A Decolonial Perspective on the Politics of Blackness and Black Academic Identity Formation in the South African Academy

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Abstract.

In this article, I use decolonial theory, literature, and data from my PhD research to analyze the complexities of blackness and the formation of black academic identities in the landscape of South African higher education. I argue that in addition to numerous other forms of identification that black academics deploy to self-identify, it is largely blackness that frames their ontological experiences of the academy. Further, through critical analysis, I demonstrate that the debates on identity politics framing the post-1994 polity in South Africa in general equally shape the discourse on identity politics at South African institutions of higher learning. I advocate for a discussion and engagement with broader identities that include non-South Africans in the academy. I analyze 'default' related to how black academics enter the academic profession while simultaneously arguing for a departure from such practice towards collective and deliberate efforts aimed at socializing blacks into the academic profession. I conclude the article by discussing how black academics deploy 'consciousness' to understand the prevalent cultural institutional cultural practices that define the South African academy.

Keywords: Decolonial Theory, Blackness, Black Academic Identify Formation, Non-South African Black Academics.

1. Introduction

In this article, I use data, decolonial theory and literature to discuss blackness and 'being black' and locate the discussion within the complex history of racial segregation in South Africa. I interrogate the experiences of non-South African black academics whose role in South African higher education continues to be a subject of intense discussion. Becoming an academic is not an obvious career choice for most black academics. Accordingly, I will briefly analyze how black academics enter the academy through what they describe as 'default' and call for a 'rethinking' of 'default' to access the academic profession. I conclude the article with an analysis of black academics as 'conscious beings' who are aware of the structures of domination in the academy ushered in by South Africa's history of colonialism, apartheid, and coloniality.

Because this article is based on my PhD study on the experiences of black academics, I will begin by providing a brief background of the broader research and briefly discuss the methodology used to generate data, a sample of which will be used in the article. I must state from the outset that while this article could possibly have been written as a theoretical paper, there are data based on ethically conducted research that help illuminate some theoretical arguments in this article undergirded by literature.

2. Background of the study and some methodological considerations

The broader study on which this article is based was conceptualized through the decolonial lens. I deployed decolonial terms and concepts to

investigate the mundane everyday experiences of complex multilayered forms of violence and dehumanization against black academics in a historically white South African university (HWU). I demonstrated, utilizing decolonial theory, how violence in the South African academy is anchored within the global colonial matrix of power defined by coloniality of power, knowledge, and being.

The research design and methodology were also anchored in decolonial theory. The study was not designed to be entirely 'mechanistic'; that is, it should not only be about listing the steps and/or methods used to generate and analyze the data without inviting other ways of knowing and collecting information (Fortier, 2017). I took seriously the ultimate responsibility of deconstructing existing methodologies and reconstructing alternative ways of knowing and doing research, as well as, importantly, rethinking the ways in which we think about research and scholarship. Consequently, the entire project was guided by the principles of non-extractivist methodologies (Santos, 2017); re-humanization (Chilisa, 2012), as well as the use of indigenous languages to conduct research.

Fieldwork for the larger project was carried out in March and August 2018. However, additional interviews with some key informants were conducted in 2019 and 2020. Eighteen (18) black academics at various stages of their academic careers were interviewed for the study. The key categories of black academics interviewed include gender, seniority, citizenship, experience, and area / specialization. For this article, we refer to four (4) interviewees: Black South African male (BSAF_01_14/03/18); Black South African female

(BSAF_01_08/03/18); Black South African female (BSAF_02_12/08/18); and Black Non-South African male (BNSAM_01_/14/18). Interview questions were created based on some of the following broad areas: the formation of academic identity formation; everyday academic work life; university administration and governance; research and publications; decolonization and Africanisation of higher education; membership of professional bodies; as well as questions on the future of the university in (South) Africa.

I used thematic analysis to analyze the broad interview data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 13), thematic analysis "minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic". One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 4). This flexibility allowed me to refine and revise the themes as the analysis evolved. I developed themes for all sets of questions that made up part of the interview. I grouped patterns emerging from various interview data into themes that I subsequently reviewed, named and defined (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Some of the themes emerging from data on blackness and black academic identity formation will be discussed in this article starting with the politics of blackness in the post-1994 South African context.

3. The Politics of Blackness and Being Black in South Africa

Being black in South Africa is a highly contested, politicized, and constantly shifting category shaped mainly by the existential conditions of a

people assigned or deliberately assuming or not assuming such an identity (Gordon, 1997). In contemporary South Africa, blackness is intimately linked with the evolution of a society in which specific historical moments/events/processes assign meanings to blackness, its articulation, its performativity, and its experience. Specifically, how we came to understand blackness in South Africa is tied to racism and racist constructions. Grosfoguel (2016, p. 10) defines racism as 'a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the lines of the human that has been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the capitalist / patriarchal western centric / Christian centric modern / colonial world system'.

I am not going to discuss the evolution of apartheid racist ideologies and their devastating effects on South African society because there is a lot of literature that deals with this topic. However, what is pertinent for my discussion is that how blackness was construed, legislated on, and deployed as a mechanism for surveillance of black bodies during colonialism and apartheid differs markedly from the racialized and raced discourse of the post-1994 democratic dispensation. That said, there are crucial and discernible ways in which that discourse still finds expression in the post-1994 polity. Here, I recall a critical incident that occurred at San Souci Girls High School in 2016 where school authorities delegitimized black girls' natural hair or 'Afros' for apparently not being 'neat' (Wa Azania, 2020). In her conversations with the black girls at the center of this racist incident, Wa Azania learned that the girls were forced to carry the school's Yellow Book to record the merits and demerits and the 'neatness' or lack thereof of their hair was part of the records. Black girls

characterized this book as "Dom Pass" because of the role it was intended to play in the surveillance of their bodies at the school (Wa Azania, 2020; Mokoena, 2017). This demonstrates that there are some old patterns of apartheid racism that manifest themselves in the new democratic dispensation. Mpofu-Welsh (2020) has characterized this as 'privatized apartheid', while other scholars (Bradlow, 2021; Madlingozi, 2017; Ruiters, 2021) refer to the enduring legacy of apartheid as neo-apartheid.

The current official legislative and policy discourse in South Africa recognizes 'black' as a broad category that includes Africans, Indians, and Coloreds (Christopher, 2006). However, as Manganyi (1973) points out, historically there have always been groups that do not take kindly to being incorporated into the category of black. Thus, just as the fluidity of black identity can afford anyone claim over blackness; it equally grants everyone the latitude to subvert and negate such identity if they so wish. In Martinique Island, for instance, Gordon (2015) demonstrates how at the height of the French colonial conquest in the 1960s black Martinicans grappled with self-identification as black. *According to Gordon (2014, p. 31), black Martinicans 'regarded themselves as French, not black or African, and expected, if not to be treated like whites, to be acknowledged, at least to be better than the other 'real' blacks, especially sub-Saharan Africans.'*

Therefore, I argue that the current categorization of what constitutes black in South African politics could be convenient for policy and legislative purposes, but it still does not address the question of what constitutes "authentic black" (Dei, 2017, p. 3).).). If, following Dei's argument, there is a possibility of an 'authentic black', it is inevitable that there

must be at least the possibility of an 'unauthentic black', a 'fake black' in a country whose name is equally 'fake' (Sithole, 2024). How, then, is authentic/unauthentic black to be understood/construed or even defined? Further, what precisely is an authentic black in the context of a post-1994 South African polity where blackness is entangled with a litany of policies and legislative discourses aimed at, ostensibly, undoing the injustices of the colonial/apartheid past? I argue that the starting p (Sithole, Steve Biko: Decolonial meditations of black consciousness., 2016)oint in dealing with the complex question of blackness is to recognize it as being a socially, culturally, politically, economically constructed category - 'a discursive invention', to use Mignolo's (2011b, p. 275) term. This recognition must consider the fact that the construction of categories is not a noble or benign exercise; and that it is in the construction of categories and the constructed categories themselves that the power structures of inequality, subjugation, and domination are concealed and perpetuated.

We must also recognize that the processes of naming / designing, defining, classifying/categorizing, (re)structuring, and 'clearing' are critical in the articulation of modernity/coloniality. For example, Escobar (1995) reminds us that the 'development apparatus' thrived by designating sociological and anthropological universals to those it considered underdeveloped or in need of development (women, illiterate, farmers using 'primitive methods', etc.) and sought to create institutions and apparatuses to address these supposedly 'universal' challenges of underdevelopment.

Building on Du Bois, Gordon (2014) urges us to grapple with how modernity / colonialism universally conflates and defines black people as 'problem people', an ontological invention that dominates Western disciplines such as genetics and physical anthropology.y. Gordon explains:

These people have been aptly described by Du Bois as 'problems.' They are a function of a world in which they are posited as illegitimate, although they could exist nowhere else. Speaking here primarily of blacks and Indians/Native Americans, by black, I also mean to include Australian Aboriginals and related groups in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. These people are treated by dominant organizations of knowledge, especially those falling under the human social sciences, as problems rather than as people who face problems. The status of the problem is a function of the presumptive legitimacy of the systems that generate them. In effect, being perfect, the systems that produce conditions resist blame for any injustice or contradiction that may be avowed by such people. (Gordon, 2014, p. 84).

The failure of the world to "deproblematize" blackness and black people remains central to the persistent violence, dehumanization, and injustice suffered by black people worldwide. However, the question of blackness as a 'problem' is more vividly nuanced in the United States, where police brutality operates as a state-sanctioned mechanism to annihilate black African Americans. What is seen as a problem, in this case black bodies (black men and boys), must be incarcerated, tortured, and murdered often without or with little accountability. Black bodies are reduced to nothingness precisely because that which must be

exterminated must first and foremost be designated as nothing, a process anchored in the constructions of modernity/coloniality.

4. Blackness and Global Capitalist Exploitation

The analysis of blackness must recognize that blackness is inextricably entangled with global capitalist economic imperatives; that maximum exploitation of black bodies lies at the core of the modern global capitalist order, from plantation/chattel slavery to the global neoliberal structuring of the world order. Mbembe's (2017) work, *The Critique of Black Reason,* critically interrogates blackness in the context of its relationship with economic extraction and exploitation. He analyzes relations of extraction during various historical epochs that include slavery, colonization, and the current neoliberal capitalist world order. In defining blackness in capitalist exploitative terms, Mbembe asserts that

In addition to designating a heterogeneous, multiple, and fragmented world - ever new fragments of fragments - the term "Black" signalled a series of devastating historical experiences, the reality of a vacant life, the fear felt by millions trapped in the ruts of racial domination, the anguish at seeing their bodies and minds controlled from the outside, at being transformed into spectators watching something that was, but also was not, their true existence. This is not all. The term "Black" was the product of a social and technological machine tightly linked to the emergence of globalization and capitalism. It was invented to signify exclusion, brutalization, and degradation, to point to a limit constantly conjured and abhorred. The Black man, despised and profoundly dishonored, is the only human in the modern order whose skin has been

transformed into the form and spirit of merchandise, the living crypt of capital. (Mbembe, 2017, p. 23).

Mbembe's analysis of the disposability of black bodies resonates with Fanon's (1986, p. 190-191) argument that

In Europe [and surely elsewhere in the world], the Negro has one function: symbolizing the lower emotions, the lesser inclination, and the dark side of the soul. In the collective unconsciousness of homo occidentalis, Negro, or, if one prefers, the color black symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine.

It is this anchoring of blackness in the grammar of suffering (to use Ahmed's 2012 phrase) that gave/gives rise to global movements advocating for the liberation of black people, from the Negritude, Black Consciousness Movement and Black Lives Matter movement to the Fallist Movements in South Africa. The unbearable suffocation induced by anti-black racist ideologies gives rise to the need to constantly strategize new mechanisms and technologies of existing while black in a capitalist world.

5. Black Academics and the Generalizability of Identity Politics

Where do we locate black academics in the larger discussions on identity politics in South Africa and the South African academy? In addressing this question, I turn to Bond (2012) who asserts that the idea of the university as an 'Ivory Tower' is an illusion created to designate the university, its activities, and its academics a distinct righteous character. I argue, therefore, that contrary to the illusion of the Ivory Tower, black academics, too, are trapped into old and new identity politics affecting how they self- identify; perform and challenge race in their everyday

encounters within the academy. They are also profoundly impacted by legislation and policies, as well as other mechanisms of social and political engineering that have become commonplace in the post-1994 South African society.

Black academics' daily experiences in the academy revolve around having to constantly navigate institutional spaces, languages, symbols, architectural designs, and knowledge systems that often devalue blackness, the African continent, African-ness, African people, as well as African epistemologies. As Vandeyar (2010, p. 916) notes, it is 'apparent that identities of today's academics do not nestle solely within the confines of the university, but that they straddle various communities of practice that are becoming increasingly more porous. For this reason, black academics play a broader complex role in the struggles of the modern South African society in which coloniality continues to unleash poverty, inequality, and other forms of human degradation". Briefly, the work of black academics is invariably shaped by the beliefs and prejudices that define society as a whole, and they also operate within and within the dominant ideological frameworks of their time (Bond, 2012).

6. Being black non-South African in the South African Academy

The recruitment of black academics from different parts of the African continent, controversial as it may be, is deeply connected to the development of the post-1994 South African higher education policy. The National Plan for Higher Education explicitly proposed the recruitment of black African academics from the rest of Africa to provide role models for black students (mainly South African) while simultaneously hoping

that this would change the institutional cultures of academic institutions (Sehoole et al., 2019).). It is crucial to mention that the National Plan was conceived at the time when the university system was expanding due to political changes. These changes necessitated plans to diversify academic staff profiles to be congruent with the anticipated increase in numbers of black students who were expected to proliferate the university system (see, for example, Breetzke & Hedding, 2016). Furthermore, Sehoole et al. (2019) note that the recruitment of academics from the rest of the African continent was intimately connected to the prevailing ideas of social, political, and economic development of the African continent. Consequently, South African universities in 2010 had 801 foreign black academics, 482 from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and 319 from the rest of the African continent (Sehoole et al., 2019). The number of African academics had increased in 2014 to 4 214 (Thaver & Thaver, 2018a).

The presence of black African academics in South African universities raises many interesting questions. For example, how do black South African academics and their counterparts from elsewhere in Africa negotiate their identities within racialized academic spaces in a South African university? How do both groups of academics experience belonging/unbelonging in the South African academy and the South African society? (Batisai, 2019). Further, how do South African black academics relate to academics from elsewhere in Africa and, conversely, how do the latter relate to their white counterparts? How does the fact that some blacks from elsewhere on the African continent do not, for example, use race as a marker of social identification, but other categories such as ethnic,

religious and linguistic affiliations (see, for instance, Tewolde, 2019) further complicate the question of black identity in the post-1994 South African sociopolitical landscape? It is in the context of these questions that I argue for an analysis that recognizes the presence of multiplicities of identities such as the non-South African Black Male (BNSAM_01_14/08/18) academic who claims not be concerned with the racial dynamics that play out between black and white academics precisely because he considers himself to be 'above the average black South African academic.'

7. Analyzing 'default' in the formation of black academic identities

The modern capitalist society is defined by a strong belief that through schooling, children and youth can be socialized into career trajectories through behavioral molding and modeling. Varenne (2007) notes that this form of socialization does not only occur in schools, but also in other social institutions and settings such as family, church, villages, towns, etc. Consequently, it can be argued that social institutions such as education operate within the logic and rationality of the modern state to create a demand for children to declare their preferred future career paths very early in their lives. The expectation is that once a declaration of a future career choice has been made, children will be socialized, again through schooling and other mechanisms, towards their chosen career paths.

The scenario sketched above begs a simple, yet complex question: Are there children who grow up wanting to become academics? To what extent are children made aware of the academic profession in the same

way that they are other professions such as law, accountancy, medicine, engineering, etc.? If the answers to these questions are negative, how do black academics end up choosing the academic profession?

Of course, there is no single simple answer to these questions. Instead, interviews with black academics demonstrate that they often enter the academic profession through an unmapped career path. This is what a black South African male academic (BSAM_01_14/03/18) referred to as 'becoming an academic by default', which will be discussed in detail shortly. Another black academic (BSAF_02_12/08/18) referred to the experience as'stumbling into academia.' More (2019: p. 28) describes becoming a philosopher as being 'fundamentally accidental.' However, contrary to the 'default' associated with the entry of black academics into the academic profession, Madlingozi (2007) tells the story of a planned and systematic preparation of white students for academic careers in the Faculty of Law of the University of Pretoria through the 'broederskap'. He explains this phenomenon and the process as follows:

Typically, this is how this broederskap plays out: An 'ambitious' white student who fits the Tukkies label is identified from her student days and soon becomes a tutor. She is then appointed as an academic assistant or research assistant where, unlike her black counterparts, she is occasionally given teaching and research opportunities. Eventually, she is recommended for a lecturer position due to the 'outstanding' work she did as an academic/research assistant (the fact that she was supported and provided with countless opportunities to demonstrate her teaching and research abilities is conveniently ignored).).). This 'goal-driven and promising' staff member then receives her doctorate thesis supervised by one

of her cheerleaders. In her new role as a senior lecturer or professor, she then begins the same process, ensuring that intellectual incest continues and that the faculty retains its 'uniqueness' and that 'standards are maintained', and so it goes. (Madlingozi, 2007, pp. 29-30)

Bearing the above in mind, I want to address the proposition of default; that is, what does it mean for black academics to enter the academy through default? In the simplest sense, entering the academy through default occurs primarily because historically, academia in South Africa was not designed to socialize non-whites into university careers and spaces. Consequently, those who were marginalized by the academic profession ended up 'stumbling' into it by default. I must acknowledge that there are instances, past and present, in which the so-called 'strong' black students are encouraged / supported to pursue post-graduate studies to the point where they finish their PhD and start working as academics. However, this is not as systematic as the *broederskap* discussed by Madlingozi (2007). Often, when senior white academics undertake to mentor young black academics, it is considered an act of benevolence that leads to the production of black academics by default. It is the default in the sense that becoming an academic may not necessarily be an individual choice, but rather a decision made by others on behalf of the student based on the perceived academic abilities and potential of the latter.

Like the instances of default discussed above, data from the broader study indicate that none of the black academics interviewed had planned to become academics. However, there seems to be a fascination among all of them with the academy that occurs as they navigate the university as students and acquire higher degrees. For example, the black South

African academic (BSAM_01_14/03/18) who brought up the concept of 'default' said that he had no intention of pursuing an academic career at all. His story is familiar to the people of his generation growing up during the struggle against apartheid in the 1970s up to the end of institutionalized segregation in South Africa in the early 1990s. He was actively involved in politics and never even finished standard 10 (now grade 12) because, as he put it, he was part of the generation of 'Freedom Now, Education Later', a slogan popularized by student activists during the struggle against apartheid in the 1970s until the demise of the system in 1994. This generation of school-student population believed that the attainment of freedom -as well as the immediacy by which it was thought to be attainable - superseded all other imperatives.

It was immediately after the country transitioned into democracy that his then political party asked him to become mayor of his hometown in the Eastern Cape Province. After weighing his options, he decided against pursuing a career in politics, instead choosing to pursue what he calls a 'knowledge production project' (BSAM_01_14/03/18). He perceived his role specifically as that of contributing toward nation-building through knowledge production, a predominant theme in the literature on the role of the university in post-independence African polities. (See, for example, Nabudere, 2003; Wandira, 1981; Young, 1981).

A black South African academic ((BSAF_01_14/03/18) who also entered the academic profession by default added something rather emotive to her academic career choice: passion. According to this academic, the urge to join the academy surfaced after over 20 years working in various tiers of the South African government where she held several senior

positions. She states that her 'passion for academia' engulfed her so much that she decided to resign from her high-paying government job to take up the position of Developmental Lecturer under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) New Generation of Academic Program (nGAP).).).

The New Generation of Academics Program aims to mitigate the shortage of academic staff in the country's universities by systematically funding and supporting the development of black academics to the point of completing PhDs. The nGAP requires that, among other things, the holder undertake some light teaching and other academic activities while working to obtain a PhD. This is one of the efforts of the DHET to address the challenges of declining academics in the country (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2011).

8. Black academics on being 'conscious' of institutional cultural practices embedded in the South African academy

Academics in general and black academics enter the academy with some degree of consciousness of their existential positionality within the socially stratified world. This includes their ability to discern institutional constraints and the enablers of their academic aspirations. Maseti (2018, p. 347) agrees with this assertion when she states that

As a black young academic, I am aware of being black because of the spaces I navigate, from departmental meetings to corridor conversations in the office, as well as interactions with my students in the class. I am a black lecturer, which often means that I [must] be very thorough in my

work. I perform my race differently in this white space due to the implicit expectations of how I should perform my race.

I contend that the development of critical consciousness is crucial to black academic identity formation, precisely because it allows black academics to effectively think within and recreate their own "epistemic and ontological borders" (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 277).). Sithole (2016, p. 13) poignantly points out that coming to consciousness or being in the state of consciousness has been with blackness from the first encounter with oppression. For black people, encountering and fighting oppression in the academy and society is almost inevitable. In what follows, I briefly reflect on the mundane aspects of academic life that shape the identities of black academics, thus requiring 'consciousness' to be grasped.

The identities of black academics are inadvertently shaped by 'communities of practice' within academic institutions (Kiguwa, 2019; Vandeyar, 2010). The entrenched communities of practices can either make or break the aspirations of black academics as they negotiate their identities within academic workspaces. Black academics are aware of alliances within the academy, as well as the 'battle' lines between individuals/groups within disciplines/schools/faculties and the institution at large. Boswell (2014) supports this argument by saying that victims of epistemic violence know what is happening to them and know how to engage in antiracist practices.

Building on Maldonado-Torres (2016, p. 13), I argue that black academics are aware of their living in the 'zone of subhumanity' in which they are constantly questioning their humanity in the world they occupy. As Fanon (1986, p. 194) bluntly puts it, "a Negro is forever in combat

with his image". The blackness, in the Fanonian sense, is constantly negotiating its existence to avoid what Maldonado-Torres (2016, p. 14) terms 'self-erasure; [in which] blackness must disappear or at least be covered by whiteness.' I submit that it is using a profoundly critical level of consciousness that black academics will be able to negate the effects of 'self-erasure' and being 'covered by whiteness'. Remaining visible, for black academics, requires awareness of the university as a complex institution whose foundations are deeply enmeshed in global structures of power.

The sense of awareness of a black male academic's 'place' in the university is captured in the following vignette:

In terms of being a black person/African in an institution that historically [laughs] had regarded blacks and Africans in these spaces as intruders, I became very early aware of the fact that I was sticking out like a sore thumb. For example, there was a sense that one was in Cambridge, yet I was in South Africa. When I got there [campus where he taught before moving to the one where he now teaches], there was tea everywhere. The only black people you saw were cleaners and those who make tea. The entire academic staff [were] white. Therefore, that forced me to be aware of my racial identity. (BSAM_01_14/03/18)

The academic in the above vignette's description of himself as an intruder has serious implications not just for how he self-identifies but, significantly, for how he values his contribution to the institution and his relationship with various stakeholders within it. In fact, an intruder is someone who occupies an institutional place where they are not welcomed. In the case of this black academic, he might have been recruited

and invited to work for the institution, but he is not welcome and, for that reason, he sticks out like a sore thumb. Ahmed (2012, p. 41) observes: 'To stick out can mean to become a sore point, or even to experience oneself as being a sore point.' In the eyes of whiteness, it is not different from black cleaning and 'tea staff', who are hierarchically located at the lowest levels not only of the university, but also of the broader society.

The experiences of the black academic cited in the above excerpt are further echoed by those of a black female academic (BSAF_01_08/03/18) who had a very difficult first week on the job at the university where she was employed. She stated during the interview that there was no one to welcome her when she reported to duty on her first day. According to her, she did not have an office or the tools of trade (e.g., computer) she needed to transition into her job. That is when the consciousness of her blackness and being an 'intruder' awakened. She reflects on her experience as follows.

As a black person, you are very aware that racism is not done and dusted. You are very aware that we grew up when these things were happening and now we are with the people who were doing these things [perpetuating racism]. Some of them grew up being taught that a black person is nothing. A black person cleans after you, she washes your clothes, she is a 'Doris' and he is a 'Boy'. These are the people you find here, and we do not need to forget that. As much as we can say that things have changed, they have not changed. Racism has become subtle and is found everywhere, even within academia. It is very subtle in the sense that if you are a white lecturer you are treated in a specific way. I sense that if

the people who are being appointed as Developmental Lecturers were white, they would have been treated very well. (BSAF_01_08/03/18).

Space does not allow for a discussion of strategies to confront established institutional cultural practices at South African universities. However, it is important to acknowledge that black academics who are able to deploy 'consciousness' to be aware of their positionality in the racialized South African academy are a crucial starting point in the expression of ideas about decolonizing the university, a discussion I dealt with elsewhere (Khambule, 2020).).

9. Conclusions

In this article, I have explored how black academic identity formation is inherently entangled with the broader discourse of identity politics in the post-1994 South African polity. Using a decolonial lens, data and literature, I analyzed how the fluidity of identities is shaped by a myriad of factors that are intricately related to the colonial past and the enduring legacy of segregation in South Africa. A critical argument was made in relation to how universities need to shift from default with respect to the recruitment of black academics into the academic profession. I highlighted the fact that new programs, such as nGAP, are changing the trajectory related to the recruitment of black academics, thus challenging the predominant narrative of default. Coloniality survives by constantly reconstituting its modalities and reconstructing new categories of blackness; and thereby antagonizing the newly constructed categories of blackness such as non-South African black academics. It is in that context that I argued for a need to deconstruct the ways in which non-South

African academics identify themselves. Importantly, this article high-lighted the critical point that whether black academics are doing enough to combat antiblackness in academic spaces, they are aware of their multiple identities in the South African universities. It is precisely this consciousness that can be used as a point of departure in articulating, strategizing, and ultimately confronting hegemonic structures of violence and dehumanization in the South African academy.

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