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Anti-racist social work in a 'post-race society'? Interrogating the amorphous other

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To cite this article: Rajan-Rankin, S. (2015). Anti-racist social work in a 'post-race society'? Interrogating the amorphous 'other'. *Critical and Radical Social Work.* 3(2): 207-220.

Anti-racist social work in a 'post-race society'? Interrogating the amorphous 'other'

Abstract

Anti-racist social work is at a crossroads: while on the one hand, racial binaries such as black/white, us/other and slave/master can be useful political tools to understand institutional racism, current contexts of multiculturalism raise questions about the continued relevance of race as a category for analysis. 'Newer' forms of racialised identities are emerging that need to be incorporated into a broader conceptualisation of non-colour-based race theory. In this article, these contradictions are explicated through a phenomenological study of embodied reflections on race, ethnicity and self-identity among social work students. Frantz Fanon's 'fact of blackness' provides an epistemic guide to this phenomenological study, providing a multi-layered examination of social work students' experiential accounts of their embodied identities, their colour, race, blackness, whiteness and sexuality and what this means for self-identity. Tentative student discourses provide powerful insights into the urgent need for a radical turn in (re)locating culture and race studies in social work curriculum.

Key words post-race • embodiment • anti racist social work

Introduction

This article attempts a critical (re)examination of anti-racist social work theories and practices within social work education in light of newer discourses of 'post-race societies' (Lentin, 2012). The critical and radical turn in social work that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Adams et al, 2002; Okitikpi and Aymer, 2009, Fook, 2012; Kessl and Maurer, 2012) has faced challenges in responding to the rapid changes of multiculturalism and neoliberal ideologies of welfare in modern Britain. Singh (2013: 18) highlights the failure in professional social work to 'evolve models to reflect the shifting discourses of "race" … that is not necessarily built on the black/ white binary'. New(er) representations of racialised identities, such as post-national anti-Semitism (Meer, 2014), 'Jihadi John', the British-born extremist from the Islamic State

(Lavalette, 2013) and, more recently, the Rotherham case of 'street-grooming' and sexual exploitation of white British girls by gangs of Asian men (Orr, 2013), have increased xenophobia and fear of the 'Other' (Bhabha, 2000).

The scale of multiculturalism is rapidly increasing, with population projections suggesting that black and minority ethnic groups will constitute over 20-30% of the total population of the United Kingdom (UK) in 2050 (Sunak and Rajeswaran, 2014). In addition, the numbers of mixed race, White Irish and Gypsy/Traveller people are also increasing and there are worsening outcomes in education and employment (Bhopal, 2011). While recent data from the Ethnic Minority British Election Survey (EMBUS) reported that minority ethnic groups were more likely than white people to be 'fully British', they also reported high rates of social isolation and racial discrimination, especially among Black African groups (Runneymede Trust, 2012). Despite this, institutional racism and racial inequalities are frequently overshadowed by the political preoccupation with the extent to which minority ethnic groups are 'integrated' into *British* society (Penketh, 2000). In 2011, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron famously declared the 'failure of multiculturalism', by refusing funding to Muslim groups that did not uphold 'British values' (Heath, 2012). This muddled approach to multiculturalism conflates a number of different issues: race with ethnicity, oppression with disadvantage, blaming victims instead of tackling the institutional reproduction of oppression. As Ahmad (1990: 46) reminds us: 'Acknowledgement of racism shifts the focus from "disadvantaged Blacks" to Black people being oppressed". Dealing with racism shifts the focus from "helping disadvantaged Blacks" to "tackling oppressors".'

One of the central tasks of critical and anti-racist social work is, then, to expose and draw attention to inequality, oppression and discrimination (Dominelli, 2008; Penketh, 2000; Okitikpi and Aymer, 2009; Thompson, 2012). Within the Professional Capability Framework (PCF), the anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive intent of professional social work is especially identified in PCF domain 3: 'Diversity: to recognize diversity and adopt anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive approaches in your practice' (TCSW, 2014). While the need for an anti-racist and antidiscriminatory social work approach is abundantly evident, the implication of this in day-to-day practice is less straightforward. Anti-discriminatory practice needs a supportive, non-racist environment within which to thrive, and can be easily coopted into other colour-blind, race-neutral agendas (Brah and Hickman, 1999; Okitikpi and Aymer, 2009). In the face of rapid changes to the

composition and social categorisation of race, ethnicity and cultural hybridity, it would be of benefit to (re)examine the extent to which anti-racist social work policy, education and practice are still effective in addressing racial inequalities.

How, then, does anti-racist social work adapt to address the increasingly complex manifestations of race and ethnicity in multicultural and multi-ethnic Britain? To what extent do we actually live in a 'post-race' society, and does that mean race does not matter, or that race as a binary is insufficient to explain problems with multiculturalism? These are some of the core debates that inform this article. In order to fully explore this theoretical proposition, this study presents a phenomenological exploration of social work students' embodied understanding of their race, colour, cultural, ethnicity and liminality, in relation to their reflexive selfhoods and their professional identity-in-the-making.

My epistemic stance is informed by feminist standpoint theory (Wood, 2012), which challenges cultural norms and social ideologies that marginalise particular groups. First, I approach race theory through an embodied self-identity perspective, which draws on multiple forms of identity politics to inform our worldviews, acknowledging that these may in turn occasionally come into conflict with each other. As an Indian woman, I seek what Bhabha (1994) calls the 'stairways of liminality', the hidden spaces of 'in-betweeness' that enable us to belong to numerous social groups at once – the embodiment of 'Us' and the 'Other'. Second, as a social work educator I am seeking to minimise the gap in what Gilroy (1987) calls 'municipal' racism or collective discrimination often experienced by black professionals and service users, linked as they are through a shared discourse of blackness. Interrogating the hierarchy within the academy is a central task in critical and radical social work (Ahmad, 1990; Murray and Aymer, 2009); and I attempt to take a reflective stance in observing the elitist distinction between knowledge generated through theory and knowledge generated through practice. In order to put social work students at the centre of my practice and research, this study provides a phenomenological examination of social work students' perceptions of their racial and cultural identities in relation to their social work role. In this way, students' self-identities, defined in terms of their own biographies (Giddens, 1991), serve as tentative discourses-in-the-making, and inductively shape and influence theoretical understanding of race at a meta level.

This article is structured into six main sections. In the first section, the complex interplay of race, ethnicity and culture and unpacked to

examine a post-race analysis of identity. Newer forms of non-colour based race categories are then explored in the second section. The central arguments around the etymology of blackness and embodiment of difference are explicated in the third section, by drawing particularly on the work of Frantz Fanon and Phillip Roth. In the fourth section, the study methodology is outlined, and the embodied understanding of race is considered using heuristic phenomenology. In the fifth section, the lived experiences of student social workers is presented using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Finally, the findings of the study are discussed along with a critical examination of implications for radical social work education.

Post-race? Ethnicit(ies), culture(s) and multiculturalism

In recent times, especially post 9/11, media attention has shifted from race equality to the failure of multiculturalism in Western capitalistic societies. The 'death of race' arguments emerging from multiculturalism debates suggest that the failure of multiculturalism is caused by an excess of culturally diverse populations in an otherwise white Europe (Gallagher, 2008; Lentin, 2012). The term 'post-race' has been used in numerous ways to denote varying social ideological positions, in some cases to explain away the presence of racial discrimination, while in others to recognise changing contexts (Gilroy, 1998). Lentin (2012: 1270) defines her position as follows:

> [T]he post-racial as I am using the concept, refers to the ways in which by bypassing or denying race as an adequate means of making sense of discrimination we risk ignoring how allied concepts such as culture and diversity have been incorporated into the denial of the significance of racism.

Thus, the evolution of a 'raceless' society does not mean a rejection of racial discrimination, but scepticism that racial discourses of blackness are sufficient to explain the complex pictures of cultural hybridity and ethnic histories that go beyond colour racism (Goldberg, 2006). Parekh (2000) links the rise in multiculturalism with supranationalism and distinguishes between shared cultural histories at a collective level (for example diaspora) and the culturalisation of politics and homogenising all cultures under the artificial umbrella of one unified cultural frame. In so far as multiculturalism is defined outside the realm of whiteness, as a self-declaration of cultural characteristics unifying a community (Hall,

1990), multiculturalism can lead to a deepening understanding of racism, not a denial of the same.

Xeno-racism: Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

Within the post-racist framework, researchers have begun to explore non-colourbased forms of racism, also known as xeno-racism, which is based on ethnicity, religion or cultural bias against a minority group (Fekete, 2013). While xeno-racism still conforms within the etymology of blackness (see above) in the creation of dual consciousness and othering, the characteristics of difference are embodied not on the skin, but in dress, culture, deportment, food etc. Sivanandan (2001: 87) coined the term xeno-racism to describe 'a racism that is not just directed at those with darker skin from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced at poor whites as well, and is therefore passed off as xenophobia, a "natural" fear of strangers'.

Post 9/11, no other group in the world has generated such extreme form of xenoracism than Muslim communities living in the West. Lavalette (2013) examines the 'Prevent agenda' rolled out in Britain after the 7/7 London bombings and the peculiarities of the self-policing expected from non-extremist Muslim people to 'win the hearts and minds' of their communities to stem the tide of extremist indoctrination. The 'other' is hence responsible for policing the extremist elements of their race, in order to prove their 'Britishness' and loyalty to the Crown (it is noteworthy that such similar displays are not required by white citizens). Penketh's (2013) study of second- and third-generation South Asian Muslim women's views about wearing a head scarf, similarly displays the offence and barbarism of the veiling to be within the white Western gaze, not in the wearers of the veil. Mohanty (2000) aptly explores the penetrative depth of the Western gaze in decrying 'dirty, filthy and tainted' anything that departs significantly from white, Christian social customs and practices. In a rare departure from David Cameron's position of being 'tough on non-assimilative Muslims', Conservative MP Baroness Warsi commented:

> The drip-feeding of fear fuels a rising tide of prejudice. So when people get on the tube and see a bearded Muslim, they think 'terrorist', when they hear 'halal' they think 'that sounds like contaminated meat' and when they walk past a women wearing a veil, they think 'that woman's oppressed'. And what's particularly worrying is that this can lead down the slippery slope to violence. (Doward, 2011)

This quotation illustrates the exoticism of the Islamic 'other' and suggests that in the context of globally increasing Islamophobia, Muslim people in Britain are scrutinised with mistrust, suspicion and racial hatred. Such xenophobia is not restricted to those who are not white people. Discourses of blackness as institutional racism, apply also to the anti-Roma campaigns and the social exclusion of White Gypsy/Traveller and White Irish groups. Anti-Semitism, a form of xeno-racism that has received little attention in social work (Lavalette and Penketh, 2013), describes a form of prejudice towards people of the Jewish faith. Thus:

> [A]nti-Semitism is best defined not by an attitude to Jews but by a definition of the 'Jew' … as a 'flexible, tenacious, intelligent, foreign tribe that knows how to bring abstract reality into play' … in short, anti-Semitism is the process of turning Jews into Jews. (Klug, 2003, cited in Meer, 2014: 9)

Racialized encounters can thus act centrally, as social discourses influencing identity formation.

Beyond the 'human stain', embodiment as freedom

Race is essentially an embodied identity as it is 'worn' on the skin. Racism, be it overt or covert forms of discrimination such as 'colour-blindness', is a denial of the tortured past of enslavement, and a rejection of present racial inequality. The very embodiment of race is then used as a vehicle to render invisible the politicised identity of blackness. Du Bois (cited in Meer, 2014: 10) poignantly refers to the alienation that a disembodied reference to race brings: 'a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the others'. Similarly, when Fanon (1952: 109) states 'Dirty Nigger! or Look a Negro!', he is drawing attention to being racially objectified, blackness being made synonymous with 'dirt', 'taint', 'impurity', in opposition to whiteness. Roth (2000) coined the term 'human stain' to describe the inescapability of racial *difference* infecting one's sense of self-identity. Like Macbeth crying 'out, out damned spot', the unwashable sin, the unassailability and permanent belatedness of race (see Fanon below) contaminates the bearer of blackness, in the eyes of the Western (white) gaze. In order to resist white representation of race, hooks (1994, 1999a, 1999b) examines the need to reclaim blackness from the white gaze, by exposing racism in all its forms across and within coloured communities. I extrapolate from hooks that as racial discrimination is levied against the 'coloured body', only an embodied

perspective – one that challenges the 'bodily order' of conformity and transgression (Williams and Bendelow, 1998;) – can lead to freedom.

Methodology

This study involved two stages. First, a theoretical investigation was conducted mapping the contours of race, ethnicity and diversity in relation to various race and post-race theories. Second, a primary data study was engaged in to explore embodied, lived expressions of race as experienced by social work students. The worldviews of trainee social workers are especially important in informing social constructions of race, as they are in the process of 'becoming' (Heidegger, 1962); of integrating their personal selves with their professional selfhoods-in-the-making. Interrogating one's self-identity understood as the self reflexively observed within one's biography (Giddens, 1991), can be a form of radical action in itself (Rajan-Rankin, 2013). An interpretivist tradition (Smith et al, 2009; Miles et al, 2013) was found to be synergetic with the main aims of the qualitative study, which were to:

- understand social work students' experiential accounts of their own embodied identity;
- explicate their embodied experience of their race, culture and identity;
- examine how these embodied representations of racialised subjectivities shaped their self-identity in relation to their personal and professional social work roles.

Merleau-Ponty's (1962: 106) concept of the 'body-subject' is especially appealing in the search for an embodied understanding of race, where 'the body [is] no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it'. Finlay and Gough (2003: 8) elucidate the relationship between embodiment, reflexivity and phenomenology: 'the genre of reflexivity as inter-subjective reflection has grown significantly … [it] focusses on the situated, emergent and negotiated nature of the research encounter … the process this involves is more than reflection – instead a radical self-reflective consciousness [emerges]….'

Smith et al's (2009) guiding framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to guide this study. In keeping with this approach, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a small sample of 10 undergraduate and postgraduate students, lasting between one and a half to two hours. Interview questions examined their notions of self-identity in relation to their self-ascribed understanding of

race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. Ethical approval was granted by the research ethics committee at my institution. Social work students (who were not my tutees) were invited to participate in the study, using a group email that was circulated by their academic tutors, to minimise the possibility of coercion. Interviews were conducted within the university setting and were taped using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim. The sample consisted of eight women and two men, of which five students were on the undergraduate social work programme and five were undertaking a postgraduate social work course. The mean age was 31.2 years, seven students were married parents with children, while two were single and one shared that she was a lesbian and in a civil partnership. This sample profile is consistent with the industry profile for social work education programmes, which have an underrepresentation of male social work students and an over-representation of mature students (Jones, 2009).

Findings and analysis

Smith et al's (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis approach was adopted to make sense of the data. This included various steps such as reading and re-reading transcripts, initial note taking, linguistic coding, explicating meaning and developing narrative commentaries (to tease apart the phenomenon from the verbal account) and deeper conceptual commentaries aimed at accessing intra-psychic meanings of experiences themselves. Emergent themes were then broadly organised and interconnections were encouraged to flourish between and within these themes. In keeping with The College of Social Work's core values to highlight areas of social inequality and oppression and enhance emancipatory outcomes for vulnerable groups, this study represents explicit and implicit discourses around race, ethnicity and identity as described by social work students themselves. In order to protect the identity of the participants, all quotations have been anonymised and delinked from identifiable characteristics of the participants.

Colourism and privileging of whiteness

Earliest recollections of 'knowing' one's own race, for many social work students, came from childhood encounters with colourism, or experiences of same-race discrimination where white skin is privileged.

> 'When I was very young my grandmother used to always differentiate between me and my sister … like she always preferred my sister. She always favoured my sister and said she was smarter, better, brighter, more beautiful, more clever than

> me. And what was never said but was always *there* you know? Was that my sister was fairer than me. She never came right out and said it, but in a million little ways I knew, I just knew … that's why she treated me differently…. Sometimes in the summer after we went swimming, she would bathe us and she would scrub me really hard you know, with a wire brush, like as if she scrubbed hard enough the black would come out.'

> 'I don't know if this is necessarily relevant but in Nigeria we use lightening creams, like, to make our skin lighter? And it's like a black man can be as black as coal but when it comes to the woman he wants, it's always a lightskinned woman.'

This rich and lucid exposition of race and colourism described by social work students speaks of the pain of experiencing racial discrimination within their own communities (Harris, 2008). In the first quotation the student's self-worth is determined in counterpoint to her lighter-skinned, fairer/better/smarter sister, with proximity to whiteness being associated with misplaced racial superiority. The reference to being 'scrubbed as if to get the black out' confirms Fanon's 'fact of blackness' theory of blackness as dirt or taint. Thus, when Fanon (1952: 92) states that 'all this whiteness burns me' he is referring to the insidiousness of race, puncturing the fragile sense of self in relation to the reference point of whiteness. Interestingly, the second quotation relates more to the aesthetic of race in relation to sexuality and gender relations. Thus, blackness is tolerated and even reified as the embodiment of aggressive masculinity, while women bear race as inferior citizens of both blackness *and* gender. As hooks (1999b) observes, the race project is left unfinished if we problematise race without gender, and gender without race.

'White noise?' Perceptions of race among white social work students

Embodied identities of social work students also played a role in shaping their approach to thinking about and talking about race. White social work students shared a particular kind of 'squirming in my seat' discomfort, of being pinned down, when conversations about race emerged in the classroom. Racial guilt was a shared experience while a sense of frustration was also palpable as white students talked about the invisibility of their whiteness and the lack of discourse with which to identify:

> ‘It’s like “white” is used as a weapon you know? Like whenever lecturers start talking about race of anti-discriminatory practice you just see the class cringe a little … like just because I’m white I’m responsible somehow. It’s frustrating because I don’t have the words to talk about *my* feelings, because all they see is white….’

> ‘It’s not that simple, it’s not just black or white. I mean I’m a white woman but that doesn’t mean I’m dominant you know? Like just because I don’t know wear it on my skin doesn’t mean that’s all there is to me.’

> ‘When you are black you see the world in colour, but when you are white you see the world differently and are always carefully because you’re afraid of being called a racist.’

The three quotations above all deal with whiteness in very different ways. While in the first two quotations, students’ voiced their frustration at being ‘pinned down’ by the black gaze (in contrast to the Western white capitalism gaze), they were forced to encounter and problematise their whiteness (see Jeyasingham, 2012). Simultaneously, they articulated the oppressive weight of whiteness bearing down on their skin, unable to think critically outside the confines of the bodily cage, being white, rendering them invisible in a critical race encounter. The third quotation reveals a canny observation about blackness and the natural fear of being labelled as a ‘racist’ for talking about race.

Racism and racial prejudice

Several of the social work students I interviewed shared experiences of racial discrimination while they were undergoing their social work course. These encounters mostly took place in practice placements or in the ‘real world’, where armed with radical consciousness, students examined, perhaps for the first time, what they have always experienced but never articulated – the feeling of being ‘othered’, of being invisible.

> ‘In my first year I had…. Yeah … a kind of discrimination experience. On my shadowing [three-day placement] I was placed with a white practice educator in a homelessness shelter. I don’t know where it went wrong, I truly don’t. I was dressed smart, in slacks, a nice suit, white shirt, black shoes. Professional you know? She just didn’t like me. She took all the students around the agency but just asked me wait in her office with a

> health and safety manual to read. Then she went for lunch and just *left me there!* [emphasis original] She just forgot about me, like I didn't even exist. I don't know if it was race or what … I know there was another black girl there but she was on the MA [Masters] programme and was more confident. She just didn't like *me*
> [emphasis added]. I was left behind, ignored and forgotten.'

This student's story speaks of innocence lost ("every ontology is lost in a colonized and civilized world", Fanon, 1952: 109). Her youth and inexperience were met by censure and rejection in her first shadowing placement. The repeated reference "I don't know where it went wrong, I truly don't" indicates the unresolved conflict of 'not knowing', the uncertainty of racist encounters that leads to questions of their imagined nature and their embodied authentic experience. The student defended her attempt to be 'professional' through her performative presentation of the self in the work environment, through her smart attire. The racist encounter took three distinct forms:

- *rejection* – the practice educator rejected her attempt to 'fit in' as an equal in a professional world in their first encounter;
- *dominance and control* – the student was then punished for her lack of experience, for her blackness, by being detained in an office while other students were taken around the agency;
- *invisibility* – she was now reduced to an inferior racial existence and experienced phenomenological invisibility.

It is important to observe here, that these interpretative comments are not an authoritative account 'proving' racism, but an interrogation of the student's lived experience of what racism felt like *to her*.

Euro-Islam and Islamophobia

Following on from the experiences of direct and covert racial discrimination, some social work students also shared their experiences of Islamophobia at their student placement:

Participant: 'Yes, I have faced racism on this course, racism on my placement. I am British and my husband is Jordanian and I converted to Islam more than 20 years ago. I am a very devout Muslim, I wear the head scarf, say my prayers and go to Mosque. But in my placement my PE [practice educator] … I don't know

… it's like she didn't take me seriously you know … like mine was a Mickey Mouse religion or something….'

Interviewer: 'That's very interesting. What do you mean "Mickey Mouse religion"?'

Participant: 'Well I guess it means, like just because I am white *and* a Muslim, it just somehow doesn't compute for her. And the strange thing is, she makes jokes, all the time. Jokes about women in *hijab*, lewd jokes about what's underneath the *hijab*. I don't know why she thinks it's ok to make these jokes, and in front of me! I'm standing right there! But it's like, she makes light of it, and then I have to laugh too, even though I find it so hurtful….'

This student's experience throws up numerous facets of racism within an indirect race encounter. Her liminal self-identity of being a white Muslim woman was met with perceived ridicule in her social work placement setting. There is a deep-seated insecurity, a fear of not being an authentic being, liminal to both worlds, an 'outsider' to British (Christian society) and to the Muslim community she has converted into. The repetitive reference to 'devoutness' suggests a need to reinforce the Muslim identity (as whiteness is seen as background, not to be problematised). The covert experience of racial discrimination through stereotyping of women in *hijab*, the exoticising and sexualising of the female animal, is couched in humour, making it impossible to counter these racist words, which fall just within the limits of political correctness in the professional encounter.

"Why can't I be British like everyone else?"

The concept of 'mixedness', multicultural identities and liminality also emerged in students' accounts. The following male student's account highlights his utter frustration at not being allowed to be himself (being British was a defiance to all the other forms of being he felt unable to relate to):

> 'You know what really makes me mad? It's that we just don't have the modern words, the modern language to describe what it *means* [points at chest] to be mixed race. You're 'forced' to be

> black or white, but you know what I'm like "get off my back, I'm not black!" My dad's Pakistani, my mum's White British, so what does that make me? Why can't I just be British like everyone else?'

This student was rejecting, not blackness, but the black/white binary that does not accommodate for culturally hybrid self-identity. Being a young second-generation, British-born, Asian Muslim with a mixed race heritage created cultural confusion for the him. His rage ("we just don't have the modern words") stemmed from an inability to define self-identity from the safe confines of cultural homogeneity (being from one race). The 'dualness' of his racial identity, at once being the 'other' and part of 'us', experiencing his blackness once removed through his parent's racial heritage, explains quite clearly why 'Britishness' (Leddy-Owen, 2012) with its focus on national identity is a raceless, colour-neutral, more appealing option.

Race: the silent scream

A common experience of all the social work students was that discussing race and racism in the classroom was an unsettling experience:

> 'I don't know, I just don't know why students in social work don't want to openly talk about race in the classroom. Maybe it's like we are past it now, like it's been fought for already, and it's still relevant, but we just need to talk about it differently you know?'

> 'I really like the concept of whiteness that you have been talking about. Like, yeah … whiteness … maybe there is a discourse to connect to what
> I'm feeling after all.'

> 'It can't just be about race you know, you have to look at the whole person. In my previous college when I came out about being a lesbian, that was the focus of my experience, not being white. But here, because of various [wave's hands in the air] "views" held by my colleagues about gay people, I don't want to come out, and then some lecturers … when they talk about race, they only see me as a white woman, and because of that like I don't understand.'
> 'It makes me really angry, and sad … when we talk about race. I feel all choked up and that makes me angry too. Like why do I

> have to carry it all? Why is it only me who has to be black and then care about race?'

Race becomes a 'silent scream' in the classroom, ever-present, raging on in the background. Social work students, especially from those from minority ethnic backgrounds, are sensitised to it ("'it makes me really angry", "why do I have to carry it all [race]?"), and in many ways their embodiment enables their admission into social work programmes. Yet, the overwhelming experience of race when articulated on a social work course that, above all else, seems to be promoting neoliberal ideas of professionalism (see Rajan-Rankin, 2013, for discussion), renders voiceless and paralysed students who are fearful to share their views in case they are viewed as 'racist', or to report racism for fear of being a trouble-maker or unprofessional. Addressing these barriers to talking about race is essential in the radical struggle for racial freedom. As Ahmad (1990: 47) observes, it is the goal of critical and radical social work to '[e] nd the "conspiracy of silence" about the presence of racism in social work and form alliances with voices heard against oppression to build a collective resource that is visible and speaks in favour of social work empowerment'.

Concluding remarks: anti-racist or multicultural social work education?

This article contains multiple agendas and is burgeoning with the dissent of a thousand voices. In reflection, it probably reads like several articles rolled into one; this is a purposeful accident. The attempt being made is to demonstrate the interlocked, overlapping, contradictory and tumultuous nature of race dialogue without any attempt to tame it. While I could have separated this article into two articles – one re-exploring theories of race and diversity in a post-race world, and another presenting a phenomenological account of social work students' perceptions of race – this would be tantamount, in my mind, to separating theory and practice, and not allowing students' embodied experiences to dance on the same page as classic race theorists, to the point where the boundary blurs with regard to where theory begins and ends. It is to the reader I leave the decision as to whether this articulation has achieved its epistemic intent.

The main findings of this study and recommendations towards the (re)radicalisation of social work education is hence as follows:

- Anti-racist social work education needs to be abreast with rapid changes in a super-diverse, multicultural society, where cultural hybridity and liminality are becoming the norm. The pull of 'post-race' is very seductive; it alludes to an embarrassing problem of racial inequality having been solved through policy mandates and equality legislation. Such arguments can sound very convincing as depicted in the following quotation: '(1) racial mixture and diverse racial ideology will resolve racial problems by transcending race; (2) fluid racial identity is an indication of a form of racial progress that deconstructs the stability of racial categories and brings society closer to a colour-blind utopia' (Henderson, cited in Harris, 2008: 2). However, I would argue that while 'post-race' categories are useful in challenging the black/white binary, they harbour the danger of disconnecting race from anti-racist social work agendas in favour of multicultural social work education. Blackness is political, and in order to challenge institutional racism, race consciousness must always remain at the core of anti-discriminatory social work practice.
- The content of anti-racist social work education with the new Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) must include a core element of blackness, migration and diaspora studies, to render complete the academic and practicebased scrutiny of historical and contemporary manifestations of racism.
- Continued professional development (CPD) must also include a broader complement of race theory and diversity studies to inform and update social work practitioners with the new developments around racial inequalities and ways to adapt their practice within the principles of anti-discriminatory social work practice. This must transcend simply culturally competent social work practice (a neoliberal solution to the multicultural problem) and lead to the creation of politicised spaces of radical resistance to the politics of representation.
- This article presents a novel theoretical proposal of linkages between neoliberal social work and institutional whiteness, which must be further explored. The idea of 'institutional stickiness', too, may provide a useful tool to explore not just equality and diversity policies, but also the racialised and politicised policy context within which these meta-level discourses are being enacted.

To conclude, I reiterate the words of hooks (1994: 6): 'to claim border-crossing, the moving of high and low, cultural hybridity, as the deepest expression within a multicultural democracy means that we must

envision ways such freedom of movement can be experienced by everyone'. Through a critical reading of hooks, I propose another thought for further consideration: that in order to achieve racial freedom, we cannot look for answers within racial inequality; in Lorde's (1984) words, we must forge our own tools and with the master work together to break the master's house (the colonial project). It is only when there is joint ownership of this task by coloniser and the colonised, that new meanings may emerge. Anti-racist social work education must hence look backwards to its radical past, to forge the way forward to a racial consciousness that transcends discourses around 'equality' in a multicultural world.

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