



unlearning

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RACISM

Reflections and learning
from the past seven years



This report is for:

Black and Brown people, communities and movements engaged in anti-racism and political education work, we hope that you see yourselves in it, and know that you are not alone.

White people who want to show up in allyship and solidarity for racial justice. We saw some shifts in 2020 following the resurgence of Black Lives Matter which have now, predictably, died down. Allyship, solidarity and learning are not passive or time-limited. We hope that you see yourselves in this report too, continue to engage in self reflection and commit to a life-long practice of tangible action for racial justice, even when it is hard. Our struggles are interconnected.

Those engaged in equality, diversity, inclusion work, or so-called anti-racism that does not have the grounding in our histories, funders, analysts, policy makers. Our learning from the Unlearning Racism programme shares valuable lessons on making significant inroads into accountability to and for our collective liberation from what bell hooks refers to as 'imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy'.

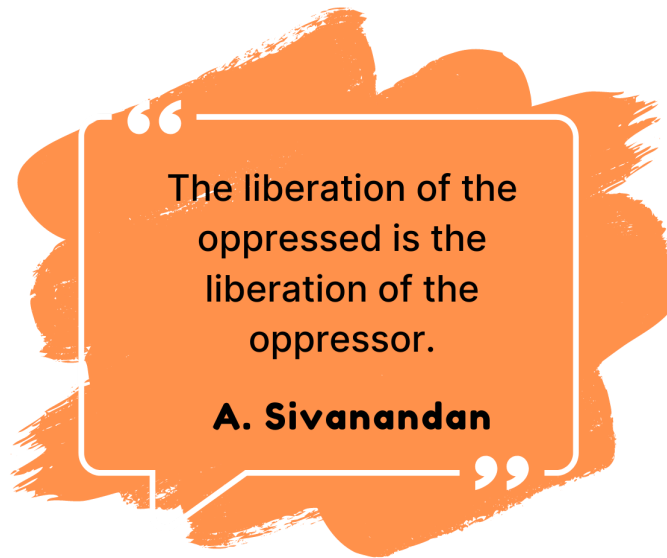
March 2024

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Introduction



'Unlearning Racism' is a programme at Racial Justice Network (RJN) that aims to mobilise white people and communities towards collective action to dismantle the structures and systems of white supremacy, under the leadership of and in service to Black and Brown movements for liberation.

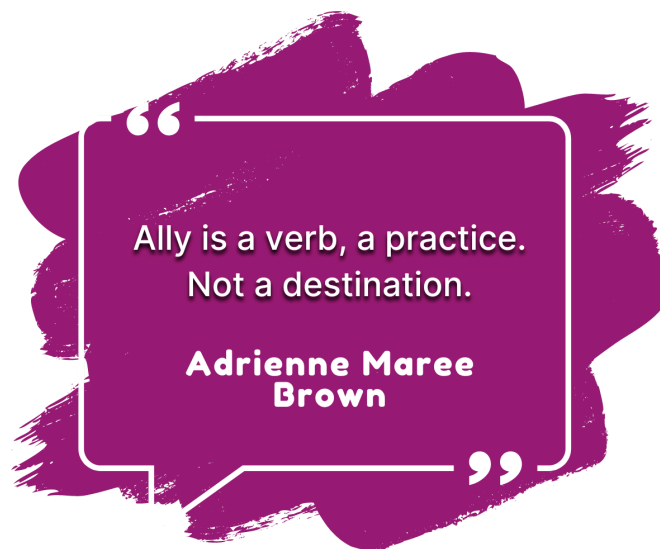
Some of the work of creating better futures for us all is working actively with people who are longing for alternatives to the status quo of white supremacy and are willing to learn. We see the need to bring these people allied with our movements along through the tool of political education and collective action embedded in transformative justice frameworks. This is reflected in the purpose of Unlearning Racism, as described in its manifesto:

The purpose of Unlearning Racism is to contribute and support Black, Brown and Majority World-led racial justice work. We do this by engaging white people and communities to unlearn racism, to increase anti-racist understanding and race analysis in mainstream thought. We mobilise white people and communities towards collective action to dismantle the structures and systems of white supremacy

The magnetic field of white supremacy and the deep conditioning to maintain 'order' means that what we set out to do has not been straightforward, simple or easy and we have learnt a lot in attempting it.

This report is one of reflection, learning and accountability to our communities, Black and Brown-led movements and ourselves. It centres the voice and experience of Black and Brown-led movement leaders as a measure of whether the Unlearning Racism Programme has served its purpose and fulfilled its aims.

The report also reflects the experience of the white people who have been part of this process from the beginning, who have held the work under the leadership and mentorship of Black and Brown movement leaders and elders.



The report is aimed at different audiences:

Black and Brown people, communities and movements engaged in anti-racism and political education work, we hope that you see yourselves in it, and know that you are not alone.

White people who want to show up in allyship and solidarity for racial justice.

We saw some shifts in 2020 following the resurgence of Black Lives Matter which have now, predictably, died down. Allyship, solidarity and learning are

not passive or time-limited. We hope that you see yourselves in this report too, continue to engage in self reflection and commit to a life-long practice of tangible action for racial justice, even when it is hard. Our struggles are interconnected.

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Writing This Report: What And Who Was Involved?

Methodology

We have used qualitative research methods to honour the wholeness of people and their multiple intersecting identities and experiences. Semi-structured interviews helped us focus on and ground their relationships in the fight for racial justice.

We interviewed six people who have been involved in Unlearning Racism in different roles, from course participants, members of the collective, staff members and mentors. They are Zoe Parker, Grace Deione, Maia Kelly, Mama D Ujuaje, Esther Xosei and Peninah Wangari-J.

This writing of this report was led by Peninah Wangari-J, Taiwo Ogunyinka and Anu Priya with contributions from Mama D Ujuaje, Esther Xosei, Antonia Halse, Grace Deione and Maia Kelly.

The visions for graphic elements included in this report were brought to life by Anju Lavina.

People Mentioned In This Report

Peninah Wangari-J

Wangari is an anti-racist activist, organiser and CEO at the Racial Justice Network with a focus on Coloniality & Social Justice. Wangari was the Lead Designer of the Unlearning Racism and worked directly to co-found The Collective, offering guidance, support and Mentorship to breathe life into the work and support its trajectory. Wangari offered movement support directly to co-ordinators, and facilitated the programmes accountability to the Racial Justice Network, and the wider movements for Racial Justice.

Esther Xosei

Esther is Reparationist, Community Advocate and 'Ourstorian' engaged in reparations policy, research and movement-building under the auspices of the Stop The Maangamizi Campaign and Maangamizi Educational Trust.

Esther came to the work of URC at the request of Wangari, providing mentorship to the 21-22 iteration of the course, delivering a workshop on the wider reparations movement, reparatory justice and her work as a Motherist and Internationalist. With reference to a UK context through the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Commission For Truth & Reparatory Justice (reparations declarations).

Mama D Ujuaje

Mama D is the co-founder of Community Centred Knowledge and a community researcher and facilitator using embodied ways that are restorative, reparative and transformative. Within RJN this work has largely focused on Coloniality and Environmental Justice offering support and encouragement to sibling project Race & Climate Justice. In the 21-22 iteration of the Unlearning Racism Mama D offered support and mentorship to collective members and delivered a workshop exploring a personal historical narrative of relationship between this work and current ideas around solidarity, with a focus on Ubuntu consciousness: the African inspired way of interdependence across all aspects of life.

Grace Deione

Grace is one of the Unlearning Racism Programme Co-ordinator. With a background in Youth Work And Community Development, they arrived at this work with a desire to explore and disrupt the oppressive facets of whiteness, challenging white identity, addressing the complexities of white supremacy through collaborative efforts. With a particular interest in understanding the extractivism perpetrated via colonisation and the legacy of racialised wealth disparities.

Maia Kelly

Maia is the other Unlearning Racism Programme Coordinator. She is a Leeds-based trainer-organiser of Serbian and Irish heritage. She is passionate about political education for co-liberation; advocates for solidarity across struggles; and emphasises inclusivity and the mind-body connection (somatics) for social change.

Terminology

Unlearning Racism / Unlearning Racism Programme

The overall programme encompasses the Unlearning Racism Course, and Unlearning Racism Collective, alongside other elements including, Action Learning Peer Support, Accountability Spaces and The Mentorship of Movement Leaders.

Unlearning Racism Course (URC)

The Unlearning Racism Course refers to the knowledge delivery aspect of the work and other learning-based activities and interventions, including the eight-week-long political education training workshops, weekend intensives and light touch webinar facilitation.

The Collective

Refers to the community of volunteers who have been engaged in the practice of lifelong (un)learning and have developed the work as a practice of collective action.

'Black and Brown' / 'Majority World'

Most terms used to refer to people who have been racialised (within the UK context) as 'ethnic minorities' prescribe identity in relation to whiteness. We use the term 'Black and Brown' and 'Majority World' people in recognition that we belong to a Global majority population of Black and Brown people.

Glocal

The word 'Glocal' combines 'global and local'. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of local communities and global systems, recognising that local actions and events can have global implications and vice versa.

Abjectified

'Abject' generally refers to something which has been made to be inferiorised and therefore in an unpleasant or degrading situation. 'Abjectified' is therefore the act of turning something into this state in a material sense or of viewing a people as inferiorised or degraded. It describes situations or conditions of such extreme misery and humiliation.

Transformative Justice

As Mia Mingus describes it, transformative justice "is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. Transformative justice can be thought of as a way of "making things right," getting in "right relation," or creating justice together. (See: more on what transformative justice is and what it includes [here](#))

Reparations

Esther Xosei describes reparations as not just a matter of returning stolen wealth or compensating for enslavement, colonisation and generational harm but must also entail restoring indigenous Afrikan knowledge systems of language, spirituality and philosophy, music, art and symbolism, as well as science and technology resulting in Afrika redefining her own knowledge systems."

Reparations are also actions and orientations towards enabling repair of those bodies, communities and environments of those which have been violated as a result of colonial extractions, exploitations and harm and moving them towards healing and self determination. This includes, but is not limited to repatriation as an act of full and proper restoration of what has been torn asunder through colonialism and human trafficking in the past and which continues today under coloniality. (See: [Esther's interview with ROAPE](#)) (Page 2)

White supremacy culture

Refers to the social, cultural, and institutional systems that prioritise and perpetuate the dominance of white people and white cultural norms over other racial and cultural groups. This term is often used to describe the pervasive influence of white supremacy on societal structures, institutions, and norms, which can manifest in various forms of coloniality.

Generative

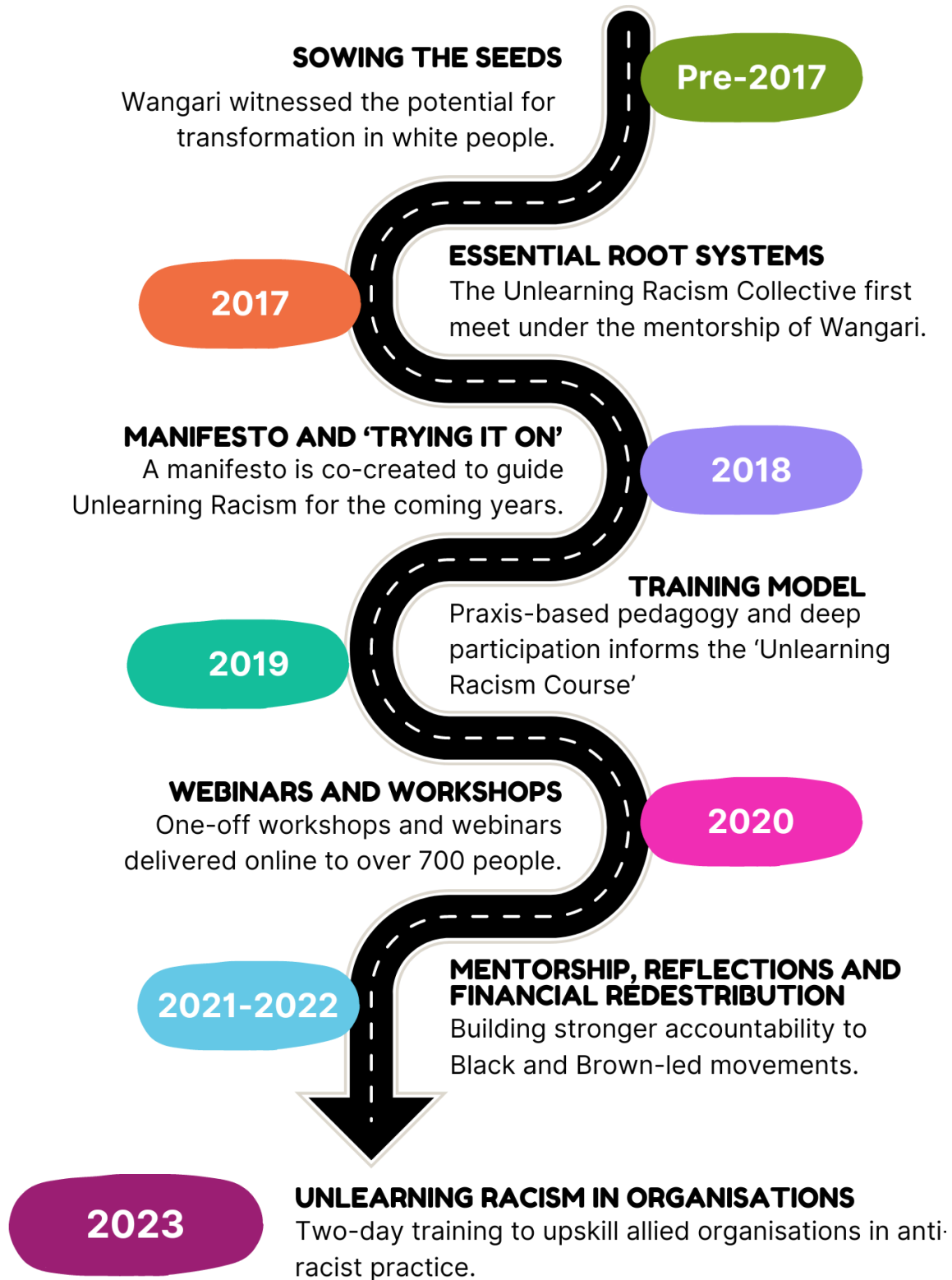
Generally means capable of producing or creating something, often in a creative or productive manner. Within the context of this report, we use it to refer to practices which are potentially restorative and which support decolonial ways of being and doing..

Radical

In her book *Women, Culture and Politics* and her address at “Let Us All Rise Together: Radical Perspectives on Empowerment for Afro-American Women”, Angela Davis says, “If we are not afraid to adopt a revolutionary stance—if, indeed, we wish to be radical in our quest for change—then we must get to the root of our oppression. After all, radical simply means “grasping things at the root.”

Activism makes use of this term to denote where we apply an analysis which invokes the historical materialist underpinnings of a given challenge. It recognises that for many problems that present themselves, that there is a rootedness to them. Because it is not accounted for during ‘business as usual’, radical takes on the energy of being ‘disarmingly new’ and ‘challengingly different’. Of course what it challenges is the status quo of white supremacy.

A Brief History And Timeline Of The Unlearning Racism Programme



Over the past seven years of its existence, Unlearning Racism has undergone numerous iterations, each contributing to its evolution. The following timeline provides a chronological overview of the program's development and transformation over the years.

Pre-2017: Sowing the Seeds

Peninah Wangari-J, CEO of RJN, had been in many movement training spaces that catered to and centred white people, and in doing so alienated Black and Brown people and put them in a position where they didn't have much choice but to expose the harms and traumas they face in the world and in these spaces to educate and 'move' people to recognise their humanity.

In one such seemingly radical space, Wangari refused to play the role that she learned was expected of her - to over-extend and give to the room stories of the violence she faced as a Black woman in the UK. The facilitator of the space disrupted their plans to meet the challenge that Wangari threw into the room - to meet her half way.

"I said (to the facilitator) that I'm willing to meet somebody halfway, but I'm not here to teach you from scratch."

- Peninah Wangari-J

The facilitator split the group, diverting the white people into a separate, caucused space. Within the caucus space white participants did some of the work needed of them, but not at the expense of Black and Brown people. It was in this moment Wangari witnessed the potential for transformation in White people *if* they were willing to listen, learn and do the work rooted in self - reflection to shift themselves by meeting the challenge required for anti-racist practice. The seeds of what would eventually evolve into the Unlearning Racism Programme were planted during this pivotal moment.

"I saw how powerful that was and thought... What if we did something similar, where I'm not there to see or hold their tears or excuse them and tell them it's okay, but they hold each other and do the work themselves to move to another point where they're not harming us. That's what I brought to RJN."

- Peninah Wangari-J

2017: Essential Root Systems

In 2017, Sai Murray (then Trustee of RJN) and Maia Kelly (now a coordinator of Unlearning Racism Programme) were on a panel, as part of a film screening for Raoul Peck's 'I Am Not Your Negro' documentary film and social based on James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript 'Remember This House'.

During the panel discussion, Maia suggested some ways the audience could help 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers.' Grace (now a coordinator of the Unlearning Racism Programme), felt unsettled by the use of terms 'refugees and asylum seekers' coined by the system to dehumanise human beings and called out this use of language during the panel discussion.

Grace now recalls this as a *"messy way to call somebody out,"* and acknowledges the display of her white saviorism in the interjection. Grace apologised to Maia after the event, but the public calling out had stirred a deep sense of shame and guilt. This led to Maia reaching out to Wangari, with a hope to learn more and be a better ally to racialized people.

Wangari and Maia met several times throughout 2017, speaking at length about the issues involved and highlighted by approaches to prevalent 'diversity, equity and inclusion' and 'unconscious bias' training and the need for deeper political education that addresses the root causes of harm - white supremacy and colonialism.

Wangari and Camille Barton, who set up the Collective Liberation Project, came together to co-facilitate a day-long workshop called 'Power Privilege and

Anti-Racist Practice' that RJN, Collective Liberation Project and Leeds Tidal organised together. It was here that people who would become the first members of The Collective first met. Following the training they wanted to continue unlearning - which Wangari and RJN offered to support and mentor. The readiness to contribute and the openness to knowledge played crucial roles in shaping relational dynamics, and cultivated the foundational root systems and groundwork for the growth of Unlearning Racism.

Rooted in a steadfast commitment which existed to centre and be guided by the wisdom, eldership and leadership of Black and Brown people who inherently understand, on a visceral level, what is needed for transformation and systemic change.

2018: Manifesto And 'Trying It On'

Wangari reaches out a hand of support to help white people who are well-intentioned, trying their best, willing to meet halfway and learn through 'unlearning racism'.

In 2018, founded on the notion of white solidarity and accountability to Black and Brown communities, campaigns and movements, Unlearning Racism launched as a 'Racial Justice Meet-Up Group'. This group was made up of approximately 13 participants who came together to self-facilitate a 10-week learning journey, with open discussions on race, white supremacy, colonialism and anti-racism movements and resistance. The workshops were designed to explore the nuances of systemic issues, encourage the sharing of experiences and collectively engage in ongoing learning and action.

"It is not about messing up or not being racist, or using the right words... it's actually moving them to action. From the very beginning, it was about how they apply the learning and how they are and stay in service to Black and Brown communities, people and movements. And understanding that liberation includes them, they are not just allies, they

do it to help themselves also. So that initial part and coming up with the manifesto was quite radical.”

- Peninah Wangari-J

In this period, The Collective, under the leadership and guidance of Wangari and support from former RJN trustees created a manifesto as a form of accountability. An excerpt from the URC Collective Manifesto is below:

We are a collective (based in West Yorkshire) who want to understand how racism functions inside ourselves and in the world around us. We aim to examine ways of thinking and seeing which are oppressive. We aim for this collective space to:

- Be a platform for ‘Action-Learning’, accountability and peer support;
- Be guided by, connected and accountable to anti-racist movements led by Black, Brown and Majority World people with lived experience of racism;
- Be a platform for, and space to learn from, the voices and experiences of those most affected by racism;
- Be a space to learn and practise solidarity - where actions are based on context and what is wanted and needed in a given situation;
- Acknowledge and credit those who continue to support us, and who help answer questions we haven’t been able to conclude through our own discussions.

2019: Training Model

In 2019, RJN introduced the ‘Unlearning Racism Course’ supported by ‘The Collective’. Inspired by a political education course in the US, Whites Confronting Racism, Wangari envisaged a course which prioritised praxis-based pedagogy and deep participation. The Collective was invited and entrusted to lean into leadership and facilitation of a caucus space for white-identifying folks and the development of a training model.

'I think it was the main thing was the trust from Penny to just have a go because there's only so much you can learn from the theory, from the text as opposed to when we do it in practice'

- Maia Kelly

The course facilitated a series of workshops and training modules emphasising lifelong journeys of accountable anti-racist practice. The approach involved unpacking shared lived experiences, utilising experiential learning tools, and engaging in creative practices to achieve embodied unlearning of racism.

'Unlearning is a lifetime thing to do. Unlearning the white supremacy, racism and knowledge in your head, then there's the unlearning of how I respond to these things, and then there's like the unlearning of this is how that knowledge lives in my body, probably due to survival conditioning. That is a longer term thing that you don't necessarily see.'

- Grace Deione

The training course was an attempt to go beyond theoretical understanding, encouraging participants to engage in disrupting systems of oppression. Alongside Peninah Wangari-J; Remi Joseph-Salisbury, Richard Tavernier and Sai Murray (then trustees of RJN) contributed to the course content.

"The trustees of RJN at that time were from academic backgrounds and were teaching or doing things around critical race theory. It was important but academic and dry. I gave them the content but with the movement, organising backgrounds and centring on grassroots accountability. I wanted something that brought the two together - the content, but also moving people to action."

- Peninah Wangari-J

2020: Webinars And Workshops

The murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement globally in 2020 led to RJN receiving an overwhelming amount of

interest in Unlearning Racism's work. At its height, RJN had a waiting list of over 1000 individuals and 40 organisations (of up to 300 staff).

Pivoting to online delivery during COVID-19, Unlearning Racism provided one-off training through a series of workshops and webinars to over 700 people. The workshops received great feedback from participants. However, the Unlearning Racism of volunteers struggled to keep up with demand and delivery halted entirely.

The pause in delivery came with a period of reflection for Unlearning Racism. While the political education was strong and well received, there was concern about whether the work was enabling lip service to racial justice without the tangible actions and change that participants committed to as part of the learning.

Mentor, Erika Thorne, shared insight around accountability that prompted The Collective to deeply examine relationships with RJN, as well as how they were mobilising and showing up for action beyond training delivery.

“Accountability is only as good as the actual relationships that white organisers have with movements led by People of Colour, Black and Brown activists. Which is only built through showing up”.

- Erika Thorne, Training for Change and organiser at SURJ-Twin Cities

2021 - 2022: Mentorship, Reflections And Financial Redistribution

In 2021 Unlearning Racism underwent significant changes aimed at building a stronger foundation of support and accountability to Black and Brown-led movements.

Wangari welcomed elders and movement leaders, Esther Xosei and Mama D Ujuaje to support the URC co-ordinators and the collective. The intention was mutual support - mentors support the collective and the collective show up and

support through tangible actions that support the movements and spaces the mentors lead and are a part of, towards greater racial justice.

This period also saw the formation of an 'Accountable Action Group', inspired by the 'Showing Up for Racial Justice' model, aimed to respond to the needs of grassroots campaigns and take targeted action.

In this part of Unlearning Racism's development, financial redistribution was emphasised as a form of tangible and accountable action to Black and Brown movements. 50% of course fees generated went towards operational costs and mentor remuneration and the other 50% was a contribution to core funds at RJN that is used to support Black and Brown communities. This was possible due to secured grant funding for the roles of the coordinators who became employees at RJN during this period.

2023: Unlearning Racism In Organisations

In response to enquiries from over 80 organisations (since 2020 in particular), the URC course was converted into an introductory package of support for allied organisations, with sector specific content to cater to different fields of work. This two day training package was delivered as a partnership between the Unlearning Racism and RJN's Black and Brown training and community organising programme, to multi-racial staff teams.

Launched as a pilot program in 2023, the organisational training was designed to upskill organisations in fostering solidarity with Black and Brown communities and supporting movements for racial justice - led by individuals with lived experiences of racial marginalisation.

It's important to note that we were purposefully selective of which organisations we would work with. Most wanted quick fixes and made extractive requests. Eventually, we agreed to work with two organisations who have engaged actively since January 2024.

Pedagogy Of Deep Participation

“

The first step toward liberation from the grip of white supremacy is to make visible the ways in which ideology, education, and culture work to maintain and perpetuate it.

bell hooks

”

Before we get to a synthesis of our learning over the last seven years, we want to expand upon what was our pedagogical approach to unlearning racism which has, at every turn, been one of deep consideration, care and a desire to embody the changes we need in the world.

The radical pedagogical approach of the Unlearning Racism Course is a deliberate insurgency against conventional educational paradigms. It doesn't merely educate; it propels participants into a radical space of deep participation where they are empowered to learn and actively dismantle their conditioning to uphold white supremacy in the day-to-day. That is the intention.

This exploration below delves into the core elements of the Unlearning Racism Programme.

From Isolation To Collective Unlearning

Working in relationship with each other is important to unseat the inherent isolation of white supremacy. It also disrupts the often hierarchical 'teacher-student' dynamic, instead working with people in their wholeness. Faith becomes a radical act, destabilising established norms and creating a space where participants feel empowered to question, challenge, and learn.

"I recognise the importance of people racialised as white taking responsibility for their own learning and being forces for good in the world, in solidarity. And the problems that come up when you lose focus, when you lose direction and when that work is disconnected from movement building of communities who are victims and survivors of racism, but in particular, anti-Blackness and Afriphobia, and other specific forms of racism that impact people."

- Esther Xosei

The course holds space for participants to process feelings, enhance self-awareness, and cultivate empathy. It provided tools for navigating relationships, leading to more authentic interactions and an approach to self and others that is based in repair from systems of domination and oppression. The emphasis on acknowledging and dealing with guilt has emerged as a crucial aspect of learning, facilitating focused action.

'I'd been working in predominantly Black and Brown spaces, doing youth work with people who'd migrated from around the world. As part of that process, I was confronted about how my whiteness had showed up in the room, and myself. That was the start of my awakening, I was working in a close relationship with a Black woman, and it was showing up in our interpersonal relationships and led to the breakdown of some relationships. I didn't know what to do with it or how to understand it. I felt a lot of shame. I'd been doing lots of work, but it had been me

reading all of these different ideas but I didn't have a context or anyone to share it with. When I did I was predominantly in Black and Brown spaces and it didn't feel right for me to always be doing that learning in those spaces. To what extent does learning impact those people, when you're on the journey?'

- Grace Deione

The Unlearning Racism course journey starts encouraging participants to confront their internalised racism, forcing deep self-awareness. The pedagogical foundation disrupts traditional educational norms by placing personal reflection at the forefront, compelling participants to unlearn racism collectively and disturb the status quo.

"Ultimately, my recognition is that as Afrikan heritage or global majority lineage and heritage people, we're always going to interface with people of the rest of the world who dominate the economic and other systems. If there's going to be any movement, then a majority of that movement is going to have to come from those bodies. As a mentor, I was a witness of how that wound healing was going to take place and what was going to have to manifest as a result of this internal work."

- Mama D Ujuaje

Participants express feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes, coupled with a pervasive sense of inadequacy at the start of the course. These feelings are important to surface, acknowledge and recognise as one of the ways we are conditioned to 'stay in line'. The profound acknowledgement of personal limitations and a yearning for knowledge and change is key to the movement from maintaining 'order' and to uprooting white supremacy.

I found it quite odd and awkward. It brought up for me a lot of things I didn't know about myself.. I felt a lot of shame, and I wasn't quite sure

why. And there were things that probably I couldn't entirely process at the time of the course. So for instance, I remember we looked at, white saviorism. I couldn't relate to it at the time at all...it's so much a thing that I just couldn't look at it. If I look at it now, I would say it's because of my upbringing. It's so embedded in my middle-classness.

- Zoe Parker, URC Collective Member

Moving Into Action: From Fear To Empowerment

Spaces for regular reflection with Wangari were not spaces of 'assessment', but rather for The Collective, revolutionary acts of self-determination. The Programme disrupts the notion of static education, embracing evaluation as a tool for resistance against complacency and by extension, complicity.

"The course was slow, deep and personal so that they can begin to really look inside. It was also for them to understand the structures that uphold racism as opposed to how racism is individualised."

- Peninah Wangari-J

Upon completion, participants underwent significant transformations. The narratives reveal improved racial literacy, heightened confidence in confronting racism, and a tangible shift from fear to empowerment. The course instilled a newfound ability to question white supremacist assumptions within oneself and others, fostering a more critical lens.

'It's not really a linear process. I'm not expecting to be perfect. I feel much more connected to my humanity and able to connect with people on that human level. The impact in my life is deeper connection, deeper relationship and deeper solidarity. With a complete awareness that I still sometimes mess up. It's how you name and acknowledge when you mess up straight away so that you can repair it.

- Maia Kelly

The Collective's initial structure as a horizontal collective of volunteers challenged the conventional educational hierarchy. Volunteerism becomes a revolutionary act of community care, breaking away from the transactional nature of education and relationships and emphasising the collective responsibility of dismantling oppressive systems.

'I remember being so nervous like, I'm in a multi-racial space, there's going to be so many white people in the room saying awful stuff and I don't know how to navigate that and what's my role in that? I was approaching it from a place of it being my responsibility as a white person to protect the people we were here to serve, but through Wangari's support and mentorship, I came to understand that my fear was keeping me from being with the realities of harm that exist whether or not I'm involved. My fear was in the way of what we were trying to achieve, and I needed to be with whatever unfolded in these spaces.'

- Maia Kelly

Action-Oriented Praxis And Solidarity Work As Resistance

The emphasis on action-oriented content and practical tasks was a deliberate and intentional fusion of theory and action. Solidarity work becomes an act of resistance, a tangible manifestation of learning that disrupts the passive consumption model pervasive in mainstream education.

For participants, the transformative learning journey manifested in real-life scenarios. They reported increased confidence in speaking up and intervening in problematic situations. Instances of challenging a complicated text in a book group, engaging in conversations about racism and homophobia, and actively participating in workplace initiatives highlighted the tangible application of newfound skills.

'I had learnt about anti-racism and intersectionality in academic settings before, but never has it felt so close and real as with this course. Incredibly confronting at times, and uncomfortable in the best way possible, it felt like it offered me both a lens to understand the world through and a mirror in which I could look at myself as a white person in a racist world; never shying away from the uncomfortable and always kind and transformative in approach. It has opened my eyes to things I don't think I'll ever be able to unsee, and given me tools for tackling them. A true fork in the road of my life as a person and as an activist, which I think I'll look back on for a long time to come.'

- URC participant

While some participants expressed limited opportunities to apply their learning, others detailed instances where confronting discomfort led to a rewarding sense of accomplishment. The spectrum of applications ranged from wealth redistribution, continuing involvement in Black and Brown-led campaigns against hostile environment and policing within RJN, disrupting racialised harm in family, neighbourhood and institutional contexts.

"There was a lot of action, for instance, I had issues with the RJN website and one of the participants, Jamieson, did it for us."

- Peninah Wangari-J

Mentorship And Eldership As Decolonising Agents

The involvement of mentors is an intentional act of decolonisation within Unlearning Racism's pedagogical design. Eldership is not a nostalgic nod to tradition but a radical reclaiming of wisdom and guidance that is considered a resource in majority world communities. It challenges colonial education structures that often dismiss non-Western ways of knowing and being.

“In terms of the accountability side of the mentorship - how was this attempt at working with the interiority of whiteness going to happen effectively, and what would manifest in terms of accountability, recognising what solidarity could be - the aspirational vision of it?”

- Mama D Ujuaje

Participants reported being able to recognise racism and white supremacy culture in their daily lives more easily. They gained clarity about their responsibility in challenging individual and institutional racism. The course's impact extended beyond the personal realm, influencing participants to question and reevaluate relationships with a newfound perspective.

“Having been a facilitator and trainer myself and having experienced all the pitfalls of that kind of work, I thought what RJN was offering and hoping to do was ambitious, but needed. That white people could take a serious look at this thing called racism and how they were going to tackle it, and to underline being accountable ... because you know you can do all kinds of things with your mind, but what you then go and manifest with your body is quite another thing. (The latter) is often the evidence of what really has one taken in and on.”

- Mama D Ujuaje

Financial Contribution As A Form Repair

Over the years, Unlearning Racism has used several financial models of resourcing the work being asked of the collective and RJN. Recognising the intersectional nature of our struggles, RJN offered pay-as-you-feel bursary places which were not merely about inclusivity but also a radical redistribution of resources. Unlearning Racism's commitment challenges capitalist norms within education, actively dismantling financial barriers and inviting participants to engage in a radical reimagining of resource-sharing. Some of the funding to

support the coordinators role as well as a trainer facing Black and Brown communities came from a connection established from the Collective.

“I could see there was a sense of understanding and humility from the people who were involved in the early days, but also action. For RJN, the very first office space and building we had came on the back of this involvement and contribution and the manifesto, which was quite radical. It wasn’t a lot, around £30 per month, but it gave us our first little bit of unrestricted money to pay for Bridge Street (previous RJN office space) when we had no other money. That contribution meant we could run a lot more sessions as RJN, including for other projects. There was a lot of action and movement on the back of that, including cross-pollinating other projects like Stop the Scan.”

- Peninah Wangari-J

Unlearning Racism Course Content

The approach of Unlearning Racism recognises the potential challenges that Black and Brown individuals face when participating in workshops where white individuals do the work of unlearning their complicity in racism. The training provides a caucused learning space for white-identifying participants interested and engaged in work supporting movements for racial justice to minimise harm to Black and Brown people.

The Course forms a comprehensive program commencing with a historical grounding in the roots of racism, shedding light on the impact of colonialism and white supremacy within the UK context. Through interactive discussions and video clips, participants grasp the systemic nature of racism, influencing political, economic, cultural, and social landscapes.

Central to the Unlearning workshops is an understanding of White Supremacist Culture and White Racial Identity Development, influence and based on the work of Tema Okun, Training for Change and Dismantling Racism. Activities guides white participants toward self-awareness, and a greater understanding of their white identity, and the role white supremacist culture plays in upholding racism. The course introduces intervention tools and learning from Transformative Justice frameworks, to encourage practices of critical analysis, deep listening, repair and accountability. Giving participants greater tools to navigate racial dynamics in complex situations.

The URC's action-oriented elements stress the importance of seeking connection and building deep relationships and connections with Black and Brown communities, as well as broader examples through wealth redistribution work. We highlight the importance of deepening participants' solidarity and fostering cross-collaboration to cultivate a culture of appreciation and relational trust.

The Impact

By Numbers

Over the seven years of Unlearning Racism’s existence, we have reached and impacted 59 volunteers, 882 white and white-passing people from hundreds of organisations’ across West Yorkshire and the UK.

This has taken place in a few ways, outlined below:

Year	Activities	Delivered by	Participants
2018	1 x course (8 modules format / 16 hrs pp)	The Collective	13 participants. (Organisation data was not captured in its first year)
2019	2 x courses (8 modules format / 16 hrs pp)	The Collective	30 participants. Organisations represented included: Refugee Action, Peace Museum, Bradford University, Leeds No Borders, Wharf Chambers, Barnardos, Yorkshire Aid, Refugees START, Red & Black Leeds, Campaign Bootcamp, BIASAN (Bradford Immigration & Asylum Support & Advice Network), Nightstop, Womens Holiday Centres, Bread & Roses Cafe, Leeds Development Education Centre, Zimbabwe Education Trust, Sisters Uncut Leeds, Deptford Pride, Rainbow Junktion Cafe, Leeds Creative Timebank, Yorkshire Life Aquatic Human Aquarium, Tea &

			Tolerance, Chapeltown Co-Housing, Quakers, Love Muscle, ASDA, Yorkshire Resists, Leeds Tidal, NHS, Seedbed Trust, Together for Peace, Cornerstone Housing Co-op, Leeds City College, Forward Leeds, Basis Yorkshire, Canopy Housing, Leeds Wood Recycling, Craven College.
2020	2-Part Webinar Series (5 hrs pp) 7 Intro Workshops (2.5 hrs pp)	The Collective	Approx 700 participants. This was a big coordination effort by a team of volunteers, which unfortunately wasn't resourced enough to capture exact data on the organisations represented. The audience was UK wide, representing hundreds of organisations including several sectors from Philanthropy, Third Sector, Public Sector and Private Sector.
2021	3 x Courses (8 Module Format / 20 hrs pp)	The Collective, Coordinator s and Mentors	57 participants overall. Organisations represented included: Dumontford University, Bradford University, Leeds University, Manchester University, NHS, Cloudwater Brewery, Open Source Arts, Community Arts North West, Tutti Frutti Productions, Parents and Carers in Performing Arts Campaign, Duke Studios, Rainbow Junk-tion Community Cafe, Voluntary Action Leeds, Bradford Rape Crisis & Bread & Roses Communtiy Cafe, Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds, Yorkshire Visual Arts

			Network, Sheaf Street, Duke Studios, University & College Union, alongside Schools, Housing Cooperatives, and a Prison Abolition Campaign.
2022	2 x courses (8 Module Format + one weekend intensive / 20 hrs pp)	The Collective & Coordinators	37 participants overall. Organisations represented included: Scouts, University of Leeds, Xanadu Housing Cooperative, Cornerstone Housing Cooperative, Seeds for Change, Suma Wholefoods, CLAY - Centre for Live Art Yorkshire, Resist & Renew, Bradford College, NVC-UK, Novara Media, Not On My Campus UK, Scottish Rape Crisis, Demilitarise Education, Meanwood Valley Urban Farm, FoodCycle, Clean Air Fund, Womans Equality Party, XR, Quakers, University of Reading, Open University, Possible (Car Free Leeds Campaign), Jubilee Movement Sheffield, Tight Lines C.I.C, Delamere Health, Chester Sexual Abuse Support Service (CSASS), Virtual Migrants, Collective Encounters Liverpool, University of Bristol and Edge Hill University.
2023	X2 Organisation training packages	Coordinator & Black and Brown Spaces Facilitator	45 participants overall From across two organisations; Wharf Chambers & Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds.

Feedback On Impact

Below is anonymous feedback from participants of the Unlearning Racism programme about their experiences and impacts they have felt from their engagement and (un)learning.

Shared understanding and legitimacy of ideas when backed by others:

"The training always prioritised allocating places to people in West Yorkshire, only offering unsold places to those in other regions around the UK. Following the courses, everyone who took part is added into the same whatsapp group, and invited to attend peer support sessions and meetings to maintain a community of practice and action beyond the course."

"I've felt and witnessed the impact of this network locally. There have been plenty of community, grassroots or third sector meetings that I've been in, where there might be a few people in the room who have been through the course. This creates a sense of knowing that we share a vaguely similar position on this, and feeling of being part of a network."

"There have been a lot of instances where I have witnessed a conversation or decision upholding white supremacy, and it has been so valuable having other people in the room you trust to back up your constructive challenge. It legitimises the challenge being made when there are a number of people in the room who share the same understanding - and you don't feel so isolated when leaning into the risks that come with challenging the status quo."

People with lived experience of racialisation as Black and Brown referring white people to the course:

"There have been several instances where my friends have fed back that they found it useful to signpost white people in their lives - partners, friends, colleagues, organisations - to the course, after experiencing racial

marginalisation in their relationships or organisations, so the labour of educating didn't fall on them."

Examples of bystander intervention and solidarity:

One participant gave an example of a situation where a white woman would use racist tropes against a Black man in her neighbourhood.

"Because of the work we have done together I was able to recognise the ways in which systemic racism plays into this. The impact was we could have a transparent conversation mutually agreeing that I could use my privilege in this situation to contact the housing office to report the situation. It's a kind of conversation I would never have dreamed we might have had before doing the course.

I then made it very clear to the housing staff, that her accusations toward him of violence which were all unfounded and put him in a dangerous situation that he might not feel able to speak up about in case he wasn't believed. I insisted they speak with him and put in a complaint about her harassment of him - which it really was - despite her very real need for mental health and psychiatric support. After that they contacted him on a number of occasions to check he was all right, so that he got reassurance they understood he was the innocent party in this."

Examples of wealth redistribution:

"It's (the course) made me really committed to not just understanding racial wealth disparities but also looking at redistribution more practically. For example, I now try to redistribute 10% of my income every year to Black and Brown organisations. Though I have quite a low income and it doesn't always happen - I usually hit around five or seven percent. My partner and I inherited wealth, and we redistributed £20,000 pounds of that to Black and Brown organisations or people who we know in our life. As a Collective there have been fundraisers we have mobilised to grassroots fundraise for such as for

Decolonising Economics, and PRALER by donating ourselves and asking others to match fund'

Impact on organisations:

Feedback from an Organisation involved in the most recent Organisation pilot training suggests that the work of Unlearning Racism was impactful as it gave legitimacy and credibility when challenging harm in the workplace. Staff were able to signpost learning from the training to reaffirm the appropriate course of action and demand resolutions in line with policies, to ensure resolutions were reached and interpersonal relationships were somewhat repaired.

"It could have been a very different situation if we hadn't had the training beforehand. Whilst the response was slow, we got there in the end. It allowed me to pose the question, can we imagine what the response would have been if it was a white staff member?"

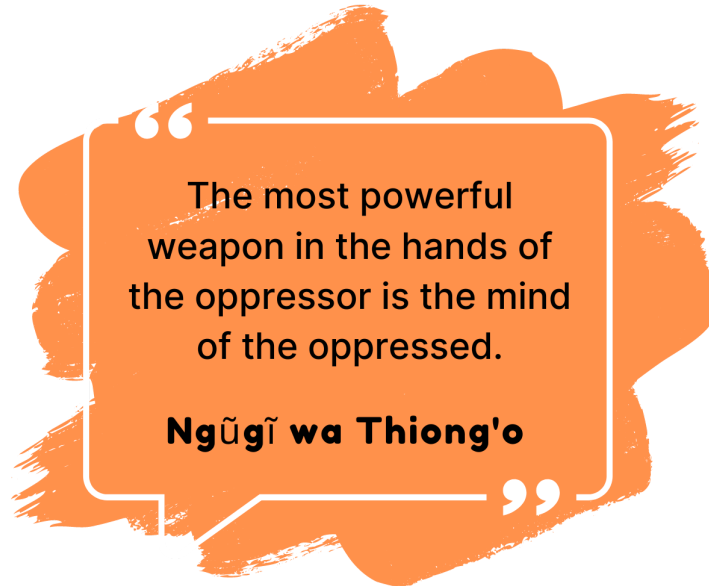
- Vania Belen Suarez Botelho, Company Director

Whilst those who attended the Unlearning Programme, via Organisation sponsored places on the course reported some long term impacts in their housing project;

"I lived in a majority white housing project which had caused racialised harm to a Black woman, leading her to leave the community. There were 4 of us who had completed the course, and so we were able to jointly organise an accountability process for the community, which involved white people committing to monthly self-facilitated unlearning racism spaces, accountable to those most at risk of racialized harm in the community. It didn't resolve the issues of racism which are ever present. It did however lead to a long term, explicit commitment to anti-racist practice. Over the years this has shifted the politics, identity and make-up of the space, to be more inclusive, welcoming and collectively committed to intervening in racialized harm when it occurs"

- URC participant

Reflections And Learning From The Past Seven Years



Unlearning Racism was set up to be a radical space of political education. Over six years, it emerged as a transformative space for participants. It started as a small reading and accountability group and evolved into a dynamic platform dedicated to unlearning racism and supporting Black, Brown-led racial justice movements.

There has been a lot of learning over this time, through its many iterations. We share them below under themes.

Theme One: Showing Up

The makeup of people who were interested in and eventually participated in Unlearning Racism workshops, webinars and courses broadly fall into two categories:

- People who wanted to be allies to people racialised as Black or Brown and wanted to learn more about how they could this

- People who might have had the same motivations as above *and* had also experienced or know something of the experience of being 'othered', either through gender, disability, class, migration.

"I expected trust before. I went into the organisation before, and was like why wouldn't you trust me? Why couldn't we just work in a relationship with each other? It's like a massive amount of presumed privilege there. Whereas I feel like with RJN, I've come in and been like, I'm gonna work for your trust. It's crucial to do this work, to come with an openness of what is needed to be in the space, and to do the work."

- Grace Deione

From our experience, it was the latter group of people who stayed longer and were committed to more tangible action when the learning elements of the work had concluded. This reflects who the course was initially designed for:

"I didn't want to do this work with organisations or people who are pushed to come and do the course, because chances are they're not coming with open hearts and minds, and there's also debating our experiences. This was not going to be a debate. This was going to be a conversation with people we could trust are coming from a place where they want to learn and they have chosen to be here."

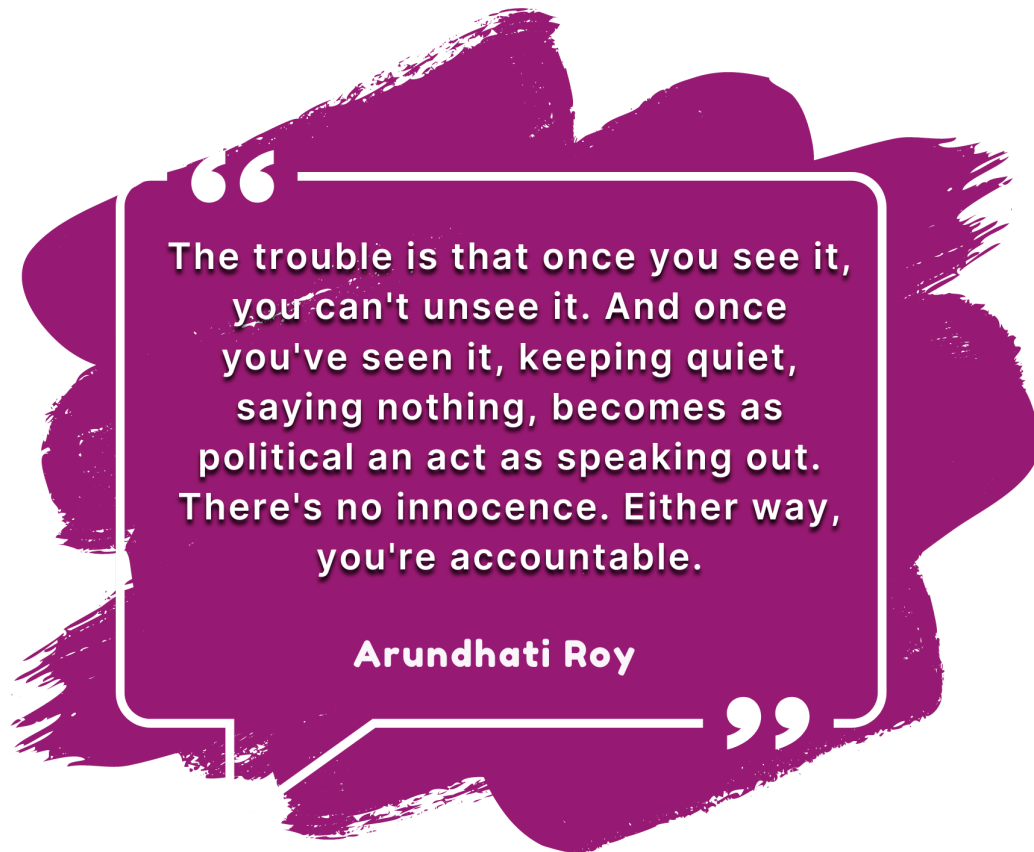
- Peninah Wangari-J

Ahead of working with organisations, we created a statement of intent which attracted allied organisations who were willing to commit to:

- A commitment of long-term sustained solidarity
- Lifelong engagement in addressing whiteness and racism
- Active implementation of social justice interventions
- Disrupting cycles of oppression
- Meaningful resource redistribution

A core part of working with organisations was ensuring accountability mechanisms that centre the experiences and vision of those most at risk of racialised harm within the organisation.

Theme Two: The Paralysing Power Of Shame



The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable.

Arundhati Roy

The drive towards wanting to learn and change things that brought people to Unlearning Racism in the first place was largely motivated by the palpable shame and guilt we saw playing out in response to the events of 2020. The true longing and deep commitment to unseat our collective conditioning to uphold white supremacy in all its forms requires us to undo ourselves. This is a life-long commitment.

Shame and guilt can move people to action, but it cannot sustain the action or support the repair necessary in order to be in true solidarity.

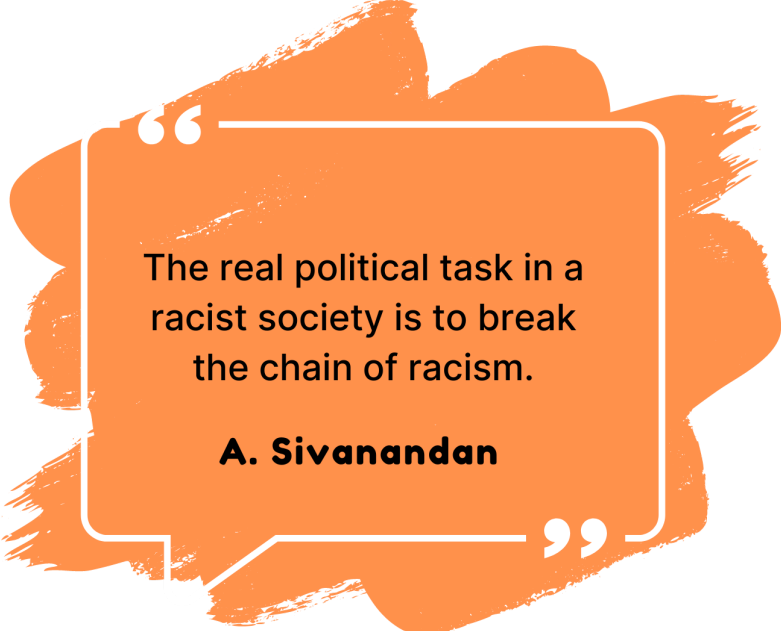
Theme Three: Isolation As A Tool Of Disconnection

Learning from Wangari's experience of safeguarding against extraction and exploitation (see page 11), we asked white people interested in unlearning racism to meet us halfway and engage with us on our terms. In the wake of movements towards racial justice in 2020, white people were more readily willing to do so. Unfortunately, the half-way point has since changed and moved closer to the comfort of whiteness. With it has come the expectation that Black and Brown people will over-extend and meet them at the boundary line that they have set.

This changing of the halfway mark is within the social, economic and political contexts of the UK, which over the lifetime of Unlearning Racism has continued to become worse for those at the sharpest ends of injustice. In the face of the continued violence of the systems we live in, people have to choose where they place their limited energy and capacity.

Whilst understandable, it is important for us to recognise these tendencies towards isolation and into single-issue areas for what they are - a tool of white supremacy to keep us separate. Cultural norms of white supremacy culture necessitates a hierarchy of oppressions, recognising some as more important or worthy of attention over others.

This hierarchy is ever-changing and adapts to whatever shape allows and supports dominant power to stay intact. The ways we respond to these blocks are often in isolation, individualised and in competition within different parts of our multifaceted selves and with each other, rather than working towards collective liberation for us all.



“
The real political task in a
racist society is to break
the chain of racism.
”

A. Sivanandan

The power of white supremacy can only exist when we are disconnected from ourselves and each other.

As ever, we are left with the questions - Who gets to walk away? Who gets left behind? Who is expected to pick up the labour of what is left behind?

But again, a question that kept coming up for me in the process of being a mentor was 'how is this course remaining accountable', and I feel that wasn't clear and there was some broken accountability. I was impressed with the manifesto which was the basis for the work, and the accountability framework from Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) which spoke very clearly about the importance of what it means to be accountable, in that case to Black organisations. So I had expectations that that's what this course would be about, but those expectations were not met."

- Esther Xosei

Theme Four: Personal Transformation vs Collective Transformation

It is clear that the Unlearning Racism Programme has supported people in personal transformation. While personal transformation is a necessary step of repair, it cannot be isolated from collective transformation that feeds structural change. Without the latter, there will always be a conditioned tendency to work within the comfort of whiteness, to use privileges as a shield to avoid the work that is required of us individually and collectively, and to walk away from the necessary work or manage it by making the learning transactional.

“As mentors, we were to give specific action requests. So for instance, one of the actions was to initiate a dialogue on the meaning of Afrikan reparations and its relevance to social interest groups in your communities, places of work, worship or recreational spaces. And where possible to record such interactions and share aspects with the Maangamizi Educational Trust. It didn't happen. Secondly, to contribute to the Nutrosa Recycling Project, a project in Ghana - it wasn't really about recycling phones, laptops and other electronic equipment that's no longer in use... that was, for me, a way of showing practical international solidarity around tech transfer. I didn't hear anything back. I asked for the support with development of promotional flyers, infographics and educational videos to promote the work of the Maangamizi Educational Trust; or to host a reparations teaching workshop or training course that could be delivered by the Maangamizi Educational Trust, or make a donation or support the production of a podcast which we have wanted to develop but don't have very good podcasting development skills. None of these things have occurred.”

- Esther Xosei

The best place for systemic transformation is in the longer-term, interdependent relationships, where there is a life-long commitment to

collective liberation through tangible actions. This is the true seat of accountability and is the measure of 'success' towards liberation.

Early participants of the course were from academia and non-voluntary sectors. We did not have sustained engagement with them after the course was completed, so we remain unsure about how the learning might have transformed them or their sectors. We moved to engage more people within the third sector and people and organisations who are interested in activism and movement building where we expected to see more impact through closer alignment with RJN values and vision.

Theme Five: Hero-worship and Dehumanisation

The participants of Unlearning Racism and collective members highly rate the learning from engaging with the mentors. Alongside political education tools and practices, participants were given tangible actions that they could support with. Unfortunately, not much of this came to fruition.

One participant noted *"I don't know if we were treating the mentors as equal human beings, and maybe that was a bit dehumanising."* This is a crucial point of reflection. It was important to participants and mentors alike to connect on a human-to-human level with the mentors. For the people on the course mentors alike, this could only have happened through some connection or relationship building.

"I think the way the course was constructed made that (connection) a difficult process. I wasn't expected to participate in the day of learning, so it was a little bit like parachuting in and out again without much interaction. One wasn't sure about the impact of one's presence. I definitely left with a sense of not being sure how it worked its way into the system and structure of what was given."

- Mama D Ujuaje

For the mentors this could have happened through participants showing up in service, which would have enabled the foundations of trust to be built. The format of delivery for learning, the safeguards RJN put in place to protect the mentors from potential extraction and exploitation were barriers to this, but also the lack of accountable action following. This is not to say that there weren't intentions to support and even attempts, but rather the *potential* to 'give back' ended up exceeding what was delivered to each of the mentors.

"Requests for actions were made, but the follow-up was very patchy. There was still a lot of working from fragility and woundedness in the approach to accountability work, so that put us in a position which we were there to address as mentors. There were tools called upon, but they were centred in fragility and woundedness and I felt, no, I actually don't want to be referred to in this way, that's somebody else's perspective, it's a white perspective of the world I inhabit and the body I inhabit it in. So, you know... let's work on that too, but the actual experience was one of being met with a 'not wanting to go there.'"

- Mama D Ujuaje

Participants placed mentors on a pedestal, which in some ways distanced the mentors as humans from the participants. While there is no doubt the mentors are fountains of knowledge and wisdom and are a source of eldership and leadership that we should learn from, the tendency to put people on pedestals and see people as 'heroes' is inherently dehumanising. This act of distancing from self risks replacing shame and guilt from racism and relationships of participants with their white identities with shame related to how 'good' or 'bad' they are in relation to the work of racial justice. This also reinforced the binary of 'good-bad' that is part of the culture of white supremacy.

"I remember feeling the same way (as Mama D Ujuaje) around being involved in the sessions I took part in where we came in to do our bit and then left. That structure felt odd because it still reinforced the power of

whiteness. And I think the reason it was done that way was to create a safe space for participants or perhaps for the people on the course to feel free to express themselves. I won't call it a design fault, because the thinking and vision was there from the beginning, the manifesto speaks to a way of working, but that's not happened... it's really around implementation."

- Esther Xosei

'It felt extractive because the time and space hadn't been put into those relationships beforehand. It didn't feel like a very reciprocal relationship. We didn't want to overuse their time. Time was set aside for them to facilitate a workshop which was about what's important in terms of their movement work. At the end we asked participants to sign up to support any of these actions. Which became even more transactional'

- Grace Dione

Theme Six: The Intersection Of Capitalism

There was no funding associated with Unlearning Racism at the beginning. All training and workshops were held entirely by volunteers for individuals. This grew to receiving some funds through training fees, and eventually through funding from a foundation. Receiving funding was a game-changer - it enabled us to resource the people delivering Unlearning Racism, including the Collective.

Although we appreciate the funding we received and what it has made possible, we have to acknowledge the inequity it caused in the work of RJN whose work facing Black and Brown communities remained less resourced.

"We've got a lot of attention from funders and other organisations, because there's a cost that comes with centering and catering to white people. So we attracted funding."

- Peninah Wangari-J

RJN, with support from the mentors, suggested a financial redistribution model where some of the Unlearning Racism Course fees would be contributed back into RJN for work facing Black and Brown communities. While Unlearning Racism did do that in the latter years of the programme, it didn't account for the cost to RJN in the first place.

The introduction of funding also had an impact on the relationship with the Collective. This was compounded by paid roles being created within RJN for the Unlearning Racism Programme, which created a shift in power, equity and self and collective accountability.

The constraints of institutional understanding of issues and how they are resourced also had wider implications for both participants, mentors and RJN in terms of what was realistically possible to deliver whilst adequately resourcing the depth of work that is needed.

Theme Seven: Disconnection from UK movements

There has been a lot of critique in movement spaces of how the US contexts of race and racism are different to UK contexts. This was evident in the surge of seeming allyship which lacked in the depth and connection to strategy and interconnections between broader movements for reparations and intersectional struggles. There are lessons on this for Unlearning Racism and what it attempted, around seeing Black and Brown people and movements as monoliths rather than with the nuance and clarity of position, applying a US solidarity model to UK contexts and in how whiteness interprets feedback.

“The manifesto talks about Unlearning Racism being a platform for action learning, which is learning from doing not by themselves or for themselves, but in solidarity with those organisations, groups, movements of people impacted by racism... there should have been action and learning with and from. It also talks about being guided by and accountable to anti-racist movements by Black and Brown people.”

I'm not sure how it transpired or whether because there's a tendency to assume that Black Lives Matter is the height of all movements of people who experience racism. I think that's very problematic because a lot of white folk lead Black Lives Matter movements and protests that could be totally disconnected from liberation, politics and organising that I'm involved in. I know that a lot actually takes place at the level of communities, and the (mainstream) picture is just very sanitised, watered down.... Easy sentiment to say 'Black Lives Matter, but the substance of it has been very weak. We've seen that with the dissipation of all those movements, you know after the George Floyd murder, we saw people coming out into the streets with all this focus and attention and now we're seeing a withdrawal from the institutions and organisations that were talking about Black Lives Matter and also from the protests that were happening on the street. Because there was no real strategy behind it, and it wasn't linked to pre-existing movements. You can't just take the US model and apply it in the UK context and think it's going to work in the same way. So, for me, that was part of the learning that needed to happen - it's a convenient excuse to justify doing anti-racism because 'I support Black Lives Matter', and I think that needs to be critically interrogated in practice. The movements I have particularly championed are reparations, in particular the International Social Movement for Afrikan Reparations. And of course, that's part of a wider internationalist movement, what's known as the People's Reparations International Movement'. So whichever direction, whether we're talking about the reparations claims and movements of Afrikan people or other people, Asian, Indigenous peoples of Americas, Aboriginal people that have reparations struggles... I didn't see, I haven't seen how that has been practically manifesting in this work"

- Esther Xosei

Theme Eight: Perfectionism And Pace

Within Unlearning Racism, however, there has been an element of perfectionism, a key tenant of the culture of white supremacy, that has had profound impacts on the course and those involved. This has manifested itself in a slow pace, number and length of meetings to get things exactly right, which has inadvertently extracted capacity and resources from RJN, and taken a toll on the people holding the work too.

The outputs have suffered as well, and have not been on par with other parts of RJN which might also be because of the disconnection between who has been interested in this work and our accountability in who this work is meant to be with and for.

“What I felt was happening and shared (with the Collective) was having meeting after meeting and document after document after document and you couldn’t see any action coming out of it. The navel gazing and spending as much time with each other (without action coming out of it) is whiteness. That’s a discomfort I’m holding.”

- Peninah Wangari-J

“I think we’re successful in holding caucus spaces that allow people to grapple with some of these ideas and feel more able to confront them. What I think that does is hold people in the safety in the comfort of that, and doesn’t give them the space to push beyond and go into mixed spaces quick enough. There are ways in which we organise that can be attributed to white supremacist characteristics of perfectionism or overvaluing the written word.”

- Grace Deione

Theme Nine: Consensus Vs Consent

There is a skill and focus within Black and Brown organising of working with parts of movements and people who are ready, and holding space for others to

join when they are more ready. This has been absent in majority-white spaces, where there is more of a focus on consensus (we must all be agreed on all elements of planning, delivery, roles and support), rather than consent (I don't have the right skill, ability, capacity to lead in the way that you're envisaging, but I trust you and will do my part in it). Whilst consensus suggests collective working and solidarity, it is in fact broken down into individual people's decisions; consent, however, recognises that some people in the room might not be best people to make a decision, but are willing to show up in support for those who can see, feel or have instinct for change towards liberation.

"We've been doing this for years and years and it hasn't built; we do all those courses but it (The Collective) hasn't got bigger."

- Zoe Parker, Unlearning Racism Collective Member

Theme Ten: 'Boundaries' Reinforcing Individualism

White supremacy culture mandates binary ways of being in self and being in relationship with others. Trying to do liberatory work whilst within the constraints of a system that is in direct opposition to said liberation has the effect of trapping people and ushering them back into line, pausing potential movement and inadvertently causing harm. For example, having an employee-employer relationship within liberation work can create a lot of confusion and not allow for the complexity and contradictions of this work to co-exist. This in turn creates unsatisfiable processes and outcomes for both the employer who holds the vision, and the employee who is bound by limitations of contractual obligation.

Understandably, individuals doing the deep personally challenging work might want to have or work with boundaries for self care. What we have seen and experienced, however, is the use of 'boundaries' as a way to reinforce individualism and to disengage from the deep discomfort of holding and staying in this work. These have to be named for what they are - socially conditioned survival mechanisms to alleviate pain of disconnection from self

that feels intolerable. It is also a way in which white supremacy culture protects itself by creating impossible conditions for attempts at liberation that we succumb to through the predictable pattern of falling into line when it's too difficult, uncomfortable or painful.

Boundaries set around workplace conditions are necessary and powerful in relation to organising and movement building, but it has to move away from the white supremacy culture's idea of boundaries that are individualised and stringent and move towards Black and Brown boundaries, which are more porous and collective, rooted in purpose.

“Who gets to take time? Who gets resources for self-regulation? And to process feelings and all of this stuff. No one addresses Black body wounding, Black body pain. And we end up perpetuating cycles of fragility that then are paralysed into not being able to act in solidarity. This whole word ‘solidarity’ needs redefining from our experiences.

In the Race and Climate Justice space at RJN, we wondered if solidarity comes with some trauma bonding - the fragilities of one pain with the other. That doesn't actually go anywhere. I think that is a key aspect of this work that's not working. It's a very powerful basis on which to make a decision about its continuity.”

- Mama D Ujuaje

All of the above comes at a cost that is too high - Unlearning Racism staff and collective have had a higher level of resourcing, access to training, support and more than other parts of RJN but this has not been reciprocated. We see this as symptoms of larger structural issues at play and have attempted to address this at every turn.

Summary



Healing from racial trauma involves not just intellectual understanding, but also embodied practices that allow us to release and process the pain stored in our bodies.

Resmaa Menakem

The themes explored in this report reflect our learning over the last seven years and are summarised below:

- **Our liberation is interconnected;** our struggle towards it requires collective effort. When the lived experience of racialisation isn't embedded into collective learning and liberation struggles, we lose sight of the root cause of our pain - white supremacy.
- **It's important that we recognise the culture of white supremacy, and how it manifests in the day to day-** from the 'good-bad' binary and 'either-or' thinking, to the paralysing power and trap of shame.
- **'Value' is understood only in terms of economic gain.** It tends to disassociate embodied values and principles which exist in Global Majority cultures and extract these values into monetary values.
- **The recentering of Black and Brown bodies in anti-racism work makes it impossible to ignore the *why* of marginalisation and deprivation.** It asks - *whom* does this marginalisation, deprivation and oppression serve

and *what* does it uphold? The answers to these questions point to how we are all - white, Black and Brown bodies, wounded by white supremacy and the ways it keeps itself alive through systems, processes, structures that we inadvertently uphold through our conditioning to maintain these systems and strategies for survival within it. It also highlights the need for repair as a necessary part of liberation.

- **This work, although unintentionally, brings up the central theme of shame**, which if not processed effectively causes paralysis and keeps us stuck. It's important to work with this shame, actively resist the pull towards the paralysis of shame, within ourselves, in relationship with others and society at large.
- **Healing disconnection from self within Black and Brown marginalised bodies is also crucial**, without which we fall into the traps of conditioning to uphold white supremacy. Such personal transformation cannot happen in isolation, it can only happen in community with others. Without it, we can get stuck in isolation and disconnection.
- **Collective learning and action are only a part of the process of healing disconnection from self which make collective transformation possible**. It is critical to attend to relational aspects diligently and effectively.
- **Seeing knowledge and learning as passive, intellectual things, rather than the embodied practice of knowing and being, stands in the way of living the change we want to see**. Trying it on, giving it a go, learning by doing are all important to reshape our relationships with our and others bodies, including how we view, acknowledge and honour knowledge in all of its forms and across all cultures.

For those engaged in anti-racism work with people racialised as white, and white-led organisations, we offer some questions for deep consideration, based on our learning and reflections:

- How do we embed cycles of learning and reflection as intrinsically linked to action, whilst resisting being at the mercy of 'process' empty of progress?
- How will the white people involved work with this accountability within themselves and with each other? Not just in service of Black and Brown movements, but also in holding white people and communities to account in terms of what is needed for liberation?
- What role will mentors and other Black and Brown leaders and elders play in shaping what accountability could look and feel like - as a measure of whether there is continued grounding in purpose, around clear objectives and checking that we are in service?
- How will (self) accountability be measured, evaluated and reflected on and learned from?
- Whose responsibility is healing and repair for white people?
- How can white people who hold and lead this work see more fully what they're conditioned to uphold, when it is coming towards them?
- What skills are required to disrupt it, navigate it, be clear on what they're willing to give to it and what they won't? ***How do they safeguard against it whilst also being a part of it?***

We hope that you see yourselves in this report and are able to take lessons for your future practice, and towards our collective liberation.

Conclusion: A Statement from Mentors of Unlearning Racism Programme

Each of us as mentors are fully committed to the work of reparations in different but contributory and complementary ways. We hold visions for the ways in which many worlds fit, according to the Zapatista, into a consciousness of the pluriverse. This 'fitting' requires there to be a rebalancing of power and place; healing of the effects of shame without concurrent fragilities; replacing feelings of guilt with proactive works of accountability and repair work on both the self and the other.

Such work requires a change of logics, attitudes and behaviours that really require a careful and embodied understanding and sensitivity to consequence. At the beginning of any such process, such sensitivity cannot be reliably held by a white bodied person, who is still learning to process profound feelings of shame and constant anxiety in relation to their performance in the field; according to the 'Key Performance Indicators' type logic of achievement, which does not refer to a healing modality, but simply accrues to itself a *virtuosity* of achievement - getting things done in a particular way as opposed to movement towards an *embodied vision of healing*.

We need, therefore, to reformulate this work - which may be better understood as 'processing guilt and shame' rather than an unlearning of racism, so that more effective tools can be assembled to do this vital work that can strengthen the works of all parties involved.

If part of what Resmaa Menakem refers to as 'clean pain processing' is understood as being active in the remedial work that caused the present imbalances in the world to be so widespread, then accountability becomes implicit in the task at hand. In fact learning can take place *as part of* the work of accountability - to help understand the logic of working in particular ways,

embracing the particular languages required to process particular pain that might arise.

Challenges are likely to arise because what is being brokered are centuries of wounding and harm, that of the 'victim' and that too of the 'perpetrator'. In our current society the 'perpetrator' is identified with civilised, norms of society and so it is a particular series of experiences and processing that is required to delink from the colonialities of being, knowledge and power and to relate to Black and Brown bodies as equal subjects and to not objectify our beingness. On the other hand, Black and Brown bodies have also been socialised and oppressed into responding and operating as inferiorised within the systems of daily and structural white supremacy. As such, another form of work is required to reorientate such behaviours, encourage a pro-cultural approach and a celebration of cultural knowledge and practice.

If there is not a simultaneous approach to the reparative work that requires undertaking then confusion is introduced in the process as different parties fail to develop complementary behaviours and practices.

What needs to be kept uppermost in any future undertaking is the understanding that the dominant culture *is* the destructive culture, however it is embodied; and so the aim of any course of action is to build a reparative culture, leading to systemic transformation.

Where To Next?

Given the reality of the precarity of white body processing and repair within the structure of white supremacy, which invisibilises the access privileges, entitlements and preferences of white bodies, we need to find different approaches that do not foreground fragility over the needs for repair for the Black and Brown bodies who have become abjectified within the glocal system.

This is difficult because of deeply entrenched structural patterns that continue to shape attitudes, behaviours and access to power and mobility in a deeply divided political, socio-cultural and economic system which manifests in ***an array of subtle and heavily nuanced patterns.***

What if we were to approach the challenge with a reversal of strategy? What if we were to pro-actively seek the repair of Black and Brown bodies, communities and organisations? And make use of existing training material and further develop our own materials to understand and develop systems of repair and healing of those bodies, communities and organisations? What would be the impact on all of the bodies where the priorities are significantly changed?

In activism and movements that centre Black body awareness, it is felt that the notions of white-body solidarity and allyship has come under question of late because of a slow and gradual undermining of its already fragile basis of existence. It tends to be premised and centred in shame, which is understood to be paralysing, rather than a staging point en route to liberation and pro-active transformative justice.

The undermining comes about because the way in which the experiences of guilt or shame has been understood and handled have generated a traumatised stuck response and reinforced the less helpful tendencies of white body affect towards work around and with Black/Brown bodied people. Resmaa Menakem enlarges upon this in his book 'My Grandmother's Hands', as does Kehinde Andrews in 'The Psychosis of Whiteness'. Because of the interconnectedness of oppressions, some of this is invoked in elite black/brown bodies (social class and historic intersections) as well as across age, ability, gender and sexuality. We will now need to work on the basis of a radically intersected understanding which still aims to centre transformative justice modalities across all Black and Brown bodies with equity. One which centres reparative justice in ways that are mutually transformative of both the systems we work with as well as each

person who is part of an interdependence, in accordance with the wisdom of Black and Brown wisdom modalities, such as 'Ubuntu'.

It is critical, in this work, that we acknowledge the failures of complicity with normalised modes of thinking and doing, as well as the ways of feeling and responding and we actively refuse engagement with them, knowing that they feed white supremacist structuring. What the process of this programme of action - the Unlearning Racism Course - has taught us is that refusal alone is not enough; that the sheer pressure of what has been deemed normalised pulls us into relations which reproduce undesired and undesirable behaviours which do not feed genuine repair.

Black and Brown bodies can be a more overt focus of the overt aim of any attempt to unlearn racism, rather than being understood as its collateral-still-being-damaged. Therefore our key takeaway from this experience is the need to proactively recentre Black and Brown bodies in movements towards repair and healing which will bring, in its wake, the commitments of white bodied 'unlearners' through behaviours, acts and commitments of responsive and responsible solidarity.

What Now For RJN?

Based on our active learning for the last seven years with the Unlearning Racism programme and the reflections shared in this report, it is clear to us that there is a need for dreaming and visioning, a pathway forward that holds repair as central. The reality of being a Black and Brown organisation taking on this work, however, is that it comes with some of the structural harms we have elaborated on in this report, including what work is seen as important, and what is resourced and what is not.

Our commitment to collective liberation is to find the resources that will allow this dreaming that is centred on the wisdom, eldership and leadership of Black and Brown people, institutions and communities.

If white bodied people, institutions and communities are able to show up in service of our collective liberation, committing to self repair as an essential part of it, it might begin to address and be accountable for the harms caused, and work towards undoing the structures that maintain the systems of harm.

This is critical work - one that understands and tackles the systemic and structural underpinnings for a world predicated on as bell hooks calls it 'imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy'.

So the 'unlearning' of racism must be committed to a series of deep self-examinations which work with the embodied knowledges of those who experience systemic harm and those who dispense it. This is not always split along lines of race or related positionalities, so needs to acknowledge nuanced intersectionalities and structural blockages.

This is work of care; this is work which centres cultural wisdoms which tend to be marginalised; and this is work which moves us all towards a liberation which surpasses what can be handed to us on a plate - seated at an imperial table - it is a collective liberation and is deeply embedded in commitments of conscious repair of all who take part in it.



racialjusticenetwork.co.uk



info@racialjusticenetwork.co.uk



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