In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued a paper entitled *The Race Concept* that had been drafted by a group of prominent biological and social scientists (reproduced in UNESCO, 1952). The statement used the term ‘racism’—then a relatively new term—to refer to a faulty and illegitimate science of human categories. It denounced racism in terms of two related elements: scientifically, it was seen to rest on beliefs about the attributes of social groups that were unsubstantiated by available evidence; morally, it debased human dignity by relating to people in terms of their ascribed ‘race’, rather than simply as human beings. It was therefore an aberration from the liberal project based on a false pseudoscience of ‘race’. *The Race Question* set the agenda for an anti-racist programme consisting of undermining the scientific validity of the notion of ‘race’ and combating ignorance about such matters through education. This agenda became known as the UNESCO tradition, and has gone on to form the basis for most top-down forms of anti-racism (Lentin, 2005).

In a similar vein, a statement had been issued in 1938 by the American Psychological Association (APA; reproduced in Benedict, 1942/1983), repudiating theories of genetic inequality of races. The APA statement suggests an ‘emotional’, rather than factual, basis for such theories. This, along with the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950) and *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport, 1954), marks a shift in focus within psychology away from the study of racial differences towards the question of why beliefs in such differences arise and persist despite being false (Billig, 1985; Duckitt, 1992; Pettigrew, 2007; Reicher, 2007; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001).

Unlike the UNESCO tradition, which deals directly with racial theories and challenges the biological reality of racial categories, the psychology of prejudice leaves the ontological status of racial categories unexamined. The agenda has been to explain when and how certain racially defined groups come to feel a certain way about others. Thus, while psychology (with some exceptions) gave up the notion of race superiority, it has rarely...
scrutinized the notion of race as other social sciences have done. However, it is instructive to situate the birth of the prejudice paradigm within the intellectual climate set up by the UNESCO statement. Just as racism was understood as a view of human categories that contradicted available evidence, prejudice was defined as a ‘faulty and inflexible generalisation’ (Allport, 1954, p. 9). The UNESCO tradition and the prejudice paradigm share a view of racism (whether originating in pseudoscience, psychopathology or both) as infecting modern nation states from without and contradicting the liberal values on which they are founded.

Towards the end of the 1970s, it became apparent that Allport’s own country, the US, remained deeply structured along racial lines even though de jure segregation had been abolished and most white people did not seem to endorse genetic beliefs about the inferiority of black people or to advocate segregation. Far from standing against liberalism, those who opposed initiatives for social justice such as busing and affirmative action appeared to do so on the very basis of egalitarian and individualist commitments. Trying to understand the politics of race in terms of inflexible and genetic racial theories no longer seemed to make sense.1

It was in this context that the notions of ‘symbolic racism’ (Henry and Sears, 2002; Sears and Henry, 2003; Sears et al., 1979, 1997) and ‘modern racism’ (McConahay, 1981, 1983) were introduced. According to this group of theories, contemporary racists deny that black people are still discriminated against, instead attributing their low status to their personal and cultural (but not necessarily biological) failings: being lazy and expecting special treatment on a group basis rather than striving for personal achievement. Policies designed to overcome disadvantage are opposed ostensibly on the grounds that such policies violate American values of self-reliance and individualism and violate democratic values of freedom and equal treatment. Thus, the notion of modern racism expands the conceptualization of racism beyond theories about biological hierarchies to a broader construct that allows for forms of racism that do not involve such theories. This expansion is justified by drawing on the concept of prejudice. Were racism to be conceptualized as a specific (pseudo)scientific doctrine of ‘race’, then the notion of a racism devoid of such a doctrine would be nonsensical (Leach, 1998, 2005). However, where racism is conceptualized as prejudice – that is, as antipathy – it becomes possible to claim that racism persists while finding expression in novel claims and beliefs not previously recognized as racist. Indeed, advocates of the symbolic racism construct are explicit that “the word ‘racism’ was chosen because the construct was thought in part to reflect racial antipathy’ (Henry and Sears, 2002, p. 254, our emphasis). In short,
modern racism is seen as both new and old. It is new, because theories of genetic racial hierarchies and segregationism are absent from it. It is also old, because it is an expression of race prejudice, which has continued from the past.

We make two related criticisms of this characterization of contemporary racism. First, we take issue with the assumption that racism in the past (that is, before the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s) always involved claims of biological superiority and inferiority, and argue that there is therefore nothing new about forms of racism in which such claims are absent. Attempts to draw a dichotomy between new and old forms of racism are further complicated by the persistence of supposedly antiquated racist representations. Second, we suggest that conceptualizing racism as prejudice has led psychologists to neglect the particularity of racism as an ideological phenomenon. We advance an alternative conception, based on that developed by Benedict (1942/1983) and Miles (1988; Miles and Brown, 2003), that can serve as a basis for a social psychology of racism that is sensitive to both its continuity and its changing forms.

Racism, old and new

From civilizing missions to racelessness

It is easy to see how the project of European colonial domination would have been bolstered by a representation of the colonized as having an inferior biological endowment. If colonized populations were eternally incapable of anything other than servitude, while their European masters were naturally endowed with the qualities needed to govern, then perhaps such subjugation would have seemed reasonable. Unequal relations of power would follow straightforwardly from unequal aptitude and disposition. Inequality rooted in biology need never change. Indeed, various such theories of immutable hierarchies of human types have been influential over the centuries. Notable examples include Arthur de Gobineau’s tripartite hierarchy and Samuel George Morton’s craniometry in the nineteenth century, as well as the particular hereditarian arguments articulated by eugenicists such as Charles Davenport and Madison Grant from the early twentieth century (Benedict, 1942/1983; Kevles, 1985; Miles and Brown, 2003; Smedley and Smedley, 2005).

Yet, as straightforward as this might seem, such immutable inferiority was not the sole view of race underpinning colonial projects. Rather, representations of natural and eternal inferiority coexisted with an alternative conception whereby ‘inferior’ racial categories were positioned at
earlier stages in an overall progression towards civilization, rather than being eternally fixed somehow outside of history in their state of savagery (Goldberg, 2002; Todorov, 1984). Colonialism was legitimated as a mission to civilize, whereby European refinement could be learnt by those currently lacking it. This representation of race, termed ‘progressivist’ by Goldberg, was even invoked to defend slavery, on the grounds that for Africans to move from a condition of savagery to that of slavery was itself considered a kind of progress (Miles and Brown, 2003). The notion that colonized people could and should be civilized through contact with Europeans became particularly influential from the mid-nineteenth century, even as theories of immutable inferiority were becoming more formalized and more popular in the biological sciences (Goldberg, 2002). Thus, representations of the inferiority of the racial other have long been varied and contradictory in their expression (Leach, 2002a, 2005).

If the goal for Europeans was to extend their civilized virtues even to the ‘backward’ corners of the world, then the people they ruled over had the task of becoming more civilized, which meant becoming more European. As Fanon (1967/2008) puts it: ‘The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle’ (p. 9). Similarly, Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) explain the notion of the ‘assimilado’, whereby it was possible for Africans in Portuguese colonies to attain a legal status similar to that of white people, so long as they could demonstrate assimilation to Portuguese norms, including the rejection of African heritage as inferior (see also Stoler, 1995). By introducing a sense of progress, a dynamic towards enlightenment, this understanding of race establishes whiteness as the standard to which the whole of humanity should strive, rather than as pertaining only to a supreme race as hereditarian racists would have it. We shall see shortly how this equation of whiteness with advancement and normality persists and informs contemporary racial systems.

Colonial rule, therefore, need not entail a doctrine of a biologically determined hierarchy of races. Rather, the idea that non-Europeans were culturally underdeveloped – as-yet uncivilized – but potentially able to become more like their European masters, informed representations of the colonized other. This stands in sharp contrast to the common identification of ‘old fashioned’ racism with doctrines of immutable biological hierarchy, and racisms based on cultural attributes characterized in contrast as ‘new’ or ‘modern’. We see instead that racist projects have long invoked historically contingent conditions of inferiority, with racial traits understood in terms of culture rather than genetics. If one seeks a dichotomy between old and new racisms, then it cannot be found in the
distinction between biological and cultural interpretations of difference (Leach, 2005; Todorov, 1984).

The constructs of symbolic and modern racism (e.g. Henry and Sears, 2002; McConahay, 1983), developed and applied principally within the US, capture a refusal to see the relations between white and black people in terms of the relative privilege of the former and the longstanding subjugation of the latter. Goldberg (2002) uses the term ‘racelessness’ to describe this condition. Black people are not seen as biologically incapable of success, as would be the case within what has been called ‘old fashioned’ racism. However, their unwillingness to adopt the appropriate modern virtues of individualism, self-reliance and so forth, which characterize the ‘American way of life’, is to blame. Black inferiority is understood in terms of inferior work ethic and values rather than inferior DNA.

In turn, the relative prosperity and status of white people is not seen by symbolic/modern racists as a case of privilege based in domination, but as the norm, and a standard fully available to black people if only they would adopt the superior values established by the white majority. Thus, whiteness embodies progress and normality, just as it did within the civilizing mission of nineteenth-century colonialism. This comparison is made explicit in Carmichael and Hamilton’s (1967) argument that the relationship between white and black Americans is literally one of colonialism: ‘As with the black African who had to become a “Frenchman” in order to be accepted, so to be an American, the black man must strive to become “white”’ (p. 46).

Kundnani (2007) has remarked similarly on the subtext of contemporary discussions about how best to render migrants to western European states as capable citizens. Deliberations over declining civility and measures to counter this are directed particularly at ethnic minorities, and even more particularly at Muslims, whose democratic commitment is constantly called into question. Under these conditions, naturalization is no longer simply the transition from one nationality to another, but comes to symbolize instead an ‘initiation into a higher civilization’ (p. 138).

Essentialism and problematization in ‘antiquated’ forms

We have seen that there is nothing particularly new about forms of racism in which the negatively evaluated attributes of devalued social categories are represented as cultural rather than biological. This should call into question any straightforward view that cultural racism has come into existence recently as a way of evading the egalitarian norms that have gained ground over the past few decades. Rather, they can be seen as a continuation of discourses of civilizing missions that were present...
throughout the ‘golden age’ of European imperialism. Not only do ‘new’ racisms have a long history, but supposedly antiquated elements are still expressed directly and continue to be influential. By looking at survey evidence, it is possible to assess the degree to which supposedly ‘old fashioned’ racist sentiments are openly endorsed by research participants and therefore get a sense of both their normativity and their explanatory importance. Our intention in this section is to call into question the view that old-fashioned forms of racism are being progressively replaced by modern ones as egalitarianism takes hold. This is not to deny the fluidity of the forms that racism takes, but rather to question the extent to which certain forms have declined in importance.

Survey research carried out in the US since the 1980s finds respondents still willing to ascribe negatively evaluated characteristics explicitly to black people. Even early work on the construct of modern racism in fact revealed higher mean levels of ‘old fashioned’ than of ‘modern’ racism among white Americans when the data were collected by a white interviewer (McConahay, 1981). Bobo and Kluegel’s (1997) analysis of representative data from 1990 finds 58 per cent of white Americans willing to claim that black people prefer to live on welfare, while 54 per cent claim that they are lazy. Only 4 and 5 per cent respectively make the same claims about white people. In contrast, ‘intelligence’ is ascribed to blacks by 21 per cent of the white respondents, while 58 per cent make the same claim about white people. These responses indicate a continued willingness of white Americans to explicitly devalue black people in the context of a formal survey interview, branding them lazier and less intelligent than white people. Similarly, Leach et al. (2000) have examined survey responses indicating a devaluation of a number of ethnic minority groups in France, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. In the nationally representative Eurobarometer survey conducted in 1988, respondents were asked the extent to which each target group came from ‘inferior races’ and ‘less well developed’ cultures. Thus, they indicated their agreement with blatant statements of inferiority. Although responses did tend towards the ‘disagree’ side of the midpoint, these statements were hardly unanimously rejected: proportions of respondents indicating at least mild agreement were 26 per cent in France, 30 per cent in the Netherlands, 38 per cent in West Germany and 41 per cent in the UK. In western Europe, as well as in the US, then, it seems that while the direct statements of relative inferiority associated with ‘old fashioned’ racism may not have been the most popular responses in surveys, they were far from being eclipsed by ‘new’ forms at the end of the 1980s.

Leach et al. (2000) also demonstrate that while mean levels of endorsement of relative inferiority were lower than claims of cultural difference, it
was the former that more strongly predicted general attitudes towards the various minority groups in most cases. Similarly, in Bobo and Kluegel’s (1997) analysis, white respondents’ ascriptions of intelligence, laziness and welfare dependency to African Americans were predictive of outcomes associated with both old-fashioned racism (objection to a close relative marrying a black person) and with modern racism (opposition to government assistance). Thus, ascription of inferiority to historically devalued social categories can still be both explicit and consequential.

Furthermore, social categories are still widely construed in terms of biology, even in contexts in which one might expect ‘old fashioned’ racism to have been displaced. For example, definitions of English nationality in terms of biological criteria received remarkably high levels of endorsement from samples of adolescents in south-east England, especially given the very direct way in which this was measured, with survey items using the word ‘blood’ (Pehrson et al., 2009). Although the tendency was to disagree with the items, less than half of the sample indicated more than slight disagreement. More importantly, construing Englishness in a biologically essentialist way was causally related to reported negative intentions towards asylum seekers, such as signing petitions and taking part in demonstrations to prevent them from living in one’s locality. Similarly, in the US, survey and experimental research demonstrates that a biological conception of racial categories reduces non-black participants’ concern about racial inequalities (Williams and Eberhardt, 2008). Other representative survey evidence also indicates that explicit genetic explanations of ‘perceived race differences’ in intelligence, ambition, mathematical ability and proclivity for violence are endorsed by a substantial minority in the US (Jayaratne et al., 2006). Again, such explanations appear to be consequential, as they were related to both ‘traditional’ segregationist sentiments and to ‘modern’ racist beliefs about black Americans’ culpability for their own low status. Thus, while social psychologists often view biological racism as antiquated and largely displaced by cultural racism, this appears to be premature.

A very particular derogatory representation that has historically been involved in racism is a view of black people as being like apes. Originating before scientific racism, but taking momentum from it, this association encapsulates a sense of black people as biologically inferior to, and needing to be under the control of, white people. Recent experimental work demonstrates that the association between black people and apes still exists in non-verbal, non-conscious reactions to visual stimuli depicting human faces: subliminal presentation of black faces, but not white faces, facilitates the recognition of degraded images of apes (Goff et al., 2008).
penalty in Philadelphia between 1979 and 1999, Goff et al. also demonstrate that language connoting ape-like associations was more frequent when the defendant was black rather than white. Furthermore, the extent of ape-related language in the press was directly related to the likelihood of black defendants being sentenced to death. The work therefore demonstrates that a supposedly antiquated form of signification and devaluation still operates, and may even contribute to the disproportionate use of the death penalty against black people in the US.

In Europe, the Swiss People’s Party has been particularly adept at using ‘old fashioned’ visceral symbols in its populist platform. In support of a recent referendum on banning Islamic minarets, the party used a poster showing eight black minarets sprouting like mushrooms (or missiles) across the Swiss flag. In the foreground stood a woman covered in a Niqab. Underneath it all, in large letters, simply ‘Stop’. In their victorious 2007 election, the party became infamous for a poster regarding immigration that contained the caption ‘for more security’. It pictured three white sheep standing on the Swiss flag and one black sheep who had just been kicked off it. In an Italian town controlled by the Italian far-right Northern League Party, a house-to-house search to identify and remove illegal immigrants in 2009 was framed in similar terms: this undertaking was to end on Christmas Day and thus became known as ‘operation white Christmas’. These three examples suggest that the blatant and ‘old fashioned’ use of black as a sign of foreboding and foreignness can be deployed in new, modern forms; the deployment of black as a sign of ‘race’ is both old and new at the same time.

Theories of contemporary racism and the ‘prejudice problematic’

Theorists of modern/symbolic racism argue that changes in the political climate brought about by the civil rights movement have led to corresponding cognitive and behavioural changes among white Americans, but that the negative affect towards black people acquired through childhood socialization is more enduring. Thus, the supposedly new forms of racism are thought to entail a stubborn residue of antipathy towards black people:

Conformity pressures, as well as the intrinsic strength of early-learned attitudes, promote the persistence of prejudice through the vicissitudes of later life. Realistic threats may come and go, but the solid core of prejudice remains, no matter how anachronistic it may become. (Kinder and Sears (1981, p. 416))

From this perspective, then, prejudice is an anachronistic residue that is resistant to change and must be projected onto new beliefs that are seen as more legitimate in a post-civil rights political culture. Beliefs about the
innate inferiority of black people and explicit endorsement of regimes of segregation (such as the Jim Crow laws) that fit a popular prototype of racism are seen as a thing of the past, having been replaced by the newer forms.

Advocates of the ‘symbolic racism’ perspective are especially keen to argue that new forms of racism are no longer functional for contemporary group or individual interests. Residual antipathy from an earlier era stubbornly outlasts its political utility. Debates about policies such as busing and affirmative action then act as triggers that arouse this latent prejudice and serve as the medium through which it can be expressed without being recognized for what it is (Henry and Sears, 2002; Sears and Henry, 2003; Sears et al., 1979, 1997). As Bobo (2004) puts it, the symbolic racism theory sees racism as a personal prejudice that ‘intrudes into politics’ with no ‘instrumental or rational objective’ of its own (p. 27). A related approach, based on the notion of ‘aversive racism’, similarly points to a contradiction between contemporary norms and prejudice (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000, 2005; Pearson et al., 2009). In this case, the tension is between sincerely endorsed egalitarian principles and automatic evaluative biases arising from mere categorization. Such approaches imply that while our social milieu endows us with a commitment to equality, our cognitive and motivational nature is a source of prejudice, and is therefore in conflict with that commitment. As such, all of these approaches are rooted in the prejudice problematic as identified and critiqued in this volume and elsewhere (e.g. Billig, 1985; Leach, 1998, 2002b; Reicher, 2007; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

The merit of the work described above should not be denied. A considerable threat to struggles for racial justice comes from a belief that racism is no longer a problem, that it is confined to politically marginal extremists, and that it no longer affects the way most people relate to one another in any substantive way. Empirical work demonstrating that this is not the case is therefore of real value. Such work includes, for example, evidence for the continued role of negative evaluations of black people in the formation of public opinion and voting in the US (e.g. Sears et al., 1997). It also includes demonstrations of routine, unacknowledged discrimination in employment and legal decision-making (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000, 2005; Pearson et al., 2009).

However, the theoretical framework within which this work has been carried out lacks an adequate conceptualization of racism itself. As we have explained, it could be argued that conceptualization of racism as antipathy towards black people has the advantage of not being tied to specific doctrines or ideological content, and therefore allowing for the possibility that racism persists while being expressed through novel
discourses under new conditions. However, because the transforming content of racism is understood merely as a progressively subtle expression of the same old prejudice, there is no interest in ideological shifts per se (Leach, 1998, 2005). This renders the investigation closed to questions of how white privilege is made sense of and defended or how anti-racist mobilization is responded to through changing political circumstances (Bobo, 2004). Conceptualizing racism as a residue from the past that is expressed through subtler forms in current, more egalitarian, times obscures its role as part of an active practice of subordination directed towards a future reality (for a similar point see Reicher, 2007). Thus, there is a price to be paid for the redefinition of racism from the doctrine of genetic inferiority to the various expressions of anti-black prejudice.

There is also a vast social psychological literature on prejudice that does not conceptualize it as irrational or divorced from material or social relational conditions. Accounts pointing to macro-social conditions rather than intrapsychic distortions have proved just as popular with scholars of prejudice over several decades. The classic work of Muzafar Sherif (e.g. Sherif et al., 1961), which treats individual-level antipathy as a consequence of negative interdependence between groups, rather than a cause of it, has left a lasting impression on the field. Ongoing work on zero-sum competition and intergroup threat, for example, can be placed in this lineage (e.g. Green, in press; Stephan and Renfro, 2003), as can recent work on relative deprivation (Leach et al., 2007; Pettigrew et al., 2008).

Tajfel’s (1978) pioneering contributions on the social functions of stereotypes, whereby derogatory beliefs about social categories are understood in terms of their legitimating and explanatory utility, rather than as cognitive distortion, have also left their mark (see McGarthy et al., 2002). For example, social dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) advances the notion of ‘legitimizing myths’ through which the privileged seek to perpetuate and extend their subjugation of others. And, a great deal of research on stereotype content focuses on its potential to explain and legitimate inequality and malevolence (for a review, see Mackie and Smith, 2002). So too does recent work on prejudice-as-emotion emphasize the ways in which emotions make sense of intergroup relations and suggest how they should be dealt with (for reviews, see Mackie and Smith, 2002; Tiedens and Leach, 2004). None of these contributions have entailed the abandonment of the notion of prejudice as antipathy. Thus, there is a long history of research that retains the concept of prejudice while viewing it, broadly speaking, as functional. This being so, it would be mistaken to characterize the prejudice paradigm as having pursued a crude individualism, or as having ignored the purposeful nature of derogatory feelings and beliefs and discriminatory behaviour.
Yet, we do not consider a shift from a dysfunctional to functional, or intrapsychic to social, view of prejudice sufficient to bring about an adequate social psychology of racism. The ‘race relations’ paradigm in sociology has been criticized, most notably by Miles (1988; see also Solomos and Back, 1994), for incorporating racial categories into its theorizing as though their ontological status was unproblematic, and a parallel point can be made about the psychology of intergroup relations. By incorporating racial categories directly into the analysis and asking how ‘whites’ feel about ‘blacks’, we generally fail to ask what it means to construe one’s social relations in terms of race in the first place, or how we come to do this. What is needed before work on intergroup relations can fully inform our understanding of racism is a psychology of racialization as a particular kind of social categorization. By developing this, we would put ourselves in a much stronger position to make sense of both the unity and diversity of racist ideology (Leach, 1998, 2002b; Miles and Brown, 2003; Reicher, 2001).

It has been pointed out that in its emphasis on generic processes, social psychology has largely neglected the particularity of social categories such as nationality (Billig, 1995; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001), ethnicity (Betancourt and Regeser Lopez, 1993; Leach and Brown, 1999; Zagefka, 2009) and gender (Cameron and Lalonde, 2001; Hare-Mustin and Maracek, 1988). In the same way, race and racialization have not been investigated in their own right in intergroup relations research (Hopkins et al., 1997; Leach, 1998). Indeed, the description of particular intergroup contexts as ‘racial’ involves importing common-sense racial categories into the analysis: for example, the relations between white and black Americans would be understood as race relations while those between science and humanities students would not. This might seem reasonable enough, but the point is that without any theoretical account of why ‘race’ is an appropriate theoretical category in the former context and not the latter, all we can do is to mirror common sense about some groups being races and others not. This means that the processes of racialization itself can never be scrutinized. A further consequence of the disinterest in the particularity of social categories is that the way in which, for example, race and nation are articulated together cannot be comprehended. Scholars of racism since the 1980s have noted the centrality of nationhood to racist discourses and practices (Balibar, 1991; Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987/2002). Yet, as far as most psychological theory on prejudice and intergroup relations is concerned, ‘race’ and ‘nation’ are simply two examples of social categories to which their theories apply equivalently, so the significance of the interface of national and racial categorization is missed.

In short, we are suggesting that social psychological research on prejudice has largely failed to adequately theorize racism in its own right. This
applies as much to theories that attribute a functional role to prejudice in intergroup relations as to those that reduce it to the dysfunction of bigoted individuals or the inevitable outcome of universal cognitive mechanisms (Leach, 1998). Consequently, we are left with no tools with which to trace the continuity of racism as it is transformed into new forms, or as supposedly antiquated racist tropes reappear. Our task in the next section is to outline the features of racism that a future social psychology of racism must attend to.

**For a social psychology of racism**

Our social psychological conceptualization of racism starts with noting the particular representational qualities of racist ideology and then suggests that the analytic focus needs to be on the semiotic and phenomenological forms through which these representations are instantiated in psychological and social life. While this approach follows that of some scholars (e.g. Benedict, 1942/1983; Miles and Brown, 2003), it has been criticized by others. Specifically, discursive psychologists have criticized this approach on the grounds that racist discourse is fluid, variable and situated, such that it is impossible to specify a priori what kind of representational content will be drawn upon in support for racist practices (e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Instead, these authors label discourse as racist to the extent that it legitimizes and perpetuates oppressive power relations; it is the effects of discourse rather than its content that determines whether it is racist or not. Yet, while racist discourse is indeed fluid, variable and situated, the same could be said of forms of racist oppression. Slavery is not the same thing as Jim Crow segregation, which in turn is not the same as excluding indigenous minority languages from school curricula or locking up families in immigration detention centres. Therefore, if racist discourse is to be defined on the basis of the practices that are sustained by it, then one still needs a definition that makes sense of the continuity of racism through its varied instances. Shifting the object of definition from content to consequence does not solve this problem. Furthermore, in their study of racism in New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter (1992) specify racist practice to entail oppressive relations between those defined ‘as Māori and those defined as Pākehā’ (p. 70). This highlights the difficulty of attempting to define racist practice in advance of the content of representations, but at the same time needing to refer to elements of those representations (‘those defined as Māori . . .’) in order to characterize a given social relationship as ‘racial’.

Specifying representational features that constitute racism, as Miles and Brown (2003) advocate, does not negate the variety of forms that those features can take. It is not specific doctrinal content such as pseudo-
scientific theories about race, genes and intelligence that is specified, but rather the representational processes of racialization and devaluation. These can operate through pseudo-scientific theories about race but also work in other ways. It is by attending to these representational processes, rather than by reconceptualizing racism as any discourse that legitimates oppression, that both the continuity and variability of racism can be understood. Thus, we believe that for a social psychology of racism, scholarship must attend to the process of racialization, the importance of devaluation, and a conceptualization of discourse and prejudice as signs with a particular social psychological appeal.

**Racialization**  Racism attributes social importance to human characteristics (Miles and Brown, 2003; see also Hall, 1996) by signifying populations as naturally and immutably different from one another. These characteristics have often fallen within Hall’s (1996) triad of ‘skin, hair and bone’ – visible features of the body. However, racialization is not primarily about visible difference. For example, anti-Semitism constructs Jews as a racial category (the term ‘racism’ was first applied to Nazi anti-Semitism; Balibar, 1991) without necessarily focusing on obvious visible difference. Indeed, the possibility of Jews passing unrecognized served to make them seem more threatening, necessitating deliberate measures to render them visible (e.g. the Nazi’s yellow star). Nevertheless, in many cases phenotypical features are often presumed to indicate a deeper, more fundamental racial essence that is more than ‘skin deep’. The notion of essentialism is pertinent here because an object’s essence does not reside in its surface features, but is merely indicated by them. Thus, racialization, as a particular form of social categorization, entails the essentialization of human characteristics.

Understood in these terms, racialization does not have to entail any explicit concept of ‘race’. For example, nationhood can sometimes be represented as a quasi-biological category (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987), and the term ‘ethnic’ is frequently used in both social scientific and ‘everyday’ discourse to signify what is in fact understood as racial (Hill, 2008; Zagefka, 2009). Furthermore, racialization does not entail a specific doctrine or theory: signification and essentialization can be done in a variety of both formal and informal ways. The representational features of racist ideology can therefore be specified without being limited to the definition of a particular kind of scientific doctrine.

**Devaluation**  Whether it is put in biological, cultural or other terms, what is achieved in racism is to signify a particular group as inferior in a way that implies inferior regard or treatment (e.g. Leach et al., 2000;
for discussions, see Balibar, 1991; Leach, 2002a; Todorov, 1984). Benedict’s (1942/1983) definition of racism as the ascription of ‘congenital’ inferiority (p. 97) is favoured by Leach (2005), precisely because (1) it makes clear that inferiority is the central claim in racism, and (2) it does not assume that genetics is the only basis for this inferiority. Congenital inferiority is present at birth, but need not be genetic. It is another way of claiming that the inferiority claimed in racism relies on an essentialist view of its target.

The inferiority ascribed to outgroups can rarely be understood in isolation from representations of the ingroup (Leach et al., 2000; Reicher, 2001, 2007). ‘Their’ attributes are seen as inferior relative to some semi-absolute standard of what good people are like. The devaluation in racism can also be more relative in quality. ‘Their’ attributes are seen as problematic by virtue of what they mean for ‘us’. So it is that attributes that are positive in some contexts (sexual potency, intelligence, power) can be construed as negative when they are ascribed to an outgroup that is viewed as problematic for the ingroup in some way. For example, sexual potency signifies a threat when it is ascribed to those who spark fears of rape or miscegenation.

Devaluation is also tied to the particular meaning of the ingroup category. For example, while immigrant minorities may in some cases be constructed as culturally different and therefore alien to the dominant majority, this alien-ness is a problem only because the majority construe themselves in terms of a national community whose nationhood is threatened by the presence of aliens. Similarly, the sentiment conceptualized as part of the ‘symbolic racism’ construct that black leaders have pushed too hard and that black people get more than they deserve (e.g. Sears and Henry, 2003) rests on a sense of violated ingroup entitlement or, as Blumer (1958) puts it, ‘sense of group position’. Blumer emphasizes that prejudice researchers need to attend to the social processes through which a sense of group position and entitlement is constructed; that it is not a straightforward perception of one’s structural position in relation to others, but an active, creative and collective process of construal. Thus, the devaluation of outgroups is fundamentally bound up with the construction of collective ingroup identities. Recent attention to notions of whiteness and nativeness in the human sciences has sparked renewed social psychological attention to the importance of ingroup identity in racism (see Reicher, 2007). Studies of white privilege and feelings about relative advantage seek to make explicit the ways in which membership in dominant or normative groups enable racism (e.g. Leach et al., 2007; for discussions, see Leach and Brown, 1999; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). This work has also examined the ways in which explicit group identity may
enable efforts against racism where individuals come to view their membership as immoral or politically problematic (e.g. Leach et al., 2006).

Discourse and prejudice as signs with a social psychological appeal While we view racism as ideology, it does not necessarily follow that this is in all cases linguistic. Racialization and problematization do happen importantly through language, but they operate through other phenomena as well, including antipathetic mental and affective states. For this reason, there is no need to jettison the concept of prejudice. For example, non-conscious associations between a social category and negativity of the sort indicated by implicit measures of prejudice can be interpreted as a form of signification, as people read, say, black skin as a cue to fear and African appearance or urban dialect as a sign of inferiority (Hall, 1996). The point is that ideology is instantiated in ways other than words (Durrheim and Dixon, 2005). A fuller account of racism, beyond prejudice, requires a reconceptualization of prejudice and of discourse as particular semiotic forms. One may think, feel, act, talk and imagine racism with the use of a wide array of signs rendered meaningful through such social action. A similar argument has been made regarding the need to account for the visceral, somatic aspects of racism (Hook, 2006). If it were to more directly examine the particular signs at work in the emotions that people use to represent the meaning given to groups, work on emotion in intergroup relations could fit well within a broader semiotic approach (see Tiedens and Leach, 2004).

Rigidly exorcizing mental or affective states from the analysis of racism is not necessarily the solution to the disciplinary failings that we have identified. While the study of discourse will continue to be crucial (see Chapters 7 to 10 in this volume, for example), the construct of prejudice, together with the various measurement technologies associated with it, also has its place when conceptualized as part of a broader representational phenomenon. The work cited above on ape associations is a good example of how this can be done (Goff et al., 2008). Making a place for prejudice does not necessitate assuming that prejudice exists prior to discourse, or that discourse should be interpreted as merely reflective of prejudiced mental states. Like all other signs, including the iconography of black sheep or missile-like mushrooms threatening the nation (shown as a flag), discourse and prejudice are particular ways of representing human experience and meaning. A social psychology of racism, and of all ideology, can be quite open to the many and varied forms in which such signs come if they are conceptualized as signs mobilized in the social psychological process of representation. Although discourse, prejudice, stereotypes, attitudes, emotions, etc. are grounded in semi-autonomous
theories and methods, they may be integrated within a broader notion of racialized signification.

Note
1. ‘Busing’ is the term used to describe the controversial practice of transporting children attending black schools (usually in city centres) by bus to white schools (usually in the suburbs).

References


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