Deconstructing Racism in an Increasingly Polarized World
Prince Harry and Unconscious Racial Bias

Just recently, Prince Harry made an extraordinary confession, admitting his upbringing as a member of the British Royal Family meant he had no understanding of unconscious racial bias. “I had no idea it existed. It took me many years to realize it, especially then living a day or a week in my wife’s (Meghan) shoes.”

His honest comments reflect how he began to understand race in a way that he didn’t before. And he’s not the only one. With the brutal murder of George Floyd, this awareness transformed itself into a worldwide protest movement. It is for this reason that we have devoted this issue to racism and BLM because our work as interculturalists — making people aware of their biases in order to enhance the intercultural dialogue — can be seen as closely related.

Our interviewee, Joel Brown, is fully aware of the evils of racism. As a Gay African-American, he became a lawyer in order to fight discrimination of all sorts. But upon discovering SIETAR, he found that it furnished the tools for intense dialogue that touches on the final questions of humanity and our existence. His interview is insightful and surprising. It starts on the next page.

Related to our theme, we have an interview of Selim Cherkaoui, who tells us about his work in Belgium prisons and ways how one can reduce and prevent radical fundamentalism among prisoners (page 10). In a related article, David Trickey writes on the ‘Golden Rule’ and how we all tend to project similarity on others, which more often than not leads to simplistic stereotypes of us and them. To counteract this, he argues for the ‘Platinum Rule’, treating people as they want to be treated (page 13).

Co-editoralist Kirsten Waechter provides us with a few teaching tips on how we can make our participants aware of our unconscious racial biases (page 14). And her colleague Christine Taylor and George Simons review international bestsellers on white privilege, race and class (pages 24-27). And lastly, our correspondent in Montreal, Dan MacLeod, offers a parable on cacophonous divisions (page 17).

Of course, we all have the COVID 19 epidemic on our minds. Interculturalist Carla Cabrera explores the different leadership styles combatting the virus, using the dimensions of Hofstede and Hall and making for interesting reading (page 18).

The end of the year is approaching and we want to wish you all, despite the hard times, a joyous holiday period.

Editor-in-chief
Interview with

Joel Brown

A thoughtful and profound interculturalist

In 1963, the Gay African-American writer and social critic James Baldwin published ‘The Fire Next Time’, two long essays on American race relations. His book, in midst of the civil rights movement, created a great stir by eloquently expressing the tragic experiences of Black Americans. In one passage, he wrote:

“Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word ‘love’ here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace — not in the infantile American sense of being made happy, but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.”

Our interviewee, Dr. Joel A. Davis Brown, incarnates Baldwin’s message. Growing up in the U.S., he experienced intimately the evils of racism and understands what happens when there’s no dialogue — or love — between cultural groups. Educated as a lawyer, he hoped to contribute to a more just society. But he learned that applying the law didn’t necessarily lead to a reconciliation of opposing parties. As he said, “Jurisprudence doesn’t really touch on the final questions of our humanity and existence.”

Upon discovering SIETAR, he found it provided him with the proper tools to deal with people’s fear of unknown cultural experiences. He is now working as Chief Visionary Officer at the Pneumos LLC, a management consulting and coaching firm based in San Francisco, CA. In the following interview, he reveals how he became a passionately active interculturalist.

Let’s begin with your story. Where were you born and raised and what were some of the early life experiences that gave you the roots for the intercultural field?

I was born just outside of New York City, but raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milwaukee is a midsize city, about 120 km north of Chicago. Historically, it was built by Germans but, over the last 80 years, it’s become fairly diverse...and one of the most segregated and polarized cities in the U.S. There are several things that influenced me in terms of interculturalism. My mom always wanted me to be socialized, to be able to meet and converse with different people and not live a sheltered life. She was a hospital administrator and her work led her to interact with people from Pakistan, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa. She was adamant that we get exposed to people from different communities and backgrounds. And she also said, “If I bring someone home, you are to treat them like family”, which was perfectly normal; I didn’t even think about it. So I had this adopted, extended family of people from all over the world — different languages, different viewpoints about everything. And that was how I
started to see the world: everybody was a friend, everybody was somebody you simply hadn’t talked to or understood yet. That was something that made it very easy for me to connect with people who are different because that has been part of the community I have built for myself.

On another level, being a Gay and African-American man on the fringe of society determined in many ways my thinking about my place in the world and who I was. And recognizing that, even within those particular groups, there were moments of exclusion. Because in the LGBTQ community, there wasn’t a lot of space to recognize people who were racial minorities. For many people, the idea was that if you were LGBTQ, you had to be white. If you were African-American, much of the narrative of what that experience was like was based upon what straight people said. So you find yourself kind of living in the margins of the marginalized group.

In terms of my formal education, Milwaukee had an extensive communication and arts program in schools, such as debate, extemporary speaking, theatre, etc. There were competitions and events around these activities, which allowed me to communicate fully in the public at a very early age.

It also led me to write poetry because with pen and paper, I found it was a safe way to express myself. It was my way to share my world without judgment or validation from other people. I remember writing my first poem when I was seven years old and my teacher said, “This is really great. Did you write this?”

Looking back, I now realize that poetry has been a lifeline to me; it’s the universe that wants to express itself through you and all you have to do is to get yourself out of the way and not overthink it. And when I don’t think, anything that wants to express itself will come through. Art is free-flowing when it is done in its highest form, it’s not dictated by conventional form. It’s supposed to be disruptive and challenge the status quo. It asks why we accept things as they are. Art, and in particular poetry, has a very important role to play in how we look at change because it is, by its very nature, designed to challenge the status quo.

You seem to have had, at a very early age, a keen and sensitive mind as well as one that questioned the status quo. Did it develop in your family and school environment? Or was it just there and it just popped out?

I sensed it was already there. My family knew that I was different — I was the free spirit, the sensitive heart, the empath. What does it mean to be an empath? To feel deeply, to hear and understand other people’s mental and emotional experiences. It was something that I had to express. It made me feel in many ways apart from other people because there were a lot of things I was exploring.
remember thinking: “Do you end up with nothingness once you leave this earth or is there an immortal soul?” With my nine- or ten-year old friends, that was difficult to talk about. I had many conversations with my older brother, probably the only person who never judged me. He always understood me to be different. But at the same time, he might say, “Don’t you want to play with toys or go outside and play sports?” I did that, but still was very much into these deeper philosophical questions about existence.

From what I read in LinkedIn, you graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in political science, then went on to law school in Virginia. Why law?

I was always fascinated by law and the idea of creating equity through justice. In the U.S., one of the easiest ways — and I say “easiest” in quotes — for marginalized communities to receive justice was through the courts. The idea is that you have an independent judiciary which appealed to reason and logic and higher concepts of living. It is much easier than trying to convince a majority population to do right by a minority population, particularly in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.

I’m in many ways a nerd, so looking at laws and how we can apply them explains why I love law. And from a philosophical point, and because I had a knack for oratory, studying law made sense at the time because laws reflected consciousness of society. I wanted to help understand that more critically, and to help evolve our consciousness.

But you aren’t practicing law anymore. What happened?

After a few years, I realized that laws reflect the particular mindset of people within a particular nation state, which often trails behind evolved consciousness. What I mean is that there’s something to be said for respecting diversity, inclusion and interculturalism from a compliance standpoint. But is that really the highest form of living? To do something because laws tell you to do so, as opposed to doing it because you know it’s the right thing to do for a more just society?

Essentially, much of law is redressing harm from the past and looking at how to make sure negative things don’t happen. However, the law doesn’t usually grapple at a deep level with the final questions of humanity and our existence. If you’re only thinking with your head, not your heart, you’re not entertaining questions of the spirit and thus you diminish your ability to relate to people on the intercultural level.

In the legal profession, you have to contend with laws, social conventions, and statutes that dictate everything: how long briefs should be, what type of paper you can use. Also, it meant having to wear a suit every day and feel
uptight and formal, which was so different from who I really am. I just felt restricted and the rebel in me found more safety in poetry and art.

Even though I loved the story of law, I realized at some point the career did not match who I was from a values standpoint. I wanted to be something different, still very much in line with justice but done in a way that felt more liberating. It’s hard to help liberate others if you’re still trying to create space for yourself to be free.

Despite my doubts, there was a lot of pressure for me to stay in law practice because of the professional prestige, the amount of time and money I had already invested, and the peer pressure. There was a stigma of being a lawyer and leaving the profession. But I’m very glad I left because I haven’t lost anything. Rather I’ve become better, more in tune, more astute, and a better global citizen. I’m thinking not just in terms of what’s legal or illegal; I think and color outside the box: what’s normal, what’s not normal, and what’s in between that.

What was it exactly that allowed you to transform yourself?

I don’t think I transformed myself; rather, I was pushing against the edges. When I was talking about personnel issues overseas, a client would say, “Oh, we have a team in London…” or “We have people with different backgrounds and are struggling to deal with this…” Those were the things that naturally fascinated me. And I found myself spending more time consulting than writing legal briefs.

At that time, I didn’t realize that there were people doing intercultural or diversity work. I didn’t even know the term “intercultural”! I mean, it was as if there was this parallel universe out there and I opened the curtain and said, “Oh my God, I didn’t realize this was all taking place.” I thought that, as a lawyer, there was only the legal dimension I could be part of. Once I saw what else people were doing, I lost interest in law.

I initially thought I was going to be doing diversity and inclusion work but realized that was a short-sighted endeavor — diversity is framed to an American lens but the world is not just the U.S. As I started to travel more, I realized that the focus in the U.S. is very myopic and ethnocentric. I don’t know if it’s because in America people think we have it all, but too many of us don’t see the need to look externally.

Because I was interested in being a better global citizen, I was more fascinated by what I found with colleagues and people I met outside the U.S. They seemed to have greater curiosity, agility and humility and were more open to creativity and innovation. That resonated with me. And once you start opening your eyes to the many things outside the
Joel Brown
— continued

U.S., your mind can’t go back to the old dimensions. It was then I realized that diversity could not only be based on the U.S. perspective and this is when I started to look into interculturalism. If you look at the world today, it didn’t come into existence by accident. There are reasons and forces and verbal elements that influence how the world works. The situations we all find ourselves in are influenced by history, sociology and politics.

When I looked at diversity and interculturalism, I found a lot of people debating the two as “either or”. I didn’t want to do that, I wanted to use both. I wanted to make it more practical and real, and I think interculturalism helps how we can look at diversity and inclusion differently. I had a number of mentors, like Kelly McCloud-Schingen and Patricia Coleman, who started to help me understand how I could merge the two.

Is this when you became aware of SIETAR?

No, not really. Some years earlier, I was with one of my earlier mentors doing consulting work with the U.S. Navy. In her working materials, she had one paper called “SIETAR Skills”. I thought, “Wow, these are pretty good. What is this organization?”

But I didn’t really become part of the organization ‘til years later through Kelly, who invited me to the SIETAR Europa Congress in Valencia in 2016. Patricia was there and she looked out for me. I was just blown away by the talks and the participants at this congress. They gave me language and tools for things I hadn’t been able to articulate well. Since then, I’ve been to every SIETAR Europa conference as well as those of SIETAR USA and Young SIETAR, all of which I have enjoyed.

But I must say I’ve gotten a lot more out of SIETAR Europa because of its broader focus and inherent humility and curiosity. I always ask myself, “How can I learn more and what is it that I’m not aware of?” That’s why SIETAR Europa is so exciting, because there’s so much to learn. Every person I meet is a teacher and they give me something additional to think about. Whether I agree with their ideas or not, I use different ideas to refine my thinking and my own practice.

Concerning your practice, do you incorporate the neurological aspects of interculturalism in your interventions?

First off, I’m continually fascinated by the neurosciences. There is so much coming out, Patrick, that I don’t have time to read it all. What I think about is, once again, how do we make people feel safe? How do we make sure to avoid things such as the amygdala hijack, the “flight, fight or freeze” mode when we interact? Help people be adaptive? These are key things for me.

Now, to answer your question I’m going to first go backwards and hopefully come to an answer. This is a maxim I believe in:
“It’s hard for people to create inclusion for others if they haven’t created inclusion for themselves.” The question is: How do you do that?

When we do work with different groups, we always start with helping people understand the part of creating space for others. The seminal question is: How do you create space and how do you allow it to be fully expressed where people can fully be themselves? This process of using Global DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and interculturalism) is less about “either/or” and more about “both/and.” That allows me to be part of the equation—the focus is not only on others but on oneself. It’s important for any leader to recognize, “I’m also part of that process.”

The main thing I try to encourage people to do is to see themselves as cultural beings in the process, and not just regard the other person as being cultural. That’s one of the big challenges. And I think when we see ourselves as cultural beings, then the fear and the risk of engaging in an intercultural dialogue becomes less, because you see it as something that’s normal, part of who we all are. It’s something that’s not necessarily a new paradigm or orientation; it’s part of a natural paradigm that you’ve already living in and you’re just extending and expanding to include other people.

If we’re more comfortable with that, we can reduce some of the monkey-brain behavior that happens and engage with a higher level of confidence and adaptability. And that’s where the diversity, inclusion and equity lens really helps inform the intercultural practice, by going deeper, beyond the superficial level, to look at power, privilege, and systems.

This brings us to Black Lives Matter (BLM), which has become very important in the U.S. Has it affected your training and consulting work with American companies?

Let me begin by saying we’re a nation in civil war, and I don’t say that lightly. What’s been happening for the past 50 years is a competition of ideas. Do you accept that we are a pluralist nation and we’re better because each person thinks differently and that such difference is equally valid? Or do we continue to operate with one narrative that is largely prescriptive and does not allow for variation? That’s what we’re dealing with.

When I say “a nation in a civil war”, it can be frightening. But look at the language people are using today, the way they’re interacting on social media. The interaction of people of color not just with law enforcement but with the power structure — it’s brutal.

The first TV debate between Trump and Biden was a very violent exercise; it was very disheartening because you’d expect something better. To reduce this polarized atmos-
Joel Brown — continued

More and more people in these troubling times are reflecting on the state of the world.

sphere will require a mindset shift for many people. What I mean here is that a lot of what we’ve been doing has not been well thought out and hasn’t been designed to solve the problem. That’s why BLM is important.

What I see with companies that have contacted us is that about half of them are sincere or earnest. I don’t require companies to be perfect and have solutions; that’s why they contact us. The other half are companies that are defensive, fearful, thus they are reacting from an impulsively reactionary standpoint. Senior leaders don’t even understand why they’re doing this, they haven’t done the self-inventory to ask the essential question, “Why is this important for us?”

I met an organization recently and asked the senior leaders why this was important to them and there was silence. One of the leaders almost seemed offended that I’d asked the question. “What do you mean?” I said, “Yeah, this is important. But if you can’t tell me from a personal standpoint why this is important, then you won’t be able to convince your people. And I’m not convinced that you’re really invested in doing this work.”

When asked to do things and operate in different ways with a different mindset, a lot of people can find this scary. What often comes up is, “Oh, you’re being European. You’re being socialist, un-American.” But I do get the sense people are looking at this more deeply. My concern is how do we make sure that this moment actually shifts something? Where people become more introspective, looking within and facing uncomfortable questions.

But will they actually do the work? I’ve had people say, “So much is going on, what can I do? There’s not much I can do.” I think we’re still dealing with the idea, or fallacy, that the work is external and not internal. I’m hoping if BLM does nothing else, it helps people realize that the internal keys have to be addressed.

I’m now seeing a lot of people starting to question the mythology they grew up with. To recognize that the U.S., from a foundation standpoint, has never been an equal society. I’m heartened to see that some people are starting to be reflective. But what I’m also seeing is a lot of finger-pointing and polarization. And what I want people to think about is, How do I shift my consciousness? How do I cultivate a mindset where I’m always questioning things? To understand where I begin, in terms of my norms, and where the norms of other people begin? How can we create a society that works for everyone and respects cultural difference?

I’m not sure we’re there yet. I think a lot of people are hopeful, but it’s too early to tell. I will say that there’s a greater opportunity now to have conversations around anti-racism and white supremacy than I’ve ever heard before.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt

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Preventing Radical Fundamentalism

Thoughts from an expert on countering violent extremism

There is an interview with the Manager of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Prison under the Belgian Ministry of Justice, Selim Cherkaoui. Selim is a Countering-Violent-Extremism expert and a front-line practitioner who employs intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the development of workshops and tools for PVE (Prevention of Violent Extremism).

Tell me: why was there the need to create your office at the Belgian Ministry of Justice?

To better understand this, we must first go back to the Paris and Brussels attacks. At that time, penal institutions had no plan in place to deal with the problem of violent radicalism linked to extremist religious or political ideology. More and more people were incarcerated for violent extremist offenses, including Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF). Prison staff were hastily trained to pick out signs that might be suggestive of violent radicalism in certain inmates. This happened hurriedly and with much clumsiness from some self-styled terrorism experts seeking to position themselves and sell their services in a very flourishing security market. It was a big failure, because there was a lack of understanding of the ‘fantasized’ universe from which these radicalized young people evolve or of the underpinning social and cultural codes involved. Through a one-size-fits-all kit, prison staff were trained to judge someone’s level of violence based on the length of their beard or the symbols depicted in their tattoos. In the case of worshippers, special attention was paid to the way they prayed.

In other words, what existed after those attacks was a lack of nuances and discernment mixed with fear and paranoia.

I was fortunate to have been recruited to create bridges of understanding and provide some insight into the realities, in which these inmates lived. I am also tasked with helping the justice services in profiling inmates: separating the wheat from the chaff rather than seeking out and glorifying the most dangerous individual as most prisons tend to do. I say this because I have learnt over the years that by putting the most dangerous inmate under a special regime, the prison tends to give such a man celebrity status among the prison population, akin to that of the fictional character in Thomas Harris’ suspense novels, Hannibal Lecter. The others consider these “special” prisoners to be anti-system heroes or martyrs in the worst-case scenario.

Now that you’ve worked here for several years, what are some of the main triggers of violent extremism that you have identified, and how do they reflect the social experiences the inmates may have had?

The triggers must be analyzed in depth starting from childhood. No one is immune to the evil of violent radicalism. Violence is everywhere in our societies, yet it does not define the evolution towards an extremist ideology. We can carry extreme ideas and at the same time condemn the use of violence, but violent extremism is the combination of two powerful and destructive forces whose triggers are still poorly understood.
Having worked with many people who have used violence to try to achieve their political or religious goals, I will probably go against the flow of what we are used to hearing. I don’t believe in the idea of refusing to integrate yourself in a society as a response to the stigmatization you feel, nor in the decision to join an extremist group to express hatred.

I think that human beings are seeking to live for a higher ideal. I refuse to judge them. Most of us are living for high aspirations; we desire to build careers, to create and protect our families, and to look after our communities or the environment. In today’s society, where being a good citizen means being a good consumer, there is a loss of landmarks, and as soon as the first psychopathic guru comes along with a life-and-death plan for how you can fight injustice, the same injustice that you identify with, it might become dangerous. Through my work in this area, I can confidently say that one of the surest triggers is the influence of macro- and world geopolitical tendencies on the trajectories of these inmates.

What are some of the practical approaches you apply to countering violent extremism in prison?

We engage in active listening; always keeping in mind the search for similarity in a non-judgmental environment in order to provide the most appropriate services in prison. I also had to develop my own work tools based on existing know-how but with much emphasis on listening to my own feelings during an interview. I have met as many profiles as there are people; each person comes with their intelligence, doubts, prejudices, hatred and love. I had to use the singularity and intelligence of the person to allow me to take them where they ought to be and not in the opposite direction.

What has always worked best, at the practical level, is my ability to develop intercultural and interreligious dialogue with them. They tend to be very sensitive to this kind of discussion. From there, I could build my approach based on alternative narratives. I insist on the word alternative rather than the word countering.

Apart from working with the prison service, inmates and other major stakeholders, are there any projects you undertake to help stem the rise of such behavior amongst young people?

We developed campaigns to empower young people so they can carry the message to their peers. We have to understand that the message is better received when it is coming from one young person to another rather than when someone in authority delivers it. This work is carried out at the grassroots level, devoid of partisan political considerations or any calculated political purpose. And since youth are more connected via the internet, we also incorporate new technologies in our approach to tap into their vision of the world.

One of the projects I am particularly proud of is a campaign that has been supported by the OSCE (Organization for Security
Preventing radical ...  
— continued

and Co-operation in Europe), which is in Warsaw. The “Words into Action” campaign aimed to address anti-Semitic hate and what influences it. Through this campaign, I was able to dig into WW2 stories of ordinary people, mostly Muslims, who risked their lives to rescue Jewish people in danger.

I imagine there must be numerous stories that encapsulate the impact of the work you do on the lives of the people you are working for. Would you mind sharing one or two with me?

I will always remember a meeting with a prisoner not so different from others in terms of the themes discussed during our interviews. This inmate was inclined to share with me his certainties and doubts. Rarely has there been such openness during a first interview. The first session lasted more than three hours, and we covered many topics, often disagreeing with each other, but we kept the dialogue open.

One day, one of the guards comes to see me and tells me the inmate is practising takiyya. (In Islam, takiyya is a precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution). I was surprised by the very idea that the guard had learnt this word during a training; it showed me how much we were stuck in the negative portrayal of Islamism to the prison personnel.

I asked the guard why he thought that. His answer was: “What a joker your guy, the Islamist, is; he started to read the Bible. He’s hiding something, he wants to show he’s repenting, it’s part of the trap”. I was curious about this piece of information and decided to ask the man about it the next time he was in my office.

When he eventually came, the first thing he said to me was this: “I am reading the Bible; I see many similarities and common stories. I want to study comparative religion”. I knew the man and knew his sincere intentions. I encouraged him. After several months, he became my best relay for any meeting with new prisoners. With those who could identify with his story, he helped to create some much-needed openings for dialogue. Overall, in working with this man and others like him, I feel I have achieved one of my goals, which is to feed their curiosity and find a way to appease their torment. Not to de-radicalize them, though. I leave this word to the experts.

About Selim Cherkaoui

Selim Cherkaoui is a Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) expert. He works with prisoners to help them build resilience and accept responsibility for their action, preparing them to reintegrate into society once released. Selim also designs tailor-made disengagement programmes and has developed pedagogical tools and capacity-building initiatives for teachers to address hate speech by raising of awareness of the Holocaust in Muslim communities and developing therapeutic tools for the rehabilitation of young people who have been radicalized. He can reached at: linkedin.com/in/selim-cherkaoui-10259a38

The Golden Rule vs the Platinum Rule
The trap of projecting similarity

by David Trickey

In a recent poll on LinkedIn, I asked if people agreed with the following statement:

We should treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated

Known as the Golden Rule, this is one of the starting points of the intercultural training program my company does. How you answer this question can reveal a lot about your own experience in dealing with cultural differences.

We broke down the LinkedIn responses received from the poll into respondents who have ‘intercultural trainer’ in their profile, compared to mainstream business people and those with a primarily academic role. These were the results in percentage terms:

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<tr>
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<th>Total Agree</th>
<th>Generally Agree</th>
<th>Generally Disagree</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
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<td>Interculturals</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
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<td>Business</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
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While interculturalists disagree more, most respondents agree with the statement, although there are significant differences across the three groups. And what's wrong with that? Most major religions include a variation on this worldview. Treating others as we would like to be treated has become an unconscious reflex. And no, I would not like to be tortured or killed and therefore probably wouldn't wish this fate on others.

But there is an insidious assumption behind this statement — so readily accepted by the majority — of similarity...other people are like me, so what is good for me must be good for them.

There is a belief that successful relationships with others — especially with culturally diverse others — requires me to ‘put myself in their shoes’. But if we reflect a moment, it’s still me in their shoes. I’ve just relocated myself geographically. I’m having an experience of the world from the perspective of ‘me in your shoes’. It’s essentially a colonization of others. I have not left myself behind to experience the world through another perspective.

To give a trivial example, as a British person I may fail to feel the ‘rightness’ of why a cappuccino should not be ordered after 11.30 in the morning, claimed by many Italians, instead I think my Italian host is taking a fundamentalist stance as I assertively order my cappuccino after dinner in that hilltop medieval town in Tuscany — and get defensive. The video on the top of the next page illustrates what Milton J. Bennett, in Kom Ferry's
The Golden Rule vs...
— continued

The Inclusion Paradox, has called *The Cappuccino Effect*...

The Golden Rule of treating others as we would like to be treated works well when we surround ourselves with people similar to ourselves. The real issue behind projected similarity as a default is much more serious than arguing about whether we should drink cappuccinos after 11.30. It’s about the extent to which organizations are enhancing or compromising the potential of their diverse workforce — turning their access to cultural diversity into a business asset. It’s also about our very survival as a species. These are big claims. To use an irritating piece of business jargon, let’s ‘unpack them’.

Over the last two years I have been working with Milton Benet, who coined the term the ‘Platinum Rule’. In contrast to the Golden Rule of treating others the way you’d like to be treated, the Platinum Rule suggests we treat people as they would want to be treated.

Milton’s highly consolidated *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* shows the 6 stages that we as individuals, and collectively as organizations, go through as we develop an increasingly sophisticated and nuanced experience of culturally different ‘others’. The Golden Rule sits firmly in the 3rd Minimization stage which is still firmly but insidiously ethnocentric (my way of doing things — or at least the right way of doing things among others on offer).

Just bear with me for a moment. Minimization is about focusing on similarities. It’s based on the assumption that our own experiences are shared by others and that there are some universal values and beliefs that transcend cultural boundaries. While allowing positive tolerance to superficial differences by concentrating on the larger things that unite us — “we are all children of God”, Sting singing “The Russians love their children too”, “we are all here to increase shareholder value”, Minimization is insidious in that the dominant culture uses the implicit compass of its own beliefs to set the direction of universal truth to which we are all expected to adhere. In plain words, we are all the same, but we need to be the same in the way we (the headquarters, the most powerful country) define it.

As Milton says, Minimization is a good place to get to, but a bad place to stop. We need to move across a threshold to ethnorelativism (my way is one way) and accept that others are as equally complex as we are, but in a very different (sometimes opposite) way. We then need to learn how to adapt to their way of experiencing the world differently (for example, how does it actually feel to believe ‘coherently’ that it’s appropriate to drink cappuccino only before 11.30!)

Then, as we become practiced in moving in and out of dif-
The Golden Rule vs...
— continued

The Platinum rule presumes difference and the need for (mutual) adaptation to different worldviews.

Different worldviews, we can act as a mediator to integrate their way with my way, while maintaining our ethical principles not out of ignorance (Denial), fear (Defense) or ethnocentric absolutes (Minimization), but out of a commitment to choices from the many available in any given context (Integration).

Further support for the risks of projected similarity comes from the work of Daniel Ofman and his Core Quadrant. Ofman shows us that we tend to have an allergic reaction to the positive opposite of our own authentic qualities. If we are naturally focused and decisive, under pressure and in the presence of our positive opposite (someone with qualities of openness and exploratory), we may occasionally succumb to the excess of decisiveness, which may be narrow-mindedness and impatience.

As Daniel Ofman points out, the rational attractiveness of our positive opposite is less dominant than the emotional loathing for our allergy (too much of our positive opposite). So, openness is seen as wishy-washiness and exploratory is seen as time wasting. If we ask a focused and decisive person to apply the Golden Rule to an open and exploratory colleague, they will have a tough time seeing the world through the other’s perspective as the allergy ‘threat’ in the more primitive part of our primate brain takes over. We literally become mindless. That’s why we tend to have friends around us who share our own qualities and to which it is easier to apply the Golden Rule. The exception here, in the majority of cases, is the person we choose as our life partner. They tend to have qualities which are the positive opposite of our own (the motives behind this ‘special case’ of selection for difference is up to you to consider).

When we collaborate with people who have been brought up with a very different worldview, there is a much higher probability of having to deal with our positive opposites. To avoid an allergic response in the process of global collaboration, we need a more ‘advanced’ process of looking for difference until similarity has been proven (to précis Nancy Adler). The Platinum Rule provides us with that mindful window between stimulus and response and sits clearly within the ethnorelative side of the DMIS. It presumes difference and the need for (mutual) adaptation to different worldviews, and that requires conscious effort.

This road is undoubtedly harder work. Looking around me I see increased polarization when talking about cultural diversity and a retreat into comforting Defense and the simplistic stereotypes of us and them. Setting fire to people’s primal instincts in seeing ‘otherness’ as a threat runs contrary to what is needed for the survival of the species. Dealing with the bigger global issues of pandemics and climate change require us to collaborate across cultures. And this means going beyond the treatment of others as we would like to be treated.

David Trickey is a senior partner and co-founder of TCO International. He can be reached at: d.trickey@tco-international.com
We are all anti-racist, but — how do we teach this in our classroom?

by Kirsten Waechter

Not only since Black Lives Matter gained momentum, interculturalists have been tackling issues of bias, prejudice, stereotypes and diversity — and thus racism and discrimination in different forms. In this teaching tip, I would like to share with you three ideas of what I do in my classroom to raise awareness because for me, awareness is always the starting point.

1. How aware are we of our biases?

In this context, I work a lot with pictures. Pictures and images influence us very subtly and often we are not aware of our negative or positive response to this. One of my activities is called “Future biographies”. This exercise is designed to challenge our own perception of what is (stereo)typical. Choose pictures of children from different ethnicities and gender. Ask students to write the biographies of these children. Quite likely, their expectations will be shaped by race and gender. Then show them who these people really were and ask them to do research on them. Have them present their findings to the class and compare the results with their own ideas. In the strip shown above, I used pictures of Amelia Earheart, Katherine Johnson, Alan Turing, and Nelson Mandela.

2. How aware are we of our own privileges?

Like a lot of people, I see myself in a double-bind situation: although I might be discriminated against as a woman, I certainly enjoy privileges of living in a white, Western European country. Sonia Thomas’ quiz about privilege seems to be a bit trivial in the beginning, but once you started taking a closer look at the questions it reveals how many aspects influence the way we are seen, and how race and racism are connected to the lack of privilege rooted in the lack of money or social opportunities. Once you have asked your students to take it, you should not only discuss their results, but also debrief them by analyzing the questions more deeply: it helps to reveal how mechanisms of discrimination work and how often we take things for granted.

3. How aware are we of our part in history?

Pop songs can make a great vehicle for education. Beyoncé and Jay-Z did that in their video for “Everything is Love”, which was filmed in the Louvre museum in Paris. They pose against statues of African gods stolen by the French colonial power; they pose in front of a painting of Napoléon who repealed anti-slavery laws in 1802; they juxtapose the portrait of Madame Récamier with two black women sitting on the floor of the museum, sending the message that it was on the backs of black slaves that people like her were able to enjoy their privileged lives, and so on. Nothing in this video is chance or arbitrary and offers a lot of questions for the classroom. You may find Will Gompertz’ review of the video extremely useful in which he reveals a lot of the references to black history made in the video.

The SIETAR Journal editorial team invites you to share your ideas: how do you teach about racism in your classroom? For that purpose, we have created a google form where you can add the description of one activity or tool. Help us build a database of teaching tools in the fight against racism.
What happened was...

by Dan MacLeod

The giraffes were all wondering where the zebras had gone, the zebras were suddenly gone. What the giraffes didn’t know was the zebras had all gone to a colloque, a colloquium. And that was the problem right there. Some of the zebras spoke French and some spoke English.

But back to the giraffes. They hadn’t yet realized — as tall as they were, as far as they saw — that their world, too, was changing, would change, inevitably change.

The zebras, being low-to-the-ground, were tuned into grassroots reality, and they realized, rather than saw, that their world was becoming smaller. If they were to survive, they must do so together.

Which the zebras were having a hard time doing, as it turned out. First off, they spoke two different languages so, right there, you have a wall, a division, a defensive reflex. And, even in the “English” camp, you had the “American” zebras. Some had been repatriated from a sort of bondage known as a “zoo” but most were influenced by American TV and movies and music.

In any case, the “American” zebras called themselves zee-bras and the “English” zebras said zeb-бра. This caused no end of discord within an already endangered group, as the insults the two traded involved the very language-differences inherent in each tribe. In the upper classes this would be evidenced by wit and cutting remarks, in the lower echelons of society this would be words like “Limey!” and “Yankee Doodle Dandy!” Childish words yet harmful to adults and children both.

...Alors, imaginons les zèbres ! Think about the zebras at-large. All of them together, each a different group, a different tribe, different clan, different individual zebras as well — how complicated things can be!

And so the “French” zebras, to differentiate themselves from the inferior “English”...

And the “English”, in order to snob the “French”...

N.B. The reader will note that all national adjectives are in quotation-marks, to delineate superfluousness and idiocy.

No one knows where it started, nobody remembers which side, but what it came down to was the “English” zebras whispered about how they were actually pure white under the common stripes, descended from the “wild, white horses” Mick Jagger sang so wistfully about. And the “French” zebras were suddenly sure they were descended from the black stallions of “Arabie” and pure ebony beneath the common stripes.

Whereupon a pride of lions took tactical advantage of the useless cacophonic divisions and thereupon pronounced the zebras neither black nor white under all those common stripes—they were quite commonly red...and delicious.

What happened was...
Culture plays a very important role in defining a person’s identity, but it is also a determinant factor on how governments and the public react to certain issues. With the arrival of the COVID-19, it has been very interesting to see the diverse responses and results worldwide, as well as how culture has had an influence in many of those actions.

The United States and Spain have been two of the most affected countries, finding both in the top 10 rankings when measured by the number of infected citizens, the number of deaths, and the infection and death rates in proportion to population. Furthermore, I have chosen these countries because I have lived and had first-hand experience in both cultures during the times of coronavirus.

I have analyzed the behaviour of both countries using cultural dimensions from the cross-cultural researchers Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall. Interestingly, the countries have shown almost opposite responses.

**Individualism vs. Collectivism**

According to Hofstede, the United States is probably the most individualist country in the world, and this trait has manifested itself in the American response to the pandemic. The country’s priority was above all to protect individual freedoms and let their population make their own decisions and take care of themselves. Therefore, lockdown, wearing masks and other measures were just guidelines proposed by regional and local governments. The main motivator to follow these guidelines was “do it for your own safety”.

Spain, on the other hand, is a far more collectivistic country relative to the US. Because the collective was seen as more important than the individual, the national government imposed a very strict lockdown that restricted individual freedoms and avoided discrepancies across regional and local governments. Spain’s collectivistic culture was also shown in the people’s motivation to “do it for everyone’s safety”, shared in balconies, social media posts, and even songs.

**Masculine vs. Feminine**

The United States is considered a fairly competitive or “masculine” country, and there have been some actions in American leadership during the COVID-19 crisis that reflect this cultural trait. For instance, President Trump mentioned in a press conference that “if we [the United States] have between 100,000 and 200,000 [deaths], we’ve all together done a very good job”, highlighting the importance of the administration’s success in fighting the epidemic.

In relation to Spain’s collectivism, the country has proven to be mostly a collaborative or ‘feminine’ country. In a collaborative and collectivistic culture, the motivator in following a strict lockdown is to prioritize the taking care of the com-
Different leaderships...  
— continued

Low power distance and egalitarianism in U.S. culture often leads to disagreement with local and national leaders.

Community, especially of those who are weak and needy. This attitude is reflected in the exceptions made during the strict home lockdown, one of them being taking care of the elderly or people with disabilities.

Power distance
The low power distance and egalitarianism of U.S. culture has led its cities and states to openly disagree with their local and national political leaders. For instance, New York’s Mayor Bill de Blasio imposed a lockdown order in New York City contradicting the NY Governor’s statements, and several governors have taken action at a state level without waiting for a response or permission from Washington D.C.

Furthermore, several groups of U.S. citizens have completely rejected the coronavirus guidelines, claiming that the governors cannot restrict their personal freedoms with stay at home orders or dictating that they should wear face masks in public spaces. Demonstrations and protests have taken place in several states where protesters have shared their view about prioritizing their personal freedoms over the collective action needed to avoid the spread of the virus. In Michigan, a group of armed protesters demonstrated against the COVID-19 lockdown by entering the State Capitol and shouting anti-government slogans, including comments comparing the current Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer, to Hitler.

Spain, on the contrary, has proven to be much more hierarchical than the U.S., especially with the increase of authority acquired by the Spanish government during the health crisis. As soon as the State of Emergency was declared on March 14th, all regional competencies of the autonomous communities were fully suspended, and those competencies were transferred to the authority and responsibility of the Spanish government. Furthermore, the activity of the Congress and the Senate was fully suspended for 15 days initially, and later extended, leaving the decision-making to the heads of ministries and the presidency.

After two months of strict lockdown (no jogging, no fresh air, no use of common spaces in private properties), the government started allowing the regions to reopen with coronavirus de-escalation phases, but the movement of people between regions was still not allowed. And to control that, the Ministry of Health started using apps to determine the location of Spanish citizens to check and see if they were avoiding unnecessary journeys.

The Spanish government also cancelled in-person press conferences, creating a system that allows the government to censor information to the public. Journalists were added to an official WhatsApp group where they submitted their questions to the Head of State or the Ministers, and after the government screened the questions, only a selected few were actually answered at the press conference. The
Different leaderships... — continued

journalism industry presented the manifesto called *La Libertad de Preguntar* (*The Freedom of Asking*) to stop the censorship, but it was later rejected by the State Secretary for Communication.

Last but not least, the national police – known as *Guardia Civil* – started monitoring social media to reduce social conflicts and demonstrations during the health crisis.

**Monochronic vs. Polychronic**

An interesting example on how United States and Spain perceive time (linear vs. flexible, respectively) is their approach to lockdown dates. Most of the states in the U.S. that issued guidelines for safety measures and quarantine, announced the lockdown would take place for a full month with a possible extension. They know American culture is mostly monochronic and its citizens tend to prioritize promptness and good organization over flexibility, giving them the chance to organize themselves for the next month knowing that the guidelines would be in place for a specific amount of time.

In the case of Spain, a polychronic culture, the government announced a first lockdown of 15 days. As the deadline approached, they extended the lockdown period for another 15 more days, and as in the first deadline, it was extended for a third and a fourth time, 15 days each. In this scenario, the focus of Spain is on adaptability because flexibility is generally valued over organization.

The lesson learned from this study is that culture is a determinant factor when making decisions of how to approach a global challenge, even if the cultural aspects are usually disregarded or go unnoticed by decision-makers. Culture subtly affects behaviour to a great extent, and it plays a very important role in determining the leadership style and leadership response of countries and governments around the world.

Therefore, we should be aware of the cultural undercurrents that affect our collective and individual behaviour in order to understand the response of our governments and the reaction of the population to those government decisions. In addition, we should recognize what cultural aspects need to be taken into account if we want to make a change in our behaviour for the betterment of society in a crisis situation.

In conclusion, the leadership and public responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the United States and Spain have been very different and almost opposite in a variety of aspects. As we have seen, culture has had a significantly influence on most of the measures taken by both governments, as well as on the attitude of the public.

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A Brief History of SIETAR Europa

as we remember Mieke Janssen-Matthes

by Leslie S. Guggiari and Susan Vonsild, co-founders of SIETAR Europa and members of the SE Board 1991-1995

On May 7, 2020 Mieke Janssen-Matthes passed away. She was a co-founder and the first President of SIETAR Europa from 1991 to 1995. She was also Executive Vice President of the former SIETAR International (now SIETAR USA) and for many years a member of the Governing Council of SIETAR International.

She received the SIETAR International Senior Interculturalist Award and was also the recipient of the SIETAR Europa Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005, in recognition of her unfaltering support for European integration, and her unwavering energy and devotion to the development of SE.

The founding of SIETAR Europa

About thirty-five years ago, Mieke attended numerous SIETAR International Conferences and with her warm straight forwardness, impressed many regarding the importance of the intercultural field and how it was unfolding differently in Europe in contrast with the U.S.A., Canada and the Far East. She clearly and patiently explained (whenever an opportunity arose to do so) how SIETAR International was American culture-focused in its organizational structure, methods of decision-making and other management functions.

After a meeting of many Europeans participating in the SIETAR International Congress in 1988 in Boston, a small group met again on the weekend of November 9-10, 1989 in a monastery in Saarbrücken, Germany. Besides the host, Wolf Hemminghaus, in Germany and Mieke from the Netherlands, people attended from Sweden, France, Denmark and Switzerland. It was the weekend when the historical events unfolded in Berlin that would change the map of Europe. As walls were crumbling in Germany, SIETARians were busy deciding how to build bridges.

In 2009, on the 20th anniversary of the conception of SE, Mieke wrote to the authors saying, “I still have a feeling ‘Europe was in the air’ that weekend 20 years ago and we just tuned in! Certainly, one of the important moments of my life, when I look back at it from such a distance.”

In early 1990 in Paris, a small group of 8-10 people gathered to discuss a European SIETAR, that focused on a Europe without borders which was quite radical at the time! The Berlin Wall had just fallen, but East and West and national boundaries were well guarded. Each country in Europe still had its own currency.

The Paris group chose from the attendees present an Interim board: Mieke as President, Leslie Guggiari as secretary and Susan Vonsild as treasurer. Mieke shouldered the burden of getting SE recognized by Dutch law and finding a
A Brief History of SE...
— continued

The first SE meeting was held in November 1989 in Saarbrücken. Here, we see Mieke Janssen-Matthes, Wolf Hemminghaus and Leslie Guggiani.

physical home. The newly built Haarlem Business School kindly offered us a tiny room as office space and became the first official seat of SIETAR Europa. During 1991 we even bought a computer! Though nearly an hour’s train ride from Mieke’s home, she tirelessly spent 1-3 days a week for 4 years overseeing the office and our student helper.

In 1991 in Haarlem, the Paris working group and interim board invited as many interculturalists as we could identify in Europe to the first conference, which was held at the Haarlem Business School. Our key mission was to describe together the state-of-the-intercultural-field in Europe in 1991. It was designed as a mapping exercise, and then an exploratory dialogue about what role SE could play. We worked around 3 themes: education, immigration and business. The results of this joint exercise became the framework for SIETAR Europa.

Past President of SE (1997-1999), Vincent Merk recalls, “It was in the early 1990’s, when a handful of European SIETARIans first met, and later held the first Congress of SIETAR Europa (SE) at the Hogeschool Haarlem. It was the small beginning of something big! Mieke was our inspiring guide and determined leader in this adventure. She naturally became the first elected president of SE, and she set the foundations to help develop it into a truly European association 30 years later.”

The interim board, now officially elected as Board of SE under Mieke’s leadership as President, set about establishing the organization throughout Europe, while negotiating SE’s role within the SIETAR International network. Recognizing the different needs of the vastly different countries and cultures of Europe was crucial. It was also important to connect the grassroots with the decision makers in government and business across Europe.

Being cognizant of the need to organize our activities at different sites around Europe, north-south and east-west, the second conference was therefore held in Colle Val D’Elsa in Italy in 1992. The third conference in 1993 was held in Bad Nauheim, Germany, where a critical mass of German attendees meant that a SIETAR Deutschland could subsequently be launched.

Mieke took on the task of getting SE recognized by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and through SIETAR International, also at the UN – an important step for legitimizing our organisation. We were first-movers: the Council of Europe gave us support for the 1994 Jyväskylä, Finland conference to organize a Round Table of Eastern Europeans.

This was an exciting moment where interculturalists from the Eastern Bloc countries could meet and debate freely face-to-face! Even without a local presence, we took the leap and
organized the 5th and last conference under Mieke’s leadership in Prague in 1995, a successful conference with 250 attendees.

After thirty years, it is incredibly important to acknowledge that this interdisciplinary, professional and service organization, whose purpose is to implement and promote cooperative interaction among people of diverse cultures, races and ethnic groups, is still so pertinent today.

The birth and early years of SE were not always easy. There were conflicts and disagreements, but also triumphs and lots of fun. Mieke took us through many a debate — building SE was a hands-on exercise in managing real cultural differences — within a group of intercultural specialists! Mieke mentored subsequent presidents and boards, lending her support and acting as a bearer of organizational history. Without Mieke, SIETAR Europa would not be.

**Tributes to Mieke**

“What I appreciated Mieke for, was that she started a movement, made sure it was running, and then let it flow.”

*Marie-Therese Claes, President of SIETAR Europa 1999-2001*

“I have wonderful memories of her warm personality, her way of making everyone feel at ease, her gentle way of being determined in what she was saying and doing.”

*Robero Ruffino, host of second SE Congress 1992, Colle Val d’Elsa, Italy*

“Her hard work and enthusiasm inspired the many presidents who succeeded her. Her support has gone now, but her spirit still surfs on the waves of our European Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research. R.I.P. dear Mieke.”

*Vincent Merk, President of SIETAR Europa, 1997-1999*
Book Review

Why I’m No Longer Talking To White People About Race

by Reni Eddo-Lodge
Bloomsbury Publishing, 288 pages
£7.09

Though familiar with the BBC series on empire and colonialism, as a US reader I was particularly enlightened by the detailed history of the domestic racist story and its consequences which Eddo-Lodge presents in the first chapter of her work. We are all aware of the fact that “history is written by the winners”. It is a bright broad landscape, keeping the treacherous dark forests of misbehavior behind us and out of the picture. Current studies indicate that US parents, with apparent good will, largely hesitate to educate children about race because of fundamental misunderstandings about children’s capacities to process race.

Though the Preface was somewhat disheartening for this old white guy, this UK history would have been worth the book if there were not a lot more. Fake history is a resource and in an age of fake news it must be replaced in everything from schoolbooks to everyday media.

The second chapter focuses on The System, as found in the description “systemic racism”. It presents dynamics of that system through a series of stories of and interviews with those experiencing various aspects of racism embedded therein that they encounter in society and workplace. While there is a discussion of the debates around positive discrimination and biracial identities, these are not seen to be effective long-term solutions to dismantling racist systems.

Next, What is White Privilege? is discussed and dissected, ending with the question, “Why don’t white people think they have a racial identity?” One is certainly imputed to them in the racism discourse, no matter how varied their stories and ethnic experiences may have been. Ignored is what they have suffered at the hands and mouths of the “Chosen People”, so well described by Clifford Langley as “the big idea that shaped England and America.”

Acknowledging diversity among white people and how various groups acquired “white” status and privilege in both the UK and the USA is an important part of the racist story that cannot be listened to and is readily dismissed because it cannot be compared in intensity and duration to the racist oppression of other skin colors or called upon as a source of empathy. For the author, it is as if white people “all learn the lines from the same sheet.” Black disempowerment is white empowerment.

The specter of shifting demographics is used as political leverage — whites are threatened with the Fear of a Black Planet — the title of Chapter 4 — with the presence of and fresh arrival of differently skin-toned others, whether expatriates, colonials or refugees and asylum seekers, and seemingly inevitable threat of their growth in number. Again, as in the first chapter this was very interesting reading to one unfamiliar with the racist story of the UK, though
numerous parallels with the USA could easily be drawn.

Most of the recent best sellers on racist issues that have come across my desk have been written by women, so it is not surprising here to find a special treatment, The Feminist Question chapter exploring the particular effects of racism on women’s sense of self, sense of appearance and body image and their reflection in the media, or lack thereof.

Although the author values having been nurtured and supported by her own early embrace of feminism, she ultimately found the need to be part a black feminist group. This posture is accentuated by experiences that lead the author to identify repeated evidence of “the overwhelming whiteness of feminism”, despite the ever pressing need for a feminism “that doesn’t leave anyone behind.

Race and Class, Chapter Six, was likewise intriguing to this reader as the function and discussion of class has been more overt in the UK context where lower, middle and upper classes were clearly defined in an industrial economy. The present situation is however a complex mixture, betimes an intertwined and overlapping of race and class advantages and disadvantages.

In any case, objective studies clearly show Blacks, Indians and Pakistanis and Middle Easterners, and particularly women in these groups, at the lower end of both the salary and employment figures. Much of this chapter focuses on the topic of housing and gentrification and the defense of the “white working class” by those invested in the current order, which flies in the face of racial equity and immigrant support.

A final short chapter: There’s no Justice, There’s Just Us. Clearly, making white people feel uncomfortable in the face of racist birthed anger is inevitable. The DNA of racism is omnipresent in social, economic and educational structures. There is pain and bottomless anger for those continuing to experience it but another sort of pain for those who come to realize that they possess privilege and racism as part of their structural social and psychological anatomy. “Do something!”—the author’s parting words. Specifics are lacking — they are left to our insight into the opportunities to speak and act that surround us.

Books are written in contexts and the closing pages, titled Aftermath, briefly set us in the context of the hostility, and yes, racist-charged Brexit vote and Trump election. The need to manage despair and frustration is ever more pressing in the throes of the pandemic and find only a small sense of release in demonstrating for Black Lives Matter in the face of political resistance and repeated judicial disappointment.

Reviewed by George Simons
Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* is inherently difficult to talk about. Potential readers either think they must read it or that they don’t need it. Readers either find it’s full of things they’ve never found words to express or feel discomfort or anger.

How do you write about a book that by its very name and white authorship raises a long list of questions?

DiAngelo is a white woman who has spent over 20 years doing diversity work knowing that her very whiteness was an asset and a liability. She has an extensive list of free resources on her website: [https://www.robindiangelo.com/resources/](https://www.robindiangelo.com/resources/). The fact that a white woman’s book topped the bestsellers lists in Spring 2020 after George Floyd’s murder was controversial. Just as many people were trying to make space for black voices, another white voice was getting all the air time.

Perhaps the question is whether or not DiAngelo’s work deserves our attention when there are so many writers and thinkers of color we could be listening to.

I think she does, and that opinion comes from the idea she uses to bookend her argument. In her introduction, DiAngelo writes, “I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define a white progressive as any white person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or in the “choir,” or already “gets it.” It’s a bold statement and one that could alienate readers she is trying to reach.

White fragility, or an intolerance to racial stress, is one of the largest roadblocks on the path to dismantling institutional racism. It’s like trying to convince someone who’s pre-diabetic that they need to lose weight and they argue for body positivity. They are sidestepping the issue.

When people of color try to engage in a conversation about institutional racism or diversity or inclusion and a white person bemoans the fact that they seem to be wrong just by being white, there’s nowhere to go because the sympathetic and expected response is for the person of color to reassure the white person that they do many things well or right.

Let’s unpack the statement: “White people can’t get it right anymore.” Anymore. The “anymore” suggests that there was a time when white people were doing everything just fine. A pothole doesn’t come into being on the day someone calls the city to ask for a repair, it was there before. It was tolerated because everyone drove around the hole. Talking about institutional racism has not mystically been called into existence by naming it. It’s been there, a gaping...
hole, all along. Maybe we didn’t have a name for it, maybe we wore a groove in the path around it instead of acknowledging it. But it’s been there.

DiAngelo devotes one of her final chapters to White Women’s Tears. In it, she describes a number of tactics white women and men use to avoid discussing racism. She sums white women’s tactics up with tears that cause white men to protect her. Men have a list of options including “arrogant and disingenuous invalidation of racial inequality via ‘just playing the devil’s advocate,’” Simplistic and presumptuous proclamations of ‘the answer’ to racism” and “Intellectualizing and distancing.” She’s unfair here when she limits women’s options. Both women and men do all the things she describes, although men’s tears have a different effect on a room.

The point is that all of these tactics short circuit conversations. They get in the way of change. They keep white dominance intact. The intent doesn’t matter. The result does.

Most of DiAngelo’s book is devoted to explaining the concept of white fragility and sharing examples. It’s descriptive. Only on the final pages does she offer the white reader a solution. If the reader is made aware of their own racist acts, there’s something they can do. It’s this...

She continues to suggest that the readers analyze their actions and seek someone to help them understand it. Not the person who made them aware of a racist act, someone else.

The challenge for all of us in a situation where we’ve hurt someone, particularly someone we like or respect or love, is to hold space for their story and pain. DiAngelo’s instructions to the offending white person do not include explaining, rationalizing, or telling others what to do. It’s simple, just listen and reflect.

The simplest things can be the hardest to do.

I write a monthly book review on my blog. When I shared my July 2020 review including White Fragility, someone responded with a flippant comment about their own possible fragility or defensiveness as a reason to not read the book. It took me a full 48 hours to think of an appropriate answer. I’ll close with it here.

“I think the general response on White Fragility is that if you think it might not apply to you, then you’re the person who should read it.”

Reviewed by Christine Taylor
Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Anti-Racism Series
Dec. 9, Wed 18.00 - 19.30 CET  
"Biases of Intercultural Communication Theory"  
This panel will discuss the biases of intercultural communication theory, and consider language, power, lack of institutional, local and global contextualization, methodological nationalism. It may also cover the vague involvement with inequality and social justice, which too often also reinforces and intensifies the hegemonic power and normative way of being and acting.
Speakers: Livingstone Thompson, Elia Isotalus, Christian Höefle, Amer Ahmed

Dec. 14, Wed 18.00 - 19.00 CET  
"Decoloniality. Equity and Belonging"  
With a renewed focus on antiracism, we critically question “coloniality” to help frame our understanding of the world. It will invite collaborative enquiry into its relevance and application in the intercultural world, especially for those in the diversity space.
Speakers: Zarine Jacob, Carlos Gonzalez Carrasco

Jan. 13, Wed 18.00 - 19.30 CET  
"The Change Within: Liberating the Colonised Mind"  
In his poem, "The White Man's Burden", Rudyard Kipling encourages and motivates the white man to take on the role of a colonialist and devote himself to the gigantic task of taming the savages of the colonies. As an alternative to this dichotomous system of oppressors and the oppressed, that exists even today, this presentation looks at Paulo Freire's model of the "Pedagogy of the oppressed" strategies which can be employed in intercultural work to create awareness about racism. We will discuss constructive methods to liberate oneself from the warped doctrines of imperialism that are indelibly inscribed in the colonised mind.
Speaker: Pritima Chainani-Barta

March 3, Wed 18.00 - 19.30 CET  
"Understanding the influence of power relations in the dialogue about racism"  
When talking about racism, we do not hear the same message in Europe as we do in the United States and elsewhere. Our specific history stands in our way to be and hear the lessons the same way. When teaching about cultural differences, of course we as SIETARIANS have the luxury to be able to use numerous models, research, books and our experiences working all over the globe. In this webinar we will focus on systemic racism and how easy it is not to take notice when privileged.
Speaker: Seyda Buurman-Kutsal

CCC Breaks
Dec. 15, Tues. 11:00 - 11:40 CET  
What creative methods could we use in the intercultural training evaluation process for the full illustration of the ROI?
Speakers: Gabriela Weglowska & Graduika Kapaja

Florence, Italy  
25-27 March, 2021  
Living Together with ambiguities  
Distinguished speakers from all over the world and from different expertise, will be convened to discuss if: beyond cultural differences are there universal values that may facilitate human co-existence, although they may be embodied in sharply different institutions and behaviors in each culture? Under the auspices of the UNESCO National Italian Commission. For more information and registration, click on www.ambigie.org

Krakow, Poland  
22-23 October, 2021  
Identities in the VUCA World (online)  
The SIETAR- Poland virtual congress calls attention to the opportunities of managing and negotiating identities in today’s rapidly changing world. More info at: https://www.facebook.com/events/487698648505206

Podcast tip  
Listen to the podcast about So You Want to Talk About Race hosted by Kristen and Jolenta of “By the Book”. Download it at: https://bit.ly/talkaboutracebook

Online Everyday  
The SIETAR Europa group, discussing  

The Importance of Bringing People Together  
on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession. To join, click here: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2740568

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