Studying Racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

The history and colonization of Aotearoa/New Zealand resulted in a unique socio-political landscape based on a foundational document - The Treaty of Waitangi - which guides policy, practice and law. Against this background the significance and importance of studying racism is discussed, alongside the claim that the changing face of racism argues for discursive methods which are sensitive to the covert nature of the language of racism. Contemporary studies of racism are discussed and the argument is made for the importance of this work in understanding the production of racism as a step toward the elimination of associated discrimination.

keywords - racism, Aotearoa/New Zealand, language, discursive psychology

Colonization and the Treaty of Waitangi

Critical psychological research into racism goes beyond traditional understandings of racism as the product of individualized cognitions. Indeed, critical psychologists suggest understanding racism begins with historical power relationships between groups (Durrheim, Hook & Riggs, 2009). While it is important to acknowledge the contestability and partiality of historical accounts, the following is offered as one socio-political context which foregrounds the study of contemporary racist talk within the uniquely bicultural country of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The history of colonization offers insight into early characterizations of Indigenous peoples thereby providing the foundations for contemporary racist practices (Huygens, 2009; McCreanor, 1997). Colonization typically involves the exploitation of Indigenous peoples with new 'settlers' taking control of resources and imposing new systems of governance. Indigenous customs and practices are overtaken by the zeal of the colonizers who assume cultural superiority through the introduction of new technology, language and law. This pattern has been repeated throughout human history where, at worst, policies of genocide and political decimation have marginalized Indigenous peoples (Power, 2003). While this is largely true in Aotearoa/New Zealand, our history took a unique political and psychological turn with the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi which became the foundational document guiding the negotiation of indigenous and settler issues.

Māori arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the thirteenth century following exploratory sea voyages from the islands of the central South Pacific (King, 2003). Settlement was based on tribal lines which claim descent from the original canoes with inhabitants developing a system of communal living based on *whanau* (close family ties) *iwi* (tribal groups) and a holistic connection to the land. Subsequent Pakeha (white) settlement began in the early 1800's,

driven partly by commercial hunting for seal and whale. Prior to 1830 Pakeha settlement was limited with around 2000 people located mainly in the north and northwest of the North Island. The Treaty of Waitangi was an agreement between Māori and the British Crown, motivated partly by British anxiety about the establishment of a French settlement at Akaoa in the South Island. The British purchased large blocks of land and in order to protect their interests a stronger alliance with Māori was sought. The Treaty embraced the principle of two peoples sharing one country and was signed at Waitangi in 1840 by Governor Hobson on behalf of the Queen of England and 45 *Rangitira* (Māori chiefs) thereby establishing a partnership in the future of the country. By 1841 the Treaty had been signed by around 500 Rangitira after it toured the country collecting signatures and gaining political traction.

The two versions of the Treaty (Māori and English) created problems in determining whether both parties had similar understandings. These problems stem from issues of translation and culture with the English version stressing the Crown's aim to establish rights to future British settlement, to establish a government to secure law and order, and to protect Māori rights during the process of settlement. The Māori version emphasizes the Queen's intention to maintain Rangitira's *rangatiratanga* (tribal authority), and to establish and protect Māori property rights. While the Treaty sought to encapsulate a sound and workable principle, equal partnership has been undermined by the policies of the British Crown (Ward, 1973). Furthermore, the Treaty has not been ratified in domestic law making it somewhat inconsequential for Pakeha. However, since its inception Māori have kept the Treaty in view, taking petitions to Parliament, cases to court, and holding Treaty *hui* (gatherings). Widespread historical land grabs and abuses of the Treaty saw, in 1975, the establishment of a commission of enquiry called the Waitangi Tribunal. The Tribunal rules on Māori claims relating to actions or omissions of the Crown which breach the spirit of the Treaty, and attempts to address and rectify significant historical injustices. The Treaty operates as the cornerstone of biculturalism with most New Zealanders valuing, at least the symbolism of, Māori contributions to national identity (Sibley & Liu, 2004).

In addition to this unique legislation, the colonization of Aotearoa/New Zealand differed from countries like India and Malaysia where there are no longer dominant white settler populations (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). In those countries the colonizers eventually went home but in Aotearoa/New Zealand they stayed and formed a 'new' country based on controlled migration and the marginalization of Māori rights in favour of the pioneering settlers. Land formerly occupied for hundreds of years was seized by newly established authorities who imposed their own systems of culture, ownership, language and technology. Customs and practices that had served across generations were overrun by the machinery of colonialism.

The importance of studying racism

Social psychologists have an enduring interest in matters of prejudice, discrimination and racism, at least partly due to their involvement in some of the more inhumane species specific practices. Racist assumptions underpin the abominable practices of slavery, genocide, and the more pernicious effects of colonization (Tuffin, 2008). The application of social psychology to the study of racism holds considerable significance and, as Reicher (2001) argues, our responsibilities are profound. If we do this right we can contribute to the fight against racism, otherwise we run the risk of failing our academic, social and moral responsibilities. Of course there is a history of science being harnessed in support of the ideology of racial superiority with white races regarded as the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy (Proctor, 1988). The

'science' of eugenics was infamously deployed by Adolf Hitler to support policies of Ayrian superiority in order to establish certain power relations as 'natural' and inevitable.

Psychological engagement with racism has, historically, not always been for the better with racist agendas supported by studies of racial differences in intelligence test scores (Jensen, 1969; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Rushton, 1994). This work highlights the difficulty in surrendering the long since discredited notion of 'race' (Richards, 1997). As Andersen (1994) argues 'race' is effectively a socio-political belief that has become transformed into a pseudo-biological concept. For Miles (1989) racism is a prejudice involving negative categorisations on the basis of genetic, and, or, phenotypical characteristics. Indeed, it has been argued (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001) that the basis for racism stems from beliefs about biological hierarchies and accompanying social practices. These definitions differ with respect to the involvement of generalisations, categorisations and beliefs, but also reflect changing conceptions of racism.

The changing face of racism

The language of racism has moved from blatant to symbolic. Claims of white supremacy are rejected, personal racism is denied, and a version of egalitarianism, based on the deep-seated values of individualism and self-reliance, is espoused (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006). Overt racism has become increasingly unacceptable and has been replaced by more subtle, symbolic, socially acceptable forms (Pettigrew & Meertens, 2001). According to Liu and Mills (2006) criticism of minority group members is often cloaked in 'plausible deniability' which makes available inferential alternatives to attributions of racism. Thus speakers can offer highly principled stances based on notions of justice or morality, values which work well to mask racist overtones. The symbolic and abstract versions of racism have been enabled by implicit shared understandings (Durheim, Hook & Riggs, 2009) which make reference to racism evident without being explicit. Thus racism may be regarded as a product of the widely distributed collective knowledge which informs everyday interactions.

Anderson (2010) maps the move to covert prejudice, employing the term 'benign bigotry' to capture the apparent harmlessness of contemporary bigotry's indirectness. However, she argues that indirect bigotry is just as poisonous due to its insidiousness. Symbolic racism is both complex and ambiguous with both positive and negative sentiments being simultaneously expressed (Adams, 1997). These sentiments are founded on moral values like the Protestant work ethic, self-discipline and individual achievement making modern racism less about biological weakness and more about belief in cultural superiority (Tuffin, 2008). And while implicit prejudice may be less obvious, its consequences are just as destructive.

The changing face of racism has stimulated alternative approaches to its study. The subtlety of modern racism has effectively 'deracialised' talk with issues of race only referred to indirectly (Obeng, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Ambivalence and variability in race talk has shown traditional approaches to attitude measurement wanting, with language based approaches increasingly deployed since these are especially useful for capturing ambiguity and contextual variability (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Tuffin, 2005). Contextuality is profoundly important for the discursive study of racism as the focus moves from abstract measures to the centrality of language in understanding racist social practices. Studying the language of racism involves data that is intensely contextualized, highly localized and sensitive to the changing socio-politics of racism. For the discursive psychologist ideologies, implications and interpretations are inextricably linked to racist actions and these become

topics to be studied through conversation, rhetoric and explanation. Thus the research agenda becomes broadened to include the study of racist discourse and rhetoric in terms of its psychological and political functions.

The following review includes research from two key traditions of discourse analytic work identified by Stokoe and Edwards (2007) as focusing on the language of majority group members. Firstly, the construction of 'the other' in public texts is considered; for example, Kendall, Tuffin & Frewin (2005) studied Parliamentary speeches relevant to controversial legislation moving ownership of the foreshore and seabed to the Crown. A key resource in these debates was the way in which fairness was constructed with respect to ordinary New Zealanders. Secondly, the review includes interview studies examining talk about topics such as racism and national identity that focus on the occasioned production of racism and avoidance of racist identities. Bell's (2009) study provides a recent example where young Pakeha were interviewed regarding their national identity as framed around issues of birth, ancestry and belonging. Bell demonstrated how participants' identity claims were unsettled by their 'second-ness' in contrast to Māori settlement and belonging.

The language of racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Wetherell and Potter's (1988;1992) seminal work examining the language of racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand demonstrated how participants were able to seamlessly support the advantages afforded by existing social conditions while simultaneously deflecting suggestions of racism. Two themes illustrate the flexible deployment of discursive resources and the way dilemmas are managed. Firstly, Wetherell and Potter (1992:118) explain how social groups and categorizations are constructed to show how "descriptive methods of race, culture and nation generate their own distinctive ontologies, psychologies and social theory". The construction of categories like 'race' and 'nation' are, of course, subject to historical contingency. When the Treaty of Waitangi was negotiated in 1840 Māori were afforded the status of an independent nation, but Pakeha now regard talk of Māori sovereignty as a threat so in contemporary Pakeha talk Māori nationhood effectively becomes a silent discourse (Tuffin, Praat & Frewin, 2004). Also absent in Wetherell and Potter's data were characterizations involving direct reference to genetic traits passed on through blood, skin colour and racial purity. This absence is consistent with the ubiquitous denial of prejudice and social sanctions against the open expression of racism which Reeves (1983) refers to as the discourse of deracialization where negative formulations of minority groups are stripped of reference to racial categories. Thus negative views continue to be stated but with the explanatory power of 'race' removed from the account.

Wetherell and Potter's (1992) participants constructed culture as both heritage and as therapy. The heritage construction highlights the importance of preservation such that culture remains historically uncontaminated by modern influences. Wetherell and Potter claim this separates Māori culture and politics from contemporary influence thereby suggesting that, since Māori culture derives its significance from the past, it is contemporaneously irrelevant and politically impotent. Constructing culture as therapeutic assumes its usefulness with regard to social problems typically faced by young urban Māori. The lack of traditional culture is interpreted as a deficiency whereby Māori lack a sufficiently robust identity to succeed in the present day. The important point being that these versions of culture can be talked about publicly since they are grounded in apparent concern for Māori welfare. Ironically, it is this concern and its acceptability that contributes to a racist agenda. This comes about through the construction of group differences (Māori have culture and Pakeha do not) and stressing in-

group explanations of inequality while de-emphasizing intergroup explanations.

Wetherell and Potter's (1992) second theme highlights the way talk is organized around a range of principled arguments based on fairness, individual rights and equal opportunity. These arguments include common phrases with a taken-for-granted quality referred to as 'rhetorically self-sufficient' or 'clinching' arguments which are difficult to dispute. Further, these rhetorical stumbling blocks highlight the extent to which race talk is strategically organized to deny prejudice. They consist of ideas such as: resources should be used efficiently; people should be treated equally; the clock cannot be turned back; current generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of the past; injustices should be righted; minority opinion should not carry more weight than majority opinion; we have to live in the present; and the importance of being practical. Superficial reasonableness masks contradictions within these arguments: for example the notion of correcting past injustices clashes with the impossibility of turning back the clock. This highlights the fact that these stock devices are used in flexible and often contradictory ways to bolster explanations for maintaining existing political hierarchies; to strengthen the denial of attributions of racism; and to justify existing inequitable social relations. Interestingly, these resources are wrapped in the ideology of concern and common sense which make them justifiable and sayable, with counter arguments appearing as attacks on the rhetorical stronghold of common sense itself. The utilisation of clinching arguments makes racist talk both hearable and, importantly, deniable since these arguments almost defy challenge. With increasing subtlety the language of racism means speakers become positioned as reasonable and justified while warding off suggestions of prejudice (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; van Dijk, 1992).

Nairn and McCreanor (1990, 1991, 1997) have also made an impressive contribution in theorising discourse as critical in reproducing the social order and legitimising the exploitation of Indigenous people. The notion of dominant discourses underscores the importance of discourse in social change and highlights the importance of alternative discourses. Nairn and McCreanor (1991) identified durable patterns in the race talk of Pakeha, suggesting they work to maintain oppressive social relations through the deployment of what has become known as the 'standard story'. Similar to clinching arguments the standard story operates within the realm of common sense and includes suggestions that Māori discontent is a result of failure to adapt to modern life. Māori who contest these views are seen as disrupting otherwise harmonious race relations and are, therefore, themselves a source of racial tension. The standard story includes strong evaluative claims whereby troublemakers are dubbed 'bad Māori' and contrasted with 'good Māori', who cooperate through successful assimilation into modern Pakeha culture.

The standard story is rhetorically robust, having endured over time (Kirkwood, Liu & Weatherall, 2005) and across cultures (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999). McCreanor (1993, 1995) notes four recurring patterns as part of the standard story. Firstly, the polarized theme of 'good Māori/bad Māori' illustrated by McCreanor as 'If Māori agitators ('stirrers') would stop stirring up trouble where none actually exists, race relations would be harmonious'. This victim blaming formulation constructs Māori as responsible for the (dis)harmony of race relations. Blaming Māori for their 'badness' absolves Pakeha from responsibility for racial discord. The concession that there are good Māori does important work in fending off accusations of racism when bad Māori are subject to criticism. A similar divisive technique was noted in constructions of Australian Aboriginals who were categorized as those who had done well for themselves and those who failed to measure up to the standards of the dominant culture (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Sale, 1999). Secondly, McCreanor

notes a pattern suggesting special treatment for Indigenous people breaches the principle of fairness ('Māori have special privileges which are unfair and racist'). Principles of individualism and merit are often cited as counter arguments against affirmative action, along with the rejoinder that all should receive equal treatment regardless of social or cultural background (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005). Thirdly, the biological authenticity of the racial grouping of Māori was challenged ('There are few 'real' Māori left'). This discourse casts doubt over the legitimacy of claims to inherited rights by raising suspicions about the genuineness of the ethnic group. The criticism rests on a simplistic biological understanding that ignores cultural, social and psychological aspects of Māori identity. Finally, there is the unifying aspiration that 'All people in New Zealand are New Zealanders and should be treated the same'. The basis for advocating identical treatment involves a commitment to invariant egalitarianism. McCreanor refers to this as the theme of 'one people' and it accords with Wetherell and Potter's (1992) 'togetherness' resource. A common identity is regarded as unifying since it excludes separate cultural identities through stressing geographical and national similarity, thereby outlining the basis for equal treatment.

While ongoing dialogue between competing Māori and Pakeha interests has been well documented (Fozdar, 2008; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) another body of work has considered how oppressive talk discredits and marginalizes Māori aspirations and rights. This work extends to recent analyses illustrating how media representations cast indigenous interests as coming from a minority rather than an equal Treaty partner (Barclay & Liu, 2003). Indeed, Nairn et al. (2006) suggest the media make a substantial contribution to colonization which continues to oppress and marginalize.

The meaning of friendships between Māori and Pakeha was considered by Fozdar (2011) who sought to assess the validity of the contact hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests increased contact between groups can reduce prejudice and stereotyping. Fozdar outlines friendships based on the invisibility of race, and friendships where substantial relationship work reduces potential conflict and avoids situations which could lead to disagreement. Thus certain topics of conversation are avoided along with particular friendship mixes where differing views may produce tension and threaten sensitivities. Topics of conversation likely to be skirted around include Māori land rights, affirmative action and the importance of Māori language. Avoidance of conflict within interpersonal relationships is understandable but it does raise questions about the extent to which racialised comments are tolerated. Indeed, the reduction and elimination of racist talk is highly desirable but this is a complex issue and as Condor (2006:15) notes, the dialogical properties of race talk are framed within a range of communicative functions achieved by comments occurring within the "delicate choreography of everyday sociability". The collaborative nature of such talk makes it difficult to attribute racism to individuals.

Setting aside these difficulties a number of studies have considered discursive alternatives which may be used as rhetorical resources to support Māori rights. For example, Geurin (2003) considered the interpersonal realm where racist comments can be responded to in ways that make them unacceptable. Huygens (2006) identified two resources in the analysis of a workplace decolonization project, affirmation of Māori authority to disconnect Pakeha dominance, and the pursuit of the 'right relationship' between Māori and Pakeha. Other studies have also sought interventions that modify available linguistic resources. Two studies (Praat, 1998; Tuffin, Praat & Frewin, 2004) explored the notion of Māori sovereignty as popularized in the context of a political protest and extended occupation of a public park in the city of Wanganui in 1995. The protest became one of the most celebrated and debated

issues in the recent history of race relations attracting extensive media coverage, with politicians, police, local government and various interest groups involved in the interpretation of key issues. The research involved analysis of media reports and interviews (Praat, 1998) and analysis of focus group data (Tuffin et al., 2004) in order to explore issues around Māori sovereignty. This work moved beyond discourses shoring up racist agendas, and emphasized discourses that challenged understandings of the Treaty and encouraged alternative interpretations leading to more positive race relations. Further, contemporary politics were unsettled by positioning Māori and Pakeha as victims of repressive colonial rule and suggesting traditional Māori issues become the concern of all New Zealanders.

In noting how the standard story effectively renders illegitimate the kinds of political and social actions that might rectify Māori disadvantage Kirkwood, Liu and Weatherall (2005) also explore alternatives. They suggest challenging the standard story as a form of political activism. Their data comprised public submissions to the controversial Foreshore and Seabed Bill which became law in 2004, thereby passing ownership of the foreshore (defined as the area between the high and low tide marks) and the seabed to the Crown. This followed a Court of Appeal ruling that a claim on behalf of South Island iwi to the Marlborough foreshore and seabed should be heard by the Māori Land Court. The Government responded with this legislation arguing it would preserve the right of beach access for all. Kirkwood, Liu and Weatherall's analysis deals with three submissions: the first illustrating the standard story, the second offering a direct challenge to the standard story, and the third providing a redefinition of the standard story thereby opposing the legislation. The first submission, predictably enough, casts colonial history as irrelevant and masks the cultural and ethnic aspects of governmental power structures. The second and third submissions critique the idea that government works for the benefit of all and highlights the differential position of Māori. These alternative constructions emphasize the way colonization maintains inequalities, and offers subject positions and arguments that may facilitate action against discrimination. This controversial legislation was also the subject of analysis (Kendall, Tuffin & Frewin, 2005) of the first Parliamentary reading of the bill. These authors argue the bill is less about guaranteeing public access to the beach and protecting Māori customary usage, and more about mobilizing political authority exemplifying racist discourses that disrupt indigenous claims. Analysis of Parliamentary speeches suggested that discourses effectively maintain and protect the ideology of Pakeha entitlement. The construction of the ordinary New Zealander formed the focus of the debate with the fairness implied by apparent egalitarianism of equal treatment masking differences in history, culture and social practices. Such claims to racelessness, it is argued, amount to little more than a poorly disguised reassertion of whiteness.

The backdrop of history is never far from contemporary discourses, a point made in McCreanor's (1997) analysis of the 'colonists handbook' published by the New Zealand Company in 1839. This material was developed for early 'settlers' and was influential in the development of contemporary constructions of race relations. As Aotearoa/New Zealand's 'first people' these early constructions of Māori suggest remarkable durability. Patterns of racist talk which were routinely harnessed to support the continued processes of colonization and domination are still heard today. McCreanor argues these texts were responsible for negative characterizations that retain contemporary currency.

Conclusions

There are several themes running through studies of the language of racism in Aotearoa/New

Zealand. Before outlining these some important qualifications should be acknowledged. While this review includes only discursive studies this is not to suggest that this is the only way to study the complexity and stubbornness of contemporary racism. Clearly there is intellectual advantage in considering multiple methods, but this review considers studies which have theoretical and methodological overlap and documents recent advances within the field of discursive psychology. The limitations of this approach to the study of racism have been discussed elsewhere (Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Riggs & Selby, 2003). Finally, this chapter openly claims partiality and intensely local work which is both inevitable and appropriate given the topic.

The first conclusion is that the contemporary language of racism is not characterized by blunt negativity but is sinuous, loaded with ambivalence and contradiction. Arguably, this variability makes racism deniable and also sayable. Race talk now resides in the language of apparent racelessness as it becomes enmeshed in the rhetorically self sufficient principles of equality, progress and unified national identity. A key strength of discursive research is its ability to lay bare the dynamics of how talk can seamlessly combine views which are simultaneously both discriminatory and egalitarian. Discursive studies demonstrate how principles such as equality and fairness can become powerful resources in justifying discriminatory practices (Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

Secondly, the discursive work reviewed can be characterized as differing from mainstream social psychological studies as intensely indexical and highly political. It is important to note the extent to which this body of work is data driven, with the data arising out of local politics and debates. Acknowledging the locality of psychological epistemologies (Huygens, 2009; Larner, 2003) importantly recognizes the limitations of how such epistemologies may be generalized across different cultural groups. This feature positions discursive researchers positively as responsive, engaged and politically aware. Engagement in contextualized local concerns and acknowledgment of an anti-racist position contrasts strongly with the politically neutral, asocial version of psychology that dominated the last half of the last century (Tuffin, 2005).

Thirdly, there is pronounced robustness in the patterns of talk which have transcended time and culture, suggesting their power, pervasiveness and persistence. One aim of studies of race talk is to better understand how the language of racism works - how it becomes possible to say the unsayable. Another aim is more proactive, attempting to challenge racist rhetoric and ensuring the unsayable remains precisely that. This initiative is well underway and there are positive signs that such work has begun.

Finally, there is the profound degree to which versions of history are implicated in the language of racism. The standard story involves a history whereby colonization happened long ago, and while Indigenous people suffered, that is a matter for the past. This effectively maintains white privilege by distancing the cultural devastation produced by colonization from current accountability. As LeCouteur and Augoustinos (2001) note this suggests indigenous people should bury the past and take responsibility for improving their lot. Differing constructions of history carry with them important implications for both understanding the past and shaping the future. To conclude it may be useful to revisit Reicher's (2001) point about our considerable responsibilities as social psychologists. The work encompassed in this chapter provides a detailed study of the means through which racism is produced. This suggests we are, indeed, living up to these responsibilities and we are some way toward the goal of contributing to the fight against racism.

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