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11. RACE AND RACISM IN EDUCATION

Seeking Transformative Change through an Inclusive and
Anti-racist Curriculum

ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that racial prejudice, Eurocentric curriculum, and low teacher expectations, negatively impact the achievement of African/Black children in North America and Britain. Consequently, these children are subjected to emotional and symbolic violence; this is detrimental to their wellbeing. The argument is framed within critical race theory and anti-colonial discursive frameworks, to analyse and theorise the experiences of Black children in the schooling system. European colonialism and its legacy, white supremacy, are deeply ingrained in Western European societies, creating injustices and inequalities that permeate every aspect of children's lives, particularly in education. In order to transform the classroom and provide spaces free of racial oppression, teachers and educators must engage in a decolonising process so that they are able to authentically de-construct and decolonize a neo-liberal curriculum. The chapter ends by looking at ways indigenous knowledges could assist teachers and students to unlearn racism and create positive learning environments.

Keywords: Eurocentric curriculum, African, Britain, critical race theory, colonialism

You can go to school and not get educated (George Dei, Video interview, OISE's website, 2016)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will attempt to examine the ways in which Eurocentric curriculum reinforces and validates White-European cultural hegemony. The dominant narrative in North America and some European countries is that Black[1] children are 'underachieving'. However, this underachievement is attributed to the perceived deficits within these students rather than as a result of the structural systems of White supremacy and racism (Dei, 2008). In his book, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, Peter McLaren, one of the architects of critical pedagogy, states that schooling is a 'resolutely political and

cultural enterprise' (McLaren, 2002). Therefore, it is impossible to look at schooling as a separate entity, independent from society because schools promote the political and cultural agenda of the dominant group. According to Professor Dei, racism in education is not only performed through the formal curriculum but also via a set of 'unwritten codes' as part of what he identifies as 'hidden curriculum' of schooling through which the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and other school agents convey specific messages to students. He goes on to argue that 'these messages are often conveyed through a climate of preconceptions which are fuelled by racial stereotypes such as the notion of 'the Black pathological family'.

With that understanding in mind, we will use critical anti-racist theory (CART) and anti-colonial discursive frameworks to examine and theorise the experiences of Black children in the schooling system in North America and Britain. CART is grounded in the fundamental values of critical race theory (CRT) scholarship tradition that developed as a counter to critical legal studies (CLS). CLS was regarded as inadequate in addressing institutional racism in the United States of America during the 70's (Lanson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, colonialism has had a fundamental impact on our global social realities, therefore we ground our analysis in a discursive framework that helps us understand these social realities in their historical context.

To begin with, I will share a brief historical background of my education as a way of contextualising my experience and the journey that has brought me to anti-racism work. I will then examine the issues by posing the following questions: In what ways do racism and the hidden curriculum affect student achievement and engagement? What tools does anti-racism provide educators to authentically de-construct and decolonize neo-liberal curriculum using Indigenous knowledges? How can we use education to do transformative work to unlearn racism? What would an inclusive curriculum look like? To conclude this chapter, I will suggest possible ways forward to facilitate true change that has the potential to build a more equal and just society.

My Journey to Anti-racism

I am writing this chapter from the perspective of a Black woman who was born and grew up in East Africa. I lived in the UK for 17 years before immigrating to Canada in 2014. I received my primary and secondary education in Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa, which became independent from France in 1977 after nearly 80 years of colonial rule. The original inhabitants of Djibouti were mostly from the Afar ethnic group; however, gradually more Somali people started settling following their immigration from Somaliland and Ethiopia. The independence of Djibouti was a symbolic one because the country inherited a colonial system of political organisation and an education system based entirely on the French colonial one. The French never really left Djibouti.

My entire schooling was in French, which remains the official language in Djibouti. I was taught European/Western history, culture, geography, philosophy,

politics and the great achievements of European men and women but nothing worthy or significant about my own history. There was no child in Djibouti who could not sing La Marseillaise, the French national anthem. We did not learn French as a foreign language; every subject was taught in French. This very fact is extremely problematic because it had a particular psychological impact on our minds as children and speaks to the concept of hidden curriculum. I, like many around me, took it completely for granted and even saw it as a privilege that we adopted the language of those who colonised us. Frantz Fanon writes, 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization' (Fanon, 1967). Fanon (1967) goes on to say,

> Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (p. 48)

As a child, I did not question the superiority of French and European culture, the beauty of their poetry and songs and the richness of their philosophies. As I think back, this was not the issue in itself. The problem was that we were did not learn anything positive about the history of Somali or African people. We were exposed to colonial and racist narratives of ourselves and other Africans that erased our humanity and positioned Europeans as our civilisers, which was even more damaging. These were the hidden messages we received through our Eurocentric education and hidden curriculum and this is the reason why it is important our analysis is framed around an anti-colonial discursive framework.

The curriculum in Djibouti, both formal and hidden, was (is) a tool which reinforces and reproduces Eurocentric and colonial ideals and values such as meritocracy, individual success and the emphasis on rational to the detriment of emotions. We were told that if we work hard, we would do well and learn how to 'speak perfect French like Frenchmen'. We were ranked according to our marks from the first place to the 50th or 60th place depending on the number of students in the class. Children who could not make to the top places were put on the spot and those who were the front-runners were popular and celebrated both in the schools as well as in our families and community.

As colonial subjects, we did not have agency or the power to influence the curriculum. We did not learn how to be critical and question the way the schooling system worked and what and how we learned in school. We were denied the 'right to participate in history' and because of that, we were 'dominated and alienated' (Dardar, 1998). In fact, our schooling taught us how to be more complacent and accepting of our own oppression and domination rather than seeking radical and

liberatory learning that provided us with the critical thinking and tools needed to resist colonialism and White supremacy.

Just like the hidden curriculum, media has been a powerful tool through which the European colonial project was promoted and sustained. In Djibouti, the media reflected European value systems rather than our own indigenous value systems. Our national television channel broadcast was dominated by an amalgam of French programmes, which were designed to further ingrain Eurocentric images and values in the African mind. For example, all of the cartoons and children's programmes that came on TV featured French or American (White) characters, were set in Western countries and spoke with French accents. As a child, all the heroes I saw on TV were White and spoke French and the greatest scientists, philosophers and inventors were White-European. These imageries and literature we were exposed to on daily basis conditioned us to accept the superiority of Europeans.

The French held themselves to a higher moral stand compared with their American cousins, so their agenda was to use African countries as a cultural battlefield against Anglo-Saxon imperialism and expose the worst of American culture and history to their African 'subjects'. For instance, rather than showing films and programmes on the struggle for independence against French rule, we were bombarded with documentaries on the Vietnam War and civil rights movements in the United States of America. I remember when 'Roots' first came on Djibouti's national television and the profound impact it had on me but also on everyone around me. 'Roots' is a television miniseries based on Alex Haley's 1976 novel, featuring Haley's family history from their ancestor Kunta Kinte's enslavement to the emancipation of his descendants. Roots was our gateway to the struggle for civil rights in the United States and to Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X. At that young age, I was exposed to what White racial oppression and violence looked like and it disturbed and angered me. I was probably too young to watch it but it exposed me to the brutality of European chattel slavery and the racial oppression Africans in the United States of America were subjected to. Up until that time, most of the things we saw on TV glamorised European and North American culture, history and people.

Despite being heavily influenced by this Eurocentric curriculum, I received an alternative knowledge about my identity, history and culture through my parents and the collective memories of my community. My parents, like many Somalis, have a strong interest in politics and followed the African struggle for liberation throughout the continent. They recounted to us the struggle the Somali and Afar people engaged in against the French colonialists and the brutal repression and retaliation by the French forces. The names of Mahamoud Harbi, Zayid Hassan, Nkrumah, Kenyata, Nyerere, Lumumba, Sankara, Toure, Biko and Mandela are names I was familiar with. The day that my mother screamed, *'Oh my God! They killed Thomas Sankara!'* reacting to the news on our radio that the African revolutionary leader of Burkina Faso was assassinated, is still ingrained in my memory even thought I was only nine years old. Teaching history through storytelling and poetry is part of many African cultures, especially those based on oral tradition such as the Somali culture.

Those stories we heard from our grandparents and parents gript our imagination. The heroes in these stories not only looked like us, but often they were related to us as those stories revolved around the lives of close family members and relatives. We learned values such as courage, integrity and altruism through animal stories. In our families and communities, we felt valued and loved which gave us a sense of belonging and self worth. The stories that my family told me had a positive impact on my self-esteem as an African woman and shaped the way I view the world around me.

Once I arrived in Britain, my sense of self worth came under great pressure, because of the relentless vilification of non-European immigrants and refugees in the media. We were blamed for different social issues from taking jobs from 'real British' people to bringing more violence and crime into Britain and exploiting the welfare system. According to Faisa Abdi and Hamdi Issa, advocates at Migrants Rights Network, 'Over the past decade, media reporting on the Somali community has been disproportionately negative and perpetually centred on moments of crisis. The typical captions are all too often the pirate, the benefit cheat, the criminal or, most damaging, the terrorist'. Somalis are particularly scrutinised in the British media because of the fact they self-identify as both Black and Muslim and are subjected to Anti-Black racism and Anti-Muslim sentiment (Abdi, Isse, 2015).

These negative stereotypes and racist narratives propelled me into the realm of anti-racism activism. Being a Black, woman female whose first language was not English, meant that I was faced with multiple barriers and forms of discrimination, which amounted to oppression. As time passed, I became more and more aware of the social inequalities and injustices ingrained in British society and I felt that something needed to be done about it. I recognised the field of education as a space where I could make a positive difference to the lives of those who have been victimised by White colonial supremacist racism over centuries. Education is a field in which we have the opportunity to unlearn our distorted views of history and learn in a way that helps us promote positive change and social justice.

RACISM IN SCHOOLS

In *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, philosopher Charles Mills explains how European expansionism in it's various forms—expropriation, slavery, colonialism, settlement—brings race into existence as a global social reality, with the single most important conceptual division being that between 'Whites' and 'non-Whites' (Mills, 1999). Those classified as 'White' have been lifted above other 'races' with the structural power to exploit and enslave the 'other'. Hence, race was the greatest signifier used to organise the population of the planet in a human hierarchy with White people constructed at the top and non-Whites at the bottom. This White racism has negative ramifications for every domain of Black life from education, employment, housing, criminal justice system, economics, to self-determination and racial identity. Many researchers identified racism and racial

prejudice and the consequent low teacher expectations, differential treatment and exclusions, as having a negative impact on Black youth (Dei, 1997). As recently as last year, a 50 page report, commissioned by the advocacy coalition called FACES of Peel revealed worrying level of discrimination, anti-Black racism and negative stereotypes experienced by Black male students ins schools. 87 Black male students who were interviewed for the report, said that teachers did not expect them to succeed and were surprised if they obtained good marks; they received harsher punishments and were treated with suspicion and assumed being part of a gang because of the colour of their skin (Gordon, 2016). These experiences, which are not unique to Peel, highlight the saliency of race and skin colour within the system of White supremacy, and for that reason, we insist on centering race in our attempt to critique the education system.

Theorising Education: The Place of Critical Anti-Racist Theory in Education

When seeking to understand contemporary societal issues, one must ground their thinking in a discursive framework that places colonialism and racism at the centre of its analysis otherwise we will be ill equipped to understand the root causes of these contentious issues and the relationship between power and racial privilege. critical anti-racist theory (CART) provides those of us who are interested in transforming the education system, with an opportunity to analyse schooling in a way that demonstrates the racism inherent in the education structures and highlights how that impacts the lives of Black youth. CART is based on the fundamental tenets of critical race theory (CRT) scholarship tradition that developed as a counter to critical legal studies (CLS), deemed ineffective in addressing institutional racism in the United States of America during the 70's. Critical race theorists criticised CLS for not considering race in its critique and argued that it fundamentally 'helped create, support, and legitimate America's present class structure (Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir, Dixon, 2004).

They argued that it was no longer satisfactory or sufficient to appeal to the moral sense of dominant bodies to advance equity and civil rights. Dei argues that CART takes into account the fact that there are different forms of oppression however; he states that 'oppressions are not equal in their consequences and intensities' (Dei, Lordan, 2013). He continues to explain that the only point of entry of this discourse is through the personal (Dei, Lordan, 2013). This perspective is important as it validates and empowers those who have been denied the opportunity to tell their stories in an authentic way.

Racism requires narratives to perpetrate itself. Narratives build prejudices and self-perceptions that privilege White bodies while exploiting and disadvantaging Black bodies. This is where stereotypes and labels come into play. Labels, and particular representations and stereotypes, facilitate the concoction of punishments or consequences that come with being categorized in a negative and unfavourable manner. Sensoy and DiAngelo explain that, 'prejudice is part of how we learn to

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sort people into categories that make sense to us […] Although this is a process necessary for learning, our categorisations are not neutral.' (Sensoy, Di Angelo, 2012). This argument compels us to consider how certain groups have been represented historically in literature and media in our society. It has been part of European/Western history to dehumanize and label African and Indigenous peoples as uncivilized, so that the violence and subjugation imposed on them could be rationalized and legitimized. Negative stereotypes can throw a human being out of the human realm on the basis of characteristics that they have no control over, such as their gender, race/ethnicity, or sexuality. This is the reason why we believe the voices of the oppressed and disenfranchised are extremely important for the production of knowledges and counter-stories that reflect their experiences with racism.

Given the pervasive nature of institutional racism and Whiteness, CART provides an effective analytical framework to interrogate the education system and propose ways to improve the schooling experience of Black children as well as other negatively racialized learners. Despite all the research and scholarly works that point out that institutional racism remains insidious and lays at the root cause of the underachievement of Black children, there is little or no change to this depressing state of affairs (Dei, 2000). In the UK, in 2005, a critical research commissioned by the then London mayor, Ken Livingstone, revealed that African-Caribbean children especially boys 'have been betrayed by the education authorities for almost half a century' and that these children 'are struggling to overcome racism from many of their own teachers' (Smithers & Muir, 2004). Yet, there is still resistance among policy makers and educators from the dominant culture to scrutinise race and racism in the education system and therefore, we continue to witness the dominance of White Anglo-European culture and ways of knowing and the flourishing of anti-Black racism. The result of this is that African children cannot access an inclusive and good quality education, and therefore remain disengaged and struggle to imagine a positive and successful future for themselves (Dei, 1997).

Racist Curriculum: Written and Hidden

The negative impact that Eurocentric curriculum has on African children has been widely discussed and theorised over the years, both in North America and Europe. British-Jamaican Social Anthropologist and educator, Dr William Henry, argues that 'children do not receive anything of note from the National Curriculum about a thinking African historical self that is positive, uplifting and predates the period of chattel enslavement'. (Henry, 2016) Out of the many millenniums of African history and civilisation, the period of chattel slavery is one that is emphasised in British schools. This clearly reinforces the idea that Africans had no history before chattel enslavement and even worse, European men such as William Wilberforce 'freed' Africans from their bondage. Many of my friends and the young people I have worked with expressed the feeling of humiliation and disempowerment they felt as they listened to classroom teachers reinforce the 'White saviour' narrative.

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This is a distorted representation of history that speaks to the concept of *cultural fundamentalism* interpreted as a denial and eraser of Black/African positive historical contributions to the world (Dei, 2016. Principles of Anti-Racism Education. OISE).

As part of my own professional development in the field of education, I tried to study the aims of the National Curriculum in England and I learned among other things that state funded schools must offer a 'curriculum which is balanced' and which 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society'. Furthermore, public schools are expected to offer 'rigorous material' and teachers 'should set high expectations for every pupil' (UK National Curriculum). Unfortunately, there is a serious gap between policy and practice as Black children continue to be undervalued and discriminated against. Furthermore, prejudicial and deferential treatment of African children is widespread and comes in form of what Professor Dei describes as 'unwritten codes' and prejudiced attitudes within school settings.

While living in the UK, I took my friend's three young daughters to an Afrocentric event during Black History Month. Black History Month is a national initiative that seeks to highlight the history and positive contributions of Black communities in the UK. This event was held in honour of Mary Seacole, a Jamaican nurse who pioneered the concept of social services in the UK (100 Great Black Britons, 2014). The eldest daughter became extremely excited by this experience and decided to do a presentation on Mary Seacole, which she shared with her Year 4 class as part of an extracurricular activities initiative that they engaged in. To end her presentation on Mary Seacole, she asked her teacher, a White, English, male, if he had heard about Mary Seacole and inquired about why her story was not taught in school. When the teacher admitted he never heard of Mary Seacole, she then asked why that was the case. The teacher tried to dismiss her pertinent questions by instructing her to return to her seat. The young girl then tried to protest by asking him again why individuals who looked like her and who did amazing things were not taught to children in schools. His response was to send her to the principal's office for being 'disrespectful'. When the parents were asked to discuss their daughter's 'behaviour', the mother became aggravated and decided to punish her child because she was afraid the school would 'fail' her because of this incident. I remember the sadness, anger and frustration on that child's face. She was effectively silenced and through this experience she learned that her opinions did not matter. She did not matter.

During my Access Course at college, I was asked to write about 'a day in my life' as part of my English class. I wrote a piece which I used as a therapy session and spoke of the fact I was feeling extremely stressed, depressed and isolated following two years of trying to overcome social barriers. I expressed my wish to return to my homeland even though it was no longer safe for me to do so. I talked about how disturbing it was that I became invisible. That was a terrible shock to my system because I came from a space where I was loved and valued. This piece of writing came from my heart and poured out of me. However, all that my English teacher could ask me was 'did you write this on your own?' I was devastated. My teacher

not only did not believe in me and doubted my capabilities but he also did not seem to care about the pain and trauma I was going through.

Of the five teachers I had in college, only one has been supportive of me and motivated me to peruse my higher education. The others assumed that I would not do well in my courses. In one particular course, the instructor, a White female, did not believe me when I informed her that I attended evening English classes and I was confident I could do well in a Level 4 ESOL class (English for Speakers of Other Languages). She remained adamant that I could not manage a Level 4 ESOL class and told me that the only way I would be allowed on the course was to pass all the levels leading up to level 4. She quickly turned away from me and continued to go about her business. I believe this instructor expected me to walk away but instead, I decided to sit through the English Level, 1, 2 and 3 tests just so that I could 'prove' to her that I possessed the necessary English language skills to join the level 4 class. Although, I have been blessed to cross path with several excellent White teachers who acknowledge their privilege and encourage their students to develop a critical thinking, it will take much more than few individuals to transform our classrooms.

Transgression and Subversion

More often than not, the lived experiences of African people in White dominated societies are dismissed and devalued when in fact they represent powerful opportunities to subvert the status-quo. This especially occurs in education where the voices of African and other negatively racialized youths are often silenced (Dei, 1997). Storytelling, or in the case of anti-racism work, counter stories, rooted in revolutionary and anti-racism thought, is an antidote to stereotypical and prejudiced representation of African people in colonial and racist narrative that dominate Westerner societies which manifest itself through the media, history and education among other areas of human interaction.

These stories are much more than simply expressing a reality. They remain a powerful way of transgressing and subverting the system of White supremacy. As an African, Black, Muslim, immigrant, a working class colonised female, I have been victimised, discriminated against and oppressed on many levels. Unless I appreciate these interlocking systems of oppression I cannot possibly start challenging them. Notable is that as I resist these systemic and systematic oppressions and try to articulate my experiences, pain and anger, I am told countless times that I have a 'chip' on my shoulder and I am 'playing the race card' by identifying racism as an oppressive system based on constructed notions of White racial superiority. It is part of decolonising our minds and empowering ourselves as African and racialized bodies to name our realities, and that is what CART helps us to do. Moreover, comparing the injustice and anti-Black racism, I and those who look like me experience on daily basis, to a chip on our shoulders, is racist in itself. This is how those who speak out against racial oppression and White supremacy are dismissed and silenced.

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It remains a challenge to engage in the act of transgression and subversion particularly for Black bodies in White dominated institutions. One of the key challenges of White supremacy is that of cognition: most Whites do not see themselves as racist. Whites are socialised to view Whiteness as the norm and have normalised it. Such statements may make Whites uncomfortable, because most Whites do not "feel" racist. However, White supremacy functions independently of these feelings. In the past, White privilege was upheld through openly racist acts and political policies, but liberal ideas about equality became widespread. The consequence of this was that White privilege hid itself behind rhetoric of equality, diversity and multiculturalism and notions of racial superiority remained unchallenged (Mills, 1999).

The aim to revolutionise our schooling system cannot be left to concerned community members, anti-racist activists and scholars. It has to be a mission for all of us if we wish to disrupt racism and Eurocentric cultural and ideological hegemonies and reverse the low attainment of some African children. The question remains, how do we moved beyond providing a diagnosis of the problem and towards remedies and solutions that have the potential to bring about the kind of change we want to see in our schools? What would a holistic education entail in our schools?

What Would a Holistic Curriculum Look Like?

Critical anti-racism theory challenges the ideas promoted by Western neo-liberalism, which lead us to believe that our society is colorblind and that the law is neutral (John, 2010). The curriculum is a tool, which reinforces and reproduces Eurocentric and colonial ideals and values. It has the aim of organising the culture, life, and environment within schools around Neo-liberal, European, capitalist values. Whoever has the power and agency to create the curriculum has power over those who are not involved in that process. How can we expect Black and other non-White children whose stories are not represented in education, to engage and feel a sense of inclusion? It is not surprising that indeed many Black children disengage from their learning due to the alienation they feel (Dei, 2013).

Professor Gus John argues that schooling is geared towards a neo-liberal agenda, which focuses on 'labour market needs and the nation's economic competitiveness in a global, free-market economy'. Education is turned into a commodity where parents are encouraged to invest in the 'best schools' rather than everyone working towards the creation of safe, inclusive and accessible schools in all communities (John, 2010).

This reminds me of the many conversations I have had with other concerned educators and community activists who had serious reservations about the way schools are structured. Many felt that too much emphasis was placed on rigid rules, memorizing information and regurgitating it. 'Too much questioning' from the children was seen as disruptive. I often sat in classrooms observing the ways in which individual expressions and creativity was squashed out of children for the benefit of

uniformity. I imagined schools as being a factory where they produced an army of labourers, robotic in their ways of thinking and behaving, groomed to continue enabling capitalism. As someone who considers education as a liberatory tool that should help humanity to grow and work for the greater good, this observation left me with a feeling of despair.

The current contemporary form of education forces us to question its purpose. Dei states that education 'must cultivate a sense of identity within a culture and community, while working with ancestral cultural knowledge retention'. I share Dei's view when he argues that 'Education must help students to deconstruct power and privilege' (Dei, 2008).

There is a pressing need to transform and deconstruct the curriculum and make it more inclusive and representative of a diverse range of ways of knowing and understanding the world. All children should be able to see themselves in what they are learning and relate it to their everyday life. African children and other negatively racialized children cannot aspire to be what they cannot see and imagine. It is important that Educators engage in decolonising their own minds and 'truths' they might hold. This process will entail an honest and critical questioning of the status-quo and the interrogation of Whiteness and the 'pervasive affect of White privilege'(Dei, 2000). This might not be an easy process but as Fanon warned us, colonisation was a violent process and therefore decolonising will also involve some form of violence. According to Dei, 'there are many forms of violence – physical, economic, sexual, spiritual and symbolic violence' that occur at different levels for negatively racialized communities (Dei, 2000).

I would argue that the school is where this 'symbolic violence', experienced by many Black children takes place. Educators from the dominant culture should use the feeling of discomfort that they may experience while they try and engage in anti-racism work so that they are able to think of ways of decolonising the curriculum and transforming the classroom into safe spaces where every child can flourish and reach their full potential. There are multiple challenges to true transformative change as identified by many anti-racism scholars and activists. As `Dei underlined during class discussions, intentions alone are not enough and diplomacy and political correctness is limiting us. He alludes to the necessity for pedagogical clarity to education about race and racism and that educators should adopt a learner-centric approach. Dei also calls for spirituality to be placed in the life of the student because students come to school with their racial, religious and ethnic identities. Spirituality provides an understanding and awareness of the creator and the importance of mother earth.

This way of understanding the world is a fundamental belief in many indigenous societies and comes in contrast to Western, liberal, capitalist societies where individual success and consumerism are seen as values worth pursuing to the detriment of the well-being and prosperity of the entire community. This way of knowing, presents an understanding of the world that is based on relations and interconnectedness and that fosters respect for all living things. There is a lot to be learned from different indigenous approaches to education such as the African

perspectives that are based on and 'understanding of the physical, social, and spiritual environments' of the students (Kanu, 2006). For instance, Kanu speaking in the context of the West African nation of Sierra Leone, states that the aim of education is to 'introduce children to society and prepare them for adulthood'. He goes on to say, 'it [education] emphasizes job orientation, social responsibility, religion, moral values and community participation'. Such an understanding would instil a sense of ownership and sense of belonging within the learners, which will consequently make them feel valued and included in their own learning.

I sat through the Principles of Anti-Racism Education class and as I participated in the discussions, I thought about some of the ways Somalis view schooling and teachers, and how this fit very well with the idea of school as part of the community. In Somali culture, and in many other African cultures, teachers are considered as 'third parents' and schools are seen as an extension of the community; a place that is accessible and inclusive. The task to educate the learner was one shared between teachers and parents as well as elders in the families and communities. This concept of community schooling is at the heart of Afrocentric schools and has been proved to make a positive difference to the academic achievement as well as the self-esteem of African children. However, I am aware of the heated debate surrounding Afrocentric schools in Canada which contextualises the undermining of African agency for self-empowerment and determination. Therefore, I expect resistance to that idea. A holistic education, which centres the learner, will not only benefit African and racialized people but it will benefit all ethnic groups and will lay the foundation for a more inclusive and egalitarian society. It is therefore in all our interest to work towards achieving that or else we would continue being complicit in an oppressive and unjust system that privileges some groups and disadvantages others on the basis of race, ethnicity and class.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I undertake the task of examining the ways in which race and racism play out in education through an exclusive curriculum that reinforces and validates White-European cultural hegemony and negatively impacts on the achievement of African children in North America and Britain. I have attempted to re-enter the classroom space and trouble the structural racism that plagues the education system using a CART and anti-colonial discursive frameworks, which provide a rigorous and insightful analysis of race and racism in education. I have argued that the so-called underachievement of African students is associated with the racist assumptions that they are deficient while the structures within education are not scrutinised. In White dominated societies, the curriculum is fundamentally a Eurocentric and colonialist tool to reproduce western cultural hegemony. It is neither neutral and nor colorblind and to believe that is is—is ignorant at best and malignant at worse. Despite countless researches that highlight the issue of racism in education, many teachers and educators from the dominant culture still remain in denial and resist this knowledge (Urrieta & Reidel, 2006).

As a way to conclude, I invite us to imagine a different world and dare to challenge ourselves to work towards achieve that. Dei reminds us that we are all implicated and there is a responsibility that comes with that implication although that responsibility is different for different bodies. The journey will not be one free of struggle however; it is a necessary endeavour in order for us to create a more equal and just world for the upcoming generations. With our unequal society, we cannot be complacent and just be bogged down by just trying to survive. We need to live for a higher purpose than simply making ends meet. Social justice is a worthy enough cause to live for.

NOTE

[1] For the purpose of this chapter, I will use the term 'Black' to refer to all people of African ancestry and heritage and will include all the categories, Black African, Black-Caribbean, Black-British, African-American etc.

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