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'Race' and 'post-colonialism': should one come before the other?'

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Abstract

One of the big unsettled analytical questions in race scholarship concerns the relationship between categories of race and categories of post-colonialism. These are often run together or are used interchangeably; sometimes an implicit hierarchy of one over the other is assumed without explicit discussion. In that activity a great deal is enveloped, including a portrayal of race scholarship which is at some variance from how race scholars conceive it. In this paper it is argued that paying attention to a distinction between these two categories, and then trying to get them not only in the 'right order', but also on their own terms, is conceptually fruitful – however messy the outcome may be. Taking the example of whiteness in particular, the paper concludes that neither explanations of 'continuity' – where historical racial or colonial dynamics are reproduced in contemporary environments, nor explanations of 'fuzzy boundaries' – which point to the porous relationships between these categories and the phenomena they seek to describe, are sufficient. What is advocated instead is an approach in which categories of race and postcolonialism are not subsumed into one another, but retain their distinct and explanatory function.

Keywords

Race, post-colonialism, whiteness, categories, history, society, explanation

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This is not the first 'world racial system' we have ever experienced; it will not be the last (Winant, 2000: xiv)

In the case of race, the 'geography' is both external and internal: colonized nations whose economies are necessary appendages for the European metropolis, and subordinated populations within Europe and the Euro-settler states themselves (Tilly, 2012: 61)

Introduction

In a recent contribution in *Ethnic and Racial Studies Review*, Bhatt (2016: 398) observed that 'post-colonial theory...often stands in for academic antiracism in some European and US intellectual production'. This tendency arguably reflects an anti-racist responsiveness amongst post-colonial scholars in settings where explicitly designated race scholarship is missing. It is unclear to me whether the tendency Bhatt describes is similar to the broader observation that race appears to have been traded downwards for sociologies of 'development' or 'global sociology' (as though race were not central to each) (Meer, 2014: 1794); a point too made by Bhattacharyya and Murji (2013: 3–4) who deem race as marginalised to 'an epiphenomenon to class, or subsumed under ethnicity, or collapsed within what, for some, are wider projects such as cosmopolitanism or social justice and human rights'.ⁱⁱ What is probably not in dispute is that the connection of race to post-colonial inquiry also points to something concerning the role of ideas, which presents us with one of the big unsettled analytical questions in race scholarship. Namely: what is the relationship between categories of race and categories of post-colonialism?

The following discussion details how these two are often run together or are used interchangeably; sometimes an implicit hierarchy of one over the other is assumed without explicit discussion. To what extent this

flows from a coherent set of positions amongst those who promulgate one or other or both approaches is unclear to me. This article argues that paying attention to a distinction between these two categories, and then trying to get them in the ‘right order’ and, perhaps more importantly, on their own terms, is a conceptually fruitful – however messy the outcome may be.

Noting the caution from Lentin (2016: 388), that ‘splitting concepts and practices has the deleterious effect of implicitly accepting the notion that race has a conceptual genealogy that is divisible from its effects’, such an activity is faced with obvious hazards. In addition to conceptual evacuation and empirical distortion, as suggested by Lentin, there is also the question of *which* literatures one adopts as illustrative of a respective tradition of inquiry. One part of this danger involves overlooking the internal heterogeneity within a given approach, and another part concerns the multidisciplinary terrain in which both categories find expression.

Fuzzy Boundaries: Framing Race and Post-colonialism

It is difficult to know where to commence a working summary of race and post-colonial scholarship. Beginning with the former, perhaps we can accept as a truism that *ideas* of race can present dynamic categories. That is to say; instead of being permanently fixed across any given society or throughout history, racial categories have corresponded to how ideas have changed across the social and political contexts in which they are found. In his study of what the idea of race has meant for racial categories in the US, Omi (2001: 244) concludes that its expression ‘has been and probably always will be fluid and subject to multiple determinations. Race cannot be seen simply as an objective fact, nor treated as an independent variable.’ Perhaps the simplest way to put this is to say that social scientists tend to be interested in the dynamic and relational properties of race as both a historical idea *and* social category.

The principal interest in this paper is on the *scholarship* of race, and here we might identify three prevailing contemporary clusters. Some scholars may slide across two or more, but of course I am not suggesting this captures the entirety of the field, and indeed (as with any taxonomy)

many scholars may not locate themselves according to it. The first we could characterise as that concerned with the *expansion* of the race concept. This is expressed in different literatures concerned with adding to ‘Atlantocentric’ ideas, or pluralising racial categories more broadly. It includes, amongst other things, ways of taking in anti-Roma discourse (Clarke, 2008), the racialisation of white European migration (Fox et al., 2012), as well as reading antisemitism and Islamophobia through registers of racialization (Meer, 2014b). The second cluster can be characterised as *race by other means*. Here we might include the ways in which notions of race are decanted into ‘values’ (Miah, 2015) or ‘melancholia’ (Gilroy, 2004a), or indeed ‘sovereignty’ (Ware, 2008). Each of these feeds into more familiar and established scholarship charting the relationships between race and nation (Hage, 1998). The third cluster we could describe as seeking *less race*. Here we could include both those who point to the actual declining significance of race in society; those seeking to diminish the significance of race through aspirations for a ‘planetary humanism’ (Gilroy, 2004b), and as well as those who object to the what has been characterised as a ‘growing culture of racial equivalence’ (Song, 2014: 109). Each cluster takes in a combination of analytical, normative-political and methodological concerns.

My contribution to the field of race scholarship has broadly fallen in the first cluster, and is very comfortable with the socio-historical understanding of race elaborated by Omi and Winant (1986: 68–9), something comprising a ‘cluster concept’ – a way of referring to a group of persons who share, and are thereby distinguished by, several properties ‘disjunctively’. Unlike these authors, however, I have suggested that temporally this goes backwards as much as it does forwards. This means that the race concept has an older pedigree than its modern usage may imply. I would like to come back to and develop this, but what is already apparent is that the race concept functions as something more than ‘a mere wrinkle in the ethnic paradigm’ (Winant, 2015: 2182). The race concept is instead fundamental to an understanding power, politics, history and society, because it ‘continues to signify and structure social life not only experientially and locally, but nationally and globally’ (Winant, 2001: 1). In previously published work (Meer, 2008, 2013), I have tried to take my cue from Goldberg’s (1993,

2009) insistence that in addition to comparativist methodologies employed in the study of race and racism, we also require relational methodologies. That is to say that where the former compares and contrasts, the latter also seeks to make connections where there are not symmetries across cases, something that can yield important insights into the common function of racial logics across different social and political landscapes. This may incorporate ‘comparative considerations, where they arise, within its scope’ (Goldberg, 2015: 251), but a relational approach also reveals ‘how state formations or histories, logics of expression and exploitation, are linked, whether casually or symbolically, ideationally or semantically’ (ibid. 255). I have always understood this as both a political as well as methodological activity, for, deciding which concerns to relate to one another is not a neutral endeavour. In the past I have specifically sought to harness the explanatory power of long-established organizing concepts within the study of race and racism, to explore how while ‘critical race theorists busily deconstruct and debunk race concept, racial categories continue to be formed’ (Mobasher 2005: 2). This labour has borne fruit in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia in particular.

How does this correspond to post-colonial scholarship? This is really the question that we explore in the following sections. At this point it is worth registering that post-colonial scholarship also relies *on its own* reading of race. One example sees the race as category, as it is expressed in mainstream British sociology, as being evacuated of criticality and ambition. For example, Bhambra (2016: 961) argues:

For the most part, race and ethnicity have been addressed in sociology as issues of *stratification* (that is, the differential distribution of rewards and resources according to ethnicity) or as issues of *identity* (that is, as expressed in cultural difference and hybridity). While both are, of course, of fundamental importance, they do not necessarily address the underlying processes by which race and ethnic differences are *produced*.

As a corrective, and across an important portfolio of work, Bhambra has tried to revise the parameters of this ‘standard conceptualisation’ through the incorporation post-colonial inquiry (Bhambra, 2007; 2014). Taking up the distinction between the ‘social’ and the ‘system’, she has argued that while for sociology the former is an intellectual terrain that has been receptive to particular critical readings, it has left intact

entrenched conventions that protect ‘core categories of analysis from any reconstruction of what such recognition would entail’ (Bhabra, 2007: 873). While one might point to surface-level reconstruction, therefore, this has not penetrated the depths of our prevailing modes of thought and inquiry. One reason being that ‘social theory elaborated within the confines of Western modernity’ (Venn, 2003: 3) retains that anchorage, not least through a ‘coloniality of method’ that is said to ‘negate’, ‘neutralize’ and ‘sterilise’ non-dominant epistemologies (Ascione, 2016: 320). The objective of this complaint is not to devalue Western social theory. It is instead to facilitate a proper understanding of its relationship to colonialism by placing it in a broader register. As Young (1992: 243) put it some years ago:

European thought since the Renaissance would be unthinkable without impact of colonialism as the history of the world since the Renaissance would be inconceivable without the effects of Europeanization. So it is not an issue of removing colonial thinking from European thought, of purging it... It is rather a question of repositioning European systems of knowledge so as to demonstrate the long history of their operation as the effect of their colonial other, a reversal captured in Fanon’s observation: ‘Europe is literally the creation of the Third World.’ (Ibid.)

In this vein, and as a concept, there is a continuing dialogue between colonialism and post-colonialism. How post-colonial theorists understand the interaction between the two is crucial but by no means straightforward. Post-colonial scholarship spans a number of debates here but principally turns on the interaction between political and epistemological relationships forged, first, during colonialism and observed, second, in the aftermath of decolonisation.

This is why the appellation ‘post’ can be misleading. The challenge that post-colonial inquiry presents is not solely anchored in what happened *after* decolonisation, but instead on the form and content of colonialism, and its subsequent (indeed contemporary) articulations. As Said (1994: 5) argued in relation to the legacy of cultural production, ‘it is difficult to connect these different realms, to show the involvement of culture with expanding empires, to make observations about art that preserve its unique endowments and at the same time map its affiliation, but, I submit, we must attempt this, and set the art in the global, earthly context’.

If we accept however that the race category, as conceived by race scholars, is not only speaking to social stratification in Weberian and now Bourdiesian senses, the pertinent question is to what extent is race scholarship not taking up the challenge set by Bhabra above, and presented by post-colonial inquiry more broadly? While I am doubtful that I can offer any answers here that will go unchallenged, and as partial as this contribution can only be, I think both categories would benefit from a consideration of their interpenetration, namely how they are perhaps forged through and against each other. In what follows I consider some of the ways in which race and post-colonial inquiry have thus been configured in relation to each other, before trying to grasp their distinct and explanatory function.

Historical ordering

The first issue concerns sequencing, namely in what order are race and postcolonial categories used? For example, did a category of race facilitate colonialism, or was colonialism instructive in cultivating a concept of race? The answer to both these questions could satisfactorily be an 'affirmative', in a way that suggests it should not be presented as an either/or. That is probably correct, but what is striking is how little attempt is made to register this tension amongst scholars who bring a post-colonial approach to race, even where a number of post-colonial readings make race the *explanandum* and coloniality the *explanans*. To frame it in these terms borrows from Hempel and Oppenheim (1948: 152) who wanted to use these terms to understand events 'by virtue of the realization of certain specified antecedent conditions'. In this respect, the explanandum ('what is the contemporary provenance of race?') meets the response of the *explanans* ('the activity of colonialism'). Take for example Quijano (2000: 534) for whom the idea of race 'does not have a known history before the colonization of America', since 'the racial axis has a colonial origin and character (ibid. 533). Elsewhere Feagin (2014: 8) argues that 'European colonialism and imperialism ... reached much of the globe and *created a global racial order*, which has had severe consequences for the world's peoples for centuries' (emphasis added). Or the argument proposed by Bonilla-Silva (2015: 81) that 'racial theory should have been rooted in the experiences of the first peoples who experienced racialization [by which is meant colonisation] ... We would be in a better explanatory position today to

understand not only race in the world system, but even developments in the United States and Europe, if we were to go back and ... 'begin at the beginning'. For Mignolo (2010: 24) too, 'the racial classificatory logic' is anchored in a colonial 'historical foundation [that] can be traced back to the end of the fifteenth century in Spain'. Or that 'Racism, as we sense it today, was the result of...conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge' (Mignolo, 2009: 19).ⁱⁱⁱ

What these readings share in common is not only that coloniality is the crucible of race, but also that the race concept is most substantively forged in modernity, or in Gilroy's (2004: 56) terms: 'modernity transformed the ways "race" was understood and acted upon'. There are a number of literatures with which might develop this point. Paul Gilroy is an interesting example as he is widely deemed a scholar of both race and of post-colonial inquiry. There are several places in his repertoire where this might be taken up. Perhaps strangely, his majestic *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) does not make this an explicit focus, concentrating specifically on the ways in which 'the social and political subordination of blacks and other non-European peoples does not generally feature in debates about...modernity'. That book then is one - very compelling - corrective to the oversight. It is instead elsewhere in *Between Camps* (2004) where Gilroy's fullest elaboration of the points raised above arguably come through. This includes his reading that:

Although it is not acknowledged as often as it should be, the close connection between "race" and modernity can be viewed with a special clarity if we allow our understanding of modernity to travel, to move with the workings of the great imperial systems (Gilroy, 2004: 58)

So there is what we can call an elective affinity between empire, race and modernity. Incidentally, this trafficking of the race concept across modernity and colonialism was a tendency shared by Foucault (1978: 149), especially his reading of how the race concept came to take a distinctly 'modern' form somewhat later, 'in the second half of the nineteenth century' when race 'took shape at this point (racism in its modern, "biologizing" statist form)'.

My response to this is not to deny that modernity has a particular formulation of race, but simply to suggest this is a formulation that is

underwritten and made possible by pre-modern characteristics that are pulled through, and that without these the modernist conception of race cannot hold. Modernity in this sense offers ‘one of many reorganisations and rearticulations of the meaning of race that have occurred throughout the centuries’ (Winant, 2001: 21). All that needs to be shown here is that race bears pre-modern antecedents. What might these resemble?

Christian symbolism, for example, long portrayed ‘white’ as synonymous with purity, which in turn was contrasted with ‘black’ impurity, in a way that suggests it is insufficient to accept the prevailing view that while precise content to race was at best ambiguous, it was certainly distinct to how it later became known. By the time the Atlantic slave trade was well under way, Christian theologians would seek religious justification from the Bible for hierarchies between whiteness and blackness, and mapped onto these colonised populations. As Garner (2011: 13) summarises, this they did so by pointing to the story of Canaan (Son of Ham) in the Book of Genesis (9:18–27), which told of a punishment to Canaan of servitude and blackness. There are multiple examples to sustain this view and both Hund (2006) and Isaac (2004) dwell on this at some length (though they disagree on the geographical provenance of race). If one shares the view that modernist formulations of race are in part assembled from pre-modern components, ‘the neatness of the present periodization will have to be given up’, and as ‘a corollary, the case for making race a subject of inquiry across various disciplines would be greatly strengthened and made more urgent’ (Mills, 2012: 61).

Perhaps broader issue compels us to register that there is a longstanding methodological (and indeed philosophical) question as to whether ‘the possession of a concept can predate the possession of a corresponding word’ (Thomas, 2010: 1739). Without seeking to resolve this, if one is persuaded that language is both constitutive *and* reflective, we can see evidence of racialisation prior to the creation of racial categories through plantation slavery and Enlightenment informed colonial encounters from the sixteenth century. Indeed, when Islam is first encountered in Europe, ‘the Prophet Mohammed (with his Jewish parents and Nestorian/heretical teacher)’ is embodied as a dark-skinned, satanic menace (Matar, 2009: 217).

The race concept then has long been saturated with cultural portrayals of religious minorities too, further challenging the Atlantocentric view of the race concept, in so far as European religious minorities too were endowed with characteristics that offered ‘reassurance that their difference could be easily identified by Christians’ (Thomas, 2010: 1747). There is I suppose an analogous point that could be made about the ways other imperial configurations of ideas of insider and outsider required race to become a colonial activity. The very idea of citizenship, for example, has contained, since its earliest formulations, a dialectical tension between notions of inclusion and exclusion, for the citizenship of certain types of people implies the non-citizenship of others. This is to say that citizenship is a relational idea that is identified in as much by what it is not as by that which it is. My contention would be that in a colonial context who is in and who is not only makes sense through a prior notion of race.

Knowledge Production

If modernity is one touchstone for the postcolonial reading of race, another is the topic of knowledge production. Bhabra (2013), for example, has argued that ‘race is not only a field of study but something that is at issue in the fundamental structure of social knowledge(s)’ (quoted in Meer and Nayak, 2013: NP6). For Gilroy (2004: 58) too the very *constituting* of race, borrowing from Said’s statement about orientalism, is only made possible through ‘modern human sciences, particularly anthropology, geography and philosophy, [which] undertook elaborate work in order to make the idea of “race” as epistemologically correct.’ It strikes me that that there are two activities in these descriptions. One concerns the form of imperial knowledge production, and the other its specific content. To understand the former, we might ask: how could a small island in the North Sea have achieved such an expansive imperial reign? The answer necessarily requires more than an audit of its military, especially naval, capacities, and the brutality which with this was routinely wielded.

A better explanation rests in how the British Empire *administered* its rule through knowledge, representation, and politics. How postcolonial theorists understand this interaction is crucial. One influential elaboration is Viswanathan’s (1995) *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study*

and the British Rule in India, and which proposes that the teaching of English literature in colonial India facilitated a type of social order in which the objectives of rule were obscured. A chief illustration was Whig MP Thomas Babington Macaulay's famous 'Minute of 1835', which argued for the common teaching of English in British India to cultivate an intermediary class between Indian colonial subjects and their British rulers:

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia, communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.^{iv}

At this juncture what seems worth reminding ourselves of are the ways that postcolonial studies has its own profound fissures in so far as it relies on a cluster of 'retrospectively ordered' (Bhambra, 2015: 128) scholarship. This, following Bhambra, might be contrasted with the 'more planned endeavour' (ibid. 129) of the kinds of decolonial approaches that I have presented above as belonging to post-colonial traditions broadly conceived. Perhaps in this respect the post-colonial and de-colonial might be characterised as alternating across deconstructive-reconstructive poles. Viswanathan's (1995: 436) contribution might be of the deconstructive kind, in trying to render visible how 'texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance. Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour served a valuable purpose in that it removed him from the plane of ongoing colonialist activity' (ibid).

I think this is compelling analysis, but I share with Hesse (2007) and Lentin (2015: 1402) the view that in such discussion race is 'buried alive' and 'denied its place as fundamental for a complete understanding of coloniality.' It overlooks, for example, how the race concept is furnished

with equivalent critiques of knowledge production. Take Winant's (2015: 2177) insistence that: 'nascent social science disciplines [were] core components of running the empires and managing the natives, the slavocracies, and the depredations fundamental to the rise of Europe and the development of the USA, but they were also vital explicators and rationalizers of these systems'. Is this a vindication that the race concept too is oriented to the challenge that post-colonial scholarship sets itself?

Put another way, scholars of the race concept are acutely aware of the relationship between it and colonial administration and indeed annihilation. They too want to emphasise how the race concept 'arrived in the present only through a profound gestation, a genealogy that eventually embraced the entire modern world' (Winant, 2000: 19). For example, if we return to the second of the issues enveloped in Gilroy's earlier statement about the constituting of race, we might turn to Walton and Caliendo (2011: 3) who remind us of how in 1684 François Bernier, a French scientist, identified four groups of humans as 'Far Easterners', 'Europeans', 'blacks' and 'Lapps' and in 1775 five types of races were put forward by the German 'physiologist' Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. These comprised 'Caucasians', 'Mongolians', 'Malayans', 'Negroids' and 'Americans'. The discursive features of this knowledge production have not gone unnoticed. Ritter (2012: 105), for example, notes how Blumenbach 'relied on travelogues and existing classification of nature such as Linnaeus' *systema nature*, the starting point of zoological nomenclature'. Race scholars have long catalogued how some of the most influential activity under colonial administrations combined prevailing science with a revisionist theology, and how this mixture found expression in the work of Robert Knox's (1850) *Races of Men* and Comte Author de Gobineau's (1853) *Essay on the Inequality of Men*. Others from this period, such as Pieter Camper and Franz Joseph Gall, measured facial angles as indications of what they perceived to be 'stature', 'beauty' and 'intelligence'. Such works drew on a longer genealogy to reflect and constitute a mid-nineteenth-century concept of race that made four truth claims which underwrote colonial rationales, providing the bedrock for domination and annihilation.

First, both the physical appearance and social behaviour of individuals was an unalterable expression of biological type. So race combined two categories which might describe both your appearance and your

character, to serve as your social identity. Second, cultural variation was determined by differences in biological type, the former reducible to the latter. Third, that biological variation was the origin of conflict between individuals and nations, both in terms of within societies but also what we would today understand as international relations. Fourth, races were endowed with different capacities according to a hierarchy, which meant some such were inherently superior to others.

These then facilitated ‘crucial relationships’ in the ‘making of new forms of *empire* and *nation*; the organisation of new forms of *capital* and *labour*; and the articulation of new concepts of *culture* and *identity*’ (Winant, 2001: 21). So the point is that critical race scholarship has not demurred from charting the ways this discourse informed and provided intellectual justification for the scramble for Africa and other colonial domination and exploitation by European powers.^v

I take seriously however the implication of Lentin’s (2016: 386) argument that it is ‘wholly insufficient to draw broad conclusions about how race was interpreted in, say France or Britain by, for example, making wholesale comparisons between French and British models of colonialism or immigration’. So the issue here is that this needs to be about social processes. One of the ways we can bring this out is through the study of whiteness. My argument here is that race allows us to render whiteness visible as something patterned by a variety of embodied hierarchies, but in ways that do not solely rely on the explanatory function of grand sweeps of history. This does not mean uncoupling whiteness from race writ large. On the contrary, it is to get a sense of how that manifests itself in contemporary social processes.

Whiteness and social processes

The study of whiteness is a relatively recent area of scholarship, even though many of the questions it addresses are inherently intertwined with issues of race and post colonialism (Meer and Nayak, 2013). Perhaps peculiarly, whiteness sits at an intersection between historical privilege and identity, something that has a contemporary dynamic but which is not universally shared in (or can be distant to) how many white people experience their identities. As Frankenberg (2001: 76) puts it ‘whiteness as a site of privilege is not absolute but rather cross-cut by a

range of other axes of relative advantage and subordination; these do not erase or render irrelevant race privilege, but rather inflect or modify it’.

In thinking about whiteness there is often a tension between its study from (i) contexts marked by historical segregation (e.g. the US and South Africa), (ii) where whiteness has either functioned (at least formally) as a repository of white majority conceptions of the given identity of societies (Hage, 1998; Hewitt, 2005), or (iii) has ordered social relations in occupied colonial states (Meer and Nayak, 2013). What each reading shares in common is that while whiteness was once ‘seen as both invisible and normative, as being a state of ‘racelessness’” (Rhodes, 2013: 52), this is no longer the case. Yet what this means and how it falls, I would suggest, is not best studied through a post-colonial category, or at least requires race scholarship to forge the analytical path.

This does not mean marginalising the capacity of post-colonial scholarship to enrich this exercise, including the ways in which the history of whiteness also serves as ‘a geography’ of the West (Bonnett, 2008: 18.), in precisely the kind of ways post-colonial scholars attest. But it does mean grasping the ways in which ‘the history of whiteness is one of transitions and changes’ (ibid). This is especially pertinent to the story of how the Irish in the UK or the Italians in the US became white; perhaps more complicated is the story of Jewish minorities, as Jacobson (2009: 306) argues:

‘Are Jews white?’ asks Sander Gilman. [...] Given the shades of meaning attaching to various racial classifications, given the nuances involved as whiteness slips off toward Semitic or Hebrew and back again toward Caucasian, the question is not *are* they white, nor even how white are they, but how they been both white and Other.

In his account Bonnet (2008) excavates an ‘ethno-cultural repertoire’ of whiteness, and how this is given particular content by writers who anxiously debated the ‘decline’ of white dominance (ibid.: 23). Amongst others, Bonnett (2008) identifies Benjamin Kidd’s *Social Evolution* (1894) and *Principles of Western Civilisation* (1902), each of which prefigure the current theories of *Eurabia* and European decline (Meer, 2012). Of course Kidd was writing at a time when the British Empire reigned over nearly a quarter of planet’s landmass (and nearly five hundred million people), and other European powers exploited the

people and territories they they had taken. Nonetheless, pointing to the thesis of Charles Pearson in particular, Bonnett (2008: 18) describes some recurring features in this perception of decline:

Pearson's principle explanation of why white expansion was at an end and white supremacy in retreat rests on demographics (notably Chinese and African fertility), geographical determinism (the unsuitability of the 'wet tropics' for white settlement) and the deleterious consequences of urbanisation on human 'character'. Moreover, and crucially the economic ascendancy of those who Inge, following Pearson, was later to term 'the cheaper races' (Inge 1922, 27), meant the white 'will be driven from every neutral market and forced to confine himself within his own' (Pearson, 1894: 137).

There is much here which spans several presumed features of culture and civilisation (intertwined in biology and environment), but which is principally underwritten by the ways in which whiteness served as a form of substantive rationality that fashioned geopolitics in its own image. Empire and colonialism are thus understood as natural states of international relations and indicative of human progress.

Amongst writers of the day, challenges to this hegemony (and related geo-political formations) must have raised some profound existential concerns. Such concerns were certainly prompted by the Japanese naval annihilation of the Russian fleet in 1904, where 'for the first time since the Middle Ages, a non-European country had vanquished a European power in a major war' (Mishra, 2012: 1). What is especially interesting is that this violent disruption occurred just at the moment the transaction (a notion we will return to) between whiteness and the West had been taking place, but in a manner 'in which the mass of white people are treated with suspicion' (Bonnett, 2008: 20).

This seeming paradox is explained by an internal racial hierarchy that drew upon notions of both race and class and informed what would later become familiar tropes of social Darwinism and eugenicist thinking. This tension, 'of asserting both white solidarity and class elitism was resolved, in part, by asserting that the 'best stock' of the working class had long since climbed upwards' (ibid.: 21), and which continued to feed into parallel debates about culture and political economy (McDermott, 2006). The especially relevant implications of the genealogy for our

discussion in that '[w]hilst "Westerner" can and does sometimes operate as a substitute term for "white", it also operates within new landscapes of power and discrimination that have new and often fragile relationships with the increasingly widely repudiated language of race' (Bonnett, 2008: 18).

In a competing reading, meanwhile, Virdee (2014) has charted the ways in which whiteness during the same period became democratized, not least through the expansion of social democratic politics on which pivots a historical seesaw of inclusion and exclusion. It is a dramatic and compelling account in so far as '[e]ach time the boundary of the nation was extended to encompass ever more members of the working class, it was accompanied and legitimized through the further racialization of nationalism that prevented another more recently arrived group from being included' (Virdee, 2014, 5). In his account race and whiteness were 'constitutive in the making, unmaking and remaking of the working class in England across two centuries' (Virdee 2014: 5–6). As such, and especially in the organization of social and political life, 'there were historical moments when the working class suppressed such expressions of racism, and on occasion, actively rejected it' (ibid.). Such is the nature of racialization: a juddering movement of the rejection of one group and the incorporation of another (or later indeed the same group), and which can be quite consistent with intellectual and popular logics of racializing.

For Winant (1997: 76) two features of contemporary whiteness nonetheless remain, and which turn on questions of supremacy and privilege:

[M]onolithic white supremacy is over, yet in a more concealed way, white power and privilege live on ... Whites are no longer the official "ruling race" yet they still enjoy many of the privileges from the time when they were.

In thinking about these we need to focus on two slightly different frames. By supremacy what is meant is dominance, explicitly as coercion but also implicitly through kinds of prevailing consensus amongst white majority society, what Dyer (1988: 44) once termed as 'seeming not to be anything in particular'. This is less visible than the ways in which once racially segregated societies continue to operate racial zones even while there is no formal policy to support it. Obvious examples are post-Apartheid South Africa and post-Segregation southern states in the US,

where racial categories are keenly related to the exercise of power. Yet there are also less obvious examples found in every liberal-democratic European Union state, manifested in the reluctance of visible minorities to move or live outside of urban centres that are often considered much safer than non-urban conurbations (Neal, 2009). This is a different kind of white dominance to that of explicitly ‘white nationalist’ movements such as the Klu Klux Klan in the US, though of course far right-wing parties in Europe often form part of the political mainstream and may also be in governing coalitions.

White supremacy might be easier to name than the ways in which whiteness serves as what Twine and Gallagher (2008: 8) describe as a ‘public and psychological wage’, and what others have termed a ‘knapsack’ (McIntosh, 1988) or ‘possessive investment’ (Lipsitz, 1998). Each of these refer to a kind of capital, and are illustrated in what Duster (2001: 114–15) elaborates as ‘deeply embedded in the routine structures of economic and political life. From ordinary service at Denny’s restaurants, to far greater access to bank loans to simple *police-event-free* driving – all these things have come unreflectively with the territory of being white’. Whiteness here is a type of habitus and the norm against which others are judged, in which ‘culture and ideology constantly re-cloak whiteness as a normative identity’ (ibid.: 12). Scholars and intellectuals have not stood outside these conventions, however, for

Throughout much of the twentieth-century mainstream, white social scientists did not focus on the institutions that created, reproduced and normalized white supremacy. The focus that guided whites in the academy primarily concerned itself with the pathology of racist individuals rather than the structural forces that produced racist social systems. (Twine and Gallagher, 2008: 10)

One of the sociological implications of this is that there is a documented tendency amongst ‘ethnically ambiguous’ minorities to seek the material and symbolic rewards of whiteness by positioning themselves as white in such things as applications for education employment, and other training (Warren and Twine, 1997; Lee, 2001). This is evident, argue Twine and Gallagher (2008: 14), in how ‘whiteness is continuing to expand in the United States, and that it continues to incorporate ethnics of multiracial, Asian, Mexican and other Latinos of non-European heritage’.

It is not clear to me how these tendencies can be sufficiently explained through a post-colonial category unless it is anchored in an approach that *begins* with an account of racial processes. This includes a wide front of messy sociological realities. For example much of the discussion of whiteness has attributed a conscious or unwitting white dominance in a way that under-recognises how '[t]he economic and psychological wages of whiteness may be more meagre (and thus more precious) the lower down the social hierarchy the white subject is located' (Garner, 2006: 262). In opening up these readings from a European perspective, Nayak's (2003a and 2003b) research has utilised ethnographic methods in post-industrial settings in order to explore how whiteness intersects with class and masculinities, and so is negotiated in ways that takes on 'multiple and contingent' meanings (2003a: 319). This is especially evident in terms of how 'young people inhabit white ethnicities to different degrees and with varying consequences' (ibid.) not least because 'whiteness is not simply constituted in relation to blackness, but is also fashioned *through and against other versions of whiteness*' (ibid.: 320, emphasis added).^{vi} What this emphasises is that whiteness needs to be understood as more than supremacy, privilege and capital; it also needs to be understood as a sociological identity that can be intersectional and negotiated, and so is curated and sustained by much more than imperial legacies.

Conclusion

In a recent symposium on race and ethnicity, Winant (2015: 2176) highlighted what he saw as 'an inauspicious anti-political trend emerging in the symposium, and perhaps in the *ERS* journalplex'. Given the number of references to race scholarship from *ERS* cited to the contrary in this paper, I am not sure this is the case. What I feel is observable across a number of academic outlets are the ways in which race concerns 'have metabolized into the twin projects of diaspora identity and something called *post-/de-/colonial/-sim/-ity*' (Bhatt, 2016: 398). That is to say that race scholarship on its own terms is missing. Is this a problem? Yes, in so far as this is the face of, or speaks for race, not least, as I have suggested, since the portrayal of race scholarship can be at some variance from how race scholars conceive it.

If indeed ‘political strategies are encoded within ... academic debates’ (Solomos and Back, 1994: 143), then I think there is at least some virtue in getting a better handle on the analytical issues at stake here. Paying attention to a distinction between the categories of post colonialism and race, and then trying to get them not only in the ‘right order’, but also on their own terms, is conceptually fruitful – however messy the outcome may be. Taking the example of whiteness in particular, it is argued that that neither explanations of ‘continuity’ – where historical racial or colonial dynamics are reproduced in contemporary environments, nor explanations of ‘fuzzy boundaries’ – which point to the porous relationships between these categories and phenomena they seek to describe, are sufficient. What is advocated instead is an approach in which racial and postcolonial categories are not subsumed into one another.

When, as I have suggested, post-colonial scholarship reduces race to affect or experiential dimensions, it also reduces its role in our understanding of origins and reproductions. As the case study of whiteness illustrates, there are several dimension that are either overlooked out flattened out in a postcolonial reading alone. This is not to deny a productive tension between categories of race and post-colonialism, on the contrary, but instead to also to register the importance of their distinctive explanatory functions too.

ⁱ I am very grateful to Claire Alexander, Alana Lentin, Karim Murji, John Solomos, Satnam Virdee, Aaron Winter and the Sociology Theory Group at Edinburgh University for helpful comments and conversations on an earlier version.

ⁱⁱ For a sustained elaboration of this see point Claire Alexander and Anoop Nayak’s (2016) plenary address to British Sociological Association Conference: <https://vimeo.com/176452879>

ⁱⁱⁱ I suppose this is preferable to the strange statement from Howe (2002: 28) to introductory readers that: ‘Just as not all racism was colonial, not all colonialism [was] racially defined...’.

^{iv} Minute by the Honourable T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835. Available here: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/oogenerallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html Viewed 26 June 2014

^v On this point at least Gilroy (2006: 5) would agree with me when he elaborates that one of the functions of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ is the way that it: ‘blinds us to the connections between race-thinking and the white supremacism that legitimized colonial endeavour, so much so that we fail to notice that racism is a problem until

the next tragic death or inflammatory eruption shakes us temporarily out of our complacency’.

^{vi} Nayak illustrates this by describing three different sub-cultures of working-class young boys.

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