



## THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

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## RACISM IN CANADIAN CONTEXTS: Exploring Public & Private Issues in the Educational System

*George S. Dei*

### INTRODUCTION

**I** BEGIN THIS DISCUSSION with some words of caution. In speaking of race/racism, I am not creating it; rather, I am pointing to what already exists. Silence cannot wish away the problem of racism. In addition, I am writing from my social position as a male, Canadian educator of African descent teaching in a post-secondary institution. I therefore speak from the position of someone who is privileged but one who simultaneously faces social discrimination having to deal with day-to-day racist and racialized practices. While I acknowledge my privileged position and the contradictions that come with it, I also share responsibility in the search for viable solutions to racism in Canadian contexts. In doing so, I borrow from Stuart Hall's (1996, 447) words of caution that we must continually recognize that "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, [and] a particular culture." The limits of our knowing do not invalidate our experiential and academic knowledge of racism.

In this chapter, therefore, I present a cursory overview of how I see racism and race relations working in Canadian society. Admittedly, any attempt to interrogate racism within society is a large and complex undertaking, given the different and diverse manifestations of society. Nevertheless, I partake in this discursive practice to show both the historical and contemporary connections of racism as it manifests itself in society. The learning objective is to critically examine the historical and contemporary manifestations of racism, specifically, the nature and context of racism in Canadian society pointing to the extent to which racism is viewed as a social or political problem. The discussion proceeds to reflect on the nation-state/governmental responses to the problem of racism, as well as the role of local community organizations in resisting/addressing racism through anti-racist initiatives. I utilize personal experience/reflections as an important knowledge base to highlight the nature and extent of racism within a specific societal institutional sector – schooling and education.

The chapter draws on my personal, subjective experiences, and I do not, in any way, attempt to project such experiences onto others. It would be presumptuous on my part to do so, and I respect the views of those who do not share the experiences I speak about. I also hold a powerful conviction that the issues discussed here will resonate with many others. There will always be allies in the struggles of the racially minoritized to have their experiences, cultures, and histories represented in the conventional school setting, workplace, and other institutional settings. Throughout this discussion, I use the word *minoritized* in the sense of power relations within the social setting. I speak of a process of minoritization, in which groups are denied access to power and their agency is structurally constrained by local and national politics of the dominant. The term *minoritized* does not mean minority groups lack agency and the power to resist. On the contrary, it (the term) gestures to the constant practice of placing these groups in subordinate power relations with the dominant group(s), primarily through the distribution of valued goods and services of society.

As a person of African descent, I have no qualms about being described as a racial minority faculty. In fact, I see myself as such. I am also working with a broader definition of *exclusion*. My broad concerns in this chapter are with the institutionalized processes of *othering*, which feeds racism and racist practices; the social construction of *otherness*, and the historic failure and outright refusal to include and to centre the experiences, histories, cultures, and knowledge systems of non-European peoples in Euro-American contexts. I also concede that there are macro- and micro-differences (or distinctions) in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and histories that need to guide the discussion of racism and oppression in society. The facts of race, ethnicity, gender sexuality, ability, and history differentially impact upon the experiences of every member of society. However, such differences should not prevent a critical analysis of the situation that minoritized bodies face in mainstream, hetero-patriarchal institutions (e.g., in schools, workplaces, union

halls, and so on). It is important that an understanding of the subjective, lived experiences of the minoritized be situated within a wider structural context, particularly in external social conditions and processes.

At the theoretical level, this chapter is positioned within an anti-racist, discursive framework. This framework seeks to challenge both the exclusionary politics of social institutions and institutional settings, and the universal claims to truth that have historically been propagated by conventional, dominant systems. The anti-racist agenda interrogates power relations in society and the rationality for dominance. The anti-racist agenda also validates difference and diversity by addressing questions of race, representation, and identity in institutional settings (e.g., homes, families, workplaces, schools, and union halls). In terms of communicative practice, the anti-racist, pedagogical strategy (like other forms of liberatory pedagogy) posits and nurtures avenues for marginalized, excluded, and silenced groups to challenge dominant hegemonic discourses, ideas, and interests, definitions of knowledge, and conventional (Euro-centred) approaches to learning.

The anti-racist framework can assist in understanding how our racial, class, and gender identities are implicated in our ways of knowing and in knowledge itself. That framework also helps us to understand how our race, gender, or class position implicates us in both particular and diverse interests in the institutions in which we work. Many times our voices can be heard differently when we seem to be saying the same things. The readings of discourses on bodies have historically worked to position us differently in the academy in terms of the politics of our work. It is not surprising that Black scholars are often heard speaking only about race, even when they are articulating the intersections of difference. Anti-racism pedagogy problematizes the manner in which patriarchal relations of schooling engage some students and faculty while disengaging others. The anti-racist stance calls on educators to acknowledge their relative power and privileged positions in society, and to interrogate what such power and privilege has done, and continues to do, for some people.

In examining and interrogating the exclusionary politics of social systems and institutions, certain questions have to be asked: For example, what are the prevailing definitions of racism within Canada? What are the lessons of history in understanding racism in Canadian contexts? Whose interests are being served by social and institutional practices of racial exclusions? How do the relations of power within our social system hegemonize the norms and values of mainstream Canadians? Do all subjects have equal access to available resources, materials, and valued goods of the society? Who and what are excluded from the seating of major players in society? How do those who are racially minoritized resist their subordination? Finally, what avenues exist in society for subordinated groups to voice their concerns and aspirations?

Race and racism have become an unsettling issue for most Canadians. A common [dominant] view or position is that the less said about these terms, the better it is for society. The hegemonic view of racism is that it is simply negative and must be swept under a carpet (see also Tatum 1999). The degree to which academic knowledge produces, sustains, or subverts such problematic general understandings is still a debatable matter. The hostility towards the assertion of racism in society by dominant groups reaches its highest level when the anti-racist worker also heralds the saliency of race in Canadian society. As Tatum (1999, 60) has observed, "some dimensions of our identities are reflected more saliently than others, a distinction made apparent by the energy we invest in their examination." Dei (1996, 1999) addresses the situational and contextual variations in intensities of oppression that make it possible for the anti-racist worker to notice that, while oppressions may be similar, they are not equal in their consequences, given the history and context of oppressive practice. I share Winant's (1997) insights in asserting that the contemporary Euro-American/Canadian scene can be characterized as an open denial of the significance of race in academic discourses. Race repeatedly takes a back seat in *progressive* politics. This fact is coupled with the call for a trans-racial politics devoid of a politics of identity. Many so-called progressive workers have also resorted to strictly class-based criteria in formulating social policy for equity and justice. In such an atmosphere, many minorities, including African-Canadians, are losing their sense of entitlement and belonging to Canadian citizenship.

In Canadian public, official, and academic discourses, one could argue that there are commonsense definitions of race relations, as opposed to critical anti-racist perspectives about what terms, such as *race*, *racism*, *anti-racism*, and *race relations*, mean. There are varied definitions of racism ranging from the denial of the importance of race to a liberal acknowledgement that speaks of race relations in the multicultural sense of *getting to know each other* and *let us get along*. In this view, culture, as opposed to race, is the central concept. The question of conflict among groups is muted, and group differences are read largely as misunderstandings, perceived ignorance, and a lack of knowledge. Racism is hardly seen as a power issue, as in, "Who has the power to construct difference?" Racism is also hardly seen in the refusal to acknowledge and problematize what is designated as different. Race relations are individual, interpersonal relations understood as simply prejudice and the simple acts of the racist self. Racism is perceived as a *personal* and an interactional problem, and to this end, anti-racist work can be about raising consciousness. Racism is not about structural relations between groups competing for access to the valued goods and services of society. Neither is racism institutionalized in daily social practices. A liberal discourse of colour-blind society erases race. How such discourse of *not seeing colour* is itself not innocent is never highlighted

for public discussion. After all, if one does not see colour, then there is no recognition of *White* power and privilege. We are all the same.

As many others have noted, the denial of racism is an integral and central part of the Canadian identity (Razack 1998, 11). There are also critical perspectives on racism that see racism as a system of structural, material, and ideological advantage that some groups have over others in society. This discourse unmasks *Whiteness* as a racial category anchored in a powerful identity (see also Frankenberg 1993; Levine-Rasky 2002). It seeks to reconfigure *Whiteness* as problematically *dominant*. Whiteness has become the *norm*, but it is not, and should not be, the norm. Racism is seen as a conscious/calculated strategy to establish group material and symbolic advantage. Race relations are relations of dominant and subordinate groups. Racism is a relation of power used to privilege and punish groups on the basis of their perceived physical and cultural differences. The social reality of many racial minorities in Canadian society can be problematized in a critical sense as subjects located in the lower end of a hierarchical and highly contested power structure. Many of the challenges faced by bodies of colour can be understood as historic problems of social inequality and of differential levels of influence within the wider social setting. The so-called visible minorities are generally in a subordinate position in relation to groups and individuals that have power to subject them to unequal and differential treatment. The structures of institutionalized racism, sexism, and classism can create obstacles to the attainment of educational and professional goals.

Racism is power. It is institutional, systemic, and cultural. In fact, racism as a system, in which one group exercises power over another on the basis of real, perceived, or imagined physical and cultural differences, has had numerous and persistent effects in Canadian history. I highlight *history* because, as Rodriguez (1998, 2000) argues, when it comes to speaking about racism, we cannot step outside of our histories. There are those who would want to amputate history from the discussion of Canadian society, in part, because this history is of a troubling past. We must resist this call to amputate the past, because the present is itself constitutive of what it is not, the past (see also Lattas 1993). The importance of the history of racism is also for us to learn from the past and to see how the past continues to shape and influence the present.

#### HISTORY OF CANADIAN RACISM

The primary manifestation of racism was European imperial expansion in the *New World*, characterized by land and resource acquisitions from Indigenous populations. In Canada, from the arrival of the French in 1535 to the Royal Proclamation in 1763, there were many instances of overt racism visited on the Indigenous population: European claims and occupations of Aboriginal land; the enslavement of Aboriginal peoples by European traders; the founding of the

Hudson's Bay Company in 1670; and the opening of the first residential school by Jesuits in Upper Canada in 1680. The introduction of slavery in Canada in 1608, culminating in the presence of over 4,000 Black slaves in Canada as far back as 1750, can be claimed as part of the history of racism in Canada (see Walker 1981). With the settlement of White Europeans in Canada came the *civilizing mission* directed towards Aboriginal peoples through legislation and education. As the colonization of Aboriginal peoples intensified amidst local resistance, immigration and employment policies and practices were explicitly aimed at making Canada a White nation and/or keeping power and privilege in the hands of Whites, despite the fact of a gradually more diversified citizenry.

As racism shaped White Canadians' dealings with the Aboriginal inhabitants of this land, racist practice also defined the historic immigration policies followed by Canadian governments over the years. Thomas (2001) notes that, for much of Canada's history, official immigration policy has been racist and exclusionary. The regulation of early entry into Canada was through a mechanistic process that ensured that Canada would be peopled by members of a particular stock. In 1896–1905, Clifford Sifton (Minister of the Interior) wanted English and Scottish settlers in the West. In the relatively prosperous times of 1946–1957, the Canadian government reappraised its prewar policy, allowing more immigrants. Social absorption was pursued to the extent that the would-be immigrants were similar to Canadians, that is, White Canadians of Western European stock. Initially, only close family members from Asia, for example, were allowed. Black Caribbean females were admitted, but only as domestic servants in the 1950s (see Calliste 1991, 1993). In fact, the government was opposed to large-scale immigration from the Orient to preserve the *White Canada* policy for the next fifteen years. Under the point system in 1967, the proportion of immigrants coming from the West Indies, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa increased sharply from less than 20 percent to over 40 percent in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Ramcharan 1995).

Looking at Canada's history, it can be argued that racism shaped national and provincial educational policies, work practices, and the pursuit of justice. Nowhere is this clearer than in looking at Canada's immigration policy/system. Immigration law is closely related to the composition of Canadian society from the perspectives of race and ethnicity, class, and gender. Immigration policy has been, and is, an instrument for social, political, and economic engineering projects of Canadian governments. This agenda is cloaked in language that upholds global human rights and domestic multiculturalism.

Racism was the reason for denying Japanese Canadians access to some of the valued goods and services of society in British Columbia during World War II. Racism is to blame for the imposition of the head tax on Chinese immigrants; "the denial of landing for the *Komagata Maru*," a ship carrying South Asians off the coast of Vancouver at the turn of the century; the race riots in Nova Scotia in the late 1800s; the segregation of African-Canadians in the educational system



in Ontario until the 1960s; the treatment of nurses from racialized groups in the 1970s and 1980s; the denial of employment opportunities for racialized peoples; the documented over-representation of racialized group members in the prison systems in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario; persistent differential access to services, such as housing, health care, social assistance, and recreational facilities; the imposition of limits on access to property; and differential treatment in the criminal justice system (see Centre for Social Justice 2001).

Walker (1981) and Calliste (1991, 1993, 1993/4) amply demonstrate the exclusionary practices that Blacks, particularly Caribbean immigrants, had to endure as they sought entry to Canadian society. Today, the primary manifestation of racism is the pervasiveness of institutional racism in the educational system, employment, media, and immigration. There are continuing instances of overt individual and institutional acts of racism and physical violence directed particularly at non-White populations. How has the Canadian government attempted to deal with acts of discrimination?

#### STATE RESPONSE TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND THE DIVERSITY QUESTION

To understand the state's response to race issues in Canada, we need to look critically at official action in terms of enacting acts to affirm the rights of Canadian citizens. Butler (2001) provides a historical sequence of policy initiatives by the Canadian national and provincial governments to affirm individual rights. The year 1948 marked the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Since this date, Canada has tried to ensure that its domestic human rights policies are in line with those of the international community. At the federal level, a *Canadian Bill of Rights* was passed in 1960. The *Act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* states, in part, that "it is hereby recognized and declared that in Canada there have existed and continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely:

- a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law,
- b) the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law,
- c) freedom of religion,
- d) freedom of speech,
- e) freedom of assembly and association, and
- f) freedom of the press.



On 17 April 1982 a *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was enacted. This was part of a package contained in law called the *Constitution Act, 1982*. One section of the charter, section 15.1, states that “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” On 12 July 1988, *Bill C-93, An Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada*, was also passed. Within official discourse, multiculturalism has since referred to the government policy of promoting cultural diversity in Canadian society.

The province of Ontario provides a clear example of the diversity of Canadian society. Ontario has a population of over 10 million people that contains 37 percent of Canada’s total population and slightly over 49 percent of Canada’s *visible minority* groups. When consideration of ethnicity/nationality is included, nearly half of all people in Canada who reported origins other than British or French resided in Ontario (Statistics Canada 1993; see also Statistics Canada 2001). Statistics Canada (1993, 1) notes that “over half of all persons in Canada, reporting West Asian, South Asian, African, Caribbean, and Black single ethnic origins, lived in Ontario.” According to the same source, in 1991, 66 percent of the total 345,445 peoples of African descent (African, Black, and Caribbean) in Canada were living in Ontario. The city of Toronto is seen as one of the world’s most ethnoculturally diverse cities, and it continues to be a primary destination for immigrants to Canada. In any given year, the city receives almost one-quarter of all new arrivals to Canada. In 1996, 47 percent of the population was foreign born, and nearly 40 percent were members of a visible minority. More recent Statistics Canada (2001) figures reveal that this trend is increasing (see also Smith, Mirza-Beg, and Anderson, 2003; Statistics Canada 2003).

Official recognition of this growing diversity is not questioned. As Abramovitz (2001) notes, embedded in Canadian institutions is the recognition that cultural diversity is a hallmark of contemporary societies, that we are a *mosaic*, not a *melting-pot*. To this end, the Government of Canada has sponsored multiculturalism as a state policy. Unfortunately, many critics are quick to point out that multiculturalism in fact does nothing to address racism or redress issues of inequity. Such liberal ideological dynamics are “grounded on an allegedly neutral and universal process of consciousness construction that is unaffected by racial, class, and gender differences” (Abramovitz 2001, 1). The ideological appeal of consensus and similarity erases both the dynamics and the relational aspects of difference. The unexamined sameness of liberal multiculturalism allows educators and cultural producers to speak the language of diversity while normalizing Eurocentric culture as the tacit norm everyone references (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998, 11).

One would argue that while good intentions abound, the problem has always been how to translate these noble intentions into concrete actions that make a difference in the lives of peoples, particularly those who are racially minoritized. The state's response to racism and anti-racism initiatives needs to be more proactive; otherwise they can simply be termed a politics of containment and accommodation. Canada has benefited greatly from the absorption of immigrants. There can be little doubt that there would have been tremendous cost to the country if adult immigrants arriving in Canada in the last two decades had been raised and educated in Canada. Immigration has been seen as a way to address human power shortages, particularly for skilled personnel. The Conference Board of Canada has projected that there will be one million skilled workers in Canada by 2020 (see Ghafour 2001). While official policy recognizes and welcomes immigrants, not much is done to ensure that the talents and skills brought into the country are fully harnessed. Although a sizeable number of immigrants have high educational levels, they have had problems accessing employment opportunities. In 1999, a total of 196,871 immigrants arrived in Canada, of which 133,201 were classified as skilled and business classes (see Ghafour 2001). Forty percent of the immigrants arriving in Canada had first degrees. Yet a good number of highly qualified and educated immigrants recount stories of disappointment in terms of the inability to secure jobs commensurate with their educational qualifications (Ghafour 2001).

The foregoing discussions have implications for social action. It is imperative that these figures translate into the provision of social and economic rights and services to adults and children that the above numbers represent. Two of the most important of these rights are elementary and secondary education. The diversity of society is the diversity of the classroom (see Board of Education 1993). The challenge to family, community, teachers, administration, and other educational stakeholders is to address questions of educational equity, social difference, and identity and knowledge production in the school system and beyond. While research demonstrates the effects of racism on students' engagement and disengagement from school, policy responses have been relatively silent on race and equity issues.

A number of research studies have documented the extent of racism in schools (see Canadian Alliance of Black Educators [CABE] 1992; Black Educators' Working Group [BEWG] 1993; Board of Education 1988; Brathwaite 1989; Solomon 1992; James 1990; Brathwaite and James 1996; Dei et al. 1995; Dei et al. 1997; Alladin 1996). Again, schooling in the province of Ontario is a good example that points to the challenge of educational inclusivity within the context of diversity and difference. As with other parts of Canada, the racialized contexts of Ontario call for measures to address the question of the exclusion and marginality of some populations. In Dei et al. (1995) and Dei et al. (1997), the authors show how some students leave school or become disengaged from

the Canadian school system because of the complex dynamics of the *cultures*, *environments*, and *organizational lives* of mainstream schools. Disengaged students and *dropouts* are very critical of the structures of public schooling, articulating their concerns around differential treatment because of their race and having to deal with an exclusive curriculum.

Furthermore, they are dissatisfied with communicative and pedagogic practices that fail to adequately explore the complexities of experiences that have shaped, and that continue to influence, human growth and development. The students also complain of the paucity of Black and other racial minority teachers in the school system (see Dei et al. 1995). These concerns are pervasive in students' voices to the extent that they emerge in response to seemingly unrelated questions or descriptions. When students speak to the low expectations of some teachers, the tendency for Caribbean students to be stigmatized as *violent, unruly, and criminal*, and for African students to be characterized as having language difficulties, they are referring to how racialized bodies are read or regarded in school systems.

#### CONFRONTING OPPRESSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS: THE ISSUE OF PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSE BODIES

In ending this discussion, I cannot overemphasize the strategies of action and responses to racism. It is important to speak of anti-racist resistance in order to convey the message that there are many Canadians fighting and resisting racism. Within many Canadian communities, there are committed individuals working in collectivities to deal with the scourge of racism and other forms of oppression. Anti-racist organizations have emerged over the years and engaged in coalition politics to deal with the interlocking systems of oppression that we all continually face in our daily lives (see Robertson 1999). These are grassroots initiatives cementing the origins of anti-racist politics in Canada within local communities (see Dei and Calliste 2000; Calliste and Dei 2000). The activities of such bodies need to be supported and sustained. I see the question of power as central to a discussion of anti-racist change to deal with racism and other forms of oppression. I maintain a view that addressing the power inequities that exist in society is crucial to a fundamental restructuring of our institutions to serve a diverse body politic. To this end, I conclude this essay by reflecting on one area of anti-racist change that is required to deal with racism within institutions. I want to focus my gaze on the educational system and address the importance of having diverse physical bodies in positions of power and influence. While I understand that these bodies may, by themselves, be insignificant and that what is required is structural change of the system, I would argue for a place for having bodies in places as *structural hegemonic rupturing* of the status quo. The essay began by identifying my location (the academy), and it ends with the same location.

Indisputably, within Canadian institutions of higher learning, there are very few *instructors of colour* in any capacity (tenured, tenure-stream, or contractual positions). The lack of adequate representation of racial minority faculty can make the presence and work of a few minority scholars in the academy very demanding indeed. This is particularly so when it comes to matters dealing directly with one's community of identification. Admittedly, the feeling of isolation may be tempered by the realization that there are other colleagues who may share similar political concerns. In fact, in pursuing anti-racism and anti-oppression work, I find it helpful to join forces with other colleagues (faculty and students) who share a similar political project, to question Euro-Canadian/American dominance of what constitutes valid knowledge and how such knowledge should be produced and disseminated internally and internationally.

Engaging in an educational project to change the Eurocentric nature of Canadian schooling is, however, a risky undertaking. In educational institutions staffed by senior colleagues who are predominantly White and male, one cannot live without the *fear* of reprisal, however unfounded, particularly if the minority faculty's academic and political work identifies the structures of White male privilege as the main target of academic and political critique (see Dei 1993). Since there are so few racial minority faculty in our educational institutions, the pressure is on those few to be appropriate *role models* for members of their race and also to provide academic guidance for racial minority students within the system. The problem with this positioning arises when one is seen as the spokesperson for others. I believe that the history of exclusion of certain bodies in our institutions provide us all with an important lesson: those few minoritized bodies *who get through the door* have an obligation to be responsive to the needs and concerns of those traditionally excluded and keep those doors open. Doing so will require playing a politics of inclusion of the bodies historically excluded.

Our schools also need a diverse physical representation of bodies to deal with the *marginal curriculum*. Taylor (1994) discusses the sometimes not so subtle nuances through which Black/African-Canadian educators "despite counted-for qualifications, have been marginalized in Canadian colleges and universities" (Taylor 1994, 8). For the critical educator, it does not take long to recognize that existing structures within which learning, teaching, and administration of education take place in Canada contribute, both directly and indirectly, to the marginalization of non-White peoples. Dei (1993) has argued that Canadian schools have historically not presented a complete account of the ideas and events that have shaped human growth and development. For example, it has been argued by many critical educators and students that Canadian textbooks and school pedagogical practices have not always presented an insightful and comprehensive account of the historic roles and achievements of Black/African peoples, First Nations peoples, and other Canadian ethnic

minorities. Many Anglo-European authors have written off non-European peoples' cultures, histories, and lived experiences, as well as their contributions to society (see also Calliste 1994).

Many schools are now slowly admitting that information presented about Africans, Asians, and First Nations peoples is usually scanty or distorted, and that they sometimes only reinforce prejudicial ideas. While this is gradually changing, much remains to be done. The works of peoples of colour, women, and gays and lesbians are not visible on the majority of the reading lists of academic courses. School administrators have usually supported only a handful of courses on non-European peoples in the schools' curricula. Such tokenist approaches to dealing with questions of difference and diversity in schooling have been helpful to no one. Even the small numbers of such courses that have been put in place are usually the first to be threatened by budget cuts.

The point of this critique is that these concerns are readily acknowledged when raised by Euro-Canadian scholars rather than by the minority educator. This has implications for the professional development of minority faculty in terms of the creation of counter and oppositional knowledge. This is particularly so for those whose academic and political work recognizes the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity in Canadian schools and the development of a pedagogy that is inclusive. Many African educators have joined the requisite alternative and non-exclusionary educational perspectives to inform a multi-ethnic, pluralistic society. Through various ways and on diverse pedagogical platforms, community groups and educators are questioning the Eurocentricity of Canadian schooling and education. They are questioning the theoretical and pedagogic inadequacies of, and political intolerance for, a hegemonic discourse that does not correspond to the lived experiences of non-White peoples, and that does not lead to a deeper understanding and integration of race, gender, sexuality, class, or social processes. Counter and oppositional forms of knowledge and oppositional discourses, such as African-centered education, have been put forward (see Asante 1987 and 1991), but these ideas, instead of being taken up seriously by mainstream education, are being marginalized. The irony of it all is that many of the harshest critics of such counter knowledges have oftentimes not even read a complete text on the discourse. They have heard worn-out criticism by another scholar (who happens to know a bit of the discourse) and just decided to go along with it, to run with it.

It is part of the paradox of the academy that, while there is some insistence on academic freedom, there is no corresponding emphasis on the issue of academic responsibility. The seduction of *academic freedom* is so powerful that it glosses over the perpetuation of harm and oppression, particularly on racially minoritized groups. I have always been struck by the exclusionary politics that can be fostered through language as a powerful medium of communication. Within academia, language can be used to mask and cultivate resentment

and intolerance with possible consequences of further marginalizing minority faculty and students. A good example is contemporary debates on academic freedom. I feel compelled to ask these questions: What is the goal of education in society? Should our schools be in the business of sanctioning any form of education that really mis-educates people about the self-worth and collective worth of minorities and people who look different in society? What do we actually mean when we tacitly fail to challenge the view that the advancement of knowledge can somehow be served through the denigration of other peoples in society? What do students learn by the denigration of ethnic and cultural minorities, women, those who are physically challenged, or who are non-heterosexuals? Why is the defense of the *noble ideals* of free speech and individual freedom always carried out at the *expense*, or *on the backs*, of minorities and our concerns? What are the responsibilities of the academic community regarding research and classroom pedagogy that validate discrimination and promote racial prejudice under the cover of such concepts as academic freedom? Are not the noble ideals of academic freedom and educational excellence enhanced in a climate of educational equity?

As a minority faculty member, I do not broach the subject of academic freedom from a disinterested perspective. I see every form of education and scholarly writing as political. I do recognize the importance and significance of academic freedom. However, I am strongly opposed to freedom of speech and research without due regard to the social responsibility of the academic scholar. I do not believe in the search for knowledge for the sake of knowledge. I do not see it as mere coincidence that in the current discussions about academic freedom, those faculty who historically have wielded the most power in the colleges and universities are having their views heard.

Despite pretensions to the contrary, our schools are not autonomous entities. Schools, colleges, and universities do not stand apart from the wider society. The connection of our educational institutions to the wider community has with it certain restrictions and constraints. As educators and students, we are all restricted in many ways as a result of external and internal vagaries and conditionalities. State and provincial funding, for example, has implications for what we do, can do, and cannot do. Internally, schools, colleges, and universities operate within specified guidelines that in many senses restrict when, how, and what people can do. There is no absolute freedom anywhere in the confines of a modern educational setting. For example, younger, untenured faculty cannot simply publish anywhere and expect to get tenure and promotion. A tenured professor whose work is deemed not to carry maximum pedagogic and communicative effect as far as the university's clientele is concerned will soon find out that there is a cost. In effect, individuals are punished and rewarded to varying degrees according to what is conventionally accepted as constituting valid academic work. To a great extent, then, no one has that absolute freedom to do what they so please in the academic setting.

If education is to contribute to building and sustaining society, how is this goal served by education that does not teach about individual and group responsibilities? The historical absence of racial minority faculty, women, and other disadvantaged groups has implications for a critical debate about the place of academic freedom in contemporary society. Those who are most directly affected by the defense of absolute academic freedom as yet do not constitute a critical mass in our educational institutions. The academy is still a long way from providing members with the requisite tools to challenge those who traditionally have had the power to define others in society. It is thus grossly unfair to defend a right when only a few people have the luxury of using such a right.

Despite the presence of other colleagues and students who share concerns about unfettered academic freedom, the few minority faculty and students in our educational institutions still find their voices and concerns marginalized. In the debate over academic freedom, the marginalizing of certain voices carries a burden of psychological and emotional distress when it is realized that defenders of academic freedom – with all their good intentions – may unwittingly be trivializing the social ills of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and xenophobia. In my academic work as an anti-racist educator, I talk about the Eurocenteredness of Canadian education and White male privilege in society. This, to me, is not tantamount to denigrating Whiteness; therefore, it cannot be argued that anti-racist teaching causes emotional and physical threat to Whites privileged by their Whiteness. To argue thus is to silence the just struggle for social justice and fairness and to trivialize the physical and emotional pain that ethnic and cultural minorities, women, and others disadvantaged in society feel when their experiences, histories, and contributions are marginalized.

## CONCLUSION

I conclude this discussion with suggestions of, and strategies about, ways to deal with the exclusion of racially minoritized bodies in our institutions. The complexities of the processes of exclusion that many minority faculty have to contend with in academia demands that concerted action be taken by various levels of educators, students, and administrators to find and institute appropriate solutions. There are already some measures in place in some schools, colleges, and universities. As was already pointed out, there are also many individuals within our educational institutions committed to addressing some of these concerns. However, we need to redouble our efforts and also search for alternative strategies to supplement existing measures of dealing with the general Whiteness of Canadian schooling and education.

Racially minoritized bodies themselves must actively explore and discover countermeasures to deal with many of the issues discussed in this chapter.



We may enter into alliances with our progressive colleagues, students, and administrative staff. We may want to liaise with other groups in the schools and in the wider society who share our concerns. We could build and cement coalitions with other colleagues in other educational institutions and devise creative ways to share information and experiences and offer support to each other.

As educators, we should see that our work involves more than teaching our youth. We need to actively engage in a larger project, a project that seeks to bring into political existence our lived experiences. We must seek to defend the dignity of all people. We must seek to rupture the status quo for genuine educational and social transformation. We cannot conveniently ignore the challenges of our times. It is important for us to answer the question, 'What do we (as educators and, specifically, racially minoritized faculty) see as our roles and responsibilities in education?' Personally, I believe that we have a responsibility to be a *voice of difference*. By that, I mean to challenge the status quo, to rupture the racialized, hetero-patriarchal nature of our educational and institutional settings and its prevailing culture of dominance. It means that we should speak out boldly on pertinent issues of our time and question the structures within which learning, teaching, and administration of education take place in Canada. Unlike others, minority faculty simply cannot afford the luxury of silence. Of course, there are always going to be risks and consequences with doing *subversive* academic work, and the central question today is going to be whether we are all prepared to take the risk and the consequences that come with doing anti-racist work. It is no longer a simple question of, *Who can do anti-racist work?*

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