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Post-racial pedagogy - challenges and possibilities.

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of ongoing discussions about how best to conceptualise, confront and ultimately eradicate racism, this paper seeks to critically examine the relevance of 'post-racial' thinking, both in a general sense, but also in relation to education. The argument is framed around a concern that multi-cultural, and to a lesser extent anti-racist approaches, have become hostage to the very same essentialising practices around 'race' thinking that they seek to challenge. This is best illustrated in the plethora of racial, ethnic, geographic, national and religious categories that are currently deployed by many educational institutions in the furtherance of 'equality and diversity' policy objectives. In setting out some of the underpinning ideas and controversies linked with the idea of 'post-racial', the paper offers some tentative suggestions as to how a 'post-racial pedagogy' could be manifested in pedagogical practices.

Keywords: race, post-race/post-racial, anti-racism, pedagogy, education.

Introduction

In their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer note that 'Classification is a condition for cognition and not cognition itself; cognition in turn dispels classification' (1979, 220). In making this observation they draw attention to a particular paradox which anti-racists are confronted with. Crudely put, this is, can one be truly 'anti-racist' whilst at the sametime deploy categories of 'race'? Put another way, this can be seen to represent a paradox between the human tendency (perhaps even need!), through inscription, fabrication and abstraction, to stabilise particular expressions of difference, but, on the other hand, the knowledge that such categories have little meaning at the level of individual human engagement. Yes, human beings vary in their physical appearance, indeed, no two human beings, even 'identical twins' are completely alike! However, the contemporary association of human differences with human capabilities such as 'intelligence', 'resilience', 'character' and 'morality', is largely a product of the need to rationalise Western colonial conquest and slavery and the ongoing impact of racializing practices. It is as Paul Gilroy characterises, a perfect illustration of 'the rational irrationality of "race"' (2000b, 69) and one is compelled to conclude that the only certainty one can have about 'race' is, as Montague (2001) argues, that it is a dangerous myth. The ongoing racializing practices within many Western societies, despite the perfectly reasonable proposition that 'race' does not exist, reveals perhaps a deeper paradoxical truth about the human condition, namely that we are predisposed to being both rational and irrational! Indeed, it is this observation that Adorno and Horkheimer suggest is a starting point for understanding the failure of the Enlightenment to enable humanity to escape dehumanising practices, which were and continue to be heavily reliant on systems of classification, (Foucault, 1979). Yet, at the same time, without some recourse to categories, though one may be able to

capture individualised experience, how does one determine an objective assessment of the broader systematic and structural impacts of racism, or for that matter any forms of oppression?

This paper seeks to explore these tensions within discussions about diversity and anti-racism more generally and anti-racist education in particular. Specifically, and somewhat provocatively, it seeks to set out some of the underpinning ideas and controversies linked with 'post-race', and to explore some suggestions how 'post-racial' pedagogy could be applied manifested in the teaching, learning and assessment process. In doing so the paper seeks to connect a wider structural and historical understanding of racism to the development of Western educational institutions and values and the resultant racialising micro-practices of teaching and learning. Invoking the concept of 'post-racial' is in itself a risky thing to do in that there is an implicit suggestion that 'race', if not dead, may well be on the way out. And so, at the outset to avoid confusion it is necessary for me to make my position clear. 'Race' and racism are alive and well and will be for the foreseeable future! My argument very much follows the work of Joshua Paul, in that by engaging in critical reflection on the ways in which we deploy the category 'race', I am seeking to explore how the 'anti-racist imagination beyond battling racism' (2014, 716) alone can open up new possibilities, particularly within the realms of pedagogy. In other words, I am seeking to argue that a 'post-race' framework offers a conceptual basis for shifting our intellectual resources from giving fuel, often inadvertently, to what Paul Gilroy (2000a) has termed 'raceology' and to construct a philosophy, pedagogy and practice that has its teleos in the ultimate destruction/declassification of racialised discourse, perhaps even the ending of racism itself. In this sense, I am deploying the term 'post-racial' as a heuristic tool to explore new ways of thinking about developing pedagogical strategies for eradicating racism.

The Heuristics of 'post-race'

To imagine a world, or for that matter a discourse, that is free of racialising ideas and language is not an easy task, and indeed may be beyond the realms of ontological possibility. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is notoriously difficult to rebottle it. And of course the task of eradicating racism is not simply a matter of shifting the imagination, though clearly for educationalists, doing so is one of the central pedagogical challenges. Racism, like water can exist in different forms, in its 'gaseous' form, certainly it can be characterised as a series of discursive and linguistic representations of people as inherently inferior/superior. In the liquid form it can be manifest in powerful cultural imaginings and 'binaries constructed in colonial discourse' (Rattansi, 1994, 39). And in its solid state, racism can present itself in the form of structural inequalities around such things as health, educational attainment, employment, asylum, immigration, and social exclusion or simple old fashioned racial violence, all of which still loom large for different black and minority communities. Indeed, the widely publicised shootings of black men across the US at the hands of the police leading to the emergence of the powerful *Black Lives Matter* movement, or the fact that black people are much more likely to be incarcerated in prison than white people, provide a sober reminder that racism is not going anywhere for the foreseeable future.

Some writers argue that the idea of 'post-race' is consistent with forces of neoliberalism (James et al, 2015). Paul (2013) characterises this as a 'neo-conservative post-racialism', which he suggests, is derived from prominent black figures in the US and UK who adopt a libertarian approach that seeks to refute structural explanations of black disadvantage. Indeed, their critiques suggest that existing anti-racist and affirmative action policies have acted to undermine black development. However, critics of this line of argument suggest that neoliberalism and anti-racism is an oxymoron. For example, Omi and Winant (2014) argue that the rise of neoliberalism was contingent on propagating a colour blind politics, not because race was no longer relevant, but because there was a need to contain and undermine the political challenge that anti-racist and other social justice movements had historically mounted. 'Colorblind politics were developed from about 1970 as the post-civil rights racial ideology of this new coalition, this new power-bloc. As colorblindness became hegemonic, this new racial ideology incubated and buttressed neoliberalism'.

In the light of the entrenchment of social inequalities under neoliberalism (See Singh, 2012), at the structural level, it could be argued that nothing much has really changed since the Windrush years which heralded the re-inscription of old colonial racism onto the canvas of Post War Britain. However, it is also true that there has been a significant change in the way that we think about 'race'. Most notably, at the conceptual and ideological level, we have seen the almost universal repudiation of the idea of biologically determined racial types. Of course, it would be naïve to think that just because scientifically something is proven not to exist that society will automatically dispose of it. Indeed, against the backdrop of new media moral panics about migration coupled with the so-called 'war on terror', we have seen most notably in Europe and North America the emergence of a dangerous 'new racism' that seeks to exploit and create fears centred on cultural, ethnic and religious otherness. (See for example Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Van Dijk, 2000)

Notwithstanding the ongoing reality of racism, we are still left with having to respond to the challenge of constructing an anti-racist project without legitimising the conceptual building blocks of racism, of which the idea of 'race' lies at its heart. Audre Lorde in her assertion that *"The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"* (1984) hints at this very same puzzle. Although in coining this phrase she was preoccupied with a blind spot that white feminist anti-oppressive struggles seemed to have regarding other forms of oppression, most notably racism, there is a more general truth in what she is saying here. Put simply, one needs new tools and concepts, both to dismantle the edifice of racist oppression and to construct different ways of being together as human beings. Such an approach whilst recognizing the alienating effects of racist oppression nonetheless seeks to uphold the unique insights of the oppressed. As Jaques Rancière suggests, the 'oppressed ... are intelligent, and the weapons of their liberation will emerge from their intelligence' (Rancière, 2011:14–15).

In opening up a discussion about developing a 'post-racial' conceptual framework for tackling racism I feel it is important to reflect on the dangers of doing so. Am I simply engaging in ungrounded rhetorical speculation about 'how nice it would be if we could all be kinder to each other'? Or, as Tim Wise (2010) suggests in his

book *The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*, against the backdrop of misplaced euphoria following the election of Barack Obama in 2008, are we seeing a modern rendition of old fashioned liberal colour-blindness? Although I must own up to feeling a profound sense of excitement back in 2008, the ongoing racial violence perpetuated against black people in the US and the rise of overtly racist right wing republican agenda, has certainly dispelled any fantasies I may have had about the US becoming a 'post-racial' state; Sadly, what David Theo Goldberg (2002) terms the '*The Racial State*', is likely to be with us for some time to come.

So, what then is the point of discussing the idea of 'post-race' given the unfinished project of anti-racism? I am convinced that, as has been the case to date, we need to refute the idea that somehow 'race' can simply become transmuted into an 'emancipatory category' without creating problems. As Darder and Torres argue, 'it is high time we disrupt its continued use that does nothing but render our theorising ambiguous and problematic' (2004, 12). Space doesn't permit a fuller exposition of this line of reasoning, needless to say that one of the products of this continued reliance on racial categories has been the birth of what is termed a 'politics of difference'. Kenan Malik, offers a compelling analysis of how anthropological thought in the 20th Century sought to propagate romantic notions of human societies in which distinct 'ethnic' groups were constructed as bounded and relatively static. He goes on to suggest that this fatal error in thinking was uncritically adopted by proponents of the "politics of difference" resulting in struggles against racism becoming largely displaced by a 'one-sided embrace of 'difference' and denigration of universalistic concepts' (Malik, 1998). Others have suggested that the tendency by influential postcolonial theorists, such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, to repudiate enlightenment universalism, was mistaken given that many black/oppressed people, fought for those very ideals (See Chibber, 2013). In his book, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, Nick Nesbitt makes some important observations about the way in which universal human rights discourses born out of the age of enlightenment were utilised by the slaves in 1791 to inspire what, as we know, culminated in the elimination of slavery in Saint-Domingue, and ultimately the founding of the Haitian Republic.

The radical transformation of France after 1789 did not determine the appearance of the Haitian Revolution; instead, the Declaration of the Rights of Man was a key element in creating ... the ontological ground that allowed for a local rebellion's increasing articulation in terms of universal human rights. (Nesbitt, 2013: 62)

And so, in some senses, whilst the idea of 'post-race' potentially represents a conceptual turn or even more profoundly a paradigm shift, it does so with one eye on an alternative view of black struggles than the one reflected in some formations of municipal multiculturalism and anti-racism. Essentially this viewpoint seeks to avoid a blanket repudiation of everything 'Western'. Indeed, it seeks to critically appropriate or mobilise elements within the Enlightenment tradition, around the ideals on universal human rights, that have historically resonated with the broad thrust of black struggles for freedom, justice and equality.

A useful starting point for our discussion comes from the work of William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) Du Bois, arguably the most influential African American intellectual of the 20th Century. In his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk* he developed the idea 'of double consciousness' which, as he suggests, is a feeling or sensation that one is:

... looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. ... two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 1903: 4).

And it is this struggle over the imposed duality and the desire to 'merge his double self into a better and truer self' that has characterised the black African American experience since the times of slavery. It is in this context, of profoundly different experiences of blacks and whites in the US, that Du Bois invoked the idea the 'colour line', a phrase originally coined by Frederick Douglass (1892), to conceptualise powerful psychosocial divisions amongst blacks and whites in the US. This idea he develops into a general theory of the division of humanity, which, as he suggests in his later book, *"Of the Dawn of Freedom"* appeared to extend across much of the world to "Asia" "Africa" and "the islands of the sea"

There can be no denying that the 'colour line' represented one of the most influential and powerful framings of 'race' throughout most of the early 20th Century in the US and arguably the post-colonial world. What is much less well known is Du Bois' later questioning of his own concept in the early 1950s following a series of visits to post-war Poland. Reflecting on his experience in an essay for Jewish Life magazine entitled *"The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto,"* Du Bois outlines how the inhumanity of the Warsaw ghetto and the experience of the Jewish population invoked him to revise his idea about the contours of 'race';

In the first place, the problem of slavery, emancipation and caste in the United States was no longer in my mind a separate and unique thing as I had so long conceived it. It was not even solely a matter of color and physical and racial characteristics, which was particularly a hard thing for me to learn, since for a lifetime the color line had been a real and efficient cause of misery (Zuckerman, 2004: 45).

Coming out of the bitterness and brutality of the experience of racism in the US, it was not just an intellectual and political challenge, but also a personal challenge to conceptualise the racialisation of 'white' people through Nazism and anti-Semitism. In the second of his autobiographies, *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois (1971) outlines the genesis of his own thought. Whilst remaining steadfast about the need to fight for racial justice, he entertains the prospect of the banishment of racism, but that this would only be possible through the simultaneous abolition of white supremacy and the triumph of Socialism. Put simply, the genesis of Du Bois's own thinking represents a realisation of an absolute imperative to connect the struggles of all oppressed

people for liberation with a broader struggle against the social and economic system, namely capitalism. In doing so, Du Bois offers both the tantalising possibility of the destruction of racism, but that this would only be possible through both dismantling the present economic order and reimagining a new more egalitarian system.

In this formulation, whilst Du Bois offers little credence for the claims of liberal anti-racism, which in the present policy context might be characterised as the 'equality and diversity' industry, there is definitely a place for both *Critical Race Theorists* and advocates of 'post-race' sometimes termed *Cosmopolitanists*, such as, Martin Apphia, Amartya Sen, Jason Hill and Paul Gilroy, in his thought process. As a prelude to offering an exposition of 'post-race', it is necessary first to set out my own understanding of the genesis of the ideas of race and racism, which, because lack of time I do very briefly.

From 'race' to post-race'

Whilst ideas about human difference arguably form a permanent feature of all human history the idea of 'race' is a much more recent phenomenon. In ancient Egypt, for instance, there is little evidence that skin colour was used in an evaluative way although it was recognised e.g. in artworks and depictions of other civilizations. (Blum 2002; Hannaford 1996). Indeed, contrary to contemporary racialised myths of the separation of western and eastern culture (which overlays the ideas of whiteness and blackness), Martin Bernal in his book *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* offers a powerful argument that suggests classical civilization in fact had deep roots in both African and Asian cultures.

In terms of understanding the genesis of 'race' thinking within Europe, we see 4 key historical periods: First, from the middle ages from the 5th to the 16th Century we see proto-racial ideas of "stock" and "blood" being largely conflated with ideas of social class. In reaction to the social changes that were taking place the aristocracy sought to impose ideas of innate superiority ("blue blood") as a defence against the crumbling feudal social order. From the 16th - 18th Century within Europe and its colonies we see the cementing of the idea that dark skinned people were sub-human though references to 'race' in this period are largely confined to the literary world and it is only towards the late 18th Century do we see a more systematic attempt to develop a 'scientific' basis for constructing 'race'. As Husband notes:

'Race' is first recorded in the English language in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar and through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'race' was essentially a literary word devoid of scientific aura, denoting a class of persons or things. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was increasing contact with Africa, India, 'the Orient', and other 'exotic' places where the variety of 'Homo sapiens' physical and cultural forms were a continuing source of wonder (1982: 12/13)

This 'source of wonder' proved to be invaluable for European (Natural) philosophers who were keen to test out their theories to explain both the mechanisms and diversity of the natural world. What we saw was a marriage of convenience between colonialists and imperialists, who were seeking to establish some kind of moral justification for oppression, and the emerging scientific disciplines who were keen to test out their theories for explaining natural diversity. The result was that we began to see the growth and naturalisation of categories of 'race'. This leads to a third key period from the nineteenth century which is characterised by the emergence of political movements within European colonies and amongst oppressed so called 'racial' or 'national' groups in the colonial centre – the work of W.E.B. Du Bois is a classic statement of this position, and this lays the ground for modern anti-racism and anti-colonialism. It is also worth noting here that discourses of 'race' and 'nation' during this period and subsequently tend to become conflated (Anderson, 1991). The fourth moment follows the revelation of the horrors of the Nazi racial state, resulting in the mass slaughter of Jews and other minorities on the ground of 'racial' impurity.

It is through the impetus of these latter two moments that the international academic community rejected the 'scientific' basis of 'race' and racial difference, and the sociology of 'race' emerges for the first time (Hall, 1980). This rejection of the notion of 'race' as a marker of human biological and/or moral superiority and inferiority has been crucial in allowing the concept to be understood through sociological categories such as ideology, social construction or as a set of discourses. Seen in this way 'race' becomes 'racialisation', through which meanings become conferred on physical or cultural differences (Miles, 2003). Whilst this strategy of seeking to shift the social conception of 'race' to a benign marker of human difference, or in a later variant, a celebration of human diversity, is significant there were some crucial weaknesses within this. Given the historical reliance of 'race' on superiority and inferiority, there was always a danger that supposedly 'benign' markers of difference could mutate into forms that are anything but benign. Nothing illustrates this more significantly than the shifting significance of "faith" and as a marker of racial difference in the form of what some contemporary writers have termed new racism or 'xeno-racism' (Kundanani, 2007).

The starting point for invoking the idea of 'post-race' comes from this simple proposition, that 'there is no such thing as race' (Nayak, 2006:411); that 'race' it is based on what Ashley Montagu (1954), suggests is a *Dangerous Myth* and that *The Fallacy of Race*, (1954) represents one of the greatest errors, if not the greatest error, of our time (p1). And so, some writers have argued the fight against racism is the dismantling of 'race' as a credible concept (Gilroy, 2000b). It follows, if 'race' works to construct a particular ontology of otherness, then the way to combat it is to develop concepts that are capable of reconstructing a sense of human morals, capabilities and needs.

In seeking to define a conception of 'post-race' we also need to distinguish our position from recent critiques, in particular Tim Wise (2010) who offers a trenchant critique of the discourse of "post-racial politics" in contemporary political and policy rhetoric in the US. He attacks Barack Obama's presidency for its deployment of a 'rhetoric of racial transcendence', accompanied by a 'public policy of colour blind universalism' (2010:16).

Wise argues that as not only is this premised by an abject failure to address the continuing problems of poverty, worklessness and incarceration amongst African American communities in US cities, but also that this language of 'colour-blindness' leaves the government without a narrative to counter the strident re-assertion of racist pathologisation, coming from groups like the 'Tea Party' and what has been conceptualised as 'neo-conservative' post-racialisms (Paul, 2014). A much more credible political project is one that infers commitments towards post-race futures. As Nayak suggests, the impetus for 'post-race' comes from positions that seek to combine the process of facing up to 'race' whilst at the same time rendering it mute (2006).

What does a 'post-racial' pedagogy project look like in practice?

Having set out, albeit tentatively, some of the theoretical contours underpinning the idea of 'post-race', I now turn to some very practical questions about how might a 'post-race' political project look like and what differentiates it from an 'anti-racist' praxis? I assume the first thing to clarify is what I mean by a political project. I see this in two senses, as a policy objective and as a pedagogical enterprise, if you like as an idea worth developing and a practice that is dialectically informed by the idea. So what does this mean? At the centre of the expression of 'post-race' at the level of pedagogy is the creation of a context, which enables racialised subjects to step through and beyond racially constructed subjectivity. However, anyone who has ever attempted this will know that this task is anything but simple or straightforward, and in seeking to understand this level of 'difficulty' the work of Frantz Fanon is critical. In his book *Black Skin White Masks* (1986), and his discussion of the trauma caused by the imposition of racialised identities, Fanon offers an invaluable insight that building an alternative project needs to address both cognitive and affective dimensions. It follows that the transcendence towards a post-race ontology cannot take place without attending to that trauma. Paulo Freire, in his seminal text on critical pedagogy and emancipatory education in his conception of a 'double consciousness' provides an interesting take on the psychological challenge faced by the oppressed more generally who:

... suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. (Freire, 1970:30).

The desire to transcend 'race' evokes the same combination of yearning and resistance, and it is engaging with these dimensions that need to be at the heart of pedagogical strategies whose objective is to allow people to, as Freire says, "*regain their humanity*" (1970:30). In this sense, the idea of 'post race' can act as a heuristic tool, a basis for developing a pedagogy of 'hope' which offers an understanding of the construction of 'race' as essentially a misrecognition of material social relations, but at the same time, creates space for people to see themselves anew outside the real and symbolic violence of racialised categories.

At the heart of such a pedagogy is the desire to promote critical dialogue, reflexivity and political awareness. This approach contrasts with the dominant diversity based approaches, which are often expressed in terms of 'managing difference', 'cultural sensitivity' or a celebration of origins. The main problem with such approaches is that they fail to see the unfinished and hegemonic nature of assertions of all cultural identities and strategies based on the celebrations of origins in particular can be regressive, not least for those people whose 'diversity' falls outside that which is being celebrated. Worst still, in spite of being formally classified as "anti-racist" these strategies can end up re-inscribing the very same racialised subjectivity one is seeking to transcend.

However, it would be naïve to think that teaching about the non-existence and illogicality of 'race', in and of itself, will succeed. Coming from the US in the light of the Civil Rights struggles in the 1960's, there emerged a view that 'race' thinking had polluted the minds of otherwise decent folks, i.e. caused a kind of cognitive dissonance or mental illness (for example the see the earlier work of Judy Katz (2003) on *'White Awareness'*) and that the only solution was to exorcise white people of their distorted sense of natural superiority. Similar programmes used the same logic in developing black studies for the victims of 'race' to rid themselves of an internalised oppression that rendered a feeling of racial inferiority; the work of Frantz Fanon was central to this approach. Of course the problem with such approaches, as implied in the work of W.E.B Du Bios and C L R James, is an overly optimistic belief that 'changing perceptions' alone without attending to the social and economical conditions would be sufficient. Nonetheless, if in a previous period it was deemed important to 'reclaim' a sense of positive blackness' as a bulwark against racialised negative stereotyping, then today the pedagogical challenge is to find ways of declassifying 'race' through articulating a new narrative of 'human sameness' – if you like moving from 'celebrating diversity' to 'celebrating sameness', or what Jason Hill suggests, in his book *'Beyond Blood Identities: Posthumanity in the Twenty-First Century'*, a world in which old 'tribal' markers of community, be they in the form of 'race', ethnicity, religion, language etc. become displaced by a notion of *sociality*, or a unmarked space in which creative social intercourse takes place (Hill, 2009).

Similarly, Martin Appiah in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (2010)* talks about the importance of conversation to the possibility of transcending boundaries of identity, 'be they national, religious or something else' (185). For Appiah conversation is not only a 'literal' act but 'also a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others' (2010:85). In this sense post-race pedagogical strategy needs to be orientated towards nurturing cosmopolitan identities which, as Amartya Sen notes, do not have to be seen as 'eliminating other loyalties' (2010:185) - there is nothing inherently wrong with people being able to identify with their particularities as they are manifested socially. But I would see the post-race element manifested through the way teachers should seek to give students permission, and thereby to develop the confidence, to move between and beyond those categories. Henry Giroux has characterised this process as *"Border Crossing"* (1993). A border in this sense is an inherited enclosed psychic space in which one resides and becoming a 'border-crosser' allows one to articulate a critical distance from aspects of one's inscribed identity/world view. As the metaphor suggests it implies stepping away from one's secure location

but, as Giroux notes, this allows us the opportunity to enter “new spaces in which dominant social relations, ideologies and practices are able to be questioned” (1993:178). Above all, at the ontological level i.e. of self, it requires and enables us to enter a creative imaginary space exploring how life would be freed from the influences of the non-existence of racial difference, of the absolute realisation that, as Dr Martin Luther King envisaged in his ‘I had a dream’ speech where human beings will ‘not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character’ (King, 1963).

Conclusion

Dreaming about a better future for humankind is fraught with dangers. The historical record would suggest that despite our apparent abundance of intelligence, as a human race or species we find it much easier to destroy than to build. Despite our personal beliefs, as a collective we seem to be adept at producing and reproducing systems of exploitation and oppression. Indeed, as John Holloway remarks, ‘today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’ (2010:7). Let me add my emphasis, ‘today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of racism’. Whilst this might reflect a realistic evaluation of how we have managed to make a mess of our precarious world, I believe it also represents a poverty of the imagination, which is uncharacteristic of all black and other oppressed peoples struggles against European oppression. Indeed, black peoples’ survival against the brutality of the oppressor was to never give up hope of a better future which is so powerfully captured by the Martinique poet Aimé Césaire in his poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Return to My Native Land) which he wrote in France in 1938 (Quoted in C.L.R. James, 1984, inside cover).

... For it is not true that the work of man is finished,
That we have nothing more to do in the world,
That we are just parasites in this world,
That it is enough for us to walk in step with the world,
For the work of man is only just beginning and it remains to conquer all,
The violence entrenched in the recess of his passion,
And no race holds a monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of strength, and,
There is a place for all at the Rendezvous of Victory.

In this poem Aimé Césaire offers two profound observations that resonate with the central argument of this paper. First, there is an utter repudiation of the idea that innate human racial differences exist, and that the potential to possess specific human qualities and virtues are unevenly distributed amongst ‘the races’. The second key point is the utopian possibility of a ‘post-racial’ future. Though such poetic thoughts may be removed from everyday material realities, they do speak to the imagination and in this regard, have great relevance for building a post-racial pedagogical project. Indeed, it was these words that inspired C.L.R James to write his last book entitled “*At the Rendezvous of Victory*” (James, 1984) in which, reflecting on struggles of the oppressed, particularly in relation to anti-colonial movements in Africa, he makes a powerful case for people

to reject the false oppressive ideologies born out of a marriage between capitalism, colonialism and slavery and to have 'new visions of themselves, so that they will find new ways to express them and create new ties, new bonds and new understandings' (84). This paper represents one such attempt to develop 'new understanding'. Whilst we continue to remind ourselves and be reminded, often in very painful ways, of the reality of 'race' and racism, we also need to hold onto and nurture an absolute belief that they are neither natural nor inevitable. 'Race' has not been here from the origins of the human race; it is a relatively recent idea and if we believe it has been produced and reproduced by human beings, then we must be open to the possibility that it can be destroyed. In evoking the idea of 'post-race' I simply want to keep open the possibility of a brighter future devoid of this fraudulent concept of 'race'.

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