A prolegomenon to a critical race theoretical Marxism

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Abstract
The critical race theory concept of ‘White supremacy’ continues to be a major locus of disagreement between Critical Race Theorists and Marxists regarding both how it operates as a general descriptor of racial power dynamics in the Western world and for its explanatory power in accounting for the multiple forms in which racism manifests. Criticisms of the concept of ‘White supremacy’ from Marxists often point to racisms that exist beyond the Black/White binary, or racism directed at minoritised White groups as counterexamples to explanations of racism that appeal to ‘White supremacy’. Marxists also often point to alternative theoretical constructs such as ‘institutional racism’ and ‘racialisation’ as better descriptions for, and explanations of, racism and the mechanisms that serve in its creation and perpetuation. However, examples of racisms that exist outside of a Black/White binary, or which appeal to the existence of racism directed at people identified as White, do not discredit ‘White supremacy’ as a descriptor or explanation of racism and can easily be accommodated within a framework for understanding racism that is consistent with both critical race theory and Marxism. Moreover, constructs such as ‘racialisation’ and ‘institutional racism’ do not have the theoretical utility of ‘White supremacy’ as characterised within critical race theory.

Keywords
Critical race theory, Marxism, Black radicalism, racism, Whiteness, White supremacy, institutional racism, racialisation

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Introduction

Much scholarship since the emergence of critical race theory (CRT) within education studies, particularly from the left-leaning and Marxist academics, has been highly critical of CRT and refused to acknowledge its contribution to theorising about, and resisting, racism (Gillborn, 2009; Warmington, 2020). Although CRT scholars foresaw the development of such a critical backlash (see, for example, Taylor, 1998), the founders of CRT and subsequent CRT scholars never intended their emerging theory to occupy such an antagonistic position within academic theorising aimed at resisting racism. Indeed, the hopes of the founders of CRT were that, as well as providing a theory that explained the particular kind of oppression experienced directly by people of colour, it would provide new useful theoretical tools for left-wing scholars and activists (while making them more race-conscious) as well as continuing to be informed by left wing and progressive thinking. Crenshaw et al. assert:

> In short, we [CRT scholars] intend to evoke a particular atmosphere in which progressive scholars of color struggle to piece together an intellectual identity and a political practice that would take the form both of a left intervention into race discourse and a race intervention into left discourse. (Crenshaw et al., 1995: xix)

Recently, CRT scholars have expressed a desire for more constructive engagement between CRT and Marxist scholars (see, for example, Warmington, 2020). One way of facilitating such constructive engagement is by recognising that the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ is useful within Marxist theorising. ‘White supremacy’ is a particularly disputed concept by Marxist thinkers (Cole, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2017a, 2017b,2020; Cole and Maisuria, 2007). Showing how ‘White supremacy’ enhances Marxist analyses of racism provides a step towards demonstrating the validity of a ‘race intervention into left discourse’ for both Marxists and CRT scholars.

By drawing on CRT, Marxist and Black Radical perspectives, this paper aims to clarify how the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ is useful within Marxist theorising. This aim is pursued, in part, through providing a response to Mike Cole’s, ‘A Marxist critique of Sean Walton’s defence of the Critical Race Theory concept of “White supremacy” as explaining all forms of racism, and some comments on Critical Race Theory, Black Radical and socialist futures’ (2020). Through providing this response, the paper further develops and expands arguments that were only briefly alluded to in the article, ‘Why the critical race theory Concept of “White supremacy” should not be dismissed by neo-Marxists: Lessons from contemporary Black radicalism’ (Walton, 2020).

My response to, and critique of, Cole (2020) is fourfold. Firstly, I argue that Cole does not directly address the central arguments found in Walton (2020) and, instead, deals with issues that were touched upon only briefly. Moreover, Cole mischaracterises arguments that were outlined in Walton (2020) concerning how the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ might explain (or feature in an explanation of) racisms that do not involve a Black/White binary distinction. However, in doing so, Cole usefully expands the debate about ‘White supremacy’ into areas about its theoretical utility as a concept for explaining multiple forms of racism. I argue that ‘White supremacy’ is needed for its ability to capture the racialised nature of capitalism.
Secondly, I argue that concepts such as ‘institutional racism’ and ‘racialisation’ cannot, in and of themselves, provide convincing descriptions or explanations of racism in the modern world. Specifically, although claiming to be grounded in history, economics and politics, some Marxist explanations of these concepts ignore the ideological elements of racism (particularly of ‘Whiteness’) that is simultaneously ontologically prior to, and embedded within, capitalism and capitalist modes of production. Without an appeal to ‘White supremacy’, explanations of racism based only upon the concepts of ‘institutional racism’ and ‘racialisation’ are, at best, incomplete, and, at worst, circular.

Thirdly, and connected to point two, above: In seeking to provide a theoretical basis to explain non-colour-coded and hybridist racism, a Marxism that relies only on the concepts of ‘institutional racism’ and ‘racialisation’, becomes too broad-brush and collapses the distinction between racism and other forms of discrimination that are directed against foreigners and migrant communities. For example, such a Marxism is unable to discriminate between xenophobia and racism.

Finally, I explore arguments that appeal to the existence of racisms that do not rest on a White/Black binary, and to the existence of intra-White racism as counterexamples against the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’. I argue that the existence of multiple forms of racism (or multiple racisms) is compatible with ‘White supremacy’ and is, indeed, a crucial component of contemporary CRT. I also argue that arguments that appeal to the existence of racism between White-identified groups amount to a form of inverted ‘model minority’ argument (see Gillborn, 2008) where exceptions to the general pattern of racism are presented (fallaciously) to show that racism (or the predominant form of racism) either does not exist or is insignificant.

Mike Cole has engaged with my critiques of his analyses of racism in a scholarly, collegiate and supportive manner. This paper is intended not only as a critique but as an attempt to advance discussion about racism, Marxism, CRT, Black Radicalism, the overlap between these theories and traditions, and their place within educational theory and practice. I hope it will be taken as such.

**Marxism and CRT**

The first time that CRT made its presence felt within the field of education studies was probably with the publication of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Some 10 years later, CRT had established itself in educational scholarship within the UK (See Cole, 2009a, 2017a; Walton, 2020 for a fuller discussion of the development of CRT and its adoption by educational scholars). Shortly after entering education studies in the UK, CRT encountered a host of criticisms. Many of the most vociferous criticisms that it faced came from Marxist scholars. Darder and Torres (2004), for example, argue that the validity of the entire CRT enterprise is suspect due to its reliance on race as a critical focal point, and race, they assert, is a construct which should not be taken seriously in the first place. Arguing from a different (but still Marxist) perspective, Hill (2009) has claimed that the statistical differences in attainment between White and Black students has been exaggerated by CRT scholars and, as such, should not be granted equal significance to class in analysis of educational attainment and societal discrimination more widely.

However, perhaps the most sustained Marxist critique of CRT has been presented by Cole and Maisuria (2007), and Cole (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2020). This wide-ranging and detailed critique of CRT (particularly aimed at the application
of CRT with education studies) has seven main strands, focused on the CRT usage of ‘White supremacy’ as a descriptor of, and explanation for, racism within modern industrial societies. These are:

1. White supremacy, as understood within CRT, diverts attention away from modes of production, which are the real, root-cause of discriminatory practices in capitalist societies.
2. CRT treats all White people as a homogenous group and ignores the fact that many Whites are exploited by White elites and live in poverty because of this. Not all White people benefit (to the same degree at least) from racism aimed at non-White groups.
3. CRT struggles to explain non-colour-coded racism.
4. CRT struggles to explain newer forms of racism that are not (or not solely) based on skin colour (e.g. hybridist racism such as Islamophobia).
5. Racism exists between people who belong to non-White groups. CRT cannot explain this phenomenon.
6. The CRT usage of ‘White supremacy’ conflates other, more widespread uses of this phrase and cannot sufficiently differentiate between fascism and racism.
7. The constructs used within CRT are counterproductive for motivating White people to take anti-racist action (adapted from Cole 2017b; Walton, 2020).

Counter arguments to the above critiques of CRT abound. For example, Gillborn (2009) argues that throughout the criticisms summarised above, Cole and Maisuria, and Cole, are relying on an outdated, class-reductionist version of Marxism and caricaturing the assertions of CRT Scholars (a charge that Cole, 2009c denies). Mills (2009) argues that CRT is a much broader church than Cole allows, and asserts that there are multiple approaches to employing CRT, many of them compatible with Marxism. Cole (2009d) rejects Mills’ account of CRT and maintains that the central tenets of Marxism and those of CRT are mutually exclusive.

In an alternative Marxist account of Whiteness and its operation within capitalist societies, Preston (2010) argues that Whiteness is more properly construed as being, itself, a form of capital. That some individuals and groups possess this form of capital while others do not account for the racial inequalities that we see today in modern capitalist nations. Cole (2012) rejects Preston’s account on the grounds that construing Whiteness as a form of capital neglects the ideological machinations of capitalism, whereby groups of people are racialised according to their relationship to capitalist modes of production. However, the proceeding arguments focus upon the two recurring components that are often at the centre of disagreements between Marxists and CRT scholars: Firstly, the theoretical veracity of the CRT concepts of ‘White supremacy’, which has been the focus of many of Marxist critiques of CRT, insofar as it usefully describes and explains racism in capitalist societies; and, secondly, the validity of arguments from Marxist thinkers that seek to persuade us that other concepts can perform this dual role more effectively.

‘White supremacy’ and explanations of racism

The central argument of Walton (2020) is that ‘White supremacy’, as characterised within CRT, is sufficient to provide the historical, political and economic basis for explaining racial inequalities within the modern world, insofar as these pertain to racism against Black and
non-white identified people and populations (especially when supplemented with a contemporary, Black Radical understanding of the operations of ‘Whiteness’ in constructing, ordering and maintaining racial inequalities). Given this basis in historical, political and economic reality, ‘White supremacy’ should be an acceptable concept for Marxists, as it adds theoretical nuance to their explanations of racial inequality, while also recognising the perverse symbiotic relationship that capitalist modes of production have with White supremacy in maintaining racial inequalities.

The argument presented in Walton (2020) concludes that:

The concept of White supremacy must feature in any analytical framework of racism for its power in accounting for what, for many, is the fundamental form of racism: racism based on the Black/White or European/African distinction. Yet while the concept of White supremacy is indispensable in our theorising about racism, it cannot, in and of itself, account for the multifaceted nature of racism. (Walton, 2020: 91)

As well as recognising that ‘White supremacy’ is necessary but not sufficient for explaining all forms of racism, the conclusion of Walton (2020) points out that even once the theoretical veracity of ‘White supremacy’ is established, further theorising need to be employed to link it to forms of racism that are not so obviously based on a White/non-White binary distinction. Also, several strategies for such theorising are available, but a proper discussion of them is beyond the scope of the arguments presented in the paper:

Theoretical questions also remain: If we accept the reality of White supremacy, how do we account for non-colour-coded racism, or hybridist racism, or racism between non-White groups?

Although a comprehensive answer to this question is beyond the scope to this paper, there are (at least) three broad strategies that could be employed here. (Walton, 2020: 91)

In summary, the three broad strategies outlined in Walton (2020) are: Employing ‘Whiteness’ as a ‘shifting signifier’ that may or may not apply only to people with white skin; limiting the concept of racism somewhat severely to one which involved a distinction between White identified and Black identified people and incorporating the concept into a broader, neo-Marxist account for explaining racism. In Walton (2020), the preferred strategy for explaining racism is identified as the final one, which uses both ‘White Supremacy’ combined with a neo-Marxist analysis to provide a comprehensive account of racism.

Despite these arguments and caveats presented in Walton (2020) that clearly do not suggest that ‘White supremacy’ in and of itself, without supplementary theory, functions as a universal explanation for every form of racism, the first half of Cole (2020) misrepresents the arguments found in Walton (2020) in a subtle, but important, way and offers a critique based on an oversimplified understanding of ‘White supremacy’ as a one-size fits all explanation of every form of racism. Cole (2020) bases most of his critique of the paper on the three strategies in Walton (2020) outlined above for theorising racisms that are (at least prima facie) beyond the White/non-white binary, even though these are only introduced briefly in the conclusion where it is stated that a proper discussion of them is, ‘beyond the scope of this paper . . . ’ (Walton, 2020: 91). Furthermore, although only a preference for one of the three approaches to explaining racisms that do not conform to a White/non-White divide is expressed, Cole’s (2020) critique takes the paper to be endorsing all three strategies.
Thus, Cole does not deal directly with the central arguments presented by Walton (2020). Nevertheless, Cole (2020) presents several stand-alone arguments for rejecting the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’. Of fundamental importance to Cole’s critique of ‘White supremacy’ are the concepts of ‘racialisation’ and ‘institutional racism’, which are taken to be theoretically more cogent and less problematic than ‘White supremacy’ (Cole, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2020). These alternatives to the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ do not provide the theoretical advantages that they are purported to have.

**Theoretical alternatives to ‘White supremacy’**

The CRT concept of White supremacy is perhaps most succinctly summarised here:

[By] ‘White supremacy’ I do not mean to allude to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1997: 592)

Drawing on this definition, along with further explanation from Leonardo (2004), three crucial components of White supremacy can be identified: it makes explicit the insidious and embed nature of racism in Western societies; it highlights a power relationship in the western world that is advantageous to White people while being detrimental to non-White people and it makes it clear that racism in the western world is a form of domination by White people over those who are identified as not White (adapted from Walton, 2020). This concept is widely used by CRT scholars (and by some scholars and writers from outside of the CRT tradition) to characterise and explain the operation of racism in the western world in contexts that range from the national to the institutional and individual level (for a more detailed discussion of the operation of White supremacy see Walton, 2020: 80–82).

However, Cole (2016a, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) rejects the CRT usage of ‘White supremacy’ for several reasons including that it is ambiguous and that the theoretical work that it performs can be better performed by a Marxist conception of ‘institutional racism’ supplemented with the Marxist notion of ‘racialisation’ (see Cole, 2020: 97–99 for a comprehensive discussion of these latter concepts).

Rejecting more mainstream conceptions of institutional racism (such as those employed in the Macpherson report, 1999), Cole favours a definition of institutional racism that is supplemented by the neo-Marxist concept of ‘racialisation’. Racialisation (specifically neo-Marxist racialisation) is characterised as:

...the categorisation of people (falsely) into distinct ‘races’. Its neo-Marxist variant is distinct from other interpretations of racialisation in that it purports that, in order to understand and combat racism, we must relate racism and racialisation to historical, economic, and political factors. (Cole, 2020: 98).

This is a distinctly neo-Marxist conception of ‘racialisation’ because: ‘Crucially, racialisation thus formulated connects racism to capitalist modes of production and makes links to
patterns of migration that are themselves determined by political and economic dynamics’ (Cole, 2020: 98).

Hence, drawing, and expanding, upon Miles (1987), Cole (2016a, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) develops a conception of racialisation that is not limited to skin colour and is rooted in an understanding of the historical precedents that lead to different groups becoming racialised at different times (See Cole 2020: 97–98 for a comprehensive account of ‘racialisation’ thus conceived). As well as supplementing the definition of institutional racism with this neo-Marxist account of racialisation, Cole also adds existing, intentional and unintentional racism to his account and ultimately settles on the following definition of institutional racism:

Collective acts and/or procedures in an institution or institutions (locally, nation-wide, continent wide, or globally) that intentionally or unintentionally have the effect of racialising certain populations or groups of people. This racialization process, that is not limited to skin colour and can be colour-coded, non-colour-coded or hybridist, cannot be adequately understood without reference to economic and political factors related to developments and changes, historically and contemporaneously, in national, content-wide, and global capitalism. (Cole, 2020: 98)

It is important to note that while critical race theory recognises the existence of institutional racism (see Warmington, 2020: 24 for a discussion of institutional racism from a CRT perspective), the use of ‘institutional racism’, as a general description and explanation of racism in place of ‘White supremacy’ is problematic for several reasons: In its non-Marxist form, as employed in a wide range of policy documents (including the Macpherson report, 1999), the use of ‘institutional racism’ has been criticised on a number of fronts including that: It obfuscates intersectional factors that play a role in discriminatory practices such as gender and class (e.g. in police canteen culture where racist vocabulary is often used to demonstrate masculinity); attempts to combat racism that focus on its institutional form often produce only bureaucratic efforts involving ethnic profiling; institutional racism encourages a focus upon individual institutions and ignores the interconnections between these institutions and, conceptually, institutional racism suggest a ‘seamless web’ of racism across institutions and does not capture the nature of racism as existing in organisations as being stronger or weaker across different departments and functions, and between different individuals within those institutions (adapted from Rattansi, 2007).

Moreover, adding racist acts (both intentional and unintentional) to definition of institutional racism does little to improve it. Remember, Cole is advocating for an explanation of racism: stipulating that racism (institutional or otherwise) is caused (in part) by racist act leads us around in a very small circle. Such a definition is true, yet tautological and uninformative.

Definitions of institutional racism that incorporate the neo-Marxist concept of ‘racialisation’ improve things partially but are still incomplete. Racialisation, although importantly recognising the role of history, politics and economic factors in producing racism, does not go far enough insofar as it precludes the ideological factors that are central to the creation and perpetuation of both racism and capitalism, and it elevates the role of capitalist modes of production as the creator of racism without recognising the role of racism (and specifically of Whiteness) in the creation and maintenance of capitalism. Such an account of racism presents racism as supervening on capitalist modes of production, but
underemphasises the role that racism plays in the construction and maintenance of capitalist modes of production. However, as Andrews reminds us, the imperialism that created the global, capitalist order would not be possible without ideas of ‘Whiteness’ and ‘White supremacy’:

You cannot work the natives in the Americas to death without Whiteness. You do not enslave millions of African people and kill millions more without Whiteness. You do not steal the resources of the world you have underdeveloped and then create a system of unfair trade practices without Whiteness. The modern world was shaped in the image of Whiteness (Andrews, 2018: 194)

In other words, racism, in the form of White supremacy, is a pre-requisite for imperialism and global capitalism, and is, in turn, re-created by this very global capitalism. Crucially, the form of racism necessary to sustain capitalism is created and maintained by White people, and (through ideology) this form of racism becomes as real and material as class:

The problem is that they [White people] collectively practice this false belief [that they are White people], which graduates from a mere idea to an indomitable, material force. It would have been enough had it remained only in their heads. But because whiteness is also in their hands, they have built a society after their own image. In other words, the idea of race is material in its modes of existence. (Leonardo, 2009: 73)

Capitalism is, in this sense, racialised insofar as ‘White supremacy’ is embedded in its very DNA. A Marxism that does not recognise the operation of ‘White supremacy’, in effect, treats the racialising forces of capitalism as being (paradoxically) colour-blind: historical, economic and political forces do not equally racialise people regardless of whether or not they are identified as white, or where they are located in the global system of White supremacy. In reality, the racialising forces of capitalism have historically, and continue contemporaneously, to place White people at the top of the racialised hierarchy, while placing Black and non-White people at the bottom (Andrews, 2018; Gillborn, 2016, 2018). Racialisation certainly is a real phenomenon (and it does, as Cole, following Miles, asserts, potential affect all people), but it is a process that does not happen in capitalism context free: White supremacy provides the framework in which historical, economic, and political forces drive the racialisation processes.

Through ignoring the material reality of the operations of Whiteness, an explanation of racism that omits ‘White supremacy’ fails to take into account the disparate effects that capitalism has on both non-White individuals and populations (globally and nationally). Within racialised capitalism, the struggles of the White working classes (or other White workers) in the industrial West are not comparable to the struggle of the Black poor in the developing world. White workers in the developed West stand in a different relationship to racialised capitalism to the Black and non-White poor in the developing world. Their struggles under global capitalism are fundamentally different and it is erroneous to make the claim that together they represent, somehow, a single group with shared interests (if they only but realised it). To illustrate this point, using the example of the struggle of teachers in the UK to avoid changes to their pension funds compared with the struggle of South African farm workers to achieve basic living wages, Andrews describes the different
relationships that these groups stand in to racialised capitalism, through the operations of White supremacy, embedded in the global economy:

...there is no comparison to be made by those in a comfortable and financially sound profession fighting over their pensions, to farm workers in South Africa demanding a wage that can feed them. Worse still, teacher’s salary and pension contributions come from the state and therefore tax revenue. As we have already seen, the wealth of Britain is produced by historically under-developing places like South Africa and maintaining their poverty through neo-colonial economic practices. Not only are British teachers rich in comparison to South African farmers; they have that wealth in large part because the farmers are poor. It is actually offensive to pretend that they are in the same struggle, and makes a complete nonsense of the idea that there is a 99% in a battle with the global elite. (Andrews, 2018: 181)

As well as being evident on the global scale, racialised capitalism (specifically in the form of embedded White supremacy) remains entrenched within the developed Western world on an intra-national level:

Upward mobility is greater for White people, and downward mobility is greater for Black people. And equity is nonexistent on the race-class ladder in the United States. In the highest-income quintile, White median wealth is about $444,500, around $300,000 more than for upper-income Latinx and Blacks. Black middle-income households have less wealth that White middle-income households, whose homes are valued higher. White poverty is not as distressing as Black poverty. Blacks are much more likely to live in neighborhoods where other families are poor, creating a poverty of resources and opportunities... With Black poverty dense and White poverty scattered, Black poverty is visible and surrounds its victims; White poverty blends in. (Kendi, 2019: 158)

It is the failure of Marxism to recognise the peculiar, racialised nature of capitalism and its embedded White supremacy (globally and within nations) along with its inability to capture the experiences of the non-White developing world, and the unique nature of the Black struggle against capitalism that has led to its rejection by Black radical thinkers:

Marxism’s internationalism was not global; its materialism was exposed as an insufficient explanator of cultural and social forces; and its economic determinism too often politically compromised freedom struggles beyond or outside of the metropole. For Black radicals, historically and immediately linked to social bases predominantly made of peasants and farmers in the West Indies, or sharecroppers and peons in North America, or forced laborers on colonial plantations in Africa, Marxism appeared distracted from the cruelest and most characteristic manifestations of the world economy. (Robinson, 2000: xxx)

Capitalism is, and was from its inception, infected with White supremacy. People, groups, and whole nations are already racialised within capitalism because of this. Individuals are not a racial tabula rasa, awaiting contact with the industrialised economies of new host nations before they gain a racial identity through a ‘racialisation’ process. To be sure, over time, and through interaction with capitalist modes of production (amongst other things), racial identities can be invented, re-invented, shift, and evolve, but this is always done against the backdrop of White supremacy.
\section*{Delimiting racism}

Racism is a specific form of discrimination that is distinct from other forms of oppression, for example, discrimination based on gender, class, disability, etc. (although it can be connected in often complex ways to all of these things). Racism is often felt, by those who experience it directly, to be a fundamental, visceral and uniquely powerful form of discrimination. Andrews, succinctly capturing the force and primitive nature of racism, characterises it as being more ‘elemental’ than, for example, xenophobia (Andrews, 2018: 197). Likewise, Battacharyya provides a definition of race (as the foundation for racism) that locates it (similarly to Leonardo, 2009) as a form of discrimination that is perpetuated through social institutions and formations, a form of discrimination that signals a fundamental and essential difference between people. There is something uniquely unsettling about the barriers created by the social formation of race as that constructs such rigid and primal boundaries:

I try to use race to indicate a mode of social organisation, the mode that categorises with unpassable boundaries. Where as some categorisation point to activity or location or performance, and may operate as fixing in ways just as troubling, race is the mode of categorisation that references the body, nature, an underlying and unchangeable essence that signals unpassable difference. (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 2)

Given the unique character of racism, it is important for a comprehensive theory of racism (s) to be able to distinguish between racism and other forms of discrimination. Theories that draw on the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ (including the Black Radical tradition as described by Andrews, 2016, 2017, 2018; Johnson and Lubin, 2017) are able to concisely locate racism as pertaining to the body, specific (fictional) natures supposedly related to the body, and, ultimately to nefarious ‘essences’ that entail ‘unpassable difference’. ‘White supremacy’ grounds our conception of racism by providing a datum (Whiteness) against which the racist imagination fixes fundamental boundaries between people.

On the other hand, theories of racism that omit ‘White supremacy’ lack the resources to capture the features of racism outlined above, and to clearly demarcate it from other forms of discrimination, particularly from xenophobia. Cole’s (2016a, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) definition of institutional racism, for example, which states that racism, ‘is not limited to skin colour and can be colour-coded, non-colour coded or hybridist’ (Cole, 2020) lacks a sufficient reference point for capturing the essence of racism \textit{qua} racism. Furthermore, Cole’s foregrounding of the economic, political and historical developments and changes wrought by capitalism while, again, omitting the role of White supremacy as an ideological force in the racialisation process make it impossible to differentiate between racism and xenophobia.

Take, for example, the case of Irish immigration to United States in the early 19th century and the appalling discrimination that the Irish endured upon arrival in the USA. Ignatiev (1995) treats this as a clear case of racism and argues that the Irish were able to overcome the discrimination directed against them through, in part, positioning themselves socially and politically in opposition to African Americans, and eventually gaining recognition as being White. Andrews (2018), on the other hand, denies this account of discrimination directed at the Irish on the grounds the Irish were, upon their arrival in America, never regarded as anything other than White (although they faced terrible discrimination.
driven by xenophobia as a migrant population (see Andrews, 2018: 197–198 for a discussion of Ignatiev’s analysis of racism, Whiteness and Irish immigration).

Crucially, Andrews’ (2018) critique of Ignatiev’s analysis of the discrimination faced by Irish immigrants to the USA rests on a Black Radical understanding of racism as being more ‘elemental’ and tied to physical, biological facts about people and racial groups:

It [racism] is tied to and written on the body, it is rejection for having difference rooted in biology. Racism cannot be overcome through integration into the social system. While the Irish assimilated into America and Britain, Black people in both countries have largely remained marginalised… Structurally, the Irish are now indistinguishable from White people in general, while Black people remain subject to severe disadvantages. (Andrews, 2018: 197–198).

As well as this biological feature or racism, it is also important that we acknowledge historical and economic factors, which also play their part. In the case of Irish immigration to the USA, in contrast to their African counterparts, the historical and economic antecedents of how each group came to be in America, intersects with their Whiteness, or lack thereof: ‘There is a reason that Irish people migrated voluntarily to America on boats, while Africans were stolen and taken there in chains’ (Andrews, 2018: 198).

However, using an explanation of racism that rests on ‘Institutional Racism’ even where this is supplement with the neo-Marxist concept of racialisation, makes it impossible to even frame the debate about where the line between xenophobia (and other forms of discrimination directed at immigrant groups) and racism is. By stipulating that racism can be colour-coded, non-colour-coded or hybridist, it is hard to see how any form of discrimination directed at immigrant groups is not racism. Such a definition unhelpfully collapses the distinction between racism and xenophobia and makes it harder to theorise why, e.g. for groups such as African Americans, the discrimination that they face (racism) persists long beyond that experienced by White-identified immigrant groups (indeed, as Bell, 1992 asserts, racism toward African Americans is permanent). The ultimate problem with trying to describe and explain racism based on the concept of ‘Institutional Racism’ is that such an explanation only stipulates how racism occurs (i.e. through the racialisation process, mitigated through institutions), it cannot explain, in anything more than a circular manner, what racism is.

The fluidity of Whiteness

A further contention regarding the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ that Cole (2020) rejects is that the property of ‘Whiteness’ can be gained or lost by different racialised groups, at different times, and under differing social, political, and economic conditions. Cole (2020) is sceptical of the idea that ‘Whiteness’ can be a fluid property and maintains that this is an unnecessary CRT proposition, one that can be avoided if we replace ‘White supremacy’ with ‘racialisation’ and ‘institutional racism’ in our theorising about racism. Cole (2020) also questions why, if we accept the Whiteness is fluid, we might need to supplement explanations of racisms that employ ‘White supremacy’ with neo-Marxist theory to help explain racisms that are not based on Black/White or a White/non-White distinction. It is worth pointing out again that the strategies suggested by Walton (2020) for explaining non-colour-coded racism or hybridist racism are presented as separate strategies, not three necessary strands of one, overarching strategy. Given this, nowhere in Walton (2020) is it suggested
that to explain diverse form of racism we need to accept both that Whiteness is fluid and that neo-Marxism is needed to supplement this thesis. According to Walton (2020), the most productive analysis of racism involves accepting that the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ is necessary for explaining many important forms of racism, but that supplementary, neo-Marxist analysis is needed to broaden the account and make it more comprehensive. However, I would add that some level of fluidity of ‘Whiteness’ needs to be incorporated into an account of racism, although this does not involve accepting that ‘Whiteness’ is infinitely fluid, as Cole (2020) characterises this strategy as being committed to.

It is also worth pointing out, as a matter of historical accuracy, that different groups of people have been identified as White (or not White) during different periods of history. For example, there has been ambiguity about the ‘Whiteness’ of Jewish people, Italians and Irish people (Rattansi, 2007), although claims about the shifting ‘Whiteness’ of Irish immigrants has been contested (see above). This is in keeping with the CRT account of White supremacy presented here, being particularly consistent with its ideological component. Gillborn (2010), for example, uses the shifting status of Whiteness to explain how poor Whites often have their Whiteness (partly) revoked in times of economic crisis in order to provide an ideological buffer between White economic elites and non-White minorities.

Accounts of Whiteness and White supremacy that deny any flexibility in who counts as White typically downplay or ignore the ideological component of White supremacy and focus primarily on Whiteness in its simplest and most obvious manifestation as pertaining only to skin colour. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limits of the fluidity of Whiteness, with some groups (e.g. African Americans) being permanently excluded from attributions of ‘Whiteness’. This is evident in CRT theorising such as with Bell’s (1992) contention that racism, directed at African Americans, is permanent in the USA. So, ‘Whiteness’ can shift, but it is not infinitely flexible, it does not range across all racialised groups, ‘...from ‘White’ to Black and all hues in between’ (Cole, 2020: 97). Whiteness does indeed shift, but it does so within the historical, economic, political and ideological constraints of racialised capitalism, which was created and maintained in the image of White Europeans.

**Racism beyond the Black/White binary and inverted ‘model minorities’**

Walton (2020) suggests that one possible strategy for explaining discrimination against people and groups that are not identified as Black is by maintaining a rigid Black/White distinction and limiting the use of ‘racism’ by applying it only to discrimination directed at Black people and populations. In this way, discrimination against non-Black groups would be explained by recourse to other phenomena, such as xenophobia, with ‘racism’ being reserved for cases directly involving a Black/White distinction. Again, Walton (2020) does not endorse this strategy. Indeed, such a strategy would be inconsistent with the view that ‘Whiteness’ is fluid (a view that Cole also attributes to Walton, 2020), especially when this is taken to entail fluidity with potentially no boundaries to its application, as per Cole’s(2020) interpretation.

In discussing racism outside of Black/White binary, Cole (2020) rightly asserts that we should not limit racism to such a binary distinction. The existence of other forms of colour-coded racism rules this out. Indeed (and as Cole, 2020 acknowledges), there is a vast array of
insightful CRT scholarship that deals with racism that is directed at racialised groups that do not identify as Black, including racism directed at Latinx people (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001) and racism directed at Asian groups (Iftikar and Museus, 2018), to give just two examples. Furthermore, we might also point to other forms of racism, such as antisemitism, which has a different genesis and formation to anti-Black racism as an example of racism that is not based on a Black/White binary distinction. Antisemitism does not have its origins in the age of imperialism and the colonisation of Africa as does contemporaneous anti-Black racism (although it is linked to anti-Black racism in other ways. See Cousin and Fine, 2012 for a full discussion of the nature of antisemitism and its connection to other forms of racism).

However, none of the above considerations about the wider application of racism to groups that do not identify, as Black provides warrant to reject the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’. In fact, CRT theorising that has been adapted to focus on other forms of racism show that ‘White supremacy’, which remains a central concept across all forms of CRT, retains a major role in theorising about multiple forms of racism beyond a Black/White binary. In the case of antisemitism, even if we choose to explain this form of racism via historical, economic and political antecedents that make no recourse to ‘White supremacy’, we still should not reject it for its theoretical utility for its role explaining many other forms of racism. Rejecting ‘White supremacy’ because it cannot explain all forms of racism, does not entail that we should reject the concept completely. This would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

A further argument presented by Cole (2020) for rejecting ‘White supremacy’ as understood within CRT, is the existence of racism directed at White groups, by White groups. Cole (2020) highlights the appalling discrimination faced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK who experience, ‘the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a huge range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice, and hate crime…’ (Cole, 2020: 99). Examples like this of the racism faced by White-identified groups, is presented here as a further reason to reject the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’. However, there is good reason not to accept arguments that appeal to the existence of intra-White racism to show the invalidity of ‘White supremacy’ as a concept.

Arguments appealing to the fact that certain White racialised groups have worse outcomes than Black (or other non-White) groups apply the same logic, although they invert the form, of ‘model minority’ arguments that are often advanced in attempts to show that racism more generally, for example, in the UK education system, does not exist or has been vastly exaggerated (Gillborn, 2008). Such arguments usually cite examples of racialised groups, typically Indian and Chinese students, who, as a general trend, outperform their White counterparts in UK schools. There are two key ways in which model minority arguments are used to downplay racism:

First, the mere fact of minority success is positioned as if it automatically disproves the charge of racism against any and all minoritized groups; and second, comparisons are made with ‘underachieving’ groups so that the latter are cast as deficient and even dangerous. (Gillborn, 2008: 152)

Citing racism against White-identified groups as a way of dismissing ‘White supremacy’ follows a similar format to the model minority argument. However, in this case, rather than appealing to non-White populations who supposedly do not suffer from racist
discrimination, it appeals to White populations that do suffer from racial discrimination. In this way, it is an inverted form of the ‘model minority’ argument. Also, whereas the model minority argument seeks to dismiss the charge of racism, the inverted model minority argument seeks to discredit the concept of ‘White supremacy’.

The reasons for rejecting the inverted model minority argument are the analogous for rejecting the standard model minority argument. Firstly, it does not immediately follow from the acknowledgement that intra-White racism exists, that White supremacy does not exist, as an overarching descriptor of global racial power dynamics. Secondly, such appeals to intra-White racism serve the same purpose as model minority arguments in protecting the White majority from accusations of racism while masking the racism directed at non-White groups. The standard model minority argument is beneficial to those who wish to deny the existence of racism because:

...White people draw considerable benefit from the existence of so-called model minorities: the stereotype provides a strong rhetorical counter to accusations of racism and unfairness. In contrast, the minoritized groups themselves are assumed to enjoy a racism-free life despite the reality of racism harassment and labour market exclusion. (Gillborn, 2008: 157).

Similarly, arguments that rely on the existence of intra-White racism as a way of dismissing ‘White supremacy’ downplay the role of White people and White social structures in the maintenance of racism that is directed at non-White groups. The inverted model minority argument effectively whitewashes the racialising effect of capitalism in that it maintains that White people are, in principal and potentially, as much victims of racialisation as are Black people. This simply does not tally with the pattern of global racial discrimination where the largely non-White developing world suffers disproportionately from racist economic and political structures, or the pattern of racism in Western, developed nations where Black populations continue to suffer disproportionately from the effects of racism. Finally, the inverted model minority argument has a similar (though unintentional) outcome to the standard model minority argument, as it implies that non-White groups are ‘deviant’ and ‘dangerous’ as, for example, by seeking to negate White supremacy. The argument removes a major explanatory factor for the underachievement of Black pupils compared to their White counterparts. This critique of the inverted model minority argument carries over, mutatis mutandis, for arguments that appeal to the existence of racism between non-White groups.

White supremacy, structural racism and Marxism

The preceding arguments have been in favour of maintaining the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ to describe and explain racial inequalities in Western, capitalist societies, and have advocated the rejection of concepts such as ‘institutional racism’ and ‘racialisation’ as being inadequate to perform this task. Allowing ‘White supremacy’ into a Marxist ontology would entail the creation of a neo-Marxism that recognises White supremacy as phenomenon that is ontologically basic, that cannot be reduced to, and is not supervenient upon, modes of production (or other economic phenomena), although it is related to modes of production in complex ways. In this way, to borrow a metaphor from Kendi (2019), White supremacy runs like a vertical fissure through the horizontal class structure of capitalist
A neo-Marxism that recognises this is, of course, neither class nor economically reductivist.

The ontological primitiveness of ‘White supremacy’ does not entail that it is a circular concept. Rather, it is a phenomenon that is rooted in the historic, economic, and social development of the Western world. The Black radical tradition recognises that ‘racialism’ has always been present in Western societies (its origins being lost in antiquity), with White supremacy being its particular manifestation under capitalism:

...capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism... hierarchies based on constructed “racialized” difference were already in place prior to the emergence of capitalism. Capitalism was “racial” not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or to justify slavery and dispossession but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society. (Kelley, 2020: xvi)

So, in this way, racialism pre-dates capitalism and capitalist modes of production and cannot, therefore, be explained by them. Robinson (2021), also arguing from a Black radical perspective, maintains that prior to the emergence of White supremacy as the dominant form of racialisation, groups such as the Irish, Jews, Slavs and other White-identified groups were subject to racial subjugation by the White European elite. Under capitalism, certain features of racialism were modified and exaggerated, and Whiteness became a signifier of racial superiority.

Interestingly, arguing from a Marxist perspective, Miles (1982) also asserts that ideas of Whiteness and superiority developed well before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and that White supremacy (although Miles does not specifically use this term) was a pre-requisite for the anti-Black racism that developed and thrived later under capitalism (see Miles, 1982: Chapter 5, for a full discussion of the development of racism under colonialism). However, in a manner that was echoed later by Darder and Torres (2004), Miles ultimately concludes, not that racism is an ontologically basic construct or a useful focal point for analysing inequalities, but an ideological chimera, the subject of explanation through a class-focussed analysis:

To attribute the idea of ‘race’ with descriptive and analytical value in this way is itself, therefore, ideological... It can be no more than the object of explanation... the construction of ‘race’ occurs within the context of class boundaries which means that the participants in all struggles, whatever their form and object, have a position in class relations. (Miles, 1982: 186–187)

Contra to Miles’ conclusion, a neo-Marxism that incorporates ‘White supremacy’ within its ontology would recognise race as intimately connected with economic, historical and social phenomena, while, at the same time, being irreducible to class or economic divisions and possessing analytical value in its own right. This would represent an extension of neo-Marxist thinking, in a similar way to which feminism incorporated and extended Marxist thought to produce Marxist feminism.

**Conclusion**

Properly understood, the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’ captures the historical, economic political and ideological components of racism as it exists within racialised
capitalism. Alternative concepts such as ‘racialisation’ and ‘institutional racism’ (even when supplemented with neo-Marxist theory) do not offer the same theoretical benefits as ‘White supremacy’ and can only offer, at best, incomplete accounts of racism and how it operates within global capitalism. A full account of racism should be able to demarcate the distinction between racism and other forms of discrimination, such as xenophobia. Accounts of racism based on racialisation and institutional racism cannot do this. Furthermore, the existence of forms of racism that are not directly based on a Black/White binary distinction, including forms of racism directed at White-identified people, are also insufficient to show that the concept of ‘White supremacy’ should be replaced.

Despite the theoretical conflicts between Marxism and CRT, there remains much scope for co-operation. For example, Cole and Maisuria (2007) identify two key strengths of CRT that make it compatible with Marxism. Firstly, they highlight the importance of the CRT insistence of the foregrounding of the viewpoints of people of colour, as occupying unique epistemological perspectives and, therefore, providing important sources of knowledge. Secondly (following Delgado, 2003), they praise what they refer to as the ‘materialist’ strand of CRT which emphasises the economic disadvantages suffered by people of colour and the structures which maintain these disadvantages. Conversely, Gillborn (2009) arguing from a CRT standpoint, has recognised that Marxism is a diverse doctrine and that there may yet be fruitful exchanges of ideas between Marxists and CRT scholars.

One way of furthering this potential for co-operation would be for neo-Marxist theorists to adopt the CRT concept of ‘White supremacy’. The theoretical benefits highlighted above would allow the development of a more nuanced Marxist analysis of global capitalism, one that recognises its embedded racialised dynamics and the need to adapt struggles against capitalist oppression based on (among other things) race and the relationship of oppressed groups to the ideological structures of Whiteness. By engaging with CRT theorising in this way, Marxists have nothing to lose. Indeed, as well as accepting this ‘race intervention into left discourse’, by adding ‘White supremacy’ to its ontology, Marxism would provide an expanded ‘left intervention into race discourse’ and offer real possibilities for radical change on a global scale.

The purpose of this paper has not been to fully explicate a CRT informed Marxism. Rather, it has been to show how, by adopting one CRT concept, Marxist theorising could become more race-conscious and begin the process of developing a Marxism that is relevant to oppressed, racialised groups regardless of their relationship to racialised capitalism. As such, this paper has provided only the briefest outline of how this process might begin. Its purpose has been to act as a prolegomenon to a Critical Race Theoretical Marxism.

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