

## Theorising race, racism and culture: David Lloyd's work

My focus here is an important and influential article by postcolonial scholar David Lloyd, 'Race Under Representation', published in the 1991 'Neo-Colonialism' issue of *Oxford Literary Review*.<sup>1</sup> Lloyd sets out to explain 'how the meshing of racial formations can take place between various levels and spheres of social practice, as, for example, between political and cultural spheres or between the individual and the national level' (p. 63). A central argument of his is that 'the terms developed for aesthetic culture in the late 18th century, as constituting the definition of human identity, continue to regulate racial formations through the various sites of contemporary practice' (pp. 63–4). Lloyd situates Kant's formulation of aesthetic culture in the *Critique of Judgement*, and particularly his discussion of concepts of 'common taste' and 'the public sphere', as formative of Western racism.<sup>2</sup> Lloyd states that his 'formal analysis of the ideological Subject' is a necessary complement of 'material histories of the specific transformations that take place through the dialectic between the state and what it perforce negates as a condition of its existence' (p. 87). I want to suggest that Lloyd's formalism proves, on the contrary, antithetical to a materialist approach.

I choose this article for discussion because it seems to condense a number of current dispositions in Western anti-foundationalist critical theory, political critique, and colonial discourse analysis. Lloyd's concern with Enlightenment ideologies is shared by a growing number of postcolonial critics. His work corresponds to the culturalist orientation of the late British journal *Marxism Today*, an orientation also discernible in British 'multiculturalist' and 'antiracist' education policy.<sup>3</sup> Lloyd's interest in Fanonian psychoanalytic formulations also reflect popular strains of colonial discourse analysis.<sup>4</sup> I address only particular aspects of Lloyd's argument: his critique of the public sphere; his accounts of the racialised subject and of anti-colonial subjectivity. Through a series of connected

critical commentaries that engage with the political and critical implications of Lloyd's work, I suggest alternative approaches to the analysis of racial formation.

### The tyranny of the public sphere?

Lloyd's article is based on the conviction that Kant's third critique is 'one of *the* founding texts of cultural theory' (p. 64; emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> It would be useful to clarify the status of these founding texts according to their national and historical specificity. The English, Scottish, German and French Enlightenments had different cultural and political histories; their philosophical premises were also, in some regards, different. When (p. 68) Lloyd refers to 'post-enlightenment liberals such as John Stuart Mill' and their continuation of Kant's racial thinking, he suggests that Kant's centrality to Victorian England is self-evident.<sup>6</sup> But Kant's pan-European influence in conceptions of 'race' is a notion that needs further justification. So does Lloyd's claim for the primacy of *cultural* theory itself in eighteenth-century conceptualisations of 'human identity'. This claim does not acknowledge as significant the theorisations produced by *political* and *economic* Enlightenment thinkers who include Voltaire, Montesquieu and Smith. And it also neglects the contributions of Kant's own first two critiques towards a philosophy of the subject, or, rather, implies their irrelevance for an understanding of the third critique.<sup>7</sup>

I want to look briefly at the passage from Kant's third critique that Lloyd quotes to illustrate Kant's conceptions of 'common sense' and the public sphere. The passage asserts that common sense is

a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of every one else, in order, *as it were*, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions ... This is accomplished by weighing the judgement ... with the merely possible judgement of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of every one else. (p. 65)<sup>8</sup>

For Lloyd, this passage illustrates the epistemic violence implicit in the notion of 'the public sphere', revealed through its *formalisation* of the category of the subject. The imposition of form upon heterogeneous elements is seen as an oppressive act. I would argue that Kant provides us here with a potentially productive model of liberal morality. This

passage stresses the importance of the subordination of personal desires in the interest of the collective. The injunction to put oneself in the position of others can be considered a helpful safeguard against anti-social individualism. By failing to engage with Kant's anti-individualist argument, Lloyd leaves unclear what relation his own work has to collective values.

It is important to examine critically the social and historical contradictions that link the public sphere to racism and other forms of social inequality.<sup>9</sup> We need to interrogate the ways in which this Kantian formulation has been used as a substitute for material transformation. But it is equally important to examine seriously the ways in which oppressed and excluded groups have been *inspired* to formal political and philosophical action by these and kindred notions of the public sphere, political representation and universal subjectivity. Lloyd's later allusions to anti-colonial nationalism suggest that, for him, such organised emancipatory movements merely relocate and repeat the originary violence of the Enlightenment public sphere and its representational 'logic'. Thus he writes: 'Nationalism ... restores continuity to the interrupted narrative of representation by reterritorializing it within the newly conceived nation. Nationalism, in other words, accepts the *verisimilitude* of imperial culture while redefining its purview' (p. 78). Aside from the problematic fatalism of such reasoning, it is also historically questionable.<sup>10</sup> Gregory Jusdanis, for example, argues against the view that 'the nationalist project is complicit with the European Enlightenment', suggesting that

It is complicit only if we understand by this that it reacted against the Enlightenment. The earliest European nationalism, for instance, fought against the attempt of the French to create a new world order, to extend the principles of the French Revolution across the rest of Europe.<sup>11</sup>

### The primacy of the aesthetic in racism?

Lloyd's analysis highlights the developmental ideology of the subject: i.e. the idea that the subject progresses from a condition of immediate sensual gratification to the capacity for identity with others. For Lloyd, racism is structural to this trajectory. As his reasoning is important here, it is necessary to quote a long passage:

it is ... the establishment of a peculiar and historically specific social form, the public sphere as defined in aesthetic theory, as the end of humanity, that *defines the logical structure* of racist discourses. *For this reason*, it is possible for an interchangeably ethical, political and aesthetic judgement as to the 'savage races' to saturate post-enlightenment discourses on race from liberals such as John Stuart Mill or Matthew Arnold to extreme conservatives such as Gobineau, Klemm, Nott or Hunt. The inadequacy of the native to self-government is demonstrated by 'his' lack of aesthetic productions or by 'his' subordination to immediate sensual gratification: the capacity for autonomy is either as yet undeveloped or absent in the savage and requires to be developed or supplied by force. (pp. 68–9; emphases added)

The italicised expressions, as I read them, appear to substitute assertion for argument. They leave unclear how the public sphere can be said to *define* structures of racist discourse. Nor is it clear how the second sentence, regarding the interchangeability of aesthetic, political and ethical judgement, follows on from this arguable definition. And equally unclear is how this interchangeability itself relates to his final sentence, which implies that aesthetic criteria for humanity precede or determine all others. Instead of being simply one of many weapons in the ideological arsenal of racism, the aesthetic here becomes formative.

What does clearly emerge is that, for Lloyd, political conceptions of race, and justifications of racism, *stem* from culture. The allusion to 'aesthetic production' in his quotation accentuates his omission of the other forms and discourses of production that were so crucial, historically, in fostering racist ideology and practice. Evidence for the lack of humanity of 'natives' was taken, inter alia, from their supposed inferiority as labouring subjects. This involved allegations of non-productivity (found for example in colonial 'tropical exuberance' ideologies), and sexual exploitativeness (found for instance in colonial criticism of the traditional 'drudgery' of African native women in serving their men). And we need also to acknowledge how notions of 'inferior' indigenous structures of governance were enlisted to further racist imperialism. In other words, 'natives' were judged by their political and economic practices as much as by their sensory and aesthetic capabilities; their racial inferiority was deduced from all of these areas of human activity.

Lloyd's contentious conclusion is that *all* racism has its roots in, and is explainable by, the categories of culture. This overlaps with the rather

different context of contemporary anti-racist British ideologies and policies in public sector services. And these, as Paul Gilroy points out, share an unfortunate overlap with ideologies and policies of contemporary conservatism:

The most elementary lessons involved in studying ideas and consciousness seem to have been forgotten. Racism, like capitalism as a whole, rests on the mystification of social relations – the necessary illusions that secure the order of public authority ... the definition of race exclusively in terms of culture and identity ... ties certain strands in antiracism to the position of some of the new right ideologues. By emphasising this convergence I am not saying that culture and identity are unimportant, but challenging the routine reduction of race to them alone which obscures the inherently political character of the term. The way in which culture is itself understood provides the key to grasping the extraordinary convergence between left and right, antiracist and avowedly racist over precisely what race and racism add up to.<sup>12</sup>

### The idea of the subject

Other questions arise when Lloyd moves to consider the practical expression of white racist expansionism in the early nineteenth century. This discussion foregrounds white European attainment of universal status. Lloyd asserts that ‘his domination is virtually self-legitimising since the capacity to be everywhere present *becomes an historical manifestation of the white man’s gradual approximation to the universality he everywhere represents*’ (p. 70; emphases added). Because some people in positions of political power consider themselves the personification of the universal human subject, the notion of the universal itself is to blame. This notion is also responsible for the fact of colonialism. Political or racial domination then becomes the inevitable outcome of the idea of the subject.

On the contrary, I want to contend that white European arrogation of this subject position says something about how power operates, but does not illuminate inescapable properties of the category of human subject itself. This behaviour reflects the solipsism of those who control definitions of humanity and are empowered to construct racial and colonised others as expressions of the merely particular. We need to explore this process by looking at its material sources, dissemination and institutionalisation. Lloyd almost precludes such explorations by implying that all

that is necessary is to recognise the cause of racism in the idea of ‘the Subject’ itself. And we need to note how his approach fails to acknowledge how *anti*-liberal notions (social Darwinism, for instance) and *anti*-foundationalist notions (Nietzscheanism, for instance) have also been used to further racism. Such illiberal notions do not correspond to the abstract universalism that, for Lloyd, is the source of racist thinking.

### Anti-colonial critique and metaphor

According to Lloyd, ‘it is not in the first instance the antagonistic recognition of difference which constitutes the discourse of racism but the subordination of difference to the demand for identity’ (p. 71). He argues that metaphor is the structure of thought responsible for the ‘logic’ of ‘identity’ thinking. Metaphor unites two discrete objects under the principle of identity. The process the subject observes in the figure of metaphor – the subordination of difference between two terms – is, for Lloyd, the same process undergone by the subject herself in the act of responding to metaphor. To respond is to be incorporated into its identitarian logic. And this is the same process experienced by the subject in her interpellation by culture and the public sphere.

However, Lloyd’s argument repeats what he claims to criticise. If the exchangeability of formerly discrete terms is for Lloyd an effect and cause of racist/identitarian logic, Lloyd’s own discourse stands guilty. We get: ‘The racism of culture is ... an ineradicable effect of its [culture’s] fundamental structures’ (p. 63), and ‘the realization that not only is race a cultural construct but that racism *is* the structure of culture’ (p. 83), and ‘the culturally *constitutive* function of racism ... Racism appears at once as the product and the disabling limit of the cultural formation of that Subject which subtends and gives the possibility of the “public sphere”’ (p. 85). The upshot is a seemingly inescapable circle. Aesthetic culture and the public sphere render racism ‘always already’ both cause and effect of identity. Racism becomes nothing more than a ‘metaphor’ for the alleged contradictions of ‘identity thought’ itself.

When Lloyd turns to two anti-colonial critiques of racism – those of the modern Sudanese fiction writer Tayeb Salih and the modern Martiniquan theorist Frantz Fanon – a strange thing happens. ‘It is racism itself’, Lloyd has said, ‘that brings to light the contradictory nature of the powerful and remarkably effective institutional logic of culture’ (p. 73). Now, we learn, these anti-colonial critiques do something rather similar.

They expose ‘the inherently contradictory metaphoric logic of identity’ (p. 83). If racist and anti-racist discourses are so similar in effect, if not in intention, what need for anti-racism? In a sense Lloyd himself turns Salih’s novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) and Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) into allegories of non-identity, whose chief value lies in their critique of the West. As Lloyd writes:

the force of novels such as *Season of Migration*, which indeed dramatizes the predicament of the divided subject of colonialism across two generations, lies *less in their representation of the damage inflicted than in the radical critique of western cultural forms that they draw from it*. What comes into question in Salih’s novel is that order of verisimilitude that I have termed the narrative of representation. (pp. 78–9; emphasis added)

Or, as he writes of *Black Skin, White Masks*: ‘the enormous task that this work proposes is the transformation of the non-identity of the black man into *the means* to a dismantling of the discourse of racism on several axes’ (pp. 82–3). Lloyd thereby turns the texts into instruments. ‘Dismantling the discourse of racism’ is indeed an important project. But is problematic to present this as the most significant activity that non-Western texts can perform. Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani make a similar point about Robert Young’s *White Mythologies*:

Young makes a compelling argument for considering the impact of the Algerian War of Independence on French political and philosophical thought. However, his powerful critique of ethnocentrism is undermined by his general tendency to read anti-colonial movements as primarily engaging the logic of Western philosophy. Thus it seems ... that a key object and achievement of the Algerian War of Independence was the overthrow of the Hegelian dialectic! ... One is tempted to wonder whether we have merely taken a detour to return to the position of the Other as resource for rethinking the Western Self.<sup>13</sup>

### What is to be done about racism?

Lloyd concludes by extending his critique of the racist foundations and effects of culture to the notion of the state, seen as the ultimate expression of the horrors of unificatory ‘logic’. His view is an idealist one as he writes himself:

it is the *idea* of the state which regulates the formation of citizen-subjects fit to participate in what is effectively state culture. For the state is not merely a contingent ensemble of institutions but is ultimately determined by the desire to unify the public sphere. (p. 87)

The language slides from the *idea* of the state, in the first sentence, to a reference to the actual state, which is in any case seen to be grounded in the realm of ideas/desires. Where, one wonders, did 'the desire to unify the public sphere' come from? And why did it arise?

What does Lloyd see as a solution to the intrinsic epistemic violence of the immutable state and public sphere? It is worth looking at his diagnosis:

the indices of difference on which racism relies gain their meaning from a distribution of values determined by that culture which founds the idea of common sense and its space of articulation, the public sphere. This implies that there can be no simply cultural solution to the problem of racism and that all the measures taken by liberal cultural institutions in the name of assimilation are at best half measures, at worst misrecognized means to the reproduction of a singular cultural form which will continue to produce racialized residues. For the demand for representation within existent institutions will be self-defeating as long as it is not accompanied by the demand for the transformation of those institutions, since every partial instance of representation of difference succumbs to the larger narrative to representation which absorbs it. (p. 86)

Lloyd is surely accurate when he argues that the solutions to racism can never be through culture alone. But his argument does not derive from the recognition that social totalities and racist structures are grounded in, and controlled by, material processes *other* than cultural ones – such as flows and dictates of capitalism. Rather than suggesting that the drawback to 'cultural solutions' is that racism doesn't exclusively derive from or exist in the cultural/public sphere, his suggestion is that it is precisely because racism *does* derive from this sphere that such solutions are limited.

The non-cultural solutions to racism and aesthetic culture or the public sphere or the state are, for Lloyd, to be found in a somewhat abstract violence. And in the subaltern groups which exist entirely beyond the contamination of any conception, influence or operation of a public

sphere (p. 88). Their value seems to be exclusively formal, as no account of their subjectivities or activities is supplied. The notion of the necessity of violence occurs in Lloyd's discussion of Fanon when Lloyd explains that the:

impossible predicament [of the racialised individual] issues perforce in madness or resistance as the subjective correlative of the process by which the colonizer's attempt to assimilate produces the national consciousness that revolts. Fanon's subsequent writings accordingly become increasingly concerned with the necessity of violence as the only means to the overthrow of imperial domination. (pp. 85–6)

Fanon's work is candid about the metaphysical basis, and function, of the violence he proposes. At the same time it is grounded in materialist analysis. Lloyd's allusions to violence emerge as more formulaic. The more substantial hope of overcoming racism lies, it seems, in highlighting the self-destructing tendencies of racial subjectivity – what Lloyd describes as 'the insistence of contradiction in racial formations, their inability to totalise the domain of the Subject' (p. 88).

In keeping with the polemic approach of my intervention here, I want to conclude by suggesting that the implications of Lloyd's opposition to the public sphere, and his veneration of a principle of difference, give cause for concern. Whether viewed in British, United States, European, 'developing' or global contexts, the dangers to human well-being of capitalist privatisation, and ethnic chauvinism, are intense. It might be time to stop holding deterministic notions of culture, form, narrative, development and progress as exclusively responsible for racism, and to look more positively at what human subjects *share*. It is also time to look more critically at the languages of 'difference', at the ways they can be used to promote social exclusivism, individualism, and a homogenised view of racialised communities. To quote Paul Gilroy again:

no single culture is hermetically sealed off from others. There can be no neat and tidy pluralistic separation of racial groups in this country. It is time to dispute with those positions which, when taken to their conclusions, say 'there is no possibility of shared history and no human empathy'. We must beware of the use of ethnicity to wrap a spurious cloak of legitimacy around the speaker who invokes it. Culture, even the culture which defines the groups we know as races, is never fixed, finished or final. (p. 57)

## Notes

Thanks to Clara Connolly for useful discussion and criticism.

- 1 David Lloyd, 'Race under Representation', *Oxford Literary Review*, 13, 1–2 (1991), pp. 62–94. See also David Lloyd, 'Ethnic Cultures, Minority Discourse and the State', in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds.), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 221–38, which follows similar arguments to his *Oxford Literary Review* article and applies them to the consideration of ethnic cultures within the USA. See Laura Chrisman, 'Local Sentences in the Chapter of the Postcolonial World', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 7, 1 (1998), pp. 87–112, for a critical discussion of Lloyd's 'Ethnic Cultures' article.
- 2 Kant wrote explicitly on race. See, for example, his 'Of the Different Human Races' (1775), *The Idea of Race*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2000), pp. 8–22. See also E. Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- 3 See Timothy Brennan, 'Black Theorists and Left Antagonists', *The Minnesota Review*, 37 (1991), pp. 89–113, for an important discussion of British left culturalism of the 1980s. For a wide-ranging discussion of contemporary British antiracism see the collection of essays 'Race', *Culture and Difference*, edited by James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage Publications, in association with the Open University, 1992).
- 4 See, for example, the early work of Homi Bhabha 'The Other Question ...', *Screen*, 24, 6 (1983), pp. 18–36, and 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr (ed.), *Race, Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 108–64.
- 5 For an excellent account of the historical dynamics and precedents to Kant's third critique see Howard Caygill's 'Post-modernism and Judgement', *Economy and Society*, 17, 1 (February 1988): pp. 1–20. Thanks to David Johnson for drawing my attention to this article.
- 6 See Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 58–61, for a probing discussion of Kantian constructions of race. See also Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the 'raw man' of Kant's Third Critique, named as the New Hollander or inhabitant of Tierra del Fuego, and her argument that he 'cannot be the subject of speech or judgment in the world of the Critique. The subject as such in Kant is geopolitically differentiated', pp. 26–7 of her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999). And see Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

- 7 Perhaps the warning of Stephan Korner is apposite here, that ‘the third *Critique* is intimately related to the other two. A reader who tried to study it in isolation would be in great danger of mistaking many of its most significant statements for empty abstractions, and of misunderstanding many others’ in *Kant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 192.
- 8 This quotation comes from p. 151 of the James Creed Meredith translation of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), as noted in note 7, p. 89 of Lloyd.
- 9 For an excellent example of this examination see David Kazanjian, ‘Racial Governmentality: Thomas Jefferson and the African Colonization Movement in the United States’, *Alternation: Journal of the Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages* [Durban, South Africa], 5, 1 (1998): pp. 39–84.
- 10 See Neil Lazarus, ‘Disavowing Decolonization: Nationalism, Intellectuals, and the Question of Representation in Postcolonial Theory’, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 68–143, for a detailed discussion of modern nationalist and anti-nationalist theories. Lazarus engages with the deterministic model that Lloyd presents here. See also Elliott Colla, ‘The Stuff of Egypt: The Nation, the State and Their Proper Objects’, *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 45 (2001), pp. 72–90, and Salah Hassan, ‘Terminus Nation-state: Palestine and the Critique of Nationalism’, *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 45 (2001), pp. 54–71. These articles supply nuanced analysis of shifting relations between the nation and the state as political and cultural formations, and by demonstrating the historical and geographical variability of nationalist politics they supply further alternatives to Lloyd’s structural determinism.
- 11 Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 9.
- 12 Paul Gilroy, ‘The End of Antiracism’, in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds.), *‘Race’, Culture and Difference*, p. 57.
- 13 Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, ‘Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, “Postcoloniality” and the Politics of Location’, in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 355.