

Beyond the Black Square:

***The
Triple
Lens of
Racial
Equity***

Dr Pathik Pathak & Dr Nazneen Ahmed
with Avila Diana Chidume

About the authors

Dr Pathik Pathak

Dr Pathik Pathak is a writer, speaker and higher education leader. He is currently Founding Director of the Social Impact Lab at the University of Southampton. He is a passionate advocate for innovation in higher education and has pioneered challenge-based education to improve graduate employability and connect universities to social and environmental challenges. He is also a TEDx speaker and a World Economic Forum agenda shaper. He has written over 50 articles for The Guardian, Open Democracy, The Conversation, The Times of India and The Hindustan Times. He is the author of the Future of Multicultural Britain (2008).

Dr Nazneen Ahmed

Dr Nazneen Ahmed is a historian, writer and socially engaged visual artist. Her art and writing are inspired by the history of migration, which was the topic of her work as an academic researcher and historian at University College London and the University of Oxford. She is currently Writer in Residence with the Southampton Stories project at Southampton City Museums and has held residences at John Hansard Gallery and Southampton City Libraries in the past. She is represented by Louise Lamont at LBA Books.

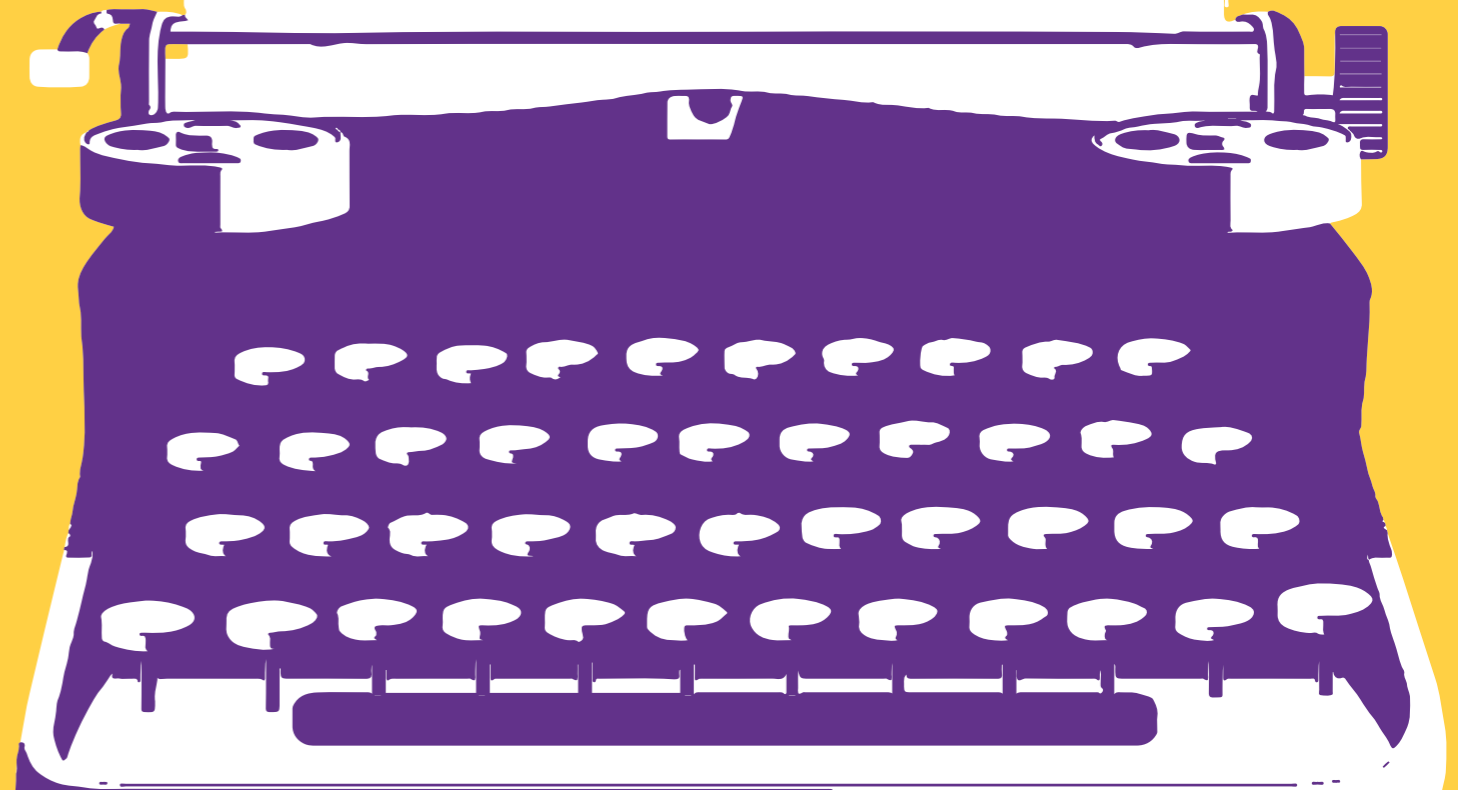
Avila Diana Chidume

Avila Diana Chidume, is a law graduate passionate about social justice and change. Since 2018, she has been advocating and working to challenge the lack of representation within the media and greetings card industries alike. Her love for art and passion for change inspires her to continue working to help minority groups. Her work is recognised internationally and has also been supported by artists such as Jay-Z and Pharrell Williams. Avila is currently working on a marketplace created specifically for under-represented communities to sell products and grow their businesses without barriers.

Note About Terminology:

In this report we consciously and deliberately use the term Black and non-Black people of colour. Occasionally we abbreviate to People of Colour, where the former term has been used in the same paragraph. We separate Black and non-Black to emphasise the primacy of the former, and we always capitalise Black because it is the recognition of a global ethnic identity and act of reclamation.

We only use the term "BAME" (Black and Ethnic Minority) where that term is used by an author we reference. We reject BAME because it is a state-manufactured term which flattens and depoliticises the global solidarity between people with a lived experience of anti-racism, as well as being recognised only in the United Kingdom.



Structures

The structure lens directs us to look at Black and non-Black people of colour in our organisations in detail.

It involves looking at numbers, but also where People of Colour are positioned, the contributions they are able to make, their promotion opportunities, leadership trajectories, and whether policies, processes and decision-making appropriately address the specific needs of People of Colour in our field of practice. This lens identifies the structural gaps and areas where changes need to take place in order to achieve structural racial equity. The lens asks us: are we doing enough to remove barriers and ensure that the "community of communities" that constitute Black and non-Black communities of colour are all equally able to gain access to our organization and its opportunities?

Whether you're an arts organisation, a university or a corporate business, you will have inevitably have Black and non-Black people of colour in your field of practice. In some cases, the absolute numbers may be small, but in others they may much larger.

In either case, the structure lens impels you to know them, and that goes far beyond a simple measurement of how many Black and non-Black people of colour engage or are involved with what you do, because that has no relevance for the quality of your impact.

Firstly, broad statistics tell you very little. Say you're a social impact organisation and you work in a geographical area which census data tells you is 11% "BAME". For one, in the UK in 2020, that means that data is at least 9 years old, which means it is likely wildly under counting that Black and non-Black people of colour your area.

Secondly, there will be huge variations between racial and ethnic minorities, including the intersections of racial and ethnic identities with gender, religion, sexuality and disability (among others).

Generalisations about Black and non-Black people of colour are generally unhelpful.



For instance, a recent study of pay for Black and non-Black people of colour in higher education revealed that, across the sector at large, the gap between white and Black and non-Black people of colour is 9%, but it is 14% between Black and white academic staff. Add in gender, and the gap is even wider. In some subjects, such as medicine, Asian men are over-represented as professors, but under-represented in others, such as the humanities and social sciences.

Equally, overall numbers can be misleading. Evidence shows that "snowy peak" syndrome continues to prevail: you may have high levels of racial diversity at the lower levels, but how about in middle management and senior leadership?

Being over-represented in the lower ranks of an organisation but under-represented in the higher rungs is surprisingly common - including in the NHS, where the numbers of BAME staff on Trust Boards is falling.

Or take a look at law recruitment. In 2017-18, 15% of pupil barristers were BAME, against 14% BAME in the population at large. Nothing to see here? You might think so. But not when you see that an astonishing 55% of Bar Professional Training Courses graduates that year were BAME.

According the Bar Standards Board, of the 1,351 people called to the Bar in 2017-18, 741 were from BAME backgrounds and 586 were white. When it comes to pupillage in the same period, just 71 BAME to 390 white first six pupils. That's why the structure lens encourages you to dig a little deeper. While the "first look" should capture data for all Black and non-Black constituencies, looking deeper means identifying where we could do more, and where we are already succeeding. A more granular, targeted approach can give us vital information to do better, particularly asking questions about outcomes and not just entry.



Cultures

Crucially, grasping structures enables a shift from vague commitments about equality to a precise strategy for racial equity. The distinction is important: we cannot treat our stakeholders the same, because they are starting from different positions in society. We have to do harder work to reach those who are disproportionately excluded, not the same as for those who are already reached.

Lastly, the structure lens also helps to move from anti-racist decision-making based on personal opinion, such as the all too common “I don’t think we have a problem”. That should no longer be an acceptable response.

By using data and asking the right – and sometimes uncomfortable questions – we can start to use racial equity as a measure of outcomes.



Our second lens focusses our gaze on organisational cultures.

Unlike structures, it turns our attention inwards. The role of the culture lens is to force us to examine assumptions which have been naturalised and normalised, becoming embedded in our practices and activities. In organisations which lack meaningful racial equity, representation of Black and non-Black people of colour at all levels of an organization and a culture of privilege-transparency, these ways of being and doing become solidified without question because they are not seen as a matter of race at all, but simply but simply the organisational status quo.

A good example is the common tendency to only allow people at a certain of seniority to present ideas at board-level. People below them can often produce ideas, only to pass them on to senior leaders who are deemed to have the requisite experience to effectively present them. This practice, when viewed through the culture lens, effectively racialises experience; inevitably it is white men who have accrued the experience to present, so people of colour and women are locked out, and so never gain that experience. These practices are based on a normalised belief that the ideas presented by Black and non-Black people of colour are ‘fair game’ and can be taken by others and reinvented as their own. That’s how workplace cultures perpetuate racial inequity.

If the structure lens shines the torch brightly on structures that prevent equal access and participation, then the culture lens asks us to do the same thing with language, practices, and processes that maintain the reproductive power of whiteness.



Whiteness is little understood, and reluctantly spoken about. In our experience, organisations and even Equality Diversity and Inclusion departments flinch when the term white is used, as though simply naming it is an act of hostility. There’s a revealing analogy with gender: we can’t tackle sexism unless we name and call out patriarchy, because it is patriarchy which sustains gender inequity.

Similarly, whiteness sustains racial inequity because it is a set of ideas and practices about race which have been circulated, sedimented and encoded through organisational cultures.

It operates by invisibly and unconsciously reproducing a white perspective to the exclusion of all others. By not naming it, we allow it to fester in the darkness.

Whiteness operates everywhere. It's present in university curricula, where knowledge from the global South is marginalized relative to that from Europe and North America.

We see it in the arts sector, where artists and arts professionals of colour are valued only in terms to their contributions to making panels, programming and engagement activities more diverse, while white artists are free to develop their creative practice without reference to their racial and ethnic identities.



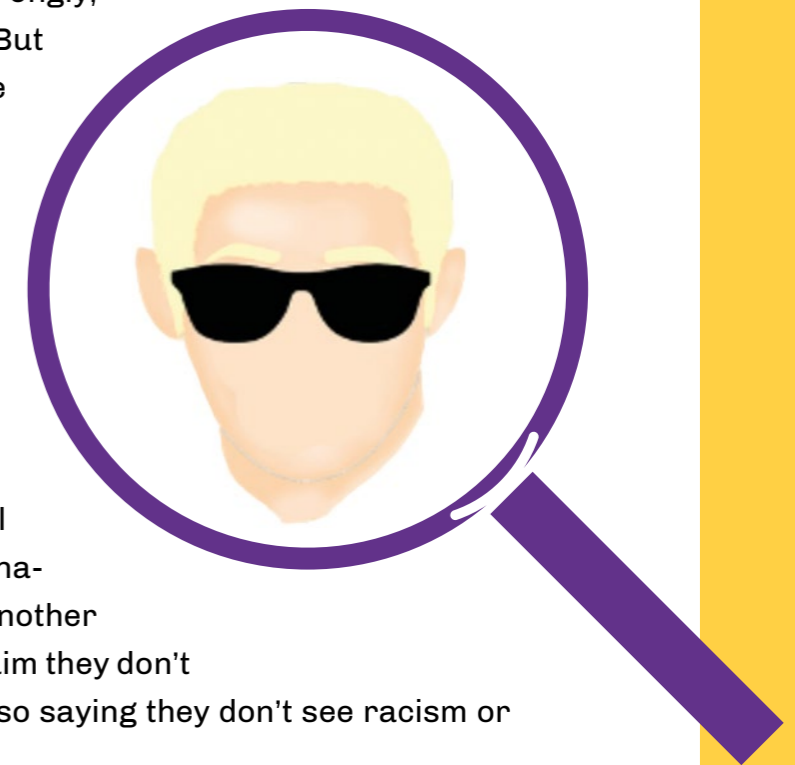
We see it in publishing, where the default reader is assumed to be white, resulting in just 8% of books having a person of colour as the protagonist and where marketing departments target their publicity campaigns almost exclusively to a single reader profile: a white middle-class woman often referred to as "Susan."

In all these cases it is the perspective of a white person which becomes deeply insinuated into how organisations, sectors and whole industries operate. It becomes difficult to see without dedicated effort, which is why the culture lens is so important.

It's why Tsedale Melaku talks about the price Black and non-Black People of

Colour have to pay as an "inclusion tax": a daily set of additional resources, emotional and cognitive energy just to comply in white spaces. Similarly, the sociologist Nirmal Puwar describes the feeling People of Colour face in confrontation with whiteness as akin to being "a space invader" - an unspoken somatic and discursive landscape in which we are always, to some degree, trespassing.

Colour-blindness is often, and wrongly, offered as a solution to whiteness. But because whiteness is so pervasive and invisible as the historical default, the inequalities and inequities it sustains have become deeply entrenched and compounded over time. Treating everybody the same (the diversity / colour-blind approach) does not acknowledge - or address - the ways in which the historical accrual of white privilege and racial discrimination have mutually reinforced one another for centuries. That's when people claim they don't say "they don't see race" they are also saying they don't see racism or white privilege.



You can see how that's problematic.

Secondly, when whiteness is the default, colour blindness assumes it is possible to start from a "neutral" position even when behaviours and actions are intuitively angled towards white perspectives. That's why when terms such as inclusion and tolerance are used as organisational anti-racist strategies, they sound better in the ears of white people than those of colour, because it is, they who "get" to include and tolerate. The rest of us have to wait patiently to be included and tolerated.



Lastly, colour-blindness is not so much a strategy as a wish. It is also a wish that most Black and non-Black people of colour do not share – we do not want to be stripped of our identities. We just don't want our racial and ethnic identities to carry penalties. It is also not reality, and so runs counter to the approach the triple lens insists on: an unflinching look at how things are.

All anti-racist organisations should want to create spaces in which people feel that they belong.

It is only in these places that they can thrive.

Ourselves

Who “does” anti-racism has become a fraught question.

We've heard from white men and women who have been bluntly told they have no business leading race equity in their organisations. Equally, we've heard from people of colour who feel they have been overburdened with the responsibility of calling out and eradicating racism on their own, because it's their problem, after all.

Both approaches are fundamentally misguided. What the ourselves lens enables is an exploration of the resources at our disposal and our own blind spots. We believe that for organisations to become anti-racist, everyone must be empowered to be agents of race equity.

That can only happen when we acknowledge that self-identification as a person of colour is not the only qualification for anti-racist work, but being white does not disqualify you either.

You do not have to walk the fire to help someone who has been burned. There is certainly a credibility gap if someone tries to lead a problem they don't understand, but lived experience is not the only means to understand racial inequity, and there are plenty of skills gap in anti-racism. While we would always value lived experience as one way of identifying inequity in structures and cultures, none of us are able to apprehend racial inequity from a single standpoint.

We need to ask the right questions regardless of our own self-identification.

For example, if we don't have lived experience of racism, we might not understand how structures and cultures converge to create barriers to entry. If we have never suffered a micro-aggression, we cannot design a programme to raise awareness of them. At that point we might want to listen to people with that lived experience.

If we do, however, we would counsel organisations to properly value lived experience. Too often, there is an experience that Black and non-Black people of colour should be willing to volunteer their time. We've heard of People



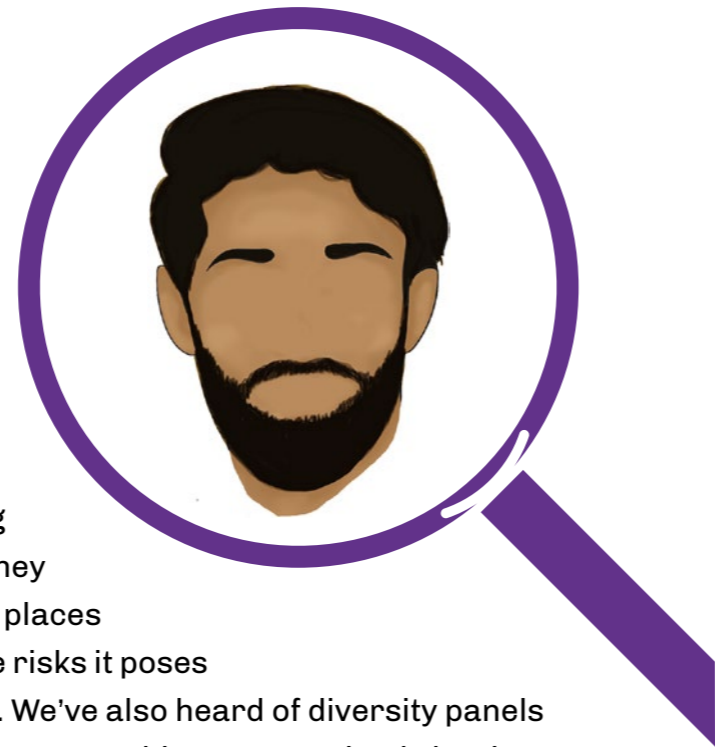
Of Colour being asked to run anti-racist workshops without any prior anti-racist training. Their only qualification is that they are not white.

Such practices assume several things at once: that all Black and non-Black people of colour are comfortable and skilled at talking about the nuances of racism, that they are aware of the mental health toll it places on them, and that they are aware of the risks it poses to their relationships in the workplace. We've also heard of diversity panels where white speakers are paid, whereas non-white are not, simply by virtue of the fact that one has expertise while the other only has experience.

All of these examples show not only that the burden of anti-racism falls on the shoulders of Black and non-Black People of Colour and that these contributions are seldom acknowledged, let alone rewarded, but that the cost of being an agent of racial equity who also happens to be a Person Of Colour is never recognised. Lived experience is often questioned, derided and gaslighted: there's evidence that the exertion of having to explain lived experience can lead to depression, anxiety and mental ill health.

Tsedale Melaku has written in depth about the "invisible labour" that people of colour have to perform -always without recognition and often taken for granted.

While lived experience is chronically undervalued, it can also be dangerously overdetermined. If we have lived experience, we cannot assume ours



is universal - it can never be. It can only ever tell one story and speak to/render visible one set of intersections, not all of them. An Asian man will not have experienced structural racism as an Afro-Caribbean woman has, and age, sexuality, and ability will all intersect to produce different



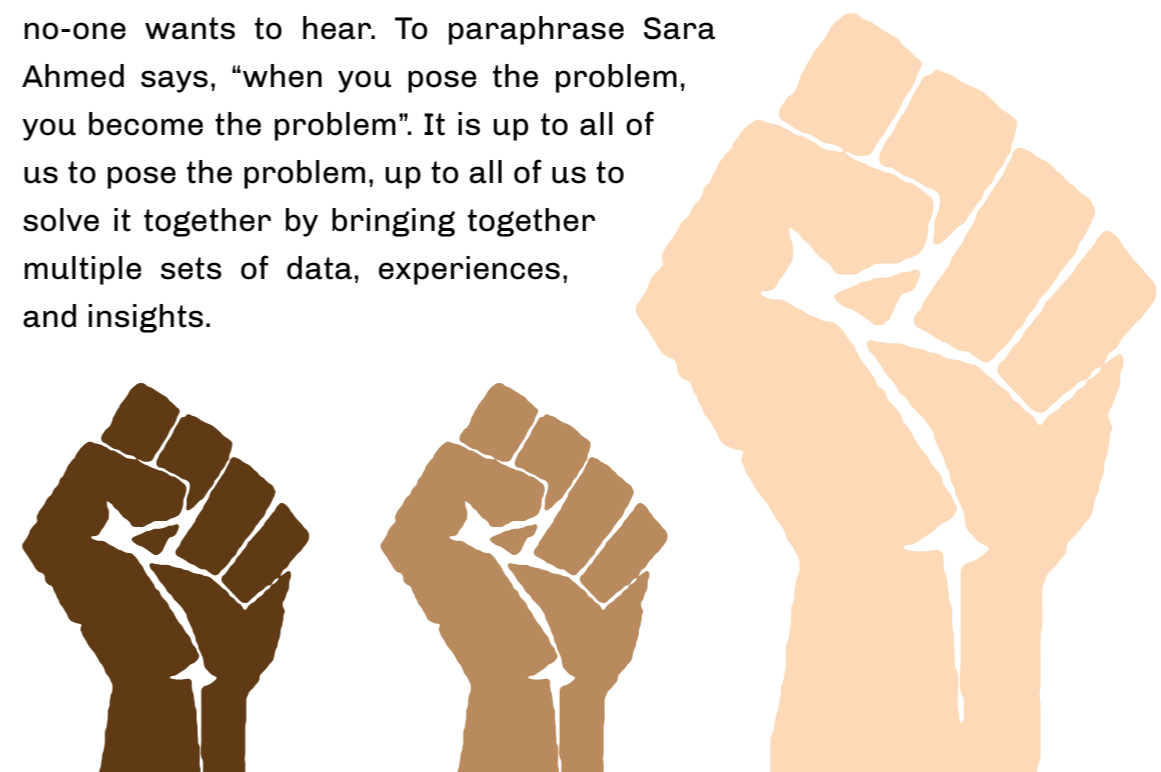
forms of exclusion. Additionally, there's a worrying conflation of self-identification with lived experience: the assumption that all Black and non-Black people of colour are knowledgeable about race, accept structural racism, and believe we have a problem.

We've seen this with the appointment of POC who have publicly queried the prevalence of structural racism to influential positions in race disparity inquiries by virtue of their ethnicity. Biological determinism, as Stuart Hall repeatedly warned us, is dangerous.

All of the above points to the simple reality that who gets to do anti-racism is not simple, but our

organisational approaches need to empower everyone – equitably – to be agents of racial equity. For too long, the burden of anti-racism has fallen on the shoulders of Black and non-Black people of colour.

We have been left to fix the systems which limit us. The emotional and psychological toll of that labour is seldom recognised, and neither is the exhaustion of beating an anti-racist drum which no-one wants to hear. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed says, "when you pose the problem, you become the problem". It is up to all of us to pose the problem, up to all of us to solve it together by bringing together multiple sets of data, experiences, and insights.



Conclusion

It's easy to slip into a despondent hand wringing about structural and institutional racism.

The magnitude of racial inequities can be paralyzing and we're left asking how we can possibly make a difference.

The triple lens is designed to liberate us from that paralysis. As we examine our culture and ourselves, we can "see" structural racism with greater clarity. And when we confront structural racism, it becomes easier to join the dots between discriminatory outcomes, culture, and biases. This is not a 3-stage process, which once worked through, is complete. Instead, these three lenses are elements of an iterative cycle that should stimulate a chain reaction of change. Tiny sparks of change, informing one another, generating momentum and the will to drive bigger changes. What we do in our organisations – whether they are universities, charities, small businesses, corporate businesses, or the arts and creative industries - can have a material effect on raising racial equity at large.

What we do in our organisations can have a material effect on raising racial equity at large.

For example, greater engagement with the arts can boost mental health, enhance our capacity to learn, and, in turn, employability, which can reduce long term illness.

As a critical mass of organisations adopt the triple lens and apply it to each strategic decision they make, being anti-racist will no longer be a minority position, but the default.

It will be those which are not actively anti-racist which will be the exception. Importantly, we believe that organisations which adopt explicitly anti-racist identities, where racial equity is not a decorative flourish but a key performance indicator, will do better. They will have provided a working environment in which people of colour will thrive, and where the people they serve will thrive too. The triple lens will not only allow organisations to do the right thing, but to do things right.

But please: don't call yourselves anti-racist until that is the authentic reality.

One that is supported by all the evidence and the data and the judgments of Black and non-Black people of colour in your organisation.

Be open to the fact that you're aspiring to anti-racism while acknowledging you're not there yet. You do not step across a threshold and find yourself a fully formed anti-racist. We all only ever becoming anti-racist. Be prepared for years of self-reflection, scrutiny and challenge.

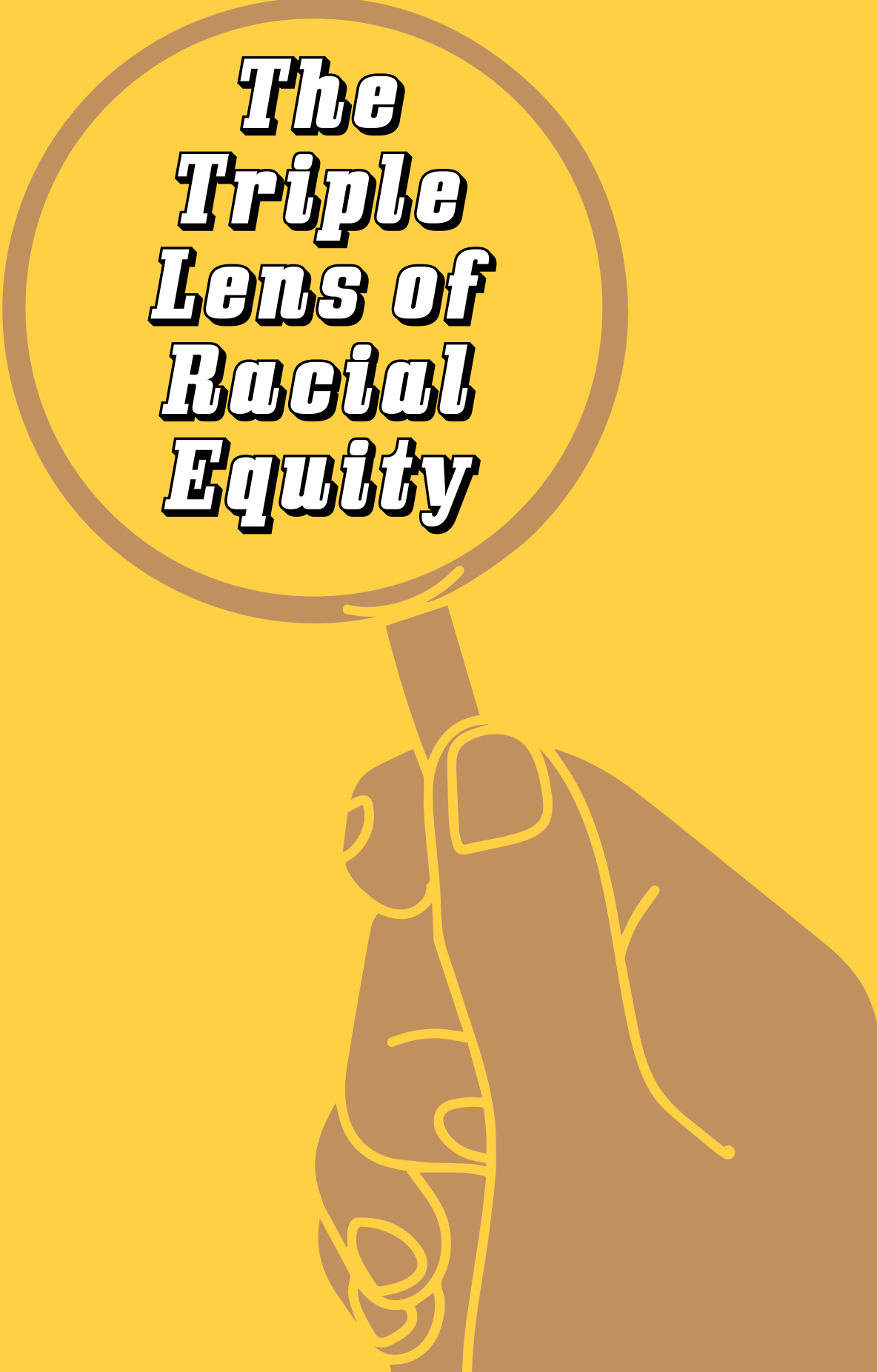
In the words of James Baldwin:

"I can't believe what you say because I see what you do."



Dr Pathik Pathak & Dr Nazneen Ahmed
with Avila Diana Chidume

Beyond the Black Square:



***The
Triple
Lens of
Racial
Equity***