

New Framings on Anti-Racism and Resistance

Volume 2 – Resistance and the New Futurity

Joanna Newton and Arezou Soltani (Eds.)

Foreword by George J. Sefa Dei



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Edited by

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FOREWORD

There are many questions that can be asked when interrogating anti-racism education. How do we respond to the continuing historical significance of race in education as broadly defined? This book sets out to theorize the connections between race, anti-racism, and Indigeneity, drawing on the broader implications for decolonization and education. Extending on some of the early theorizations on decolonization (see Fanon, 1963, 1967; wa Thiong'o & Mignolo, 2007), I will contend that part of the new framings of anti-racist practices of today must be geared towards developing a framework for decolonization (see Dei & Simmons, 2010). Decolonization is not possible without critical education that embraces Indigenous worldviews and counter philosophies of education. Decolonization must be tied to anti-racist education. The possibilities of decolonization connect to the question of identity and how we centre culture, body politics, history, and memory in counter knowledges. One reason why identity is important is that it is linked to politics of resistance and decolonization.

The pursuit of anti-racism education for anti-colonial and decolonial ends will look differently today than ever before. Despite past and ongoing anti-oppression struggles things have not changed much. The historical atrocities against Indigenous, racialized, colonized peoples are still ongoing. Mis-education, genocide, and the dispossession of Indigenous lands have left a painful legacy. As part of the colonial nation building project, there is a desire to erase Blackness and Indigeneity. To disrupt the everyday functionings of a society built on White supremacist assumptions and foundations, we need to look towards other knowledge(s) to dismantle this one-dimensional mindset. We must indeed be careful not to centre Whiteness in ways that may dislodge the saliency of other lives.

New framings of anti-racism cannot dismiss the 'permanence' of skin colour as a marker for social differences. A closer proximity to Whiteness and White identity is rewarded in society. To understand this feature of human society we must use a discursive prism that shifts from binaries. In Dei (2017a) I argue for a clear distinction between a 'Black-White binary' and a 'Black-White paradigm.' The 'Black-White binary' assigns fixed notions of skin colour racial identity, creating an oppositional division of two sides (Black and White). Our society is complex and therefore we need to move away from such binaries and simplistic readings. A 'Black-White paradigm' is simply a prism or lens of reading social relations and relations of power. It speaks to the relative importance of skin colour as constructed, and yet acknowledges the saliency of Blackness and body politics. This saliency of Blackness is at the root of anti-Black racism, and particularly the placing of Black and African bodies at the bottom of a racial hierarchy. The paradigm is significant for anti-racism and anti-oppression work, because it acknowledges the saliency of

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race, skin colour, and anti-Black racism. As many have noted skin colour and anti-Blackness operate to fix peoples of African-descent in a state of permanent visibility, hypervigilance, and selective invisibility (Deliofsky & Kitossa, 2013). A social construction of Blackness (as transgressive and deviant), along with the imagined ideal Black/African phenotype, is deeply grounded in Western culture and upholds the 'Black-White paradigm,' as well as the "perceived Black physical formidability" (see Wilson, Hugenberg, & Rule, 2017; Deliofsky & Kitossa, 2013). Anti-Black racism has been a particularly negative reading, (re)action, and concrete response to Blackness and racism directed at the Black/African body. Such readings, responses, and practices are framed by racist thoughts (e.g., alleged sub-humanity of the Black/African subject and our supposed roots in a dark, uncivilized, deviant and criminal world, see also Dei, 1996; Benjamin, 2003). It is important to emphasize that the 'Black-White paradigm' is not a negation of the colonial impact of Indigenous peoples. It does not speak to a hierarchy of oppressions and neither does it efface the intersections of identities. It simply offers us a lens for reading race relations and the understandings of how a particular thinking process serves to structure and justify significant social relations, practices and histories in our communities (see also Smith, 2015; Johnson, 2003; Sexton, 2010, 2015).

Every day we have witnessed the ongoing struggles of racialized, colonized, and Indigenous communities in our institutions and workplaces. These struggles take form in anti-racism as radical decolonial resurgences. These struggles cannot be individualized nor made to stand apart from a collective challenge. The endeavours cannot also be about individual prejudices, biases, and discriminatory actions. They must be about institutional and systemic changes that draw from collective community resources and knowledges. These struggles must unmask power, privilege and dominance; they are enactments of Whiteness. It is for this reason that anti-racism teaching must embrace a radical pedagogy of decolonial praxis. Such a pedagogy must decenter Whiteness, especially when we consider the way racism is continually naturalized and normalized.

This book will be a part of the anti-racism journey by taking up some key questions: How do we build on the tenets of a critical anti-racist theory (CART) to inform anti-racist practice? How do we bring critical scholarship of race and anti-racism to understand ongoing manifestations of anti-Indigeneity, racisms, and Euro-modernity? How do we as educators link our teachings to broader questions of identity, representation, and imperial global power? How do critical studies on race and anti-racism help us to rethink and reframe new questions of educational futurity? How can we explain the 'post' in the 'post-racial' when racism is in vogue in the corridors of power everywhere around us?

New framings of anti-racism should inform readers the ways colonial and neo-colonial systems have sanctioned and continue to sanction Indigenous genocide, racialized violence, social deaths, and dispossession of Black/African and Indigenous peoples' lands and resource through systemic innocence, denials, and practices of erasures. We need anti-racism to interrogate nation state colonial citizenship,

to trouble the discursive myths and mythologies of ‘White settler innocence’ and imperial benevolence, and the ways the sovereignty of Indigenous communities and Black/African populations’ humanity are continually stripped away. We need anti-racist epistemes to inform critical educational practice to question colonial settler subjectivity and the imbrication of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity.

One way to do this is to acknowledge how education centres Eurocentricity on all learners. The ‘universal learner’ is often assumed not to have any race, ethnicity, gender, class, or sexuality. Many of us seem to have a problem with counter and oppositional discourses that challenge or subvert Blackness as a “badge of inferiority” and would want to diminish the fact that African “enslavement was truly a living death” (Asante, 1991, p. 176). When Afrocentric discourses affirm Blackness and Africanness it is countered as another version of Eurocentrism. So why is there a ‘problem’ when counter educational paradigms and approaches (e.g., Afrocentricity and Indigeneity) call specifically for centering the African/Black and Indigenous child? Can we perhaps trace this paradox or conundrum to the fact that the universal learner ends up being the archetype of the Euro-colonial body.

We are at a historical juncture where it is hard to meet many folks who will openly admit to extolling the virtues of racism. People are fully aware that to do so would invite legitimate and understandable charges of being racist. This contributes to what I have called the ‘discomfort of speaking race.’ So we may have folks who may be rightly deemed “closest” racists. We should call them out. Similarly, there is the hypocrisy of those who decry racism and yet hold in their inner thoughts very racist beliefs, occasionally embodying these thoughts for their advantage. If we are vigilant in the pursuit of anti-racism many of these hidden truths will soon be laid bare. We have no choice because racism is a form of colonial and imperial violence that denies dignity to all peoples. “New Framings on Anti-Racism: Resistance and the New Futurity” is a call to action. The authors of this collection seek to expose the different manifestations of racism in contemporary times.

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We would also like to thank Professor George J. Sefa Dei for entrusting this project in our care. Thank you for creating and fostering a space where we had the opportunity to learn from others, to engage in meaningful exchange, and to teach, listen, and explore in an environment of mutuality and solidarity.

As editors, we learned a great deal from this experience and were able to support each other in a way that highlighted the power of solidarity. We have a deep respect for each other's lived experiences and approaches to anti-racism education. We are grateful for each other's patience, kindness, and optimism.

From Arezou – I would like to thank Tyler for challenging me to see the complexity through which racism manifests, and for never letting me fall back on the black/white binary. To Kobra and Ali, thank you for setting me on this path.

From Joanna – A special thank you to my partner Simon who supports me in all that I do. To all of the 'other mothers' in my life: thank you for your wisdom and unwavering support. And to my parents: thank you to my father who is a constant source of encouragement, and finally to my mother for giving me pride in my racial identity and for always teaching me to fight for what is right and just.

INTRODUCTION

On-going processes of globalization and transnational migration, coupled with capitalist modernity, have exacerbated the continued significance of race. It is important for scholarship and research to come together to assist particularly disenfranchised groups as we articulate our social existence and collective destinies. Some of the questions that this volume seeks to address are: How do we build on the tenets of critical anti-racist theory? How do we use critical scholarship on race and anti-racism to counter conventional discourses of black/white binaries? And lastly, how do we account for the persistence of white supremacy in a context of racial hegemony?

This book is intended to generate important enquiries into the teaching and practice of anti-racism education, by way of working through conversations, contestations, and emotions as presented in a year-long course in, “Principles of Anti-Racism Education.” Throughout the collection, contemporary educational issues are situated in personal/political conversations as voiced through pedagogues, practitioners, and scholars in order to present new insights on anti-racism praxis. Our aim is to demonstrate the resistance and futurity possible when students, educators, staff, administrators, policymakers, and community members engage in critical anti-racism education.

This book will build on existing scholarship by asking new questions that have implications for decolonial, futuristic praxis. We hope to move the discussion beyond schooling and education (broadly defined) and also ground our analysis in other institutional settings. This volume will foreground current debates on issues of immigration, racialization, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and the violence of settler colonialism by pointing to new framings of anti-racism. It looks at the question of anti-racism and the politics of futurity as a re-imagining of community and social change. It is comprised of ten essays from scholars, activists, and educators dedicated to frameworks of anti-oppression.

Sandra Hudson, in “Indigenous and Black Solidarity in Practice: #BLMTOTentCity,” discusses how the colonial nation-building project of Canada is built on falsehoods that further erase the historic and ongoing atrocities against Black and Indigenous peoples. Hudson draws from Black Lives Matter’s 2016 occupation of Toronto Police Service Headquarters as an example demonstrating the actualization of Black and Indigenous solidarity in resurgent political movement building.

In “Racism in the Canadian Imagination,” Arezou Soltani explores how Canada’s erasure of racial oppression in its past and present imaginings is in tune with liberal traditions of nation-building. By embodying a politics of shame and utilizing the myth of the American Dream, Canada is able to present itself as a multiracial and multicultural plurality whilst keeping racism in the periphery.

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Celine Gibbons-Taylor in “So Mi Like It: An Analysis of Black Women’s Sexual Subjectivities,” provides a thought provoking engagement with Afro-Caribbean artists in subverting and challenging colonial, white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal norms that have been assigned to the bodies of Black women. Gibbons-Taylor demonstrates the resilience of Black women’s subjectivity in interrogating the fixed imagery of hypersexualization and deviancy associated with the construction of Black womanhood. Here, we learn the different ways in which Black women revalue and redefine their sexuality and gender, presenting a transformative politic that engages with anti-colonial, anti-racist, and Afro-futurist Black feminist teachings.

In “Anti-Black Racism, Resistance, and the Health and Well-Being of Black Bodies in Public Education,” Joanna Newton draws on her lived experiences in education, and the lived experiences of her family and colleagues to explore how Black bodies in public education experience racism. Newton employs Critical Anti-Racism Theory (CART) to examine these experiences of anti-Black racism and the impacts they have on the health and well-being of Black bodies. Newton suggests that CART is an important theoretical tool for understanding the experiences of Black bodies in public education in order to transform educational spaces to ensure the health and well-being of Black bodies.

In “Interculturalism in Peru and Québec: A Functional Project?” María Roxana Escobar Ñañez provides a cross-cultural examination of interculturalism in both Peru and Québec as a way of interrogating dominant hegemonic discourses of multiculturalism. By situating the conversation in both Peru and Québec, Escobar Ñañez highlights the various ways in which governmental policies have used interculturalism to control culturally diverse populations. She presents critical interculturalism as a decolonizing and anti-racist project, whereas the state works to create a multi-centered society in which there is a plurality of knowledges, bodies, and identities respected within the state.

Lauren Katie Howard in her paper titled, “The Subversion of Whiteness and its Educational Implications for Critical Anti-Racist Frameworks,” aims to move conversations of whiteness and white supremacy away from questions of privilege to a critical interrogation of the ongoing violence of Indigenous peoples through land theft and dispossession. Changing this dynamic requires direct intervention in disrupting the normal functioning of society built on white supremacist foundations. Howard provides an insightful analysis on breaking down black/white binaries by reimagining whiteness studies as a decolonizing practice that focuses its attention on settler colonialism.

In “Moving to and/with: Understanding the Construction of Race and Privilege” Marco Bertagnolio exposes the mechanisms through which white power and privilege operate in maintaining its hegemonic stronghold. Whiteness as a cultural value is so pervasive in society that it is both the obvious and hidden norm against which most things are measured. By embodying a decolonial mindset of “and/with,” Bertagnolio shifts our focus away from dichotomous forms of thinking in order for white bodies to create alliances with racialized peoples and engage in anti-racism work.

Sabrina Jeanine Azraq in her piece, “Palestine: BDS as Refusal and Resistance in the Settler Colonial Academy,” discusses the pivotal role the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement plays in dismantling the ongoing Zionist settler-colonial project in the land of Palestine. This piece provides a pragmatic approach to the role that intellectuals, students, and academics can play in interrogating racism within the academy.

Through her own lived experiences, Christine McFarlane in “Anti-Racism and Decolonization in Education from an Indigenous Perspective,” discusses the impact of colonization and racism on Indigenous peoples through processes of assimilation. McFarlane powerfully conveys the importance of anti-racism theory to decolonize Eurocentric models of education in order to centre Indigenous knowledges.

Lastly, Percy Konadu Yiadom in “Interrogating Child Labour from an Anti-Racism Prism,” uses anti-racism theory as an entry point to address Western and non-Western perceptions of child labour in Africa. His aim is to highlight the contradictions and dilemmas that arise when addressing the issues of child labour in developing countries.

Combined, these collections of essays take up questions around new conceptual framings on race, white supremacy, and Indigeneity for the politics of educational and social futurity. We would also like to note that the thoughts of the contributors do not reflect those of the editors. We were entrusted to maintain the integrity of each chapter and to honour the voice of each contributor. At the heart of this volume is our abiding commitment to anti-racism praxis. It is our hope that this collection provides new theoretical directions and practical applications to anti-racism work.