

# Antiracism Education In and Out of Schools

Aminkeng A. Alemanji  
Editor

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## FOREWORD

*It is a shame that racism is still alive in 2017* (Message on Twitter, January 2017)

In the last couple of years, and maybe increasingly during the first months of 2017 since D. Trump's inauguration, the world seems to have witnessed an alarming increase in negative, demeaning, and dehumanizing discourses about the "Other"—about his/her culture, religion, language, skin color, political stance, etc. The impression that this leaves us with is that of collective hallucination and even hysteria. It is surprising in postmodern times like ours that this should continue to happen. Postmodernity is said to be about multiple and unstable identities, the loosening of the grip of nation-states and the recognition of *mélange*. But postmodernity (and the accompanying accelerated globalization) also pushes us towards extremes. It can lead us to try to find our "roots," to take refuge in solid identities to protect ourselves against this fast-moving world and the loss of buffer zones between "us" and "them."

The ugly evasion of neat ordering and explanations that Modernity tried to impose onto us through a pseudorationalization of the Human has been questioned over the last decades. And for "implicit-thirsty" people like us, this is frightening. Othering the "Other," (re-)categorising and differentiating are direct consequences of the fear of not being able to grasp this world and our own identity. *In what box do I place myself? Where does the 'Other' belong? Who am I? What is the difference between the other and I? Where does the border between*

*'us' and 'them' stand?* As Hanif Kureishi argues (2014: 11): “we like to believe that there was a better time when the world didn’t shift so much and anything appeared more permanent. We were all alike and comprehensible to one another, and these spectres didn’t forever seethe at the windows”. This is, of course, an illusion. Throughout history, we have always been surrounded by “others”. However, the way these “Others” were othered was different. Considering the long history of our world, race, the central concept of this fascinating volume, appeared with Modernity, some two or three centuries ago.

Although our era is pervaded with good intentions about ‘diversity’ (calls for tolerance, respect, etc.), racism, one form of discourse against the “Other” often leading to terrible actions, appears to be a common response to the real and virtual presence of certain “Others.” Racism is probably the worst form of pornography of the ‘Other’. As the fascinating volume edited by Aminkeng Atabong shows, the racialized Other is too easily ‘boxed’ and rejected; the heterogeneity that s/he represents (still) frightens the majority.

In many parts of the world, talking about race in education and/or public spheres is touchy, a veritable taboo. There is a shared belief that talking about race “sustains racism” (Gordon and Newfield 1995: 382). What this volume shows is that there is a need to talk about race in order to problematize racism—and, potentially, diminish its influence. Hiding and censoring discourses of race does not help. There is a need for people to understand that different skin colours do not pose a threat to “us,” but that our behaviors toward and imaginaries about skin colors represent the real danger. For Selasi (2015), race is a power category. She adds “(...) we know is a social construct, that was constructed to support a sociopolitical and a socioeconomic hierarchy”. The chapters of this book demonstrate convincingly that work on antiracism can help people to observe themselves as “Others” and to create a distance inside themselves and thus reflect on this type of hierarchy.

Concentrating on race in education is never neutral. And no educational project can be neutral as such, whatever its “users” claim. Any perspective on issues of intercultural/multicultural encounters, interracial issues *cannot but be* ideological. In 2016, Aminkeng Atabong and I published an article entitled “*If an apple is a foreign apple you have to wash it very carefully*”: *Youth discourses on racism*. The article made it to the New real peer review Twitter feed. @RealPeerReview “tweet mocks” scholarly papers from “Mad Libs.” The tweet accompanying

the link to our article said: “Shocking finding. Students do not share the researcher’s ideological perspective on racism”. The point of our article was not to show that students discussing racism in Finland did not share our ideology but to pinpoint the unique way they were taught to discuss race at school (“we are all the same”; “colour does not matter”, “we Finns are not racist”, etc.). The idea of anti-racism is not to replace one system of explanation with another, but to help people multiply their explanatory systems and to dig into the real complexities of the issue of race as a social construct. Although we did not know if the label “Mad Libs” really applied to us, we enjoyed reading the message thread following the post, especially comments like “Imagine going to Finland of all places and telling people not to be nationalistic. The nerves of these people”—which reflects, of course, another type of ideology...

Franz Kafka is said to have written “Why read a book that does not disturb you? If a book does not give you a blow in the head why bother with it?” I am convinced that Aminkeng’s volume will trigger such reactions among its readers and urge them to reconsider the positions of race, racism, and antiracism in education. I also hope that the volume will contribute to make people aware of their own ideologies about these issues and to consider alternative ones.

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