

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Politics of Anti-Racism Education: In Search of Strategies for Transformative Learning

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Politics of Anti-Racism Education is a book that engages the tough questions of anti-racism practice: How do we recognize anti-racism when there is no prescription or recipe for transformative practices? How does anti-racism resist the imperial divisive practices at various sites of difference while simultaneously amplifying the saliency of race? How do anti-racism educators challenge and support each other to do the ongoing work of anti-racism to guard our work from being consumed by hegemonic status quo agendas? What does it mean to name that which is incommensurable – experiences of race and racism? These are among some of the questions the contributors in this book engaged both in dialogue in the classroom, as well as in the chapters presented here. In sharing our stories as framed through the counter-narrative of anti-racism, our purpose is threefold: to hold anti-racism policies, practices, and theorists accountable to the necessity for transformation in anti-racism work; to contribute to a community for those who want to do the tough work of anti-racism education; and to challenge the urge among those who want to move beyond questions of race to reconsider dismissing racism as a thing of the past. We argue that there is a need to retool anti-racism and challenge the epistemological gatekeepers who want us to confine anti-racism discourse to the trash bins of history. This book pursues a crucial search for strategies for engaging a critical anti-racism education for transformative learning. Contributors in this collection generate important enquiries into the praxis of anti-racism education, working through conversations, contestations, and emotions as present(ed) and live(d) in a year long graduate course, *The Principles of Anti-Racism Education*. The chapters present

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multiple journeys – journeys of decolonization – of those who are coming into a critical anti-racism praxis; they speak to the politics of anti-racism education as a dialectic of struggles and desires for transgressive learning spaces that are open to difference. Writing from various subject locations, authors come to engage anti-racism education in the discursive fields of Policy and Curriculum; Media Representations; Ally-ship, Coalition Building, and Representation; and Autoethnography. Throughout the collection, contemporary educational issues are situated within personal, political, historical, and philosophical conversations in relation to the challenges and possibilities for students, educators, staff, administrators, policy makers, and community members to engage in critical anti-racism work.

This collection itself is important because the work diverges from the existing scholarship by way of broaching some of the theoretical limitations and possibilities as voiced through pedagogues. It speaks to the importance of anti-racism education in a time when even those who desire to engage this framework struggle to be heard; in a time when there are anti-racism policies in institutions, yet to speak anti-racism philosophy remains dangerous at worst and made unspeakable at best (see Ahmed 2006); in a time when Canada claims its identity to be one of the most multicultural societies and yet we are bombarded by the media (mis)representations of the Global South; and in a time when to speak race and anti-racism is considered to be stirring up trouble in the face of post-racial discourses.

The goal of a critical anti-racism is to change/transform our communities and our mutual coexistence as communities with Nature and beyond. Resisting and challenging racist hegemonic practices is key. While we can understand ourselves in a holistic prism/paradigm that stresses our mutual interdependencies with everything (e.g., social communities, cultures, and Nature), the ethics of social justice/equity work resides in humans, not in institutions nor Nature. In other words, a critical anti-racism practice amplifies the social construction of race, disrupting the hegemonized discourses of the inevitability of racism through biologizing narratives of race (see, for example, Omi and Winant 1993; Hall 1996).

Primarily, anti-racism is about human action and institutionalized social practices. We know these have consequences far beyond humans (e.g., environments/Nature). The focus on intergroup relations ought to be about understanding conflict and power relations as manifested in everyday materialities of existence, human/social interactions, and the institutionalized ways of distributing and allocating the valued social goods and services of societies (see, also, McDermott and Madan 2012). The politics of anti-racism are grounded in the fact that our social world *can* and ought to be more equitable; anti-racism for transformation keeps its focus on an imagined utopia, but it amplifies the process of mundane (everyday, social, institutionalized) actions towards utopia rather than measuring its success by having reached this imagined space of utopia once and for all. The search is for a “better world,” a community of interdependence where mutual coexistence with each other/ourselves, with Nature/Mother Earth, etc., is attainable and must be strived for. This will be creating a “messy utopia” where colonizing relations of any kind are disrupted. We use the term “messy utopia” to signal towards Michael Adams’ “unlikely utopia”; for Adams (2007) utopia is a process and is messy and challenging. Our point is to focus on a search for utopia, for any real utopia is messy and uncomfortable,

especially for anyone very much accustomed to the unearned privileges of the status quo. By messy utopia, we imply neither easy nor uncomplicated processes, alliances, and efforts. Instead, we refer to the often awkward, challenging, and rewarding collaborations that are needed to effect change in a society which holds, among its core values, social justice and diversity (Dei 2012a).

Given that our world is about interdependence, networks, and strategic arrangement, anti-racism education for transformation learns from Indigenous Philosophies, which teach about the urgency and imperative to create communities where we rethink our relations as humans with both animate and inanimate others occupying a shared space. This space is what Dei (2012b) has called a “trialectic space” – a space involving a dialogue among multiple parties, a sort of “dialogic encounter.” It is constituted as a space for learners to openly work with the body, mind, and spirit/soul interface in critical dialogues about their education. It is also a space that nurtures conversations that acknowledge the importance and implications of working with a knowledge base at the nexus of society, culture, and Nature. Such spaces can only be created when we open our minds broadly to reimagine schooling and to see schooling as a place/site and an opportunity to challenge dominant paradigms and academic reasoning.

Colonial education, which has permeated our individual and collective consciences, as informed by Euro-Enlightenment paradigms, has classified and ordered our world by way of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability. Anti-racism education, to reimagine social relations, must attend to the intersections of difference. Long ago, Dei (1996) articulated as among the fundamental principles of anti-racism the idea that race maintains its full effects in association with other forms of difference. In understanding the politics of anti-racism, we must engage our interstices through an intersectional analysis and simultaneously hold on to the notion of the relative saliency of particular identities. Tellingly, Kumashiro (2002) writes, “Anti-oppressive approaches to teaching and researching operate in ways that challenge some forms of oppression while complying with others” (p. 68), so part of the challenge for anti-racism education is to remain reflexive on the sites through which we may be complicit in oppressive relations. Andrea Smith (2006) reminds us, too, however, that there are substantive differences in terms of how these various identities are lived and experienced.

In having this conversation, we recognize the discursive authority poststructural orientations have been given in the academy, orientations that urge us to reconceptualize identity and subjectivity away from the unified humanist framework towards a more fluid and contradictory understanding; however, some versions tend towards erasure of the materiality of these identifications. Politics of anti-racism compel us to guard against the dehistoricization of lived experiences and relations of power and privilege. We believe there is something that must not be lost in reclaiming past powerful notions regarding understandings of our identities for the present, particularly for the marginalized. Nancy Hartsock (1990) writes, “somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at the precise moment when so many groups have been engaged in ‘nationalisms’ which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the nature of the ‘subject’ [...] Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to

name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that's just when the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic" (quoted in Weedon 1997, pp. 175–176). Weedon (1997) continues by reminding us that while Hartsock's analysis may speak to some poststructuralist work that discounts questions of agency, post-structural feminism has blended the two desires to at once work with identity politics and amplify the limitations of essentialized, humanist, constructions of identity: "They [poststructural feminists] propose a theory of identity which sees it as discursively produced, necessary but always contingent and strategic" (p. 176). Thus, we revive anti-racism discourse, building on early anti-racism thinking and practice. We are bringing a particular reading of the "race," "racial," and "racialized" that is relevant to the present in which both subjects, communities, nations, states, and the global, construct and resist identities as well as colonial encounters.

The challenge becomes to understand the possibilities and limitations of working with the Western Enlightenment unified subject categories as well as work through what it means to engage those categories concomitantly in our analyses. In other words, discourses about the intersectionality of social difference (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. as linked, intersected, and integrated) must never lose sight of such differences as sites of marginality and resistance. All intersectional analyses must have an entry point and openly acknowledge that there are often obstructions to what we bring into our focus when we claim to look at all differences at the same time. The fact is that the politics of anti-racism requires that race remains the axis around which other intersections are understood. Here, it is important to understand the notion of saliency as primary/preeminent and guard against it supporting and being supported by a hierarchy of knowing and difference. Saliency also involves a political choice; it speaks of intellectual and academic pragmatism, the efficacy of having a particular entry point in anti-oppression work as well as a recognition of the troubling history of the continual denial of race. The notion of saliency works with the idea that racial groups exist, they exist in hierarchies of power, and that contemporary society is racialized. The politics of anti-racism proposes that this hierarchy of differences works through racialized logics, and for this reason, in anti-racism, we amplify the saliency of race.

In teaching and dialoguing with students and colleagues, we have on a number of occasions had to grapple with questions such as the following: What is "anti-racism"? How is this different from a "multicultural" approach? And how are we to articulate a critical anti-racism orientation as a way of thinking and making sense of contemporary racism, colonial and colonizing relations, and procedures of racialization and colonization in the face of mainstream privileging and intellectual affection for the "post-racial/non-racial"? The "anti" is an unabashed political stance; it locates our work as a challenge to the status quo and it compels us to reimagine a better now (McDermott and Madan 2012). However, we recognize the gumption needed to sustain this political stance, and as has been argued elsewhere (Dei 2008), there is a concern about the "stigma" those who are bent on protecting the status quo have attached to anti-racism work and scholarship and with that stigma come implications for our present and future work as anti-racism educators.

In this collection, we offer a nuanced reading of what constitutes an intellectual subversive politics in the ongoing project of decolonization for both colonized and

dominant bodies as we resist racist encounters and experiences. The everydayness of racism makes this project far more imperative and urgent. There are emerging sophisticated readings of race and racism that smack of intellectual denials and hypocrisy, as attempts to skirt around critical discussions of race and racism. We ask our readers to consider the possibilities of a counter theoretical narrative or conception of the present in ways that make theoretical sense of the everyday world of the racialized, colonized, and oppressed. We bring a politicized reading to the present as a moment of practice to claim and reclaim our understandings of race, gender, class, disability, and sexuality in the present with implications for how we theorize subjectivities and identities.

If identities are linked with knowledge production, then we must speak about anti-racism from our different locations, experiences, histories, and identities. It is important that today's academy be a decolonizing space where we begin to interrogate, think, and rethink the ways in which dominant knowledge, discourse, and practices have shaped our understandings of social power relations; of our relationships with one another; of who we, individually and collectively, are; and who we believe ourselves to be, of our understandings of sociopolitical difference in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability/ability, and body image. In conceptualizing this space as a space of decolonization through the evocation of embodied knowledges that we all bring, we can begin to discuss and think about resistance and the ways in which we can and do collectively and individually assert our own sense of who we are and where we come from in the face of ongoing dominating institutionalized relations of power. The development of a critical embodied consciousness is a primary objective. Asserting this/our classroom/academy space then as a decolonizing space means (crucially) that we are all responsible for knowledge production and dissemination and the politics of embodiment that is required (McDermott and Simmons 2013). In the following chapters, the authors attend to many of these issues, and it is our hope that their diverse articulations of anti-racism education can provide a space for others to come into, reflect upon, and further engage their anti-racism practices.

Situating the Chapters

Part I – Intersectional Analyses: Rethinking Anti-Racism Education, Masculinity, and the Politics of Sexuality

The chapters in this section grapple with the incommensurability of experience and the impossibility of unpacking that experience focusing on one site of difference. In that, they each try to address questions of what it means to work with the saliency of race and simultaneously consider the ways in which various identity categories come to interact in shaping one's experiences through contradictions and inconsistencies. In their own ways, each chapter in this section asks anti-racism

educators to consider the ways in which we can guard against our complicity in some forms of oppression while we are working towards addressing and dismantling others (Kumashiro 2002). George Dei's chapter, *A Prism of Educational Research and Policy: Anti-Racism and Multiplex Oppressions*, asks how we can rehumanize research and policy in order to shake the status quo foundation that upholds hierarchies of difference. Sharing part of the history of the African-centered school that opened in 2009 in Toronto, Dei calls for research and policy to be brought back to the ground, and he suggests that the African-centered school can be considered a model for anti-racism educators, theorists, and policy makers to turn to in their anti-racism pursuits. He urges the necessity for teaching, research, and policy to be dialogic as they come to engage theories, lived experiences, community members, and histories reflexively, and he models this reflexivity as he asks the tough questions around the possibilities and limitations of a focused school (in this instance race-focused) in addressing oppression at various sites of difference.

In *Homonormativity Inside Out: Reading Race and Sexuality Into an LGBT Film Festival Opening Gala*, David Pereira takes us through the screening of the opening film at an LBGTQ festival as he witnesses and contests the whitened homonormativity he found in the elite audience's attitudes towards the film choice. He queries the audience's responses to a film that disrupted their expectations of a stable white gay identity and asks how race and sexuality are regularly implicated in (re)producing a whitened homonormativity that excludes racialized bodies from gay or queer sexuality. While racialized bodies are excluded from the production of a normalized gay identity, Pereira argues that along with the dominant white subject, non-white gays are implicated in (re)producing homonormativity's racial itinerary and consolidate whiteness in ways that uphold racial boundaries. Through personal reflection, the chapter narrativizes the post-screening conversations to suggest the racial discourses engaged by dominant and non-dominant gay subjects reify a singular, white *shade of gay*.

Writing from her position as a social worker in a school site for students who have been removed from the public school system for a variety of reasons, Camisha Sibblis reflects on the challenges her own identity – Black female researcher and social worker – poses in relation to questions of how power functions in the structure of expulsion programs. She notes that the gendered racial makeup of the participants in the expulsion program is suggestive of the results and sites of oppressive practices in the educational system in Canada. She engages a social constructionist orientation to explore the ways in which Black male students are constituted and thereby limited through historical discourses on Blackness and masculinity in schooling and education. Thinking through her experiences, Sibblis unmask the differential management of Black male students with other students in the expulsion program, making a case for the exigency of anti-racism education in Canada.

Part II – Policy and Curriculum: Questions of Whiteness, Aboriginal Education, and Indigeneity

The focus of this section queries the limitations and possibilities of the institutional discourses, by way of policy and curriculum, inclusivity, multiculturalism, and equity. As anti-racism educators, we are often dismissed in contemporary times due to the introduction of official policies – from inclusion and equity policies in general to specifically anti-racism policies. On paper, in other words, the institutions are addressing the needs of the multicultural society we live in. Chrissy Deckers, in *Moving Towards an Anti-Racism Curriculum*, suggests that we need a sustained politics of anti-racism to uphold the race equity policies to meet the needs of all students. Situating her discussion in the postsecondary education system, Deckers queries the ways in which racialized bodies are “othered” *within* discourses of multiculturalism and existing race equity policies. She articulates the difficulty of speaking to race and practices of “othering” within the context of contemporary education and urges us to resist the temptation to move beyond anti-racism, and instead to move towards an anti-racism curriculum.

Similarly, Susanne Waldorf’s chapter engages the postsecondary curriculum through a critical discourse analysis of two teacher education courses that include a specific focus on “Aboriginal Education.” Waldorf historicizes critical Indigenous scholars’ and their allies’ critiques of the conventional “cultural inclusivity” approach to Aboriginal Education since the 1970s. By way of interrogating power structures embedded in racism and colonialism, Waldorf analyzes the increasingly implemented Aboriginal Education focus in teacher education programs. She analyzes the curriculum for the ways in which it interacts with the dominant discourse of cultural inclusion and the alternative discourses it offers. The chapter ends with some suggestions for anti-racism and anti-colonial pedagogies within Aboriginal Education.

The last chapter in this section by Ximena Trabucco Martínez examines the discordance between the Chilean school curriculum and Indigenous Rights policies. Martínez examines the legal framework of Chilean education with a specific focus on the policies of inclusivity in relation to Indigenous education, and she suggests that the incorporation of Indigenous education cannot be effectively provided under the formal colonial classroom structures which work to undermine the possibilities for Indigenous education. Through her analysis, it is possible to see the ongoing processes of colonization and the cultural effects on the Indigenous population in Chile who are continually affected by assimilationist policies that underpin the contemporary relationships in conventional schooling and education. Overall, Martínez suggests that the current organization of schooling has limited capacity to accommodate Indigenous education and that, instead, she argues, Indigenous education would best be served in the structures organized by Indigenous perspectives.

Part III – Representations: The Media, Discursive Authority, and Counter-Narratives

Each of the authors in this section present counter-narratives to the ways in which particular groups are represented in contemporary discourses. These chapters seek to disrupt the singular, essentialized storying of Others and challenge the reader to consider who is telling those stories, with what authority, and, simultaneously, who benefits from the particular tellings? Re-narrating the media conversations about the Tamil refugees who arrived in Canada on board the MV Sun Sea, Gillian Philipupillai considers the role of educators and education in the detention of the children in the political landscape of counterterrorism. Through an analysis of the ongoing marking of Tamil youth as *always already* “terrorists,” the chapter draws attention to education as a key site of racial management and examines how racialization of Tamils, especially Tamil refugees, youth, and children, functions in education, public images, and discourses linking “Tamilness” to “terror” and evicting Tamils from the right to belong to the public sphere. Philipupillai argues that the case of the MV Sun Sea demonstrates the targeting, detention, and monitoring of Tamil youth and children in the white settler state of Canada is integral to the project of white settler colonialism and its reliance on education for racial management. Through her discussion, Philipupillai argues for the possibilities of an anti-racism response that is grounded in anti-colonial commitments.

Hodan Yusuf, in her chapter, *The Single Story of Somalia and Media Misrepresentations*, also considers the ways in which an abject Other group has been represented in the media. The chapter disrupts the singular story of famine, ethnic conflict, terrorism, and piracy that the media paints of Africa by inviting the reader to bear witness to the realities of progression and freedom enjoyed in many parts of the continent. Through an anti-racism discursive framework, the chapter explores Western media misrepresentations of Somalia and the media’s complicity in advancing the colonial project. The chapter frames a counter-narrative through amplifying Somali voices and the role of Somali’s in the diaspora. The chapter articulates the continuing efforts of Somali youth and nonprofit groups to produce stories from the Somali perspective and offer counteractions based on Somali interpretations.

The final two chapters in this section address the implications of the mainstream discourse of “model minorities,” and they query the ways in which this discourse contributes to sustaining a racial hierarchy. Ayla Raza brings a critical perspective to the liberal multiculturalism that fosters the “model minority” discourse to demonstrate how it has created and continues to maintain a hierarchy of non-white bodies within Canadian education. In this discussion, Raza engages in counter-narratives to disrupt the limiting subject position for Brown bodies as well as querying the effects of the model minority narrative on Brown youth. Working with Brown as an analytic category, Raza engages in an anti-colonial and anti-racism framework to amplify the missing voices in the discussion of schooling experiences for Brown students. Kenneth Huyn’s chapter contributes to this discussion by way of analyzing state-led discourses on the concept “Asians” in Canada. He suggests that these

discourses present a particular representation of Asians as successful, which is productive of the notion that the state-led ideology of multiculturalism effectively manages types of social difference, such as race. This chapter troubles the essentialization around the concept of Asian by situating particular experiences sociohistorically. Through articulating interrelated discursive, historical, contemporary, and affective realities faced by Asians in Canada, the chapter evidences the need for anti-racism research and activism to engage possibilities for transformative understandings.

Part IV – Autoethnography: On Coalition Building, Identity and Belonging, and Decolonization

Orienting their discussions around their own locations and experiences, the authors in this section invite the reader into aspects of their lives as they come to think about the role of anti-racism education in transforming their relationships, identities, questions of home and belonging, and decolonization. Min Kuar brings together teachings from a Sikh prayer from her upbringing which focuses on responsibility to land and all of creation and the Two Row Wampum's (Gaswentah) sophisticated message of coexistence. Kuar reengages the meaning of the Sikh prayer as the grounding for relationship building between racialized and Indigenous communities in what is colonially called Canada. Through her narrative, Kuar considers how intellectual and intercultural relationships between her relationship to land – both her homeland in South East Asia and the land and traditional territories of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, where she currently resides – can frame the relationship and coalition building with First Peoples and constitute a *lived* anti-racism practice.

In the next chapter, Alexandra Arráiz Mattute works with autoethnography to consider her educational experiences through an anti-racism lens as she narrates her ongoing process of decolonization. Mattute shares how the conversations in the course brought her to realize the ways in which the curriculum at the international high school in Venezuela she attended erased her from her own schooling and learning while she simultaneously comes to grips with the colonial legacy that shapes Venezuelan public and post secondary schools. The chapter invites the reader into the journey of decolonizing for Mattute by way of unfolding the layers and picking at the seams of erasure she experienced in school. Simultaneously, Mattute articulates her movement towards anti-racism education and the powerful discovery of Latina feminist writers in her understandings of her experiences.

While Mattute shares her journey through academic conversations, Theresa Smith's chapter was inspired by her journey to the Philippines to lay her grandmother's remains at rest. This journey was more than a physical journey; it was a spiritual journey in which Smith shares her struggles with which lands she (can) call home. Working with an arts-informed narrative, she explores the "middle ground" of

belonging and identity that first-generation Canadians experience both within Canada and in the home country of their families. In doing this, Smith asks what are the ways our social locations shape our ability to claim certain identities, histories, and lands at the intersections of race, class, privilege, and nationality. The chapter urges us to maintain a commitment to reflection as well as action in guiding one's critical anti-racism practice.

Finally, Mairi McDermott's chapter picks up on Smith's call for reflexivity as she works through two particular lived experiences, one as a Teaching Assistant for *The Principles of Anti-Racism Education* and the other as the lead facilitator of a student voice initiative in a community organization, in order to come into an articulation of her anti-racism pedagogy. Writing through her experiences, McDermott traces the role of affect in educational sites, in these cases educational sites oriented by way of an anti-racism politics. The chapter considers how affect is always already present in classroom relations as well as the call by anti-racism education to unlearn what conventional schooling practices suggest is stable and universal knowledge, and she urges the anti-racism educator to engage affect as a central part of her praxis. In this urge, however, McDermott cautions us to remain reflexive about the ethics involved and our pedagogic responsibilities when centering affect in our classrooms.

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