

(Anti-)Racism in Context

by Nigel Amenu-Tekaa (he/him)

Throughout history, those in power **created myths about superiority to justify oppression**. Religious decrees like **Dum Diversas** and **the Doctrine of Discovery** gave European rulers permission to **conquer, enslave, and acquire land** from non-Christians.

The "Doctrine of Discovery"

- A set of **legal principles** developed during 15th and 16th centuries
- legitimized European countries **colonizing and taking land** from people indigenous to lands outside of Europe
- Taking action required **papal bulls**: official letters issued by the Pope that **made actions legal**

Dum Diversas

Authorized Christian rulers to enslave non-Christians and seize their lands.

Terra Nullius

means "empty land" in Latin; land is unoccupied if not by Christians

Over time, these myths and ideas morphed into **racial hierarchies**, laying the foundation for ideology called **white supremacy** and justifying **oppressing** others through systems like:

- **chattel slavery** (race-based slavery), **colonization** and **imperialism**,
- **genocide, ethnic cleansing**, and
- **segregation, apartheid and legal racism**



chattel slavery + colonialism

chattel slavery: race-based slavery, almost exclusively targeting people from Africa

colonialism: when a nation acquires land and **exploits** the people and/or resources for its own financial gain. Directly governs the land thereafter; tied to **capitalism**

genocide + ethnic cleansing


genocide: deliberately destroying an entire group of people based on their identity through killing, cultural erasure, displacement

ethnic cleansing: forced removal of an entire group from a place through violence or intimidation to create a society of only one type

segregation + apartheid

segregation: separating groups based on race/ethnicity whether enforced by law or social norms

apartheid: a legalized, structured system of segregation and racial oppression enforced by law

 **common forms seen more frequently present-day:**

cultural appropriation
exploits, distorts, discredits, erases culture of a marginalized group

immigration policy and law
bias in immigration laws creates barriers that favor some and exclude others

Social Positionality

A person's **social positionality**—shaped by race, class, gender, and other identities—determines their **access to power and resources within society**. Ideas of superiority, like white supremacy, have historically **positioned certain groups as dominant while justifying exclusion and oppression** of others. These beliefs become **embedded in systems**—laws, education, policing, and immigration policies—that uphold **power imbalances**, granting privilege to some while marginalizing others. Understanding positionality helps reveal how oppression operates and how these systems can be challenged.



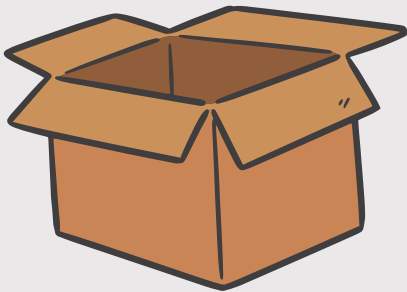
"Did you know that vampires have no reflection in a mirror? [...] And what I've always thought [...] is that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. [...] Part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it."

– Junot Diaz
Dominican American Writer

Oppressive systems, beliefs and cultures, such as White Supremacy Culture (WSC), work to **dehumanize, suppress, and erase stories/identities**, denying people their humanity and dignity.



The Box



Biases and beliefs about which identities, cultures or ways of knowing are superior have been shaped by centuries of norms and assumptions in our systems, including education. These norms create a rigid “box” of what is considered ideal, forcing individuals to **conform or assimilate** while **marginalizing** those who don't fit. As school leaders, it's critical to recognize how this “box” shows up in our schools—**through expectations, policies, and decisions**—and how it can limit the potential and well-being of students and staff.

Think:
“Systems”



Hmm...

Harmful Idea... (supremacy)	...used to rationalize...	...creates systems (laws, patterns, history, traditions)
white supremacy (racial hierarchy)	colonization, genocide/ethnic cleansing	Residential Schools, Immigration Policy/Law, Chattel Slavery
cis-gender and heterosexual ("cis-het") normativity	"Queer and trans content is inappropriate for children"	bans discussing gender identity, erasure of 2SLGBTQIA+ history, contributions, voices
"men > women," gender hierarchy binary thinking, patriarchy	"men are for leading, women are for caring"	barriers to/underrepresentation in leadership, pay equity and influence in shaping policy

Resistance and Countering Oppression

People indigenous to places across the globe have fought oppression as soon as people from elsewhere came to colonize and exploit land, people and resources. Resistance has not only taken form as revolts, activism, and expressions of joy, but also **survival, community, and celebrating what was meant to be erased.**

Know acts of Rebellion & Resilience:

Revolts, civil rights movements,
Indigenous resistance

Education & Awareness:

Challenging bias

Learn diverse histories, stories,
authentic voices; we show and teach
students they have agency in shaping
what's around them.



Joy & Art as Resistance:

Music, dance, visual arts storytelling, cultural
traditions that sustained community

Everyday Resistance

- Speaking up and **calling-in**
- disrupting racism
- Co-building our communities
- Instilling inclusive communities

Because of the context and history of colonialism, we grew up in a culture where groups were painted with a single brush stroke, stereotypes, prejudice, etc. – and this dehumanizes. How do we counter and resist in our educational spaces?

By centring:

- **Student stories**
- **Student voice**
- **Student agency**

As the adults in our school communities, if we want to counter the harm that we witness amongst students, we should work to create an environment where **student voices are heard, valued and acted upon.**

Do students feel respected, reflected, connected and protected?

How can we foster a culture where youth can be their true, authentic selves?



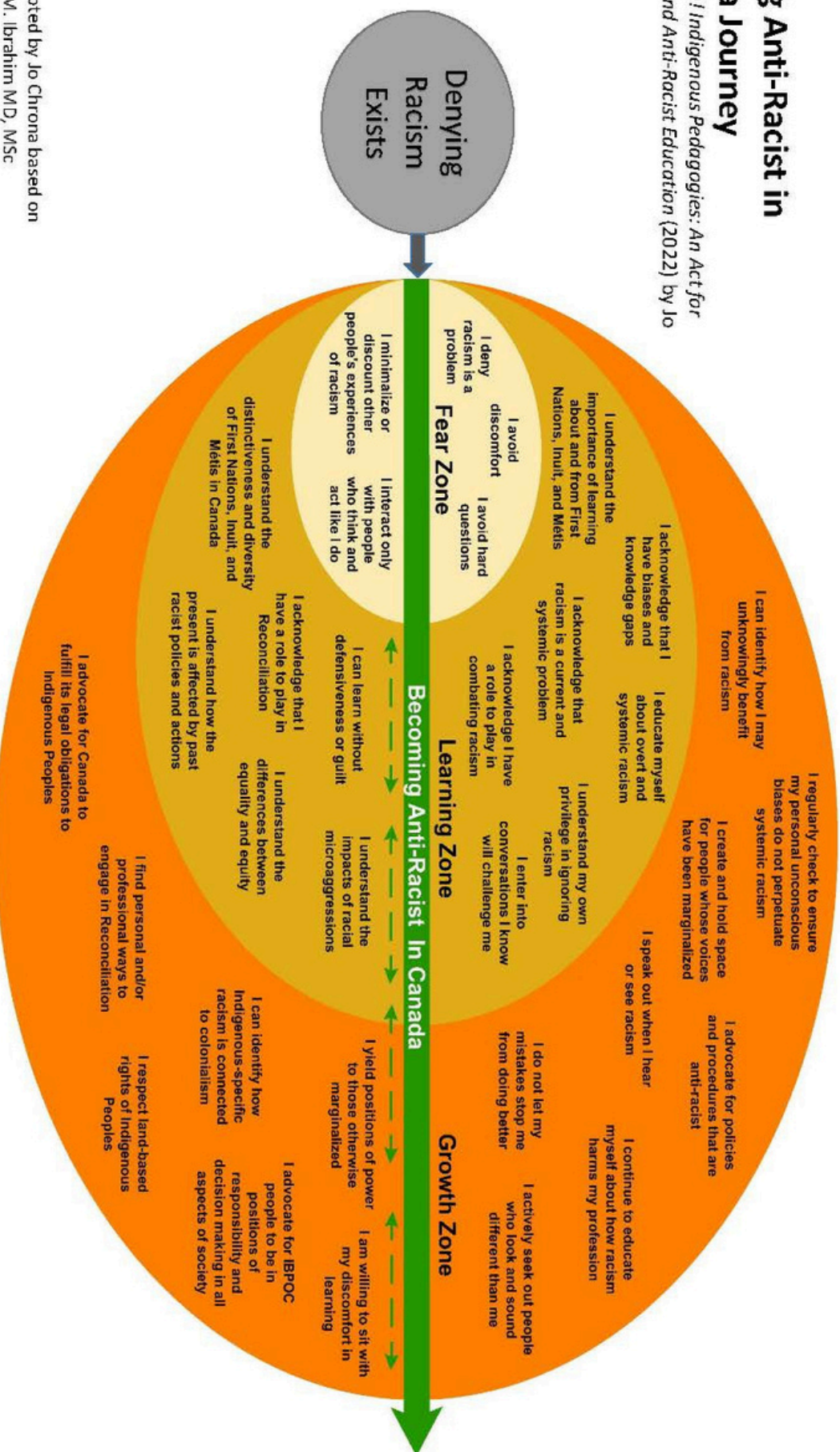
“All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of ur time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we're here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time.”

– Richard Wagamese
Ojibwe Writer, author of *Indian Horse*

Becoming Anti-Racist in

Canada: a Journey

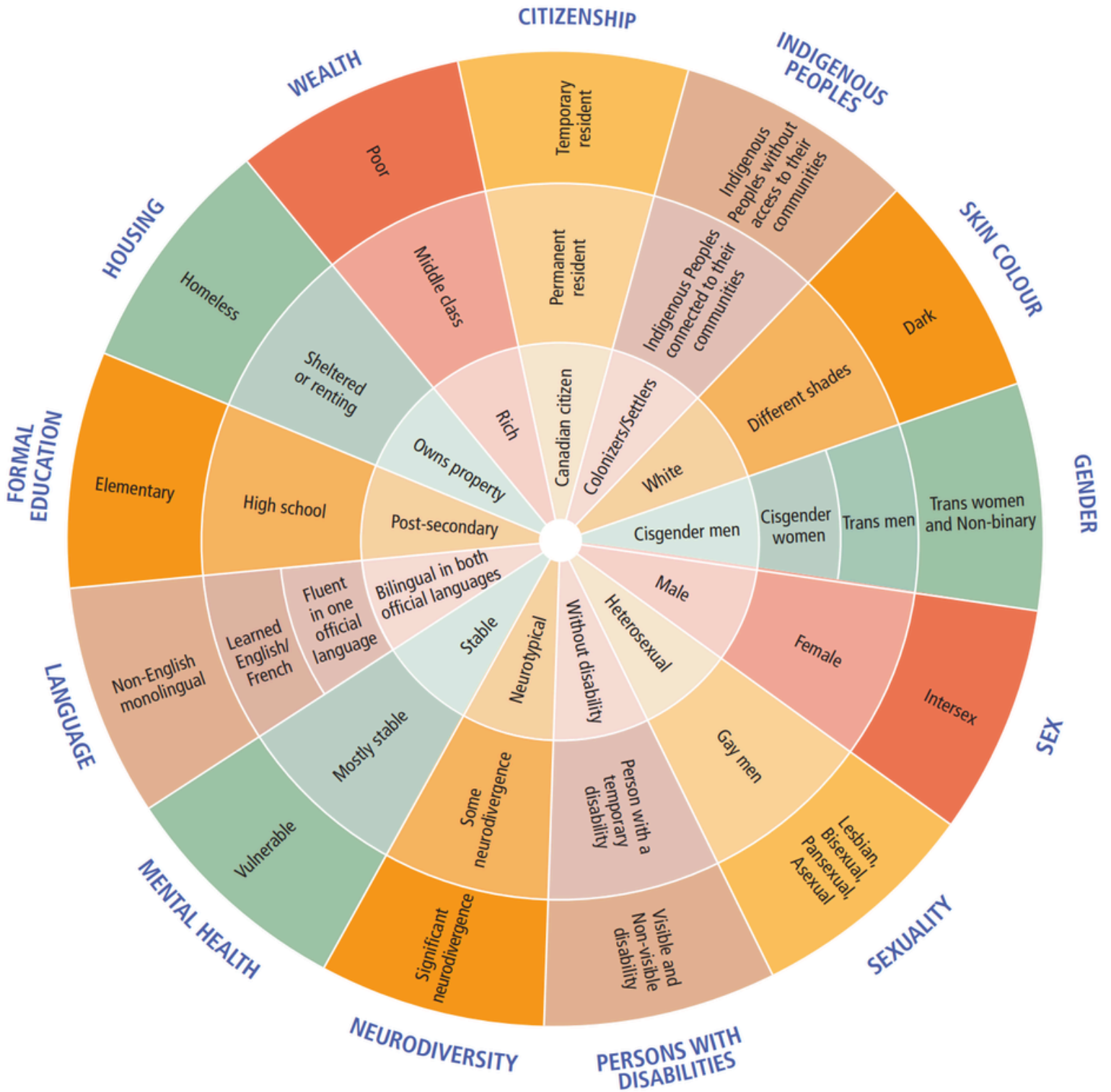
From *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education* (2022) by Jo Chrona



Idea/graphic adapted by Jo Chrona based on work of Andrew M. Ibrahim MD, MSc

WHEEL OF PRIVILEGE AND POWER

(the closer you are to the centre, the more privilege you have)



Note: the categories within this wheel are only examples in the Canadian context, and we should not limit ourselves to them. Intersectionality is a broad concept, and this tool is only a beginning point.