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1 | The shifting terrain of racist dynamics and anti-racism

Introduction

'Race' and racism are contentious terms. The existence of racist dynamics in social relations is not always acknowledged. In some European countries, the categorisation of people into different 'races' is rejected by appeals to a universalised notion of nationality; for example, a Frenchness that obliterates difference (Abye, 2001). In others, the word 'racist' is suppressed, for example, Switzerland. Some white people take umbrage at being seen as racist and refuse to engage in understanding the complex and intricate racist dynamics they unquestioningly accept in everyday life practices (ELPs). Others actively engage in forming alliances to eradicate it. These varied responses expose contested and constantly shifting terrains that (re)produce and (re)configure racism. In this chapter, I explore how 'race', racism, anti-racism and oppression shift in meaning and are embedded in ELPs to acquire potency. I argue that anti-racist initiatives can eradicate racism. Achieving this goal remains problematic and uncertain.

I place 'race' in quotes to indicate that the term is contested and socially constructed rather than biologically derived. People continue to utilise biological attributes in the social construction of particular ways of seeing and doing 'race' in the world. The word 'race' highlights the politicisation of biological traits alongside social ones and their evaluation in social interactions as either negative or positive to produce the racialisation of both black and white peoples.

Defining racism and unpacking racist dynamics

The 2001 Census gave the United Kingdom a minority ethnic population of 4.5 million or 7.6 per cent (ONS, 2002), an increase over

the 4 per cent it comprised in 1981. Of these, 55 per cent were under 16 years old. Minority ethnic groups are more likely to: reside in low-income households; be unemployed; have health problems; and be victims of racially-motivated crimes than white ethnic groups (ONS, 2002).

The number of immigrants entering the United Kingdom has been restricted since the 1970s except for family reunification purposes; growth in these populations is occurring through births to those already here (ONS, 2002). The ONS (2002) claims that the minority ethnic population is growing more rapidly than the white one, revealing that ethnicity characterises only 'black people', not all peoples.

Definitions matter

How 'race', racism and anti-racism are defined matter. Words indicate understandings of reality, shape interactions within discourses that produce them, and expose specific conceptualisations of power relations and people's place in the world. They also influence actions taken. Words both reveal and construct ways of knowing, exposing the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin thoughts and behaviours. Questioning words and meanings is more than arguing about semantics.

Scientifically, *all* human beings belong to the same 'race' – *homo sapiens*, believed to have originated in Africa, a position alluded to by Charles Darwin (Kohn, 2006:38). The amount of melanin produced by melanocytes in skin determines skin colour. This is a biological process linked to the environments in which people live. In these, melanin interacts with sunlight to produce many skin shades amongst humans. Historically, the meaning of the term 'race' has varied. It once focused on a racialised hierarchy that encompassed the physical attributes of all 'races' – identified by skin colour and depicted in popular parlance as white, yellow, red and black (Gobineau, 1953). Definitions of 'race' propagated by Count Gobineau illustrate a biological theory that racialised skin colour. Later, it focused on allegedly different intelligence levels that favoured the white 'race' (Hernstein and Murray, 1994). 'Race' as a biological entity has acquired a new lease of life through genetic biology and socio-biology. These explain variations in human physicality and behaviour through genomes. *The politicisation of this*

biologically based process through the negative valuation of darker skin results in racism and exposes its socially constructed basis.

The politicisation of biological attributes is evident everywhere. Under colonialism, European forms of racialisation focused on 'others', were extended across the planet, and became embedded in countries settled by Europeans. Spread through imperialist ventures, it redistributed world resources to those with desirable physical traits. The continued valuing of lighter skin amongst people of African origins in Jamaica is attributed to this (Williams, 2007). Other forms of racism hold sway in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. These debilitate and destroy humanity; for example, caste in India where a hierarchy establishes the Brahman, Kshatria, Vaisia and Sudra, above 'Untouchables' or Dalits who, traditionally, were deemed barely human. In Europe, racist discourses based on culture superseded biological ones in the 1980s (Barker, 1981). Cultural racism, reinvented through a 'war on terror', emphasises culture and religion amongst Muslims, giving Islamophobia a dyad that led George W. Bush to assert a 'clash of civilisations' between East and West (Ahmed, 2003).

Stuart Hall defines racism as 'a set of economic, political and ideological practices whereby a dominant group exercises hegemony over subordinate groups' (1980:338). A hegemonic construction of racism captures people's hearts and minds in an untheorised common sense that masks the dynamics that underpin it so that consent is obtained without conscious action. Foucault (1991) calls these dynamics the 'instruments of governmentality' or means whereby people control and discipline themselves. This is achieved through narratives that turn signifiers of 'race' like skin colour into artefacts of everyday life. These assign place and meaning to oneself and others through taken-for-granted processes of racialisation that establish binary dyads of superiority and inferiority. They become embedded in daily routines by processes that create and affirm racialising narratives at the personal, institutional and cultural levels. Permeating every aspect of social life these narratives constitute 'technologies of the self' that produce the 'self'. Their unarticulated assumptions underpin racism, make it a normal feature of everyday life practices, conceal its endemic presence in society and enable people to focus on the crude, irrational beliefs and actions of a few evil individuals. These dynamics allow white people to cast themselves as non-racist, take umbrage at being called racist, and

become extremely defensive when accused of living in a racist society.

Oppression is a system of domination that denies individuals dignity, human rights, social resources and power. Discrimination is a small part of an oppressive system concerned primarily with *access* to social resources and power. Racism is a specific form of oppression that stereotypes and negatively values peoples' ethnic and cultural attributes. It interacts and intersects with other forms of oppression like classism, ageism, sexism and heterosexism. Some consider these 'isms' additive; others as existing in parallel universes with competing hierarchies of oppressions. Reframing these as created in and through interactive relationships with intersecting components nests racism within intersecting universes of oppression. In these, a person endures all forms simultaneously as each mediates and is mediated by the others.

'Race' and racism are constructed during interactions between black and white people. They have been and remain complex, emotive concepts covering a range of heterogeneous populations, black and white. Each has its own positioning in racist social relations. Racism has not been and is not simply a matter of 'black' versus 'white'. Undoing racism is not solely a matter for black people. Engaging white people in tackling racism, their role and privileging in racist frameworks is crucial to eradicating it (Frankenburg, 1997). Understanding particular expressions of racism in historical context is useful in deconstructing it for specific purposes.

From the first edition of this book, I argued that 'black' and 'white' were social constructs that facilitate our understanding of racist dynamics rooted in a binary framing of social relations that configured one group – 'black' people – in an 'object' position at the receiving end of racist dynamics, while 'white' people, as the authors of these relationships, located themselves as 'subjects' holding agency for initiating action. My focus on 'black'–'white' relations was not to deny the relevance of other forms of racism at the time, but to concentrate on one that I felt provided insights that would help social workers address others, albeit while taking account of the specifics that impacted upon each ethnic group (Dominelli, 1988:7). Thus, I indicated that those of 'white' ethnicities, like the Polish, Germans, Irish and Italians, were also at the receiving end of racist dynamics, but that the experiences of each

group was different and merited study in its own right. I expressed the same view in relation to different ethnicities within populations of African and Asian descent and suggested that both ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ had to be deconstructed to advance equality. The positions of all parties to an interaction have to be unpacked and understood.

In subsequent works, I highlighted how this positioning is affected by the responses and intentions of all parties to a relationship through the exercise of human agency whereby people mediate what happens in a particular context. Those cast as inferior do not always accept being so defined. They may: internalise their position by accepting it; accommodate it; or resist it. Those depicted as superior may accept, accommodate or resist it too. Outcomes are not predetermined, but negotiated in and through social interactions that can enact, re-create or disrupt these relationships. Whichever option participants in an interaction go for shapes the final outcome (Dominelli, 2002a). Black people who internalise white norms seek to emulate white people and their lifestyles. This includes protagonists like Pecola who prayed nightly for blue eyes to win approval in Morrison’s *Bluest Eye*; black children who paint their skins white (Coard, 1971); black children demanding white foster parents; or black service users wanting white social workers. In outlining black people’s development in his model of nigrescence, Cross (1992) defines this as the pre-encounter stage.

These experiences have been exacerbated by simplistic forms of racism awareness training in vogue during the 1980s. These fostered the idea that power lay only on one side of the oppressor–oppressed divide and did not focus on the subtle playing out of relations of subordination and domination in everyday life practices wherein localised resistance by oppressed people is enacted. Understanding connections between different aspects of racism requires sophisticated anti-racist analyses that address situations in systematic and holistic ways. An alternative to simplistic forms of racism awareness training was conscientisation (Freire, 1970).

practice tips defining conscientisation

Conscientisation is a process that engages people in: deconstructing their realities to better understand them and the complexities embedded within everyday life practices and professional routines; and unpacking the social

processes and power relations that link personal behaviour to social relationships that perpetuate or maintain specific social positions and promote social inclusion for some and exclusion for others.

Conscientisation creates anti-racist insights into and for social work by revealing black people's experiences of racism as not simply about resisting being oppressed by white people, but carving out a dignified life in the interstices of the social spaces that they both shape and are shaped by when interacting with others. It also exposes how the normalisation of white people's worldviews enables them to: take its construction for granted; become detached from racialised situations; ignore the multiple dimensions in which whiteness is created; fail to recognise subjectivity of others; negate equality in and through action; and (re)create privileging specific to them.

Multidimensional racist dynamics

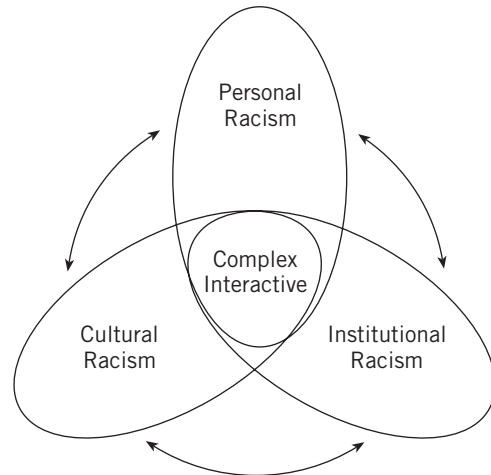
Forms of racism

Racism as the enactment of social relations that create a racialised binary dyad with superior and inferior elements carries implications for both those who oppress and are oppressed. Racism has three inter-related interactive components that are embedded in and negotiated through the minutiae of everyday life and professional practice: personal; institutional; and cultural (Dominelli, 1988). These three forms are interactive, have some overlapping elements that feed into and out of each other and in the process of being enacted, they racialise social relations to create racialised hierarchies of oppression that value some attributes by devaluing others. Moreover, these three forms establish white norms as the only gateways to a dignified life.

Institutional and cultural racism constitute structural racism because social resources and power are used to sustain them, whereas personal or individual racism is socially frowned upon, despite its reliance on structural racism to sustain it. Racism is a multidimensional form of oppression or more than discrimination. This analysis differs from Thompson's (2006) PCS (personal, cultural and structural) model in that it is holistic; sees the three types of racism as interlinked and interactional; and defines both institutional and cultural racism as structural (Figure 1.1). Focusing only on discrimination, therefore, does not address the structural

nature of institutional racism, although it would make a social worker practising in an anti-discriminatory manner *personally less oppressive* than one who does not.

Figure 1.1 Dimensions of racism



Personal (or individual) racism is practised by individuals as prejudices, negative attitudes and activities that deny certain categories of people dignity and equality. They draw on institutional and cultural racism for legitimacy. Personal racism as in-your-face hatred promoted by bigoted individuals is the form that most people think about when referring to racism in society. Personal racism may be institutionally condoned as revealed by the CRE's (2003c) report into the murder of Zahid Mubarek. His white killer, an avowed racist skinhead combined cultural and institutional racism in Feltham Young Offenders Institution with his own personal racism and that amongst white staff and white inmates to reinforce statements that disparaged black people and set up Mubarek as an object lacking humanity and expendable in extracting himself from custody (Dominelli, 2006b; Keith, 2006).

Institutional racism refers to the routines of professional practice and policies that determine eligibility and entitlements to social resources by excluding some people more than others. It pathologises excluded groups for their failure to succeed within the system; is missed in taken-for-granted everyday routines; is legitimated by

public power and authority; and rations power and resources to people perceived as racially inferior. Institutional racism makes racially tolerant individuals act in racist ways, without being aware of it. It reinforces the controlling dimensions of social work, intensifies its policing functions with respect of minority ethnic groups and excludes them from playing prominent roles in creating and delivering mainstream services.

Macpherson (1999:321) defined institutional racism as the:

collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

British society is indebted to Lord Macpherson for raising institutional racism, an issue that had been denied for so long, and giving it a high profile. It rightly highlights its embodiment in professional practice including health. Minority ethnic doctors are located at the bottom of the labour hierarchy and in less popular specialisms, for example, geriatric medicine (Goldane, Davidson and Lambert 2004). Yet, the Macpherson definition muddles the different forms of racism in the latter part of the quote. Eradicating racism requires clarity in thought and in understanding its complex structural dynamics including the interconnections between its different elements to shift action in anti-racist directions. In its absence, individuals resort to seeing racism as the product of individual bigotry, removed through education that eliminates ignorance as Lord Scarman (1981) did in his inquiry earlier. Sadly, this is also the endpoint of Macpherson's definition.

Cultural racism consists of those social values, traditions, ideas and norms that guide social interactions between people, and groups and assign worth to some and devalue others. Embedded in culture, these elements – including language and religion that people use to compose a *collective* worldview – legitimate a person's or group's place in society and behaviours that cultural racism draws upon to provide the cement of popular racism that integrates, affirms and perpetuates institutional and personal racism within everyday expressions of racism. Institutional and cultural racism

thus become the structural components of racism that feed into and out of personal racism and each other, to create complex connections between them. This connectedness complicates the eradication of racist dynamics and practices. Not understanding the linkages between them results in the structural components of racism working against white people's personal intentions of goodwill in promoting black people's welfare. Their connectedness also frustrates well-meaning initiatives that leave them feeling personally disempowered in and resentful of anti-racist projects.

In Britain, cultural racism normalises white Anglo-Saxon culture as superior; disparages black people's cultures by using white English culture as the norm used for judging these; and labels those deviating from its benchmarks 'deficient'. Hence, black lifestyles, child-rearing patterns, behavioural norms and ambition to improve their lot are undervalued or treated with contempt and disdain. Difference is deemed 'dangerous' and practices associated with it are rejected. This endorses the idea that those embedded in black cultures and organisational structures need 'rescuing', as is the case with black adolescents like Asian ones who are defined as experiencing cultural conflicts with parents (Ahmed, 1984) and African-origin children who are seen as subjected to inappropriate discipline and requiring increased surveillance and control. Gilroy refers to the latter as 'differential intensity' (Gilroy, 1982).

Culture, as a dynamic set of attributes claimed by one group of people, creates bonds of identification between people who may be different and unites those who share similar features. These identifiers are racialised, gendered and interactive. They include social values that shape a worldview and artefacts that compose it; for example, language, religion, traditions, rituals and social divisions. These identifiers are adapted to circumstances that emphasise some more than others for specific purposes. Cultures change over time from within or in encounters with those from different cultures. In a globalising world, a culture that comes into contact with another retains some of its heritage as continuities; others that change become discontinuities. Gilroy (2000:130) comments on the spread of African American culture across the globe:

cultural commodities have been used to communicate a powerful ethical and political commentary on rights, justice and democracy that articulates but also transcends criticism of

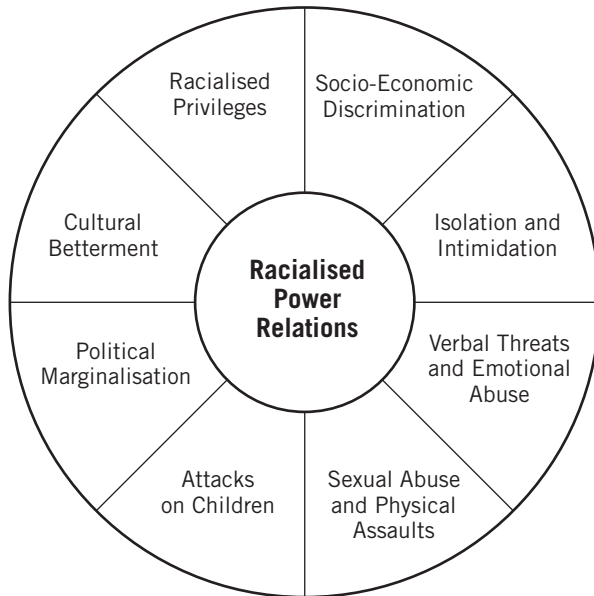
modern racial typology and the ideologies of white supremacy. The living history of New World blacks has endowed this expressive tradition with flexibility and durability.

He also highlights how similarities and differences in these exchanges maintain traditions of black struggles for freedom in new contexts and inspire others.

Cultural identifiers shift relationships between the private and public domains and impact upon families. Gilroy (2000:189) argues that in the 'turbulent narratives' of rap music, conservative framings of a black family as a sanctuary for raising children coexist with intimate private spaces that fathers and mothers enjoy by depositing children with extended family. Competition for private personal and family space subjects children to paternal indifference, described in gender-neutral ways. Narrowed opportunities for public and private expressions of pleasure produce hedonistic lifestyles that become subversive spaces where black male agency is re-enacted in patriarchal terms that (re)create black women and children as both winners and losers. Celebrity status amongst African American male superstars may have given them power and control over their own lives. But, in the broader social framing of American society, black men's masculinities are subjugated ones that deny black men wholly self-defined agency (Connell, 1995). So, social privation impacts directly on the roles that black men, women and children can assume in their families.

Racialised power relations

Power relations and systemic inequalities are crucial to the (re)production of racist social dynamics that establish specific claims to social resources and identity. In racist social dynamics, power relations are formed during processes of racialisation and occur within a framework of interaction and negotiations that accept, accommodate or reject racialising assumptions. Those rejecting this framework may replace it with either new racialising assumptions giving them control or egalitarian ones. Rejection can either involve consensus or impose a specific worldview on others via coercive means as happened in the racialisation of territories and peoples under colonisation. Those exercising power dominate others by mechanisms of intimidation and control encapsulated in Figure 1.2 below

Figure 1.2 Racialised power relations

Source: Adapted from L. Dominelli (2002) *Anti-Oppressive Social Work Theory and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 80.

Racialisation as a socially constructed process

Identity is formed through social relationships embedded in complex interactions. It is a multi-faceted and fluid aspect of a person's sense of self – who s/he is deemed to be/wants to be. It is linked to being part of a wider group associated with a specific spatial territory or interest that has a logic of belonging and place to those embedded within it. Knowing who you are in a representational sense in specific social contexts is as crucial as knowing who others are and how they see you. Racialised identities have social processes that configure and represent identity attributes in certain ways.

For ten years, I asked social work students at Masters' and Bachelor's levels to write down three terms that describe them. Seldom was 'race' or ethnicity given, even in lectures on these

topics. When they were asked to discuss identity traits with other students and compare notes with how others saw them, even if a black and a white student were involved, rarely was 'race' or ethnicity mentioned. At best, one or two students out of an entire cohort would self-define as British or European, even when discourses in the media had saturation coverage about 'immigrants', 'Europeanness' or defining 'Britishness'. 'Ethnicity' and 'race' were not meaningful descriptors to them. Their roles as (primarily white) students or parents and personal traits like honesty, reliability and friendliness were more significant and accounted for most of their descriptions. Black students were more likely to self-identify as black, but were not often represented. My observations across the United Kingdom suggest that racism is explored less frequently today than it was before the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) abolished Appendix 5 in *Paper 30* in 1994.

Current coverage of anti-racist theories and practice on placements is also inadequate. In placement visits as recent as 2006 when I last carried them out, practice teachers told me, 'We couldn't do much on the anti-racist front because we have no black clients', indicating that despite several decades of discussing anti-racist approaches to social work, white ethnicities were not considered part of ethnicised relationships by predominantly white groups. These were people committed to anti-racism, willing to learn and play their part in creating a non-oppressive world. Their responses show a lack of knowledge and skills for doing so, a skills deficit that CCETSW and now the GSCC have failed to address amongst white educators and practitioners constituting the majority of those teaching social work. They define tackling racism around the presence of black people – a problem of their absence; and neglect white people's ethnicities by their presence (Dominelli, 1991).

Problematising definitions of 'race' and ethnicity

Devolution affirms the United Kingdom as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-national society where diverse peoples coexist. The exact racial composition of its population is unknown. Collecting identity data is problematic, but the Census gives an official terminology.

Case study A formal classification of peoples

The 2001 Census improved on previous categorisations by having six categories of ethnic groups that operated on two levels. *Level 1* consists of: White; Mixed; Asian or Asian British; Black or Black British; Chinese; and Other. *Level 2* contains further differentiation, namely: Asian or Asian British; Black or Black British; Chinese; or Other Ethnic Group for the black category; and White British; White Irish; and Other White; for the white category. Level 1 draws upon a Black-White dyad with limited differentiation in the Black category to distinguish between those of African descent and other black people. Level 2 is more inclusive, covering Indians, Pakistanis, Black Caribbeans, Black Africans and those of multiethnic backgrounds, but is confusing.

These changes include some ethnic groups but exclude others, black and white, for example, Arab Britons or Black Irish. And is 'White British' sufficient to tell us about English, Scottish or Welsh peoples, let alone peoples of other white ethnicities holding British nationality, but differently positioned in racialised hierarchies in the United Kingdom? And where are those who associate with none of the above categories? The meaning of each category is unclear. Do respondents base their answers on place of birth, ethnicity, nationality or what? Where does religion fit in? British law recognises Sikhs, but not Muslims, as an *ethnic* group. Yet, Sikhism is based on a religious identity that encompasses several ethnicities and nationalities. Faith differences have long been associated with ethnicity, as Catholics of Irish origins in the United Kingdom can attest. These categorisations are problematic because how ethnicity is defined impacts directly on how 'race', racism and the social processes of racialisation are understood.

Recognising the inadequacy of the Census categorisation, the Labour Market Division (LMD) within the Office of National Statistics (ONS) refined it further. White became British and Other White; Black or Black British became Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black; Asian or Asian British became identified as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Other Asian; Chinese remained Chinese; Mixed became White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Other Mixed; and Other Ethnic

Group was unchanged. This differentiation revealed that people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent are the poorest groups and those of Chinese origins, numerically the smallest, but said nothing about those this classification excluded.

The LMD formulation remains risky for policy-making and is further complicated by the interchangeable use of the categories 'race', ethnicity, nationality and religion. Like is not compared with like and geographical, religious and ethnic groupings are mixed together. Like the original categorisation, the LMD one ignores the processes of racialisation that racialise not only ethnicity, but also class, gender, age, nationality, religion and other social divisions that produce disparities within each category, making this categorisation unusable except in crude generalisations. These various social divisions are significant in constituting reality and have to be understood because differences and similarities have to be deconstructed to progress the eradication of racism. All categorisations are problematic in that they exclude some people by including others and focus on specific features that ignore others, and so should be used with caution.

Minority ethnic groups live in spatially segregated areas: 98 per cent live in England. Of these; 48 per cent are in London and comprise 37 per cent of its population (ONS, 2002). For the first time, black people outnumber white people in two London boroughs: Newham – 60.6 per cent and Brent – 54.7 per cent (ONS, 2002). They are also concentrated in areas with established black populations including Birmingham, Leicester, Leeds, Liverpool, Bradford, Cardiff and Glasgow. Their numbers and spatial distribution affects their status in life and services they receive (Clark and Drinkwater, 2002). Patel and colleagues (2004) and Patel and Lim (2004) have identified Chinese elders as the most dispersed, isolated and lacking in relevant services because their concentration in catering as self-employed workers prevents them from developing community links and self-help organisations. Some minority ethnic groups have progressed since 1991; for example, gains in educational achievements amongst Indians have surpassed those of white people (ONS, 2002). Racialised gender relations render women's discrimination different from men's in each ethnic group. In education, women of Caribbean descent out-perform men of similar origins.

Despite differentiation in experiences, high levels of discrimination persist amongst minority ethnic groups (CRE, 2006b). Black

British people are under-represented in high-status employment positions and as recipients of welfare services (ONS, 2002). They are over-represented in: schools as poor achievers; criminal proceedings; and higher tariffs of the court sentencing system, especially custodial settings (Home Office, 2002a). Discretionary practices limit their access to influential positions in decision-making structures in local and central government, trade union organisations, the courts and prestigious jobs. Equal outcomes may be achieved if different inputs meet varied needs within a common objective of equality to redistribute posts.

Black people have limited access to influential positions in local and central government and other organisations; for example, demographics in the House of Commons show few black MPs. The first black MP was of Asian origins and elected in 1892. After a hiatus of nearly 100 years, four black candidates were elected to Parliament in 1987. This rose to 12 in 2001, reaching 18 by 2005. This increase is far short of the 55 needed for equal representation. To date, only two elected MPs, both black men, have become ministers: Paul Boatang, who has now left politics, was the first black Minister and worked in Health, the Home Office and Treasury. Keith Vaz, Minister for Europe until he criticised government policies, was dropped in 2001. The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Lords from 2003–7 was a black woman, Baroness Valerie Amos. She was earlier Secretary of State for International Development for a short period. Paul Boatang covered social work, which he termed social *care*, in his brief as Minister of Health and later for children in the Home Office. As Secretary of State for International Development, Valerie Amos covered international community work and social development. Black people's poor representation at the highest level in Parliament is also reflected in the welfare state as both recipients of services and as employees.

In local authorities, the number of black councillors remains small. In Sandwell in 1984, black people made up 11.5 per cent of the population. Four black people were local representatives and between 1 and 2 per cent of employees were black with few in the senior echelons (*Sunday Times*, 15 April 1984), a picture that has altered little. However, the British National Party (BNP) had gained 4 out of the 70 seats in the 2007 local elections. The vast diversity within any minority ethnic group makes it difficult to speak authoritatively about their experiences of racism. The conceptual tools for

dealing adequately with these have yet to be developed, although there has been progress in unpacking racism's dualistic dynamics and complexities. Further analyses of differentiation require specific examination of a range of different elements like gender and ethnicity, age, religion, geographical location, language skills, specific contexts and other factors. Exploring each specifically would take debates further, but cannot be achieved in this short book. I use the terms 'black' people and 'white' people as symbolic devices to indicate one dimension of reality: that socially constructed interactive processes racialise both social and biological attributes to divide people into those *assumed* superior and entitled to privileges (white) and others cast as inferior and disadvantaged (black). I focus mainly on the dynamics of racism, processes whereby it is created and their significance both for black and white peoples' lives and for social work practice. Specific illustrations highlight particularities and differences in experiences.

Reflecting upon unitary identities

Words socially construct signifiers of specific identities. As representations, these change over time to reflect particular socio-economic and political realities. In the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, 'black' became a political term symbolising a unity amongst diverse ethnic groups to resist racist practices. This socially constructed unity relegated concerns linked to specific identities to the background, not to be forgotten, but to be addressed subsequently (Brixton Women, 1984). Forging a unitary identity when different ethnic groups were divided from each other initiated collective political action that highlighted the necessity of eradicating racism. In 1978, the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) described joint struggles on 'stop sus' with liberation movements in Africa in their Newsletter *FOWAAD*. These organisations were allied to the trade union and women's movements and brought together diverse ethnic groups around a black movement. Their unity suppressed the uniqueness and heterogeneity of each separate identity for strategic reasons; ignored specificities in racial oppression; and neglected complaints related to particular groups. As each ally sustained daily life around specific identities, these arrangements created inclusion and exclusion simultaneously.

Tensions ultimately fractured these temporary and transient alliances. By the mid-1980s, their fragile unity became endangered and some, like OWAAD, dissolved. People of Asian origins rejected the label 'black' for failing to account for historical and cultural differences. Yet, 'Asian' is a poor descriptor as it masks heterogeneity between peoples of different cultures, religions and ethnicities originating in Asia. Americans use the term 'people of colour' and hyphenated appellations to address complexities. These also inadequately address heterogeneity; for example, Hispanic Americans come from a range of different countries, ethnic groups and cultural traditions, not just one.

Ethnic groups are divided by age, gender, class, disability and sexual orientation. As more than culture and geographic region are involved in identity formation, the issue of what to call different ethnic groups remains unresolved and divisions deepen within and across these groups. What is needed is a terminology that respects differences within an egalitarian framework and acknowledges commonalities. Achieving this is difficult when claims of ownership involve territorial integrity and belonging. In some situations, different interests generate conflict among groups that were once allies. People of Asian and Afro-Caribbean descent fought over questions of territorial ownership, belonging and gender relations in Perry Barr, Birmingham during 2005 (Phillips, 2005a). Asian and white youths battled on the streets of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001 (Cantle, 2002). Black-white relations are further complicated by white backlash, as indicated by Proposition 189 in California. Based on a moral panic around differentials in birth-rates across ethnicities, it sought to restrict the term 'American' to white Protestant Americans to allay fears that Hispanic Americans, increasing disproportionately, would overtake them numerically in the twenty-first century (Small, 1994).

Peoples' attributes are racialised in social interactions that create a binary dyad that divides people into superior (white) and inferior (black) beings to create relationships of domination and subordination. These racist dynamics racialise people differently, whether or not these are acknowledged. White people are racialised in ways that privilege whiteness; black people are disadvantaged by the same process. This dyad narrates people into the inclusionary category of 'us' and exclusionary one of 'them'. It racialises the 'them' and *de*-racialises the 'us' group. This enables the 'us' group to think

it is outside the framework of racialised social relations and believe statements like “‘Race’ is an issue for black people’. Social workers do likewise when they claim ‘Racism is not an issue for us because we have no black clients’ without seeing it as problematic. Eradicating racism means locating both the ‘them’ and ‘us’ within the same framework of racialised beings and relations to uncover the simultaneous privileging of white people and disadvantaging of black people. *The racialisation of one and de-racialisation of the other is one movement.*

Discussions of racialised identities in liberal Western democracies have been fraught. The overriding cultural values of equality and tolerance make those privileged by racist discourses feel uncomfortable talking about gains that accrue to them and do not see themselves as racialised. The perception that ‘race’ applies only to those configured at the receiving end of racist dynamics enables white people to see themselves as *unracialised* beings operating within a neutral framework of social interaction. Not racialising themselves has been a major obstacle in ‘deconstructing whiteness’ (Frankenburg, 1997) or seeing heterogeneity within and between groups. An assumed homogeneity across the black–white binary divide renders invisible the specificities of racism’s impact on different ethnic groups. This includes denying its influence on *disadvantaged* white ethnic groups from Eire, Southern, Central and Eastern Europe; and black ones from places like Africa, Jamaica, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan or Syria; and advantaged white English and white Protestant ethnic groups.

Those resisting these characterisations develop strategies to counter racist onslaughts on their identity and focus on affirming their achievements and place in the world (Graham, 2002). Cross (1992) calls this the internalisation-commitment stage of black identity development. White social workers should recognise acceptance, accommodation and resistance strategies and be aware of models that can assist black children develop attachments to a range of important others, assert and maintain the integrity of their identities and enhance their self-esteem (Robinson, 2002). Africentrism takes the history of African-originated peoples as a source of pride and highlights their substantial contributions to world achievements (Asante, 1987). Supporting black people in and through social work requires organisational change and transformations in professional practice, including co-working in egali-

tarian partnerships, employing black social workers in significant numbers and at all organisational levels, developing meaningful links with black communities and providing suitable services and options for black and white clients.

As a socially constructed system, the bases of racial oppression are arbitrary and defined for specific purposes. 'Race' becomes exclusionary by rationing or legitimating the receipt of social resources to those belonging to the valued racial group. In European societies, this is restricted to white European nationals by discourses that assume those from third countries in the Southern hemisphere migrate to abuse Europe's welfare systems instead of contributing to them. Empirical evidence reveals that the opposite occurs. Ethnic minority employees are employed to sustain welfare services. Doctors, nurses and social workers from overseas maintain the British health and social care systems (Patel et al., 2002).

Sensoy (2006) in commenting upon Asian Cultural Heritage Month in Canada highlights the majority group's failure to recognise its privileging and racialisation by reflecting that 'in Canada, without having to make any special proclamations, white heritage month is continuously being celebrated' because white privileging is invisible. Its invisibility pervades 'assumptions about the dominant white culture, its collective history and social relationships'. He wants Canadians to unpack this lack of awareness because Canada's 'social health depends on our sincere and sustained attention to our racial history'. The purpose of raising consciousness is not to cause:

white children to be ashamed of who they are ... [but] to develop conscious, critical habits of mind ... [and] well-reasoned and compassionate solutions to social tensions and problems.

(Sensoy, 2006:A17)

This message resonates with anti-racists in other countries where a dominant group exercises power over others rather than living with them in egalitarian social relations.

Racist social dynamics are configured around specific ethnic groups and racialise characteristics that differentiate one ethnic group from another within a negative evaluative framework. This creates racialised hierarchies of being and value that privilege

certain groups over others, while drawing on a basic dichotomy of superiority and inferiority to produce specific outcomes. This includes privileging allegedly superior individuals or groups and disadvantaging those deemed inferior. The latter are stereotyped; cast as deficient, non-contributors to broader society; and distanced from the superior group through processes of 'othering'. Those configured as inferior experience this racialisation through exclusion, deprivation, discrimination, humiliation, scapegoating, disparagement and denial of their humanity.

The changing faces of racism

Islamophobia, a new variant on an old theme, indicates how racist dynamics are created anew as people interact with each other, switching between the biological and social realms, making racism an unstable social arrangement that alters over time and with changing social circumstances. Whilst science accorded biological racism legitimacy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, politicians legitimate contemporary racism by utilising cultural features in distinguishing one 'race' from another (Barker, 1981). This includes politicising attributes like language, religion, dress and lifestyles. Since the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 9 September 2001 (9/11), Islam has become a key signifier for darker skinned people wearing their traditional dress. In this, religious difference is used to characterise Muslims as inferior and dangerous – an idea captured by the term 'Islamic terrorist'. Fear and hatred of Muslims has been called Islamophobia, the specific form of racism used to attack Muslims. Ahmed (2003:8) defines Islamophobia as 'a generalized hatred or contempt of Islam and its civilization . . . [that is placing] pressure on the Muslim family and on social, political and even moral life'. This exacerbates conflict between people of different faiths and civilisations and destroys any sense of compassion or justice that could promote harmony between them (Ahmed, 2003).

Those who divide people on the basis of religion do so arbitrarily with scant regard for their realities. People originating from the Indian subcontinent, whether Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, are perceived as 'Islamacists'. Lumping people together to deny them a unique identity, human rights and place in society depicts racism in action. Such exclusion legitimates assaults against the person as occurred

in southern England after the London Bombings of 7 July 2005 to a young man of dual heritage – white English and Ghanaian African, who was called a ‘Paki’ with ‘Bin Laden as his brother’ before being attacked by white English skinheads (personal communication). These reactions are an extension of the ‘new racism’ that Martin Barker (1981) identified when Margaret Thatcher spoke out against ‘swamping British culture’ with ‘alien’ ones. Her statement was enforced by the 1981 Nationality Act which introduced the concept of *patriality* – having at least one parent or grandparent born in the United Kingdom – to citizenship; removed the automatic right to citizenship of those born here, ending the 700 year-old tradition of *jus solis*; and gave credence to the view that black people did not belong in Britain (Gordon, 1985). Thatcher’s comments reinforced Anglocentricity by focusing on white English culture as the British norm. The development of the new racism coincides with loss of empire, a settled, indigenous black population in the United Kingdom and the repatriation of black people on a voluntary basis (Kaufman, 1998). It also deepens the link between citizenship and immigration.

Blurring the boundaries between nationality and citizenship has entered official discourses. In Canada, the first black Governor-General, Michaëlle Jean, born in Haiti, was pictured in the papers as spending ‘Mother’s Day in her Motherland’, that is, Haiti (*The Province*, 14 May 2006) even though she is the official representative of all Canadians, taking the place of Queen Elisabeth II. This discourse suggests she has a ‘motherland’ other than Canada; is not truly committed to Canada; or symbolically blurs nation-state boundaries and affiliations, that is, officially sanctioned transnational relationships. The latter response would reflect life in multi-ethnic communities.

The white media adds to the depiction of black people as undeserving members of British society by conflating crime statistics with ‘race’ to hold black people responsible for high crime rates and economic decline. These statistics cast a long shadow over black people’s lives, especially young black men of African-Caribbean, African and Arab descent (Hood et al., 2003; Braidwood, 2003). Racial profiling combines policing public spaces with closer surveillance of private ones making encountering the police during ‘stop and search’ more frequent and dangerous for black youths than white ones and engenders fear in black commu-

nities (Hearnden and Hough, 2004). Coupled with HIV/AIDS, gun culture and the drug economy, these depictions intensify fears shaping public spaces in black communities and mean that 'Daily life becomes a perpetual dress rehearsal for death' (Bauman quoted in Gilroy, 2000:196).

The racialisation of 'dangerous underclasses' promoted by New Right theorists like Charles Murray (1994) use social workers' unpopularity with the public on child protection, failed 'do-gooding', permissiveness on 'race', scroungers and 'law and order' to affirm the demand that welfare state services be withdrawn. They blame white social workers for helping undeserving people, of which black clients are one group, without containing and controlling social problems. Bureaucratic social work and culturally competent social work essentialise 'ethnicity' and redirect service delivery towards control and containment (Dominelli, 2003).

Discourses about white refugees and asylum seekers from Eastern Europe depict them in racist terms and illustrate how racism is reinvented for changing circumstances. Their plight highlights the powerful role of the media and government policies in constructing people as 'others' who do not 'belong' within a polity. Their discourses suggest that scarce social resources are abused by 'foreigners' who are cast as simply interested in living off the labour of others by consuming public services and spaces (Lavenex, 1999). Little note is taken of how policies and practice create specific positions for groups of people by limiting welfare entitlements or prohibiting waged employment, as occurs to asylum seekers in Britain. Meanwhile, immigrants' enormous contributions to society remain devalued.

Barriers to anti-racist approaches: wheel of avoidance strategies

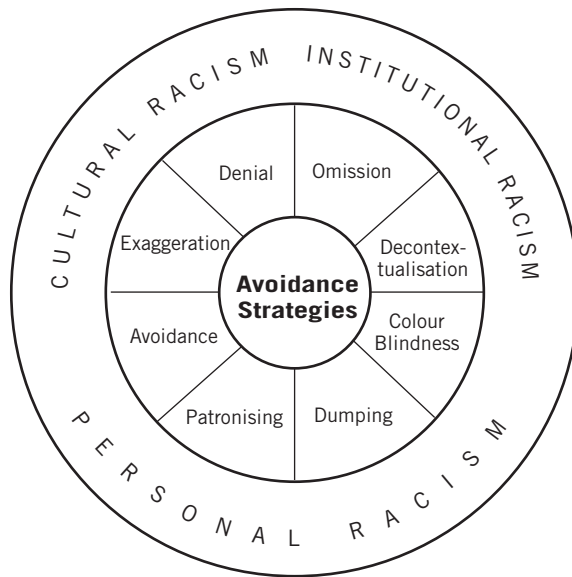
Anti-racism is a state of mind, feeling, political commitment and action to eradicate racial oppression and transform unequal social relations between black and white people to egalitarian ones. White people can act on these matters without relying on tokenistic responses that dump responsibility for change on black people by building bridges and alliances across difference and creating a better society for all peoples regardless of 'race', ethnicity or culture. Anti-racist relations focus on issues directly linked to 'race'

whilst paying attention to their intersection with other forms of oppression. Active engagement with one dimension of oppression to achieve a given purpose limits addressing the others despite working on complex oppressive relations.

Avoiding engaging with racist dynamics

Black people's rights to self-determination create difficulties for white social workers who do not appreciate the implications of black autonomy for practice and view with suspicion and trepidation black people who reserve areas of action for themselves. This can occur in contested child welfare issues like cross-country adoptions or transracial fostering (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Dalmage, 2003; Barn, Ladino and Rogers, 2006). Considering white ways of relating to children as superior can impede development of child care practices that enhance black children's lives.

White people's fears of being oppressed by black people in a worldview characterised by dichotomous understandings of power and oppression impede anti-racist action. Based on a zero-sum power game of winners and losers, these fears are real. They have to be tackled directly to transcend racial divides. White people enact eight strategies of avoidance that restrict their involvement in anti-racist behaviour: denial; omission; avoidance; decontextualisation; the colour-blind approach; patronising approaches; and exaggeration. More than one can be evident in any given situation and each interacts with the others. The wheel of avoidance strategies diagram depicts these (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Wheel of avoidance strategies

Source: L. Dominelli (1997) *Anti-Oppressive Social Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 73.

Avoidance strategies also enable white people to engage superficially with activities aimed at eliminating racism and limit black people's space for self-empowerment.

practice tips strategies of avoidance

Understanding how strategies of avoidance operate enables social workers to counter racism and support anti-racist practice. I describe these below:

1. *Decontextualisation*. People decontextualise racism by conceptualising social relations in a vacuum devoid of power relations. They may accept its existence 'out there', e.g., South Africa under apartheid, but refuse to believe it permeates their everyday activities. A crucial feature of this strategy denies black people's individual experiences of racism. Or, it may ignore racism under the pretext of focusing exclusively on another form of oppression, e.g., sexism.

2. *Denial*: Denial strategies rest on people's rejection of racism, especially its cultural and institutional variants. They ignore evidence of widespread cultural and institutional racism but accept it as personal prejudices held by extremists.
3. *Omission*: Individuals subscribing to this view ignore the racial dimensions of social interactions, see 'race' as irrelevant in most situations and relate to others as if racism did not exist. Social workers' comment 'There is no racism here' to describe a district office in an area with a high proportion of black people living in it, without employing black workers or delivering services to black clients, reflects the failure to acknowledge institutional racism and has traces of denial.
4. *The 'colour-blind' approach*. This treats black people as if they were white people or accorded 'honorary' white status. The statement, 'I treat everyone the same' is a formulation negating a black person's specific experience of racism.
5. *The 'dumping' approach*. In this, white people hold black people responsible for creating and eradicating racism. It becomes a sophisticated form of 'victim' blaming, e.g., expecting black employees to tackle all matters relating to racism.
6. *The patronising approach*. This deems white ways superior but tolerates black people's approaches to things. Multiculturalism that does not address unequal power relations and structural inequalities exposes this strategy as a superficial acceptance of cultural diversity.
7. *Avoidance*. People are aware of racism in social interactions, but avoid opportunities to confront it. This might mean flinching at racist behaviour but keeping quiet about it, e.g., ignoring racist diatribes by colleagues or clients.
8. *Exaggeration*. This acknowledges racism in everyday life, accepts something must be done, but exaggerates or magnifies the value of minimal steps dealing with it (from the view of those at the receiving end), e.g., thinking that racism can be eradicated simply by introducing an 'equal opportunities' policy.

Racist dynamics permeate social work policies and practice

Social work practice is not exempted from personal, institutional and cultural racism in its policies, practices and theories. The presence of racism in social work was initially documented in 1978 by the Commission on Racial Equality (CRE) in *Multi-Racial Britain*:

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The Social Services Response. Other reports followed and testimony from black people exposed the racist nature of their experiences. The identification of racism in the profession was followed by calls for anti-racist initiatives and black perspectives to promote racial equality (Ahmad, 1990). Anti-racist awareness training enjoyed popularity for a while, but was discredited for its simplistic approach to difficult problems. It made white people feel guilty as oppressors and without hope or strategies of action that would make them black peoples' allies in anti-racist struggles. Today, postmodernism legitimates individual, not collective struggles for freedom and thereby allows racist practices to continue oppressing black or minority ethnic peoples.

Racist, anti-racist, non-racist social action

The continuum of social action around racism in social work runs from racist to anti-racist to non-racist. Anti-racism is a stepping-stone between racist and non-racist social relations. Anti-racism bridges where we are at – embedded in racist social relations, to our goal of where we want to be – non-racist ones. Contemporary social relations are replete with racist framings that undermine black peoples' experiences as full citizens. Resistance to and countering racism are part of the anti-racist agenda. The non-racist reality being aspired to has to be created rather than assumed. Formed by eradicating racism, a non-racist environment can produce a context where 'race' is no longer relevant. If racism disappears, anti-racism is unnecessary. Erasing racist social relations has been complicated by the failure of previous anti-racist initiatives. These have been attacked by those supporting its objectives and those opposing them. Opponents consider it 'political correctness' perpetrated by those following fashion trends rather than seriously engaging in practices that meet people's need to be free from racial oppression. Others deny its existence despite a long line of official reports exposing racism. The most significant covered the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999); killing of Zahid Mubarek (Keith, 2006); and death of Anthony Walker (McVeigh and Hill, 2005). Supporters criticise anti-racists for not doing enough to eradicate racist practices; doing things badly; or being irrelevant (Gilroy, 2005).

Anti-racist social work

Anti-racist social work is a form of practice that takes as its starting point racialised social relations that depict 'black' people as inferior. It aims to eradicate racist social relations and dynamics from the profession and society. In realising this, white people tackle racist practices at the personal and collective levels; learn about black perspectives; and build alliances with black people by agreeing common objectives to eradicate racism and create egalitarian partnerships. Black people have their own expectations and demands for these alliances and engage with white people to achieve *mutually* acceptable ways forward (Bishop, 2001). They also address other forms of oppression that intersect with racist social relations; for example, sexism, classism. Focusing on racism alone can be a starting point for the journey.

Social workers assume that personal tolerance and commitment to professional ethics rooted in equality enable them to practice in non-oppressive ways. Black people's experiences of their interventions, numerous research projects and public inquiries demonstrate that this is not so (CRE, 2003c; MacKay, 2006). Anti-racists have analysed social work practice and developed alternatives like those discussed in Chapters 4 to 8. Answering questions as to how and why a profession dedicated to people's well-being oppresses black people has brought structural racism, defined as institutional and cultural racism, into the equation and exposed connections between it and personal racism that implicate personally tolerant individuals in racist practice. Devaluing black people's knowledge, skills and qualifications excludes them from competing for certain posts or over-qualifies them for those they hold (MacKay, 2006). Whether directly involved or not, white people's status as perpetrators and beneficiaries of racist social relations positions them differently to black people in anti-racist endeavours. In establishing egalitarian relations, white people will lose taken-for-granted forms of power and privileges. White people have an explicit choice to make about whether or not they work in anti-racist directions.

By casting diverse needs as competition for scarce resources, white social workers who sympathise with the hardships poverty imposes on white clients can feel unable to pursue claims for help and also undermine anti-racist endeavours. Emecheta (1983), speaking as a black woman, describes how easily her white social

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worker ignores the racial dimension in their interaction and when hearing white clients making racist remarks. Cohen (1985) reveals the difficulties white anti-racist youth workers face in raising consciousness about racism amongst racist white lads in a run-down working-class estate. Tenants associations expose similar dynamics (Ledwith, 2005). A white social worker working with asylum-seekers and refugees in southern England spoke of dilemmas in providing them with services when poor white people had none (Dominelli, 2004a). Their comments revealed a failure to understand that asylum-seekers and refugees had fewer rights or resources to access than white service users and exposes social workers' inability to rise beyond individual interventions to formulate collective strategies that enhance the well-being and quality of life in *both* groups. The picture is complicated by other changes. Neither the reproduction of racist practices nor their elimination are static, one-off events. Privatisation, globalisation, legislative changes, dwindling resources and bureaucratisation of practice through the new managerialism and neo-liberalism make its context a constantly shifting and developing one (Dominelli, 1996, 2004b). New understandings of racist dynamics and grass-roots demands for human-rights and citizenship-based practice contribute to the constant evolution of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice.

Defining poor people as 'deserving' or 'undeserving' sustains individualised forms of practice that cast black people as 'undeserving' and ignores their life contexts. While having poverty and inadequate resources in common, poor white people's views that black people get unfair shares of social resources draw on decontextualised depictions of black people that ignore the impact of racism, a structural inequality, on their experiences of hardship and poverty. Forming alliances to address the problem of scarcity to meet both their needs is crucial if one group's options are not to destroy another's. In a citizenship-based democracy, each individual has a right to good services. The question is *how* to achieve this. Having social and community workers engaging people in both individual and collective actions can help.

putting it into practice

- Consider how you might understand racism as a complex and contested concept.
- Consider the significance of structural racism as an issue for social work practice.
- Consider how social workers might practice in oppressive ways and what they can do to become anti-oppressive practitioners.
- How can you make a contribution to eradicating racist social work practices?

Further reading

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