

Colonialism and Racism in Australian Organizations: Mobilizing Business Schools for Social Justice

Authors: Celina McEwen (University of Technology Sydney), Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (Brown University), Alison Pullen (Macquarie University), Robynne Quiggin (University of Technology Sydney) and Carl Rhodes (University of Technology Sydney)

Abstract

Racism in contemporary Australia began with British colonization, enshrined in the founding legal precept that the continent was a ‘terra nullius’ – nobody’s land – free to be controlled by colonial power. Racism was deployed in colonial Australia to maintain control of resources and to achieve economic, social and cultural dominance over the colony’s First Peoples. To this day, colonization is a central determination of social injustice (Griffiths et al., 2016) and racism is a barrier to formal and substantive equality for Indigenous people (Murawin & Assoc., 2018). Australia is a country of multiple racisms. Until 1966, the White Australia Policy meant that only ethnic Europeans were allowed to immigrate (Tavan, 2005). The multiculturalism that arrived with expanded immigration brought new forms of racism, as well as sustained, and often acrimonious, debates over immigration and refugees. In 2021, the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner’s declared “racism is [still] a significant economic, social and national security threat to Australia” (AHRC, 2021: 4). In businesses and other organizations, efforts to tackle racism have had limited success (Steinfeld et al., 2019). The persistence of racism in Australian organizations presents an urgent challenge for business education to develop a new cadre of leaders for whom racial justice is a goal that is possible, tangible and desirable. Embedding effective anti-racist and racial equity programs in university curricula is an essential part of meeting this challenge (Allen, 2017). This paper contributes to addressing this imperative by assessing how Australian Business Schools can educate to redress colonialism and disassemble racialized workplace hierarchies and inequities through leadership for racial justice.

Significance and approaches

The significance and value of this paper will stem from its contribution to knowledge about how to educate business students to be able to achieve just outcomes in the workforce for people who have been marginalized in society on the basis of their cultural or religious background and/or skin color. The work will draw on, and contribute to, feminist business ethics (see Lim, 2018) and anti-racist pedagogy (see Kishimoto, 2018) by applying them to business education. Central to this will be an ethics practiced through relationality, capacity-building, responsibility, allyship and (self-)care.

References

- AHRC (2021). *Concept Paper for a National Anti-Racism Strategy*. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Allen, S. (2017). Creative diversity: Promoting interculturality in Australian pathways to higher education. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 251-273.
- Griffiths, K., Coleman, C., Lee, V., & Madden, R. (2016). How colonization determines social justice and Indigenous health. *Journal of Population Research*, 33(1), 9-30.
- Kishimoto, K. (2018). Anti-racist pedagogy: From faculty’s self-reflection to organizing within and beyond the classroom. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(4), 540-554.
- Lim, M. (2018). Feminist ethics and business ethics: Redefining landscapes of learning. In E. Heath, B. Kaldis & A. Marcoux (Eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Business Ethics*, pp. 131-147. London: Routledge.
- Murawin & Associated (2019) *Closing the Gap: Retrospective Review*, Canberra: National Indigenous Australians Agency.
- Steinfeld, L., Sanghvi, M., Zayer, L.T., Coleman, C.A., Ourahmoune, N., Harrison, R.L., Hein, W. & Brace-Govan, J. (2019). Transformative intersectionality: Moving business towards a critical praxis. *Journal of Business Research*, 100, 366-375.
- Tavan, G. (2005). Long, slow death of White Australia. *The Sydney Papers*, 17(3-4), 135-139.