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Racism in the “colony”: Towards appreciating race fluidity and racialization in social psychology of racism

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Abstract

Race is a significant means through which individuals and groups relate to each other. A problematic instance of its significance is colonialism and all the destruction it brought with it. In this paper, I explore how knowledge about race and racism from settings that were erstwhile colonized can enrich current understandings and approaches to studying race and racism in social psychology. I advance the possibility of mutual learning and sharing of theoretical and methodological practices for researchers who examine race and racism in colonizing or settler-colonial settings and those in erstwhile colonized settings. I do so by first, locating the centrality of Whiteness for the very development of race categories and the shaping of psychology as a discipline. Second, I discuss how race and racism are examined in (primarily) Euro-American contexts, with a focus on engagement with Whiteness by Critical Race Psychologists and social constructionist researchers. Third, I outline alternative ways of engaging with race and race categories identified in erstwhile colonized places. I end with how this latter informs our understandings of race and racism, and possibilities for mutual learning.

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KEYWORDS

race, racism, colonialism, global south, racialization, race fluidity, social psychology
Critical Social Psychology

1 | INTRODUCTION

Social psychologists have extensively examined topics of race and racism in colonizing or settler-colonial settings, involving groups that were colonizers and colonized, among others. As a result, theorizing of race and racism has been influenced by work in these settings. Some recent scholarship is reworking these ideas to offer a more critical and, at times, decolonial approach to studying race and racism (Adams et al., 2015; Stevens & Sonn, 2021). In these settings, researchers rightly highlight the relevance of Whiteness in the racial organization of social world (Feagin, 2020). In contexts where the majority population themselves were historically oppressed, in contrast to settler-colonial groups, these orientations are likely to be different. In reordering the focus from phenomena in colonial and settler-colonial settings and groups to those who were colonized, the aim here is to develop alternative ways for social psychologists to consider race and racism that are grounded in the orientations of persons themselves.

There are two reasons why such a dedicated focus is significant for social psychologists. First, the influence of colonialism on psychology has shaped the discipline and has implications for how race itself is/was studied. Largely, race and racism have been subject to questions around “how come individuals are racist?” Racism or prejudice is routinely treated as a social evil that needs to be fully understood so that it can be removed from societies. How about those contexts that were shaped by racism? Findings involving groups that were subject to colonialism might inform us of alternative formulations and understandings of race and racism.

Second, there has been little engagement with colonialism in social psychology, in ways that have transformed the field. Increasingly however there are initiatives (Adams et al., 2015; Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Stevens & Sonn, 2021) and the present paper situates itself within such ongoing efforts. Social psychologists have deeply engaged with Nazism through developing theories and series of studies to explain how ordinary Germans could become Nazis or sympathizers and participate in genocide, such as social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1971), studies on obedience by Milgram (1963) or Zimbardo's (Zimbardo et al., 1971) studies on the role of social situation. No such attempt has been made at explaining how Europeans participated in colonialism, how ordinary British or Belgian persons could take part in loot, pillaging, and genocide, or how colonialism was resisted by Europeans or others (not that the present paper aims to offer an explanation.). What has been offered as an account is the relevance of race, but from disciplines other than social psychology (Meer, 2018; Miles, 1993; Quijano, 2007b; Wade, 2002). It is yet unclear if these explanations align with social psychological ones, since not much has been done to answer those questions. However, the salience of these ideas has been used to interrogate how psychology itself has prioritized Whiteness.

2 | RACE, COLONIALISM, AND PSYCHOLOGY

In this section, I outline how colonialism influenced ideas of race in broader scholarship and psychology. I borrow from approaches of Billig (2018) and Gergen (1973) that emphasize an engagement with history for a thorough understanding of social psychological phenomena. I outline how relations between colonialism and ideas of race and racism mean that social psychologists must consider the implications of these racial dynamics and racialization.

Social scientists and decolonial scholars (Miles, 1993; Quijano, 2007b; Wade, 2002) argue that racial categorizations are rooted in historical events such as “European”¹ colonialism (but also see Meer, 2008). Racialization, as a process of treating individuals as constituting a race, routinely mixed race, religion, and political opinion, and predated colonial encounters between European agencies and others. Jansen and Meer (2020) argue that Jews and Muslims were racialized well before the Atlantic Slave Trade and European colonization. Wolfe (2002, 2016) however, argues that while various practices of grouping and group-based discrimination, such as Judeophobia and xenophobia, were prevalent in “pre-modern” times these practices did not constitute racialization. The distinctions, to Wolfe (2002, 2016), are about, one, the absence of ideologies that involved hierarchies and two, relating phenotypical features to behavioral, cultural, and moral aspects. Banton (1979) traces the first English-language use of the term “race” to 1508, referring to ideas of descent as outlined in the Bible. For race scholars (Miles & Brown, 2003; Quijano, 2007b; Wade, 2002), European colonization has a direct bearing on the articulation of the race concept.

Wade (1993, 2002) argues that the selection of apparent phenotypical variations, namely skin color, as a basis for racialization itself displays a Eurocentric view of counting and developing difference. Kapila (2007) argues that such European (Scottish) ideas of race as physical manifestations transformed into a broader notion encompassing “civilizational” (p. 503) ideas of religion and language through its circulation and engagement in the “colonies.” An outcome then is to reckon that the study of race and racism is ultimately linked to Euro-American colonial projects.

The dawn of “modernity”² also brought about a consolidation of race-concepts and race-thinking. Enlightenment that produced scientific progress immensely contributed to producing, stabilizing, and promoting the race-concept as an essential aspect of humankind (Mignolo & Bussmann, 2023; Quijano, 2007a). These ideas of racial differences as based in inheritable biological differences essentialized racial groups in scientific circles (Meer, 2018). Racial identities were organized along a hierarchy with “Caucasian”/“European” group at the highest level with “Negroid” at the lowest and other racial groups in between (Jackson, 2020; Saini, 2019; Steinberg, 1998). Individual actions, social behavior, culture, and civilizational aspects were structured on this hierarchy.

The appeal of such ideas for colonialism are well documented: these “scientific” works were actively used to give rational ballast to the enterprise of colonialism (Meer, 2018; Teo, 2020). Said (1978) argues that such forms of racial essentialism were and continue to be discursive rationalizations for colonialism. Ernst and Harris (2002) show that ideas of race to mean racial superiority were explicitly used in the British Parliament to justify colonizing South Asia. Fredrickson (1988) argues that slavery was justified on the grounds of White supremacy and Black inferiority. These ideas were routinely prevalent and, on many accounts consolidated the stereotypes along racial “types” (Wetherell, 1996). However Tilley (2014) argues that there were several scientific voices against race-science and treating race-categories as essential features of human society.

It is not merely the historical prevalence of race essentialism that carries the explanatory burden. Instead, scholars point to how racial superiority impacted organization of knowledge and societies. Mills (2019) in his monumental work *Racial Contract* lays out a significant argument encompassing concerns over metaphysics, social relations, and consequent social order. Mills' (2019) argument is that the exclusion of non-White persons' experiences in developing philosophical and political thought has meant both an ontological and epistemological exclusion of such persons. This exclusion is articulated as “White ignorance,” where theories, policies, social relations, and norms are produced through an active ignorance of alternative forms of knowledge and ways of life (Mills, 2007).

The discipline of psychology is not immune from scientific racism and its influence has been notable in prioritizing Whiteness. Winston (2020) traces the prevalence of ideas about racial essentialism and hierarchical ordering to Bache's (1895) description of racial differences in reaction time. Such research projects are neither outdated nor uncommon. While the more recent work does not explicitly use race as a biological concept or endorse a racial hierarchy, Winston (2020) argues that these studies replace race with notions of “ancestry” (Rushton & Jensen, 2010) or “national IQ” (Rindermann, 2018). Teo (2020) argues that founders of psychology, like

Francis Galton, Le Bon, and Paul Broca, themselves were engaged in “race psychology.” The list is long and troublesome, and it does not end with the 18th or 19th centuries (see Winston, 2020).

For Teo and Febraro (2003), the problem in psychology is *ontological* in showing that understandings of the “psyche” or the inner mind are what are found in the “West.” For scholars like Winston (2020) and Salter and Adams (2013) the concern is *epistemological* in treating “White” as interchangeable with human, where approaches that were developed in Western contexts are treated as seemingly applicable elsewhere (also see: Bhatia, 2017; Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Both sets of concerns however deal with the overwhelming influence of racial formation on psychology. This much is similar to the critique of prevalent political theorizing by Mills (2007, 2019).

Other approaches in social psychology that study race and racism have similar problems. Durrheim (2015, 2021) and Condor (1988) argue that social cognition approaches treat categorization as routine and inevitable in their attempts to explain prejudice. In doing so these approaches treat racism as not merely an intra-individual feature, but also treat prejudice as expected part of being human. Combined with the above arguments it is reasonable to consider the “human” in question here as a “White” individual. Another common approach based on social identity theory (Brown, 2000) posits in-group favoritism and social dominance orientation (Sidanius et al., 1996, 1999) as explanations for racism and other forms of oppression. Both sets of explanation similarly treat racial prejudice and hierarchies as inevitable. These approaches in social psychology then are deeply problematic since the implications of their work is to treat racial prejudice and its consequences as inevitable. While these approaches do treat racial prejudice and other forms of oppression as highly undesirable, their explanations combine racial essentialism with an inevitability of racial prejudice and thus contribute to the continuation of Whiteness.

At this point it is important to clarify that for the critical authors (or me), the problems do not mean that the practicing of such theory or research is limited to White/Western individuals, instead it is the framework for these approaches that is critiqued (Buchanan et al., 2021). These critiques aim to contextualize the findings in psychological sciences as derived from historical contexts of prioritizing Whiteness/Western ways of life (Mills, 2007; Teo, 2018). We are then faced with two sets of intersections: Whiteness and psychological theorizing and practice, and, Whiteness and studying race and racism (Nelson et al., 2013). A full account of these is not the primary purpose of this paper, however, it is useful to note that in response to such critiques, and an acknowledgment of how colonialism and related ideas of racial essentialism had become ingrained in psychology, certain approaches examine race and racism as social and cultural constructions. Common to these approaches is a rejection of race essentialism or treating race and racism as inevitable features of human communities. These approaches examine Whiteness either through an explicitly critical focus—Critical Race Psychology—or social constructionist or discourse-based approaches.

3 | STUDYING RACE, RACISM, AND WHITENESS

The approaches discussed below treat race as a social construction rather than as a biological concept: race is examined as variously constructed across socio-historical and interactional settings. First, let us look at Critical Race Psychology (CRP), which addresses the above issues head-on. CRP treats race itself as a core organizer of social relations and it is through this that it traces the impact of colonialism and Whiteness on psychology. Researchers here explicitly acknowledge how race shapes, structures, and organizes social life and psychological sciences. Derived from Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980, 1988; Crenshaw, 1988, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and other critical cultural approaches, it treats as central the structuring and shaping of culture and society along race lines. For critical race theorists, racial privilege—White privilege in the US—feeds into social and institutional structures, which allows for racial privilege to continue further.

Salter and colleagues (Salter & Adams, 2013; Salter & Haugen, 2017) have argued that, at least in the context of the United States, racial matters are ubiquitous to the point that race is not an artefact of behavior but is embedded

in the culture (Salter & Haugen, 2017). Stereotypes and versions of appropriate behaviour are derived from features and actions of White individuals. Salter and Haugen (2017) trace the racial invisibility and Whiteness in psychology to the normalization of Whiteness in Euro-American culture. Concepts, theories, and methods routinely used in psychological research while seemingly neutral, are neglectful of the ways in which the racialization of our social world might impact these. Consequently, many of the concepts, theories, and methods in psychology reflect a racially privileged position to the active detriment of racial and ethnic minorities. CRP then engages with both racial inequities in the world and psychology's universalist claims to mental states and behaviour. This line of argument adds to arguments discussed earlier in highlighting the continued relevance of race for psychological knowledge generation (Buchanan et al., 2021; Winston, 2020).

Second is a set of approaches building on social constructionist and ethno-methodological arguments (see Whitehead, 2022, for notable differences). A core feature of these approaches is the focus on examining race in social interactions and discursive practices. Durrheim et al. (2011) argue that racial categories are central to the production of racism. Others argue for examining the construction and use of race categories in situ—in individuals' interactions and their discursive practices (Goodman, 2014). This however is not meant to suppress the broader relevance of race categories (see Shrikant & Sambaraju, 2023). Instead, the express focus is on how race categories and, consequently, racism are matters of engagement and negotiation in interaction (Goodman, 2014).

In other work, Durrheim, Ross, & Whitehead (2015), argue that studies of race and racism have to engage with the prevalent social norms against expressions of race and racism. Conceptualized as “race trouble,” this approach to studying race and racism is built on findings and arguments of discursive researchers (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Billig, 1988; Goodman, 2014). This means that researchers examine discursive phenomena (practices and interactions) for how race and racism are produced in and through them. Denials of racism and being racist are examined for negating inferences of being prejudiced (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Billig (1988) discusses the operation of a “norm-against prejudice,” by which he refers to a routine orientation of individuals that they would avoid coming across as prejudiced. Tracing the importance of rationality back to Enlightenment in Europe, Billig (1988) argues that rationality is an important value for Euro-Americans. Denials of prejudice are then rhetorically significant as they mitigate inferences of irrationality. Other approaches based in discursive psychology (in distinction to critical discursive approaches) similarly locate the examination of race and racism in individuals' orientations in their interactions and social practices (Goodman, 2014; Sambaraju & Minescu, 2019).

For studies conducted in settler-colonial settings and groups, management of prejudice is considered as a means of managing inferences associated with settler groups' histories of colonialism or racial oppression (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Little scholarship in this approach has examined the interrelations between colonialism and race (for exceptions see: Sambaraju, 2021; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). While the social constructionist approach does not explicitly engage with colonialism and its influence either on race categories and racism or psychology, it does engage with Whiteness (for instance: Perkins et al., 2019). It considers “White” as routinely invisible and oriented to as the unnamed yet standard category.

This much is then common to both approaches: an appreciation and engagement with how race orders and organizes social life. These approaches emphasize the role of our actions and activities in the continued relevance and maintenance of racism. Both approaches emphasize the centrality of race for understanding social relations, alongside a particular engagement with invisibility of Whiteness. Whiteness is either considered as informing norms and standards, which then make their way into psychological research, or as oriented to as the routine and taken-for-granted racial category. This similarity in focus also indicates a distinction in approaches to examining Whiteness and race in social life: a principled position to start a research inquiry in CRP in distinction to identifying orientations to race and Whiteness in social constructionist approaches.

This engagement with invisibility of Whiteness, in distinct ways, is informative: it informs us about the centrality of Whiteness to the production and maintenance of race categories and racism, and for theorizing race in contemporary (social) psychology. Racial categorization is seen as applying to those who are racialized in distinction

to the taken-for-granted category of the “White individual” (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Morawski, 2004). For Euro-American and other settler-colonial groups the engagement with Whiteness reveals the practices by which a racial societal structure is produced and maintained, akin to what scholars working within CRP have shown. For persons and groups in settings that were colonized, how are race and racism oriented to?

4 | RACE AND RACISM IN ERSTWHILE COLONIZED SETTINGS

Several studies in social, cultural, and/or indigenous psychology have examined racism in contexts and for groups in Latin America, East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Australasia, and parts of Africa. Without undertaking an exhaustive literature review of all social or cultural psychological work published about racism in these settings, I will focus on some of the main ways in which race and racism have been examined in critical and/or qualitative ways to show how examinations of race and racism have engaged with colonialism and racialization.

As will be shown, for persons in these contexts, racialization is a central concern. Racialization can be understood as a process by which races come to be (Banton, 1998; Fanon, 2002). This view admits of a non-essential, socially constructed, and flexible approach to race and race categories. Rai (2022) argues that a focus on racialization allows for considering the significance of local contexts in which race and racism are salient. Studying racism in settings that were erstwhile subject to European colonialism faces up to two considerations on race and racism: first is how race and racism are related to colonialism. This involves engaging not merely with the content of race stereotypes but also with practices of race-making. Further this also means considering that taboos and social norms around prejudice may be oriented to and enacted differently. Second is to examine how race and racism are part of social life. In the absence of (direct) colonialism, what are purposes of race categories and racialization? What purposes do these serve for persons and groups?

4.1 | Racialization and colonialism

Latin America presents a unique case since most of the Latin American nations have notable amounts of “White” population and racial classifications in Latin America are extremely fluid (Davenport, 2020). Telles and Flores (2013) show that this fluidity is seen across different nations and regions in Latin America, across various historical periods, and social class (Degler, 1986; Telles & Paschel, 2014). This variability then poses particular challenges for research that aims to examine racial disparities or interracial attitudes.

The fluidity in racial classifications also means that individuals can flexibly make claims to membership in particular racial groups in ways that favor themselves and oppress others. In Chile, Bonhomme and Alfaro (2022) examine racial categorizations online in the context of migration from Haiti during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their analyses show that categorizations of Black and indigenous peoples were made to associate backwardness, unhygienic practices, and disease. There are two points of note in their work, first is that the categorizations were flexibly made. Chileans could categorize themselves as “European” or “White” in ways to develop inferences around cleanliness and hygiene, civilized and moral, and ultimately with a sense of superiority. This was in contrast to Haitians who were treated as an “African” other and ascribed problematic features of being dirty and unhygienic, violent and uncivilized, and ultimately as “infra-human.” The flexibility for Chileans to categorize themselves as European and/or White and Haitians as African and/or Black along with inferences about behaviour allowed for legitimately excluding Haitians. Second, these categories and the inferences associated with them could be traced to the historicity of colonialism of South America (Ramon, 2009; Wade, 2010).

For Bonhomme and Alfaro (2022), the categories and their inferences continue to have a significant relevance for contemporary issues. In Latin American contexts, argues Wade (2010), Black peoples occupy a more ambiguous position in relation to native or indigenous peoples who were and continue to be “othered.” Racial identification is

then bound to social and historical contexts: relations with others, population dynamics, and socio-economic statuses (Telles & Flores, 2013; Wade, 2010).

Brown (2001) points to another instance where racial categorization derives from colonialism. At the turn of 20th century in South Asia, caste and tribe groupings were increasingly constituted in terms of race and some were ascribed criminality. Brown's argument is that the porosity of caste categorization was extended to racial categorization in categorizing tribal communities as criminal races. For the ruling British administration this allowed for delinking crime with colonial imposition and instead attributing it to "natural" behavior of these races or in other events extreme causes like famine.

The colonial relevance of categories and the associated inferences has been noted by social psychologists in other contexts too. Reddy and Gleibs (2019) in a survey study of stereotype content in Malaysia and Singapore note that prevalent stereotypes resonate with colonial ideas about different ethnic categories. However, what is left unexamined is whether those ethnic groups themselves have changed. For instance, what it meant to be "Malay" or "Indian" in 19th century during colonialism is bound to be different to be what these mean for 21st century. It is precisely for the possible discontinuity of reference of these ethnic/race categories to any stable social group that the flexibility of using these categories becomes of interest. As the above findings show, race categories are treated as fluid and flexible "slots" into which individuals can categorize themselves or others. Racialization in these contexts does occur in relation to colonialism, but persons can develop and ascribe race categories flexibly.

4.2 | Racialization and socio-political projects

Much research points to how processes of racialization attend to socio-political projects either at broader national level or at other societal levels.

Researchers are invested in examining how racialization of groups informs national belonging. The influence and impact of Western understandings of race on South Asia have been extensively examined. Cháirez-Garza et al. (2022) developed an entire special issue in the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* to the question "Can racial concepts be translated across contexts?" (p. 1). The authors argue that processes and practices of racialization in India derive from Western scientific notions enforced during colonialism. They document historical practices by which racial classifications and categories came to be seen as "natural kinds" in the Indian context for communities, caste groupings, and tribal communities. Following these findings, Cháirez-Garza et al. (2022) argue that processes and practices of racialization are central to racism in the Indian context.

Rai (2022), in interviews with individuals from Northeastern parts of India who were living in Delhi, examines the various forms of racialization they experience. Rai (2022) notes that racialization takes place along gendered lines where distinct forms of discrimination and marginalization are experienced by individuals across genders. She shows that categorizing those individuals as "Northeastern" or "chinki" or "Mongoloid" follows socio-historical and political logics. While "Northeastern" was an administrative category in the colonial times, it changed later to a racial category. Similarly, McDuaie-Ra (2012) documents how individuals from Northeastern parts of India are racialized as "Chinese" or "Mongoloid." She draws attention to the tension between "emic" and "etic" ways of racializing individuals, where emic versions have to increasingly contend with etic versions of racialization arising from Euro-American contexts. An unfortunate outcome then has been to deny discrimination and marginalization of those from Northeast as "racism."

Rai (2022) argues that racialization (or not) serves a political purpose. The racialization of Northeastern individuals serves to treat those individuals as an "other" within India, with the consequence that their membership in the national polity is questioned (Wouters & Subba, 2013). This racialization serves to outline the boundaries of Indian polity. Baber (2004) makes a similar point in widening the net of racialization to include religion (also see: Kapila, 2007). Baber shows the ascription of distinct biological and cultural features to categories of "Hindus" in contrast to "Mohammedans" or "Muslims" (Datta, 1993). This allowed for racializing cultural differences to result in

distinct racial groups. Baber (2004) argues that such “cultural racism” allowed for mobilization of violence and oppression, while opening the possibility of managing claims about racism under the guise of mere cultural differences (cf. Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

Findings from South-East Asia point to other forms of racial fluidity. In mainland China, race served to homogenize, what would be an ethnically diverse population, and render them into a national community. Ien Ang (2022) argues that racialization of people as “Chinese” poses interesting concerns for Chinese people across various nation-states. In Singapore for instance, the category “Chinese” is the non-native majority category which ultimately relegates other racial categories to a minority status. Individuals from mainland China were actively “recruited” to bolster the Chinese-ness of Singapore.

However, Sylvia Ang (2018) notes that such migrants are treated as an “other” in respect of their non-national belonging, indicating that racial belonging changes relevance in other contexts. Racialization of migrant Chinese and their problematic treatment, to Ang (2018), indicates fluidity of racial categorization. Accounts about Chinese migrants in media and elsewhere indicate a difference between an ethno-national Chinese who are Singaporeans and those newly arrived Chinese. Such constitution of an ethno-national hegemonic category does however exclude other racial categories. The discrimination and problematic treatment of racial minorities in Singapore have been extensively documented (Velayutham, 2009, 2017). Teo (2022) examines how “brown facing” in Singapore promotes problematic stereotypes of Indian and Malaysian individuals. These practices, together work to maintain a hegemonic Chinese-ness in distinction to categories of stereotyped and vilified other racial categories. The above findings point to practices by which racialization is part of projects of nation formation and contestation.

4.3 | Racialization and personal projects

Finally, researchers have shown how the flexibility of racial categorizations is a direct concern for individuals themselves. Findings from examination of how race categories and anti-Black racism in India are negotiated show that the “Black” and “Indian” categories are treated as not necessarily exclusive categories (Sambaraju, 2021). Rather, the flexibility of racial categorizations takes the form of categorization in respect of possibilities for experiencing racism. Racial categories could be subsumed under categories of “victims” or “perpetrators” of racism, which allow for accepting, questioning, and denying claims about racism. Balaram (2018) takes an explicit focus on “hybridity” (Modood & Werbner, 1997) in the context of Indo-Caribbean persons. They argue that Indo-Caribbeans face issues because of their hybrid identities of being “Indian” in origin and “Caribbean” by geography and culture. On the one hand, their very existence might be seen as a “discovery” and an exotic identity to be engaged further. On the other hand, their hybridity might mean distancing by other South Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities. Balaram (2018) argues that racialization of Indo-Caribbean peoples occurs through hybridity and displacement. Instead of seeing these as processes of emancipation, Balaram points to various possibilities for hybridity to produce problematic positions for those who are Indo-Caribbean.

Practices of racial inscribing also work in the opposite direction furthering the idea that practices of racialization and racial fluidity are central to understanding race and racism. The body is a clear site of racial inscription and contestation, given that it is this phenotype that is routinely treated as the reason for racialization (Banton, 1977; Miles, 1989). However, the body can be variously understood: a specific skin tone and hair form can mean “Black” in the US but might mean “mulatto” in Latin America. Bodies themselves are routinely altered through changes to hair, skin color, or body shapes in ways to affect changes in racial identification (Edmonds, 2007).

In Jamaica, Brown-Glaude (2007) examines how practices of skin-whitening and bleaching by Black individuals are understood. Their examination proceeds from treating the “body” as a site of everyday race making. Brown-Glaude (2007) locates these practices in the broader context of color distance to Whiteness on the one hand, and the public debates on vilifying skin bleaching, on the other hand. This latter undermining of bleaching practices involves essentializing Black skin color as a racial signifier and a marker of heritage. For those who bleach their skin,

bleaching is a means to possibly make better their socio-economic situation. Black bodies are then used to construct either Blackness as form of resistance to and affirmation of one's colonized or enslaved heritage, or as an obstacle to overcome. Saraswati (2020) similarly points to how the use of skin-whitening creams by women in Indonesia are efforts to racialize themselves as White or Caucasian, which however remains an unrealizable dream. Above findings then point to how racialization and race categories are projects that serve to hegemonize certain groups or exclude others, build a national polity, or allow persons to negotiate their membership in what are seen as more privileged groups. Race categories are then not only flexible and fluid, but also used to forward various projects that are exclusionary.

It is useful to relate the above sets of findings to similar instances of flexibility and fluidity of Whiteness. Scholars have noted how those who were Irish or Italian were not readily seen as White (Brodtkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1994; Omi & Winant, 2014). Similarly, Bajan British are not readily seen as Black on their return to Barbados (Potter & Phillips, 2006). Both cases suggest that participants can and do treat Whiteness as fluid and flexible, and tied to socio-political projects. Specifically, these projects are hierarchical and aim to achieve exclusion or selective inclusion (Wolfe, 2002). For instance, although South Asian migrants to the United States in early 20th century were acknowledged as Caucasians, their Whiteness was not accepted and consequently their inclusion compromised (Sohi, 2014; Williams, 2019). These findings show that racialization is a fluid process that attends to developing, maintaining, and negotiating social hierarchies (Wolfe, 2002).

5 | RELATIONAL LEARNINGS

While there has been an explicit acknowledgment of how colonialism has shaped psychology and race studies, in CRP for instance, in colonizer and settler-colonial settings, its engagement and relevance for persons and groups in erstwhile colonized settings has not been fully addressed. An attempt has been made in this paper yielding some significant insights. Unsurprisingly, the various ways in which persons ascribe racial identities and group memberships to themselves and others indicates that race is not necessarily linked to phenotypes. As discussed earlier, the relevance of phenotypes itself has been linked to a “Eurocentric” way of organizing persons (Kapila, 2007; Wade, 1993, 2002). However, the flexible ways that persons racialize themselves and others is striking and carries important implications.

The significance of race-making and racialization means that these practices should be studied for how social groups and identities are constructed and come to be treated as salient for individuals. The racialization of persons can then be examined for its outcomes, such as colonialism, however in more contemporary settings. Further, race making can be examined in its own right—as *sui generis*—since it attends to local socio-political or interpersonal contexts of use.

For researchers in Euro-American settings, findings from erstwhile colonized settings, unsurprisingly, point to the diverse constructions and orientations to race categories and consequently, racism. The flexibility and fluidity of racialization means upending possible assumptions about Whiteness as universal or as the central organizing principle for race and racialization. Instead, alternative ways of racialization might also be salient and need to be recognized as such (see Balaram, 2018). Further, instead of merely looking at antecedents of racism in terms of beliefs or social structures, a focus on racialization allows us to examine how race-making accomplishes other interpersonal or social outcomes.

For critical race psychologists, the findings discussed above offer possibilities for examining how Whiteness continues to inscribe and shape racial categories. The ideas of aspirational Whiteness in interpersonal or broader social settings can form strong tools for a critical examination of race and racism in our lives. Researchers can usefully examine how Whiteness maintains racial groups and identities, in addition to contributing to other socially situated outcomes of Whiteness. Of course, scholars taking this approach can extend the critical notion of pervasive Whiteness to settings where alternative forms of racialization are in play.

For social constructionist or discourse-analytic researchers these findings point to possibilities for considering how racism is negotiated in talk beyond attending to norms and taboos (Billig, 1988; Goodman, 2014). A focus on other ways that race and racism feature in and shape social interactions would be useful, such as norms that do not implicate persons as colonizers. A more relevant inquiry then is to examine the processes of racialization where race-categories come to be seen as meaningful for participants (Wilkinson, 2011). Perhaps this goes together with acknowledging that racialization is not always linked to racism (cf. Durrheim et al., 2015). Ultimately, these findings point to examining and theorizing race and racism beyond the Black-White continuum.

For researchers examining race and racism in erstwhile colonized settings it is vital to consider the colonial underpinnings of race categories and its implications for racialization. Researchers here can usefully consider the implications of CRP on how race can organize societies. Similarly, researchers can also incorporate ideas and practices from social constructionist approaches discussed above. Core here is the focus on how discursive practices and orientations to race and racism take place in consideration of operating social norms. While taboos on racial prejudice and accusations of racism might be relevant in some contexts (Velayutham, 2009, 2017), the absence of these or alternative formulations of these will have their own salience in other contexts. Identifying these practices and norms will yield rich and grounded knowledge about how racialization effects group formation and negotiation of national belonging. Ultimately, social psychologists interested in studying race and racism must acknowledge the connections of race categories, racialization, and racism with colonialism without treating race categories as essential or stable descriptors of individuals (Bhatia, 2018). Racialization can be a focus that allows for a full account of the role of race in how individuals relate to each other. While at present the paper addresses social psychologists, the discussion here will be of much interest to indigenous and cultural psychologists. Especially to researchers who are working on race or ethnic group and identity formation (Bhatia, 2018).

6 | LIMITATIONS

Clearly the papers discussed here do not in any way represent the full body of psychological work that examines race and racism in diverse contexts. There are several research studies and findings that treat race categories as stable and pervasive features of individuals (Chew, 2018; Reddy & Gleibs, 2019). Given that the present objective was to identify features of research that examined race and racism in these settings, research discussed here focuses on how race categories are meaningful for participants. Again, neither do all these papers take an explicit nor any form of de/post-colonial position in examining race categories and racism, nor do the authors and papers have an explicit concern with Whiteness. Rather what they have in common is an engagement with the colonial or Euro-American conceptions of race. Their focus is on practices by which racialization takes place. Such focus shows that race categories and our belonging in racial groups is flexible and fluid.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

Race is a significant means through which individuals and groups relate to each other. While European colonialism crystallized certain ways of racialization, primarily based on phenotypes, above findings point to notable other ways of doing so, those based on caste, religion or social class. This is not to dilute the emancipatory potential of the idea of race and racial group membership. Instead, the flexibility of racialization only points to how race remains a powerful means of making sense of ourselves and others and possible relations between various agents.

A thorough decolonizing approach will mean that practices of persons in erstwhile colonized places must be examined in their own right. Doing so, offers invaluable lessons in developing an understanding of race categories and racism, the role these play in our lives, and how to live our lives without being diminished by these. Race and racialization can be examined for their consequences in organizing ourselves as social groups.

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ENDNOTES

¹ By “European”, I refer to the empires and other agencies arising from Europe that proceed to colonize various parts of the world, including parts of Europe itself. While not all European powers had an active role in colonialism, scholars argue that Europeans benefited immensely from this (see (Höglund & Burnett, 2019) for the case of Scandinavian countries)

² For Mignolo (2011), modernity is the Euro-American narrative the promotes a Eurocentric worldview.

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