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Intersectional Anti- Racist Academic Activism for Policy-making (INTARAAP) through community engagement

Ima Jackson and Judy Wasige

Abstract

Prevalent research for policy making often highlights how racialised communities experience racialisation. However, it pays little attention to how racialisation in research and policy processes might contribute to social inequalities. This chapter demonstrates application of Intersectional Anti- Racist Academic Activism for Policy-making (INTARAAP), an emerging practice in Scotland. By centring racialised groups' perspectives in the production of evidence for policy and practice, INTARAAP aims to foster a better understanding of the mechanisms of racialisation in these processes. The chapter sets out key theoretical and practical issues in the development of research for policy-making founded on intersectional perspectives through engagement with those often racialised in these processes. The case study used describes the creation of a national process to provide an interface between the skills shortages in the public and private sectors and professional and vocational qualifications acquired by those from beyond the UK. It became named as Skills Recognition Scotland.

1. What is Intersectional Anti-Racist Activism for Policy-making (INTARAAP)?

This chapter demonstrates application of an emerging Intersectional Anti- Racist Academic Activism for Policy-making (INTARAAP) approach in Scotland. The chapter sets out key theoretical and practical issues in the development of research for policy-making founded on intersectional perspectives through engagement with those often racialised in these processes. Evidence used is from the development and implementation of a national process in Scotland to provide an interface between the skills shortages in the public and private sectors and professional and vocational qualifications acquired from beyond the UK. It became named as Skills Recognition Scotland.

INTARAAP emphasises the role of societal structures in constituting the conditions in which racialised communities are situated and the inherent vulnerability to inadequate interventions that fail to recognise the structural dimensions of their circumstances (Cho, Crenshaw, & Leslie, 2013). Intersectional analysis is founded on Black feminist thought and attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalised in society (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Analysing the role of the interrelated dimensions of racism in shaping racialised groups' experiences can foster a better understanding of racialisation and necessitate that their perspectives and practical concerns become critical in policy decision making (Nazroo, S. Bhui, & Rhodes, 2020). Racialisation refers to the processes by which racial meaning is attributed to people's identity and reflects the power dynamics in society at a given time (Murji & Solomos, 2005). Understanding how different groups have been racialised by current and historical policies and practices is critical as different groups have been racialised differently at different times for different reasons that ascribe power to some groups while marginalising others (Banton, 2005).

Researchers have demonstrated that there are more similarities between people categorised as being racially different than there are between those who are designated to the same race - this dismisses the usefulness of 'race' as a scientific category (Fields & Fields, Barbara, J, 2014; Saini, 2019). When differences between groups are defined in terms of 'race', that is when racial meaning differentiates social collectivities, they are racialised (Miles & Brown, 2003; St Louis, 2005). To emphasise the social nature of the historically racialised group differences, therefore, instead of 'race', the term racialised group is used in this chapter.

Racism is discrimination motivated by racialisation. Reflecting the broad range of racialisations suggested above, multiple racisms have been explored by scholars at different times, including biological racism, cultural racism, scientific racism interpersonal racism, structural racism, institutional racism to name some (Small, 1994; Miles & Brown, 2003; Banton, 2005; Murji & Solomos, 2005).

They are social constructions informed by beliefs that certain groups are inferior therefore underserving. Persistent multiple racisms experienced by racialised groups often result in multiple intersecting intergenerational disadvantages that determine their conditions, as including inequalities in health, education, housing social, employment and politics.

However, predominant anti-racist practices largely focus on tackling interpersonal racism, an array of behaviours ranging from micro-aggressions to verbal and physical violence that threaten, harm and devalue those who are racialised. Yet, it is structural racism, for example, the processes that create disadvantages in accessing economic, physical and social resources and institutional racism- the practices and procedures that shape the experiences of racialised groups in institutions- that determine the living conditions of racialised groups and encourage interpersonal racism (Nazroo, S. Bhui, & Rhodes, 2020). Racialised inequalities are therefore informed by social structures and systems, rather than determined by identities. The differences in the risk and outcomes of racialisation for different groups can therefore be best understood and tackled if intersectional analysis of the multiple racisms is interpreted in the context of lived experiences.

INTARAAP involves academics collaborating with racialised communities and policy-makers to redefine how racialisation is understood and experienced, explore the changes required to address the challenges described, and translate the findings into policy-relevant, scalable solutions. Part of the research and writing process is dedicated to thinking carefully about the implications of the work and taking responsibility for its potential impact on communities.

The INTARAAP approach aims to facilitate access to power and opportunities to shape policy solutions. It aims to provide racialised communities access to academic expertise and policy-making insight, to enhance opportunities for centring their perspective in decision-making and promote their understanding of policy concepts or service issues under discussion.

Further, INTARAAP gives academics and policy-makers an opportunity to understand and reflect on how and why their thinking is unreflective of the experiences of those racialised, commonly interpreted through a systemically racialised lens which often results in them becoming agents of racism in the very processes they should aim to address racism.

INTARAAP nurtures researchers' and policy-makers' appreciation of diverse perspectives and alternative views to increase preparedness for engagement with intersectional perspectives and experiences. It has been recognised and applied in key strategic organisations across sectors in Scotland to support the need for systems change.

2. Background- why INTARAAP?

The lack of engagement with racialisation by academics and policy-makers often maintains ignorance of the issue and its implication in people's lives. Racialisation and racism are often perceived to be exceptional events linked to individual behaviour rather than founded on normalised institutional and systemic practices. Little concern for or perhaps more generously little understanding about the potential impact on racialised groups is demonstrated even when they are the target for policy-making (Wasige & Jackson, 2018).

Longstanding demands from racialised communities, social unease and the drive to unsettle the prevailing circumstances by societal pressures, exacerbated by events such as Brexit, Scottish Independence, the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, have exposed people's vulnerabilities within the system in a way that is unacceptable to the general status quo. The need for a groundswell of academic researchers and policy-makers who seek to address racial inequality is urgent.

Access to centres of power enhances potential to frame issues in policy relevant formats

Racialised communities are largely underrepresented in the academy and policy decision-making. This often motivates the creation of safe spaces for activism and knowledge production to resist their racialisation and marginalisation. However, this largely remains on the periphery of political power and can contribute little towards policy and social change. This exclusion often blinds from realising their expertise is the expertise required for more inclusive policy-making. Concurrently, little encouragement comes forth from dominant knowledge production systems to voice that expertise (Collins, 2009).

Academic activists engaging in these spaces can inspire hope for the long-anticipated changes. For example, through providing increased access to centres of

power through access to and engagement with decision makers and enhanced potential to frame their issues in policy relevant formats.

Centring lived experiences disrupts processes founded on racialised identities

INTARAAP is underpinned by intersectional analysis which hypothesises that the diverse risk and outcomes faced by racialised groups can only be understood and tackled if interpreted in the context of lived experiences of structural, institutional and interpersonal forms of racism. Therefore, explanations of the risk and outcomes of racialisation should be explored using data and reference to the testimony of the targeted groups.

Bringing in racialised groups' perspectives directly aligned to a challenge disrupts usual processes founded on preconceived racialised identities. However, there must be a clear distinction between the expertise of lived experience and the understanding of what systemic racism is in action, and the mechanisms that it employs. Lived experience on its own is not sufficient – although that detailed careful thinking created by “bringing in” can help support the process. Researcher or policy-maker interpretations are often overgeneralisations or misinterpretations of the issues, unless they have deep knowledge of the systemic process and understand how racialisation and racism function in society.

Essentially INTARAAP counteracts racialised groups' experiences being interpreted by the same systems that create the systematic racialisations which are often difficult to counteract (Lorde, 2017). Additionally, it helps recalibrate the power mechanisms that develop within racialised communities such as opportunity hoarding by some 'leaders' and the uncritical partnerships formed by policy-makers with some Third Sector organisations that form the basis of exploitation and can be difficult if not impossible to counter (Tilly, 1999; Verloo, 2013).

Case study: Developing “Skills Recognition Scotland”

Longstanding evidence indicates those who migrate to Scotland are not enabled to function at their skills, qualifications and expertise levels (The Equal Opportunities Committee, 2016; Trevena, 2016; Scottish Government, 2016; Hepburn, 2020). The overlapping structural disadvantages, including the lack of a formal process to accredit their qualifications and inadequate interventions largely maintain and perpetuate racialisation, contribute to their vulnerability to poverty and other disadvantages (Netto, Sosenko, & Bramley, 2011). Unemployment and underemployment amongst adults in Scotland with overseas skills and experience brings with it not only a cost for the individual concerned but also incurs wider macroeconomic costs, such as a reduction in productivity, deskilling and a reduction.

Engagement with migrant communities in Scotland clarified the frustration and perceived hopelessness of their circumstance. The significant issues of unemployment and underemployment as well as the well documented skills shortage for employers in Scotland heightened the urgency for change (Guest & Vecha, 2010; Scottish Government, 2016; Sutherland & Kromydas, 2016; Scottish Government, 2018).

A witness seminar using an INTARAAP framework in 2016 hosted in Glasgow Caledonian University brought together all the relevant policy and service providers, including the Scottish Government, The Scottish Qualifications Authority, The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and Third Sector migrant support organisations such as

Bridges Programmes and Radiant and Brighter laid the foundation for Skills Recognition Scotland (SRS) implemented in 2018.

The SRS is a national process for mapping skills/qualifications achieved abroad to the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF).

3. INTARAAP - formal and informal arrangements

Various important factors should be taken into consideration to improve the potential success of this work.

- **Intersectional analysis of existing structures must inform activities**

An intersectional analysis of racism in existing structures is significantly important as it informs project design and methods.

It is important that those who seek to undertake this work have a good understanding of the policy landscape under exploration, including the associated services to identify who holds decision making power. This would help ensure all the key players are involved, and support the incorporation of social justice and transformation goals are in project design.

Current anti-discrimination initiatives in the UK are implemented under 'equalities' legislation, in line with the Equality Act 2010. However, there is a long-held concern among equality experts and activists that as progress towards racial equality has been extremely slow, existing tools are inadequate for combating deep-rooted inequalities (Conaghan, 2007; Young, 2016; Lyle, 2016; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2020). Ahmed (2012) argues that 'equalities' does not have the "strength" to force organisational change, because it is historically seen as an organisational strategy to not make change - conceptualisation as 'equality' denies focus on the inequalities it purports to address.

To use the INTARAAP approach **it is essential to be mindful of the dynamics of the equalities landscape and seek alternative policy contexts that resonate with the vision and understanding of the proposed processes.** For the SRS project the tactic was to consider the positive potential, involve decision makers far beyond 'equalities' and seek welcome and support for the ambition of the wider work. The economic benefits of accrediting skills/qualifications acquired overseas aligned with Scottish Government departments concerned with demographic change including Future Skills - Scotland is Now - Scottish Enterprise and Population Growth policy. These areas were all successfully encouraged to engage.

- **Researchers embedded in and trusted by communities must lead the work**

INTARAAP works best when the researchers involved are well versed with how those who are racialised understand and experience racism in the context of being researched. It is important here to differentiate between community engaged researchers and academic activists and why this kind of work must combine both aspects.

Whilst community engaged researchers are often skilled in building networks and centring communities' perspectives in their research, their work may not always incorporate social justice aims (Nelson, et al., 1998) (Pittaway, et al., 2010) (Todd, 2011) (Mikesell, et al., 2013) (Wilson, et al., 2018) (Pratt, 2019). On the other hand, an integral aspect of academic activism is to foster social justice, but the work does not always build from the perspectives of the target participants (Eschle & Manguashca, 2006) (Klar & Kasser, 2009) (Flood, et al., 2013) (Rose, 2017).

- **Disrupting dominant knowledge structures is critical**

Evidence of racialised discrimination within existing research and policy structures in spite of purported aims to tackle marginalisation indicates the lack of awareness by researchers and policy-makers of their complicity in these processes.

Hence a key aspect of INTARAAP is to improve understanding of racialisation and racism: how it functions within organisations, how it shifts and changes within society. **You cannot make research and policy decisions about those racialised if you do not understand your own and your organisation's role in these processes.**

Researchers involved must understand that **it is the expertise of those racialised that is crucial in developing new ways of knowing to support the system address itself** - they must be keen to disrupt the dominant knowledge structures (Hill Collins, 2009) (Mowat, 2015).

- **Flexibility is integral to INTARAAP proposals**

Due to the multidimensional diverse and dynamic nature of the issues addressed, flexibility must be integral in INTARRAP working arrangements. In particular, there has to be some flexibility around funding arrangements. Whilst there can be a clear budget, it is important to clarify it is often unclear what specific areas will be developed over others.

For example, the cost for advisory support may be more in practice than initially intended or it may be less depending on the prevailing circumstances. In-built flexibility is therefore critical as it allows the potential dynamic needs of the project to be met. However, the anxiety around funding addressing racialisation and racism in systemic processes is worth noting because it challenges the status quo of how and what spending is organised around.

- **Thought leadership is critical in shaping perceptions**

There is a real tension which exists in policy development and subsequent service provision regarding dedicated funding for ant-racist work as an extra demand on the system - whereas **from an anti-racist perspective funding identified is to support the system either not undertake racist policy processes or try to redress the manifestation of systemic inequality.** Public perceptions and policy-makers' understanding about the issue determine how the concern and anxiety of spending on "them" as opposed to anyone else are judged.

Critical thought leadership is needed to change this narrative and identify why we have been stuck in whiteness and this interpretation of how and what should be (Conaghan, 2007; Buccella, 2020).

- **Engaging policy-makers in this approach is not always instantly successful**

In addition to managing public perceptions about the project, building the confidence and trust of a variety of policymakers and departments is critical. The fluidity of the staff in government policy-making necessitates maintaining trust and integrity of the project plan. **The historical understanding of how policy is created around racialised groups means that in the process of engagement with policymakers is as important as engagement with racialised groups themselves.**

- **Examples from other jurisdictions can help build confidence- but watch for demands to claim more than you can when you start**

The availability of data about an issue helps to develop public and policy-maker's confidence regarding demand for the infrastructure and to justify the project and the spending.

Lack of ethnicity recording in Scotland to identify, monitor and address systemically racialised inequalities is well documented. That it is consistently not addressed is itself viewed as a mechanism of systemic racism (Expert Reference Group on Covid 19, 2021).

Intersectional analysis of national structures and processes for recognising overseas skills/qualifications in countries like Germany and Canada was critical in articulating Scottish specific structures, processes, practice and the pitfalls (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2019).

The "act" of agreeing to fund the infrastructure can be viewed as the solution. There is pressure to show off the ambition before there is evidence that it could and will work. The infrastructure needs developed to a level that the weight and ambition of the work can carry the publicity and the anticipated demand. **The pressure to demonstrate policy decisions ostensibly to mitigate or address racialised inequality can become intense and should be resisted.**

- **Involving local, government and international expertise in quality assurance**

Monitoring and quality assurance processes - using a Steering Group to manage local operational issues can help to ensure the project stays on track and remains true to its aim.

Involving the Government throughout is crucial as it positions the work not as something being done to them but done with and for them to address systemic processes. It allows them to engage with the learning required for fostering intersectional social justice.

Initially people functioning at a relatively low level yet who could provide stakeholder organisational insight into systems, assumptions and ambitions in the SRS project

was important. As the work progressed the Steering Group changed to comprise more senior influencers and decision-makers within organisations.

An International Advisory Board with relevant expertise lifts the conversation away from localised issues into a much broader international understanding of systemic function.

- **Developing trust and gaining buy-in**

Initial activities must involve articulating plausible evidence of the current situation and the benefits of the proposed infrastructure or strategy and engagement with targeted service users (employers and migrants) and key decision makers.

Mutual trust needs to be maintained with targeted users of the infrastructure. For migrants this was sustained through relying on their knowledge and expertise built through their experiences of racialised systemic processes demonstrated. For employers it was through recognising that developing wonderful skills recognition structures with little buy-in from them is pointless. Involving civil servants was helpful in making decisions about which sectors most required the infrastructure from their own policy intelligence within Scotland.

This approach has supported policymakers to understand that it is “their learning” about the usual processes, and increasing their confidence in disrupting these processes- rather than learning about the specifics of project content that is required. They are in essence learning about the process of policy-making as it demonstrates to them how the system marginalises the experiences of those they wish to support. It can be an important opportunity for them to both hear the conversations and to understand their own role within the conversations.

4. Mechanisms and challenges

A better understanding of racialisation necessitates centring the perspectives of racialised communities in policy-making. It improves the potential to evidence first-hand experiences into policy and reduces the normalised reliance on evidence translated through intermediary organisations into “policy speak”.

The table below outlines what we think works about the INTARAAP approach and what the challenges are in working in this way.

MECHANISM	CHALLENGES
Realising the system needs to counteract its own processes.	Disrupting a system not designed to enable this mechanism is exhausting and time consuming
Acknowledging that it is easier for researchers and policy-makers not to challenge existing processes as the system	The professional and personal can become infused and therefore needs managed.

is designed to “protect” from that level of intimacy.

Developing the potential for humility, hope and understanding of the depth and complexity of the issue to be addressed.

Building momentum to enact and sustain societal change requires the moral and activist input from those with lived experiences of racialisation.

Recognising that racialisation is normalised within existing processes. Some stakeholders can be obstructive because the ‘system’ rewards them.

Understanding the landscape, including who currently benefits and whether they have insight into their own role power and authority is vital’.

Collaboratively exploring with racialised groups, researchers, policymakers and other ‘systems change’ stakeholders how to best counteract systemic racialisation.

Recognising that systemic racism as it exists means that engaging with systemic racism is itself seen as divisive.

Bringing in the national and international conversation about racism in order to mitigate the tendency to have the gaze on proving racism exists.

Acknowledging migration forces change - this is important but often resisted and undervalued.

Acknowledging that learning from the inclusion of people who have experienced migration and racialisation works best if that process of bringing in is supported by those who understand the mechanisms of systemic racism.

Recognising that pandering to media and political expediency can result in “Policy Clickbait”.

Maintaining honest potentially disruptive conversations in these sorts of spaces can be risky as you are never sure how they will be received and interpreted.

Building capacity to enable reflection on the processes indicates many assumptions and biases the system would probably prefer not to see.

Understanding the organisational risks to those invited to participate is required to help prevent subversion of their existing professional “agency” to work against.

The power base of beneficiaries of current processes can undermine the work you think you are going to do together.

Not all groups realise they are racialised nor do organisations all accept that the structures of systemic racism exist.

Everyone and every organisation on their own journey - this needs to be managed.

Building appropriate national and international linkage to ensure that the focus is not on proving racism but on the mechanisms, which create and sustain it.

Building mechanisms that enable lived experiences to inform the system to reflect on itself.

Building expertise on racialisation and racism to enable lived experiences to influence processes.

Considerable pressure can be placed on “successful” initiatives, to publicise achievement before processes can hold societal pressure and scrutiny, including

<p>Acknowledging that situating scepticism alongside commitment to accomplish research and policy goals is a difficult tension to manage.</p> <p>Fostering leadership confidence to encourage the process to include those usually excluded from the decision-making table.</p>	<p>people's hopes and needs careful management.</p> <p>Maintaining scepticism as a necessary tool is a professional risk.</p> <p>This can be a professional risk and requires collective agreement in order to sustain it.</p>
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5. Concluding

Projects and initiatives such as the example in this chapter often exist for political expediency. This dynamic means that there is always a threat that they will be pulled. Maintaining trust in the process, maintaining long term buy-in of Ministers and their departments, despite their often-transitory roles, is important. At the same time, maintaining trust and supporting those who are basically the “guinea pigs” of the process in which you are asking them to rely are significant requirements.

The impact of COVID-19 demonstrated at least for a moment how inequalities are created and sustained by the system which is ostensibly intended for eradicating or ameliorating those same inequalities. This moment appears unprecedented in building awareness of systemic racism and other aspects of intersectional inequality.

However, the ability for the system to right itself and re-calibrate around this new knowledge and hence ignore it cannot and should not be underestimated. Academic activists with their deep knowledge of the critical thinking required, the “bringing in” of the marginalised and the building of public policy processes which incorporate these aspects should see this as a moment- a call to action.

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