

**Carl Parsons and Kaia-Marie A. Bishop – Book Review: Mike Cole (2016)**  
***Racism: A Critical Analysis*. London: Pluto Press.**

**Review 1**

**Carl Parsons**

*University of Greenwich, London, England*

This book is a welcome, surprisingly level-headed and non-combative book on race from the far left. It is welcome because race is a much disputed arena for fighting the inequality battles and better alliances are needed between Marxists and Critical Race Theorists. It tries to explain why CRT is self limiting without parody or antagonism and makes a pretty good job of it. The book runs to 200 pages, impressively packed with data and well referenced historical accounts.

Cole sets out his stall well in a full and rightly complex introduction. Race, racism, Critical Race Theory - and its shortcomings, Marxism - and what it has to offer and various features of CRT and Marxism that could complement each other. One hopes that his mission to bring an alliance between CRT as a major Left paradigm and modern Marxism. It is a worthy goal and may do much to give meaning to repression and rejection experienced by the excluded and deprived; he wants social analysis to be 'grounded in the economic and political realities of racialized societies' (p. 11). He points out here that capitalism thrives where hegemonic controls induce workers to blame other (ethnic minority/immigrant) workers rather than those owning and running the profit-making enterprises. Thus we get workers blaming the newly arrived or just 'different' instead of bankers and money institutions for poverty and believe the

justifications given for austerity. Mike Cole is exhaustive in his constructive critique, indeed exhausting if you follow up the 126 notes on this first chapter. The three substantive chapters which follow on the UK, USA and Australia are a useful mix of the sound scholarship one expects from Cole and the consistent anti-free market capitalism message Cole has always provided. Most impressive is the elaboration of the nature of racism. He refers to 'multifaceted forms of colour-coded, non-colour-coded and hybridist racism [plus] xeno-racism' arising from migrants from the European Union as it increased the number of members by 18 between 2003 and 2013. Add to this Islamophobia, triggered by the attack of 9/11 and the Afghan and Iraq wars (pp. 27/28). The changing objects of racism over even recent times, the increased groups adversely affected and the official and unofficial racist action against them merit attention.

The historical account of racism in the UK, the colonial era and its beneficial (for some) consequences for industrial development is laid out. At different times, with different leaders and with different surface motives a range of non-Brits have been denigrated and repressed. The Irish suffered in various ways from parliamentary inaction over industrial declines, potato famine before the independence granted to (won by) the south and its increasing economic ties with the USA. The opium wars, the pillaging of countries of Africa and Asia, sometimes (often?) with brutal military escapades are shocking and relevant material for racism today. Through the period of the conservative Thatcher government and on through a 'new labour' rivalling its conservative predecessor in its third way alliance between government and private capital, racism has been allowed to simmer. This has often meant to equally poor attacking each other instead of those sections of society most blameworthy and most benefiting from unfettered, 'creative' capitalism, or 'immiseration capitalism' (p. 83).

The chapter on the USA covers the oppression of the native Indians before even the arrival of slaves. From the arrival of the first slaves in the 1560s in Spanish Florida, through to the ending of slavery in the 1860s encompasses 300 years of the most appalling degradation and dehumanisation, shocking in terms of its duration and numbers. Who would deny the claim that 'present day racist practices and attitudes carry the stench of the slave market' (p. 101). The USA has a population of 36 million, overwhelmingly immigrant by origin, whether voluntary or involuntary. The population is 13% African-American and 17% Hispanic. The USA's colonialist acquisitions include much that was Mexico and later Puerto Rico. Cole takes us through the Asian American diaspora which includes Chinese, Filipino/a, Korean, Indian, Japanese and Vietnamese. These are collectively billed as the 'model minorities' (p.122). Islamophobia is related back to Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. While at one time a rallying banner for Black Americans, this religious line became one distinctly tied in by media to ISIS and the 'war on terror'. As Cole writes, ISIS is not 'the incomprehensible emanation of satanic evil' as claimed by some writers but that successive US administrations have built up [this] most reactionary and backward Islamist fundamentalist forces for many decades' (p. 129). We therefore create our own racist enemies through acquisitive and repressive military-backed activities - and then demonise them whilst pretending not to *understand* them.

Back home, anti-Black racism flourishes, economically, in the judicial and police services and in housing. Look at the concentration of poor Black areas, the sclerosis of inter-race relationships, the education and health provision Black people experience and with no sign of acknowledgement or concerted attempts at improvement soon.

Australia has equally multifaceted racism though it plays out differently. Its history is different, though one may see the treatment of Aboriginal peoples as

similar to that meted out to American Indians. Cole lists atrocities committed against Aboriginal settlements right up to 1928 (p.137). 'Aboriginal life expectancy is 10 years less than Whites', the proportion growing up in poverty is much greater and, almost amusingly, all learn that 'Captain Cook discovered Australia' (p.143). The South Sea Islanders suffer similarly.

Anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese racism have historical roots, different ones. The Irish have suffered and the Jews have suffered and, though local conditions may have made this happen in different ways, it remains as part of the racist scenario of Australia, as it does in Britain. Cole takes us through White Australia, newer colour-coded racism, newer hybridism racism, Islamophobia and anti-asylum-seeker racism and he reels off the white supremacist groups at home in Australia – a reminder that the same are to be found in the UK and USA.

Some reference is made to Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) but maybe not enough. The final chapter does return strongly to 'ruling class' strategies and the austerity measures sold by the right. We are promised a more focussed view of the levers for resistance and counter-hegemonic avenues in his forthcoming *Antiracism: a critical analysis*. Respect is due to this enlightening study of racism in three Anglophone countries.

## **Review 2**

**Kaia-Marie A. Bishop**

*Eastern Michigan University, Michigan, USA*

Mike Cole's *Racism: A Critical Analysis* is a timely piece given the unveiling of racism embedded in institutions and the current political and economic climate in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. This can be seen in

Brexit in the United Kingdom (UK), in the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US), and in the election of Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister of Australia. It is in this context that Cole analyses racism in the UK, the US, and Australia through a neo-Marxist lens in order to link racism to capitalist modes of production and migration patterns influenced by capitalism.

Cole's analytical framework is shaped by neo-Marxist, Gramscian, and Althusserian theory. He also pulls from a central tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT): "that racism is an unexceptional and constant occurrence for people of colour" (p. 3). However, Cole critiques CRT for not connecting racism to capitalist modes of productions or migration patterns influenced by capitalism. He argues that CRT homogenizes White people, does not adequately explain non-color-coded racism (xeno-racism that is not based on skin color), and does not explain newer hybridist racism (anti-asylum-seeker racism and Islamophobia) or "inter-ethnic racism" (p. 18). Cole uses a neo-Marxist understanding of racialization, where the false racial categorization of people is understood in relation to historical, economic, and political factors. He argues that while race is a social construct, racism "is a frighteningly real, burning and omnipresent issue" (p. 2).

The text uses a broad understanding of racism, given the complexity and multifaceted nature of racism. This understanding consists of several kinds of racism: older color-coded and non-color-coded racism, newer color-coded and non-color-coded racism, and newer hybridist racist. Older color-coded racism originates from the colonial era, but continues today. He discusses how older non-color-coded racism racializes "the Irish, Jewish people, and the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities" (p. 24). Newer color-coded racism describes anti-migrant racism. Examples of this include the racist assaults on Indian students and taxi drivers in 2008 and 2009 in Australia. Cole uses the term

newer non-color-coded racism to refer to xeno-racism, which is *not* based on skin color and includes displaced and impoverished White people. Newer hybridist racism refers to anti-asylum-seeker racism and Islamophobia. In addition to the detailed discussions of the types of racism discussed in the text, Cole offers clear explanations of the other concepts necessary for his framework. Two of the most important concepts used in the book are the Gramscian concept of common sense and the Althusserian concept of interpellation. Common sense refers to a superficial understanding of disparities in society, rather than a systemic one, and are “thoughts and reflections that are felt to be the product of years of knowing what is right and necessary, but really mirror the interests of the ruling class” (p. 9). Interpellation is described as “the process via which the politicians and the media, for example, claim to be speaking on behalf of the people” (p. 10). Because of these in-depth explanations, Cole’s position and the framework for his argument are clearly established.

The book is divided into three sections, which analyze racism in the UK, the US, and Australia. Cole begins his chapter on racism in the UK by discussing the older color-coded racism in settler colonialism, where biological racism was used to racialize peoples across the British Empire, as well as within the UK. He also analyzes older non-color-coded racism, newer non-color-coded racism, newer hybridist racism, and offers a detailed analysis of racism during the time leading up to the 2015 general election. Cole contextualizes the types of racism in the US and in the context of austerity capitalism through brief historical and current overviews of the experiences of Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, African Americans, Latina and Latino Americans, and Asian Americans, as well as through an overview of Islamophobia. The chapter on Australia explains the histories and realities of older color-coded racism, older non-color-coded racism, Hansonism, newer color-coded racism, and newer hybridist racism.

Throughout all three chapters, Cole reminds readers of the correlation between poverty and racism. He argues that despite the differences among people experiencing different types of racism, they share important commonalities, and he links these differences and similarities of their experiences of racism to racialization processes and capitalism. Cole argues that racism is ‘common sense,’ which reinforces racist stereotypes and exacerbates racist reactions. Through the process of interpellation, ideologies such as this are imposed on people, without feeling like an imposition to them. People are then trapped in a single worldview that is both racist and supports capitalism as the best system possible, allowing the ruling class to control the public through ideology while maintaining hegemony. Cole captures this well when he writes, “we tend to think and act in the interests of the ruling class, as if it was solely our choice to do so, and it is fully in our interests to do so” (p. 10).

In this text, Cole offers a clear, comprehensive overview of racism historically in three countries, linking it with issues of social class. He uses multiple historical and current examples as evidence effectively. However, as the author notes, he misses and glosses over some information. There is no discussion of various hate groups or of responses to racism, which would show the agency of peoples who otherwise might be looked at as victims. A discussion of these topics would allow for a fuller understanding racism. In addition to these missing discussions, Cole argues against an intersectional understanding of racism because intersectionality “renders social class as non-axiomatic, not the crucial social relation on which depends the ability or otherwise of capitalism to sustain and reproduce itself” (p. 23). He argues that while it is theoretically possible to have a capitalist system with racial and gender equality, it is not possible to have a capitalist system with social class equality. For this reason, as well as the use of racism to create profits and to divide workers, it is necessary to understand the relationship between racism and social class. While Cole’s

point about the necessity of social class division for a capitalist system is valid, an intersectional perspective would allow for more exploration into the complexities of the relationship between racism and social class, given the “mutually reinforcing vectors of gender, class, and sexuality” (Nash, 2008, p. 3).

*Racism: A Critical Analysis* offers a broad historical overview of racism in the UK, the US, and Australia with a valuable framework for thinking about racism. While further discussion of hate groups and responses to racism would be useful, the adept way that Cole weaves his analysis with examples offers insight into racism across the three countries. He does this in a way that shows the complexity of racism from a neo-Marxist lens. Cole’s argument about the various types of racism offers another perspective on racism, which seems to be useful for more fully understanding the intersection between race and social class.

### **References**

Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 89, pp. 1-15. Available from <http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/journal/41305>

### **Author Details**

Carl Parsons is a Visiting Professor of Social Inclusion Studies, Department of Education and Community Studies, University of Greenwich

[c.parsons@greenwich.ac.uk](mailto:c.parsons@greenwich.ac.uk)

Recent publications: 'Ethnicity, disadvantage and other variables in the analysis of Birmingham longitudinal school attainment datasets' published online in *Educational Review* (2017) download at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/5JkGyUuI5YiY5u7BI76/full>

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Kaia-Marie A. Bishop is a doctoral student at Eastern Michigan University in the Educational Studies program, concentrating on Urban Education, and teaches written composition at the college level. Her current research interests include writing self-efficacy in postsecondary students, critical pedagogy, composition pedagogy, and the impact of neoliberalism on public education. Corresponding address: kbishop3@emich.edu; Department of Teacher Education, Porter Building, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197.