

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH: IN THE SHADOW OF BRICOLAGE

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ABSTRACT

Critical race theory (CRT) seems to face a never-ending baptism by fire. When the Trump administration sought to ban CRT from American federal training courses in 2020, this may have come as a shock to few (Lang, 2020). Perhaps of greater surprise was that mutual sentiments resonated with the UK Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch, a black female, who appears to oppose the teaching of CRT in principle (Thrilling, 2020). The resurgence of such denunciations is problematic in a Western world which is primed for social activism, particularly for scholars in higher education institutions, where CRT has been gaining traction as a guiding framework for research into antiracism, fairness and affirmative action. This chapter suggests that the condemnation of CRT is neither unexpected nor is it altogether absurd. Nevertheless, it aims to provide a balanced metatheoretical 'criticism' of CRT and offer a view on the suitability of, and prospects for, its activist research agenda in higher education. Quite often, criticisms of CRT reflect issues with its origin as a troubled bricolage of conveniently assembled 'tenets', which do not lend themselves easily to the burden of evidentiary production required in higher education research and practice. In this review, I analyse CRT, through its bricolage-style characteristics, as primarily an explanatory theory, with respect to its application against racialised issues in higher education policy. It is hoped this chapter offers academic and activist researchers a way past the shadow of CRT's bricolage, by defusing some of the misgivings towards its inherent limitations.

Keywords: Activism; racial studies; intersectionality; ideology; hegemony; prejudice

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INTRODUCTION

Are you a research *bricoleur*? If you have used critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework or methodology, then it is highly likely that you *are*. In the philosophical work of Lévi-Strauss (1966), a *bricoleur* extemporaneously adapts a mixed bag of materials into an artisan project, or a ‘bricolage’. This term also applies to the *methodology* behind such adaptations (Kincheloe, 2004). This chapter extends previous historical and systematic reviews of CRT, from its cradle within the US critical legal studies (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) through its adoption in the educational space (Gillborn, 2008; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015), to suggest *how* and *why* CRT is a bricolage at its core and what this means for higher education research.

PROPOSITIONAL THEORIES OF RACE AND RACISM

The historical centre of significance for discussions on ‘race’ and ‘racism’ depends somewhat on your geopolitical lineage. In the United States and South Africa, the idea of ‘race’ is interpolated from the relatively recent segregationist policies under Jim Crow and apartheid (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom and Europe, race is consequential to the mandate for social progress, drawn through the periods of the enlightenment, colonialism and modernity (Seamster & Ray, 2018). And for scholars of the pre-industrialised or industrialising ‘Global South’, race is denounced as a Western pathology, since it carries a Heideggerian ‘will to ignorance’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2004), meaning that it excludes the knowledge of those native peoples who had been oppressed by the construction of race.

These different historical centres also ontologically condition theories of ‘racism’ in terms of race and race relations. For instance, under the segregationist paradigm of the early 1900s, the premise of ‘racism’ was probably best articulated by anthropologist Ruth Benedict as ‘the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority’ (1942, p. 87). Emphasis on human fate being *biologically* encoded as race is what spurred the concept of ‘blackness’ as a monolithic but disunified enterprise, motivating a revolution of black power against ‘non-blackness’ in the early twentieth century. This manifested as high-profile political campaigns, from the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King, Jr., to the calls for diaspora unification representing the black radicalism of Malcolm X (McCartney, 1992).

Black resistance initially had limited effect against the deeply ingrained societal understanding of racial attributes being explainable within one’s biology, until sophisticated techniques allowed for deeper investigations into the structure of DNA. Richard Lewontin’s (1972) analysis of DNA markers in *The Apporionment of Human Diversity* was a landmark critique against racialisation. He positioned that ‘[h]uman racial classification is of no social value and is positively destructive of social and human relations’ (p. 397). Despite caveats over

Lewontin's statistical analysis (Edwards, 2003), modern scientific claims which allude to racialised human deficits are generally met with ire and scepticism (Kathleen, 2017). Significant examples include associating blacks and Hispanics with lower-inherited intelligences in 'The Bell Curve' (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), and the marketing of a heart failure drug targeted to African Americans (Sankar & Kahn, 2005); both have stirred controversy as being racist endeavours.

Nonetheless, the persistence of *casual* racism, despite the overtures of political correctness displayed in response to these extreme claims, has frenzied scholars into seeking alternative links between 'racism' and 'race', depending on their sociopolitical allegiances. Black feminists avoid ontological concessions to race, taking it as given, while charging the patriarchy with the accountability for racism (hooks, 2000). Marxists unify broad tags of racialisation (like Islamophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism) within economic 'modes of production', believing this to bring structural integrity to their arguments (Brustein & Brustein, 2003; Cole, 2004).

Breaking away with earlier theorising of race as either an anthropological aberration or ideological doctrine, Omi and Winant (1986) propose their 'racial formation theory' (RFT) as 'the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories' (p. 61) or as, in their concise update, 'a way of "making up people"' (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 105). Their work underscores not only the social construction of race, but also its place as a 'master category' for sorting human differences, independent from social class, gender or sexual orientation. RFT remains popular with American sociologists of race, due to its consistency with their preference for meso-level analyses that do not get trapped in sociopolitics and structure-agency problem (Ray, 2019).

While race is central to RFT, *racism* is under-theorised; two other key branches of scholarship have engaged with this gap. The first is the framework for 'racialised social systems' offered by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997), which takes cue from RFT by endowing racism with its own ontological independence. His argument is that racism must not be thought of as an epiphenomenal field that simply propagates or reacts to changes in racialised projects, but instead as a system of forces which resolve to generate our awareness of *stereotypes*, *prejudices* and *discrimination* (Bonilla-Silva, 2005). The second branch which critiques RFT is Joe Feagin's (2006) systemic racism theory, which centralises the *reproduction* of racism through an intractable 'white racial frame'. Feagin's sharp turn towards a central concept of 'whiteness', that is more sociological in nature than political, set the tone for American progressive theorisation that had parallels across the Atlantic.

Post-WWII changes in migration patterns and land sovereignty disrupted workers' reliance on Marxism to remedy the major economic inequalities facing newly settled populations in the United Kingdom, Europe and Africa. The genesis of cultural studies in the United Kingdom and the poststructuralist thinking in Europe were largely reactions to dissatisfaction with Marxist scholarship, with knock-on effects for the theorisation of race and racism. Stuart Hall, one of the progenitors of British Cultural Studies, collected ideas within *race*,

ethnicity and *nation* under the common umbrella of *culture* (Hall, 2017). Hall's mission was to derive a stable ground for 'cultural identity' that was neither reductionist nor scattered across individualised politics, regarding it 'not [as] an essence but a *positioning*' (1990, p. 222, emphasis in original). For Hall, the theorisation of race *could not* precede the theorisation of culture and identity.

Contemporaneously, the poststructuralist and postmodern turns pervading Europe influenced a cadre of theorists who took race itself to task, considering the ambiguities in the theories outlined. The application of various 'post' paradigms to the critical evaluation of race has spawned an anthology of discrete works, rather ambiguously known as 'race critical' theories (Appiah, 1993; Goldberg, 1990; Miles & Brown, 2003). Goldberg (1993) deems a 'race critical' scholar as one who absolves the tenuous links between race, racialisation and racism, given that prior theories had failed to rationalise these. Drawing on Foucault's (1980) ahistoricist approach to power, as well as Bauman's (1991) characterisation of modernity as being chaotically ambivalent and uncertain, Goldberg argues that race is an *impossible* box to check, being immanently contingent on political and moral orders of discourse.

But what lies in the afterglow of these grand projects to theorise race and racism? Black radicalism, especially through higher education movements (Kendi, 2012), has been nourished within large-scale prosocial movements like 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Rhodes Must Fall' and endorsed by scholarship on civic engagement (Robinson, 2019). Marxism has endeavoured to overcome its ingrained 'psychosis of Whiteness' (Andrews, 2016), enticing black activists across the West to embrace the idea of a socialist state (Andrews, 2018). Meanwhile, Hall's culturalism set the groundwork for contemporary integrationist projects like *multi-culturalism* (Pitcher, 2009) and 'race critical' ideologies have been taken to their natural limits by prominent scholars advocating for a *post-race* world.

Gilroy (2000) cautions that 'to imagine dangerous meanings [of race] can be easily re-articulated into benign, democratic forms would be to exaggerate the power of critical and oppositional interests' (p. 12). In other words, Gilroy and those who share his abolitionist commitments believe that denying 'race' as a permanent subject of critique would be a pyrrhic victory for racial progression. To the merit of this argument, despite multiple attempts at theoretical consolidation (Carmichael, Ture, & Hamilton, 1992; Feagin & Hernan, 2000), sociologists and activists have agreed to disagree on the models and traditions that are needed to make the concepts of race, race relations and racism coherent, consistent and complete (Golash-Boza, 2016; Winant, 2000).

Yet if one conscientiously explored the metatheoretic patterns within sociological thought, one would find that such disagreements are comprehensively explained by the paradoxes between social cohesion, culture and individual agency within the structure-agency problem. These paradoxes affect the balance between implicit agreement and explicit coercion in the *hegemonic* power struggles that are contextualised by race and racism. While social theorists of race continue to investigate and trial alternative paradigms for these paradoxes (see, for example, the 'relational' approach of Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012), activism-oriented

scholars, including those in higher education research, have invested in the bricolage approach of CRT to support their campaigns.

AN ANATOMY OF THE TENETS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

I provide here an anatomy of CRT, within the space it occupies against the theoretical landscape described in the preceding section. It is crucial to distinguish the anatomy of CRT, compared with that of a type 1 (propositional) theory, in the semantic schema of [Abend \(2008\)](#), which I will use henceforth. The theories described are of type 1, or *propositional*, meaning they have been constructed using a set of assumptions considered to be tautologically ‘true’, and whose variables and parameters are logically connected. Sometimes these assumptions are implicit; [Hall and Du Gay \(1996\)](#), for instance, assume that *race*, *ethnicity* and *nation* share ontological characteristics that allow them to be unified under one’s ‘cultural identity’.

Type 1 theories are at risk of breaking down, either when assumptions cannot be vindicated under empirical investigation or the deductive logic applied is flawed. The latter tends to happen more in social theory, which suffers from the aforementioned structure-agency paradoxes. Specifically, sociological thought establishes definitions of society, culture, agency and power which maintain varying degrees of logical incompatibility, depending on the notion of *causality* which connects them ([Archer, 2003](#); [Lee, 1999](#)). These sociological incompatibilities are inherited by the type 1 theories of race and racism and end up *overlapping* or *competing* for clarity.

CRT is more purposefully thought of as a type 2 theory in [Abend’s \(2008\)](#) schema – one that attempts to explain a phenomenon by ‘identify[ing] a number of “factors” or “conditions,” which individually should pass some sort of counterfactual test for causal relevance, and whose interaction effects should *somehow* be taken into account’ ([Abend, 2008](#), p. 178, emphasis added). As with type 1 theories, there are assumptions about the factors and their interactions, but what is important here is the term ‘somehow’; there is no demand for full logical consistency or completeness of the factors identified to explain the phenomenon, making a type 2 theory somewhat ‘looser’ than type 1. This does not necessarily make such an approach invalid; the empirical value of a theory lies formidably in the balance between its *explanatory* power and *predictive* power ([Shmueli, 2010](#)), each of which is important in its own right. A theory exhibits greater explanatory power; the more relevant factors it contains and the more predictive power, the better the factors are weighted and linked together. A type 2 theory can be more useful than a type 1 theory if explanatory power is preferred in the context.

CRT attempts to explain the phenomena of race and racism *jointly*, using a set of factors typically referred to in scholarship as ‘tenets’ ([Delgado & Stefancic, 2017](#)). These tenets have grown in number and scope over time as the scholarship base expanded, especially in higher education research ([Hiraldo, 2010](#)), but not

all authors recognise the tenets in the same way or with the same prominence. This is because the interactions between and weighting of the tenets depend on the context in which CRT is applied. As the tenets themselves overlap with isolated concepts from the type 1 theories discussed, CRT tends to have a *higher* degree of explanatory power, but a *lower* degree of predictive power, than alternative propositional theories in racial studies. Indeed, many type 1 theorists subscribe to CRT to the extent that they share similar commitments to explaining (rather than predicting) relations of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Essed & Goldberg, 2001). The following provides a brief sketch of each of the tenets, explaining how they are adapted in higher education to align with activists' and sociologists' agendas.

Racial Realism

The tenet of racial realism is the most fundamental to CRT. Its lineage is often traced to legal scholar Derrick Bell's (1992a) oeuvre '*Faces at the Bottom of the Well*', where he picks at Frantz Fanon's dilemma that 'racist structures... [are] permanently embedded in psychology, economy, society, and culture of the modern world' (p. 10). Others also relate to Bell's epilogue in the same work where he laments 'racism lies at the center, not the periphery... in the real lives of black and white people, not in the sentimental caverns of the mind' (p. 183). Here Bell strongly conditions the *real* inevitability of both race and racism simultaneously, irrespective of whether each is material, idealist or socially constructed. Further work, particularly in the British strand of CRT, adds that racial realism implies that racism is *institutionalised* and must be understood in its historical context (Gillborn, 2015; Warmington, 2019).

Effectively, this tenet advocates that we retain normative practices, discourse and thoughts that preserve racial categories (Glasgow, 2009) without explicitly relying on the interior mechanisms and assumptions that drive the ontological interactions between race and racism. This mandate gives CRT its legs, as it allows for discussions to move beyond the metaphysics of race. In higher education, it provides a clear starting point for discussions on segregation and marginalisation in areas as diverse as student affairs, faculty structure, art, sport and well-being (Hylton, 2008; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Spillane, 2015). On the other hand, its unassailable and dogmatic epistemological basis leaves this primal tenet of CRT exposed to criticism, particularly in its exclusion of an idealist or cultural component (Crenshaw, 2010). To some extent, CRT has ameliorated this by adapting and annexing the other tenets below in reinforcement of racial realism, ultimately fuelling its bricolage spirit.

Critique of Liberalism

The critique of liberalism supports racial realism by challenging the notion that sufficient remedies exist to appease or stymie the reproduction of race relations, racism in society and racialised organisations. Sometimes less euphemistically referred to as the 'myth of meritocracy' (Castagno, 2014; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011), it positions market forces, neoliberalism and welfare

systems as ignorant in assuming that racial groups can be made better off by simply committing to a culture of ‘equal access’ to *opportunities*. It thus defies ‘colour blind’ approaches, which selectively deny that race is a significant variable in the translation of opportunities into real and equitable *outcomes*. The works of [Bonilla-Silva \(2018\)](#) and [Henricks \(2018\)](#) are interesting parallels in their arguments that colour blindness is itself ideological and complicit in the historical reproduction of racist structures.

In higher education, an insightful mechanic of colour blindness is the training of teachers to develop ‘politically correct shields’ ([Lander, 2014](#)), which allow them to deflect uncomfortable discussions of race in their classrooms, creating the impression that *neutrality* (and therefore liberalism) is fundamental to the teaching profession. Advocates of colour blindness, and meritocracy, argue that holding the spotlight over race and racism is counterproductive, and the philosophical slippage of drawing awareness to racialised structures for equality effectively brings about radicalised anarchy. Evidence of this is seen in ‘colourism’ – the idea that people of mixed-race heritage which includes white parentage are inherently advantaged, irrespective of their identification with ‘blackness’ ([Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010](#)).

Liberals indicate this creates an environment where you are ‘*dammed if you do; damned if you don’t*’, with the myriad possibilities for hierarchies of race bringing about ‘equality fatigue’. A stark example of reactions to this fatigue is the ‘All Lives Matter’ movement ([Atkins, 2019; Mazzocco, 2017](#)), which attempts to engender the liberal premise that *all* lives are equally at risk. There is a subtle irony in the arguments that society has itself become ‘post-race’, as the approach it sets forth has become a reified culture – one that supplants the need to recognise societal structure in general ([Lentin, 2014](#)). Nevertheless, the battle between criticality and liberalism, even in issues of race, is ultimately philosophical and cannot easily be settled without conceding ground on some normative vision of justice ([Rawls, 2001; Sen, 1987](#)).

Experiential Knowledge

Historicist approaches to recognition of race and racism have desired for a tenet that centralises the experiential knowledge of people of colour. Philosophically, this means opening the fields of historiography and memory studies to work through the mechanics of revisionisms in history ([Straker, 2013](#)) and transitional justices ([Rigney, 2012](#)). In practice, ethnographic methods used in these domains have expanded to rely on ‘storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *testimonios*, *cuENTOS*, *consejos*, chronicles and narratives’ ([Solorzano & Bernal, 2001](#), p. 314). These ‘extras’ allow CRT to function as an overarching methodology through ‘counterstory’. This was inaugurated in the ‘first-person singular’ voice of black literature spanning the 1770s through 1920s ([Lee, 1998](#)) and was inherited wholesale by black radicalism in the 1960s. Counterstory is a grounded approach for research into racialised structures, race relations and people of colour, which reacts in defiance of ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ epistemologies, to reinstate minority voices ([Martinez, 2020](#)).

One major criticism of CRT is that it has gone beyond these traditions to include methods such as allegory and composition (Bell, 1987), which are less recognised as driving rigorous interpretative research. Even Ladson-Billings (2005) has cautioned against a completely deconstructive approach in education; she worries that the attraction of CRT allows ‘focus on storytelling to the exclusion of the central ideas such stories purport to illustrate’ (p. 117). Moreover, Richardson (2000) raised the questions of evaluation and judgement with respect to the technique of ‘autoethnography’, which is being used more commonly by CRT and other bricolage-styled research (Taylor, 2019). Nevertheless, counterstory continues to be a core methodology in the application of CRT to higher education, leading, for instance, to new understandings of faculty apartheid (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), and racial microaggressions (Linder, Harris, Allen, & Hubain, 2015).

Intersectionality

Exploration into individual experience is one side of the agency coin. The other side is the representation of ‘intersectional’ groups – those whose experiences are unique because their cultural identities cut across the margins of other broad social groupings (e.g., gender, class, religion, disability status, sexual orientation). Intersectionality was introduced by critical legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) in her treatise on the differential oppression that women of colour experience compared with either white women or black men. Most CRT scholarship presents intersectionality in a philosophically dilute form; multiplicity of cultural identity can lead to forms of oppression that are ‘multiple’, but cannot be understood in terms of the discrete source identities (Cole, 2020; Harris & Patton, 2019; Mitchell, Simmons, & Greyerbiehl, 2014).

But what happens to multiplicity in the space of liberal policies? Through an intersectional analysis of ‘trans*’ students in racialised higher education institutions, Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018) establish that these students’ oppression is one of *tacit exclusion* through liberalism rather than some overt marginalisation. They lament that oversubscription to the ‘multiplicity’ extrapolation of intersectionality has attenuated Crenshaw’s original analytic sophistication, such that it fails when applied to liberalism.¹ I propose further that the ‘multiplicity’ argument relies on oppressive forces being epistemologically recognisable. This reasoning can be generalised to show that the true power of intersectionality lies in its analogies with a well-known paradox in game theory, the prisoner’s dilemma (Rapoport, 1989). The idea behind this paradox is that liberal policies aimed at a single marginalised group (e.g., women) can inadvertently allow for favourable dispositions towards majority members (*white* women) to create a natural pocket of policy exclusion for the intersectional members (*black* women).

¹Trans* – as used in the original Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018) article, the authors cited the expression trans* as a means to be inclusive of the various ways in which trans* people may identify their genders, including in ways that do not rely on the prefix trans or the word transgender.

In this articulation, there is significant scope for intersectionality to add more rigour to the bricolage of CRT.

Principle of Interest Convergence

CRT incorporates certain hegemonic projects which are not always explained well by type 1 theories. Hegemonic projects tend to be the feudal ground of activists, principally because hegemony changes form through different expressions of power struggles (Thomas, 2009), but it can never be fully eliminated. Therefore, whether consciously or not, activists tend to take a 'lesser of evils' approach to dealing with hegemony. The benefit of CRT's bricolage is that it does not pick sides, so *all* racialising hegemonic projects are impeachable *ex ante* and with equal measure.

The two most clearly developed hegemony-oriented tenets in CRT have deep roots in post-Marxism and the works of Antonio Gramsci. The first is the 'principle of interest convergence', which maintains that racial progress can be made explicitly and transparently whenever general 'white interests' are coincidentally satisfied. The quintessential exemplar of interest convergence in most CRT scholarship is the Supreme Court's desegregation policy for USA public schools (Bell, 1980), which was regarded as being motivated to preserve the image of (white) democracy against communism on the world stage (Jackson & Jackson, 2005). In higher education, similar interest convergence occurs within diversity initiatives of 'predominantly white institutions', which tend to benefit financially from symbolically maintaining a quota of non-white students in their cohort (Patton, 2016).

Whiteness as Ideology

The second hegemonic project used as a central tenet in CRT is 'whiteness as ideology'. Strictly speaking, this tenet represents an umbrella of possibilities for hegemonic manifestations of the ontology of whiteness and overlaps widely with Feagin's (2013) concept of the 'white racial frame'. Early CRT dealt with this overtly as 'white supremacy' – the essentialised binarism of racial differences that laid the grounds for economic, political and legal advantage (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Harris later adapted this to explain her vision of 'whiteness as property', a related but distinct hegemonic principle that has roots in the Marxist notions of 'ownership of means of production' and class-based hegemony (1993).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) relied on this tenet when advancing their original case for applying CRT to the education space. Once CRT in education had subsequently crossed the Atlantic, Gillborn (2005) retained the label of 'white supremacy' for dramatic effect but tailored its meaning to reference the unintentional political norms carried through whiteness as being mainstream and embedded in educational policymaking. Further theorisation considers 'white fragility', the concept that white people can use their distress as an excuse for avoiding uncomfortable discussions of racism (DiAngelo, 2018). The 'whiteness as ideology' tenet incorporates 'white fragility' and has been applied to support the moral imperative to 'call out' racism in the higher education academy (Sian, 2019). This suite of independent hegemonic projects based on whiteness laid the

philosophical foundations for critical whiteness studies as an offshoot of CRT (Leonardo, 2009), wherein it also features as a reflexive methodology for higher education research (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019).

Commitment to Social Justice

Despite the inclusion of hegemonic projects within tenets, this is not sufficient to guarantee that CRT can attend to the complexity of power struggles that are imbricated in race relations at every national, social and institutional level. The challenge is that not all scenarios featuring racial conflict, stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice involve obvious interactions with some form of hegemonic infrastructure that can be accessed by marginalised groups. This restriction parallels the gaps in other critical scholarship and led to the idea of ‘subaltern’ classes (Spivak, 1988) – those which suffer injustices of exclusion and denial of fundamental pieces of their identity, without full awareness of these injustices. For this reason, contemporary CRT scholarship tends to list the ‘commitment to social justice’ as a balancing item, reiterating the emancipatory nature of the theory through interdisciplinary praxis (Pratt-Clarke, 2010) and ‘all-rounded’ activism with respect to social inequalities.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AS A CONTINUUM OF BRICOLAGE

Although CRT is a frontrunner in discussions of race and racism, its *de facto* lack of hygiene when cleaning up its theoretical commitments has made it an easy target for both political and academic criticism (Hayes, 2013; Parsons, 2016). Derision between camps, for and against CRT, has been particularly vitriolic in the United Kingdom (Warmington, 2019), but even in the United States, uptake of CRT has been sluggish by scholars who prefer type 1 theories of race and racism (Christian, Seamster, & Ray, 2019). It should be clear by now that CRT is a different animal from other theories of race, race relations and racism. This begs the question, is there a viable place for CRT among the Parthenon of type 1 (propositional) race and racism theories? Certainly, CRT has endured its trial by fire, and its place may be justified because it can be rationalised within spaces which are *themselves* of a bricolage nature, one key example being in the organisational design and functions of higher education.

By preserving the centrality of race and racism, CRT keeps one eye fixated on regulatory structures that may obscure ‘white governmentality’. This refers to the shaping of policies that diminish the political and cultural experiences of everyday life from racialised citizens, such that they become ‘otherised’ from their national identity (Hesse, 1997). This ‘otherisation’ may not be intentional, but it can occur nevertheless where policies are complex and interrelated. For instance, higher education scholars have recognised that even where policies *seem* to be localised, they are subject to waves of globalised forces through policy borrowing (Vidovich, 2013). Ball (1998) contextualises that educational policymaking ‘is inevitably a process of *bricolage*... [m]ost policies are ramshackle, compromise,

hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes' (p. 126, emphasis added).

It is therefore unlikely for *new* policies to be able to remedy forms of otherisation or racialisation, at least not in a predictable manner, since the inherent policy bricolage makes it difficult to reliably set equality as a goal. A similar argument was provided in Bell's (1992b) charge that the judicial system reproduces racism, as there is no meaningful way for precedent in favour of black rights to be set. Such actualised 'chaos' of policymaking at the highest levels means it is difficult to calibrate higher education deracialising agendas in a manner consistent with liberalism and colour blindness or indeed against theorisations of race and racism that commit to the ontological integrity of policy-making structures. CRT therefore benefits activists by avoiding the liberal trap of simply endorsing naïve (multicultural) policy change as a negation of racism.

Even where policies *do* filter downward to higher education institutions in a coherent manner, they tend to integrate within the organisational culture in ways which are not predictable from a top-down analysis. Huisman (2000) explores various techniques for operationalising the concept of 'diversity' in HEI characteristics, which lends itself to the notion that policy outcomes in HEIs *might* be predictable if we understand the most salient characteristics by which institutions can be meaningfully categorised. Yet, as May and Jochim (2013) argue, the linear process of policy *enactment* does not support a deep understanding of the contours of policy regimes with respect to a strict categorical understanding of HEI organisational culture. Indeed, drawing on the poststructuralist vocabulary of Deleuze, it may be more informative to think of higher education policy enactment as an 'assemblage' of unstable relationships and possibilities that can be used to understand how policies inform organisational 'truths' (Burke & Kuo, 2015), without being reduced to categorical 'sameness'. CRT's intersectionality tenet is viable here in its game theoretic form, for exposing systematic distortions in these organisational 'truths' that may envelope racialised meanings.

Another challenge is that positive concepts we may privilege as institutional indicators (e.g., excellence, egalitarianism, efficiency) are all subject to some form of 'organisational improvisation'. This notion of improvisation is endowed with an agentic bricolage that is performative, goal-oriented and strategic (e Cunha, Da Cunha, & Kamoche, 2002). Where strategies which attempt to uplift these indicators persist, racialised experiences of students and staff can become subdued, deconstructed and lost, requiring direct counterstories to recover and expose asymmetric information. These counterstories must also account for discourses which are de-rationalised due to breaks in common knowledge of experiences that are simultaneously gendered and racialised (Kennedy, 2002). CRT thus serves as an *actionable* means to evaluate the representation and voice of racially diverse students and staff within the organisational aims of higher education.

Finally, we must recognise that although racialised ideologies in higher education institutions may appear the same *phenotypically*, they do have distinct genetic makeups. Nevertheless, within certain normative dimensions, we can categorise ideologies according to mutually exclusive 'orientations' with respect

to their underlying educational policy frameworks (Jones, 2013). Mutual exclusivity is important for the interpretation of race relations, as it underscores the idea that we can interpret equilibria conditions in racialised ideology at an *axiological* level, even though there is significant complexity in the ontological forms of race and racism. The existence of such equilibria was implicit in Gramsci's work on power and hegemony of social classes (Williams, 2020). Hebdige (2005) further argues that similar dynamics apply to expressions of race, ethnicity and nationality as a *whole*. These expressions are then merged and assimilated into our identities via a bricolage-style series of cumulative and recursive social practices that act as a programme of 'cultural software' (Balkin, 1998).

This cultural software determines which normative dimensions of hegemony manifest through social and political change. CRT does attempt to account for cycles of hegemonic instability of race (as a part of cultural identity), under the tenets of 'interest convergence' and 'whiteness as ideology'. Yet, it would not be expected that these cover the full scope of relevant racialised issues in higher education. For instance, Nimako (2016) explains there is an *epistemological* component to racialisation in universities that reinforces the exclusion of minority knowledges, over and above the hegemonic exclusion of minority ethnic identity. These 'epistemic injustices' can be insidious and difficult to trace, and as a result, CRT's functional basis is only completed through its established commitment to social justice in the widest sense, in excess of *overt* domination or hegemony.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY – WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Arguably, CRT has found a niche in higher educational scholarship, alongside other fields developed in a bricolage style, like critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008) and post-colonial studies (Huggan, 2013). Indeed, CRT is mirrored by other frameworks addressing marginalised groups (Gillborn, Warmington, & Demack, 2018), including Latinos (LatCrit), people with different abilities or disabilities (DisCrit) and people disenfranchised by the application of quantitative methodologies (QuantCrit). The shape of these agendas is broadly consistent with the sociopolitical and power-centric architecture of CRT's tenets, with matters of whiteness being substituted more generally by 'dominant ideologies'; this can therefore be used as a template for further 'CritWorks' applied to higher education research.

I remain sceptical of alternative works which attempt to reintegrate principles of type 1 theories of race and racism as an enhancement to CRT. By the arguments presented on the empirical and metaphysical constraints of bricolage, such endeavours are likely to be redundant and not improve CRT's theoretical robustness or predictive power. Complementary programmes for stabilising CRT may instead try to position the tenets in a mutually exclusive manner, allowing for specific dimensions of equality orientations and hegemonic projects that relate to colonial values in education (Jogie, forthcoming 2022).

A final area of uncertainty for CRT is its applicability across academic disciplines and political boundaries. Although CRT has been useful in facilitating the idea of the Western ‘racial state’ (Sayyid, 2015), it has yet to bear fruits when delivering the right balance of tenets to issues of racialised education systems in post-colonial, post-communist and post-conflict states (Law & Tate, 2015). Perhaps CRT must prove its viability within broader sociology of race studies in its existing Western contexts before it can grow further in higher education research. This seems to be progressing readily in the United States, where the neo-pragmatist framing of sociology is a natural fit for CRT’s well-designed bricolage. On the other hand, UK race scholars are somewhat offset from mainstream sociologists, though there may be potential for CRT to commit itself within an ontological hierarchy like that offered by critical realism (Bhaskar, 2010), so that its tenets can readily integrate with the core issues of gender, class and culture relevant to the socialisation of higher education.

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