of master and servant are evident in the interaction. The relationship between the cleaners and students appears to reflect the kind of familiarity, intimacy and trust that characterize domestic labor relationships more generally (Lutz 2011). As one of the cleaners stated, though their lawyer, in the Times Media video: “We trusted these boys and treated them like our own children.” The report that the students felt that they “actually have a very good relationship” with the cleaners suggests that the friendly and trusting relationship was reciprocal. Nonetheless, we must remember that trust, intimacy, and care in paternalistic relationships such as these is premised upon the subservience and uncomplaining gratitude of workers.

The Times Media reporter states as fact that the cleaners performed “humiliating tasks at the hands of four students . . . [which] included eating urine-soaked meat.” The truth, however, is that the students showed paternalistic care for the workers throughout the video and that the workers felt this and reciprocated. The UFS video supports the students’ claims that the urination was staged, and it is likely that the workers believed that the urination was staged when they watched the video with the students afterward. The interaction was humiliating, but not because the workers were deceived into eating urine-soaked meat. It was humiliating in the same way that domestic work in general is humiliating when it is premised upon paternalistic relations and the subservience and uncomplaining gratitude of workers. But it is easy for participants to ignore the humiliating inequality of their relationship by focusing attention on and enacting trust, intimacy and care.

In addition to providing a framing of trust and care, the context of domestic labor helps to make the events enactable because it allows both parties to see themselves as participating in a friendly exchange of favors (see Durrheim, Jacobs, and Dixon 2014). In the Times Media video, the

workers explained (through their lawyer) that they participated because the boys asked them, “please help us, we want to record a video . . . we are going to use that recording in a competition.” So the workers viewed themselves as helping the boys, and the gift of the whiskey afterward was a paternalistic token of appreciation from the boys.

Durrheim et al. (2014) have argued that feelings of intimacy, practices of care, and ideas about mutual exchange and helping are part of a system-justifying ideology that helps to preserve and legitimate paternalistic inequality in domestic labor relationships. These are familiar forms of experience and identification in South African domestic labor environments, where relationships are deeply unequal and are often humiliating. Subservience is marked by practices that include degrading work (e.g., cleaning toilets, handling dirty underwear), exploitive wages, provision of inferior and leftover food, gifts of secondhand clothing, segregated spaces and eating utensils, restricted movement and freedom of association, and a lack of power to negotiate terms of employment. However, by viewing the relationship as one of care, trust and reciprocity, concerns about racism and the trouble they occasion can be kept at bay.

It is easy to interpret the ordinary practices of domestic labor and the practices represented in the UFS video as being racist. The deep inequality and the humiliating subservience of the relationship, the historical context of colonialism and apartheid, and the ongoing reality of white privilege all help to cast domestic labor as racism. No wonder the white employers Christine and Anna cited earlier (Phyfer 2015) expressed concerns about being viewed as racist. However—and this is the main point—the *participants avoid this reading* in their routine and as they participate in social life together (see Billig 1999). This is true both of the students and workers who made the UFS video and the participants in domestic labor relationships more generally. They *must avoid* engaging with the racism of their relationship in order for social life to proceed because—as we have seen—accusations and denials of racism rupture ordinary interaction, replacing the easygoing, friendly and polite routines with bitter acrimony.

To avoid racism, participants must have ideas about what constitutes the “racism-to-be-avoided,” and what can provoke it (Durrheim, Greener, and Whitehead 2015, Durrheim, Quayle, and Dixon 2016). They avoid racism from their point of view and from their distinctive “possibilities of performance” (Latham and Conradsen 2003) as workers or employers together with the racial baggage that goes with this positioning. Both parties

know how to avoid racism and the conflict it can occasion. It is difficult to study racism-to-be-avoided precisely because it is avoided. It remains unexpressed as an implicit possibility that could be but is often not taken up. Occasionally, such absences are marked by the kinds of reflections that are evident in the comments of white employers such as Christine and Anna. Mostly, however, researchers must analyze absence by comparing what was actually said or done in an interaction with what could have been said or done (Billig 2006, Irvine 2011). Interaction and topics that are avoided can be seen in outline as absences created by the practices and routines of avoidance (see Murray 2015). Interactionally, these absences are evident as collaborative avoidances that Billig (1997) suggests can look like “a joint conspiracy to achieve a collective refusal of knowledgeability” (p. 152). For example, a married couple might avoid talking about a painful infidelity by one party that occurred in the past. As they steer the conversation away from the topic—“let’s not go *there!*”—they also indicate the conversational taboo and construct an object of relational trauma. Likewise, parties in domestic labor relationships can steer interaction away from racism-to-be-avoided, refusing to take up opportunities to behave in racist ways or accuse others of racism even where outsiders can easily see and vicariously experience racism, such as the humiliation or exploitation that workers are often subjected to.

The students and workers in the UFS video avoid behaving like racists or victims of racism even when they easily could respond in racist terms or to racism. Consider the horrific scene where the workers are on their knees, in a Fear Factor mock-up, being told to “*sluk*” (swallow) the disgusting concoction that the students had prepared. Amid the laughter, the workers can be seen resisting, but not in the style of recalcitrant employees, or by leveling accusations of racism; and the boys can be seen directing the show and encouraging compliance, but not in the character of a racist *baas* (boss). At one point, a cleaner can be heard refusing to eat the disgusting food with the words, “*Jou gat man*” (“your ass man”). The response to this personal rudeness is general laughter, with the boy directing the show yielding with the words, “alright, alright.” The rudeness and refusal to obey are not treated as an expression of disrespect, for to do so would risk stepping into the mold of a racist *baas* and rupturing the current form of social life.

Ideas about racism-to-be-avoided form the backcloth to the scene. The participants are performing in a degrading scene but are interacting in a color-blind fantasy in which race and racism do not exist. To keep racism

and its subject positions at bay, the participants must avoid it. And in so doing, implicit ideas about what constitutes the racism-to-be-avoided are projected as negative images onto the taken-for-granted backcloth of everyday life. Non-racial and color-blind acts and responses of racism-avoidance are informed by and thus also reproduce unspeakable discourses about race and racism that constitute the underbelly of racial thoughts, feelings and behaviors of racialized South Africans.

Race Hate and Color-Blind Rejoinders

Thus far this article has considered how color-blind and nonracial identity positions can be taken up in context of race trouble, where people anticipate being racialized. Our primary interest has been the construction of creditable identities and possibilities of action, which can be accomplished by accusation, denial and repression of racism. I have argued that racial humiliation in the UFS video and in domestic labor more generally in South Africa is premised upon such subject positioning. In this section, we will briefly turn attention to the location and function of color-blind rhetoric in argumentative discourse. What role do color-blind and nonracial arguments play in conversations? Certainly, we can expect them to function as criticisms and as rejections of racism, but in so doing, how do they become part of a form of social life that also includes racism?

Racial stereotypes provide a shared grid of intelligibility which people can use to anticipate accusations and expressions of racism, to deny and avoid racism, and to act in ostensibly “non-racist” ways. In addition, however, racial stereotypes provide the rationale for expressions of racial hate or outrage. Consider the selection of comments that were published on YouTube in response to the UFS video (see Figure 2). The first and fourth comments in Figure 2 are the most recent (at the time of writing) and the earliest posts that appeared on the seven year-long exchange of racial hate flaming that is now archived on YouTube (cf. Cresswell, Whitehead, and Durrheim 2013). Both comments treat the video as proof of the more general stereotype that whites (or *boers*) are racist. They express outrage at the video in the strongest possible terms, calling for the murder and genocide of whites and *boers*, echoing a familiar racial discourse which was popularized in the struggle song, “kill the boer,” and that continues to be sung today as a form of critique and resistance. The comments don’t come labelled as

being racist and—like all racializing acts—they are arguably “not racist.” Rather than being racist, genocidal rhetoric like this can be defended as antiracist, virtuous, truth-telling.

Appeals to color blindness and non-racialism in contexts like this serve as *criticisms* of arguments that are portrayed as being racializing or racist. As such, they invoke the specter of racism they seek to exorcise. They do this in two ways. First, criticisms gesture towards the “racism” they are criticizing, conjuring up the racist arguments to condemn them. Second, they often elicit such “racism” as the color-blind arguments become objects of criticism themselves—potentially from all parties in the racism debate—for being naïve, idealistic, or dangerously playing into the hands of the real racists. Color-blind discourse becomes a target of criticism because it refuses to speak out against real injustice.

The rhetoric of color-blind arguments can be seen in “Na” post in Figure 2, which was one of a scattering of color-blind posts that could be found amid the obscene racial hate on the YouTube archive. “Na” express a color-blind, post-racism desire for a world of peace and love governed by recognition of our universal humanness. Color-blind discourse like this criticizes both the racism of the video *and* the racialized criticism and defense of the video. The post gestures toward the racism of the forum by lamenting and criticizing the horror of racial hate that it seeks to displace. In the fray of arguments about racism, color-blind positions also attract criticism as being naïve forms of idealism in the face of ongoing racism. This is illustrated by



FIGURE 2

Select Youtube comments in chronological order.

the “Ho” post in Figure 2, which castigates white commentators who reject the racism of the UFS video for ignoring the reality of racial hate that is directed against white people. Equally, we could imagine “Tu” or “Ga” arguing how color blindness plays into the hands of the oppressor and that the only solution to racism and its denial is a genocidal call to arms.

This brief analysis of color-blind rhetoric supports the argument of the chapter as a whole, namely, that non-racialism does not stand outside race trouble but is part of it. Just as nonracial subject positioning takes its bearings from racism-to-be-avoided, so, too, color-blind arguments are incited by and incite the racism they seek to criticize. Racism and non-racialism are locked into rhetorical relations with each other, each countering and inciting the other.

Conclusion

We are all implicated in the persistent racial inequality that continues to characterize our world, including post-apartheid South Africa. We might live in a leafy, homogeneously white neighborhood in Europe, recoiling in horror at the (racialized) “human traffickers” shipping racial others into Europe. We might be a white South African “*baas*” or “*madam*”; or a black “maid” or “gardener.” We might be a civil rights lawyer, a politician, an academic, or an ordinary person speaking out against racial injustice and oppression. We are all implicated in the system together because we are all connected by the history of racial oppression and domination and the ongoing practices of consumption, exploitation and violence that continue to produce racial categories and relationships. And we share the racial discourses that have always been used to explain and judge our world and account for ourselves within it.

It feels good to think that we are not part of it, even as we participate in it. The analysis of the UFS video suggests that it might even be necessary to think that you are no part of it in order to participate in it. The students and the cleaners together took part in the events recorded in the video in a spirit of trust, intimacy, and fun-and-games. They could do this because—I have argued—they used familiar identity frames to displace racial framing and keep accusations and recriminations of racism at bay.

While avoiding the genocidal excess of many of the YouTube comments, it is tempting to join the chorus of criticism that derided the UFS video and the students as being racist. Why then would one want to treat

these depictions of racism as social constructions and seek to study the race trouble they themselves participate in? I suggest that the primary reason to study race trouble is political. What does criticism of racism—and the colorblind, post-racism ethos it articulates—accomplish?

I argue that criticism of racism can achieve the same effects as the nonracial framing of interaction in the UFS video. In the process of focusing attention on deplorable racist acts, people and events, it also shifts focus from other practices that are “repressed” and thereby implicitly exonerated. Billig (1999) describes the process, which he has named, “dialogic repression”: “At its simplest, repression might be considered as a form of changing the subject. It is a way of saying to oneself ‘talk, or think, of this, not that.’ One then becomes engrossed in ‘this’ topic so ‘that’ topic becomes forgotten” (Billig 1999, 54). The process is represented in Figure 1. Accusations of racism involve abstracting an event out of social life and constituting it as an act of racism. In the process, the forms of social life that made the event enactable recede into the background of ordinary acceptable practice. The ordinary humiliation of domestic labor is forgotten as we identify exceptional events to castigate as racism.

The process involves a degree of misrecognition as the ordinary is cast as exceptional. This is possibly the reason why the focus of racism accusation was the urination in the food, when this evidently did not take place. Urinating in the food became the focus of attention, as an outstanding act of racism. In contrast, barely a comment was made about the workers kneeling and eating like dogs. Many of the critics would themselves have experienced domestic workers kneeling before them to clean floors and toilets. The criticism of outstanding events and the racism of others can be a way of collaboratively forgetting about our participation in ongoing ordinary relationships of racial inequality.

Criticism of racism works also to absolve the critic. It does this in two ways. First, as discussed, by the process of dialogic repression, criticisms of racism create fractious forms of interaction that focus attention away from ordinary life and thereby help us to “forget” about the “racism” of our everyday lives. Criticism of racism abstracts events from ordinary life, making them exceptional instances of Racism, and in the process directs attention away from the ordinary relations we are part of. Second, criticism of racism also helps the critic to feel that they, personally, are no part of it. Critics position themselves as external to the objectified “racism,” as an outsider judging the deplorable slice of reality.

Non-racialism, color blindness, and post-racialism have emerged as useful resources for criticizing racism. They allow us to participate in our racial worlds and to intervene in it, for example, by de-escalating racial flaming. However, I have argued that we need to look beyond the surface rhetoric of its non-racialism, to understand how it is also implicated in producing the “dynamic mutually constitutive practices and contexts of social division” that Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown (2011, 199) refer to as “race trouble.” The analysis of race trouble involves a refocusing of analytic attention on the whole conglomerate of racial practices, criticisms and justifications of “racism”—including color-blind positions—in ordinary life and the events of “racism” that it spawns (see Durrheim 2016). This will allow us to see how the whole lot is put together as a “racial formation” (Omi and Winant 1994) by people with many good intentions.

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NOTES

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1. The UFS video, which was made in September 2007, can be downloaded from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8N-h8anSuE>.
2. The Times Media video, entitled, *They Betrayed Our Trust* (produced by Puma Fihlani), is available at <http://multimedia.timeslive.co.za/videos/2008/02/they-betrayed-our-trust/>.
3. The framing of the activities as a fear factor contest is mentioned explicitly by the boys in the UFS video.

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