

Race, Racism, and Empire: Reflections on Canada

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THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* SEEKS TO INSPIRE CROSS-BORDER DIALOGUES between academics and activists on the ways “race,” racism, and empire are being theorized and experienced on the ground. In particular, we would like to focus attention on the unique manner in which race, racism, and empire are articulated in the Canadian context. Canada provides an interesting site for investigations on race, racism, and empire. On the one hand, it has a long history of indigenous colonization, white settlement policies, settlement of people of color through racialized immigration policies, participation in free-trade regimes, and in British and U.S. imperialist agendas. On the other hand, Canada is located in a peripheral location within Western hegemony and is characterized in national mythology as a nation innocent of racism. In the postwar period, state policies of multiculturalism have represented Canada as a welcoming haven for immigrants and refugees, while in reality these policies worked to create structures that kept new Canadians of color in a marginal social, political, cultural, and economic relationship to Canada. Internationally, Canada is often constructed as a “peacekeeping nation” that is outside larger imperialist agendas. Such national mythologies erase the history of colonization, slavery, and discriminatory immigration legislation.

In the past decade, many critical race scholars have argued that local and national articulations of “race” and racism are tied to larger transnational projects of colonialism, imperialism, and empire (see, for example, Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995; Grewal and Caplan, 2002). In this special issue, we have asked scholars to examine how Canadian analyses of race and racism have been, and continue to be, located in national and transnational discourses of “race” and racism. In particular, we have turned our attention to three salient themes in Canadian critical race scholarship: theorizing the relationship between race, racism, antiracism and empire; exploring transnational processes in the construction of “race” and racism; and reflecting on the re-articulation of “race” and racism in Canada in the post-September 11 period as it has been shaped by local and transnational forces.

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Theorizing “Race,” Racism, Anti-Racism, and Empire

In the past decade, several new perspectives for analyzing “race” and racism have emerged. Often labeled critical theories of “race” and racism, these perspectives issued from a critique of Marxist approaches to race and racism (see, for example, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982). In a seminal article, Stuart Hall (1980) illustrated how Marxist writers, such as Raymond Williams, naturalized the idea of “race,” and thereby contributed to the articulation of racism. In addition, Hall argued that contemporary articulations of “race” and racism could not be explained merely through references to capitalism, class differentiation, or false ideology, but also needed to be located in the cultural, political, and social realms.

In searching for an alternative epistemological site, some, though not all, critical race scholars have employed Michel Foucault’s concepts of discourse, power, and identity to explore the complexities of race and racism (for such studies, see Said, 1978; Hall, 1999; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Stoler, 1995). Deploying Foucault’s concept of discourse, critical race scholars have suggested that “race” and racism have been constructed through projects of modernity, colonialism, and slavery, which were premised on knowing the colonized. Following Foucault’s emphasis on the social construction of identities, critical race theorists have illustrated the ways in which identities are located in discourses of “race.” These writers observe that by knowing the Oriental or colonized subject, Europeans came to understand and articulate Europeanness, whiteness, culture, democracy, and citizenship (see Said, 1978; Goldberg, 1993). Much of this work also implicitly draws on Foucault’s notion of power as diffuse and unlocalized — thus implicating white working-class and white feminist identities in projects of colonialism and post-colonialism (see McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1995; Ware, 1992). However, as contributions in this issue by Himani Bannerji, Bonita Lawrence, and Enakshi Dua suggest, there are important omissions in critical race scholarship.

First, it is critical to consider how capital and capitalism have shaped the idea of “race” and the articulations of racisms. Though Foucault’s concepts of power, identity, and discourse have allowed us to understand the location of race and racism in culture, modernity, and whiteness, often such an emphasis has obscured the relationship of race and racism to capitalism. Orientalism, European culture, modernity, and whiteness are constituted, in part, through a dynamic and ever-changing capitalist mode of production; yet critical race theorists often have failed to elaborate on such connections. Obviously, such an omission has important implications for our understanding of “race” and racism. Indeed, as we witness Western states and global capital deploying Orientalist discourses to legitimize the economic and political restructuring of the Middle East, the furthering of our analysis of how “race” and racism and capitalism are mutually constitutive takes on added urgency. In this context, Himani Bannerji’s article, drawing on Marx’ writings, makes a penetrating examination of the interconnections between “race” and class through the social

embodiment of racialized minorities. The article signals ways for thinking through how the discourse of race is colonialist, racist, and capitalist.

Also obscured in critical race scholarship is how the contemporary colonization of indigenous peoples could and should inform an analysis and politics of “race,” racism, and empire. The invisibility of the continuing colonization of indigenous peoples throughout North America and their struggles to reclaim their nationhood within settler societies is striking. As we write this introduction, the Canadian national press has been reporting on the lack of safe drinking and bathing water on reservations, and that these conditions have led to higher incidences of skin and other diseases among those living on Canadian reservations. The remarkable aspect of such reporting is that the tropes of discovery are deployed, with unhealthy conditions presented as a new finding, thereby erasing the long history of colonization. Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua not only ask what meaning this invisibility has for those theorizing “race” and racism, but also suggest that critical race theorists have themselves contributed to this invisibility. They argue that critical race theorists erase Native existence in their theoretical analyses, fail to recognize how colonization and settlement on Indigenous land continue, and emphasize the history of slavery and race politics in a way that obscures the continued oppression of aboriginal people. Despite a long history of aboriginal activism in Canada, and elsewhere, it is striking that there has not been more, and substantive, dialogue between antiracist theorists and aboriginal theorists.

Placing “Race” and Racism in Canada in a Transnational Context

In the process of investigating Canadian articulations of “race” and racism, scholars and activists have highlighted the significance of placing their work in a transnational context. Colonialism, British imperialism, immigration, diaspora populations, and global interconnectedness have shaped local expressions of race and racism. Indeed, several authors note that we must begin our analyses by examining how Canada, as a local, national, and regional space, has been constructed through ideas of race and transnationalism. In this issue, Razack observes that analyses of space help us to understand how minority populations have been spatially ordered and contained, illustrating how racism is always also a spatial project. Race, space, and subjectivity produce dominant and subordinate identities. Such a framework has led to an understanding of race and racism as fluid, and constantly being redefined through transnational forces. This scholarship also points to the importance of analyzing racialized identities through diasporic and transnational processes.

There are two central themes. The first uncovers the way in which the construction of Canada as a national space, with an attendant national identity, has been tied to a transnational discourse of whiteness. The potency of whiteness is evident in settler societies. Indeed, a number of scholars have pointed out that in the 19th century, anxieties about Canada’s identity and place in the British Empire were resolved in part through the initiation of a politics of whiteness (see Perry, 2001; Bonilla Silva,

2000; Dua, 1999). National mythologies operate to make Canada a white nation. We are constantly led to believe that Europeans built the nation, and in the telling of this history, the conquest, genocide, slavery, and continued exploitation of the labor of aboriginal and people of color is suppressed and/or erased. As Goldberg (2002) suggests, whiteness is enacted in subtle and overt ways in institutions and social spaces and is organized to maintain a “world racial order of white dominance.” In Canada, the nation continues to be scripted as white even as some major cities like Toronto are steadily moving toward a majority-minority population. Immigrants and refugees are needed to bolster the economy. However, the terrain of struggle persists for minority subjects as exploitation in the workforce and racism persist and speak to the fragility and dilemmas inherent in a transnational world. Further complicating projects of whiteness are the ways in which immigrants and refugees displace aboriginal struggles for decolonization.

A second important theme is the ways in which transnational processes shape diasporic identities. Scholars such as Grillo (2004) and Bowen (2004) discuss transnational processes of immigration and diasporic populations to illustrate the clashes of identity, nationality, and citizenship. Transnational social spaces come into existence due to spatial movements. The latter are regulated by access to resources and by nation-states, specifically the laws and policies they put in place to govern travel, immigration, refugee flows, and treatment of ethnic minorities (Faist, 2000). Transnational social spaces allow for analyses of the mixed feelings evoked in relation to nationality, identity, and citizenship for those who do not fit the normative white identity. In recent years, the hegemony inherent in globalization and transnational corporations has allowed capital to travel freely across borders, but the mobility and citizenship rights of the poor and vulnerable have decreased (Stasiulis and Bakan, 2005). At the same time, transnational social spaces, created through such spatial movements between nation-states, create new visions to respond to neocolonialism and imperialism. These spaces can also help to facilitate reciprocity, exchanges, and the building of transnational communities. However, they can also be sites of racism and further oppression.

This history suggests that it is not possible to understand race and racism without exploring transnational forces. Five articles in this issue examine how contemporary articulations of race and racism are constituted through a transnational and global terrain. In particular, these articles focus on the ways in which the racialized and gendered nature of work in a global economy shapes racialized identities, the ways in which academic institutions are located in transnational regimes of “race,” whiteness, and power, and the ways in which political movements such as the anti-globalization movements and antiracist movements are constituted through transnational processes. Kiran Mirchandani explores the nature of gendered work within the context of global economic relations. She examines call centers in India to illustrate how the workers there are ordered by gender and shaped by their experi-

ences of racism and servitude. Neocolonial relations persist even as transnational corporations redefine global workspaces.

Narda Razack examines the meanings of space, identity, and citizenship through international social work and focuses on North-South relations. She argues that epistemological considerations of nationality and identity are crucial for analyzing movements from one space to another, especially from dominant to subordinate space. Perceptions of the nation, and one's sense of self within and outside the nation-state, affect the ways in which minority and white bodies negotiate local and global space. These imaginings suggest that nationality becomes either more secured or unsettled in the process, with distinct differences for black and white subjects. As she states in her article, when white people go to less economically secure countries, they are hit full in the face by whiteness. Jody Nyasha Warner's article points out that academic inquiry is often international in nature (and such research can serve us in our antiracist imaginings); she examines how well, or not, academic libraries have responded to this need. Warner specifically looks at the lack of literature by African authors in a large, urban, Canadian university library. She uncovers systemic barriers of racism and globalization operating at the library, which create such a gap. Warner suggests issues that need to be addressed if academic libraries are to be the representations of all human stories, as they purport to be.

According to Andil Gosine, transnationality allows for the rewriting of racist discourses in environmental activism. He describes how the environmentalist discourses of anti-globalization movements help to reify a dominant colonialist thinking that has racist and sexist implications, especially regarding lack of reproductive rights for those in less economically secure countries. Gosine calls for alternative anti-globalization activisms that would expose racism and patriarchy. Grappling with participants' ambivalent locations within capitalism and racism, and through the lens of critical transnationalism, Gordon Pon argues against essentialist political categories that disallow the thinking through of shifting and contradictory subjectivities. Thus, transnationalism, especially in the new era of globalization, poses challenges for minority subjects in their claims to citizenship and nation. Pon explores the contradictory locations of affluent Chinese-Canadians, and analyzes how these contradictions position them within an antiracist praxis. His study reveals that professional Chinese immigrants face persistent racial discrimination, precluding their full participation in white, Anglo society.

The Re-articulation of Race and Racism in the Post-September 11 Period; Situating Canada in the Geopolitical Order

Since September 11, the re-articulation of "race" and racism has brought to the forefront the centrality of discourses of race in everyday life, as well as an awareness of how such discourses are contingent on transnational economic and political forces. Analysis of race and racism in the post-September 11 world has provoked sharp

reflections from activists and academics. We would argue that “race” and racism in the post-September 11 period continue, in a re-articulated form, the historical processes of racialization associated with colonialism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and, more recently, globalization.

One question that has engaged us in this issue is the unique way in which the racialized politics of the post-September 11 period are articulated, and experienced, in Canada. As noted, Canada’s place in the new geopolitical order is contradictory. In challenging U.S. hegemony in this period, particularly regarding the war in Iraq, Canada has played an important role. A major voice in United Nations discussions on endorsing military action in Iraq, Canada insisted that the alleged arms violations be dealt with through international policies. Canada felt so strongly about this that it chose not to join the United States in its invasion of Iraq. Yet Canada has simultaneously participated in transnational regimes of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere, enacted legislation aimed at “national security,” and participated in national and transnational racist discourses of the Orient, Arab, Muslim, immigrant, refugee, aboriginal, and people of color.

Notably, the re-articulation of “race” and racism in Canada in the post-September 11 period shares similarities with what has occurred in other sites. After September 11, the Canadian state implemented a series of legislative changes that has increased its ability to police borders, immigrants, asylum seekers, Internet and cell phone communication, and political resistance. Particularly noteworthy are the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act (Sections 83 of the Criminal Code), the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act, the Public Safety Act (along with the founding of the Public Safety Ministry), and the increasing use of Security Certificates.¹ Second, as in other sites, such augmented state powers have affected people of color and their experiences of “race,” racism, and their civil rights in society. Most notable has been the systematic surveillance, profiling, arrest, and detention of Arabs and Muslims, including those who are citizens, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Since September 11, Canada’s Ministers of Immigration and the Solicitor General have signed 27 Security Certificates (almost all applying to Muslim and/or South Asian men) declaring that a permanent resident or foreign national is inadmissible on security grounds. Many of these men are being detained (and have been for years) without being charged. In addition, in the post-September 11 period, the discourse of race and racism has shifted, as signifiers such as religion, education, and “looks” take on heightened meaning. In particular, people with strong religious convictions have been targeted for surveillance, policing, and incarceration (see Sherazee and Podur, 2003). As Rygiel (2006) points out, a “typical” terrorist profile has been broadened from the uneducated, poor, and desperate to one of a well-educated, middle-class professional man. The broadening of the definition of a terrorist dislocates discourses of race and modernity, where education has at times been seen as a tool for transcending “race.” In addition, there has been a blurring in the popular imagination of Muslims to include those who are South Asian,

Middle Eastern, and North African. However, increased surveillance powers have not targeted only people of color and asylum seekers, since Canada's aboriginal peoples and anti-globalization activists are also affected. Ironically, the Anti-Terrorism Act was first used in response to aboriginal protests on land claims in British Columbia and in the detention of anti-globalization activist, Jaggi Singh, who is of South Asian descent. Finally, as in other sites, there has been greater regulation of border crossings. New technologies such as eye scans are repositioning bodies as sites of security measures.

In seeking to understand these post-September 11 re-articulations of "race" and racism in Canada, many writers and activists have suggested that these changes are not simply a product of national policy, but rather of U.S. policy and Canada dependency on trade with the United States (see, for example, Ramraj et al., 2005; Sherazee and Podur, 2003; Thobani, 2003; 2004). There is much to support this argument. The closing of the U.S.-Canada border after September 11 displayed the ways in which Canadian border policy was subject to U.S. policies. Immediately after September 11, Canada was criticized for having immigration and refugee policies that allowed terrorists to enter (see, for example, Library of Congress Division, Nations Hospitable to Organized Crime and Terrorism, October 2000). Since then, attempts have been made to harmonize U.S.-Canada-Mexico border policy through the "Smart Border Agreement," which was negotiated to increase security and ease the flow of goods and people at the U.S.-Canadian border.² The creation of the Public Safety Ministry sought, in part, to allow for better integration with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Moreover, the new Immigrant Card and Canadian authorities' enforcement of the "no-fly" list exemplify Canadian adherence to U.S. border policies. Notably, the argument that such changes are a product of Canadian dependency on the United States echoes many Marxist explanations of the militarization after September 11. A number of writers have suggested that increased militarization stems from the rise of U.S. hegemony globally (see, for example, Ahmad, 2003; Wallerstein, 2003; Mann, 2003; Harvey, 2003). As Ahjaz Ahmad states (2003), "the U.S. commands more power than any imperial centre ever has in human history, with no competitors worth the name."

However, such an argument fails to address the complex economic and social processes that have created transnational support for U.S.-led militarism and the concomitant racism. This is clearly insufficient for explaining the Canadian state's participation in militarization, the new security measures, and the re-articulation of race and racism. Left out is the way in which discourses of "race," of whiteness and otherness, have shaped Canadian involvement. Three articles in this issue point to how Canada's involvement in post-September 11 militarization is located in securing the boundaries of a new Canadian identity, one that was redefined as representing Canada in terms of "civilization." Moreover, these authors highlight the crucial role gender has played in the re-articulation of race and racism. Sedef Arat-Koc examines responses to a speech by the prominent Canadian woman of

color and feminist, Sunera Thobani. The speech strongly critiques U.S. imperialism. Arat-Koc argues that the response to it represented an attempt by the Canadian Right to redefine Canadian identity in the post-September 11 period, resorting to a “clash of civilizations” discourse in a campaign to redefine Canadian identity as part of “Western civilization.” Such redefinition seeks to situate Canada as an unconditional partner of the United States in foreign policy; internally, it has led to the whitening of Canadian identity and the increased marginalization of its nonwhite minorities.

For Sherene Razack, Canada’s role in the post-September 11 geopolitical order has been framed through the discourse of the clash of cultures. She analyzes three mainstream “feminist” texts that have advanced the idea of a culture clash of epic proportions between the West and Islam. Razack shows that each author believes that to criticize the current U.S. and Israeli administrations is to overlook the misogynist political regimes in the Middle East. Such arguments, says Razack, provide a new racial logic through which European superiority, the U.S. bid for empire, and Israeli occupation are defended and legitimized. Finally, Yasmin Jiwani’s analysis of a prominent Canadian newspaper’s coverage of Muslim-Arab identity indicates that while Canadian coverage emulated U.S. coverage in many ways, in that it represented Muslim women through the tropes of passivity, victimhood, and rescue, it also diverged in an important way. Canada’s official multiculturalism created a particular racialized logic of inclusion whereby coverage suggested that Muslim women could be distanced from the acts of the terrorists, as well as from their countries of origin.

In conclusion, we hope that this special issue will inspire cross-national conversations on the ways in which the articulations of “race,” racism, and empire in different localities (the regional/national) are transnational and interconnected. An important question requiring closer examination concerns the modes by which race and racism have been mutually constituted through Orientalism, modernity, capital, and capitalism. Second, critical race scholarship must integrate the ongoing colonization of aboriginal peoples into theories of “race” and racism. Third, we need to study further how the imperiled Muslim body (as well as other racialized bodies) is being redefined in a climate of surveillance, mistrust, targeting, and captivity. Finally, we must explore the ways in which discourses of “race” and racism have allowed local and national spaces to be incorporated into U.S.-led militarism.

NOTES

1. In the post-September 11 period, the Canadian government has dramatically increased the use of Security Certificates, which were first introduced in the 1990s. Security Certificates allow for the indefinite detention without formal charges of alleged terrorist suspects. Although the Certificates are subject to judicial review in the Federal Court (on the basis of reasonableness), they give a judge

unprecedented powers to hear evidence in the absence of the named person or their counsel, and also pre-empt other proceedings, including application for refugee status. The person named is subject to removal without appeal and there are no limits on the time a person subject to Security Certificates can be detained.

2. When implemented, it will preclude most refugees who reach the United States from making a refugee application to Canada.

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