Does Whiteness Need Dismantling?

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Answer

• YES!!!
• Now let’s go get some early tea!
Killjoy Longer Answer

• Begs an earlier question -> Does whiteness exist?
• And if so, does it matter?
• This conference is about Identity, so...
• How many people here identify ‘being white’ as part of their identity?
• <Counts>
• Having a choice about this is nice.
• Not many black people can exercise the same sort of choice.
1. What is Whiteness?

- Enduring social construction (colonial) with no biological reality around ‘race’
- White as the ‘unmarked’ state – the default, i.e. ‘NORMAL.’
- Shades of fluid whiteness, e.g. Jewish, etc., ethnic Chinese in SA ‘coloured’ Taiwanese – ‘honorary whites’ in 70’s/80’s (bringing money!)
- Invisible White tacit privilege (head start and systematic advantages)
- Whiteness as one position, but with *power* given normative dominance and privilege from history of (colonial) exploitation.
- If someone says they don’t see colour, tell them to see an optician – and if it’s true, they should just get red and green people mixed up!
So Where does Whiteness Come From?

• **The History of Whiteness** (Painter, 2011)
• Idea of ‘race’ is not just a matter of biology but also includes "concepts of labour, gender, class, and images of personal beauty"
• Whiteness defined in opposition to Blackness (the conquered, subjugated and hence ‘inferior Other’)
• Stems from the ‘colonial project’, in sanitised white-speak.
• Slavery can only be justified via dehumanisation.
• Strengthened by neo-Darwinian theories of biological ‘difference’
• Whiteness mutates and co-opts whenever needed, to strengthen base (e.g. USA expansion of definitions; divide and rule class racism).
Why Do We Need to Talk About It?

• The unspoken reinforces the status quo!
• Important to reflect on our difference and whiteness, including any own experiences of discrimination/prejudice
• White as intrinsically more valuable – an *enduring* narrative!
• Black = less valuable & can be treated as such & used to generate more White wealth
• Apartheid & Capital – Racism embedded in capitalist structures, e.g. cheap labour
• Anyone living in SA during apartheid – Whiteness & Male Patriarchy too. (Trump Too?)
• So we acknowledge intersectionality and multiple identity markers impacting, e.g. Class, gender, sexuality, disability etc.
An Extremely Brief History of Racism (Richards, 2012)

• Crusades & European colonisation of world – White ‘superiority’ justifies conquest/exploitation <linked to emerging capitalism, i.e. profit over ‘lesser beings’ – people reduced to economic units to exploit/slave-trades)
• Racism therefore linked to socio-economic conditions (White > Other)
• Construction of ‘scientific’ support now discredited (eugenics) ->
• Race does not exist (we are all humans from Africa), but despite this...
• Racism DOES continue, however!
• Insider/Outsider (Us-Them) and not just White/Black; but why?
• To protect hegemonic interests by excluding others and avoiding equity of access.
• Structural/Systemic and therefore not just individual (unconscious) ‘prejudice’!
• UCT, 2015...Libraries #Rhodes Must Fall -> Oxford University (Decolonisation)
Legal Realities of Whiteness

• Up until 1990, White was a legally enforced category in South Africa.
• White => Asiatic/Indian => Coloured = > ‘Natives’/Bantu/Black
• (Have to) Fill in your Rasse/ Race: W  I  C  B
• My sister would scrawl; HUMAN
• But there was little more powerful than petty white bureaucrats in old SA
• At the end of the year there was annual accounting around race reclassifications – <neat boxes above broken and spilled into each other>
• 315 Coloureds became Black, 3 Blacks became White; 151 Indians became Coloured, 23 Whites became...
• Wild-Game accounting parody: 15 giraffes became zebras, 111 meerkats became porcupines, etc, etc...?
But Why? From 1950 Population Act

• Asiatic means, a person whose parents are, or were members of a race or tribe whose national or ethnical home is Asia, and shall include a person partly of Asiatic origin living as a Asiatic family, but shall not include any Jew, Syrian or Cape Malay;

• Bantu means a person, both of whose parents are or were members of an aboriginal tribe of Africa, and shall include a person of mixed race living as a member of the ‘Bantu’ community, tribe, kraal or location, but shall not include any Bushman, Griqua, Hottentot or Koranna;

• Coloured means any person who is not a white person, Asiatic, Bantu or Cape Malay as defined, and shall include Bushmen, Griqua, Hottentot or Koranna; and

• A white person means a person both of whose parents are or were members of a race whose national to ethnical home is Europe, and shall include any Jew, Syrian or other person who is in appearance obviously a white person unless and until contrary is proven.
Always Nuances: Whiteness Has ‘Shades’

• Until ‘contrary is proven?’ - > if possible to do so, must be ‘degrees’ of whiteness, surely, i.e. some are more ‘white’ than others??

• Who polices the boundaries?

• Dual heritage/mixed ‘race’ and ‘passing’ for white <Split families in SA>

• Which kinds of ‘white’ are more ‘acceptable’? <Class; ethnicity etc.>

• Example on Stratford Train.

• White resistance to apartheid was strongly over-represented by people from the Jewish communities, e.g. Joe Slovo, Dennis Goldberg, Ray Alexander, Ruth First...<African commemorative stamps> Why?
Again, Why?

• The whole absurd edifice was to enshrine white dominance and access to resources, by keeping a cheap underclass – Race/Capital

• Other white western systems are less crude (and more cunning) about keeping whiteness invisible, ‘the unmarked (privileged) norm’.

• Again, the (racist) system pays: <although Chinese growth may change this list from 2016/17>:
  
  • Since 2015, richest 1 percent owns more than the rest
  • Eight men own same amount of wealth as poorest half of world
  • Ten biggest companies outweigh revenues of 180 countries combined
  • Nine of ten richest people in world are white men. (DiAngelo, 2018).
Whiteness and the R Word

• Racism – Direct/Indirect & Conscious/Unconscious
• So You CAN be ‘racist’ without meaning to be.
• Why and how?
• By the casual, unthinking degradation of marginalized groups - brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership
• Prejudicial comments are often not planned or even realized as such but emanate from an (unacknowledged) position of assumed superiority
• Implicit Association Tests may ‘diagnose’ but don’t ‘treat’
What Can We Do About This?

• Thursday 10.30 am Symposium: 1467 Symposium : Race/Racism
• Nimisha Patel on ‘50 Ways to Leave your...
• Racism’ (see References).
• Disrupt ‘white spaces’ if needed – educate, challenge, don’t collude.
• Will be uncomfortable, may lose ‘friends’ etc.
• A cost is usually involved, for doing what is required. i.e. being fair and just.
• Given white men are dominant, intersectional joined up thinking needed – allies to challenge White Patriarchal Capitalism?
• There are always alternatives!
• The Company Car...
Stretch Your Boundaries

• Go out of your comfort zone, if you find you are in almost exclusive white zones, as racism feeds on stereotypes – avoid ‘white flight’
• ‘Decolonise Your Mind’ #RMF (Rhodes Must Fall)
• And remember, while racist institutions exist, we can never truly be free from racism, as we will keep (inadvertently) ‘breathing’ it in, so stay aware, alert and open to promptings/teaching, from inside and out.
• The ‘Job’ of Disrupting Whiteness is a Life-Long One. Recent example:
  • Replacing Peter Parker as Spider-Man!!??
  • There can be only ONE Spider-Man. Umm, okay, yes, so he’s white, but...
• Go See...
MILES MORALES:
My new HERO!
‘Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse’
A ‘black’ Spider-Man!
So How Do I Identify?

- Aotearoa New Zealand – 2 years in CAMHS ‘poor area’ = ++ Maori/PI
- Treaty of Waitangi – Bay of Islands, and Maori accounts of...
- The arrival of the ‘Other,’ the Pakeha, the white goblins...
- As a white man, I am Other to the majority of the world, I am...
- A white goblin from Africa, or an African Pakeha, but...
- Plenty of white privilege got me here too!
- Or, if you go see the new Spider-Man movie, you will see we are all wonderful Spider-People/Heroes.
- Let’s take on The Kingpins of Whiteness!
The Whiteness Project
References (TBC)