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Article:
Tate, SA (2014) I can't quite put my finger on it: racism's touch. Ethnicities. ISSN 1741-2706

https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796814564626

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‘I can’t quite put my finger on it’: racism’s touch

Introduction

Black liberation thought is foundational for BCRT which is crucial for unpicking the operation of white power in organizations. Such unpicking is urgent given Lewis Gordon’s (1995) observation that in organizations racism melts into thin air even as it permeates their spaces, their very walls. ‘I just can’t quite put my finger on it’ is often something that we think/say as we struggle to identify racism’s invisible touch. That is, where to touch is, to leave a discernible mark or effect through contact, to stir emotionally/ affect the emotions, to adjoin, to come up to, to treat briefly, to tinge, to be pertinent to, without being ‘a soft touch’. As we try to put our finger on it through critical race conscious intellectual work in the academy post-race sensibilities present us with slippages in which ‘race’ no longer matters, racism does not exist and BCRT is *not* theory whilst teaching on ‘race’ and racism is mainstreamed. We then look to materiality and try to put our finger on it through *sensing* touch and the relationality of distance and proximity in always already knowing the other before perceiving the other through body contact. Racism is indeed so ordinary as to be transmitted through the flinching away from Black touch, whether as theory or body contact, a movement away which even if slight contains within it a moment of contempt/ disgust. Such dirty affects are the basis of shaming encounters in which both the racialized other and BCRT are located as ‘touched’, not quite right, without any word being spoken. ‘As Fanon has so provocatively put it, black defiance to black dehumanization has been historically constituted as *madness* or social deviance. Blackness and in specific form *the black* thus function as the breakdown of reason which situates black experience ultimately in a seemingly nonrational category of faith’ (Gordon, 1997a: 5).This is the ordinariness of racism where BCRT

is aligned with the Black body so as to alienate it from the academy and erase its decolonizing impetus. Let us try to put our finger on it by first turning to look at touch and affect.

Touch and affect

> I saw her as I was nearly at the doors of El Corte Inglés and its promise of air conditioned coolness in Seville. She sat in a crumpled heap on the sidewalk in the 46 degree heat with her begging cup, face and lips dessicated by the sun. I rummaged in my purse and gave her what change I had. It wasn't much, but my recognition of her need, of *her* in that moment of giving led to her 'gracias muchacha' and a burning look of recognition from her grey eyes which touched me to my core.

That was a few days ago and since then I have been thinking how easy it was for her to recognize my humanity in the moment that I recognized hers, to get past race as the deciding principle of our encounter. I compare this to my quotidian experiences in the UK where race and racism very often dictate their tenor through the touch of eye or skin and their affective entanglements.

> In one of the many university cafeterias I put the money for my purchase in the cashier's hand and she places my change on the counter. I touch my student on the shoulder to attract her attention and she flinches momentarily before she can control her reaction. I stand in the lift at work and even though it is crowded an invisible cordon forms around me so that my skin is never touched. I have learned not to shake hands on introduction unless a hand is

> first extended in greeting. It is strange to have such studied white avoidance of my Black skin, of my gaze.

You would think that in the 21st century the old myth that the colour rubs off would have subsided enough to put an end to the white fear of Black contamination through touch. However, as we know, 'fear' of Black touch continues which leads us to think as does Derrida (1993: 136), that touch is a conduit into the self

> For to touch so one believes, is touching what one touches to let oneself be touched by the touched, by the touch of the thing, whether objective or not, or by the flesh that one touches and that then becomes touching as well as touched. This is not true for all the other senses: one may, to be sure, let oneself be 'touched' as well by what one hears or sees, but not necessarily heard or seen by what one hears and sees, whence the initial privilege of what is called touch.

Touch can invade us without our pre-knowledge or assent. As such, it does not necessarily mean to be touched as one can touch from an unheard and unseen position of privilege because touch always 'concerns the other' (Derrida, 1993: 122). This is the touch of anti-Black racism with which we must continue to engage in order to understand its effects and affects in the academy. Touch provides a connection to the other as it is deeply affecting and transmits affect. It carries the body's potential to affect and to be affected and as such is integral to our perpetual becoming. As affect laden, touch marks one's belonging to a world as much as it shows non-belonging as the body is made to be as much outside itself as in itself, caught in a complex web of inter-twined relationalities. Thus, white consciousness of the inferiorized, racialized other has significance beyond just visual perception. The

visual is also implicated in touch as Black skin touches the eye and is distorted in that very touching so that individual uniqueness is eradicated as black homology comes into view. 'His [her] flesh becomes "black flesh", his [her] thoughts "black thoughts", his "presence" a form of absence- white absence' (Gordon, 1997a: 71).The relationalities which spring from white 'fear' of touching and being touched by Blackness read as pollution point to resistance to feeling with, through and for the other as much as it does to continuing white disgust of and contempt for Black skin and Black people.

It is still necessary to assert that dirty affects such as disgust and contempt for the Black other are alive and well in tolerant institutions such as universities and in cosmopolitan spaces within 'tolerant societies' such as the UK. This is so as, tolerance is imbricated with both disgust and contempt as contempt is the midpoint between tolerance and disgust (Ngai, 2005). Further, in contempt an object can be considered as inferior, dismissed or ignored. Sianne Ngai (2005: 336-337), shows us this imbrication of tolerance with contempt and disgust when she states

> Disgust finds its object intolerable and demands its exclusion, while the objects of contempt simply do not merit strong affect; they are noticed only sufficiently so as to know that they are not noticeworthy […] one can condescend to treat them decently, one may, in rare circumstances, even pity them, but they are mostly invisible and utterly and safely *disattendable.*

As well as refusal of touch there can also be touch that conveys disgust, contempt, intolerance and condescension. For example, how often have we had a white touch with the comment, 'Your skin is so soft and smooth'? This invariably begs the question 'was Black skin supposed to feel different from *skin*?' Here skin is notice-

worthy, visible and demands attention but because of this we also see carried within touch that very disgust and contempt which being touched tends to alleviate. That touch, which Derrida (1993) describes as touching without being touched. Touch as a way in which we connect as humans loses its easy relationality and positive affective connections when we attach the inclusions and exclusions of race, the abjection of the racial nomos (Gilroy, 2004) and the coloniality of power (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a).

In the racial nomos there is a legal, governmental and spatial order in which race does not necessarily signify open affirmations of physical variations coded on the body (Gilroy, 2004). This does not, of course, mean that the psychic life of race ceases as these affirmations of physical variation drop out of view but are seen and heard well enough by anti-Black racism in assertions of white supremacy and common-sense notions of racial difference. Rather, what denial of the fact of the psychic life of race points to instead, is the impersonal, discursive, imperial ordering (Gilroy, 2004) of the coloniality of white racial power in which the other is always already known as the 'native', 'primitive', 'carrier of culture', 'different', 'inferior', 'abject' (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a). Here Black presence continues to be absence while white absence as the invisible norm is the *only* presence. Thus, in the racial affective economies set up through the racial nomos ruled by the repression of race disgust and contempt, the continuing coloniality of power ensures that white racist touch can easily be erased or denied as the musings of someone Black who is 'touched', one who has '*only* an outside' (Gordon, 1997a: 73).

This last 'touch' as in 'touched in the head' provides an easy way out of the accusation of racism by producing disgust and contempt of the other through blame which marks the other as 'stranger' (Ahmed, 2000). Blame negates the need to feel

white individual guilt because of involvement in racism either by collusion or overt practices or indeed the need for institutional action to go beyond tolerance to striving for equality, because of the strangeness of the other. For the racialized other fear of blame refuses the necessity for action and raises the spectre of ostracism, of being more alone than the number one. This is an aloneness born not from self-imposed solitude but from lack of the touch of friendship, of collegiality, of a touch which admits that I become myself through the other (Bhabha, 1990). This last touch of identification points us to a discussion of post-race sensibilities in the academy.

Post-race sensibilities in the academy

As academics we like to think that we work in institutions where 'race' no longer matters, skin is not significant and meritocracy dictates that we are all treated equally. In the UK these false certainties have been engendered by years of anti-discrimination legislation, organizational equality and diversity policies and their attendant bureaucracies. This has produced a psychic life of race in institutions which 'glues a particular social order' (Holland 2012: 32) in which we are post-race because of our assertions that racism no longer matters or exists only for far right and neo-nazi perspectives. White academics put themselves above such retrograde irrational tendencies because after all we all know that race does not exist (Warmington, 2009). They establish themselves as the arbiters of tolerant anti-racism which is as integral a part of the multicultural, cosmopolitan UK as a cup of tea. By this sleight of hand/ discourse anti-black racism has been made to disappear because

> Anti-black racism problematizes blackness so as to evade black problems. For black problems are difficult for everybody. Four hundred plus years of

> super exploitation are difficult to erase overnight. So denial emerges on levels that are almost magical […] Blacks disappear and so does responsibility for blackness (Gordon 1997a: 74)

As Blacks disappear white superiority is evaded so that class emerges as the great divide of the 21st century which must be dealt with through policy interventions.

This wholesale acceptance of the idea of being post-race in the UK academy denies continuing disgust and contempt for Black bodies and BCRT. These are the affects which continue to circulate within the anti-black psychic life of institutions through the people which construct them. Sharon Patricia Holland (2012: 39) calls these affects 'racial feeling'. They continue to articulate racism's touch where racism can never be named but continues to circulate through what Teresa Brennan (2004) calls the transmission of affects. It is the intensity (Massumi, 2002; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010a) of these affects which still remain as traces which we sense when racism attempts to hide its material, corporeal, carnal and psychic effects

> through making its noxious values so familiar and frequent that they cease to function as objects of observation and reflection; they, in short, become unreflective and so steeped in familiarity that they become invisible […]. Racist institutions are designed so as to facilitate racism with the grace of walking through the air on a calm summer's day (Gordon, 1995: 38-39).

Further, being post-race exerts its own racisms, its own racist affects and effects, its own disciplined bodies, indeed, a biopolitics (Foucault, 1994) if you will, which exerts its own governmentality. For example, as academics we think that there is academic freedom and it is something that we hold dear. However, some are freer than others, made so by the workings of race and racism in the institution and

knowledge validating processes (Collins, 2000; Pilkington, 2011; Hylton, 2008, 2012; Rollock, 2012; Warmington, 2012).

The institutional facilitation of anti-black racism is clarified in Charles Mills' (1997: 40) Racial Contract as

> Both globally and within particular nations, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favouring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously and unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further.

For Holland (2012: 37) what is important about Mills' Racial Contract is that 'it transforms the singularity of rationality at the center of the Western episteme, and as a consequence redefines racism as a very rational act. Racist action *makes* the system of racial differentiation work'. I would also like to add here that racist inaction serves the same function as to do nothing is to collude with and keep in place a system from which you stand to gain. An example will suffice here.

> Imagine if you are told by your head of department by email that you must share your room with an unknown person even though there is no shortage of space. You are never introduced to this person but discover a stranger one Monday in your room who first of all looks at you with animosity with the unspoken question, 'who are you, do you have a right to be here?' before saying on his presence being challenged that he will be sharing with you. After sleeping on it you then contact your head of department by email to say

> that you cannot share with this white man because your encounter felt very uncomfortable. The response then ensues, 'are you saying that he is racist? I have had dinner with him and I do not think he is. So the room sharing will proceed. If you think that you have experienced racism then use the University procedures to complain'.

A perfectly rational managerial response you might think, but let us pause here a moment and think some more about racism's deniability.

As a white feminist who is 'anti-every-oppression' the head of department established herself as the judge of who was racist and who was not even though the word 'racism' had not been used by her Black female colleague. The white feminist's racist action was to attribute blame for the use of the word 'racism' to her Black colleague as well as deny racism and ask her colleague to use the university's procedures if she thought she had been discriminated against. Her racist inaction was to leave the arrangements as set by her even though her colleague had expressed discomfort, thus, again denying the possibility of racism. Further, the question 'are you saying he is racist' and the request to use university procedures for redress point to an attempt to silence the colleague's complaint. Complaints threaten the white post-race consensus because they can be the precursor to political action (Cheng, 2001) and so must be silenced.

Of course, we might think that this is just one regrettable incident and probably just based on misunderstandings on all sides as a Black and white feminist are bound to have disagreements. To do this, however, is to cease to acknowledge the quotidian character of racism in institutions and the fact that it is such interactions which indeed construct the institution itself (Boden, 1994). As Dede Boden (1994)

claims institutions are built from the ground up from the daily interactions of their members. That is why we cannot claim that racism has disappeared in organizations because of anti-racist and equality policy and practice (Tate and Mather, 2011) and assertions of being post-race.

Universities are caught within a strange space in which the racism which they deny exists re-emerges to deny the possibility of being post-race. If we think about this some more it is possible to aver that as a result of its deniability because of its place within the quotidian, rational life of organizations, racism produces both individual and institutional melancholia. As for the individual, institutional melancholia is tinged with disgust and contempt, alongside guilt and shame for itself as an (im)possible space for the post-race sensibilities which it craves because race and racism resist erasure as they bubble to the surface of mundane interactions.

Using Freud, Ranjana Khanna (2003: 16) asserts that melancholia is 'an affective state caused by the inability to assimilate a loss, and the consequent nagging return of the thing lost into psychic life'. As assimilation of a loss is not possible through mourning the lost object is swallowed whole (Khanna 2003). 'Freudian melancholia designates a chain of loss, denial and incorporation through which the ego is born' (Cheng 2001: 8). Although Cheng (2001) and Khanna (2003) relate melancholia to individuals and the links between the psyche and the social, I would like to suggest that we think the organizations that individuals create melancholically. As is the case for the subject, universities continually generate a profound ambivalence around the racism that has been swallowed whole. Such racism has been denied but still emerges as a source of unease that is deeply troubling if equality is constantly asserted as an integral component of how the organization visions itself and its societal/global role. The institutional relationship to

racism shifts from attachment to its necessity so as to maintain the Racial Contract, to nostalgia for its certainties, to resentment at both its loss and its unsettling presence. As melancholic, universities remain fixated on the possibility of racism in their midst, almost choking on the hateful, loved and necessary thing that has been swallowed whole. The critique of racism ensues so that an inassimilable loss is shown through a language of complaint and redemption by way of equality and diversity practices, processes and cultures which are standard expectations for post-Stephen Lawrence institutionally racist organizations[1]. Universities thus engage in confession, critique and excoriation of themselves for attributes one would associate with the lost object, racism. This institutional melancholia provides an excuse for individuals who are not ashamed of the charge of racism because everything derogatory that they say is because of the organization or is common societal 'knowledge' (Cheng 2001). Thus, shame and guilt become inactive agents in institutional change (Munt, 2007; Probyn, 2005; Sedgwick, 2003).

For Sally Munt (2007:3), there 'are a variety of opinions on the distinction between guilt and shame, and often the two are confused. In its simplest form the distinction is an epistemological/ontological one, that in the former one *knows* one has committed a wrong (guilt) and, because of it, one has entered a state of disgrace (shame)'. Of course, if university and individual remain in a state of denial of individual and institutional racism (Pilkington, 2011) then knowledge of wrong-doing is repressed, as for the white feminist, so guilt and shame are never felt. In fact, shame is an affect which must be avoided at all costs because it admits guilt and

[1] Stephen Lawrence's racist murder by a gang of five white youths in Eltham, South London in 1993 and the subsequent enquiry made it clear that we live in a society with racist institutions. The Macpherson Report (1999) focused on the Metropolitan Police Service as institutionally racist and this led to changes in the Race Relations Act as well as recommendations on preventing racism through a national curriculum in schools which valued cultural diversity and that Local Education Authorities should promote anti-racist strategies. After a cold case review unearthed DNA evidence putting them at the scene of the murder, David Norris and Gary Dobson were sentenced as juveniles in January 2012 to 14 years and 15 years and 2 months respectively but the rest of Stephen's suspected killers are still at large.

generates disgrace. Shame's disgrace can 'provoke a separation between the social convention demarcated within hegemonic ideals, enabling a re-inscription of social intelligibility' (Munt 2007, 14). That is, shame is the basis for anti-racist change so it is imperative that shame at racist acts continues not to be examined because of its incitement of

> a wilful disintegration of collectivity, it can cause fragmentation, splitting and, dissolution in all levels of the social body, the community and within the psyche itself. Unexamined shame can also fall like a mist, obscuring vital political connections, sourced from injury it unwittingly seeks to reproduce injury to others, as a positive energy through direct attack or a more negativising denial and obliviousness (Munt 2007: 26).

Here then is a description of shame as an active force for psychic injury within organizations where lack of relationality ensures that the racialized other, as is the case for the Black feminist above, feels racism's touch but cannot put their finger on it. Direct attacks such as denial of the place of BCRT in curricula can be attributed to racist guilt and shame which resists racism's attempt to melt into thin air.

As for melancholic institutions so it is for the individuals who construct them. Racism cannot melt into thin air because shame is related to our experience of the self in social bonds. This relationality brings into awareness the imagery that the other rejects the self (Mokros, 1995: 1095). 'Shame brings the fear of abandonment by society […] of being left to starve outside the boundaries of human kind' (Probyn, 2005: 3). We feel shame because we are affected by what we come into contact with (Ahmed, 2004). 'Coming into contact' has both a regulatory function and the relationality of self-awareness that are aspects of 'the phenomenological experience of shame [in which] the self is both participant and watcher in its own fantasy of

shame' (Mokros, 1995: 1095). As a participant, one is *affected* by shame but as a watcher the impact of shame is *affecting*. This affected/ affecting doubleness then leads to an intensification of white shame where 'I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself' (Ahmed, 2004: 104). That is, I have to expel the abject racist other from the self (Kristeva, 1982) in order not to feel guilt and to maintain an identity devoid of the stigma (Goffman, 1963) of racist shame. However, as we know from Julia Kristeva's (1982) work the abject can never be totally expelled and continues to exert its psychic force. It is this recognition that perhaps has led to pervasive post-race ideas born of tolerance that because we live in a racist society we are all equally affected by racism and Black people can be racist too. This thinking provides a perfect get out clause for anti-black racism and denies the necessity for BCRT as a decolonizing tool within universities.

This is the crux of the operating principle of melancholic post-race sensibilities. Both institutions and white individuals are engaged in a process of admitting to widespread societal and institutional racism, purging it from their systems through admissions of shame in which they put themselves apart as better than those who are not as aware of the shame of racism and implicate Black people in racism itself. Racism is thus swallowed whole, unable to disappear into thin air, but rather held in place as the fabric of that very air itself. This is what permeates the walls of institutions and animates interactions with such intensity that we can sense it as affect. We can touch it but cannot voice these feelings because of their deniability ensuring lack of action for change.

Without the possibility of shaming others into action where is the Black woman in the example above left affectively? What can she do with her pain that goes beyond affect to having political consequences? Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) makes a

useful distinction for us in trying to get to grips with melancholia when she incites us to go from the inaction of grief to the agency of grievance. In performing this move there will always be 'psychical complications for people living within a ruling episteme that privileges that which they can never be' (Cheng, 2001: 7) and as Encarnacíon Gutíerrez Rodriguéz (2010b) reminds us *homo academicus* continues to be white. Thus even though white privilege and institutional 'melancholia is paralyzing ... the inassimilable paradoxically becomes the site of what Freud calls a critical agency' (Khanna, 2003: 22). Such a critical agency operates through 'the *plaint* or a kind of lament [in which] the complaints are directed toward the object that has been incorporated' (Khanna 2003: 65). The object here is the white racism which is part of the daily life of Black academics that must be complained about to be made known (Warmington, 2014; Rollock, 2012; Chakrabarty, 2012). Critical agency is also the basis of Cheng's (2001) formulation of the subject of grievance as political change agent. However, such critical agency emerges only through taking enormous affective and professional risks of alienation, lack of promotion and inevitably a change of organization or leaving the academy. This is the politics of aloneness in individual responsibility which is bred by post-race sensibilities where the necessity for anti-racist politics has been undermined because of the guilt, shame and inaction that animate institutional and individual melancholia.

At base then there is a 'culturally instituted melancholia [in which]… there is a class of persons….[who] are constituted essentially as the unthinkable, the unloveable, the ungrievable, and that then institutes a form of melancholia which is culturally pervasive, a strange ungrievability' (Bell 1999:170). This strange ungrievability of the Black person as unloveable and Black originated theory as unthinkable emerged through the coloniality of power and is maintained by the

Racial Contract in universities. Black thought had to be made unthinkable. Unthinkability continues within the 'absurd invisibility' (Gordon, 1997b:13) of race and racism in post-race relationality.

Distance, proximity and post-race relationality

What does it mean not to be seen? The invisibility of Black skin and Black personhood as classed, gendered, sexualized, abled and aged is a common experience (Puwar, 2004). Not being seen is a peculiar technology of racist distancing and non-relationality. 'There are many ways to look without seeing, and for those caught in the web of oppression, not being seen is so familiar that it, too, ceases to function as a seen circumstance. Invisibility loses its extraordinary dimensions' (Gordon 1997b:13). In the example above feminism could guarantee the Black feminist's visibility, enable her to be touched, through the proximity of feminist politics and theory but does not. This is so as race and racism continue to be constant interlocutors in Black/ white relations within post-race aspirations so much so that Black 'racial feeling' is itself forced into invisibility as its visibility is too unsettling for whiteness. Thus, what is replayed again and again through (in)visibility and its relations of distance and proximity to the Black body is 'a violent namelessness committed against blacks whose familiarity is so familiar that it transforms the protective dynamics of anonymity itself' (Gordon, 1997b: 13). For anti-black racists Blacks are, therefore, not nameless as would be the case in that social anonymity with which we pass each other in the world. Rather, we are the very *familiar nothing* (Gordon, 1997b: 28), established by whiteness since colonialism, slavery and indentureship with which no relationality is sought or indeed imagined as possible because we continue to be visible, heard, smelled, touched and sensed only as white constructions. Thus, the

> black is invisible because of how the black is 'seen'. The black is not heard because of how the black is 'heard'. The black is not felt because of how the black 'feels'. For the black, there is the perversity of 'seen invisiblity', a form of 'absent presence' (Gordon, 1997b: 37).

Here we get to what needs to be included in Derrida's (1993) ideas on touch above. As an absent presence for us *not* to be extended the touch of relationality which seeks to reduce distance, to go beyond racism's Manichean determinations of being/ nothing and acknowledge common humanity, is a quotidian experience.

Focusing on touch to reduce distance locates proximity as a significant element in antiracist theory and practice. However, proximity does not guarantee relation as we see in multicultural societies such as the UK because 'racism orders some of the most intimate practices of everyday life, in that racist practice is foundational to making race matter' (Holland, 2012: 20). Proximity, the skin to skin touching of the other, which should lead to us *being* touched, still keeps racism in place and this makes us wonder how it is that proximity does not work to erase distance.

As we might expect this is because of the past, present and future of race and racism in which anonymity means that one is never touched at all nor can one be touching in the sense of not being felt, heard or seen (Gordon, 1997a). We see this, for example, in Fanon's (1967) description of the psychic and material toll of being hailed into place as a Negro, being touched by the words 'Look a negro, I am frightened'. These words reduced him to white constructions of primitiveness and violence at the same time as making him representative of '*his race*' through calling into being the racial epidermal schema. This racial epidermal schema still spreads

out like an invisible net *touching* Black skin wherever it goes materially and psychically so that

> In fact, the touch can alter the very idea as well as the actuality of relationships, morphing friends into enemies and strangers into intimates. For touch can encompass empathy as well as violation, passivity as well as active aggression. It can be safely dangerous, or dangerously safe. It also carries a message about the immediate present, the possible future, and the problematic past. Finally, touch crosses boundaries, in fact and imagination (Holland, 2012: 100).

The potential of border crossing produced by touch constitutes the very necessity for psychic and physical distance itself so that the other is kept apart in the continuing colonial game of opposites which constitutes racism. The racist touch relationalities of distance and proximity attached to Black bodies extend to theory which establishes Black decolonizing critique.

BCRT and decolonizing critique

Even though race does not exist it is reified in theory through the very repetition of its non-existence which seems counter-intuitive to everyday common-sense where it is taken as natural and necessary for identification/ disidentification (Warmington, 2009, 2012). Theory keeps in place Black/white opposition through sociogenesis. 'Sociogenesis refers to the role of human institutions in the constitution of phenomena that human beings have come to regard as 'natural' in the physicalist sense of depending on physical nature. Sociogenic dimensions are meaning constituting dimensions of social life'(Gordon, 1997: 33). If society continues to see Black people as 'a thing' then this necessitates a denial of a Black perspective on the

world, a Black 'worlding of the world' so to speak (Yancy, 2008). In the white worlding of the world within which the academy generates the study of race and ethnicity Blackness and whiteness have been constructed in social, institutional and psychic life through a racialized 'existential socio-diagnostics [which is] a convergence of individual involvement in social processes and the imposition of social processes on individualization' (Gordon, 1997b: 41).

In some hegemonic theory on race and ethnicity Blacks are known as troubled and troubling for white society because of inherent criminality, mental ill-health, violence, broken families, poor educational attainment, unemployability, the list goes on and on. So the study of race and ethnicity continued the very idea of 'opposite' which was central to the colonial enterprise into the postcolonial understandings and management of the internal racial colonies formed through migration of the former colonized to the metropole. Edóuard Glissant (1997:17) described the relationality of opposition in the colonial period as being one in which

> The conquered or visited peoples are […] forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror. A tragic variation of the search for identity. For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an "opposite" for colonized peoples identity will be primarily "opposed to"- that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.

Glissant reminds us that there were always Black struggles for identity in the Caribbean by enslaved African and African descent people through revolts, maroonage and cultural retentions which themselves carried within them the decolonizing impetus. The defining decolonizing moment in race, ethnicity and racism studies in the academy and the birth of BCRT from Black academics/ activists/ writers emerged, in my view, with the work of Bernard Coard (1971), the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (1978,1982), Hazel Carby (1982), Paul Gilroy (1987), Stuart Hall (1987), Ambalavanar Sivanandan (1989) and Heidi Mirza (1992,1997), to name a few. Four decades ago Coard (1971) examined why it was that Caribbean descent children were over-represented in schools for the educationally subnormal (ESN) because of their underachievement. He saw white teachers as having a significant impact on the performance of a Black child- which was the basis of their assessment as educationally subnormal- because of open prejudice, being patronizing and having low expectations of the child's abilities. Carby (1982) and Sivanandan (1989) continued Coard's critique of racism in schools. The CCCS (1982) edited collection foregrounded the operation of racism in all aspects of 1970s British life whilst locating this within colonialism. Gilroy (1987) illustrated the quotidian ways in which common-sense understandings of 'race' as fact continued to dynamize racism in the UK. Hall (1987) disrupted the ruling episteme of the opposite by asserting that *everyone* has ethnicity not just those visible others who have been racialized and that ethnicity is itself open to change depending on historical, social and political contexts (Warmington, 2012, 2014). Mirza (1992, 1997) insisted on the necessity for gender and feminist analysis within race critique as did Carby (1997) who spoke to the racism of the white woman's movement and the necessity for rethinking its most cherished theoretical and political

categories if feminist sisterhood was ever to emerge. As Black British intellectuals from the African and Asian diasporas they spoke to academia as those who experience racism's touch to make us think again about the theoretical givens. Here we see a Black critical race critique which resisted over-determination from without; refused the question of race as being 'fundamentally of the "blacks"' (Gordon, 1997c:3); made visible the fact that theoretical perspectives were 'conditioned by the question of blackness' (Gordon, 1997c:3); asserted that race is an issue because of the 'value placed upon what has been determined as "given"; and insisted that BCRT analysis must be intersectional.

Understandings of racism which are not touched by Black critical race perspectives always seem to start from several basic premises which uphold its authority as theory that has the power to tell us something about objective realities. First, that theory does indeed provide objective descriptions of racism which can lead to social policy attempts at its eradication. However, as we know no theory is objective as it always starts from the position of its producer (Collins, 2000; Boatça et al, 2010). The second premise which is part of societal common-sense is that racism is irrational. It is the result of a white backlash caused by *fear* of Black presence in white communities and the perceived Black threat to white people's jobs, social/family life, housing, education system, and intimate heterosexual relationships. What is interesting about the use of fear here is that it reproduces the white self as under threat, the victim who has been affectively and materially touched by the need to keep the touch of the Black other at a distance. The last premise is also one that relates to the UK as a multi-cultural society with hyphenated identities. That is, that tolerance, assimilation and mixing will put an end to racism because racism is only about self/ other relationships which can be ameliorated through proximity and touch.

What we do not see in these premises which seem to merely replay popular common-sense, is any acceptance of the presence of white power and the racist oppression it engenders or indeed, 'the phobogenic dimension of anti-black racism' (Gordon, 1997b: 36). The turn to BCRT has been important for theorizations of racism as it has inserted the very Black body and psyche which had hitherto been an absent presence into thinking race, ethnicity and racism 'through the skin', through Fanon's (1967) racial epidermal schema if you will.

As can be seen from the academics above, BCRT first began the decolonizing task set forth by Glissant (1997) by seeking to decentre whiteness but centre racism by taking a *critical* position on matters of race and its intersections. It sought to move away from the limitation of being positioned as solely opposed to whiteness by undertaking explorations of race with its basic tenet being 'racism is ordinary' (Gilroy, 1987). For scholars of BCRT, 'racism is almost always articulated as an everyday occurrence, as pedestrian rather than spectacular' (Holland, 2012: 3). This is underlain by an understanding that '*everyday* racism defines race, interprets it, and decrees what the personal and institutional work of race will be' (Holland, 2012: 3). Such understandings led to a shift to the use of 'biographical or "experiential" accounts of race and racism… [before turning] to its own metatheoretical assumptions [which] became the focus of its critique. We can consider this dimension to be the positive outcome of the turn to postcolonial theory' (Gordon,1997b: 35). However, racist epistemic practice and epistemicide continue to resist BCRT's decolonizing impetus through mainstreaming this body of work and presenting it, for example, as 'sound bites' of Black/Third World feminist thought or Hall's thoughts on ethnicity.

As sound bites BCRT's critique has been undermined because curricula can touch on race, ethnicity and racism but universities still govern academics and students alike as they attempt to keep the Racial Contract in place. For those few who still continue to teach courses focused on race, ethnicity and racism rather than just having a 1 hour lecture in total on these topics, the experience is one of academic isolation, colleagues not seeing BCRT *as theory* and thereby questioning its value and place within the wider curriculum. This questioning also undermines the place in the academy of colleagues who see their work as contributing to the development of this area. The depths of the negative white reaction by both colleagues and students to white faculty who teach BCRT is also a revelation of how racism's touch acts to keep white people in the place decreed by the Racial Contract. Colleagues say, for example, that as white people teaching BCRT they are not taken seriously as academics and are expected to let racism go unnoticed or face having to cope with white guilt, disgust and shame utterly unsupported. Such struggles illustrate that racism continues to insist on self/ other relationalities in order to keep the Racial Contract in place. This latter resists BCRT's critiques through the deployment of negative affect, as well as refusal of relationality and proximity to those who would aim to upset its givens by their own refusal to know their place and remain within its boundaries. Terrorizing white dissenters through negative affect and being set apart is also part of the psychic life of racism within universities as melancholic institutions. Racism continues to resist decolonization by keeping opposites in place and we see this resistance also within curricula which deny their Eurocentric, anti-Black, heteronormative, middle class and able bodied orientation.

Conclusion

> For many black people when the question of their blackness is raised, there is but one challenge from which all others flow. It usually takes the form of another question. What is to be done in a world of nearly a universal sense of superiority to, if not universal hatred of black folk? Or, to paraphrase W.E.B. DuBois from *Darkwater,* what is to be understood by black suffering? It is this question that animates a great deal of the theoretical dimension of black intellectual productions (Gordon, 1997a:1).

Irrespective of the decolonizing challenge of BCRT racism's touch continues to make its way in universities unheard and unseen, dragging white melancholia, guilt, shame and contempt/disgust for Black bodies and anti-black epistemic violence in its wake. Black bodies and BCRT continue not to *be* touching even as their touch remains a challenge to the pervasive power of anti-Black racism. BCRT urges that we disengage from colour blind racism and denial of the salience of race and racism in our lives.

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