

# THEORIZING ANTI-RACISM

**LINKAGES  
IN MARXISM  
AND CRITICAL  
RACE THEORIES**

EDITED BY  
ABIGAIL B. BAKAN  
AND ENAKSHI DUA



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## Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories

*Edited by Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua*

Over the last few decades, critical theory examining issues of race and racism has flourished. However, most of this work falls on one side or the other of a divide between theory inspired by Marxist approaches to race and racism and theory inspired by postcolonial and critical race theory. Driven by the need to move beyond the divide, the contributors to *Theorizing Anti-Racism* present insightful essays that engage these two intellectual traditions with a focus on clarification and points of convergence.

The essays in *Theorizing Anti-Racism* examine topics that range from reconsiderations of anti-racism in the work of Marx and Foucault to examinations of the relationships among race, class, and the state that integrate both Marxist and critical race theory. Drawing on the most constructive elements of Marxism and postcolonial and critical race theory, this collection constitutes an important contribution to the advancement of anti-racist theory.

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS  
Toronto Buffalo London

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© University of Toronto Press 2014  
Toronto Buffalo London  
[www.utppublishing.com](http://www.utppublishing.com)  
Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN 978-1-4426-4935-4 (cloth)  
ISBN 978-1-4426-2670-6 (paper)



Printed on acid-free, 100% post-consumer recycled  
paper with vegetable-based inks.

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### Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Theorizing anti-racism : linkages in Marxism and critical race theories /  
edited by Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4426-4935-4 (bound). – ISBN 978-1-4426-2670-6 (pbk.)

1. Critical theory. 2. Anti-racism. 3. Racism. 4. Race. 5. Social  
classes. 6. State, The. I. Bakan, Abigail B. (Abigail Bess), 1954–, author,  
editor. II. Dua, Enakshi, 1958–, author, editor.

HM480.T54 2014 305.8 C2014-903668-X

---

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its  
publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario  
Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support  
of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund  
for its publishing activities.

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## Acknowledgments

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This book represents a truly collaborative effort, as it reflects both of our long-standing commitments to social justice research and praxis. We began working together when Ena approached Abbie some years ago about the need for a collection that would advance our shared commitment to creative critical scholarship, traversing sedimented orthodoxies, regarding race and racism. At the time, such an idea seemed not only eminently reasonable, but one that would attract considerable support. This part has proven to be accurate. But what we did not anticipate were the challenges. Overcoming the divide has proven to be complex, involving the questioning of layers of historic certainties, revisiting assumptions, and the development of new collegial networks. Through this, we have appreciated each other's curiosity, support, perseverance, patience, profound knowledge, humour, and creativity, which have helped to develop a better volume, but also to advance in each of us a more profound passion to extend, expand, and deepen the dialogue.

The volume itself is the product of a significant collective effort, involving many people and many conversations over years of labour. Thanks are owed to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Centre for Feminist Research at York University, York University, Queen's University, and the University of Toronto. Each of these provided resources and support without which the volume could not have made its way to publication. The transition from an idea about theorizing anti-racism to the completion of this volume would not have been possible without the encouragement, professionalism, and continuing guidance of Douglas Hildebrand, Acquisitions Editor at the University of Toronto Press. No one could imagine a more helpful and

supportive editor. We would also like to thank Carolyn Zapf, our copy editor, for her careful eye in editing our chapters before publication. We are grateful to the University of Toronto Press and to the anonymous reviewers whose comments on earlier versions of the collection contributed to a stronger volume.

We have also been aided by outstanding support. In the first stage of the project, Vivian Lee was instrumental in organizing the initial workshop that inspired the volume. Meghan Mills's assistance in following up with contributors helped to keep the collection on track. Paul Kellogg provided technical support for the workshop. A special thanks goes to Angela Pietrobon, our editorial and production assistant throughout the development of the project. We are grateful to Angela for her meticulous work in the preparation of the collection.

Many colleagues from many spaces have participated in contributing to extending the dialogue regarding theorizing anti-racism, in numerous ways, through the volume's long maturation: Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Janet Conway, George Dei, Margot Francis, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Audrey Kobayashi, Paul Kellogg, Ania Loomba, Minelle Mahtani, Katherine McKittrick, Charles Mills, Radhika Mongia, Sherene Razack, John Sanbonmatsu, Sarita Srivastava, Asha Varadharajan, and Rinaldo Walcott.

Each of us, as co-editors, also relied on a team of gracious supporters to navigate the challenges of life and work, all the while keeping an eye on the central importance of this collection.

Ena would like to thank Savitri Dua, Sara Abraham, Sedef Arat-Koç, Himani Bannerji, Feyzi Baban, Arti Dhand, Mary Gellatly, Ashwin Joshi, Mustafa Koç, Michael Kuttner, Deena Ladd, Bonita Lawrence, Wayne Motayne, Kiran Mirchandani, Kim Rygiel, Ashwini Tambe, and Alissa Trotz, whose friendship has provided for a rich and warm community that redefines family and political and intellectual communities. Colleagues at York University – Jessica Balmer, Bettina Bradbury, Tania Das Gupta, Honor Ford-Smith, Lindsay Gonder, Andil Gosine, Celeta Irwin, Carl James, Ali Kazami, Kamala Kempadoo, Sonia Lawrence, Radhika Mongia, David Murray, Narda Razack, and Sue Sbrizzi – have provided an engaged community of critical race and feminist scholars whose conversations and insights have shaped me, perhaps more than they know. Colleagues at several other universities, particularly Davina Bhandar, Roland Sintos Coloma, Shahrzad Mojab, Roxana Ng, Gordon Pon, and Malinda Smith, have provided a committed

community of critical race scholars. Ena would also like to acknowledge her son, Jashan Dua, and her collection of nephews and nieces, Akshay Goodrich Dua, Hannah Goodrich Dua, Alican Arat-Koç, Kanishka Christoffson, Rahul Christoffson, Kira Gellatly-Ladd, Savita Gellatly-Ladd, Asha Motayne-Trotz, Kai Motayne-Trotz, Suvan Joshi, Syona Joshi, and Jamie Rygiel-Baban. When Jashan was five and Ena was beginning to write her chapters for this collection, he looked up at her one day while playing with a Spiderman car. “Mom,” he said quietly, “Spiderman is not going after the bad guy.” “Why?” she asked. “He is too busy writing an article,” he responded. While their humorous exchange was governed by the desire of a child to have unfettered access to his parent, it also raised a discussion of how to fight for social justice. Ena’s contributions in this collection are inspired by the need for us to develop the tools to ensure that the next generation does not encounter racism, or at least encounters less racism (if racism can be quantified) than their grandparents’ and parents’ generation did. She hopes the collection will also inspire the next generation to continue to look to theoretical insights and the importance of the written word in informing their praxis in the struggle for social justice.

Abbie wishes to thank Roland Sintos Coloma, Martin Cannon, Adam Hanieh, Janice Hill, Catherine Krull, Margaret Little, Eleanor MacDonald, Mazen Masri, Scott Morgensen, Mary-Jo Nadeau, Alan Sears, Cindy Sinclair, Alissa Trotz, Terrie Easter Sheen, Frances Shepherd, Cynthia Wright, and Rafeef Ziadah for being there over the years of production of this work and helping in ways they may not know. Abbie wishes to acknowledge Paul Kellogg for sharing hours of joyous and productive conversation, and for his unending encouragement. She also wants to thank her children, Adam McNally and Rachel Kellogg, now young adults, who have supported her scholarly and activist labours in various ways all their lives, while patiently enduring her distractions. And, posthumously, Abbie thanks her parents, from whom she learned about the complexities of race, class, and power in ways they did not articulate, but navigated boldly. Mildred Bakan (1922–2010) was an intellectual pioneer, inspiring an example of scholar-activism that was nearly impossible for Jewish women of her generation. David Bakan (1921–2004) wrestled with Jewish identity and meaning, in theory and practice, with a devotion to discovery of truth, and its spectacular character, that is beyond measure. The commitment to extend dialogues across difference, a commitment that has animated this project, was the

stuff of their being. Abbie is still learning to comprehend and appreciate the impact they have had on her own intellectual development. Her work is indebted to their teachings.

This book represents a genuine collaboration, greater than the sum of its parts. It is both a finished project, of which we are genuinely proud, and part of an ongoing work in progress, one part of a conversation, that demands all due modesty.

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## THEORIZING ANTI-RACISM

Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories

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## Introduction



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# 1 Introducing the Questions, Reframing the Dialogue

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ABIGAIL B. BAKAN AND ENAKSHI DUA

The aim of this collection is to advance critical scholarship in theorizing race, racism, and anti-racism by recognizing the pivotal importance of both Marxist and critical race theoretical contributions. In past decades, a considerable body of scholarship focused on theorizing race and racism has emerged. While rich in contributions, this scholarship can be characterized by a theoretical divide between Marxist approaches to race and racism and those located in what we suggest is a continuum of critical race and postcolonial frameworks. Important critiques have emerged of both Marxist and critical race writings in this regard. Commonly, Marxists insist that a focus on material conditions of life and production are essential to explaining relations between race and class, and claim that critical race scholarship fails to centre this epistemological starting point. Alternatively, critical race scholars challenge what they see as a reductionist economism, which fails to centre ideological divergences not only between but also within class formations. However, for many scholars on both sides of this divide, the compelling importance of developing an anti-racist theory that is informed by, and in turn informs, social praxis has pointed to the need to think through the relationship of Marxism to anti-racism, and anti-racism to Marxism. The co-editors of this collection have presented papers and organized panels at a number of conferences on this subject, where animated conversations have taken place on how to re-theorize race and racism in order to go beyond a palpable, though sometimes unnamed, theoretical impasse. This collection is thus the result of numerous conversations and is intended to both reflect contributions to date and encourage the continuation of constructive conversations in wider circles. As similar tensions exist in regard to other areas of critical scholarship – such as

cultural, transnational, feminist, and queer studies – we anticipate that this collection will encourage related discussions across paradigms.

This collection is the product of a continuing conversation. The text was preceded in September 2008 by a scholarly workshop held in Toronto, Ontario, organized with the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Queen's University, and York University. Re-theorizing race and racism, the theme of this volume, was the workshop's focus, and a number of the contributions in this collection were developed from early drafts first presented there. Other contributions have been added to address particular issues not discussed at the foundational workshop. The present collection therefore builds on this initial conversation and shares further contributions made to date. Rather than revisiting the historic polarization in these bodies of work, we have attempted to shift the discussion towards an integrated analysis regarding various entry points, case studies, and theoretical challenges specifically concerning theorizing race and anti-racism. We consider these and related issues to be grounded in the ways in which culture, modernity, and whiteness were constituted by, and in turn continue to constitute, a dynamic capitalist mode of production and global processes of imperialist war and conquest.

We understand "race" to be a constructed category of difference, where phenotypical, cultural, linguistic, and/or other specific characteristics are ascribed to designated groups; these groups are accordingly rendered the subjects of systemic and sustained discriminatory ideas and practices. Racism is the body of ideas and practices that establishes, maintains, and perpetuates such categories of difference, sustained through multiple, varied, and contextually specific social, political, and economic constructions. Pivotal in advancing anti-racism, defined as a theoretically informed political praxis that can effectively challenge and overcome racism, is the capacity to explain the complex processes that generate race and racism. This is, of course, a challenging task. It involves developing a theoretical framework that addresses the ways in which racism is socially constructed. We suggest that both Marxism – with its insights into capitalism, the state, ideology, and oppression – and critical race theory and postcolonialism – with insights into Orientalism, racialized legacies of colonialisms, nationalisms, and whiteness – are central to contributing to such a project. Our aim is to mitigate the tensions between these approaches, which have been more commonly exaggerated and the points of commonality underplayed. Such

tensions, we suggest, can be productively addressed and transcended to advance Marxist and anti-racist scholarship.

Clearly, a focus on Marxist and anti-racist scholarship encompasses a breadth of literature that would be impossible to address in a single volume. Certainly scholars working under the rubric of Marxism have varied profoundly, according to their regional or historical focus, or depending on whether they support or oppose particular geopolitical states that are identified as “Marxist” or “socialist.” Other Marxisms have developed in regard to theoretical and strategic approaches related to political party projects (see, for example, the intense debates associated with the Algerian independence war discussed in Birchall 2012). Similarly, there is a burgeoning body of work that concentrates on theorizing race and racism, also varied in focus. This work has been variously grounded in analysing particular periods associated with slavery, colonialism, or empire, or with particular patterns of racialization associated with whiteness, intersections, or privilege. In order to address the challenges posed by such vast bodies of scholarship, we employ a method that, we suggest, simultaneously adds breadth and narrows the scope. This collection addresses a broad range of Marxist writings, from Karl Marx to Antonio Gramsci, from C.L.R. James to Dorothy Smith. But we also limit the focus to Marxist writings that specifically suggest theoretical contributions to understanding anti-racism, with a view to considering racialization in relationship to class – broadly understood as social relationships related to processes of production and reproduction – as a central and defining element. Similarly, we are aware that framing race and racism is an endeavour located in different theoretical and strategic approaches, and we attempt to include some of the most significant among these diverse perspectives. However, we deliberately include both the postcolonial and critical race theoretical traditions in a single continuum, collapsing other distinguishing elements in order to focus on racialization as a process linked to colonialism and settler societies as a central element.

A number of critical race and postcolonial scholars have suggested that the historical and contemporary articulations of race and racism cannot be explained by a limited reliance on the core categories of Marxism, such as capitalism, class differentiation, or false consciousness; instead, the plane of analysis is broadened to include cultural, political, and social realms. In a pivotal article, Stuart Hall (1980) argued that Marxist writers such as Raymond Williams had naturalized the idea of race, and thereby contributed to the articulation of racism. Such

theorizations of power, identity, and discourse, while shedding light on some aspects of the production and reproduction of race and racism, have tended to obscure others. A number of Marxist theorists have argued that postcolonial approaches to race and racism have underemphasized materiality and capitalism, and that the turn to Foucault may in fact obscure our understandings of how race and racism are related to capitalism (see, for example, Dirlík 1997; Parry 2004). At the same time, the particular contribution of Marxist theory, history, and organization to postcolonial studies, conceptualizations of racialization, and anti-racist emancipatory movements and ideas has inspired an expanding literature (see, for example, Brennan 2002; Jani 2002; Austin 2008; Anderson 2010; Blackburn 2011). Within this totality, where capitalism is understood as not only an economic but also a social and political system, issues such as the role of centralized state authorities, uneven development, and hegemony can be understood in the context of racialization. Orientalism, European culture, modernity, and whiteness are constituted significantly through a dynamic global capitalist mode of production, and, institutionally and ideologically, within and among capitalist states within a global system of power.

To address these issues, the first two sections of this volume are organized to consider the place of Foucault and Marx in theorizing race and racism. Following this introduction to the volume, we, as editors, offer specific introductions to various sections. These begin with a section on "Rethinking Foucault," consisting of three chapters: "Revisiting Genealogies: Theorizing Anti-Racism beyond the Impasse" by Enakshi Dua; "Foucault in Tunisia" by Robert Young; and "Not Quite a Case of the Disappearing Marx: Tracing the Place of Material Relations in Postcolonial Theory," also by Enakshi Dua. A section on "Revisiting Marx" follows, again introduced by a brief note from the editors, and is composed of two chapters: "Marxism and Anti-Racism: Rethinking the Politics of Difference" by Abigail B. Bakan; and "Marxism and Anti-Racism in Theory and Practice: Reflections and Interpretations" by Himani Bannerji.

To this point, our focus is to address concepts and tensions with a view to reframe historic debates with the aim of engaging constructively with issues that specifically address race and racism from a critical theoretical perspective. Despite a significant body of literature that points to the limitations of both Marxist and critical race theorizing of race and racism, few scholars have addressed questions that would allow us to move forward and reach greater clarity. As Stuart Hall

noted in the mid-1990s, the “two halves of the current debate about ‘late modernity’ – the postcolonial and the analysis of new developments in global capitalism – have indeed largely proceeded in relative isolation from one another” (1996, 257–8). An important element caught in the abyss of this wider debate is the place of race and racism. This has implications beyond abstract theory – not least in the context of increased post-9/11 racial profiling and border regulations, rising global migration, emerging policy debates regarding multiculturalism and diversity, and the ongoing implications of the Arab Spring. We suggest there is growing recognition among critical scholars that these debates have come to an impasse.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, some scholars have attempted to offer such an exploration. They include Marxist writers such as Bannerji (2007), Bolaria and Li (1985), Galabuzi (2006), Satzewich (1992), and Stasiulis and Bakan (2005), who have integrated analyses of capitalism and ideology with questions of racialized social exclusion, whiteness, culture, and nation. Similarly, postcolonial and/or critical race theorists such as Balibar (1991), Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004), Dei et al. (2006), Dua (1999), Dua and Lawrence (2005), Hall (1996), Loomba (2005), Mills and Pateman (2007), Razack (2004), Said (1978), and Thobani (2007) refer to capitalism, globalization, and imperialism in theorizing racialized discourses and whiteness, culture, and nation. In bringing together these approaches in an identified and engaged relationship, theoretical and methodological advances are suggested that demand elaboration and amplification, pointing to an original and important synergy, if not quite a synthesis.

In an attempt to overcome this impasse, four key questions have shaped the collection. We begin by reconsidering the characterization of critical race/postcolonial theory as being in opposition to Marxist theorizing. We ask if there are alternate readings of critical race writings on race, including the writings of Foucault, with an eye to points of convergence with a Marxist epistemology. We consider whether there are insights suggested by critical race theory that can serve to advance or complement the epistemological frameworks inspired by Marxism. Second, we ask if there are alternate readings of Marx’s writings and Marxism that would allow for more nuanced conceptualizations of race and racism. Are there aspects of Marx’s theorizing and concepts that would offer particularly relevant insights into theorizing race and racism? Third, we ask if there are insights in the writings of “Black and Third World Marxism” that might allow us to rethink the contemporary divide. We recognize that ours is not the first generation to experience tensions between Marxism and theorizing race and racism – nor

are these tensions isolated from global events. Thus, we revisit various writers to explore their insights and consider how these can contribute to current debates. Fourth, as an emerging number of contemporary theorists have been putting forward frameworks that integrate race, class, and state, we ask if this work can offer models with which we can integrate the insights of critical race theory and Marxism.

These analyses inspire the next two sections of the volume. Following a brief introduction from the editors consistent with the presentation of earlier sections, "Legacies and Relationships" revisits and highlights some classic thinkers, including their contributions and interactions, through readings rooted in understandings of both Marxism and critical race approaches. This section comprises three chapters: "C.L.R. James and W.E.B. Du Bois: *Black Jacobins* and *Black Reconstruction*, Writing Heresy and Revisionist Histories" by Anthony Bogues; "Colonizing, Colonized: Sartre and Fanon" by Audrey Kobayashi and Mark Boyle; and "Intellectuals, Oppression, and Anti-Racist Movements in South Africa" by Eunice N. Sahle. The next and final section of the volume, "Interventions in Race, Class, and State," is briefly introduced to highlight the value of an intersectional approach to these issues. The section includes four chapters that address new, or unpack earlier, theoretical and historical challenges in theorizing anti-racism. These chapters are as follows: "Race, Class, and Colonialism: Reconsidering the 'Jewish Question'" by Abigail B. Bakan; "Race, Sovereignty, and Empire: Theorizing the Camp, Theorizing Postmodernity" by Sunera Thobani; "Rethinking Whiteness, 'Culturalism,' and the Bourgeoisie in the Age of Neoliberalism" by Sedef Arat-Koç; and "Race and the Management of Labour in United States History" by Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger. The volume is concluded with an "afterword" by the editors, which both traces the various threads of the arguments in the collection and raises some questions about continuing the conversation.

This is an ambitious project, and we do not want to suggest that it is a comprehensive review or an inclusive approach that will lead to the advancement of a new synthesis. In fact, we are aware of two particularly notable absences. The first concerns the complex matrix of issues associated with indigeneity. The relationship of indigeneity to land, and to ongoing colonization and occupation in settler societies, offers particularly rich and challenging theoretical questions centrally relevant to the intersection of Marxism and critical race theory. We, as co-editors of this collection, have both engaged in issues related to indigeneity in the context of anti-racist theoretical challenges from distinct entry points (Dua and Lawrence 2005; Abu-Laban and Bakan 2012). Rather

than forcing this extensive area of inquiry within the limited context of this collection and inevitably failing to do it justice, we have elected to acknowledge the serious limitation. The second notable absence is the politics of social reproduction, gender, and sexuality. The intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, and the varying forms of family that shape and inscribe anti-racist theorization, regarding both daily and generational social reproduction, are similarly pivotal to the questions addressed in this volume. Significantly, both of us have arrived at the current project through intellectual journeys largely inspired by debates emerging from the contributions, as well as the limitations, of feminist and queer studies (see Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Dua 1999, 2007; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005). Rather than presume that these major areas of enquiry could be adequately addressed in single chapters on indigeneity and gender, we have opted to affirm their absence. We note that these questions are addressed in some of the chapters, but we recognize the limitations of the collection in providing a comprehensive consideration of these important dimensions. We invite further contributions for future publications.

As the volume proceeds, supported by editorial introductions and an afterword, we suggest that reconsidering the divide between Marxism and critical race/postcolonial theorizing and reframing the dialogue can invite constructive advances in theorizing race and anti-racism. Moreover, we hope that this volume will inspire wider networks of communication that raise critical anti-racist theory beyond such polarizations, and that a wider community of scholars and activists can advance and learn from ongoing and effective anti-racist praxis.

#### NOTE

- 1 Others, of course, have fuelled the divisions. See Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013).

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