Solidarity in anti-racist struggles:
A culture-centered intervention

Teanau Tuiono and Mohan J. Dutta

Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research & Evaluation (CARE)
Massey University

**CENTRE FOR CULTURE-CENTRED APPROACH
TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE)

School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing

BSC 1.06 Level 1, Business Studies Central

Massey University Manawatu campus

Private Bag 11 222

Palmerston North, New Zealand

Tel: +64-06-951-9282; ext=86282

W www.carecca.nz

Mohan J. Dutta, Director, CARE
m.j.dutta@massey.ac.nz

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Teanau Tuiono, Activist and Mohan J. Dutta, Director,
Center for Culture - Centered Approach to Research & Evaluation,
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ABOUT CARE

The Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centered methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Center collaborates with communities, community organizers, community researchers, advocates, and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organizing, food and agriculture, worker organizing, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor, and economic transformation.

Teanau Tuiono, is a based in Palmerston North and has over 20 years experience as an activist, an advocate, and organiser at local, national, and international levels.

Prof. Mohan J. Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as Neoliberal Health Organizing, Communicating Health, and Voices of Resistance.

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In this white paper, we depict solidarity as the organizing concept for addressing racism in Aotearoa, New Zealand. After defining the concept of solidarity, we address the questions: Why do we need solidarity in activist and advocacy interventions seeking to address racism? What does solidarity look like in struggles against racism? We wrap up the white paper with key elements drawn from our dialogue, foregrounding "seeing connections" as a way for bringing together anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and decolonial struggles. Seeing Whiteness as the very basis for the production of various forms of marginalization sets up the groundwork for anti-racist struggles.

The Whiteness of racist structures has historically operated through the colonial policy of "divide and rule." This policy, played out in the form of setting up reward and discipline structures, has operated on the basis of dividing colonized peoples into groups/sub-groups and setting up conflicts between these groups/sub-groups. The conflict thus created and reproduced among colonial people through the instruments of colonial bureaucracy is the very basis of legitimizing the colonial project.

We suggest that the very concept of the state as a colonial tool, based on the notion of boundaries, creates the conditions for marginalization. Juxtaposed in the backdrop of the notion of the state is the Māori concept, Whakapapa, drawing on the notion of connections and flows (two different ways of looking at the world and being in it). The state historically is a colonial structure, based on the notion of boundaries that form the infrastructures of Whiteness. It organizes populations of colour to discipline, to colonize, and displace, and simultaneously to keep out, through its techniques of boundary-making.

In resistance to this colonial notion of the state with boundaries, the Māori concept of Whakapapa offers a conceptual framework of linkages and connections. It is also a framework that can be used to challenge prejudice in Māori communities against migrants and refugees that are seeded and propagated by the white colonial structure.

This is what one of us, Teanau, noted, drawing from the experiences of working with Māori struggles:

'We need to express our Māoritanga beyond the constraints and borders of the Nation State. Often when Māori talk about the Māori worldview I ask - where is that geographically? Just the North Island and the South Island? Because for me - If you look at our whakapapa[1] there are connections that go beyond the settler state boundaries of New Zealand there are links to Ra'iatea in Tahiti and Hawai'i to the North and Rapanui to the East."

These borders and lines that carve up the Pacific, determine who can go where and when for how long, and who needs a visa and who doesn't. It determines who can enter New Zealand as a migrant and who has to do legal acrobatics to qualify as a refugee. If you are from a white Western country, it is easier to enter the country than for many of our Pacific whānau that sit right on our doorstep.

If those lines are questions of separation and disconnection then any answer must be based on values that are in opposition to separation. They should view the world as it could be, not only decolonising our thinking and spaces but also re-indigenising our ideas and practises. Whakapapa as an idea is pervasive throughout polynesia in not just how we are genealogically connected but also how our struggles are connected. How we see ourselves reflected in other people helps to build solidarity between peoples'. It acknowledges the rich tapestry of Pacific history that has been woven over centuries of interactions. Interactions that cannot be confined by lines and borders but share linguistic, ancestral and cultural roots. With Raiatea in French polynesia at the centre, Rekohu (Chatham Islands) and Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the south, with Hawai'i to the north and reaching out to (Easter Island) Rapanui to the east.

It is this connection of whakapapa and resistance to exploitation which helps frame how Māori and migrant and refugee communities of colour can build solidarity. We argue that a framework of solidarity orients toward exploring linkages, and conceptualising ways of connecting by acknowledging and seeking to understand differences. Through the exploration of the linkages between them, movements against racism resist the "divide and rule" strategy deployed by Whiteness. The linkages enable different activist interventions, anchored in different approaches to addressing racism, to connect with each other.

Moreover, solidarity across struggles, for instance, across anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles, center the overarching question of how to resist the consolidation of power. Seeing that capitalism by its nature is neocolonial and racist enables working class movements to connect with anti-racism movements emerging from migrant, refugee, and minority spaces. The question of power, when explored from a framework of solidarity, offers a framework for building larger movements that address the complex interplays of capitalism, colonialism, and (im)mobility.

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Solidarity in New Zealand

There are many examples of communities of colour having to deal with white supremacy and offering lessons on solidarity.

Māori struggles against racism

At the heart of the struggle of Māori against racism is the struggle for Tino Rangatiratanga. The word tino is an intensifier and the word rangatiratanga broadly speaking relates to the exercise of chieftainship. Its closest English translation is Indigenous self-determination although many also refer to it as Māori independence. Such a concept embraces the spiritual link Māori have with Papatuanuku Earthmother) and is a part of the international drive by indigenous people for self determination. We can see this in Māori Land occupations from Takaparawha (Bastion Point) to Ihumātao.

Pasifika struggles against racism

The Dawn raids were an infamous part of New Zealand history where the State targeted polynesian overstayers in the context of an economic decline despite the fact that most overstayers were actually white. The Polynesian Panthers (inspired by the Black Panther party) rose to prominence at this time organising within pacific island communities to combat the racism of the State.

The Recognised Seasonal Worker scheme is also a site of exploitation of Pacific workers; it is set up to create cheap labour sources for the horticultural sector. It is often in the news with stories of the increasing number of Pacific Peoples being victims of human trafficking and worker exploitation.

Immigrant struggles against racism

The rise of facism in America and the targeting of minorities by white supremacists connects directly with the Christchurch terrorist attack. At the heart of the Christchurch terror attack is the rise of the Islamophobia industry, deploying the narrative of hate in the post 9/11 climate to perpetuate white supremacy. This thread of Islamophobia weaves through white supremacist, zionist, and Hindutva propaganda. It is therefore vital to decenter and resist the propaganda around Islamophobia in immigrant struggles against racism.

Immigrant voices resisting white supremacy in settler colonial Aotearoa New Zealand foreground the experiences of tangata whenua with colonial oppression. Analysis of white supremacy that forms the basis of the settler colonial state is vital to anti-racist struggles led by migrants.

Class formations play out in immigrant contexts, with on one hand, model minorities being produced by the neoliberal state in its multicultural narrative, and on the other hand, precarious and working class migrants experiencing ongoing cycles of exploitation. The discardability of working class migrant bodies forms the structure of a racist migration structure. Unions of migrant workers therefore are critical spaces for crafting anti-racist strategies.

Colonial multiculturalism fosters and accommodates sites of power within migrant communities through strategies of engagement to develop and reproduce racist practices. Immigrant struggles at the gendered, disabled, rainbow, ageing margins critically interrogate these spaces for consolidating power, and simultaneously resist the strategies of co-option.

Connecting class and anti-racist struggles

There is a long history of working class solidarity in Aotearoa, Trade Unionists were at the land occupations at Bastion Point and also present at Ihumatao. Many well known Māori organisers learnt their skills within the Trade Union movement. Trade Unionists and Socialists also supported the Samoan Independence movement headed by the Mau Movement during the aftermath of World War One. Christian socialists and other conscientious objectors had considerable alignment with Te Puea Herangi as they opposed conscription into World War One.

Culturally-centering solidarity

The process of culturally-centering solidarity is one of anchoring solidarity in voices of difference, particularly attending to the voices of the "margins of the margins." The process of cultural centering is one of continually asking, "Who is not present in this space?" "Whose voices are being erased from this space?" In asking these questions, solidarity work is continually turned toward inclusion of difference, attentive to the margins that are created and sustained on an ongoing basis. The framework of continually looking for who or what is erased also brings forth a sensibility that is invitational to difference that is erased under homogeneous community identities, recognizing that communities at the margins are not homogeneous, are rife with inequities of representation and recognition, and are themselves sites of power inequities.

Voices from the margins

For long, the infrastructures for the conversations on Whiteness have been held and controlled by White academics, activists, and civil society organisations. This too forms the

Whiteness of the colonial project. Even as White participants/experts engage in conversations on how best to address racism, the voices of communities of colour remain erased from the discursive arena. This is also the case within academia and its organizing of knowledge. Whereas Pakeha experts have long held the control over the discursive arena, the voices of academics, communities, and activists of colour have been largely missing.

The project of dismantling racism therefore is also about interrogating and deconstructing the structures of Whiteness that constitute the everyday spaces of conversations and articulations. Who speaks on racism, studies it, and speaks on it, is constituted within the power inequities that form the infrastructures of Whiteness. This then translates into the tenor of the conversations on addressing racism being set within the norms of Whiteness, often upholding prevailing ideologies of White supremacy.

To dismantle racism therefore is to specifically co-create infrastructures for voices of communities of color at the margins. The ownership of these infrastructures by communities of color would mean that the organizing logics underlying these infrastructures are rooted in rationalities of communities of color at the margins, rather than being set by the norms of Whiteness.

Solidarity based on Whakapapa seeks connections in the co-creation of the infrastructures for voice so a wide diversity of voices from the margins are expressed in dialogue with each other. The anchoring of these conversations among voices in difference enables the articulation of transformative politics that connects a diverse range of struggles. The hegemonic structures of capitalism and colonialism are interrogated through voice infrastructures that recognize their interplays.

Standing up to racism

To stand up to racism is to make explicit the racist structures of Aotearoa New Zealand and to make them visible in dominant discursive spaces. The hegemonic discourses in the public sphere in Aotearoa New Zealand erase racism through the construction of a public image of Aotearoa New Zealand that is open to difference. This public image of Aotearoa New Zealand as a benevolent society, reflected in messages such as "This is not us," produces an identity of Pakeha New Zealanders that is open to and inviting of difference. Yet, this identity produced through discourse, is largely at odds with the everyday lived experiences of ethnic and racial minorities in New Zealand. The historic experiences of Māori in New Zealand point to a racist structure underlying the settler colonial project. This racist structure is reproduced in the contemporary context of New Zealand society, with Māori experiencing systematic disenfranchisement because of racist ideologies within structures, organizations, and processes.

The experiences of racism voiced by Māori communities in New Zealand offer conceptual anchors for conversations on racism within migrant and refugee spaces. The recognition of the racism experienced by Māori forms a critical element of the anti-racist solidarity work we propose. Māori struggles against racism offer vital lessons for movements for migrant and refugee rights. Pedagogies of racism built in conversation with immigrant and refugee communities ought to be embedded in a historical understanding of the racist nature of the colonial project. In doing so, anti-racist work targeting the structures that constiute the lived experiences of migrant and refugee communities is grounded in the lessons learned from the anti-racist work of Māori struggles. The pedagogy of Māori struggles is also crucial to dismantling White supremacist pedagogies that are served as propaganda to middle and upper middle class migrants, disrupting the neoliberal ideology of merit and individualism. Interrogating the rewards attached to colonial privilege that produces model minorities is critical to the process of standing up to racism.

The Māori concept of Whakapapa offered earlier is a way forward, enabling different communities of colour to see linkages and flows, situated in the backdrop of Whiteness and the colonial project. By looking at movements and the ways in which these movements have been constituted amid colonialism, communities of colour are able to explore spaces of solidarity. Seeing the connection among the different experiences at the margins and bridging across these connections lies at the heart of the process of standing up to racism. Anti-racist interventions thus formulated encourage conversations anchored in seeing the connections across spaces and experiences, drawing the linkages to the colonial project and finding tools to dismantle it.

Dismantling colonialism

Voices from the margins, anchored in the two concepts of solidarity and Whakapapa , dismantle colonialism through their witnessing of racism that forms the infrastructure of the colonial project, facing it, standing up to it, and creating creative communicative spaces for anti-racist and decolonial imaginaries. Rather than develop surface-level interventions that urge individual attitude or behavior change (see for instance the Human Rights Watch campaign, Give nothing to racism, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9n_UPyVR5s), solidarity invites deep interrogation of the structures of racism, often sustained at institutional and organizational levels, with attention to strategies for challenging these structures. Recognizing the role of knowledge production in shaping spaces of policy formulation and governmentality, we recognize the importance of connecting this activist work with the struggles against racism and colonization in the academe. The techniques of Whiteness that silence dissent and resistance under the guise of civility must be called out on an ongoing basis.

The recognition for instance that we are writing this collaborative essay sitting at a University where its Vice Chancellors mission of creating a Te Tiriti-led University comes into resistance from various White colonial structures, attends to the deep power inequalities in colonial formations of knowledge production. That the work of dismantling racism in the academe is one of deep decolonization ought to lead to questions such as: Who is talking about racism in the academe? Who are the gatekeepers for conversations on racism in the academe? What are the costs (tenure and promotion, firing, threats and other techniques of disciplining) to be paid for talking about racism in the academe? What are the potential strategies for disrupting #AcademeSoWhite, particularly with prevailing codes of civility, dialogue, and merit embedded in whiteness? What are the strategies of dismantling White fragility, especially in terms of addressing normative individualization of structural critiques? What are the opaque structures of organizing through donors, trustees, boards etc. that safeguard Whiteness and colonialism?

Recognizing that racism forms the basis of colonialism and is in turn, sustained by it, shapes the communicative processes that resist colonialism. Working together, the voices of differences from the margins, imagine what anti-racist futures look like. That such anti-racist futures are at their heart decolonial creates an anchor for deeply interrogating the neoliberal

formations that form the taken-for-granted logics of state-market-civil society structures. The recognition of the neocolonial strategy of "Divide and rule" shapes the everyday practices of dismantling racism, refusing to reproduce the frame of "Divide and rule" and simultaneously seeking to dismantle its colonial origins.

When indigenous communities, migrants, and refugees see themselves as allies in collective struggles, they create opportunity structures for transforming the racist structures. Similarly, when working class struggles join alongside anti-racist struggles, the extractive and oppressive practices of capital are brought to question, recognizing the various sites of exploitation that are built into the capitalist project. Everyday tools and tactics that circulate and reproduce Whiteness are called out on an ongoing basis, and are replaced by communicative practices that are anchored in difference, working across connections, and seeking to build alternative structures that are just and equitable.

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[1] Whakapapa: (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we embarked on this journey with the hope of articulating a framework of solidarity as a conceptual basis for theorizing and practicing anti-racist interventions in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and globally. As part of this work, Teanau created and hosted The Solidarity Project (also on the CARE website), drawing in activists and community organizers from a wide range of anti-racist struggles in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Our conversation in this white paper points to the importance of seeing the world as **Whakapapa**, and forming strategies of interventions from exploring linkages. These explorations of linkages enables stories to emerge that interrogate and make visible the relationships between colonialism, capitalism, and state formation (border management), rooted in Whiteness. Through this recognition, infrastructures for the voices of the margins suggest strategies for addressing racism, dismantling colonialism, and imagining alternative futures.

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