

**On ‘white supremacy’ and caricaturing, misrepresenting and dismissing
Marx and Marxism: a response to David Gillborn’s “Who’s Afraid of
Critical Race Theory in Education”.**

Mike Cole

Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, England

In this journal in 2007, Alpesh Maisuria and I critiqued two central tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) from a Marxist perspective (Cole and Maisuria, 2007). These are its primacy of ‘race’ over class, and its concept of ‘white supremacy’. Part of the critique focused on the work of leading UK Critical Race Theorist, David Gillborn. A year later Gillborn (2008) responded briefly to our critique. There followed an interchange between Gillborn and myself (Cole, 2009a; Gillborn, 2009). I welcome Gillborn’s willingness to enter the debate between Marxism and Critical Race Theory. In Gillborn, 2009, Gillborn raises a number of issues in reply to my paper (Cole, 2009a) (both papers appear in the first edition of the new journal, based around the annual UK *Discourse Power and Resistance* conferences, *Power and Education*).

Here I will limit my response to what I consider to be the most important issues for the readers of *JCEPS*: the concept of ‘white supremacy’, and Gillborn’s caricature, misrepresentation and dismissal of Marx and Marxism. At the outset, I would like to reiterate my concluding comments in Cole, 2009a (p. 118), namely that my purpose is not to question the ideological or political integrity of Critical Race Theorists, but to open up comradely discussion in the light of the entry of CRT into British academia. I have great respect for David Gillborn who has an impeccable history of fighting racism, and my comments should be seen in this light, and in the context of our common commitment to the ongoing struggle against racist thoughts and practices. It is my hope that readers of *JCEPS* will join in the debate, a debate which has major implications for radical theory and practice.

The concept of white supremacy

With respect to my suggestion (Cole, 2009a, p. 485) that Critical Race Theorists, including Gillborn, wish to replace the concept of racism with that of ‘white supremacy’, I must say that on reflection my use of the term ‘replace’ was inappropriate. I certainly was not in any way suggesting that Critical Race Theorists were not concerned with combating racism, since this is self-evidently their primary aim. My point is that Critical Race Theorists tend to find ‘white supremacy’ as a descriptor of reality for the everyday experiences of people of color a more useful term than racism alone in certain contexts, for example in the US, and in other specified countries [1]. In 1989, the radical black American writer bell hooks noted:

As I write, I try to remember when the word racism ceased to be the term which best expressed for me the exploitation of black people and other people of color in this society and when I began to understand that the most useful term was white supremacy (hooks, 1989, p. 112).

This quote was cited by Gillborn in an earlier paper (Gillborn, 2005, p. 485), and in fact the term ‘white supremacy’ as a descriptor of reality is used routinely by Critical Race Theorists. It has been defined by Frances Lee Ansley (1997, p. 592, cited in Gillborn, 2008, p. 36) as referring ‘not ... only ... the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups’, but also to:

a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white supremacy and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

Gillborn (2008, p. 36) acknowledges that ‘[s]ome critical race scholars argue that White Supremacy, understood in this way, is as central to CRT as the notion of capitalism is to Marxist theory and patriarchy to Feminism’.

In Cole, 2009a (see also Cole, 2009b), I argued that there are four significant problems with the term ‘white supremacy’. The first is that it can direct critical attention away from modes of production. To take one example, it is difficult to understand racism in the immediate post-world war period in the UK without addressing the needs of the post-war economy and the need for cheap labour from the (former) colonies. This, in turn, has to be seen in the context of British Imperialism.

The second problem with ‘white supremacy’ is that it homogenizes all white people together as being in positions of power and privilege. Thus it masks, for example, the vast number of poor white people in the UK. While black people are twice as poor as whites, and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin over three times as poor as whites (Platt, 2007), this still leaves some 12 million poor white people in the UK.

Third, ‘white supremacy’ inadequately explains what I have referred to as ‘non-colour-coded racism’. Gillborn (2009, p. 128), notes that I insist on reading ‘White supremacy in simple blanket terms as if CRT viewed all Whites as equally

privileged and equally powerful’, and that I do not deal with his statement in his (2008) book that ‘*All White-identified people are implicated in these relations but they are not all active in identical ways and they do not all draw similar benefits – but they do all benefit, whether they like it or not*’ (Gillborn 2008, p. 34). I do, in fact deal with this in detail in Cole, 2009b (pp. 61-64), where I argue, in a CRT-type ‘chronicle’ [2], that this is not necessarily the case for *all* white people. Suffice it to point out here that the existence of anti-semitism (e.g. Townsend, 2009), anti-Irish racism (e.g. Mac An Ghaill, 2000), anti-Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) racism (e.g. Duffy and Tomlinson, 2009), xeno-racism (e.g. Fekete, 2009) and Islamophobia (since this is not necessarily based on skin colour) all challenge the concept of ‘white supremacy’ and militate against notions of ‘all white-identified people benefit’, at least as a universal declaration [3]. Lack of ‘white benefit’ is particularly acute at given periods of history in certain geographical locations. Current anti-GRT racism in predominantly ‘white’ areas of the UK is but one example.

The fourth problem with ‘white supremacy’ is that it is totally counter-productive as a political unifier and rallying point against racism. Telling working class white people that they are ‘white supremacist’, for Marxists, totally undermines the unification of the working class which is necessary to challenge capitalism and imperialism. This is developed below [4].

Caricaturing, misrepresenting and dismissing Marx and Marxism

David Gillborn’s main reasons for replying to my paper (Cole, 2009a) were ‘to set the record straight on certain matters and offer readers some signposts as to where they might look next if they are interested in understanding critical race theory’ in contrast to ‘the confused and often misleading straw person version that tends to appear in critiques from both ends of the political spectrum’ (2009, p. 125), and to challenge ‘over-simplification, misunderstandings and misrepresentations’ of what he describes as reductionist Marxism (ibid.) (see below) [5].

Gillborn takes issue with my statement that he is reluctant to engage in debate with Marxists (Cole, 2009a, p. 118). What I meant by this is that Gillborn is reluctant to engage *constructively* with Marxists and perhaps to acknowledge some of Marxism’s strengths. He tends rather to caricature, misrepresent and dismiss Marxist

arguments. As evidence that he has ‘engaged in debate’, he cites pp. 37-38 of his book (Gillborn, 2008), where he makes reference to a paper by Alpesh Maisuria and myself (Cole and Maisuria, 2007) mentioned briefly above (as far as I can tell neither of our names appear in the main text, merely in two Notes to the chapter). In stating that our position is that CRT ‘gives undue attention to racism rather than class divisions’, Gillborn (2008, p. 20) greatly oversimplifies our argument. What we actually set out to do is to make the case that, *in order to facilitate a serious and in-depth understanding of racism*, CRT, in its advocacy of ‘white supremacy’, and in its *pre-eminence* of ‘race’ over class is not able to attain such an understanding. We commend the Marxist concepts of racialization (e. g. Miles, 1987, 1989) and xeno-racialization (Cole, 2004) as having the best purchase in explaining manifestations of racism, Islamophobia and xeno-racism in contemporary Britain. This is because racialization and xeno-racialization, unlike ‘white supremacy’, connect to modes of production, as is argued at length in Cole, 2009a (see also Cole, 2009b).

Gillborn is fully aware that an analysis of racism from a Marxist perspective, rather than an analysis of class, has been one of the central features of my writing over a period of over two decades (in Cole, 2007, p. 14, I described racism as ‘one of the key issues facing the world in the twenty-first century’). Equally, in the presence of Gillborn at a seminar (Cole and Maisuria, 2006), Maisuria articulately advocated a Marxist analysis of *racism*. Maisuria is, in fact, a PhD student at the Institute of Education, London University where Gillborn works. Maisuria’s thesis examines the intersectionality of ‘race’ and social class in discourses of racism, specifically contextualizing the efficacy of the Marxist concept of racialization in Sweden. There is thus no reason for Gillborn to be unaware of the centrality of racism in Maisuria’s research. Moreover, Gillborn is also surely aware of Maisuria’s writing on racism (e.g. Maisuria, 2006). So it is puzzling why Gillborn makes the statement that Maisuria and I believe CRT ‘gives undue attention to racism’.

Economic determinism and class reductionism

Gillborn (2009, p. 128) also levels at me the accusation of economic determinism and class reductionism. I would argue that using Marxism to understand racism is not indicative of either economic determinism or class reductionism. I will deal with each in turn. Gillborn’s reference to ‘economic determinism’ relates to Charles Mills (2009) suggestion that ‘*once created* - race achieves a certain autonomy

of its own which requires the rethinking of orthodox white Marxism'. Economic determinism (or economism, or vulgar Marxism) in fact refers to a form of Marxism, where the economic base rigidly determines what happens at the other (superstructural) levels of society: the political system, educational system and so on (see Cole, 2008, pp. 33–36 for a discussion). As Robert M. Young (1998) puts it:

The defining feature of Marxist approaches to the history of science is that the history of scientific ideas, of research priorities, of concepts of nature and of the parameters of discoveries are all rooted in historical forces which are, in the last instance, socio-economic. There are variations in how literally this is taken and various Marxist-inspired and Marxist-related positions define the interrelations among science and other historical forces more or less loosely. There is a continuum of positions. The most orthodox provides one-to-one correlations between the socio-economic base and the intellectual superstructure. This is referred to as economism or vulgar Marxism.

However, as Engels (1890) put it, economic determinism was never part of Marxism:

According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase.

Gillborn (2009, p. 129) in fact acknowledges that Marx was not an economic determinist, but still implies that I am!

With respect to 'class reductionism', Gillborn is so obsessed with the notion that my work is 'class reductionist' that he describes my response to CRT as a whole as 'a restatement of [my] faith in a particular class-reductionist version of Marxism' (ibid., p. 128). As I have argued elsewhere (Cole, 2008, p. 70):

while intent on relating all forms of oppression to the metanarrative of capitalism, modern-day Marxists consistently acknowledge and oppose and combat varying oppressions, in addition to social class. Thus, it is inaccurate to put Marxism in a time warp, which associates it with ... class reductionism.

It is hard to see how my use of Marxism, in particular the Marxist concepts of racialization and xeno-racialization to determine how historically and contemporaneously certain groups of people are on the receiving end of *racism*, could be seen as reducing everything to ‘class’ [6].

The Case of Ricky Lee Allen

Gillborn (2009, p. 127) chides me for avoiding referring to his comments (in Gillborn, 2008, pp. 37-38) on Ricky Lee Allen because, he suggests, it ‘perhaps puts some of the attacks on CRT in an uncomfortable light’ (Gillborn, 2009, p. 127).

It is worth dwelling briefly here on some of Allen’s views. According to Gillborn (2008, p. 37), Allen believes that ‘white Marxists and their supporters have had a history of scrutinizing the contradictions of Blacks more harshly than those of non-Blacks’ (Allen, 2006, p. 5, cited in Gillborn, 2008, p. 38) and also ‘views contemporary academic Marxism as an exercise of White power’ (cited in Gillborn, 2008, p. 37). In commenting on one of Critical Race Theorist John Preston’s (2007, p. 10) four reasons why the ‘abolition of whiteness’ should be taught in schools, namely that ‘Whiteness Is a False Form of Identity and . . . There Is No Such Thing as White Culture.’ (ibid.), I argue (in Cole, 2009b, p. 136) that while I agree that there is no such thing as ‘white culture’ per se, there are white *cultures*. It is particularly important, given the scenario of ongoing and, especially during the current recession, increasing white working class racism in the UK (exacerbated by sections of the tabloid press), that educators do not deny the existence of white working class cultures. Indeed, with respect to such cultures, educational institutions should be centrally involved in helping to identify and develop strategies to promote good inclusive practice for *all* pupils/students, including the white working class, *non-racialized* as well as racialized (ibid., pp. 136-7) [7]. Sections of the white working class in England have voted for the fascist British National Party (BNP) at recent elections *precisely* because they feel that they are treated with less equality than others. If we were to *teach* white working class young people that they have no culture, or indeed if we were to treat them as if they had no culture, that would be racist, would alienate white working class children even more, and would not be conducive to inclusive practice. The notion of such a lack of culture which would surely lead to identity crises (ibid., p. 137). Unfortunately, this is a point that Ricky

Lee Allen (2007, p. 65) seems to revel in since he states that critical educators need to provide an environment which produces these. Such educational practice would rightly be massively contested by the overwhelming majority of educationalists, of teachers and of other educational workers. Far from putting Marxism in ‘an unfavourable light’, I think the views of Ricky Lee Allen put certain Critical Race Theorists in an unfavourable light.

Marx and Slavery [8]

Gillborn’s hostility to, and indeed lack of understanding, of Marx is underlined in his (2008) book when he refers to some of Charles Mills’ work on the relationship between ‘White Marxism and Black Radicalism’.

He cites Mills (2003, p. xvii) as claiming:

critical race theory is far from being an adjunct to, or outgrowth of, critical class theory; in fact, it long predates it, at least in its modern Marxist form. Long before Marx was born, Africans forcibly transported as slaves to the New World were struggling desperately to understand their situation; they were raising the issues of social critique and transformation as radically as—indeed even more radically than—the white European working class, who were after all beneficiaries of and accessories to the same system oppressing blacks. (cited in Gillborn, 2008, p. 38).

Gillborn’s (2008, p. 38) comment is that ‘Mills’ point is extremely powerful’. Gillborn goes on point out that Marx moved to London in 1849, more than a decade before slavery was abolished in US territories (ibid.). ‘These simple facts’, Gillborn states, ‘make the minimal presence of race in Marx’s analyses all the more damning’ (ibid.).

It is difficult to understand what both Mills and Gillborn are implying. I will deal with Mills’ quote and Gillborn’s comments on it in turn.

With respect to the quote, Mills seems to be suggesting five things: (1) that the struggle against racism predates the *modern* European class theory; (2) that slaves’ analyses and struggles were an early form of Critical Race Theory; (3) that slaves were more radical than the white European working class; (4) that the white working class were beneficiaries of slavery; and (5) that

they were accessories to it. With respect to (1), given Mills' use of the term, 'modern', this seems to be truism. As far as (2) is concerned, given that Critical Race Theory grew out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the 1980s, a fact heralded by those central to the movement (see Cole, 2009b, chapter 1), it is difficult to make sense of Mills' assertion. That slaves were more radical than the white working class (3) is difficult to quantify. It really depends what Mills means by 'radical'. With respect to (4), that the white working class were beneficiaries to slavery, this is true in the sense that they accrued some benefits from capitalist plunder. Having said that, it needs to be remembered that slavery also helped capitalism sustain intense forms of exploitation of the white working class in the UK, such as that which operated in the cotton mills and that Engels compared to slavery (Engels, 1845 [2007]) [9]. Finally, whether the white working class were accessories (5) needs to be seen in the context of the success of the interpellation process – the extent to which they were 'taken in' *ideologically* [10]. To merely describe the white European working class as 'accessories' implies conscious rational choice outside the confines of ideological processes.

It is thus very difficult to understand why Gillborn finds Mills' assertions 'extremely powerful'. As to Gillborn's development of these assertions, while I accept his point that there is a minimal presence of 'race' in Marx's writing, Gillborn seems to be implying that, given that slavery existed in the US territories when Marx arrived in London, that Marx should have written about slavery, but did not, and should therefore be 'damned' for it. As a matter of historical record, Marx, a leading European abolitionist, was London Correspondent for the radical anti-slavery 'New York Daily Tribune' (Laskey, 2003, p. 1). During the US Civil War, Marx urged and organized English textile workers to support the blockade against the Confederacy, even though it was not in their immediate economic interests and also led to massive layoffs, as a result of the cut off of imported cotton (Marx, 1862, p. 153). Writing about the importance of the working class engaging in extra-parliamentary activity, Marx described working class disgust and action against the Confederacy as 'admirable', 'incredible', and as 'more striking' than other demonstrations (e.g., against the Corn Laws and the Ten Hours Bill) because of its unambiguous spontaneity and persistence (ibid.). Marx saw the action as 'new, brilliant proof of the indestructible staunchness of the English popular masses' (ibid.), and reported with great enthusiasm on 'a great *workers' meeting* in Marylebone, the most populous

district of London' (ibid.) which served 'to characterise the "policy" of the working class' (ibid.). At that meeting, the following motion was passed unanimously:

This meeting resolves that the agents of the rebels . . . are absolutely unworthy of the moral sympathies of the working class of this country, since they are slaveholders as well as the confessed agents of the tyrannical faction that is at this very moment in rebellion against the American republic and the sworn enemy of the social and political rights of the working class in all countries. (cited in Marx, 1862, p. 153).

At the same meeting another motion, expressing 'the warmest sympathy with the strivings of the Abolitionists for a final solution to the slave question' (cited in Marx, ibid.) was also adopted unanimously. The final motion, again unanimous, was sent to the US government a copy of the resolutions 'as an expression of the feelings and opinions of the working class of England' (ibid.).

Marx took this strong Abolitionist position because, as he wrote to Engels on the eve of the Civil War, the uprisings of slaves in the United States and of serfs in Russia were the 'two most important events' taking place in the world (Marx 1860, p. 5). Marx expressed his views on slavery succinctly in *Capital Volume 1*:

In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. (Marx (1887) [1965], p. 301).

Furthermore, at the time of Abraham Lincoln's re-election, Marx addressed congratulations to him on behalf of the First International. It fell to Lincoln, Marx wrote, 'the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstitution of a social world' (cited in Douglass, 2009) [11].

Conclusion

In this paper I began by assessing the CRT concept of ‘white supremacy’, finding it lacking on four fronts. I went on to critique David Gillborn’s caricaturing, misrepresenting and dismissing Marx and Marxism (for a more comprehensive Marxist overview of CRT and the work of Gillborn and other Critical Race Theorists, see Cole, 2009b). Gillborn (2009, p. 6) concludes his critique of my (2009a) paper by trusting that in ‘any future comradely engagements with CRT’, I will do greater justice to the object of criticism’. Substituting ‘Marxism’ for ‘CRT’, I would say the same to Gillborn.

Now more than ever it is important to *understand* rather than to caricature and dismiss Marxism. To borrow Gillborn’s (2009, p. 125) terminology, it is crucial to challenge ‘confused’, ‘often misleading’, ‘over-simplified’, ‘misunderstandings’ and ‘misrepresentations’ of Marxism. Neoliberal capitalism, for several decades flaunted as ‘the only alternative’, has now been severely discredited. It is time to mount a serious challenge not just to neoliberal capitalism but to capitalism and imperialisms per se. While it is important to continue dialogue between Critical Race Theorists and Marxists, it needs pointing out that, in the main, this occurs in academic and legal circles [12]. In the barrios of Caracas, in the backstreets of Kathmandu, and everywhere else where the poor live, and the spark of socialism has been lit, people are not embracing Critical Race Theory. Instead, as I have witnessed personally they are engaging with the possibility of a *practical democratic socialism*, a socialism that is truly inclusive, with respect to ‘race’, but also with respect to gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other forms of exploitation and oppression [13].

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Alpesh Maisuria and the three *JCEPS* referees for their comments on this paper. Any inadequacies, of course, remain mine.

Notes

1. CRT is geographically limited. While Ladson-Billings (2006, p. xii) states that ‘[i]n its adolescence CRT . . . takes on an international dimension’, the only examples she gives, apart from the United States, are the United Kingdom and the suburbs of Paris. Gillborn (2008, p. 1) has argued that, in addition to the

United States and United Kingdom, CRT has relevance to Canada, Europe and Australasia. Marxism, on the other hand, is unequivocally international.

2. 'Chronicle' has been defined by leading US Critical Race Theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006, pp. viii-xi) as a constructed narrative in which evidence and other forms of data are embedded, while Gillborn (2008, p. 4) refers to the 'use of imagined characters to debate issues and exemplify real-world problems'.
3. Allied to this notion of 'white benefits' is the central CRT concept of 'interest convergence'. I have applied this to the election of Barack Obama, but unlike Gillborn who talks of 'benefits to White people' per se (Gillborn, 2009, p. 126), I suggest that this election vindicated shared interest in the election of a black Democrat between people of color and national (and international) capital. I recall (Cole, 2009b, p. 155) that The *London Evening Standard* billboard at Kings Cross Station announced on the day of the election victory, 'Obama Mania: Shares Surge'. As Anindya Bhattacharyya (2008, p. 7) notes, while 73 percent of the poorest households (with an annual income of less than \$15,000) voted for Barack Obama, so did 52 percent of the richest households (those earning over \$200,000 a year). Top-down corporate mobilization for Obama, as Bhattacharyya (ibid.) points out, meant that by 'mid-October [Obama] had raised a massive war chest of \$640 million and spent \$250 million on TV advertising', while McCain's October budget was \$47 million (ibid.). This is not to deny the importance of the defeat of Republicanism, nor the symbolic importance of Obama's victory.
4. One theorist who tries to combine CRT and Marxism is John Preston. For example, given that a logical extension of 'white supremacy' is the 'abolition of whiteness', Preston (2007, p. 13), argues that '[t]he abolition of whiteness is . . . not just an optional extra in terms of defeating capitalism (nor something which will be necessarily abolished post-capitalism) but fundamental to the Marxist educational project as praxis'. Indeed, for Preston (2007, p. 196) '[t]he abolition of capitalism and whiteness seem to be fundamentally connected in the current historical circumstances of Western capitalist development'. From my Marxist perspective, coupling the 'abolition of whiteness' to the 'abolition of capitalism' is a worrying development which, if it gained ground in Marxist theory in any substantial way would most certainly

undermine the Marxist project, even more than it has been undermined already (for a critique of Preston's 'classroom pedagogies' to promote the 'abolition of whiteness', see Cole, 2009b, pp. 135-138).

5. In describing some of the main features of Critical Race Theory, Gillborn points readers to some key texts and also notes that CRT is a vibrant and changing movement and refers to a range of offshoots, giving 'LatCrit' and Critical Race Feminism as examples (Gillborn, 2009, p. 2 in my version). He might also have included 'queer-crit' and 'materialist and idealist CRT' as well as the rigorous debate provided by 'black exceptionalism', 'Asian-American Jurisprudence' and 'Native Jurisprudence' (see Cole, 2009b, pp. 15-21). In Cole, 2009b, I attempt a comprehensive overview of CRT, including its origins in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), its various offshoots and central tenets. I address what I perceive to be its strengths as well as its weakness (see chapter 3 of Cole, 2009b; see also Cole, 2009d). Gillborn's speculation that my book (Cole, 2009b) (which he had not read at the time of writing his 'reply' to me, because it had not been published) will largely repeat points that have already been made elsewhere (Gillborn, 2009, p. 125) is misguided. Gillborn claims that I fail 'to engage seriously with the real work of critical race scholars' (p. 129). That is for Gillborn and others to decide if and when they read the book. Suffice it to say at this point that at least one central Critical Race Theorist, Richard Delgado disagrees. He writes on the back cover of the book that '[a]ny movement would be fortunate to have the meticulous but wide-ranging criticism that Cole offers'.
6. My own preferred definition of racism (e.g. Cole, 2009b, pp. 39-41), which stresses culture as well as biology, unintentional as well as intentional racism, overt in addition to covert racism, and 'seemingly positive attributes' ascribed to minority groups, as well as obvious negative ones, dominative as well as aversive racism, racism brought on by certain stimuli, and non-colour-coded as well as colour-coded racism could hardly be described as 'class-reductionist'. It is the *relating* of this definition, via Miles' (1987, 1989) concept of racialization and the concept of xeno-racialization (Cole, 2004), that enables a connection with modes of production, and thus to Marxist analysis. My use of Miles' work on racialization to *avoid* class reductionism is somewhat ironic since the work of Miles and his associates on *racism* could

perhaps be described as class reductionist. Indeed Gillborn's accusations of class reductionism with respect to *the concept* of racism might have had more purchase if levelled at Miles and his associates based around the Department of Sociology at the University of Glasgow (for a critical discussion of this school of thought, see Cole, 2009b, pp. 38-39).

7. By 'racialized sections of the white working class', I mean, for example, the constituencies referred to above – Jewish workers, Irish workers, workers from the Gypsy Roma Traveller communities, and Eastern European migrant workers.
8. This section of the paper is derived from Cole, 2009b, pp. 79-81.
9. As Engels (1845 [1920], p. 154) put it, writing of how the 'long working periods continued night after night' in the cotton mill disabled the workers: '[t]he knees are bent inward and backwards, the ankles deformed and thick, and the spinal column often bent forwards or to one side' (ibid.). Engels (ibid., p. 164) also noted how common it was for workers to suffer 'the squeezing off of a single joint of a finger' or 'somewhat less common the loss of the whole finger, half or a whole hand, an arm, etc., in the machinery' (ibid.). Moreover, according to Engels, the surveillance system in the mills 'from their ninth year to their death' (ibid., p. 180) rendered the operatives in this respect worse than the black slaves in the 'New World'. As he argues, '[t]hey are worse slaves than the negroes in America, for they are more sharply watched' (ibid.).
10. Althusser (1971, p. 174) uses the formulation 'interpellation' to describe the way in which ruling class ideology undermines the class consciousness of the working class. For Althusser, the interpellation of subjects—the hailing of concrete individuals as concrete subjects—takes the form of 'Hey, you there!' (p. 175). The subjects of the interpellation process 'recognize' the existing state of affairs . . . that 'it really is true that it is so and not otherwise', and that they must be obedient. Subjects recognize that 'the hail' was really addressed to them, and not someone else (p. 175) and respond accordingly: 'Yes, that's how it is, that's really true!' (p. 140). Their subjection is thus freely accepted (p. 183). Thus, for example, when confronted with the 'inevitability' of slavery, the response is 'That's obvious! That's right! That's true!' (p. 173). There is no point, therefore, to even consider alternative ways of running the world without slavery (the same argument can be applied to neoliberal

capitalism before the current recession). Of course, we must not forget that because of their material conditions of existence, participation in struggle etc, the ‘bad subjects’ might respond differently: ‘that’s most dubious! That’s wrong! That’s a lie. Things can be different’. Using this Althusserian concept—the power of capitalist structures to keep capitalism on course—does not signal agreement with the work of Althusser as a whole. A structuralist Marxist, Althusser is widely perceived to be deterministic, in denying the power of ‘human agency’—the ability of people to successfully struggle to change things. Althusser’s structuralist Marxism is often contrasted with the humanist Marxism of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci famously called for continued determination, even in the direst of circumstances, in the belief that resilience will result in meaningful change even in the face of adversity (Gramsci, 1921 [1977]). Gramsci (1978) also popularized the concept of hegemony to characterize the balance of forces in capitalist society. Struggle he felt was ongoing, and the role of socialists is to engage in counter-hegemonic struggle. My view is that both Althusser and Gramsci are useful in understanding and challenging capitalism. The former reminds of us of the power of capitalist structures, the latter of the enduring power of capitalism, but also of the power of the human will in breaking through the structures.

11. This is not to deny that Marx, as a product of his time, held racist views or made racist comments (see Cole, 2009b, pp. 170-171 Note 7 for a discussion).
12. This is not to undermine academic debate. Such debate is very important. Nor is it to suggest that Critical Race Theorists are cloistered in the Academy, nor that they are not concerned with everyday issues, for clearly they are, and they *do* have influence on everyday events. It is just to question the extent to which CRT has a significant base outside Academia or the legal profession. If it does, no doubt someone will tell me.
13. In 2006, I spent a week in Venezuela, teaching at the Bolivarian University in Caracas (see Cole, 2009b, p. 126 and p. 175, Notes 14 and 15; see also Bruce ((2008)) who has provided a thorough analysis of the Bolivarian Revolution, in particular the central role of women). In Kathmandu in 2009 I was able to talk to a number of Nepalese workers from the retail trade, while on holiday there. Most were supporters of the Unified Maoist Party of Nepal (their wages have been doubled since the Maoists came to power). I am neither an apologist

for, nor an expert on traditional Maoism. However, an hour long meeting with Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Party of the Unified Maoist Party in the Constituent Assembly, Narayan Kaji Shrestha, also known as Prakash, in his modest two-storey house (he agreed to meet myself and my partner immediately on being informed that I was a Marxist professor), left a favourable impression on me. So did television footage of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, (Prachanda), rallying women at a big demonstration where women spoke with great enthusiasm about equality for women (this was echoed by several women workers I met). At the time of writing, Prachanda has recently resigned and the situation in Nepal is uncertain. However, it would be fair to say that neither in Venezuela nor in Nepal does class reductionism prevail.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Alpesh Maisuria for his comments on an earlier version of this paper

References

- Allen, R.L. (2006) 'The Race Problem in the Critical Pedagogy Community', in C.A. Rossatto, R.L. Allen, and M. Pruyn (eds.) *Reinventing Critical Pedagogy: Widening the Circle of Anti-oppressive Education*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Allen, R. L. (2007) 'Whiteness and Critical Pedagogy', in Z. Leonardo (ed.) *Critical Pedagogy and Race*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Althusser, L. (1971) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London: New Left Books. Online: <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/LPOE70ii.html> (accessed February 15, 2009).
- Ansley, F.L. (1997) 'White Supremacy (and What We Should Do about It)' in R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (eds.) *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the Mirror*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Bhattacharyya, A. (2008) 'The Movement behind Obama'. *Socialist Worker*, November 15. Online: <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=16399> (accessed February 15, 2009).

Bruce, I. (2008) *The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21st Century*, London: Pluto Press.

Cole, M. (2004) 'F*** You—Human Sewage: Contemporary Global Capitalism and the Xeno-racialization of Asylum Seekers'. *Contemporary Politics*, 10 (2), pp. 159–165.

Cole, M. (2007) 'Reality Racism: Challenging Racism in the Era of Big Brother'. *EnglishDramaMedia*, October, pp. 9–15 and pp. 35–38.

Cole, M. (2008) *Marxism and Educational Theory: origins and issues*, London: Routledge.

Cole, M. (2009a) 'The Color-line and the Class Struggle: a Marxist response to critical race theory in education as it arrives in the United Kingdom', *Power and Education* 1 (1), pp. 111-124.

Cole, M. (2009b) *Critical Race Theory and Education: a Marxist response*, New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cole, M. (2009c) 'Critical Race Theory Comes to the UK: A Marxist response'. *Ethnicities* 9 (2) June, pp.246-269.

Cole, M. (2009d) 'A real force for change' *Times Higher Education* 20 January
Online:
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=40506>
[0](#) (accessed March 18, 2009).

Cole, M. and Maisuria, A. (2006) "'Shut the f*** up' 'you have no rights here': Critical Race Theory, Marxism and Education in post-7/7 racist Britain'. Paper

Mike Cole

presented at a conference entitled, 7/7, “Race” and Education, Institute of Education, University of London, 30th June.

Cole, M. and A. Maisuria (2007) ‘ “Shut the F*** Up”, “You Have No Rights Here”: Critical Race Theory and Racialisation in Post-7/7 Racist Britain’. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5 (1). Online:
<http://www.jceps.com/index.php?pageID=article&articleID=85> (accessed April 23, 2009).

Douglass, D. (2009) ‘In honor of the bicentenary of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin’, World Socialist Web Site, 12 February. Online:
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/feb2009/pers-f12.shtml> (accessed February 15, 2009).

Duffy, R. and Tomlinson, A. (2009) ‘Education on the hoof’, Lincoln: Centre for Education for Social Justice, Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincon. Online:
<http://www.bishopg.ac.uk/docs/Research/Education%20on%20the%20Hoof.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2009).

Engels, F. (1845) [1920] *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, London: George Allen and Unwin.

Engels, F. (1890) ‘The Materialist Conception of History: From a Letter To Joseph Bloch’, London, 21 September. Online:
<http://www.marxist.net/marx/w2frame.htm?WhatIsMarxism3.htm> (accessed March 18, 2009).

Fekete, L. (2009) *A Suitable Enemy: Islamophobia and Xeno-racism in Europe*, London: Pluto Press.

Gillborn, D. (2005) ‘Education Policy as an Act of White Supremacy: Whiteness, Critical Race Theory and Education Reform’, *Journal of Education Policy*, 20 (4) July, pp. 485-505.

Gillborn, D. (2008) *Racism and Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?* London: Routledge.

Gillborn, D. (2009) 'Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory in Education? A Reply to Mike Cole's "The Color-line and the Class Struggle"', *Power and Education* 1 (1), pp. 125-131.

Gramsci, A. (1921) [1977] 'Unsigned, L'Ordine Nuovo', March 4, 1921, text from Antonio Gramsci *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)*, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gramsci, A. (1978) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

hooks, b. (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist. Thinking Black*, Boston, MA: South End Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006) 'Foreword They're Trying to wash us Away: The Adolescence of Critical Race Theory in Education', in A. D. Dixson and C. K. Rosseau (eds.) *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's children Got a song*, New York: Routledge.

Lantier, A. (2008) 'Obama's Transition: A Who's Who of Imperialist Policy'. *World Socialist Web Site (WSWS)*. Online: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/nov2008/pers-n19.shtml> (accessed February 15, 2009).

Lasky, J. (2003) 'Marx and Engels on the Civil War', *Crossfire*, 73. Online: http://www.americancivilwar.org.uk/news_marx-engels-on-the-civil-war_11.htm (accessed February 15, 2009).

Mac an Ghail, M. (2000) 'The Irish in Britain: The Invisibility of Ethnicity and Anti-Irish Racism'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26(1), pp. 137-147.

Mike Cole

Maisuria, A. (2006) 'A Brief History of British 'Race' Politics and the Settlement of the Maisuria Family', *Forum: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education*, Vol 48, No1. Online:

http://www.worlds.co.uk/pdf/validate.asp?j=forum&vol=48&issue=1&year=2006&article=13_Maisuria_FORUM_48_1_web (accessed April 24, 2009)

Marx, K. (1860) [1985] 'Marx to Engels, after 11 January 1860', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 41, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Marx, K. (1862) 'A London Workers' Meeting', *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Vol. 19*. Online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1862/02/02.htm> (accessed February 15, 2009).

Marx, K. (1887) [1965] *Capital, Vol. 1*, Moscow: Progress Publishers

Miles, R. (1987) *Capitalism and Unfree Labour: Anomaly or Necessity?*, London: Tavistock.

Miles, R. (1989) *Racism*, London: Routledge.

Mills, C (1997) *The Racial Contract*, New York: Cornell University Press.

Mills, C. W. (2003) *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Mills, C. W. (2009) 'Critical Race Theory: a Reply to Mike Cole', *Ethnicities* 9 (2).

Platt, L. (2007) *Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK*, Bristol: Policy Press, in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Preston, J. (2007) *Whiteness and Class in Education*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Townsend, M. (2009) 'Rise in antisemitic attacks "the worst recorded in Britain in decades' *The Guardian*, 8th February. Online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/08/police-patrols-antisemitism-jewish-community> (accessed March 3, 2009).

Young, R. M. (1998) Marxism And The History Of Science, *The Human Nature Review*. Online: <http://www.humannature.com/rmyoung/papers/pap104h.html> (accessed March 18, 2009).

Writer's Details

Mike Cole is Research Professor in Education and Equality, Head of Research, and Director of the Centre for Education for Social Justice at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, Lincoln LN1 3DY

Correspondence: Mike.Cole@bishopg.ac.uk