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Race and identity in organizations

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‘Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution, you were a problem.’ -- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

In his classic exposition of life as a black man in a colonized world, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1967: 82) writes: ‘I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.’ If identity is the process of finding meanings in things, in the world, and in the self, Fanon is one of the first critics to articulate the fact that identity work for those who have been racialized, or turned into ‘an object in the midst of other objects’ (p.82), should challenge our understanding of how identity work occurs. Although much of *Black Skin, White Masks* is concerned with the ways that colonized and racialized people do creatively and persistently engage in the work of making themselves into subjects rather than objects, Fanon’s argument is not that race happens to be the particular content of a universal, existential process of becoming a self. In a critique of Sartre’s (2004) theorization that racial identity is a minor term that will be transcended in the historical progression of the dialectic towards common humanity, Fanon (1967: 103) insists, ‘black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal.’

Poignantly, Fanon’s work continues to be highly relevant in thinking about race and identity in organizations, and in organization and management studies in broader terms, because the question of how we can research and write about race as a formative rather than circumstantial

aspect of identity remains. Notwithstanding ongoing developments in critical race theory, cultural and ethnic studies, studies of colonialism, and black feminist theory, the analysis of race in organization and management studies continues to be confined to sub-fields such as cross-cultural management and diversity and inclusion. While race is a salient concern in those fields, the fact that it does not travel far beyond them suggests that race is still understood as a problem of *particular* bodies, rather than a question of how racial identity both organizes and is organized and what role organizations and management practices and knowledges have in those processes (Nkomo, 1992, Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014).

In this chapter we begin with a brief review of how race and identity are written about in the organization and management studies literature, in order to elaborate our claim that race remains confined to particular sub-fields where it is deemed at least moderately relevant. Through reflection on these sub-fields, as well as consideration of some of the key recent literature from outside the field, we propose some theoretical questions and orientations that could help constructively redirect research on race and identities in organizations. In particular, we ask how we can connect organization and management studies to the rich, extant literature in other fields that theorizes race and identity; think about racial identity itself as a productive, generative identity rather than simply a limit; and begin to understand race as an organizing principle rather than a matter for scholars who specialize in problems of managing racialized bodies.

The strange life of race in organization and management studies

The literature on identities in organizations has, by and large, sidestepped questions of race. This is despite the fact that race is one of the ‘big three’ social categories, with gender and class, as well as one of the key historical organizing principles of societies influenced by European imperialism and colonialism and their concomitant forms of knowledge. Race,

together with gender and class, was the principle means of both structuring societies and identifying people. These legacies of European colonialisms are still with us and have remarkable powers of both endurance and recursion (Stoler, 2016).

The concept of race as something that describes an organic reality, a naturally occurring and reproducible phenomenon, has been abandoned in anthropological and biological thought since the 1960s (Murji & Solomos, 2015). Even from its first use in scientific literature in the 1860s, the biological concept of race was always difficult to separate from the socio-cultural (Banton, 1998). Nevertheless, the irrefutable conclusion that there is no biological basis for racial classification has not managed to displace a quasi-biological understanding of race and its concomitant socio-cultural applications. This is perhaps because, as Hacking (1999) has observed in other contexts, analyses have not been careful enough to determine precisely *what* about race, racism, and processes of racialization is socially and culturally constructed and *how* they are so.

Historical studies show that racial thinking is a relatively recent form of collective differentiation, emerging in late eighteenth century thought. It replaced older xenophobic ways of thinking that had targeted, for example, Jews, Muslims and Africans before the emergence of race as an organizing principle (Hannaford, 1996). Importantly, as Patrick Wolfe (2016: Kindle loc 159-160) puts it, ‘this configuration is a specifically European (or Eurocolonial) invention. While other societies have invaded, colonised, and settled ... the discourse of race is a distinctly European phenomenon’. The colonialism and cultural and epistemological imperialism of Europe have made race a ‘global’ quasi-biological and/or socio-cultural discourse, one on the basis of which identities, too, are built and spun around across the globe.

In organization and management studies literature the unsavoury history of race as an organizer

of groups and identifier of individuals means that when and where race is discussed, it almost unfailingly appears as a problem that affects and concerns particular bodies. Analysis of race is only attached to bodies that are already considered, through other, 'broader' social, cultural, and historical processes, to be *racialized*. Organizational processes themselves are not understood to be among those social and cultural processes that do the work of race-ing and racializing, and thus, as Nkomo (1992) writes, race has not come to be considered an organizing principle in itself.

Despite this history, race is a neglected topic in organization and management studies (Alfred & Chlup, 2010; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Nkomo, 1992; Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006; Swan, 2017a). In their review of journal research between 1964 and 1989, Cox and Nkomo (1990) found that the number of studies addressing issues of race in organizations was small, and that the trend was declining. Reviewing the same journals some 15 years later, Proudford and Nkomo (2006: 335) found that little had changed: 'we still know ... little about the mechanisms that perpetuate and sustain ... differences and, consequently, how to eradicate the negative consequences of racial differences in organizations'. The neglect of race has meant that despite the development of a rich literature on racial identity, formation, and representation in cultural and literary studies, history, sociology, critical anthropology, ethnic studies, and critical race theory since the 1990s (Murji & Solomos, 2015), progress on making sense of how organizational structures and processes contribute to racial formation, or vice versa, has been slow.

It is surprising that race and the process of producing race, racialization, have not been more central to discussions on identity, which helps us to understand how individuals relate to the groups and organizations in which they are participants. Given the role race plays in everyday life, organizational life included, it would seem that race should have more of a role in the

thinking and theories of the relationships between identity and organizations than it has thus far been allocated. In his comprehensive review of identity work and identification literature, Brown (2017) is led to mention ‘ethnicity’ only once, in passing, and ‘race’ or ‘racialization’ do not need to make an appearance at all. Similarly, in his retrospective of studies of (organizational) identity in a leading journal in the field, Brown (2018: 5, our emphasis) notes that ‘attention has from time to time been focused on gender ..., and *more occasionally ethnic* and moral ... identities, sometimes in complex and interrelated ways.’ It is, indeed, in the form of ‘multiple identities’ that race, in its modern, culturalized form of ethnicity, appears in identity studies (eg, Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016). Gender appears on its own, but race typically does not.

The silence over race in literature on identities in organizations is both curious and disappointing, as the language of identity is ubiquitous, and the study of self-identities in organizations is an increasingly mainstream preoccupation of organization and management scholars with diverse interests (Brown, 2018). Identities are studied as people’s subjectively construed understandings of who they were, who they are, and who they desire to become. As such, identities are implicated in, and thus key to, understanding and explaining, ‘almost everything that happens in and around organizations’ (Brown, 2015: 20). It is also increasingly popular to view self-identities as evolving constructions, which are worked on to establish (a temporary) sense of coherence and distinctiveness in the face of ambiguity, uncertainty, and insecurity (Brown, 2017; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003;). Identities are understood to be constructed in social (organizational) contexts, and they are formed, enacted or worked on through discursive, narrative, or rhetorical means in conversations and other interactions.

The literature on identities in organizations is, however, not always clear about distinctions and connections between self- and collective identities. Race as a source and form of identity brings

this to the fore because it cuts across the self and the collective. Moreover, identities are not only discursive but also embodied, as they are formed and enacted in and through our physical bodies and how those intersect with the social and the organizational. While bodies are acknowledged in some recent research on identities (eg, Knights & Clarke, 2017), scholars have not examined race and racialization from this perspective. Race is still neglected in the study of organizations in general and identities in organizations in particular, some 30 years after the first calls to address the matter (see, Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Nkomo, 1992).

The ‘problem’ of the ‘racialized body’

In areas of analysis where race has been given some attention, such as cross-cultural management, diversity, inclusion, and equality and discrimination in human resource management, there is potentially scope to understand how racial identity is formed through organizing and organizations. However, studies in these areas also tend to fall back on quasi-biological thinking instead of revealing how race works as an organizing principle. For example, diversity is most commonly studied as the processes and structures in which bodies that have *already* been racialized through *other* historical or social processes, are enabled to enter and participate in organizations (Landau, 1995; Ng & Burke, 2005). In the functionalist tradition of diversity research, the question of how bodies come to be racialized is less important than the social (or simply demographic) fact of their difference, a difference that appears to require management (Ahonen, Tienari, Meriläinen & Pullen, 2014). In critical traditions of diversity research, processes of racialization are treated as more salient, since scholars working in these approaches recognize that power relations are crucial to forming racial identities. In neither case, however, is diversity itself considered to be an organizational process that is one of the technologies for producing race in the present day. The racial identity of diversity subjects is recognized as a historical product of *past* power relations; but it is not recognized as a product of ongoing power relations that *continue* to produce race, even if for

progressive and constructive ends (Ahonen & Tienari, 2015). In such cases, diversity discourse itself works to ‘conceal how social categories such as gender and race work’ (Ahmed and Swan, 2006: 98) in retaining systematic discrimination and oppression in organizations and in society.

The tendency of race to dissolve as a focus of analysis in diversity research is one example of how such concealment occurs. Categories familiar from social justice struggles are combined not only with other persistent categories of difference in personhood, such as (dis)ability, age, and religion, but also with more circumstantial categories, such as hierarchical position, organizational function, and educational attainment. The result is that diversity has developed into a broad set of ideas and approaches in organizational practice as well as in research, becoming a contested terrain in both. Race disappears as a relevant social category that requires investigation – and reappears as an individual variable to be both counted and accounted for (Ahonen et al., 2014).

In the case of discrimination in organizations the quasi-biological thinking works somewhat differently. Understood as a problem that requires management, discrimination is also considered a practice that targets bodies that have already been racialized *before* their entry into organizations (Chrobot-Mason, 2004;). However, especially where such discrimination occurs in processes of recruitment and promotion, situations in which disciplinary norms of differentiating between people, creating hierarchies, and evaluating capacities are always in play, it is not clear how we could draw the line of racialization at the boundary of the organization. We would argue, instead, that such organizational norms are a crucial part of *forming* racial identities, and it is important to discover precisely how organizational processes do the work of making race rather than how they work on already racialized bodies.

Analysis of recruitment in North American organizations by Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, and Jun (2016) makes racial identity formation and its relationship with organizational processes explicit. The team studied how non-white job applicants represent their race in resumés, which is the first form of self-representation by a candidate that an employer sees. The participants in the study demonstrated a keen awareness of the subtleties of racial self-representation and were practiced in representing themselves, for example, as more or less ‘black’ or ‘Asian’ as necessary. This can be understood as a form of identity work. While the applicants know that the employer will see the colour of their skin upon being interviewed, they also understand that presenting themselves carefully and ‘correctly’ (in racial terms) in their resumés may get them onto a shortlist. The applicants acknowledged that they needed to interpret whether the employer is seeking ‘a really Asian Asian’ versus a somewhat ‘whitewashed’ one; or a black worker who ‘fits within a certain box’ versus a ‘potentially outspoken black worker who cares deeply about racial issues’ (Kang et al, 2016: 495).

Participants in Kang et al.’s (2016) study are already highly aware of the difficulty of representing themselves in exactly the normative (white) terms the employer sets. The extent of this problem becomes obvious when we consider what followed in the recruitment process. In cases where a ‘diversity friendly’ employer used diversity language in their advertisements, the applicants read this as an invitation to represent themselves more openly as racial minorities. Kang et al. (2016) found, however, that despite the use of diversity language, this more explicit, even transparent, self-representation by the candidates did not afford them an advantage and in fact worked against them. Despite inviting the candidates to represent themselves as minorities, the ‘diversity friendly’ employers were just as likely as other employers to reject ‘explicitly diverse’ minority candidates. In the end, they did not ‘fit’. Kang et al. (2016) argue the applicants were rejected *because* they complied with the request to represent themselves as diverse. The burden of representation of race remains on the applicants,

the diversity subjects. The problem of the racialized body remains their problem. As such, organizational norms remain a crucial part of the forming and norming of racial identities, and race operates as an organizing principle.

Race as organization and identity work: conversations with other fields

In developing studies of race, identity, and organization, there are several useful trajectories of work about racial identity and racialized subjectivity to draw on from scholars working in cultural studies (Gilroy, 2000, 2004; Hall, 1997), literature (Gates and Appiah, 1992; Spillers, 2003), history (Roediger, 1991, 2005; Stoler, 2002, 2006), ethnic studies and sociology (Bhambra, 2007; Go, 2016, 2018), and critical race theory (Wynter, 2015; Sharpe, 2016; Weheliye, 2014). In these literatures, the particular problematics of how we could write about the body's relation to historical and social processes of racialization are mapped out in some detail. Putting this work into dialogue with an understanding of organizations and organizational life is an urgent task for any scholar interested in recovering the possibility of saying something about racial identity, discrimination, and liberation that cannot simply be reduced, once again, to predictable niche areas of study, such as diversity and inclusion. Moreover, for organization and management scholars the significance of the existing scholarship on race is that it articulates a genuine and pressing need for thinking about race as an organizing principle, which organization and management studies has the knowledge to provide. We do not have the scope in this chapter to provide anything near an exhaustive review of the state of critical scholarship on race but offer three examples of how we can take our lead from it.

Paul Gilroy's (2000, 2004) work maintains a consistent and articulate commitment to theorizing a cosmopolitanism that can organize and build a world without racial differences. In his analyses this means facing the effects of racialized modernity—including relinquishing

any romantic (or indeed racist) notions of racial identity that could be tied to or found in the body. Racial identity is configured as a problem in Gilroy's anti-racist scholarship insofar as it falls back on (quasi-)biological explanations of race that cannot be substantiated. As he suggests, the fall of scientific racism after the Second World War made biological explanations of racial identity untenable. He is equally persuasive in arguing that the logic of thinking 'culture' (or, in other contexts, 'ethnicity') instead of 'race' also tends to revert to 'a peculiarly resistant variety of natural difference' (Gilroy 2000: 29).

The idea that those most invested in social justice might have to abandon the concept of race and possibly their own racial identities is deeply challenging. Yet Gilroy (2000: 13) suggests 'the idea that action against racial hierarchies can proceed more effectively when it has been purged of any lingering respect for the idea of "race" is one of the most persuasive cards in this political and ethical suit'. Whether one agrees with Gilroy's cosmopolitanism or not, his work invites us to challenge the logic of attaching 'natural' differences to groups of people and then deriving meanings from them to be used in identity work (Ashe & McGeever, 2011). The problem for Gilroy is the operation of the logic that produces racisms and racial identities alike. He challenges us to think of other ways of organizing our understanding of individuals and groups.

In a different trajectory, building especially on the work of both Sylvia Wynter (2015) and Hortense Spillers (1999), Alexander Weheliye (2014) argues that a precise understanding of how the racialized body and subject is central to the biopolitical moment we inhabit remains a crucial task of analysis. This is not because the body is an essential location of race for Weheliye anymore than it is for Gilroy, but rather because 'the novelty of modern racializing assemblages lies in the fact that the biological given is as such immediately racialized' (Weheliye, 2014:73). For Weheliye, this is a necessary intervention in contemporary political

and social theories of bare life, which consistently neglect questions of racism and colonialism, while purporting to reach definitively beyond them. Gilroy abandons knowledges that draw on the logic of race—what he calls raciology and which includes racial identity—as an important escape route towards an anti-racist future. However, Weheliye makes a convincing case that the contemporary focus and interest in bare life and biopolitics discourse is unhelpfully anti-identity politics, and threatens to leave some of key elements and experiences of life out in its pursuit of bareness, the general and the ‘unifying’.

As a result, the abandonment of raciology might end up reaffirming the ‘strong anti-identity strain in the Anglo-American academic in its positioning of bare life and biopolitics as uncontaminated by and prior to reductive or essentialist political ideologies such as race or gender’ (Weheliye, 2014: 7). As a response to this, Weheliye thinks carefully through the ways in which race works through the flesh, that is to say, the body itself in the absence of all those things that black and brown people have been deprived of at various points in time, ‘kin, family, gender, belonging, language, personhood, property, and official records’ (Weheliye, 2014: 40). In doing so, it is his aim to disrupt the idea that race and racial identity are mere qualifiers of Universal Man, in an important return to Fanon’s project.

The challenge of how to think about the racialized body and racial identity takes yet another possible trajectory in Ann Stoler’s work in both her historical studies of the Dutch East Indies and reflection on the more contemporary politics of the French National Front (Stoler, 2002, 2016,). Like Gilroy and Weheliye, Stoler argues that race can never be fixed in the body, and she is particularly interested in the question of why and how, nevertheless, race and racism repeat and reoccur with such persistence and violence in the absence of a stable object. She argues that racism and racialization take their tactical capacity from a changing and porous relationship between the visible and invisible (Stoler, 2002, 2006, 2016) at any given moment

in time and place. Whereas Gilroy suggests that we should abandon raciology, partly because race is imagined and configured differently (for example, DNA gives us a different idea of how the visible relates to the invisible than did nineteenth-century racial science), Stoler's research suggests that the dynamic relation of the visible to the invisible is what makes race a particularly potent concept, one that animates and re-animates bodies, organizations, and nations.

Racial identity in the imperial palace of social science

The problem of how to write about the body that is racialized necessarily leads us to the general theories we have of historical, social, and organizational processes of identity formation. As Nkomo (1992) argues one reason why dominant approaches to the study of race and organization reify race is because the production of knowledge about race falls firmly 'within a racial ideology embedded in a Eurocentric view of the world' (ibid.: 487). Eurocentric thinking about race, as in Fanon's work, presumes that we can develop universal theories of identity and organization and then apply them to those who have been racialized.

Returning to the example of diversity management, critical scholars have made the argument that diversity discourse effectively functions to (re)create the white male norm against which all others are diverse (Ahonen et al., 2014; Zanoni et al., 2010). In those cases where the universal theories developed by social science are applied to those who are considered racially different, it is often deployed in order to validate the universal applicability of the theory. Writing about the application of Max Weber's theories to Chinese subjects, for example, Xu (2008: 244) notes that 'where identifiable characteristics of the Chinese happen to fit into both Weber's and organizational theory, the Chinese case supports and validates the claim and

utility of universal theory'. By contrast, where anomalies or deviations from the theory occur, they are used to demonstrate how the racialized subjects are in need of 'correction', to be brought back in line with the universal theory. Theory building about identity itself, then, needs to grapple with this legacy of 'imperial social science'.

One of the most salient recent developments in scholarship on race outside organization and management studies is the emergence of a postcolonial sociology (Bhambra, 2007; Go, 2016), particularly a postcolonial sociology of race (Go, 2018) that might be able to grapple with the colonial legacy of social science. For Go (2018: 9), a postcolonial sociology is 'necessary rather than simply supplemental for a proper sociology of race'. As he understands it, the historical context of colonialism and imperialism is crucial for thinking about race today not only because colonialism was built on racial difference, but because it produced racialized and racializing knowledges, such as sociology itself. This is an important development because a 'proper' sociology of race is one in which racial identity is kept in its methodological and epistemological place, as Weheliye's (2014) work indicates, as a qualifier, rather than a constitutive concept in sociological knowledge. Like Gilroy, Weheliye, and Stoler, then, the lived experience of those who are either compelled or impelled to adopt a racialized identity is the subject of Go's analyses, but not necessarily its object.

Organization and management studies has already made some moves towards decolonizing its theoretical frameworks through postcolonial approaches (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008; Jack & Westwood, 2009; Jack, Westwood, Srinivas & Sardar, 2011; Prasad, 2003). However, these attempts at epistemological transformation have, like the study of race in organizations itself, been confined to areas of organization studies where race is deemed to be 'relevant' such as cross-cultural management, diversity and inclusion. The problems and solutions are caught in a frustrating, circular scholarly process where to properly analyze how organizations produce

racial identities requires decolonizing the universal theories that guide such research. However, decolonization of (some aspects of) those theories is contained to fields where universal theory has already determined race is a ‘relevant’ concern, naturalized, and seemingly unable to challenge the logic of universal theories.

Intersectional analyses that refuse to separate our understanding of how racialization works from how processes of gender and class formation work, is one way to disrupt this particular operation of ‘imperial social science’ (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1991, 2003; Oyewumi, 1997; Spivak, 1999). Where Eurocentric theory artificially separates race from gender, class, sexuality, and disability, intersectional analyses insist that a proper understanding of the power dynamics that structure society, organizations and organizational processes must consider how these processes interlock and affect each other. This has some potential to disrupt the tendencies of universal theory because it reminds us that on the one hand, race is produced and lived in a huge variety of ways, and on the other hand, struggles are always connected because people are the product of multiple processes of identity formation simultaneously (Acker, 2006). In organization and management studies, the challenge remains how to use methods that interrupt the epistemological practices of imperial social scientific theory.

Scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and Peggy McIntosh (2012) have argued that we need more explicit examination of that which normally remains invisible, of whiteness as a racial identity in and beyond organizations. Critical studies of whiteness have argued that ‘white people do not experience the world through an awareness of racial identity or cultural distinctiveness, but rather experience whiteness and white structural practices as normative, natural, and universal, and therefore invisible’ (Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007: 396). As such, whiteness works as the ‘neutral and invisible norm against which other identities are measured’ and by which identities are defined historically, socially, and legally (Al Ariss et

al., 2014: 363). In organizations, and in organization and management studies research, this means ‘whites do not have to acknowledge their race in organizations as only racial/ethnic minorities are viewed as having race’ (Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014: 395). Focusing on whiteness, or the part of normative processes of racialization that normally escapes our analysis, reminds us that racialization is a genuinely dynamic social construction: it produces not just ‘people of colour,’ but also ‘white people.’ Whiteness, too, is ‘multifaceted, situationally specific, and reinscribed around changing meanings of race in society. The meaning of whiteness varies in relation to context, history, gender, class, sexuality, region, and political philosophy’ (Green et al., 2007: 393; see also Young, 2008).

An analytic focus on whiteness has the potential, once again, to conceal the workings of racialization processes. The assumption, for example, that whiteness remains ‘invisible’ to white people themselves puts back into play the idea that to move around the world in a body that has been racialized as white happens at some unspecified point ‘before’ entry into the world, or the organization. If whiteness accrues through processes of normalization, however, it ought to be possible to articulate how, where, and when white people become white. As a number of historical studies of whiteness have demonstrated, there are historical periods through which certain people, such as the Irish migrants in United States, have become ‘white’. This means that there are structures and organizations they encounter that engage them in processes of racial becoming (Ignatiev, 1995; see also, Painter, 2010; Roediger, 1991, 2005; Roediger & Esch, 2012; Young, 2008). In organization and management studies, then, a focus on whiteness should not become an alibi for whiteness to rehearse and display its innocent ignorance of processes of racialization (Swan, 2017b), but rather a spur to understand how organizational processes teach people about their deviations or distance from racial norms. Listening to others would be a place to start in developing a ‘progressive white praxis’ in responding to racism in research in general (Swan, 2017a: 547) and research on identities in

organizations in particular.

Returning to the body with a difference

Research on race in organizations aims to recognize the painful historical and social experiences of those who have been marginalized and oppressed as a result of their race. However, if we are to develop a keener sense of how organizational processes are part of the formation of racial identity, then we might also investigate whether and how those identities generate and build capacities, as much as it constrains and delimits other capacities.

Cultural studies and literary scholarship on racial self-representation has already documented and mapped a number of ways in which people create books, music, paintings, fashion, and style using the situations and processes that racialize their bodies and identities. It is not possible, even in a handful of citations, to do justice to the wide range of cultural productions that black and ethnic writers, artists, and musicians have created; or to the black and postcolonial aesthetics that have been the foundation of social and cultural movements, but it would be instructive to understand how these processes also occur in organizational contexts and through the opportunities organizational life offers to both create and represent racialized identity.

There is an important parallel with gender and sexuality studies here. Where the performativity of both gender and sexuality have been well understood as not only restraints on bodies that are gendered and sexualized, but the source of play, pleasure, creativity, and liveliness (Butler, 1990), the social construction of racialized bodies has not been understood or theorized in the same way. In organization and management studies, then, we might ask these new kinds of questions about the productivity and pleasures of racial identity. What role do organizations and their processes play in helping people to understand what their racialized capacities are?

How do people respond to and take up the cues about their racial identities from what they are able to do or make in certain organizational settings?

It is important to articulate some caveats here. In using the word ‘productive’ we do not mean to set up a dichotomy between research of ‘good racial identity’ and ‘bad racial identity,’ but rather to draw attention to the fact that insofar as gender and sexual identities are understood to be socially constructed, they are understood to give rise to bodily practices that make use of and transform the body, as well as constitute the basis of new capacities. The potential difficulty in making sense of what this might mean in relation to race brings us back to the quasi-biological thinking that assumes racialized bodies are somehow, essentially, black even before the negative processes of racialization (such as inferiorization or dehumanization) are inscribed on to the surface of the body. What does blackness or whiteness make it possible to do with a body? Are there ways to enjoy, subvert, and re-perform racial identity, just as there are clearly ways to do so with gender and sexual identity? (Tate, 2009; Rajan-Rankin, 2018).

Again, a caveat is in order here. We are not suggesting that practices of racial appropriation (such as minstrelsy) are processes of identity production because they ‘do’ or ‘make’ things with racial identity. It is vital that we do not detach analyses of racial identity from the power dynamics and history of racial oppression. However, we do want to suggest ways in which we can reorient our research towards the ways that racial identity ‘produces’ and does not just function as a limit, negation, or burden. An indicative example might be the work of the American director and performance artist, Anna Deveare Smith, who has developed a method of interviewing people who have been racialized in different ways and then physically incarnating and performing those subjects, in their own words, in her one-woman shows. As one critic notes ‘the implicit challenge of Smith’s performance style lies in inhabiting these kinds of voices while keeping mimicry and parody in tension. Of the characters she performs,

Smith writes “I try to close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us. I am willing to display my own unlikeness” (Wald, 1994). Devere Smith’s work reminds us that it is in understanding that racial identity is a social construction in the fullest sense that might help us finally leave behind the quasi-biological understanding of race that clings to the body.

The contributions discussed throughout this chapter suggest ways for doing this. Gilroy (2000) challenges us to think of other ways of organizing our understanding of individuals and groups apart from race. For example, when we are aiming to make our organizations racially or ethnically ‘inclusive’, what does the work involve, how much of it is identity work, and who is it that will work (or end up working) on (their) identity? Weheliye’s (2014) work also presents important challenges to studies on identity in organizations. For example, why, in critical analyses, has the turn to questions of neoliberal governmentality and identity consistently neglected race? These analyses aim to identify and examine the formation of ‘the subject’ in neoliberal conditions but seldom if ever does the subject appears as anything but the Universal Man, or at best, a gender-specific version of him. The individuals that emerge from the production factories of neoliberal regimes seem curiously ahistorical, with identities that manage to remain ‘unrace-d’ despite the fact that organizational processes, regularly and consistently apply, for example, various kinds of diversity labels upon particular bodies and manages them accordingly (Ahonen & Tienari, 2015; Ahonen et al., 2014).

Further, Stoler’s work (2002, 2016) offers organization and management studies the opportunity to think about the ways that racialization is reconfigured, repeated, and restructured through different organizational processes. How, for example, do diversity, inclusion, and equality each repeat and reconfigure racial identity work differently? What does the repetition itself do as a process of racialization? For Stoler, the repetition is itself an important dimension of how racialization does its work over time, since each repetition is not quite the same, but

changes the tactical field in complex and often unexpected ways. The rapid proliferation of the related but also seemingly distinct fields of diversity, inclusion, and equality suggests that something tactically interesting is at work, but we would need analyses that recognize the organizational processes themselves as part of the work of racializing to understand those tactics.

Intersectional analyses offer other ways to rethink race in studying identities in organizations. The lived experience of disability, for example, is connected with the lived experience of class and race because where people have access to resources and support for their disability by virtue of their class and/or race, the impact of their disability on their life course is significantly altered. Finally, critical whiteness studies help us remember that racialization is a social construction that produces white people as much as it does people of colour. The weight of white privilege in theory, method, and practice, however, works to conceal *how* racial identities are produced (Bhopal, 2018; Middleton, Roediger, & Shaffer, 2016). One of the key tasks is to lift this weight to reveal the production of racial identities..

Conclusion

Race remains a neglected topic in organization and management studies in general and studies of identities in organizations in particular. This chapter has set out to tackle the question of how we can research and write about race as a formative rather than circumstantial aspect of identity in and beyond organizations. As such, we have begun to search for understandings of race as an organizing principle rather than a matter for scholars who specialize in problems of managing racialized bodies in sub-fields such as cross-cultural management, diversity and inclusion. Taking race seriously in studies of identities in organizations is not without its challenges since, as we have argued, a core part of the solution involves reflecting on the imperial epistemology that takes race as an object for inquiry that is only relevant as a qualifier,

or circumstantial anomaly, of its universal theories. Nevertheless, in bringing an organization and management studies perspective to the study of race and identity, we propose that we can begin to understand some aspects of the social construction of racialization that scholars in other fields have not been able to theorize. Organizations are not simply contexts in which the racialization that has occurred in other times and spaces is continued, but rather are structures and processes for forming and reproducing many of the norms of racialization today. Analyses of organizations that can detail and explain these processes will be key to dislodging the quasi-biological thinking that perpetuates the logic of race.

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