

A framework for anti-racist strategies in Aotearoa New Zealand rooted in Te Tiriti

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Connecting across cultures: A framework for anti-racist strategies in Aotearoa New Zealand rooted in Te Tiriti

24 September 2020

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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.

Marise Lant is a Māori leader; Lobbyist, an Indigenous rights protector; Founder of 250 Years of Colonisation – The Aftermath leading the protest and burning of the Union Jack in opposition and response to the arrival of the year replica of Endeavour to Gisborne on 8 October 2019; Previous chairperson of the Tairāwhiti District Māori Womens Welfare League; Current representative on the Tairāwhiti District Māori Council; Supporter of the Tairāwhiti Multicultural Council.

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In this white paper¹, we outline the vitality of connecting across cultures, anchored in Māori leadership in shaping and guiding anti-racist interventions in Aotearoa New Zealand, connected to anti-colonial struggles by Māori. Noting that the entrenched settler colonialism in New Zealand is based on a history of Whiteness², we argue that witnessing this Whiteness in the colonial configuration of New Zealand is the first step to dismantling it³. Māori have historically experienced, negotiated and resisted the racist structures of Whiteness that form the architectures of settler colonialism in New Zealand through their everyday organizing across whanau and hapū. We center Whiteness to the colonial structures of racism in New Zealand because of the centering of White norms as the basis for perpetuating oppression, expulsion, genocide, rape, and murder of indigenous communities (Māori in New Zealand) and the simultaneous

marginalisation of communities of colour, many of whom have experienced similar histories of expulsion, genocide, and violence.

In this paper, we argue that recognizing and centering the leadership of Māori as people of the land lies at the heart of the process of cultural centering we discuss here, anchoring interventions seeking transformations in racist structures in the everyday lived experiences of the indigenous people of the land. The leadership of Māori is vital to anti-racist struggles not only as a way for building strategies that work but more fundamentally as the basis for turning to Te Tiriti. At the same time, connecting with the struggles of communities of colour, migrants and refugees in Aotearoa New Zealand creates a framework of solidarity that sees the Whiteness percolating through racist structures, witnesses the connections between them, and

seeks to decolonize them. We argue here that seeing the connections between and across indigenous, ethnic, migrant and refugee struggles is central to culture-centered strategies of anti-racism that seek to dismantle Whiteness in colonial organisations, institutions, and society.

Culture-centered connections

The process of cultural centering in anti-racist interventions seeks to co-create communicative infrastructures for voice, advocacy, and activism at the raced margins of settler colonial formations. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, co-creating registers for anti-racist

strategies across cultural contexts of marginalization is built on seeing and seeking out connections, building relationships, and working relationally to create anti-racist frameworks of transformations that address Whiteness at organizational, institutional, and societal levels. Connections as an organizing framework also opens up infrastructures of solidarity across anti-racist spaces and interventions.

Centering Māori knowledge

Centering anti-racist interventions in Māori knowledge places Māori ways of relating to each other, to our communities, and to the land as the center of anti-racist struggles. Manaakitanga is a Māori concept that reflects hospitality, the ways of opening up, reaching out, and building dialogic spaces with visitors by making them feel welcome. As a guiding anchor for anti-racist struggles in Aotearoa New Zealand, manaakitanga makes open the spaces for cultural interaction by turning to the values of the indigenous people of the land. It turns to Māori values as the basis of constructing a universal of openness and dialogue, of connecting with other cultures, and of building spaces for coming together in cultural dialogues. Yet another concept that lies at the heart of Māori knowledge is whanaungatanga. Whanaungatanga centers relationships in the organizing of lifeworlds. It fosters the value of the whānau (family in an extended sense) working together to co-create decisions and act relationally to support the collective wellbeing of the whānau. Centering whanaungatanga places relational commitments across cultures in the context of the collective wellbeing

¹ We note in the naming of the white papers as authorial sources of knowledge the logics of Whiteness that constructs it.

² Whiteness refers to the hegemonic values of the colonising white culture, established as universal. See Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The white possessive: Property, power, and indigenous sovereignty*. U of Minnesota Press

³ Here we note the ongoing efforts at silencing conversations on Whiteness in Aotearoa by both white liberals and white supremacists. While white liberals suggest that the concept of Whiteness does not apply to Aotearoa, white supremacists deploy the age-old strategy of using communicative inversion by labelling anti-racist critiques of Whiteness as racist toward white communities.

of the whānau. The idea of the whānau as the basis for universal wellbeing is vital to the contemporary struggles against Whiteness that thrives on othering and division to perpetuate its extractive logics. Finally, aroha reflects love and affection, offering a register for receiving Manuhere (guest or visitor) with openness. Centering anti-racism in aroha dismantles Whiteness that drives racism in Aotearoa New Zealand by dismantling the deficit logic that it perpetuates.

Anchoring multiculturalism in Te Tiriti O Waitangi

Placing Te Tiriti O Waitangi at the center of the multicultural articulations in New Zealand foregrounds and centers Maori experience as the basis for understanding the racism of colonization politics as well as the processes of expulsion, displacement, and alienation from traditional land that are central to the perpetuation of racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The treaty as a guiding anchor for multiculturalism places the framework of multiculturalism within Māori articulations of cultural sovereignty and cultural connectedness. Moreover, questions of human rights and racism are placed in the ambits of the treaty, turning to Māori rights of self-governance as the basis for dismantling the Whiteness of colonial structures. Centering Te Tiriti O Waitangi forms the first step toward recognizing the Whiteness that shapes the accepted Centering Te Tiriti O Waitangi forms the first step toward

recognizing the Whiteness that shapes the accepted version of the treaty, and for raising claims to put into place other treaties that were entered into by Māori. One such example of a treaty is He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene: the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand. Whakaputanga offers an alternative register working alongside Te Tiriti to recognize Māori rights beyond the manipulations and distortions of the colonial framework. Such struggles for multiple plural sites of recognition dismantle the structures of Whiteness that perpetuate racism through the codification of the normative assumptions of Whiteness.

Connecting across struggles

Seeing the colonizing work of Whiteness across the multiple registers of everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand is integral to building a connected strategy of anti-racism. For instance, the ongoing settler colonial occupation of Māori land, the alienation of Māori from traditional and customary land, and the ongoing destruction of Māori whanau are integral to the perpetuation of Whiteness. Issues such as inequalities in health outcomes, early childhood experiences of violence, drug use, incarceration need to be situated within the context of these colonial structures embedded in the logics of Whiteness. Similarly, struggles related to traditional and customary rights to forests, water, mountains, and minerals are vital to the protection of the environment and to solutions related to climate change. Recognizing Māori

sovereignty across these struggles creates an opening for anti-racist solidarities crafted by migrants, refugees, and ethnic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Connecting across struggles and connecting across indigenous and other communities of colour offers a comprehensive framework for addressing and dismantling Whiteness at the structural level.

Getting inside and dismantling structures

Racism is perpetuated through the Whiteness of structures, built into the everyday norms and ways of functioning that are codified into these structures. For racism to be dismantled across organisations, institutions, and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori, and people of colour need to embed themselves into institutions, organisations, and communities and learn the processes through which Whiteness perpetuates itself. Learning the mechanisms of working of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of government is important to developing strategies for dismantling Whiteness. Because Whiteness perpetuates itself through normative assumptions, it is critical to build learning strategies that are equipped to closely interrogate the workings of power within these spaces. Central to the perpetuation of Whiteness across organisations and institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand is the Whiteness that is coded into educational structures. Dismantling Whiteness in educational structures is an imminent need.

Establishing independent Māori and ethnically diverse assessors

To achieve the strategies outlined above, the structures that constitute dominant organisations and institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand need to be placed under independent observation and evaluation. Whiteness perpetuates itself by setting up as normative institutional and organizational logics that are based on its values of individualism, reductionism, and othering. Salient here are the co-optive processes that superficially incorporate difference to further perpetuate Whiteness. Establishing independent Māori assessors that sit outside the structures of institutions and organisations and are embedded within the Māori council creates frameworks of accountability. Placing ethnically diverse assessors within the Māori council further creates a dialogic anchor between Māori and other communities of colour, which collectively hold accountable the institutions and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Discussion

In this white paper, we outline a framework of connecting across cultures anchored in Māori knowledge as the basis of culturally centering anti-racist interventions. Moreover, we need the salience of naming Whiteness, the workings of the values and norms of a dominant White

culture that shape institutions, organisations, and societies as the basis for beginning the work of transforming structures.

Anchoring anti-racist interventions in Māori knowledge and connecting across cultures, a culture-centered approach to dismantling racism in Aotearoa New Zealand foregrounds Te Tiriti O Waitangi as well as the plural registers of treaties signed by Māori as the traditional people of the land. Centering the conversation on anti-racism on treaties looks across issues and struggles, connecting across them and connecting Indigenous and other communities of colour to dismantle Whiteness that underlies racism. The role of educational organisations as sites for perpetuating Whiteness suggests the urgency of anti-racist interventions that are directed at dismantling the Whiteness within educational organisations. To build educational spaces that address the core commitments of Te Tiriti is to fundamentally dismantle the racist structure of Whiteness that constitute academic organisations. To enable these transformations, we propose establishing independent Māori assessors, working alongside assessors from communities of colour to examine dominant organisations and institutions, to challenge the hegemonic norms of Whiteness that shape these organisations and institutions, and to carry out the work of dismantling Whiteness.
