

Black Solidarity

A Philosophical Defense

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Abstract: How should black people, indeed any other group of people in general, respond when they are grouped together and oppressed on the basis of the contingency of their physical characteristics? Questions of liberation from oppression involve questions about the means to overcome that oppression. Throughout the ages of struggle against racial oppression, for example, collective black identity and solidarity has been one of the favourite responses and rallying call for racial justice and liberation. In South Africa this response has recently emerged through the formation of a number of highly controversial groups such as: The Native Club, The African Forum, and The Forum for Black Journalists. Critics of these formations think that such black solidarity, divisive, irrational, morally objectionable and, above all, racist. This paper defends the emancipatory racial solidarity tradition, exemplified by The Native Club and similar constituted organisations, against such serious charges and critiques mounted by contemporary leading thinkers on identity. The tools for such a defense are primarily derived from Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of group formation in his *Critique Of Dialectical Reason*. I argue that since anti-black racist consciousness always operates at the level of collectives, it is therefore impossible to fight such racism as an individual; that collective black solidarity is a necessary condition for racial emancipation.

Keywords: black solidarity; collective consciousness; emancipation; The Native Club; Jean-Paul Sartre; racism; liberation.

Questions of liberation from oppression involve questions about the means to overcome that oppression. George Kateb, for example, poses these questions: How should human beings react when others constitute them into a collective based on certain features deemed to warrant hostile and negative treatment of those so characterised? What kind of response would be appropriate when such classification 'supported by superior force is meant to invade the psyches of those

categorised, generation after generation, and make them accept the categorisation and cooperate with it to their own injury' (Kateb, 1998:48)? Put in specific context, how should black people, for example, respond when they are grouped together and oppressed on the basis of the contingency of their physical characteristics? Throughout the ages of struggle against racial oppression, competing paradigms of liberation have existed. Apart from the liberal solutions of assimilation (universal humanity) and integration, black identity and solidarity has been one of the favourite responses and rallying call for social justice and liberation for most black people. Black leaders repeatedly exhorted their followers to become a more unified collective agent for emancipation. Thus, many prominent theorists in the history of black political and social thought defended a collective black identity theory that was tied up to liberatory black solidarity.¹

This historical response still commands considerable attraction for some black people. In South Africa, for example, black identity and solidarity has recently been expressed and demonstrated by the recent formation of a number of highly controversial groups epitomised by The Native Club.² Black South African intellectuals felt marginalised not only from the national discourse but also, and more importantly, from the production of knowledge. Since these terrains have been dominated mainly by white neo-liberals, the way to correct this intellectual and cultural imbalance required the organisation of black intellectuals into discussion and debating fora. To this end, The Native Club was launched. According to The Native Club's official website, the core objectives of the Club are: (1) to create an environment in which ideas can be disseminated, debated and discussed by inquiring minds; (2) to create a congenial climate for reflection and self-examination; (3) to assert itself in the realm of arts, culture, politics and the economy; and (4) to give a voice to the voiceless. The emergence of an organisation to promote the empowerment of blacks through self-organisation, the creation of safe spaces where blacks could share and analyse their experiences, voice their grievances and anger, and develop new and better institutional practices became a source of surprise and discomfort to many people in the post-apartheid 'New South Africa'.

Critics of The Native Club and similar organisations maintain that such groupings promote racial exclusivity and that such racial exclusivity undermines not only the ruling African National Congress (ANC) policy of non-racialism, but also the much celebrated democratic South African Constitution. In other words, they doubt whether

these organisations have any constructive role to play in a society built on racial reconciliation. Many, therefore, wonder why black solidarity is needed at all, especially since apartheid is ‘dead’. Should we not just reject black solidarity and embrace interracial or cross-racial antiracist solidarity instead? Since apartheid is dead, some people do indeed think such black solidarity divisive, irrational, morally objectionable, and racist. This paper attempts to defend the emancipatory racial solidarity tradition exemplified by The Native Club and similar recently constituted organisations against such serious charges and critiques mounted by contemporary leading thinkers on identity.³ The tools for such a defence will be derived from Sartre’s work on group formation.

Some people may well question any project that appropriates Sartrean philosophy to defend group solidarity. Besides being relegated to the realm of *passé* by those who hate his views,⁴ Sartre’s writings are decidedly individualistic. His individualism is evident in statements such as: ‘Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others’ (1956: 364) or ‘Hell is - other people’ (1989: 45) or ‘My original fall is the existence of the Other’ (1956: 263). In the face of such individualistic and conflictual presuppositions and the ontological solitude of human reality, how can the notion of a collective consciousness or group solidarity be possible? Was it not precisely because of this individualism that the French Communist Party reproached him for ‘leaving out of account the solidarity of mankind and considering man in isolation’ (Sartre, 1966: 23)? Sadly, many critics of Sartre fail to realise that starting from *Being and Nothingness* through to the middle texts of the late forties and early fifties and finally to *Critique of Dialectical Reason*,⁵ Sartre developed an existential ontology and existential Marxism that offer a rich theory of groups and collective consciousness. It is indeed this Sartre of the *Critique* who, having studied the historical conditions of his era, clearly recognised the problem—first articulated by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*—of ensembles or groups in the realm of political action. Another reason why I find Sartre appropriate is that his theory of ensembles maintains a point of view that is outside of liberal individualism. The discourse of liberal individualism—a la Appiah and dominant in the post-1994 South Africa—as I shall argue, denies the reality of groups precisely because in its conception, categorising people in terms of race, sex or class is inherently oppressive and a denial of individual flourishing and autonomy. It is this liberal individualism, characterised by what Sartre calls ‘analytical reason’,

which he vehemently attacks in his writings from *Existentialism and Humanism*, through to *What is Literature?*; *Materialism and Revolution*; *Anti-Semite and Jew*; *Introducing les Temps Modernes*; and ultimately to the *Critique*.

Sartre on Group Solidarity

Even though the early Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* is famous for his individualist view and his pessimism about human relations, most people do not take into account the hints of positive human relationships of solidarity he provides in that very text. These relationships of solidarity are expressed through the Us-object and We-subject relations. In such relations the condition of conflict between individuals is momentarily suspended because of the *look* of the Third that generates an external unification of individuals and thus temporarily freezes antagonistic and conflictual relations. The essential condition for one consciousness to be united with another is for both individuals to be subjected to the objectifying *look* of the Third.

The insights of this text are applied in two intermediate texts, *Anti-Semite and Jew* and 'Black Orpheus' in which Sartre insists on the necessity of Jewish solidarity and black solidarity against the anti-Semites and the anti-black racists respectively. These moments are the preparatory stages to a universal humanism, which can, in terms of his dialectic, be realised through socialist humanism. But before the universalism of socialism, the black person, for example, must realise that since he or she is oppressed primarily because of his or her blackness, 'he must first of all become conscious of his race' (Sartre, 1988: 296). But, Sartre warns, this solidarity is an external solidarity lacking cohesion and interiority and thus extremely fragile when the Third disappears. It is a solidarity which does not take the form of a free relationship but is rather imposed from the outside by some sort of foreign and external power and results from a common alienation. Its structure takes on the dyadic conflictual form of inter-subjective relations or being-for-others as described in *Being and Nothingness*. This section of *Being and Nothingness* also anticipates the *Critique* in which the We-subject of the earlier Sartre is developed into a fully-fledged theory of ensembles. In this later text, Sartre spends a significant part of his time attempting to make intelligible reciprocity and solidarity among individuals who are constituted, and constitute themselves, into collectives or groups. Here, the idea of the practico-

inert enables him to distinguish between two formations of social collectivity—the series and the group.

Seriality

The *Critique* is Sartre's attempt to understand human freedom within the concrete context of social and political spheres in which there is a dialectical move from an isolated individual to one who participates in various forms of social union and experiences the ties of solidarity. Here, individuals are brought together into groups and collectives mainly because of events in the sphere of the material and practical fields. In this sphere collectives do not only depend on the consciousness of the Third but also have their origins in the material field of the practico-inert. Because of its totalising effect, the material field mediates collectives into what Sartre calls 'series' and groups.

A series is a collection of people who are connected only by external closeness or immediacy. Put differently, it is a collection of unself-conscious, isolated, passive, autonomous individuals brought together exclusively by a common product or object situated outside the collective. Since in Sartre's conception of human freedom all relations must be understood in terms of action, a series is then a social collective whose members are unified passively either by objects of interest or by the material effects of the actions of others, the practico-inert. Examples of a series include a collection of people listening to a radio broadcast, consumers connected by the market or a number of commuters waiting for a bus. In the bus example, everyone is in the queue for the same reason: transport, and this constitutes them into a collective albeit that they do not have a common or collective goal. No one is interested in the Other except only insofar as the Other is a possible competitor for limited seats in the bus. When this happens, scarcity has entered the collective, determining, in the process, relations between individuals as that of hostile competition. To this extent, each wishes the Other was not there; and each becomes Other than herself, penetrated by the scarcity of the material things and how they influence their relation to the others. To avoid imminent conflicts, they constitute themselves into an ordered queue, an act that in itself is also a recognition of their community. But this union of each to each is one of discrete, separate identities.

The serial object, the bus, not only dictates the seriality of the members of the collective but also renders individual members inter-

changeable because they are not socially differentiated. For this reason, each member of the serial collective experiences feelings of isolation, passivity, alienation, powerlessness, and otherness. As a result, no individual action in the serial group can bring about change or liberation from the serial condition.

This theory of series provides grounds for understanding race positioning in seriality. Racism, Sartre asserts, is a form of manipulated seriality. In an anti-black society blacks are constituted both as serial unities and as serial objects. By force of their position, anti-black racists hold blacks in series. Racist language and discourse, racially separated spaces, media, attitudes, institutions, and so on—in short, the racist condition—constitutes the serial object which in turn confers a serial unity on black people as a constituted group. As members of the serial group, blacks become constituted in such a way that they are passively and unintentionally connected to one another, each a victim of the unchosen contingent bodily link that affects the results of the praxis of each.

In seriality, the individual experiences herself as anonymous, as Other to the others, contingently interchangeable with them. For instance, as victims of anti-black racism, blacks are and experience themselves as invisible; to see that black is to see every other black. In the play, *The Respectful Prostitute*, Sartre dramatises this invisibility by denying the 'Negro' individuality. The Negro has no name; he is simply 'The Negro', anonymous, interchangeable, and without an identity such that any Negro can take his place and be lynched simply because *he* is a Negro, black. It is not surprising that The Negro experienced a deep sense of powerlessness, isolation and helplessness.⁶

Understood as the atomisation of the collective into a diffusion of innumerable individuals who relate to one another through some abstract external mediation, seriality resonates with liberalism's atomisation of the individual as a social unit. Indeed, it is clear that because of its philosophical and moral commitment to the universalist ethos, liberalism wishes to preserve social collectives at the level of seriality that is constituted by atomic autonomous individuals whose only relations to others is alterity. Hence Sartre's main focus is on the liberal democrat—the rational, well-intentioned liberal who insists that there really is no black question; the liberal democrat whose proposed solution to the problem of anti-black racism is that the black be simply assimilated into mainstream white dominant society. While Sartre thinks that liberals would unintentionally like to reduce the racial problematic to the serial level of individual autonomy *qua* isolation,

passivity and otherness, for him the only way to effectively fight it would be at the level of what he calls group-in-fusion.

The Group

Series assume the character of groups when the serial members realise that they are all equally in danger from or vulnerable to an outside threat which only a combined effort can effectively deal with. Sartre's concept of the group is thus an exploration of the movement from serial reality to group formations that are united by shared experience and common interests. Seriality is thus anterior to group formation and is the basic type of sociality out of which groups emerge. A group is a collection of people who, unlike those in a series, are consciously united by a common objective or end. It is constituted when some action or commitment is undertaken within a seriality; that is, faced with a common need, danger, threat or oppression, a fusion of individuals in a series occurs leading to collective praxis. The essence of collective praxis is the surpassing of existing dangerous or oppressive situations; but furthermore 'the essence of the fused group is the sudden resurrection of freedom' (Sartre, 1982: 401), a negation of the disabling experience of serial feelings of isolation, impotence, alienation and fear which represent the individual's diminished capacity to choose. What starts a group-in-fusion as a transformative or emancipatory agent, therefore, is the negation of itself as serial inertia, alienation, separation and powerlessness.

Sartre begins his examination of group solidarity by discussing the conditions under which it normally occurs (e.g., the fall of the Bastille during the French Revolution). Since his examples of the formation of fused groups are outlines of revolt (all centered on the French Revolution), it is fitting for our purpose to take as an example a situation of revolt and solidarity that occurred in our history: the Soweto uprising.

Early in June 1976, word went around of the dissatisfaction caused by the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. The rumour spread quickly that the police were going to arrest and detain a number of student activists and suppress any imminent demonstration. Internal changes occur in a situation of this sort. With the looming and actual threat of police brutality and suppression, the black students began to see things in a new light; new perceptions of the self were activated. The Other was no longer reduced to simple serial alterity, but was also in danger. The Other was me;

‘everyone...see(s) himself in the Other...everyone sees his own future in the Other and, on that basis, discovers his present action in that of the Other’ (Sartre, 1982: 354). The distance that characterised the serial condition that separated individuals through the mediation of the practico-inert was being eroded. ‘Everyone reacted in a new way: not as an individual nor as an Other but as an individual incarnation of the common person’ (Sartre, 1982: 357). This moment, the spontaneous interiorisation of the common threat, Sartre calls the ‘Apocalyptic moment’, that is, the dissolution of the series into a fused group.

In the face of detentions without trial, and death threats from hostel dwellers who constituted themselves into a counter-collective group, students began to talk and act together as a group. Seized by fear and anticipation of police harassment, they began to strategise. The historical temperature of oppression was escalating. The normal routines of school class attendance no longer seemed important; attention was focused on the police presence, the security police informers and the danger or threat they represented. Black students who were complete strangers to one another began to have a common interest, a collective and shared apprehension of a common project, a common transcendent end, and a common destiny. Important to note here is that the solidarity which emerged during this uprising was founded in and was fundamentally the product of a racial need, a racial threat and a common racial response to the danger. Racial group solidarity, therefore, does not necessarily emerge out of racist intentions but against such oppressive racist or sexist intentions. Students from other racial groups, for obvious reasons, did not participate in the uprising.

This mutual and common comprehension, recognition and appreciation of each other’s destinies and projects by black students constitutes reciprocal relations. In such relations, the Other becomes an instrument, not for the negation of the Self but for its affirmation, the consequence of which is the emergence of group solidarity. Solidarity is a product of positive reciprocity such as that which is found, for example, in any team sport. In this case the outcome is shared with everyone making him or herself the Other’s means in order that the team’s collective effort enables it to realise its single purpose, winning. This reciprocity is always subject to mediation by matter or the perspective of the Third; that is, mediation by the practices of other people. The important point to note here is that reciprocity as a feature of group solidarity is not, as in seriality, imposed from without but

comes freely from within, in interiority. In short, what characterises the group-in-fusion is the negation of the impossible past condition; it discards mutual indifference, isolation, and powerlessness.

Given the fragility of groups in fusion, the constant threat of possible retrogression into seriality, the possibility of the group moving into the practico-inert as a passive synthesis, and the group's desire for permanency, may lead the members of the group-in-fusion, according to Sartre, to take on a pledge of loyalty to the group and therefore transform it into a *pledge group*. The pledge itself does not necessarily have to be a ceremonial action (e.g., taking an oath, or observing rituals and ceremonies such as vows over the Bible); it is an event which occurs at the moment the group becomes its own end. The pledge group, for reasons that are internal to development of group formation, may progress into an organisation and further into an institution such as the state or church.

Against Solidarity

In both his early and later development, Sartre consistently defends group solidarity against oppression. Similar to Sartre's position,⁷ I respond to the problematic posed by Kateb—'How should human beings respond when other human beings group them together in a category that is fixed by a few physical characteristics: when the categorisation is made with hostility to those who are categorised?' (1998: 48)—in this simple manner: collective identity and solidarity. If effective resistance to racism needs to be a group or collective project of solidarity, the critical question which arises is: What should be the organising principle on which this solidarity is grounded? I argue that a reasonable response from the point of view of the victims of racism is: If the problem is racism, and racism is predicated on race, race becomes the legitimate ground and point of departure for emancipatory solidarity. Indeed, what else can solidarity be based upon except the very criterion or category which is used as a foundation for that very oppression? To claim as I do that racial solidarity is a rational way to deal with racism is, *ceterus peribus*, to utter a banality. However, the banality of such a claim assumes a different dimension when it becomes a source of national controversy and its legitimacy is called into question by competing paradigms of racial liberation posited by prominent thinkers. A current popular contesting paradigm that rejects race as a foundation for racial solidarity is largely spear-

headed by Anthony Kwame Appiah, among others, and is subsequently used, in its South African variant, by the critics of solidarity groups such as The Native Club. Among the outspoken leading critics of The Native Club are prominent intellectuals such as Jonathan Jansen and Achille Mbembe.⁸

In Appiah we have what is perhaps the most powerful and well-known critique of race-based solidarity. I shall therefore pay more attention to his position—qua critique of black solidarity as a type of racism and nativism—not only for its philosophical sophistication but also because of its close liberalistic resonance with the position of the critics of The Native Club and other black solidarity ensembles in current South Africa. It is particularly noteworthy that Appiah's concerns were initially a response to W.E.B. Du Bois' 'The Conservation of Races', a paper Du Bois delivered on the occasion of the formation of an American Negro Academy in 1897. The aim, similar to that of The Native Club, was to encourage intellectual activity among black people and defend them against racist attacks. The similarity of intention between the formation of the American Negro Academy and The Native Club makes Appiah's critique all the more applicable to the latter. For example, in the same manner as Jansen and Mbembe, Appiah's position commits him to the unwarranted claim that attempts by oppressed racial groups to promote racial solidarity are themselves racist.

Furthermore, all three agree that nativism in Africa presents itself as an opposition to universalism by creating, in Appiah's words 'two real players in this game: us, inside; them, outside' (1992: 56); that is, indigene/alien, or western/traditional binaries. Similarly, part of the problem with The Native Club is the choice of what the critics call a racially inflected term 'Native' and its connotation of binary exclusionary practices of indigeneity/foreigner or native/settler.⁹ Consequently both Jansen and Mbembe, echoing Appiah's claim that the very use of ordinary racial categories is racist, accuse The Native Club not only of racism but also of 'nativism', essentialism and black nationalism. For Jansen, the challenge in the face of invidious racism is 'not to regress into some obscure nativism or race essentialism, as the morally obtuse project of The Native Club tried clumsily to enforce' (in Van Wyk, 2007: 130). In the same vein, Mbembe argues that since blacks have now acquired political power, black solidarity should not 'embrace racial particularism, nativism,¹⁰ communal nationalism or the politics of difference' (in Van Wyk, 2007: 144).

Appiah's view is that black solidarity (especially the kind advocated by Alexander Crummell and later Du Bois) constitutes racism

of a special kind, but racism all the same, namely: *intrinsic racism*. Intrinsic racism consists in giving preference to one's own 'racial' group to the exclusion of other groups, not because the other groups are inferior to one's own but simply on the basis of racial solidarity with members of one's race. Appiah's claim is that, 'the discourse of [racial] solidarity is usually expressed through the language of *intrinsic* racism...the bare fact of being of the same race...provides the basis for solidarity...[and] makes the idea of fraternity one that is naturally applied in nationalist discourse' (1992: 17). Accordingly, Pan-Africanism—and by extension Negritude, Black Consciousness Movements, Afrocentricity, The Native Club and so on—serves as an emblematic doctrine of 'intrinsic racism'. He then concludes that the Pan-Africanists must abandon the idea of race as a regulative principle in order to 'escape from racism fully, and from the racialism it presupposes' (Appiah, 1992: 20). The reason for this judgement emanates from Appiah's denial that races exist.¹¹ For him, any belief or claim that there are human races is *ipso facto* racist even in the absence of any value judgement being made about the superiority or inferiority of the races or hierarchising them according to physical, moral or intellectual traits. He finds support for this claim in scientific findings of biology and genetics.¹²

Having thus argued that races do not have a biological or scientific legitimacy, Appiah then insists that racial solidarity should be rejected not only on the grounds that it is predicated on a falsehood but equally important, because it involves treating an irrelevant factor (morphological characteristics) as a basis for being concerned about one's group rather than about one another. In short, because races do not exist, he concludes that race is an unworthy basis for identity and political solidarity. Indeed, any one who preaches solidarity on the basis of race is a racist. In line with Appiah's suggestion that colour-blind interracial solidarity—to be sure, cosmopolitanism¹³—is a morally defensible strategy to fight racism, Mbembe and Jansen also suggest the fostering of 'cross-racial solidarity' (Mbembe, 2007: 147) or 'a world without race, a broader cosmopolitanism' (Jansen, 2007: 132).

Critique of the Anti-Solidarity Position

First I wish to contextualise my critique of an anti-solidarity position within the framework of Sartre's critique of liberal humanism pre-

cisely because I regard the attack on racial solidarity by Appiah, Jansen and Mbembe to be in principle informed by liberal humanistic values. Sartre's distinction between analytic reason (spirit) and synthetic reason offers itself as a persuasive critique of liberal humanism. Analytic reason, for Sartre, is the mode of thought of liberal humanists according to which composite realities must necessarily be reducible to simple elements or atoms whose relations to each other are external relations. In the social and political spheres, human beings, for the analytic spirit, are atomic, solitary individuals whose only concept of solidarity is that of 'a pea in a can of peas: he is round, closed in on himself, incommunicative' (Sartre, 1988: 256). Human beings exist as individuals side by side without any true unity, their relations are external and their solidarity a passive bond among distinct molecules. Blinded by this mode of reason, the liberal humanist rejects claim of racial identity such as Blacks or Jews, but recognises only the individual human being who is an incarnation of universal traits of human nature that are constituted by reason. For the liberal humanist, therefore, the black person does not exist; there is no Black consciousness or Jewish consciousness, there is only human consciousness. In this way the concrete particular is rejected in favour of the abstract universal. What this mode of thought ultimately leaves us with is the idea that there are no blacks and therefore there is no racial problem. This position, for Sartre, contains within it a tinge of anti-black racism.

What I think informs Appiah's position and that of the critics of *The Native Club* is their adherence to liberal values and ideals. There is definitely no mistaking their liberalism and its antipathy to any collectivism that puts individuality in jeopardy. Behind their views on race and racism is an adherence to liberalism's core set of general principles, namely, commitment to: (i) an individualism which considers as basic the political, moral and legal claims of the individual over and against groups; (ii) the belief in reason as constitutive of human nature and therefore the basis for human equality; (iii) freedom of choice; (iv) individual privacy; and (v) individual autonomy without undue prescriptions or limitations from outside. Describing himself as a modern liberal, Appiah states: 'We believe...that individual autonomy is at the heart of political morality' (in Cloete et al. 1997: 79-80). Liberalism insists that race is a morally irrelevant category because it is not earned but an accident of nature. Accordingly, human beings must avoid irrational choices that appeal to contingencies like race. What therefore needs to be done, liberals argue, is to

eradicate the evil of irrational and illogical prejudices and exclusions based on an irrelevant category such as the colour of a person's skin or texture of her hair. It is precisely this belief in the irrelevancy of race that constitutes the foundation of the principle of colour-blindness or what in South African parlance is known as 'nonracialism'.

The position taken by Appiah and the critics of The Native Club against group identity and solidarity is reminiscent of Sartre's characterisation of the presumed friend of the Jew, the liberal democrat, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. The liberal democrat is someone afraid of the 'consciousness of the Jewish collectivity' (1965: 56), someone who wishes to destroy the Jew as a Jew 'and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen' (Sartre, 1965: 57). In liberal individualism, Sartre insists, lies the bad faith of the liberal democrat about the realities of liberal societies. In a society such as South Africa whose liberal constitution idealises the rights of the individual above all else, social power groups or cliques—for example political, religious, sport, gender, gay and lesbian, and cultural groups—still dominate the nation. There are few rights that any individual has that are not backed up by the power of some group no matter how much the contrary is believed to be true. And in Brazil, where races are officially declared non-existent, groups are still identified as 'Preto' (Black) and 'Pardo' (Mestizo or Mulatto) thus revealing the falsity of this acclaimed 'racial democracy'.

At this juncture it would be useful to remember, *pace* Appiah, Sartre's theory of seriality, according to which the individual's experience of isolation and alienation reveals the impotence of her atomic existence. This atomic individual impotence, on Sartre's account, provides a fitting response to and contextualisation of Appiah's liberal conception of collectives. Appiah's position on group solidarity is to a large extent similar to Sartre's conceptualisation of serial collectives. Understood as the atomisation of the collective into a diffusion of innumerable individuals who relate to one another through some abstract external mediation, seriality has a resemblance to liberalism's atomisation of the individual as a social unit. To the liberal, Sartre wrote, 'a physical body is a collection of molecules; a social body, a collection of individuals. And by individual he means the incarnation in a single example of the universal traits which make up human nature' (1965: 55). It is thus clear that because of its philosophical and moral commitment to individualism and the universalist ethos, liberalism wishes to preserve social collectives at the level of seriality that

is constituted by atomic autonomous individuals whose only relation to each other is alterity. Sartre makes the connection between the abstract universalism of liberal democrats and serial atomisation of the individual:

In society as conceived by the analytic cast of mind, the individual, a solid and indivisible particle, the vehicle of human nature, resides like a pea in a can of peas: he is round, closed in on himself, uncommunicative. All men are *equal*, by which it should be understood that they all participate equally in the essence of man. All men are *brothers*, fraternity is a passive bond among distinct molecules, which takes the place of an active or class-bound solidarity that the analytic cast of mind cannot even imagine (Sartre, 1988: 256).

The analytic cast of mind is so powerful that after centuries it is still the dominant and 'official doctrine of bourgeois democracies' (Sartre, 1988: 257) in which racial solidarity or any group solidarity is not tolerated.

At this point, what emerges from the above is: firstly, the anti-solidarity position leaves blacks in a serial condition of impotence against racism by reducing them to isolated and alienated autonomous individuals; secondly, this conception fails to recognise and thus ignores the importance of group-in-fusion as constituting solidarity in the face of the danger of racism; and finally, it mistakes the flexibility of group-in-fusion for the unyielding demands for group loyalty of the pledge group. The conflation of the flexibility of group-in-fusion and the pledge group manifests itself in Appiah's concern that racial solidarity by its very nature places certain demands on its members, for example, proper ways of being black, certain cultural preferences and so on. These demands, Appiah argues, are almost like 'scripts' that shape individual life-plans and possibilities. Identities emerging from these demands are 'too tightly scripted' (Appiah, 1996: 99) thereby undermining the cherished individual autonomy. I noted earlier that unlike in the fused group where individual praxis of each member is relatively free, the pledge group demands absolute loyalty (a self-imposed inertia) through the pledge from each of its members. Fearful of the freedom of each member to leave the group and thus lead to its dissolution, the group imposes the oath on itself and becomes a pledge group. Through the pledge a brotherhood bond is produced while simultaneously bringing terror and fear into each member's heart. The pledge affirms the right of the group over the individual.

Appiah and the critics of The Native Club, like most critics of African communalism¹⁴ and communitarianism, off-handedly assume that by emphasising racial solidarity, collective black identity proponents necessarily conceive of the black individual as *completely* constituted by their racial group. In their view, this interferes with individual autonomy—making the being and life of the individual *wholly* dependent on the activities, values, projects, practices and ends of the group—and consequently diminishing the individual’s capacity to choose. But emancipatory group solidarity, described above as group-in-fusion and expressed in the Soweto uprisings, need not erode individual autonomy. It is only when the fused group transforms itself into the pledge group that individual autonomy is interfered with. By introducing the pledge, Sartre attempts to capture what he takes to be the lived experience and intelligibility of solidarity. Being-in-the-group is far from constituting total absorption of the individual into the group. Rather it is a stronger development of the individual self insofar as the pledge can make explicit the fact that the individual has the potential to abandon, desert or betray the group. In other words, being a member of a group does not entail complete absorption by the group such that the individual loses her freedom to choose; it is only when a pledge is made that the demands become, in Appiah’s phrase, ‘too tightly scripted’.

Part of the problem with liberal individualism is its intolerance of group identity, and therefore its disregard of the fact that racist consciousness always operates at the level of collectives. It is this indifference to racist collectivist nature that makes anti-solidarity proponents blind to racism’s viciousness. The word ‘race’ itself signifies not a single individual person but a collection or group of people socially distinguishable by certain morphological and phenotypical characteristics—biological, genetic or scientific evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. If, as it is commonly agreed, racism is predicated on the assumption of the existence of races, if race refers to a collective or a group of human beings with certain socially identifiable physical traits, then racism cannot be a phenomenon directed against a single individual; its reference is to a group. Consequently, to the racist consciousness, human beings always exist as collective wholes and their identities inhere in those collectives. To such a consciousness, human beings will always appear as Blacks, Whites, or Indians and so on. A person, according to this logic, is not an isolated being within a collective whole, but a part of a homogenised crowd. An individual person with a self-identity is unheard of to the racist

consciousness because the foundation of being is the racial group or collective.

Since racism is fundamentally not a phenomenon about the uniqueness of an autonomous individual but about collectives (groups, the superiority or inferiority of a presumed racial group), each individual person belonging to that particular collective is replaceable and changeable in the manner of each individual within the Sartrean seriality. This fact is captured by the popular racist phrase: 'All Niggers look alike', that is, they are one and all. *Any* one of them will do. For this reason, it is impossible to fight racism as an autonomous individual. While the individual can refuse to be broken by racism, while she can act to diminish the extent to which she suffers from racism and can make significant contribution to the emancipatory effort against racism, she cannot abolish or destroy racism all by herself; Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X or even Steve Biko could not. Racial solidarity is a necessary condition for emancipation from racism. Biko recognised this fact when he emphatically stated: 'We are oppressed not as individuals ... we are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with the tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil' (1996: 97).

Earlier we noted that Appiah accuses black solidarity advocates, especially Alexander Crummell who founded the American Negro Academy at which Du Bois presented his 'The Conservation of Races', of intrinsic racism. The Native Club, whose aim was similar to that of the Academy, has also been accused of racism.¹⁵ An interesting question Appiah asks is whether Pan-Africanists (especially Crummell) can legitimately be described as racist in the same manner in which we describe apartheid South Africa and Nazi racism as racist. In other words, is 'intrinsic racism' racism? His answer is in many ways unsatisfactory. For him, although these racisms are the same, they however differ from a moral point of view. Apartheid and Nazi racisms both led to 'systematic oppression' resulting in harm, whereas the 'intrinsic racism' of Crummell and his Pan-Africanist heirs contained no harm or oppression but benefit. The point I wish to contest, however, is not whether the one racism is morally better than the other or not. In my view, while apartheid and Nazism were incontestably racist, Pan-Africanism and by extension The Native Club cannot be described as racist for the simple reason that what is lacking in them, but present in apartheid and Nazism and constituting

the core of racism, is fundamentally the dreadful belief in ideas of superiority and inferiority which provide justification for subjugation and domination.

While Appiah makes a valuable and significant distinction between racialism and racism, a distinction which most race theorists such as Lucius Outlaw endorse, he however equates racialism with 'intrinsic racism' and racism with 'extrinsic racism'. But, racialism, as Outlaw correctly points out, neither is nor need become racism (1996: 8). Racism, unlike racialism, involves the binary of superiority/inferiority. In point of fact, racism involves notions of domination, subjugation or control, that is, racial power relations, whereas racialism does not. Definitions or theories of racism contain the following components as part of their nature: (a) a belief in the superiority of one race over others or one other; (b) the idea that this inferiority or superiority is mainly of a biological or cultural nature; (c) the belief that biological inequalities are reflections of moral, social, cultural or mental characteristics; and (d) the belief in the legitimacy of the domination or subjugation of the inferior races by the superior ones. But these features are absent from what is normally understood by racialism. Indeed, Appiah grants that intrinsic racism is much less objectionable than extrinsic racism precisely because it is 'acknowledged almost exclusively as the basis of feelings of community' (Appiah, 1992: 17). But this makes it hard to understand why intrinsic racism qua racialism is in fact racism at all. There certainly are no 'feelings of community' in racism. Racism is dehumanisation and human alienation par excellence. Appiah, therefore, as well as the critics of *The Native Club*, are guilty of conflating the two and thereby passing negative judgements on a phenomenon (racialism) that is not necessarily dangerous and immoral, as Appiah himself admits and Amy Gutmann has demonstrated.¹⁶ While racialism qua belief that races are real and valued does not imply racial inequality and domination and thus is not necessarily invidious, racism qua belief that 'one's race is superior to other races' (Gordon, 1995: 2) is necessarily pernicious especially when employed as means of dominating, excluding, and inferiorising the targeted racial group.

Linked to the issue of racialism is the concept of race (colour)-consciousness. The critics of race-based solidarities fail to see that race (colour)-consciousness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of racism. One can be race (colour)-conscious without being a racist. For it is possible that one can take a position that there are distinct types of races yet demand that they should be treated and

respected equally. Hence one could conceivably fight against racism while believing in the existence of different races, that is, fight against racism while being a racist. This suggests that race-consciousness is not sufficient to constitute one as a racist. None of the proponents of black solidarity in question have claimed black superiority over and domination of others. Referring to Negritude, Sartre also declares that the Negro 'wishes in no way to dominate the world: he desires the abolition of all kinds of ethnic privileges: he asserts his solidarity with the oppressed' (1988: 326).

The argument that it is racist to hold that races exist is certainly powerful and has a semblance of coherence when viewed from the standpoint that racists predicate their racism on the assumption of the existence of races. They use the presumed existence of different races as their point of departure in arguing for inequality among races. How can those who suffer from racism hope to succeed in their liberation by utilising the very same false instrument of 'race' used by their oppressors? Is this not another form of apartheid and was it not the outlawing of this evil system that the liberation movements were all about? Echoing these concerns of the critics of *The Native Club*, Appiah states that he finds it strange that victims of racism should themselves sanction false racist theories and themselves be racist. Is it not true, as Audre Lorde insisted, that '[t]he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (1984)? What is needed, in Appiah's view, is simply to demonstrate that races do not exist in order to bring the racist ideology tumbling down. Not only must the belief in the existence of races (racialism) be destroyed, but the use of the very word 'race' must also be dispensed with. If both the belief in the ontology of races and the word itself are discarded, then the notion of black solidarity based on racial identity becomes superfluous. Ultimately, what Appiah and the opponents of *The Native Club* propose is nonracialism qua colour-blindness.

Whilst it may be correct that scientific (biological) races do not exist, and that genetic, interracial similarities are more prominent than intra-racial ones, at the phenomenological level of everyday experience and of common ordinary perception in an anti-black society, a white person will more likely feel 'closer' to another white than to a black person in the streets. As de Benoist argues, '[g]eneticists may well stress that genetic pools do not necessarily correspond to phenotypes, but it is not genetic pools that the average person meets in the streets' (1999: 40). Appiah himself admits that the stubborn racist is unlikely to change her racist attitude and behaviour upon learning

about the scientific truth that the notion of 'race' is an illusion precisely because races do not exist. In the very midst of scepticism about the reality of race and racialised identities there is an undeniable existential reality in an anti-black world, that race and racial identity carry immense existential (political, social, religious, cultural, or economic) significance. Race or racialised identity has the capacity to either close or open life possibilities, to limit or widen existential options such as available residential, educational, economical or emotional options. Caught within the context of such a situation, racial solidarity becomes a powerful instrument for racial emancipation.

Conclusion

Firstly, what emerges here is that whilst preaching 'tolerance' as a virtue and proclaiming themselves tolerant of other ideologies that are supposedly authoritarian, liberals such as Appiah, Jansen and Mbebe are in fact intolerant within certain limits dictated by their belief in individual autonomy and reason. In point of fact, they exhibit an amazing intolerance towards anyone who steps out of individualism in favour of groups or collectives. Secondly, it is only by conceiving racism as a mental attitude or phenomenon that the desire by black people to group themselves in order to fight racism can be perceived as morally the same and as deplorable as apartheid or Nazi racism. To equate the actions of, let us say, The Native Club and that of apartheid advocates is to abstractly ignore the historical conditions which produced them. It involves a logical sleight of hand by which black solidarity and racism are declared interchangeable and equivalent simply because they are both race-based. Ignored is the historical and moral difference between programmes or systems of racial oppression and the determination of the victims of racist oppression to defend themselves. This, indeed, is the same logical sleight of hand normally applied in opposition to affirmative action programmes.

All things being equal, and if we were living in an ideal non-racialised possible world, a world in which race counted for nothing, 'the bare fact of being of the same race', as Appiah puts it, should not be a compelling moral, political or social reason for preferring a person of one's own race over another. Indeed, in such a world the conception of race as a basis for identity would probably not even exist. However, in an anti-black society, for example, one's real or imagined race becomes a determining factor in terms of who one associates,

and therefore forms alliances, with. The major problem with Appiah's view—and by extension, the critics of The Native Club and other black formations—is that it is one which would apply with reasonable force and success in an ideal, abstract and perfect possible world in which everyone is colour-blind. But ours is not an ideal possible world; it is cruelly a real existential world.

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Notes

1. For a thorough discussion of the differences among theories of black solidarity, e.g., 'common oppression theory', 'collective self-determination theory' and 'collective identity theory' see Tommie Shelby, 'Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression' *Ethics*, 112, 2002, 231-266, and for a much more expanded version of this issue, see Tommie Shelby, *We who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).
2. Historically, a number of black organisations have existed in South Africa. Indeed, most political organisations such as the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Natal Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Party, the Black Consciousness Movement, and so on were race-based groups. Recently, new anti-racist race-based groups have emerged, for example, the Black Lawyers' Association, the Black Management Forum, the Black Taxis' Association, the Black Farmers' Union, and Black Chartered Accountants. For some reason, these newly formed organisations have not caused a stir such as the one caused by The Native Club, The African Forum and The Forum for Black Journalists. The Native Club is a formation of black intellectuals intended to utilise the talents of blacks with the purpose of stimulating discourse on how to advance a black perspective on matters of national interest in a country which claims to be non-racial yet is still gripped by the legacy of the racism of the past. The African Forum and The Forum for Black Journalists followed in the footsteps of The Native Club. The African Forum was formed by black academics at the University of Kwazulu-Natal for the purpose of bringing about meaningful transformation at the Institution. The Forum for Black Journalists is a group of

- black journalists who, cognisant of white domination and racism in the media industry, constituted itself with the aim of monitoring racism in this industry.
3. See for example, K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*. (New York: Oxford, 1992). For similar positions to Appiah's see for example, Randall Kennedy, 'My Race Problem and Ours,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1997, 55-66. For Kennedy, racial solidarity—loyalty, kinship, or pride—is burdensome for an 'unencumbered self' like him who is animated by a 'liberal individualistic and universalistic ethos that is sceptical of, if not hostile to, the particularisms—national, ethnic, religious, and racial—that seem to have grown recently'(57-8). See also Teodos Kiro, 'A Practical Idea of Blackness' *Quest*, vii:1, 1994, 23-43; and Charles Verharen, 'An Ethics of Intimacy: Race and Moral Obligation' *Radical Philosophy Review* 1: 2, 1998, 89-97.
 4. John Gerassi's book: *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of His Century*, vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) captures this attitude.
 5. J-P Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Vol.1. *Theory of Practical Ensembles*. Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith. (London: Verso) hereafter referred to as the *Critique*.
 6. A long passage worth quoting in full Sartre states that the Jews: 'are primarily serial unities. In fact, the being-Jewish of every Jew in a hostile society which persecutes and insults them and opens itself to them only to reject them again, cannot be the only relation between the individual Jew and the anti-semitic, racist society which surrounds him; it is this relation in so far as it is lived by every Jew in his direct or indirect relations with all the other Jews, and in so far as it constitutes him, through them all, as Other and threatens him in and through the Others. To the extent that, for the conscious, lucid Jew, being-Jewish (which is the statute for non-Jews) is interiorised as his responsibility in relation to all other Jews and his being-in-danger, out there, owing to some possible carelessness caused by Others who mean nothing to him, over whom he has no power and every one of whom is himself like Others (in so far as he makes them exist as such in spite of himself), the Jew, far from being the type common to each separate instance, represents on the contrary the perpetual being-outside-themselves-in-the-other of the members of this practico-inert grouping' (Sartre, 1982: 267-8).
 7. A similar position held historically by most black leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Alexander Crummell, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, Steve Biko, and Chabani Manganyi. See, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Conservation of Races' in Howard Brotz (ed.). *African-American Social and Political Thought 1850-1920*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 483-492; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. (New York: Vintage, 1967); Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*. (Randburg: Ravan, 1996); and Noel Chabani Manganyi, *Being-Black-in-the-World*. (Johannesburg: Sprocas/Ravan, 1973).
 8. See K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*. (New York: Oxford, 1992); Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Randall Kennedy, 'My Race Problem and Ours,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1997, 55-66; Jonathan Jansen, 'Native Club: A Dangerous Move to Deflect Attention from State Failings,' *Sunday Times*, 28 May, 2006; Achille Mbembe, 'SA's Mpropheti is Leading us on a Road to National Suicide' *City Press*, 4 May,

- 2006, 'Stirring a Dark Brew that Echoes Nongwawuse's Fatal Prophecy,' *Sunday Times*, 24 June, 2006; Jonathan Jansen, 'King James, Princess Alice, and the Ironed Hair: A Tribute to Stephen Bantu Biko', and Achille Mbembe 'Biko's Testament of Hope', both in Chris Van Wyk (ed.). *We Write What We Like*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007). The irony of these latter critiques of black solidarity is that they are in celebration of Biko who, through the Black Consciousness Movement, advocated black solidarity. See also Motlatjo Thetjeng, 'Native Club Racist,' *Financial Mail*, 26 May, 2006.
9. The word 'Native' initially carried a negative connotation equivalent to 'savage' 'barbaric', 'uncivilised' or 'heretic'. As Arnold Toynbee noted: 'When we Westerners call people "Natives", we implicitly take the cultural colour out of our perceptions of them. We see them as trees walking, or as wild animals infesting the country in which we happen to come across them. In fact, we see them as part of the local flora and fauna, and not as men of like passions with ourselves, and seeing them thus as something infra-human, we feel entitled to treat them as though they did not possess ordinary human rights. They are merely natives of the lands which they occupy; and no term of occupancy can be long enough to confer any prescriptive rights. Their tenure is as provisional and precarious as the forest trees which the Western pioneer fells or that of the big game which he shoots down. And how shall the "civilised" Lords of Creation treat the human game, when in their own good time they come to take possession of the land which, by right of eminent domain, is indefeasibly their own? Shall they treat these "Natives" as vermin to be exterminated, or as domesticable animals to be turned into hewers of wood and drawers of water? No other alternative need to be considered, if "niggers have no souls". All this is implicit in the word "Native" as we have come to use it in the English language in our time'. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study in History*, vol.1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 152-3. In South Africa, 'Native' meant 'any person, male or female, who is a member of an aboriginal race or tribe of Africa; and shall further include any company or other body of persons, corporate or unincorporate, if the person who have controlling interest therein are natives (The Native's Land Act, 1913). What becomes clear in the two definitions of 'Native' is the indigeneity and therefore ownership of the land; and what the critics of The Native Club are contesting is the implicit claim to land ownership in the name Native Club, something that has become a burning political and economic issue in Zimbabwe.
 10. On 'nativism' see K. Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch.3; Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 11. For some support of Appiah's view see Naomi Zack who, for example, sums up the argument of her text, *Race and Mixed Race*, as being 'that black and white racial designations are themselves racist because the concept of race does not have an adequate scientific foundation' (1993: 3-4).
 12. For a critique of this view see Albert Mosley, *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*. (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995); 'Are Racial Categories Racist?' *Research in African Literature*, 28: 4, 1997; Alain de Benoist, 'What is Racism?' *Telos*, 114: 11, 1999.
 13. See K. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

14. For an interesting critique of Appiah's African cultural diversity view, see Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*. Revised ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), xxiii-xxxii.
15. See Motlatjo Thetjeng, 'Native Club Racist', *Financial Mail*, 26 May, 2006. Unlike Appiah's precise definition of racism, the critics of The Native Club used the word 'racist' without explanation or definition. All we can gather from their writings is that for them a racist group is one that advocates solidarity on the basis of race.
16. For a similar distinction between racialism and racism see, for example, Michael MacDonald. *Why Race Matters in South Africa*. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 106-107; Albert Mosley, *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*. (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 216-235; Alain de Benoist, 'What is Racism?' *Telos*, 114: 11, 1999, 20-23.

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