Key Concepts and Definitions for Building Racial Literacy

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Racial literacy is a process of solidarity building, to grow our common knowledge of what race and racism do and how to develop effective strategies to defeat them.

ACADEMICS PLAY A ROLE JUST AS THEY DID IN THE PAST.

RACIST

NOT RACIST

Introduction

This guide has been created to give the user tools to understand the history and sociology of race, racism, and antiracism. These concepts contribute to enhancing racial literacy in society.

In Australia, the term racial literacy began to be used more widely after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. This led to it often being misrepresented and confused with contested concepts, such as cultural competency (Bargallie & Lentin, 2020). Most cultural competence training is apolitical and does not confront race and racism as central to the Australian colonising project. Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka nation and Critical Indigenous scholar, Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson teaches us that focusing on culture alone can be dangerous because it has been used to assess Indigenous people's authenticity and, on this basis, to grant or take away rights (Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

The development of any racial literacy resource must be accurate, research-informed, and grounded in understanding and commitment to the history and contemporary practices of anticolonialism and antiracism on this continent. This guide has been designed with these principles at the fore.

The aim of racial literacy, as first set out by the Black and Native American scholar Frances Winddance Twine (Twine, 2004) and the late Jamaican-born US civil rights legal scholar Lani Guinier (Guinier, 2004), is to help people who face racism navigate a systemically racist world. We approach racial literacy as a practice of solidarity. Far from paternalistically assuming there is 'illiteracy' in society that must be remedied, we believe concepts and definitions must respond to community needs and build on people's own knowledge. Grounded in years of dialogue with students, activists, and the community at large, this paper is based on the principle expressed by the Black freedom fighter, Assata Shakur:

'The less you think about your oppression, the more your tolerance for it grows.'

Enhancing our understanding of what she calls 'the complicated problem' of racism, with all 'its multiple forms and subtleties,' is a collective endeavour that requires all hands-on deck (Shakur, 2001).

It is important to be clear that enhancing our racial literacy is not sufficient for tackling racism. Racial literacy building is a praxis over the lifetime that must be accompanied by active struggles against racist systems and ideas. It involves the learning of complex ideas and the unlearning of received knowledge. As the Critical Race and Intersectional feminist scholars, Debbie Bargallie, Nilmini Fernando and Alana Lentin state:

'We stress that racial literacy work is critical, and we strenuously reject the notion that racial literacy is merely another "training" that can be added to the hotchpotch of cultural sensitivity/competence, unconscious bias, or diversity training programmes routinely recycled and wheeled out by a burgeoning anti-racism industry' (Bargallie et al. 2023, p. 5).

What you will find

1 Definitions of key concepts relating to race, racism, and anti-racism.

2 Succinct explainers on systemic racism, how to effect systemic change, the processes of racialisation, the specific deployment of race in the context of settler colonialism, and effective language for speaking about race, racism and antiracism.

3 Examples that illustrate the problems at hand.

Concepts are not static objects. They are rooted in contexts and intellectual traditions, and they evolve. Users of this guide are encouraged to understand that the terms discussed below have roots in activism and scholarship. Theories of race, racism and antiracism have been most effectively developed by those affected. It is thus vital to honour knowledge holders by citing them and acknowledging their labour.

1 Definitions of key concepts

A RACE AND RACIALISATION

Origins of Race

Race emerged in medieval Europe (Heng, 2018) and developed as a practice for differentiating between groups of people during the feudal and early capitalist era (Robinson, 1983). It came into force in the late 15th century during the Iberian Reconquista when the supposed 'impurity of blood' of non-Christians was used to justify expelling Jews and Muslims or to forcibly convert them and impose Christianity as the dominant religious power. During the Spanish invasion of the Americas after 1492, these racialist ideas were applied to Indigenous peoples. The Spanish invaders debated whether Indigenous people, and later African people, as non-Christians, were fully human. This paved the way for the idea that humanity is a spectrum rather than all human beings made in the image of God, the prevailing monotheistic belief to this point.

Race

Race is a way of thinking based on the idea that groups of people have shared heritable physical and/or cultural characteristics. These are assumed to be fixed and unchangeable, and these groups are differentiated hierarchically. Ideas taken from biology, culture, nationalism, and religion are woven together to generalise about whole populations. Rather than being an identity, as the pioneering African-American thinker W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, race can be understood as a 'badge' that is imposed on those who are forced to wear it (Du Bois, 1940).

Politically, race is adaptive to time and circumstance. In general, it is a tool for the management of human differences for the purpose of exploitation and domination that serves to maintain white supremacy (Lentin, 2018). As a tool of power, race comes into force in regimes of colonisation, slavery, and Apartheid, but also within the labour market, migration policy, etc. It is implemented within states, governments, and institutions, such as the police, education, healthcare, and welfare, to manage people and demarcate between them.

Race and biology

The idea of biological or genetic differences among human groups which align with their physical appearance or geographical origin has no basis in fact. A racial pseudo-science that became dominant in the nineteenth century sought to validate pre-existing ideas about the inferiority of non-European peoples. It legitimised eugenicist practices such as forced assimilation through 'breeding' or sterilisation. While there are no significant biological or genetic differences between groups known as 'races', the divisions created among human groups are socially, culturally, and politically meaningful and cannot be reduced to myth alone and denied. Although race does not originate in biology, racism can have long-lasting and multigenerational effects on physical and mental health (Gravlee, 2009).

Racialisation

Racialisation refers to the historical and contemporary processes through which a person, a group of people, or a context, situation or issue is made to be 'about race' (Murji & Solomos, 2005). Racialisation is a way of speaking about race in action; the practices, discourses, and ways of thinking that lead to groups and individuals being treated in discriminatory, exploitative, or violent ways because of assumptions made about who they are and their place in society relative to the racial norm. Racialisation, then, infers a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, white and non-white, coloniser and colonised. It is useful to speak about positive and negative racialisation. This allows us to see white people as being racialised, rather than 'raceless'.

An example of racialisation in practice is the differential treatment of Australian citizens and residents of Indian origin who attempted to travel back to Australia during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2021. Similar bans were not imposed on those from the US and Europe despite equivalent risks to health. An association was made between country of origin and infection risk that had no basis in the epidemiological evidence and, instead, mobilised racialised assumptions about the threat posed to Australia by people of Indian origin as a group.

B WHITENESS

Whiteness

Whiteness originates and develops in contexts of racial domination. Rather than a skin colour, whiteness is a structure of power that connotes a relationship of domination between people designated white and those designated non-white. Whiteness is made invisible so that it appears as the standard or the norm against which everyone else is judged. People racialised as white rarely have to acknowledge the advantages that accrue to them as a result.

According to the African-American critical race scholar Cheryl Harris, in the context of slavery, 'white racial identity' meant being free, while enslaved Black people were born into unfreedom (Harris, 1993). The Australian historians Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake explain that people in North America, Australasia and Europe started to identify as white in a defensive reaction to people in the majority of the world whom they had colonised. This led to the emergence of 'white men's countries' such as Australia, which proclaimed itself a 'white working man's paradise' until the renouncement of the so-called White Australia Policy in 1973 (Lake & Reynolds, 2008).

As a category for inclusion and a culture, whiteness is elastic. Diverse groups of migrants in settler colonial contexts have been integrated into the structure and culture of whiteness over time. An example of the elastic nature of whiteness is the gradual inclusion of groups such as the Irish. Under British colonisation, the Irish were considered racially inferior. As the late US-American historian Noel Ignatiev wrote, the Irish 'become white' in settler colonial contexts, such as North America and Australia, where they were recruited into the project of colonial domination against Indigenous people and enslaved Africans (Ignatiev, 2015). Similar processes of cooptation into whiteness can be observed across diverse groups in Australia who benefit from its advantages within racially inequitable contexts, thus shoring up white settler colonial rule on Indigenous lands.

White supremacy

White supremacy is the belief that white culture is superior, that white people should dominate others, or that white people are genetically superior to others. Today, white supremacists argue that white people are at risk of being replaced by non-white people due to immigration and multiculturalism. They thus argue for the right to live in a white-only society. While, at their most extreme, these ideas have justified genocidal actions and regimes, whiteness itself already implies supremacy because its original and continued purpose is to demarcate white and non-white peoples in contexts of white racial domination.

Whiteness and Possession

As a global structure dividing the world, whiteness is bound up with wealth and ownership. W.E.B. Du Bois referred to the 'global colour line', dividing the world into white and 'other' (Du Bois, 2014). This line distinguished between those with the right of ownership and those who were dispossessed (Indigenous and colonised peoples) or those who were made into possessions themselves (enslaved Africans). In the colonial context, the anticolonial freedom fighter, psychiatrist and writer Frantz Fanon sums it up thus: 'You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich' (Fanon, 2001, p. 40). In Australia, Indigenous sovereignty is denied when white claims to the land are deemed more legitimate than those of Indigenous peoples. This is what Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka nation and Critical Indigenous scholar, Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson refers to as the possessive nature of whiteness (Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

Does anti-white racism exist?

In a 2024 example, Matildas football star Samantha (Sam) Kerr was accused of racially vilifying a white police officer in London. However, the notion of 'anti-white racism' ignores what the sociologist Miri Song calls the 'history, severity and power' of racism, which emerged as a set of practices and ideas to shore up white supremacy (Song, 2014). Calling Kerr's behaviour 'anti-white racism' creates an equivalence between rude behaviour and racism. Racism underpins systems such as colonialism and imperialism, slavery, and Apartheid and places whole groups of people at risk of harm on a systematic basis. Thus, it is not appropriate to think of racism as synonymous with individual bad behaviour, meanness, or bullying. Therefore, while Kerr's conduct may have been unseemly, it was not equivalent to racism.

C RACISM

Racism

The African American geographer and abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes that racism is 'the state-sanctioned and/or legal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death' (Gilmore, 2007). In other words, racism places people in harm's way based on how they are treated as a group by the state or other institutions over time. This way of seeing racism emphasises the actual experiences of the people who face racism. Racism impacts them because political, economic, and social conditions beyond their control compromise their quality or longevity of life (Brooks, 2006). Racism manifests in multiple ways (see below).

Specific forms of racism

All forms of racism should be seen as mutually reinforcing the overall structure of race and maintaining white supremacy. In the aim of antiracism, which depends on solidarity, it is important to stress how the various forms of racism interact with each other rather than seeing them as separate. Nevertheless, specific characteristics of individual forms of racism are noted in the following.

In Australia, all groups benefit from the dispossession of Indigenous land and peoples. Thus, while migrant groups experience distinct forms of racism, our understanding is aided by considering how this is shaped by the ongoing colonisation that thwarts Indigenous self-determination and from which all non-Indigenous benefit.

Systemic Racism

The US-American sociologist, Joe Feagin, describes systemic racism as a 'material, social, and ideological reality that is well-embedded' in societies such as North America, Europe, and Australia (Feagin, 2006). It operates within 'group relations, institutions, organisations, power structures' (Feagin & Elias, 2013). The term systemic racism is used to draw attention to the fact that racism is not just a question of individual attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours, but that these are shaped by their interactions within racist systems. Systemic racism gives rise to institutions that reproduce hierarchical and asymmetric power relations among differently racialised groups, placing negatively racialised people at a disadvantage as a matter of course.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism is closely linked to systemic racism. According to Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton in their book Black Power, institutional racism is a concept that draws attention to the systemic conditions that produce racist actions and attitudes (Ture & Hamilton, 1969). It counters the 'few bad apples' thesis, the idea that racism is merely the actions or beliefs of ignorant or extremist individuals. Instead, it is the institution itself that produces and condones these attitudes and behaviours.

The spectrum of institutional racism

Institutional racism takes many forms. Fundamentally, as the founder of the London-based Institute of Race Relations, Ambalavaner Sivanandan wrote, 'there are two racisms: the racism that discriminates and the racism that kills' (Younge, 2018).

The police and the criminal justice system are examples of institutionally racist structures. In Australia, Indigenous people, including children as young as ten years old, are arrested, charged, and incarcerated at a much higher rate than the average. The rate of Indigenous deaths in custody in Australia is a further example of institutional racism. The failure to apply the recommendations made by the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has contributed to the persistent high rate of avoidable deaths of Indigenous people during arrests, in police cells, and in prisons. An abolitionist perspective stresses that such systems cannot be reformed because they are based on a racialised vision of criminality that is core to colonialism, according to which Indigenous people are deviant and require surveillance, discipline and punishment. This perspective has become embedded in the laws, policies and practices of the police and criminal legal institutions.

Racial microaggressions also occur within institutional contexts. According to the Kamilaroi and Wonnarua Critical Race scholar, Debbie Bargallie, these are 'hostile, derogatory and insulting behaviours, processes and practices' which are 'often invisible to non-Indigenous people' (Bargallie, 2020). Everyday attitudes and beliefs routinely enacted through various forms of racial microaggression go hand-in-glove with institutional practices. Institutions do not operate in isolation from the people who develop racist policies and enact racist practices. Therefore, institutional racism and interpersonal racism must be examined and challenged concurrently in the workplace (Bargallie, 2020, p. 271).

In her research with Indigenous employees of the Australian Public Service, Debbie Bargallie found that they experienced various kinds of racial microaggressions. These include Indigenous as deficit, when Indigenous employees are assumed to be less intelligent, or unable to write to an 'expected standard'. Another example is the pigeonholing of Indigenous employees in Indigenous Affairs with no route to advancement in the organisation. A third example is the experience of being hyper-surveilled by supervisors who used performance management to punish employees, especially when they speak out about the racism they experience at work.

A common feature of racial microaggressions, like racism in general, is their denial. When people raise their experiences of racism they are often dismissed as being 'too sensitive' or unable to 'take a joke'. Race critical scholar, Alana Lentin describes 'not racism' as a way of not only minimising the experience of racism, but of redefining it to exclude the knowledge and experience of those affected by racism. This often leads to people's experiences of racism today being compared to historical examples such as the Holocaust, Jim Crow segregation, or Apartheid, and dismissed as 'not real racism'.

Everyday racism

Richard Delgado, one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, presents everyday racism as a way of talking about the ordinariness of racism (Delgado et al., 2012). The Surinamese-Dutch scholar, Philomena Essed wrote that everyday racism 'connects structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life' (Essed, 1991). It shows how racist ideology and structure are expressed in habitual interactions that may go unnoticed, even by those who experience them, because they seem so ordinary. Everyday racism includes 'seemingly petty experiences of disrespect, humiliations, rejections, blocked opportunities, and hostilities' (Essed, 2008). For example, Black or Indigenous people report being followed by security personnel when entering shops, or being assumed to be unable to pay for what they buy.

Anti-Indigenous racism

Pre-existing assumptions about Indigenous people as inferior and primitive accompanied British invaders in 1788. According to Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the designation of the lands now known as Australia as terra nullius - land belonging to no one - legitimised the dispossession, murder, rape, and incarceration of Indigenous peoples (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Indigenous people were seen as being either 'in the way' of settlement or as workers who could be exploited (Elias, 2021). As a result, Indigenous people were displaced from their lands and forced to live on missions or reserves, leading to the loss of language and culture. Many had their children removed, a practice that produced the 'stolen generations'.

Today, Indigenous people continue to face endemic levels of incarceration, deaths in custody, child removal, discriminatory healthcare, labour discrimination, and racist violence. For example, a 2024 inquiry held in South Australia found that due to racist assumptions about their ability to care for their children, an endemically high number of Indigenous babies are removed from their mothers at birth, often while still in the hospital (Richards, 2024).

Anti-Indigenous racism is central to settler colonialism. Ongoing colonisation, resulting in a lack of land rights and self-determination for Indigenous people, is the particular form taken by anti-Indigenous racism and that which distinguishes it from the racism that affects non-Indigenous people in Australia.

> While the next three definitions—Islamophobia, Orientalism and anti-Arab racism—are all distinct, they are related and prop each other up.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia was first named by two Muslim scholars writing in French about the life of the Prophet Mohammed in 1918 (Vakil, 2009), but the phenomenon existed much earlier. According to the Critical Muslim scholar Salman Sayyid, Islamophobia creates a 'violent hierarchy' between the idea of the West and all it represents and Islam (Sayyid, 2010). Muslims are disciplined, punished, and/or excluded as they are seen as incompatible with or threatening to Western modernity. This has led to the conflation of Muslim people with terrorism, leading to repressive policing and incarceration against them and the violation of their human rights.

Islamophobia leads to all Muslims being suspected of posing a threat to safety and/or social cohesion. We can observe Islamophobia at work in debates over multiculturalism, citizenship, migration, security, feminism, literature, and other cultural forms. This has led, for example, to campaigns in Australia targeting Halal food. Muslim organisations providing Halal certification were erroneously accused of channelling the money earned to terrorist groups, creating a moral panic.

Orientalism

The idea of Orientalism is attributed to the late Palestinian scholar, Edward Said (Said, 1978). Orientalism, referring to the 'East', sees orientalised people as inferior in opposition to those from the West who see themselves as intellectually and physically superior. Said understood this racist Orientalism as 'an interconnected system of institutions, policies, narratives and ideas' that emerged under European colonialism in the 'East' and continues to justify western foreign policy (Hibri, 2023). In the case of the US-led wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, Orientalist ideas about 'primitive' societies in need of saving from 'mediaeval' rulers are closely tied to Islamophobia which sees the Muslim religion as being a vector for these ideas. Women and LGBTQIA+ people, in particular, are seen as in need of rescuing from patriarchal domination which, in an Orientalist vision, is seen as especially barbaric. This is counterposed to a West which sees itself as enlightened and progressive on matters of gender and sexuality despite the fact, as feminist decolonial scholars such as Maria Lugones have shown, that the gender system was largely imposed on colonised societies by Europeans (Lugones, 2016).

Anti-Arab racism

Anti-Arab racism is said to go beyond both Islamophobia which focuses on racism against Muslims, and Orientalism which is not specific to the Arab world and the Arab diaspora. The Palestinian-American scholar Steven Salaita argues that anti-Arab racism predates 9/11 although this was an important catalyst for amplifying it (Salaita, 2006). Anti-Arab racism bears similarities to other forms of racism, but it is ubiquitous across the political spectrum and, according to Salaita, since 9/11 especially, is not taboo across the political spectrum. Anti-Arab racism homogenises all Arab people, refusing the regional differences among them. A major vector for anti-Arab racism is the media in which negative images of Arabs and Arab societies are circulated. A central component of anti-Arab racism is the supposed violence of all Arab people whose presence is said to pose a threat to societal safety.

Allied to anti-Arab racism is anti-Palestinian racism. Palestinian and Jewish scholars, Abu-Laban and Bakan argue that this is a significant sub-set of anti-Arab racism which nevertheless differs from it in two key ways (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2022). First, anti-Palestinian racism is defined by the denial of the racial elimination of the Palestinians in 1948 enacted by Israel, known as the Nakba (catastrophe). This denial can be seen to be a permanent feature of anti-Palestinian racism, an example being the denial of the genocide perpetrated against the Palestinians of Gaza. The second feature is 'racial gaslighting'. Abu-Laban and Bakan argue that despite the fact that Israel has been recognised as operating a system of Apartheid (Amnesty International, 2022) and is a settler colonial regime (Sayegh, 1965), the international community defers to its self-description as the 'only democracy in the Middle East.' This denies Palestinians' lived experience and leads to a lack of support from among Western states.

Anti-Blackness

According to Black Studies scholars, Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas, anti-Blackness refers to the material and symbolic positioning of Black people as 'the slave race' since the beginning of modern times (Jung & Vargas, 2021). However, earlier ideas about Black people as 'demonic' or inferior can also be found in pre-modernity, and as far back as Antiquity. During the transatlantic slave trade, it was argued that Black people were predisposed to be slaves. This built on the earlier idea that they were less than human. As a consequence, 'what it means to be Human is continually defined against Black people and Blackness' (Walcott, 2014). This underpins the levels of violence of all forms against Black people globally today. Because Blackness came to symbolise 'negation and lack,' it was also used to designate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Pasifika people as 'uncivilised' after British colonisation.

An example of contemporary antiblackness has been observed in the 'racial empathy gap'. Research carried out in the United States found that people in various scenarios erroneously assumed that Black people feel less pain than white people and members of other groups because of the violence that they experience. This leads routinely to Black people receiving less pain relief in medical settings (Trawalter et al., 2016).

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a European phenomenon. The term was coined in 1879 in a German anti-Jewish pamphlet. Yet, Jew-hatred goes back to Antiquity and develops with the spread of Christianity. In the context of late 15th Century Spain, Jews and Muslims were both seen as internal threats to the establishment of a purely Catholic kingdom. As scholars of antisemitism, David Feldman and Marc Volovici state, defining who a Jew or a Muslim is was vital for defining who a Christian was not (Feldman & Volovici, 2023). Antisemitism deploys

several competing myths, which all present Jews as dangerous outsiders seeking to destroy society from within. Over time, Jews have been presented as both cunning and all-powerful or as pests in need of extermination. This adaptable function of antisemitism is its main characteristic (Lentin, 2008). Nazi ideology linked social and political antisemitism to racial pseudo-science to justify the mass industrial extermination of European Jews.

D COLONIALISM

Colonialism

Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial control over another country, occupying it, exploiting it economically, and extracting its material and cultural resources. Colonial rule also had a destructive effect on Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and traditions through the imposition of the coloniser's social norms and education models. However, colonial rulers often proposed that they were bringing progress, education and order to colonised societies whose members they considered in need of 'civilising'.

Settler colonialism

Settler colonialism is distinguished from colonialism because it aims to create a settler society on Indigenous land and not only to extract from the land to enrich the colonising society. Settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the native population through various means. These entail massacres and genocide, including cultural genocide through the enforced loss of language and tradition. Assimilation is another practice of elimination that was achieved either through the theft of Indigenous children into white families, or by forcing Indigenous people in general to live according to the norms established by the colonising group. According to the late British-Australian historian Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism is a 'structure, not an event' because it is a continual practice that adapts and transforms over time (Wolfe, 2006).

Anticolonialism

Anticolonialism is both a historical event and a tool to analyse how colonial power works. As a historical event, anticolonialism means the struggle against colonial rule in colonised countries. As a tool of analysis, anticolonialism exposes the contradictions between European ideals such as progress, democracy and freedom and the actual genocidal, extractive and exploitative practices of the European colonial powers (Anticolonialism, U.Va.).

Decolonisation

Decolonisation refers to dismantling colonial rule in its different forms and returning lands and resources to their original owners. As the anticolonial freedom fighter, psychiatrist and writer Frantz Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, decolonisation means the 'whole structure being changed from the bottom up,' which he says is 'the minimum demands of the colonised.' Given the extent of colonisation over almost the entirety of the globe from the fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century, decolonisation 'sets out to change the order of the world' (Fanon, 2001, p. 27). Despite the formal end of colonisation in most parts of the world, this process is still ongoing due to the continuing dominance of Western civilisation, as expressed politically, culturally and economically.

Decolonising

Decolonising practices generally refer to the realms of knowledge and the self. Decolonising knowledge refers to undoing colonial interpretive frameworks, for example, within education. This can mean prioritising previously silenced histories such as Indigenous massacres or the knowledge and perspectives of Indigenous and other colonised peoples when they have previously been excluded from the official education curriculum. The impact of colonisation on individuals' sense of self means that decolonisation necessitates a longer process in which formerly colonised peoples work on rebuilding a self-understanding that is not shaped by colonial ways of seeing, knowing, and doing.

In settler colonial contexts, such as Australia, decolonising is a method for drawing attention to the endurance of the structures of colonialism within institutions such as the law, education, health, and social welfare, as well as in common understandings of gender and sexuality and for imagining a future outside these structures.

Activists have warned against the tendency to use the language of decolonising to describe reformist practices that ultimately keep the structures of colonial power in place, such as making adaptations to curricula, adapting institutional language, or adopting diversity, equity and inclusion policies. Such measures may paradoxically reinforce existing structures of colonial power.

E FRAMEWORKS OF RESISTANCE

Indigenous sovereignty

Indigenous sovereignty is derived from the continued existence of diverse Indigenous peoples on the lands currently known as Australia, who never consented to being 'subsumed within the Australian nation' (Mansell, 1998). Indigenous sovereignty differs from Western models of sovereignty which are based on the idea of 'a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity and individual rights' (Moreton-Robinson, 2008, p. 2). In contrast, Indigenous sovereignty is carried in the body, derived from Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and grounded in the interrelationships between 'ancestral beings, humans and land' (Moreton-Robinson, 2008, p. 2).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality was developed by Black feminists to theorise the mutual dependency of various forms of structural oppression: race, class, patriarchy, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, etc. The Black Socialist queer members of the Combahee River Collective emphasised that because Black women experience them all simultaneously, it is 'difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression.' Each of these reinforces the other (The Combahee River Collective, 1977). Arrernte feminist Celeste Liddle explains that while Indigenous women face both racism and sexism, her understanding differs from that of white feminists because their experience of sexism, patriarchy and misogyny is not the same. For example, the campaign to close the gender pay gap does not take account of the fact that, for many years, Indigenous women were not paid for their work at all. Additionally, the alarming rate at which Indigenous women disappear or are murdered hardly enters public consciousness in striking contrast to cases of homicide affecting other Australian women (Liddle, 2014).

Antiracism

Antiracism is a heterogeneous set of ideas and practices defined by differing interpretations of race and racism (Lentin, 2004). How antiracism is interpreted depends on whether the emphasis is placed on racism as a set of individual attitudes that can be modified with better education or whether racism is a systemic problem, grounded in white supremacy and colonialism, that requires a dismantling of these structures. Both attitudinal and systemic change are necessary to achieve an end to racism.

Abolition

Contemporary abolitionist practice originates in movements to dismantle police and prisons. It is based on the idea that the current system is shaped by colonialism, white supremacy, and racism. According to the African American abolitionist activist Mariame Kaba, the system cannot be reformed because it operates as it was intended to (Kaba et al., 2021). The Gunditjmara abolitionist Tabitha Lean adds that 'the prison-industrial complex isn't an isolated system, so abolition must be a broad strategy.' Abolition denotes a different way of viewing harm that does not assume it can be dealt with by punishing individuals by taking them out of their communities. Instead, abolition requires us to deal with the root causes of harm by collectively imagining alternative, non-oppressive, non-capitalist futures.

2 Explainers

What is a racialised social system?

A 'racialised social system' is defined by the realities of racial hierarchy and inequality (Meghji, 2022). The Afro-Puerto Rican sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva defined the racialised social system as 'societies that allocate differential economic, political, social and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines... After a society becomes racialised, a set of social relations and practices based on racial distinctions develops at all societal levels' (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474).

Looking at racism as a social system encourages us to take a holistic approach, which views race as a complex system that can only operate when different components work together. The material and the ideological go hand-in-hand. Racist discourses and ideas are necessary to justify the existence of the relative material deprivation of the majority of negatively racialised people. Talking about social systems as being racialised counters the dominant view of racism as a matter of prejudice. Consequently, it is not enough to try to change individuals' opinions; it is necessary to struggle to bring about systemic change. It is also insufficient to prove racism wrong from a scientific point of view because science is only one way of justifying white supremacy.

This approach frees us from the impression that racism only works in some spheres and shows how it influences the working of the whole society (Meghji, 2022). The benefit of this is that it shows that because racism is dependent on all systems within society working together for it to function, the persistence of racism can also have adverse effects on society as a whole. If more control has to be imposed on negatively racialised people for the system as a whole to persist, these measures will affect other marginalised groups in society. Indeed, an intersectional approach demonstrates that different oppressive structures reinforce each other, and thus, as the African-American community organiser Fannie Lou Hamer told the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington in 1971, 'Nobody's free until everybody's free.'

How to effect systemic change

Since the global Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, we have heard more talk of systemic racism. At the same time, there is a backlash against antiracism in the guise of the so-called 'war on critical race theory' and 'war on woke'. There is an alarming increase in authoritarianism seen in the success of far-right, anti-immigration governments around Europe and the intensified polarisation around issues in the US and Australasia. This came to the fore in Australia in October 2023 with the defeat of the Voice to Parliament referendum. Against this backdrop, how might it be possible to effect lasting action against racism that attacks the racialised social system and not just individual attitudes?

Because the status quo benefits those in power, any change must target the system as a whole rather than merely reforming existing structures or enacting measures such as greater diversity in representation. As Yannick Marshall has shown, the system is not 'broken'. It is functioning as intended (Marshall, 2022). While proponents of diversity and inclusion have advocated for the participation of more negatively racialised people in positions of leadership as one route out of racism, the fact that we cannot extricate race from power means that this rarely has the desired effect. This can be seen in myriad examples, not least the highly racially diverse nature of the last British government, which enacted racist policies affecting migrants and asylum seekers and incriminated antiracist protestors.

In contrast, antiracist movements, movements for Indigenous sovereignty and the self-determination of colonised peoples have led the way in thinking imaginatively about how to change the conditions that keep the racialised social system in place. For example, the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party made concrete suggestions that could have led to lasting systemic change had they been implemented. Although they were straightforward, the points in the program went against the mainstream position in modern Western capitalist societies. They included things such as full employment for Black people, decent housing and education, freedom from incarceration and police brutality. They ended by declaring, 'We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace.' These are all universal human rights.

Standing in the way of achieving these demands is the dominant ideology that individuals in society are responsible for their own life 'choices'. Such a view denies the fact of historical injustice and continuing racial stratification, but it facilitates ongoing white advantage in the racialised social system. Thus, system change must proceed on both the material and the ideological level. Governments could decide tomorrow to stop incarcerating Indigenous people, house everyone securely, end racist migration controls, outlaw police brutality, etc. This should be accompanied by funding programs that teach the history of race and colonisation and its present realities at all levels of education and within workplaces, sporting, and cultural institutions. Antiracism campaigns should resist focusing on individual attitudes and moralistic appeals to 'do the right thing' and emphasise the systemic nature of racism. This requires a serious, long-term financial commitment, including investment in research in critical race studies, which is currently almost entirely absent from Australian research funding.

The processes of racialisation

The term racialisation originates with the Martinican psychiatrist, anti-colonialist and pan-Africanist Frantz Fanon's book Black Skin, White Masks (Fanon & Markmann, 1967). In it, he opposes the experience of being racialised to that of being humanised. For Fanon, the lived experience of being black in the modern colonial era means being objectified. He explains the inability of Black colonised peoples to develop a self-understanding outside of the negative views ascribed to them by the coloniser. Hence, for Fanon, to be racialised means not to be considered fully human.

Racialisation is a helpful way to think about how ideas of racial difference come to shape structural conditions and how race works in action in specific contexts, be it different societies or within various institutional or everyday settings. Seeing race as a set of processes allows us to question the assumption that racism withers away given enough time. As the abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes, 'History is not a long march from premodern racism to postmodern pluralism.' Instead, she explains, racism is a 'changing same' that makes groups appear naturally different and incompatible. It secures the conditions for 'reproducing economic inequalities,' and, on this basis, validates the idea of a hierarchy of human differences (Gilmore, 2022, p. 70). In other words, racialisation makes socially engineered inequality appear as though it originates in naturally given differences that we call 'races.'

As an idea, race gives the illusion of certainty. Racialisation calls us to see how this illusion is constantly being produced because it benefits existing relations of power and difference on local and global levels (Gilmore, 2002). For example, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore draw attention to how the state actively manages racial categories. They call this process racialisation. They draw an analogy with the management of state infrastructure such as roads and telecommunications: 'racist ideological and material practices are infrastructure that needs to be updated, upgraded, and modernised periodically' (Gilmore & Gilmore, 2008). Racialisation should be understood as a major function of state governance; at different times, the concerns of certain negatively racialised groups are elevated and others are discarded, and vice versa. Understanding this helps us to understand the apparent inconsistency of the state's positions on race and racism across times and contexts.

Suppose we understand that the primary function of racialisation is to manage difference in the interests of maintaining levels of inequality and facilitating the exploitation of certain groups, for example migrant workers? In that case, the utility and endurance of race ceases to be a mystery. Instead of tackling racism as a problem of individual bad attitudes or lack of education, antiracists can make better use of our time by analysing and exposing how and why race becomes significant in situations of inequality and exploitation.

The deployment of race in the context of settler colonialism

A distinction is often made between 'franchise colonialism' and 'settler colonialism'. Under the former, colonial rulers did not settle permanently on the lands they colonised, while in the latter, they did. However, the two systems overlap as the same colonising power often runs both. Both extract from and exploit the land and its Indigenous people for profit, both use violence (including genocide), and both seek to eliminate or transform local knowledges and cultures (Englert, 2022). The Indigenous Lenape scholar Joanne Barker points out that it is important not to separate settler colonialism from imperialism and 'colonialism proper'. Doing so runs the risk of diluting Indigenous resistance, creating the appearance that colonisation in societies such as Australia is a 'done deal' (Barker, 2011).

Nevertheless, the defining feature of settler colonial regimes is that settlers make the societies they occupy their homes. Therefore, Indigenous people stand in the way of total conquest of the land, and the making of the 'new' society in the image of the colonisers requires eliminating Indigenous people, either through genocide or assimilation. Settler colonialism can be summarised in the late British-Australian historian Patrick Wolfe's well-known remark that 'settler colonisers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event' (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388).

Wolfe refers to race as the 'organising grammar' of settler colonialism. This does not mean that Indigenous people are colonised 'because of their race.' However, race is produced as a means of justifying the mechanisms of control that are used against them by settler colonial rulers (Wolfe, 2006).

In Australia in the 19th century, new racial identities were invented in the aim of reducing the remaining Indigenous population. As the Yawuru historian Shino Konishi notes, Blood quanta – '"half-caste", "quadroon," and "octaroon"' were ways of quantifying the dilution of Indigenous people over time through 'mixing' with the white settler population (Konishi, 2019). The theft of children that produced the 'stolen generations' (mid-1800s-1970s) was also part of this racist assimilation policy. This use of eugenicist social engineering added to other practices of domination, punishment, and exploitation against Indigenous people by settlers. Originating in the early 1800s, policing of the colonial frontier took the form of 'war-like police operations' against Aboriginal resistance. Later, as the Yuin scholar Amanda Porter and the Australian criminologist Chris Cunneen write, police were given 'far-reaching powers into the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples' (Porter & Cunneen, 2021).

Indigenous people and their ongoing right to land remains the 'primary, structuring, conflict of any settler colonial formation' (Englert, 2022, p. 11). Hence, today, racialising discourses, laws and practices are used to assert settler colonial possession of the land. What Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka nation and Critical Indigenous scholar, Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls 'patriarchal white sovereignty' is continually deployed, either overtly or more covertly, to make the case that Indigenous people cannot make 'good' (profitable) use of the land (Moreton-Robinson, 2009). This is the basis of ongoing Australian settler colonial racial capitalism. Australia is still a settler colony because the land has not been returned to Indigenous

peoples, despite concessions made to them, such as their recognition today as full citizens and some attempts at admitting to and redressing historical injustices.

Effective language for speaking about speaking about race, racism and antiracism

Race, racism and racialisation are dehumanising discourses and practices. As such, they are not neutral, academic topics, but impact strongly on those targeted by them. There is a strong tendency, analysed by racism and media scholar, Gavan Titley, to treat racism as a matter for debate. Titley describes this as the 'incessant, recursive attention as to what counts as racism and who gets to define it' (Titley, 2019). Racism is presented as a matter of opinion, not an objective reality. Calling a situation or a person 'racist' is seen as an insult rather than accurately descriptive. What Alana Lentin has called 'not racism' – the redefinition of what racism is that denies the knowledge and experience of those who face racism – is common (Lentin, 2020).

In media and the public sphere, there is little acknowledgement of how racialisation frames certain narratives. Furthermore, issues that concern those targeted by racism and centre their perspectives rarely make the news. For example, many cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women are rarely reported. One common suggestion to rectify this is to increase the representation of negatively racialised people to reflect the realities of a multicultural society more adequately. However, while this is important, critics have pointed out that representation alone does not rectify racial injustice because people's identity does not always have a bearing on their commitment to antiracism. Additionally, just making public-facing representation more diverse does little to transform current power arrangements in a white dominant settler colonial society. For example, while it is important to see a wider range of people from various racialised backgrounds on our screens, it makes little impact if a dominant white settler colonial mindset continues to shape how decision making is made behind the scenes.

Given a landscape in which people not only have to face racism, but also must justify the necessity of talking about it, how can this be done?

Treat racism as a serious topic. Race scholarship should be centred over treating racism as 'up for debate'. Facts and analysis grounded in research, especially that by Indigenous people, Black people, people of colour, migrants and refugees should be prioritised.

Lived experience is important, but there is no necessary alignment between people's experiences of racism and their understanding of how it originates, develops, and functions.

Privileging traumatic experiences of racism as a way of 'building empathy' centres the needs of white people, who do not face racism, over those whose stories are being consumed.

Avoid treating racism as a matter of personal attitudes or beliefs. While white advantage certainly exists, it cannot be dismantled by individuals acknowledging their white privilege.

Similarly, avoid treating racism uniquely as a moral problem, but rather as a political, economic, and environmental one that requires structural, not individual, solutions.

Emphasise the links between race and other structures of dominance such as class, gender, sexuality, migration status, and physical ability.

Emphasise that a lack of racial justice affects everyone in a society negatively. The state's treatment of the most oppressed and marginalised in society is indicative of its potential treatment of everyone apart from the most privileged. An appreciation of the co-dependency of race on other structures of dominance encourages more people to commit to overturning racism. While this has always been vital, it is particularly urgent in the current climate emergency.

Support collective responses to racism, grounded in communities, rather than privileging celebrities 'speaking out'.

Centre analyses of racism which demonstrate that racial-colonial arrangements are not inevitable but historically produced. Those targeted by them have always resisted. Just because the continent known as Australia was invaded and settled by white colonisers, does not mean an end to Indigenous existence. Where there is racism, there is the struggle to end it.

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