

Race, Racialisation, and Colour-Caste:

Neville Alexander's Contribution to the Philosophy of Race

By George Hull | Peer Review



Abstract

Since race categories do not pick out biologically significant divisions of humanity, their use can be misleading and offensive. Yet racialisation – society's viewing and treating South Africans as though they comprised different races – has generated real societal groups which are significant from the perspectives of justice and identity. In the philosophy of race, these facts make for a conceptual conundrum. Is common-sense race thinking right that races, if they exist, are human groups differing in significant, inherent and heritable ways, in which case there are no races? Or has common-sense race thinking failed to grasp races' socially constructed nature, and should we say races are the really existing groups generated by racialisation? The same facts confronted the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) – a mid-20th-century South African liberation movement – with

an organisational and theoretical challenge. Given its uncompromising non-racialism, how could it justify a federal structure which effectively divided its membership into African, Coloured, and Indian sections? If this was not race-based division, what was it? A former NEUM member, Neville Alexander, provided the Unity Movement with the conceptual resources to answer this challenge. I argue that his major work, *One Azania, One Nation*, is also a contribution to the philosophy of race. Alexander first contends that social constructionists cannot, without equivocation, claim that common-sense thinking about race in one sense has created races in a quite different sense. He then shows that introducing a second concept, 'colour-caste', can preserve the insights of the constructionist approach. While races are unreal, colour-castes are real social identities which need to be overcome.

Introduction

In South Africa, as in other countries where race thinking has in the past played a determinative role, race presents itself to us today clothed in paradox. Race categories and the concept of race can strike us as unsound, race itself as unreal – relics of an age of illusion and oppression which should be discarded. Public discussion of a research publication from 2019 – which claimed that ‘Colored women in South Africa have an increased risk for low cognitive functioning, as they present with low education levels and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors’ (Nieuwoudt et al., 2019: 1) – correctly stressed that there are strong scientific objections to the use of, and especially generalisations in terms of, race categories such as ‘coloured’ (see, for instance, Jansen et al., 2020) [1].

At the same time, race can strike us as real and important – a phenomenon which should factor into policymaking by societal institutions and government. This applies particularly in relation to efforts by South African institutions to redress historical injustices inspired or rationalised by race thinking. For example, a newspaper opinion piece recently questioned a South African university’s commitment to redress in staff appointments, on the basis that its ‘top management team [...] is dominated by coloured and Indian or white South Africans’, with individuals ‘of African descent’ (sic) in the minority (Naidu, 2020) [2].

Examples like these raise conceptual questions. Is it possible both to criticise a scientific study for employing race categories and to criticise an institution’s redress policy by invoking race categories? Does the one criticism simply contradict the other? Or would a correct theory of race allow that both lines of criticism could be legitimate? At the root of all these questions is the question which is my focus here: What is race?

Due to its conceptual character this is, in part, a philosophical question – though only philosophy informed by relevant biological and social-scientific research findings could hope to answer it adequately. But professional philosophers are not the only people who engage in philosophical thinking. I argue here that an important contribution to philosophical thinking about race is to be found in the work of an activist and intellectual from South Africa’s Unity Movement tradition: Neville Alexander.

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In recent years, several studies have highlighted the relevance of Unity Movement ideas for South Africa’s renewed engagement with questions of race and identity (see especially Maré, 2014; Zinn, 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Motala et al., 2017; Erasmus, 2017; Soudien, 2019). These studies have, however, tended to focus on the Unity Movement’s general anti-realist position about race, without paying attention to the particular more nuanced account of race which Neville Alexander developed. Where they have given attention to Alexander’s position (see Zinn, 2016; Motala et al., 2017), they have not pinpointed the advance it makes on the theoretical work of the previous generation of Unity Movement intellectuals, or the fact that Alexander’s thinking also makes a contribution to the contemporary philosophical debate about race.

In what follows, after explaining why there is a philosophical question about the nature of race, I detail how the same factors which make this philosophical question so hard to answer created a theoretical and practical conundrum for the leaders of the Unity Movement in mid-20th century South Africa. I then outline Neville Alexander’s distinctive position on race in his major work, *One Azania, One Nation*, showing how his thinking advances not only the debate about race in Unity Movement circles, but also the philosophical debate about race today. As we will see, Alexander argues that, though race is unreal, the societal process of racialisation has given rise to real groups, colour-castes. While real now, colour-caste identities need not

exist forever. In Alexander's view, they are something which can, and must, be overcome.

Why is there a philosophical question about race? [3]

Not many people would think to ask a philosopher what race is. The expertise of human biologists and empirical social scientists seem more relevant. And in the first instance, it is. But sometimes a few uncontested empirical observations, taken together, create a paradox or dilemma which only careful conceptual thought will resolve. Many philosophical problems arise this way. For instance, the observation that it is open to us humans to decide whether or not to carry out some physical actions, combined with the scientific observation that universal laws govern physical events, creates the philosophical problem of free will. In the case of race, three observations – on which there is wide agreement among empirical researchers – create a philosophical conundrum.

(i) Races, on the common-sense understanding, are not real

There is a common-sense understanding of 'race' of which almost all English speakers are aware, even if they distance themselves from it. On this understanding, races are human groups which differ significantly, significantly enough to justify our giving them their own labels: 'Black', 'white', 'Asian', 'Pacific Islander', in South Africa 'Coloured', and others besides. The differences – says this common-sense understanding – are certainly physical, perhaps also cognitive and emotional. What is more, they are relatively fixed and immutable. Unlike cultural and religious differences, they are not a matter of choice or training; rather, they are inherent to the individual, possessed by nature, and passed on down the generations like a family's distinguishing traits.

To say this is the common-sense understanding of 'race' is not necessarily to say that common sense takes races on this understanding to exist. There is, after all, a common-sense understanding of 'unicorn', though it is not common sense that unicorns exist. There have always been sceptics about race. And it is likely that some, despite being sceptical, have nonetheless spoken and acted as though they believed in races – for example, because they found themselves, or desired

to be, on the privileged end of a racialised hierarchy (Blum, 2010: 317n4). But 'race' is not quite like 'unicorn'. An unexamined assumption that races in the above sense exist is widespread in many parts of the world. As Charles W. Mills puts it, 'lay consciousness' about race 'is typically realist' (1998: 60). What is more, belief in races in the above sense has informed influential scientific theories and political doctrines – both the harmful doctrines underlying colonial, fascist, and apartheid politics (see Fredrickson, 2002), and some of the political theories of Africanists and pan-Africanists in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Appiah, 1992: Ch. 1).

For significant and inherent differences to be transmitted within discrete populations, they would need to be genetically encoded. Yet that is not what scientists find. Humans have more than 99 per cent of their DNA in common. When geneticists compare the chromosomes of members of what we count as different races, they consistently find that the overwhelming majority (85% or more) of what little human genetic variation there is can be found within groups we call races. Only a small proportion (a maximum of 15%) can be classed as variation between groups we call races (Nei et al., 1972; Lewontin, 1972).

At the phenotypic level, traits also do not cluster as common-sense race thinking would lead one to believe. Human skin pigmentation varies along a spectrum by latitude (Jablonski, 2015). Nose shape varies among humans, but not along the fault lines of 'race': for example, many East African 'black' people have the same nose shape as North European 'white' people (Atkin, 2012: 35). Tightly curled hair can be found among people classed as 'white' as well as among those classed as 'black'. All in all, if one's purpose was to come up with a rational categorisation of human beings by physical traits, one would not arrive at the divisions common-sense race thinking presses upon us.

If one focuses on the 15% of human genetic variation which exists between the groups we call races, among the different clusters detectable are some which correlate in a rough and ready way with common-sense race thinking's divisions. For example, Noah Rosenberg and his colleagues' cluster analysis identified five populations corresponding very approximately to groups we would class as races – except, notably, it counts South Asians (for e.g. Bangladeshis) as

members of the same population as North Europeans (Rosenberg et al., 2002; Rosenberg et al., 2005). Though the differences such a cluster analysis detects are real biological differences, they are not significant biological differences. Indeed, the clusters Rosenberg and his team located are largely made up of non-functional DNA in the human genome (Spencer, 2019: 104). Neither at the phenotypic nor at the genotypic level does common-sense race thinking carve human nature at its joints.

(ii) Racialisation is real

Though there are not significant, inherent, heritable differences between the groups we call races, this has rarely stopped us, over the past 500 years, from behaving as though there were (see, for e.g., Fredrickson, 2002). Perceiving and treating groups as though they were races is what social scientists call racialisation. Lawrence Blum defines it as 'the treating of groups as if there were inherent and immutable differences between them; as if certain somatic characteristics marked the presence of significant characteristics of mind, emotion, and character; and as if some were of greater worth than others' (2002: 147).

What Blum describes here is racialisation on a racist basis – i.e., based on the notion that the putative different human races form a natural hierarchy. This form of racialisation has been especially pervasive (and destructive) in human history. But it is also possible to treat people as though they were members of different races, while taking those races to be of equal, or incomparable, worth; as it is to treat people as though they were members of races which differed only physically. Here I will understand racialisation broadly, as the pervasive viewing and/or treating of groups as though they were discrete, relatively homogeneous divisions of humanity which differ from one another in significant, inherent, heritable ways.

(iii) Racialisation can give rise to real societal groups

Centuries of racialisation has in some cases given rise to real societal groups. Members of these groups have had in common the similar types of treatment, whether favourable or unfavourable, they receive in certain contexts. '[T]he black man,' W.E.B. Du Bois famously remarked, 'is a person who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia.' ([1940] 2002: 153) That is not necessarily to

say that they are aware of having types of treatment in common. '[W]hite privilege,' Chike Jeffers has claimed, 'is [...] a condition of which it is characteristic that having it makes it more likely that one will be unaware of its existence.' (2019: 53)

The groups to which racialisation gives rise are not only distinguished by ways in which they are perceived and ways in which they are treated. Members of a group may respond to racialisation with an alternative vision of their group identity, subverting the identity imposed from outside. We should be cautious about generalisations in this area, since any cultural identity ascribed to a group is likely to be contested by many individual members of the group (Shelby, 2005: 224–25; Soudien, 2019: 84). But it is not implausible to think that a group which is racialised could actively respond to racialisation in this way.

Chike Jeffers has claimed that 'black identity [...] is an identity partly shaped by the agency, creativity, and traditional cultures of those who came to inhabit it and, as such, it has distinctive cultural meaning and value' (2013: 419–20). In the South African context, Denis-Constant Martin has made a similar claim about the group racialised as 'Coloured'. He writes:

The people who were to be classified coloureds were stripped of their names, as individuals and as people, when they were organized as a group from the outside. They nevertheless took possession of this group and invented an original culture; they created rules to live by and ideals to dream from. (Martin, 2000: 117)

Rather than resolving the issue of what race is, let alone answering the question of whether races exist, the three empirical observations above generate a dilemma. One could take the view that the common-sense understanding is right about what 'race' means, and conclude that races do not exist in the real world. This is the option favoured by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *In My Father's House*. 'The truth,' writes Appiah, 'is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us.' (1992: 45) On this anti-realist view, the identities to which racialisation gives rise are illusory; racialisation is nothing but the propagation of illusion. However, there is another option. Rather than deferring to the common-sense understanding of 'race', one could take the view that

racism do exist, and are the groups to which racialisation gives rise. Going down this route entails agreeing with the idea that racism exists, but holding that the common-sense understanding of 'race' needs to be revised.

Precedents for this second, semantically revisionist, type of response to the facts are easy to find. In the first dictionary of English, Samuel Johnson recorded the common-sense understanding of his time, when he defined 'whale' as 'the largest of fish'. Yet whales are not fish; they are mammals like us. Are we to conclude that whales do not, or did not then, exist, or that when people in Johnson's time said 'whale', they were referring to the rhincodon typus, which is the largest fish? Surely not. We know what organism they were referring to, and we know that it exists (albeit in ever-decreasing numbers). What needed to be revised in this case was the common-sense understanding of a whale's nature. Perhaps the same is true in the case of race.

Philosophers such as Charles W. Mills and Sally Haslanger have argued that racism is not biologically but socially real: they are constituted by the societal processes of classification which seize on a cluster of physical markers, and by the societal processes of privileging and disadvantaging which order the groups with these markers into a generally recognised hierarchy. For Haslanger and Mills, racism is a social construction not in the sense that it is an illusion, but in the sense that its reality depends on societally inculcated habits of perception and behaviour (Mills, 1998; Haslanger, 2019).

A variant on this social constructionist position holds that, though racism was originally constituted solely by processes of privileging and disadvantaging, they are now also partially constituted by the cultural ways of life which unite their members (see Jeffers, 2013). The philosophical debate over which of these views of racism is correct remains unresolved (see, for e.g., Glasgow et al., 2019).

The Unity Movement's response to the question of race [4]

'The Unity Movement' refers to a cluster of South African political organisations, encompassing the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), founded in 1943; the New Unity Movement (NUM), still in existence

today; and several others in between – including the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) and the Cape Action League (CAL).

The NEUM came into being through the federation of two organisations dedicated to opposing segregatory legislation in the Union of South Africa. The first of these was the All African Convention (AAC), founded in 1935 to oppose proposals from J.B.M. Hertzog's government for further political and territorial segregation of Africans, and comprising mainly Africans from rural areas of the eastern Cape. The second was the Anti-CAD, founded in 1943 to oppose plans from Jan Smuts' government for a Coloured Affairs Council (CAC) and ultimately a Coloured Affairs Department (CAD). Later, in 1948, the Anti-Segregation Council, a splinter from the Natal Indian Congress, also affiliated to the NEUM (Jaffe, 1992; Adhikari, 2005).

The overlapping leadership of the AAC, the NEUM, and the Anti-CAD was drawn from a small group of Cape Town intellectuals. Most prominent were Ben Kies, Goolam Gool, Hawa Ahmed, Janub Gool, I.B. Tabata, and Hosea Jaffe. In their leadership roles, these intellectuals – dubbed 'the Cape Radicals' by Crain Soudien – applied ideas which they had developed over a number of years in discussion groups, especially the New Era Fellowship. Their interactions with a compulsively secretive Trotskyist organization, the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), whose members included the Scottish novelist and political theorist Dora Taylor, were also decisive in shaping their thinking (Soudien, 2019).

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in their attempts at this analysis, they were confronted by the same three empirical observations, and by the same dilemma in how to respond to them, as are philosophers of race today.

(i) Races, on the common-sense understanding, are not real

Their uncompromising non-racialism set the NEUM and its affiliates apart from other mid-20th century South African liberation movements. For the NEUM, non-racialism signified not merely the equality of races, or even the irrelevance of race in all practical contexts, but the non-existence of race. Nowhere is this more evident than in Ben Kies' speeches from the 1940s and 1950s.

In his address to the Anti-CAD conference of May 1943, Kies repudiates the 'vicious racial myths' prevalent in South Africa at the time. These include, on Kies' analysis, not only ideas of racial hierarchy – 'the idea of white trustees and non-white child races' – but also the very idea of 'racial differences' (1943: 1, 14). Kies' A.J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture from 1953 likewise critiques 'the myth of race' (1953: 7). Once again, Kies rejects not only ideas of 'inherent "racial" superiority', but also the very idea that there are different human races:

[O]ne thing is quite certain, and that is that mutations in skin-colour, hair texture, shape of nose or skull, and stature, owing to geographical dispersal, isolation and diet, have made not the slightest difference to the biological unity of man as a single species, and provide no scientific basis for a division into what are popularly mis-called "races". (1953: 12)

There was no genetic evidence for Kies to draw on in the early 1950s, but he cites then-recent work in physical anthropology to substantiate his critique. Kies' position can also be seen as an organic development of the scepticism about racial categories prevalent among political activists in the Cape, going back to Abdullah Abdurahman's African Political Organisation (APO). The APO had mocked the 1905 School Board Act's attempt to provide a definition of 'European' and in 1925 Abdurahman had denounced government policies for being based on unscientific race theories (Lewis, 1987: 68, 134).

In the 1940s and 1950s, the National Party government was beginning the process of legally codifying the common-sense race categories which had been in use for a century or more. Over the ensuing decades it was to apportion different rights and entitlements to South Africans, depending on their assigned race, creating a notorious system of legally sanctioned racism (Maré, 2014). But it was not only in government circles that race thinking intensified during this period. Within the Congress Movement, which campaigned against segregation and apartheid, the leading intellectual of the Youth League, Anton Lembede, articulated a hard-line Africanism based on biological racial realism:

The Leader of the Africans will come out of their own loins. No foreigner can ever be a true and genuine leader of the African people because no foreigner can ever truly and genuinely interpret the African spirit which is unique and peculiar to Africans only. Some foreigners Asiatic or European who pose as African leaders must be categorically denounced and rejected.

(Lembede, [1946] 1996: 92)

Consistent with their uncompromising non-racialism, Unity Movement organisations took a stand both against D.F. Malan's National Party government, and against the African National Congress (ANC). The AAC founded the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) – in Phyllis Ntantala's words – 'to counter the rabid racism of the Youth League with its slogan "Africa for the Africans"' (2009: 153) [5]. Meanwhile, the Anti-CAD instituted a social boycott of everyone who participated in the CAC, instructing its members: 'Don't meet them, even if it is necessary to cross over to the other side of the street. Don't see them, even if you do come face to face with them.' (Lewis, 1987: 214)

(ii) Racialisation is real

The leaders of the Unity Movement paid a lot of attention to the societal process of racialisation. It was something they wanted to bring to a halt. They had a Marxist explanation for why racialisation had occurred in South Africa as it had. 'The real cleavage is one of class, not one of colour,' wrote Tabata in *The Awakening of a People*; '[b]ut [...] the herrenvolk found it possible, and in fact extremely convenient to utilize Colour differences to cover over and obscure the fundamental dividing-line, that of class.' ([1950] 1974: 4)

Echoing V.I. Lenin's economic analysis of imperialism (see Lenin, [1917] 2010), Kies contends that the property-owning class in South Africa and in the imperial metropole overseas used the idea of race to effect a 'basic segregation of the working class into a white labour aristocracy and a black serf majority' (1943: 3). The higher-paid and privileged white working class would be willing to support the ruling class in the super-exploitation of the majority of the working class. Meanwhile, the owner class used its psychological weapon of race a second time, playing 'divide and rule' against the non-white working class:

The African is told that he is superior because he is "pure blooded"—and he has believed this. The Coloured man is told that he is superior because the "blood of the white man" flows in his veins—and he has believed this. The Indian has been told that he is superior because he belongs to a great nation with a mighty culture—and he has believed this. The Herrenvolk of South Africa have nothing to learn from Dr. Goebbels, for their vicious racial myths have bitten deep into the life and ways of the non-Europeans.
(Kies, 1943: 5)

(iii) Racialisation can give rise to real societal groups

The Unity Movement also showed clear awareness that racialisation in South African society had given rise to real societal groups. This awareness is manifest not only in statements by its leaders, but also in the form Unity Movement organisations took. The NEUM, though committed to non-racialism, was deliberately structured as a federation of 'three federal bodies representing the three racial groups,' as Tabata put it (1945: 14) – the AAC membership being virtually all Africans, the Anti-CAD membership Coloured people, and (from 1948) the Anti-Segregation Council Indians.

Yet the first generation of Unity Movement intellectuals proved unable to conceptualise adequately the nature of the groups to which racialisation in South Africa gave rise, making it difficult for them to articulate the justification for the NEUM's federal structure. This is evident in Kies' address to the 1943 Anti-CAD conference. After deprecating the myth of race and the unsavoury motives behind racialisation in South Africa, Kies enters the following qualification to his call for non-European unity:

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[W]hen we speak of a united front of ALL non-Europeans we do not mean lumping ALL non-Europeans holus-bolus together and fusing them all together in the belief that since ALL are non-European oppressed, the African is a Coloured man, an Indian is an African, and a Coloured man is either Indian or African whichever you please. Only those who are ignorant of both politics and history can believe in this nonsensical type of unity.
(Kies, 1943: 13)

Given that he has already told us they are not races, this passage invites us to expect an explanation, based on politics and history, of what the groups Kies mentions are. But no explanation is forthcoming. Instead Kies defers the very question at issue, continuing:

When [the non-Europeans] have thrown off their chains, then they can settle whatever national or racial differences they have, or think they have.
(Kies, 1943: 13)

Mohamed Adhikari and Crain Soudien claim statements like these from Kies show that the Unity Movement's abandonment of race categories was at this time incomplete (Adhikari, 2005: 408; Soudien, 2019: 133). I believe the correct diagnosis is somewhat different. While the first generation of Unity Movement intellectuals were confirmed anti-realists about race, they were still groping for an adequate characterisation of the groups to which racialisation in South Africa had given rise, and which, they were convinced, made the NEUM's federal structure necessary. The crucial next analytical step was to be taken by Neville Alexander – albeit from outside the Unity Movement's organisational structures.

Neville Alexander's contribution to the philosophy of race

Neville Alexander was expelled from APDUSA in 1961 for contending, unlike his mentor Tabata, that the time was right for armed struggle in South Africa. From 1964 to 1974, he served a term of imprisonment on Robben Island for his activities with the Yu Chi Chan Club and the National Liberation Front. Though writing from outside the Unity Movement's formal structures, Neville Alexander's published works following his release remained firmly in the tradition of Unity Movement non-racialism. His magnum opus, *One Azania, One Nation*, written in the second half of the 1970s and published under the nom de plume 'No Sizwe', is the most successful attempt by a theorist in the Unity Movement tradition to conceptualise the nature of South Africa's population groups. Since the factors which led the Unity Movement into a quandary about the population groups are the very factors which make for a dilemma in philosophical theorising about race today, the conceptual portions of *One Azania, One Nation* are also a contribution to the philosophy of race.

The 'central thesis' of *One Azania, One Nation*, according to its author, is 'that the officially classified population registration groups in South Africa are colour-castes and that it is of pivotal political importance to characterise them as such' (No Sizwe, 1979: 141). Like the previous generation of Unity Movement intellectuals, Alexander is adamant that affirmations of racial equality are insufficient. 'There is something fundamentally wrong,' he writes, 'in accepting that the "population groups" in South Africa are "races" at all' (No Sizwe, 1979: 133). Alexander agrees with his forerunners in the Unity Movement that this is both because race is a scientifically discredited concept and because the belief that there are different races in South Africa does the ruling class's work of division for it: it dissipates in inter-sectional rivalry the activist energies which alone could overturn the inegalitarian status quo.

A social constructionist about race would say Alexander could have resolved the Unity Movement's quandary by affirming that the population groups are races – so long as races are to be understood not along common-sense biological lines, but as groups constituted by societal processes of classifying, privileging, and disadvantaging. Alexander is aware of this theoretical option, and he rejects it. Social

constructionism, in his terminology, is the position that there exist 'sociological races'. To understand Alexander's thinking on race, it is crucial to unpack his reasons for rejecting this view. He writes:

Put very simply, this approach implies that, because a very large number of human beings (but how many? by what statistical formula is an adequate number to be arrived at?) believes that there are "ghosts", science must accept the reality of "ghosts" because the belief in their existence occasions individual and group behaviour that could be expected if such things did in fact exist. Because "many" people still believe that the sun revolves around the earth, therefore the sun does revolve around the earth! Or because racial prejudice is a very real phenomenon, therefore "race" is a reality. (No Sizwe, 1979: 136)

It would be easy to dismiss this passage as putting the matter not just simply, but simplistically. However, I believe there is an insight buried in this passage written by a Unity Movement political theorist more than 40 years ago which can advance the contemporary philosophical debate about race.

A constructionist would likely object that Alexander clearly has not grasped the social constructionist position. Key to this position is that the descriptive meaning of 'race' employed by the constructionist who affirms that there are races ('sociological races', in Alexander's terminology) is entirely different from the common-sense meaning of 'race' employed when people affirm that there are races in everyday life. The constructionist would also point to a significant disanalogy between ghosts and planetary motions, on the one hand, and races, on the other. While individuals' beliefs and behaviours have no impact on the movements of heavenly bodies or the ability of humans to appear in spectral form following their death, individuals' beliefs and behaviours do have an impact on what societal groups come into being and persist. It is precisely because racialisation is a real process which gives rise to real societal groups that societal groups are available as candidates to count as the referents of – as that which is designated by – race terms.

But this objection misses the point. If I have understood it correctly, the thrust of Alexander's

critique of 'sociological races' is as follows. The social constructionist cannot both hold (a) that people's everyday beliefs framed in terms of 'race' as they understand this term generate real races, and (b) that the real nature of races is very different from what people's common-sense thoughts or beliefs framed in terms of 'race' would predict. Constructionism about race is an attempt to have one's cake and eat it. A theory which says the groups produced by racialisation are constituted by ordinary race thinking, and behaviours based on race thinking, has already invoked the concept race and established its content. Common-sense race thinking assumes that races are groups which differ significantly and inherently from one another, in ways which are passed on down the generations. A theorist who accepts that the groups produced by racialisation are brought into existence by beliefs about race in this sense cannot, without equivocation, go on to claim that the groups produced by racialisation are races in a quite different sense.

This is the light in which Alexander's comparison of race thinking with beliefs about ghosts and planetary motions must be viewed. If it were true that people's believing in ghosts produced ghosts, the ghosts produced would have to be ghosts in the very sense in which people believed in them. The same applies to planetary motions. But equally, if it were true that people's thinking and acting as though there were races produced races, the races produced would have to be races in the very sense in which people thought of races. If one holds that common-sense race thinking gives rise to real groups, but is not willing to affirm that these groups are races in the way common-sense race thinking understands races, then one must hold that the groups to which race thinking gives rise are not races, but groups of another kind.

Having rejected the social constructionist position, Alexander is not constrained to deny that racialisation gives rise to real groups. On the contrary, in *One Azania* he reserves some of his harshest words of criticism for members of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa, who insisted on a purely class-based analysis of South African society and castigated the Unity Movement for its federal structure. '[T]he ultra-left vestiges of the Fourth International,' according to Alexander, faced 'the national question [...] with total incomprehension' (No Sizwe, 1979: 112–13). Alexander's position is that the South African population groups –

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African, Coloured, Indian, and white – are not races, not that they are not real.

Alexander holds that the process of racialisation in South Africa has given rise to colour-castes. The concept caste is appropriate, he argues, because racialisation has constituted the four groups hierarchically, with white people the most advantaged and privileged, Africans the most disadvantaged, and Indian and Coloured people in between. As in other caste systems, South Africa's colour-castes have exhibited tendencies towards endogamy, cultural distinctness, and job specialisation. As Alexander writes, they 'exhibit two fundamental tendencies, economic integration and non-economic separation within a single politically defined territory' (No Sizwe, 1979: 146). Whereas the ideology which held the Hindu caste system in place was religious, South Africa's has been held in place by a pseudo-scientific racial ideology: hence South Africa's caste system is a colour-caste system in Alexander's view (No Sizwe, 1979: 148).

Neville Alexander's contribution to the philosophical debate about the nature of race is twofold. In the first place, he supplies – albeit in abbreviated form – an argument against the social constructionist form of realism. The constructionist cannot, without equivocation, hold that the belief in races in one sense creates races in a quite different sense. A theorist who denies the existence of race on the common-sense understanding of it, but believes that racialisation gives rise to real societal groups, must conceive of these groups not as races but as groups of another kind. In the second place, Alexander shows that adopting an anti-realist position about race does not entail jettisoning the insights about racialisation and its impact which

the constructionist position takes on board. Introducing a second concept, alongside the concept race, which captures the nature of the groups which racialisation creates, enables us to acknowledge their social reality. It is quite possible to follow Alexander in adopting this second concept, even if one has doubts that 'colour-caste' is the best label for it. Though 'caste' is frequently used in a general sense to mean a group with a place in a hierarchy (see, for e.g., Wilkerson, 2020), it might be thought that the associations with the Hindu caste system will inevitably create confusion, so a label like 'racialised group' may be preferable (see, for e.g., Blum, 2002: 149) [6].

By denying the reality of races but affirming the reality of colour-castes, Alexander provides the conceptual resources which the Unity Movement needed in order to justify its federal structure. Organising its members by population group was not a regression into race thinking, but an acknowledgement of the reality of colour-castes. But since a caste identity is one which denies humans' fundamental equality, it will be natural for members of subordinate colour-castes, once they understand the nature of such an identity, to wish to co-operate in dismantling the system which makes it possible. As Jaffe had put it, without the benefit of Alexander's colour-caste theory, the 'federal form' was 'necessary because it proceeds from conditions as they actually are, [...] transient because it overcomes the conditions which made it necessary' (1953: 20).

Finally, Alexander's theory provides a cogent way of resolving the paradox with which we started. If 'Black', 'white', 'Coloured' or 'Indian' are used as terms for races – biological groups exhibiting significant, inherent, heritable differences – then they are relics of the past in need of being discarded. If, on the other hand, they are used as terms for colour-castes – the hierarchical products of South Africa's history of racialisation – then they refer to group identities which, while real, are in need of being overcome. Pursuing redress policies and monitoring their progress are plausibly one step on the way towards doing this.

Notes

[1] The article by Sharné Nieuwoudt and her colleagues was soon retracted by the journal which had published it. In a statement on 2 May 2019, the editors said this was because 'a number of assertions about "colored" South African women [...] cannot be supported by the study or the subsequent interpretation of its outcome'. This seems to me a valid

criticism of the article. Whether these general assertions were based on 'racial essentialism' is a different matter. I am not as confident that they were as several of the contributors to Jansen et al. (2020) appear to be.

[2] I am not associating myself with the analysis in this opinion piece. My purpose is simply to illustrate the racial language often used in discussions of redress policies.

[3] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal whose comments enabled me to improve this section.

[4] Parts of this section draw on Hull, 2019.

[5] To be fair to Lembede, his published writings suggest his thinking was racist but not racist – i.e., he affirmed the existence of races, but did not view them as forming a natural hierarchy (see Appiah, 1992: 13–20, for discussion of this distinction).

[6] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for pressing me on this point..

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