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Decolonising the academy, 'getting brave', and going into battle ...

Alana Lentin

Western Sydney University

A.Lentin@westernsydney.edu.au

We are living in pressing times. Of course, this is a continuum, not a radical departure. The racial state has always told itself its white lies (pun intended).

When I moved to Australia in 2012, I am ashamed to say I did not really know where I was coming to. Then it hit me with the full breadth of its open palm with a ricochet that still won't settle. Everywhere I could see evidence of the hypervisibility of white possession, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) has unmasked it.

What do I do? I am still asking myself that question. But one thing I know I cannot do is remain silent. Moving to Australia has forced me to confront my own complicities and my own ignorance. It has also taught me that I will never know land, I will never have country; nor should I. I have been returned to my diaspora by the confrontation with the reality of those whose land they inhabit but from whom it is daily stolen. I do not want to be here; there is nothing here for settlers. We should go, and apologise for having come.

This is me talking to myself. The internal chatter of the academic mind is not something the neoliberal university permits us to share. But I believe our world could do with more, not less, self-doubt; less 'guarantees', to echo Stuart Hall. I don't mean to say that everything should be up for debate; rather the opposite (Hall, 2017). I mean to say that for those of us educated within the colonial structures of the western university, we must be ready to be more open to learning from those it has long locked out.

In general, it is true the humanities and social sciences remain overbearingly white and Eurocentric. The curriculum is a long way off from being decolonised. However, I am also disturbed by those among our academic leaders who know Indigenous studies, Black feminist thought, and queer theory. They have sat in seminar rooms with the leading scholars. Yet they fail to implement their words or their work in their own practice. They recreate the hierarchies and reinstate the injustices that these writers and teachers – our colleagues and mentors in critical race studies and antiracist practice – work so hard to expose and dismantle. What is a decolonised curriculum worth in a colonial academy on colonised land?

At the July 2018 ACRAWA Symposium, 'Thinking Relationally About Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia,' Yassir Morsi, moderating the final panel, asked how it was possible to work on the critical interrogation of these topics from within a university system so deeply invested in upholding them. Professor Irene Watson replied that 'it just is'. We might take this to mean that we labour on, within and against the structures that we cannot change. We learn from what Robin D.G. Kelley calls 'Black study, Black struggle', "repurposing university resources" to "self-radicalise" (Kelley, 2016). We do what we can with what we have.

And this is good and this is fine. But we are still confronted with a structure that we cannot depend on for protection. In July 2018, the *Monash Bioethics Review* published an article entitled 'Defending Eugenics'. In it the author, Jonathan Anomaly, argued that policies should be put in place to reduce "consequences of people reproducing at random" (Anomaly, 2018, p. 31). He wishes to reinstate the 'spirit' of the race scientist Francis Galton in making the argument that "future people would be better off if people with heritable traits that we value had a greater proportion of children" (Anomaly, 2018, p. 31). There is no way that these positions can be dissociated from their racist history, or indeed their present. Not only have practices such as the forced sterilisation of poor Indigenous and Black women never completely gone away and the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families remained at unprecedented levels in Australia today, but we are witnessing the creeping of 'race realism' and 'not racism' (Lentin, 2018) into public acceptability. Allow me to explain.

While much has been made of the rise of the alt right within the context of the election of Donald Trump to office, it is still easy to view him as a relative outlier to the mainstream of politics. However, the publication of an article defending eugenics in a reputable scientific journal is emblematic, in my view, of the structural context that enables and legitimates this. We can call this the logic of liberalism which, as Lisa Lowe has shown in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, is cut through with race and coloniality (Lowe, 2015). Indeed, the key problem we face in undoing racial rule within societies, such as Australia, that consider themselves liberal democracies, is the fact that political liberalism understands progress as immanent to itself. Therefore, as Lisa Lowe explains, for example in her discussion of the abolition of slavery, liberals are able to write off the freedom struggles of enslaved peoples as well as the changing economic conditions which reduced the profitability of slavery to make the claim that abolition was the culmination of liberalism's progress.

We are faced today with a media and an academic system that mirrors this scenario. Freedom of speech is seen as a good in itself in what is presented as the 'marketplace of ideas'. So, an article defending eugenics can be published presumably because airing these views will lead to their being taken on and defeated by others in the field. Likewise, the management of Sydney University believes that taking money from the Ramsay Centre to set up a course in Western Civilisation against the backdrop of the closure of the Aboriginal Studies 'Koori Centre' bears no connection to the University's origins as the first on invaded land where Aboriginal students and staff of colour continue to be underrepresented and the curriculum is far from addressing its investments in colonial knowledge structures, as Victoria Grieves (2019) has argued forcefully.

The same belief in liberalism as the ultimate corrector underpins what Gavan Titley has called the 'debatability' of racism in the public sphere (Titley, 2016) and the growing predominance of what I have termed 'not racism' (Lentin, 2018). While

denialism has ever been a feature of racism because the public is bereft of the tools of racial literacy and understands racism purely as a problem of individual morality, 'not racism' adds a further dimension to this scenario. Not only do those caught in the act of racism, such as the family of the Finsbury Mosque killer, Darren Osborne, deny their racist intent, but academics line up to repackage racism as an 'unhelpful' diversion from the real matters at hand. Such is the agenda of Birkbeck College professor, Eric Kaufmann whose report 'Racial Self Interest is Not Racism' (Kaufmann, 2017) argues that white pro-Brexit and Trump voters should not be accused of racism for voting with their ethnic group against their perceived usurpation by immigrants and ethnic minorities. Racism, in this scenario, is portrayed as a diversionary tactic used by political opponents to ensnare those they object to, thus effectively victimising those responsible for racist acts, at the ballot and beyond.

Books such as Kaufmann's *Whiteshift* (Kaufmann, 2018) and *National Populism* (Goodwin & Eatwell 2018), all of whose authors were recently critiqued for taking part in a panel discussion on 'Is Rising Ethnic Diversity a Threat to the West?', (see for example Sanusi, 2018) are used by the media to legitimise the dominant agenda that a 'left behind' white working class was responsible for the Trump and Brexit votes. The solution touted by Kaufmann et al., is that more has to be done to listen to the concerns of white people who feel beleaguered by cosmopolitan elites who, it is said, have foisted immigration and multiculturalism on them. This message succeeds despite the weight of research now demonstrating that neither the Trump nor the Brexit vote were driven by the so-called 'white working class', that the majority of the working class in most countries in the Global North are in fact Black and Brown, and that racist views on immigration were among the main motivations for those who voted for Trump or the leave the EU (Shilliam, 2018).

The task facing critical race scholars is vast. In the past, I used to downplay the role that neo-fascism has to play in contemporary racism, instead emphasising the institutionalised, insidious nature of racism. We can no longer do this. While racial logic is infused into the crevices of western societies and continues to determine the life chances of Aboriginal people, Black people, Brown people, Muslim people, Roma people, etc., white silence about this fact propels the rise of open white supremacy. The liberal tendency that negates the impact of race as a technology of power in our systems of governance, of knowledge, and of law, also negates the significance of this rise. While, a previous iteration saw real racism identified only in the actions of evident extremists, twenty years of the global 'war on terror', the criminalisation of migrants and asylum seekers, and the grinding persistence of state racism against Black and Indigenous peoples serves to sanitise the image of white supremacists and 'race realists' to the extent that their views appear as 'commonsense'. Ideas that were once voiced openly only by those on the fringes of politics have, spurred by the mounting of 'white crisis' gripping the west at least since the start of the multicultural era – but actually always already intrinsic to racial-colonialism – now become mainstream. Universities and scholars, not wishing to be seen as partisan, now permit a 'both sides' approach according to which, to echo Donald Trump, there is 'good and bad' on both sides. Our campuses, already intellectually dangerous spaces for 'non-white', 'not quite white' and people of colour, have become, in some instances or have the potential to become in others, physically dangerous spaces.

We are going to need academics to become a lot braver. We cannot continue to theorise on the backs of the racialised without committing to the fullness of their lives. The academy needs a full overhaul; it needs to decolonise and not just metaphorically

(Tuck & Yang, 2014). I hope that the CRAWWS journal can become a space of radical opening to young Aboriginal and scholars of colour, and other racialised people; that white people in this space listen with humility and that we go together into battle for the sake of our collective future.

Author Note

Dr Alana Lentin is Associate Professor in Cultural and Social Analysis at Western Sydney University. She works on the critical theorization of race, racism and antiracism. She is co-editor of the Rowman and Littlefield International book series, [Challenging Migration Studies](#) and the President of the [Australian Critical Race & Whiteness Studies Association](#) (2017-19). In 2017, she was [Hans Speier Visiting Professor of Sociology](#) at the New School for Social Research in New York.

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