

Honorary Whiteness: Delusions of Racial Hierarchy

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Editorial

The concepts of whiteness and blackness are usually employed to describe low and high melanated persons across the globe respectively. Sometimes these concepts are used under protest because of the narratives/stereotypes associated with either of them. However, the concept of blackness is always used more disadvantageously to convey negative feelings and to 'other' a group of people. As a term that is negatively employed, belongingness/association with whiteness guarantees a feeling of acceptance. Othering therefore signifies that there is a group that has arrogated to themselves the right to assess anyone that does not belong to their social status and the person who others his/her victim owns the template for assessment. Victims who are othered stand on the border and watch the display of privileges without the possibility of experiencing such privileges. On this basis is the need for validation built, all in a bid to partake in privileges.

The presumption of racial differences among human species is socially constructed to meet the aspirations of race realists. Under this category of social construction is a variety of nuances, which makes race relations/conflicts more complex. A sub-class of this variety is honorary whiteness, which is a blend of interracial and intraracial issues. Honorary whiteness serves as a broad ideology under which those on the borders fall. It is a scenario where the high melanated identifies with whiteness so as to share in the benefits that created inequalities among humans in the first place. It is the pursuit of European identities through mastery of foreign languages, religions, cultures, etc., based on the false premise of European superiority; it dissects the urge of high-melanated individuals' desire to identify with low-melanated peoples, while belonging to high melanated group/communities. It promotes class structure through the emphasis on racial disparities. The identification with low-melanated groups spans through different aspects of human interactions and comes to us in both subtle and brutal forms that may sometimes be hard to detect. For proper engagement, it is necessary to understand the ideology behind whiteness. As an ideology, whiteness is a racial heterotopia. By this, I mean that the space of whiteness is real and invasive and serves as a virtual space that both high and low melanated persons encounter. High melanated persons experience it in a way that validates white superiority and they play subordinate roles, sometimes by instinct. A typical example is a church in Nigeria with high melanated audience, which may choose to get an interpreter for one low melanated individual. The defence is to enable the individual understand what goes on in church. It could also appear in the form of a cashier who would

distort a queue in order to attend to a low melanated man of Euro-American identity. These acts are most times acknowledgements of the presence of superior individuals under the guise of courtesy, or acts of kindness towards visitors. Whiteness therefore outnumbers people invisibly. Low melanated persons on the other hand experience the space of whiteness in a way that guarantees benefits without much hustle. By this, I do not mean that competence is relegated during a hiring, or due process, but both high and low melanated persons are not usually held to the same standard in such process. The colour of the skin ab initio announces the benefits and sometimes skin colour closes the door to further debate about qualifications. An example is a scenario where a low melanated lady introduces her low melanated boyfriend/fiancé to her family/friends; mere mention of the name of the man suffices. However, if the fiancé is of high melanated identity, she is tempted to mention his name with all the degrees he has acquired and how successful he is in life. The differences in both introductions are necessary in order to ensure acceptance in a world where being educated, or corporately dressed is synonymous with whiteness.

I know only two ways to achieve this status of whiteness; it is either through the colour of your skin, or by attaining those characteristics associated with whiteness. These two scenarios present real dangers to otherness and the exercise of privilege. The surest way to attaining such privileges is through honorary status. Every conscious human being would choose to be intentional about living a better life in dignity. But what victims do not keep in mind is the fact that any attempt to move from one social status to another is not bad in itself. What becomes troubling is the intention behind such transition. If transition to a social class gives me the leverage to be removed from a lower status and at the same time allows me to enjoy certain benefits that others are denied access, then it betrays the purpose of movement to a social class. Sometimes, people protest inhumane treatment in order to have the opportunity to also create subtle forms of oppression when they attain humane status. I also acknowledge that at the same time, it is not easy to revolt as a victim from the downside of history. Sometimes revolution requires tangible resources and needs to be funded. People could sometimes break their protocol when they need to transit to an elite class, but with the sole intention to guarantee of dignity for others. The claim is that it is easy to influence altruistic policies when you are a member of the institution whose power it is to make and implement those policies. At the same time, there are individuals who rise to the top only to ignore the original project that motivates them in the first place. I align with the idea of Joseph Rye that there are situations that double standards are appropriate to achieve worthwhile results. Sometimes a blend of the ethics of responsibility and of conviction would do some greater good. It is the ethics of responsibility that allows for some violation of personal moral codes. A blend of ethics of conviction and responsibility should be for a great good. It is different from a situation where people feel they violate personal moral codes for altruistic end, only to discover that such violations are for individual convenience. This special issue focuses on real issues that people experience, viewed from different lens. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, authors provide solutions on how to avoid this mental trap of otherness. It may appear that the burden of freedom is in the hands of only victims. Both beneficiaries and victims

are trapped in this heterotopic space. The former allows himself to think that there are innate qualities given by nature that are lacking in any other person outside his specific racial affiliation. This then accounts for gradations of humans along colour line; with the perception of some people as thinking beings and others as solely emotional beings. This partly accounts for homicide along racial lines coupled with centuries of grudge. The victim on the other hand tends to hold a position of gatekeeping for low melanated persons. The victim holds this position sometimes with conviction so that when privileges are distributed, the victim as gatekeeper is not left out. Two issues arise from being a gatekeeper: the first is that there is loss of identity since you must take up another identity in the process of communicating the will of those who belong to a social class. Also, you have a responsibility to be a policeman not necessarily to those who do not align to the will of the oppressor, but those who oppose it. The will of the oppressor is basically communicated indirectly either through language, intonation, economic policies, political leadership and so on. As a result, scholars have come together in this edition to identify some ways that whiteness is made manifest through the activities of high melanated persons, especially of African descent. These works by scholars have also identified some solutions to peculiar problems, which include; the philosophical, theological and psychosocial perspectives.

Beginning with the first chapter Isaiah A. Negedu and Peter Echewija Sule interrogate a key part of the aviation industry, which is the activities of airline operators towards ensuring safety standards that have not been contemplated in the past. One of these is manifested through the communication of flight attendants before and during take-off of flight. This chapter questions the urge to Europeanise communication when most of their local clients come from the African continent and Nigeria in particular. The article argues for a reconsideration of safety nets that take local languages into consideration depending on the country of operation of an airline.

SimonMary Aiyokhai introduces a new dimension to whiteness within the context of embracing a Trinitarian identity. He raises a question about the legitimacy of identity markers in the world considering the fact that there are different cultures, languages, colours, lifestyles and so on. However, in all of these, the idolatry of whiteness objectifies the rest of humanity as others are basically construed to serve the pleasure of the coloniser. SimonMary argues for a Eucharistic identity that dispels polarity and embraces everyone. SimonMary sees the Eucharist as a place where both the victim and oppressor identify with each other and all acknowledge their frailty for a greater good; this is made possible because white supremacy holds both victims and oppressors hostage.

Kizito Michael George delves into the domains of science and religion in the construction of structural racism. Some scientific inventions were designed to create rifts between different colours of the human race and to grant privileges to some people over others. Religion was also not left out as biblical verses were also devised in the service of whiteness. Kizito thinks that racism was constructed in order to subhumanise Africans and glorify whiteness. In essence, without the existence of blackness, whiteness would have no relevance, since there has to be a yardstick for the evaluation of white superiority. The glorification of whiteness is still more evident through the activities of leaders on the African continent who

must retain such structures in order to gain some benefits. This appears in form of neo-liberal policies that ignores indigenous economic realities for the enthronement of one-size-fits-all policies of modernisation. Kizito's work provides workable and liberation ideas for humanisation of high melanated people especially in Africa.

Babalwa Sibango introduces a thought-provoking contribution into the discourse on land expropriation in South Africa and how people are divided along racial/beneficial lines in their acceptance, or disapproval of land policies. Even amongst immigrants in South Africa, identification and nearness to whiteness amplify superiority of low melanated persons. Sibango identifies some other category of indigenous persons who use their affiliation with whiteness to promote policies that put them in a status of racial gatekeepers. In the quest to gain some economic advantage over others, different groups claim indigeneity and for recognition of some forms of cultural identities above the identities of some other persons. This article is worth reading in order to understand why people jostle for whiteness as an affiliate identity and what should be done about it.

In the next chapter, Onah Aloysius Uchechukwu does a critical reflection on the concept of honorary whiteness. He traces the history of whiteness to some philosophers and scientists and explained how their notions of high melanated persons emboldened racism, with the signification of whiteness and blackness as purity and evil respectively. For Onah, honorary whiteness implicates both the victim and the beneficiaries as it makes both group myopic in their various understanding of human race. He therefore proffers solutions along sociopolitical, philosophical and aesthetic lines that could lead to holistic understanding of human make-up. For those who are interested in the psychology of victims to whiteness, this work would be relevant to their discourse.

Olawunmi Macaulay-Adeyelu's theme on the concept of blackness is quite interesting. She argues that there is a correlation between the symbolic and categorical use of blackness as a narrative that was foisted on high melanated people especially of African descent. She uses one of the pioneers of Afrobeat to explain why she thinks that both scholars and activists have not been very critical in their interrogation of what blackness means intrinsically. As such, Fela's valorisation of blackness has not been successful. Olawunmi acknowledges that the main task of the use of blackness by activists is for the purpose of black emancipation and to ensure that oppressors and low melanated people embrace others with dignity and for the victims themselves to have repatriation of minds. In doing this, there is need to avoid unfounded narratives and expunge stereotypes that dehumanise, including those that seem to be universally acceptable even by the victims themselves.

It has been argued that apartheid in South Africa has not come to an end; this has led to a protest by some scholars to claim that there is no post-apartheid South Africa, only post-1994 South Africa. This is because the structures that entrenched apartheid in South Africa still exist. As such, the existent condition in South Africa is only a mutation of what existed before 1994. This is the crux of Gugu Ndlazi's article. She holds that there are still racial policies that continue to ensure that indigenous people are dehumanised through inequality in its different

manifestations. Ndlazi proposes an awareness and intentional effort to promote sameness of humanity.

Hazel T. Biana and Jeremiah J. B. Joaquin engage Lucius T. Outlaw in a thought-provoking interview on racism. In a conversational approach, Outlaw explained what it was like, growing up in America as an African American. Raised by Christian parents in a neighbourhood dominated by high melanated people, Outlaw could not make a sense of racism in a community that even had worship centres segregated along racial lines, yet claim to worship same God. The fact that his parents belonged to low social and economic status made him seek alternative ways of mental emancipation through philosophical studies and animated his interest in studies devoted to high melanated and oppressed people. Outlaw says that racism is socially constructed and he dissociates himself from the 'philosophy of race' that presents the field of racism as a specialised field. Outlaw ventured into Du Bois and believes that no human being is born pre-wired to survive in the environment. There must be social interaction of people for survival in any environment; using the theory of evolution, Outlaw explains how our lives are intertwined. This piece is highly recommended for a world filled with diversity.

