Neoliberal anti-racism: Responding to 'everywhere but different' racism

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Abstract

Racism cannot be treated as a spatially homogeneous phenomenon. This review reports on the merits of a localised approach to anti-racism, and delivers a frank assessment of the challenges faced when developing local responses to racism in a neoliberal era. Under neoliberalism, local actors are responsibilised, and for anti-racism this means action can potentially be closely aligned to local inflexions of racism. But localised responses to racism under neoliberalism are associated with deracialised and depoliticised policies on interethnic community relations. Neoliberal anti-racism promotes competition among local agencies rather than coalition building, and is associated with spatially uneven and non-strategic action.

Keywords

Neo-liberal anti-racism: Responding to 'everywhere but different' racism

I. Introduction

From the late 1980s onwards a series of researchers, mostly geographers, amassed a convincing case that space matters to racism; that racism cannot be treated as a spatially homogeneous phenomenon (e.g. Robinson, 1987; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Bonnett, 1993; Bonnett, 1996; Troyna and Williams, 1986; Dunn et al., 2004). The shape and form of racism varies by place (Dwyer and Bressey, 2008; Jackson, 2008). The case for spatial variation had empirical support, both quantitative and qualitative (Forrest and Dunn, 2006; Lamont et al., 2002; Robinson, 1987), as well as theoretical substance (Dunn and McDonald, 2001; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). Racism was evocatively described as 'everywhere different' (Forrest and Dunn, 2006: 168) - (see also Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Vasta and Castles, 1996), reflecting, for example, the current ethnic mix, the histories of inter-ethnic relations and socio-demographic characteristics of those residing in a particular place and the unique cross-cultural relations. Bonnett (1993) observed that, when studying anti-racist educators in the United Kingdom, race equality consciousness developed in localities in ways that reflected the specific discursive context. Geographers have taken the lead in asserting the spatial variations of racism.

Having rehearsed the 'everywhere but different' nature of racism our review assesses the prospect for everywhere but different anti-racism. Our first aim in this critical commentary is to report on what we see as the merits of localised responses to racism, and we anchor that within the literature that has emerged over the last 20 years. Our second aim is to deliver a frank assessment of the difficulties of localised anti-racism. We position those difficulties within the contemporary context of a globalising world of neoliberal governance. This commentary draws upon the activities of an Australian based collaborative research project with human rights commissions. As part of our work in this area we analysed localised anti-racism initiatives in two localities: one in South Australia (SA) and one in New South Wales (NSW). In this paper we make reference to in-depth interviews conducted with individuals working in interethnic community relations in these areas as well as interviews that were conducted with state or federal officials working on anti-racism in Australia. The local level interviews involved representatives from local government, schools, sporting groups, voluntary/community organisations, faith based organisations and local leaders, each of whom were involved in the implementation of localised programmes with anti-racism ambitions. For our current purposes, localised anti-racism encompasses formalised initiatives that seek to address racism, including activities such as cultural celebrations, educational programmes that promote cross-cultural contact and regulatory initiatives to address specific points of tension. As we elaborate on below, attempts to address racism

commonly took place within programmes with broader goals. We acknowledge that the practices that seek to undermine racism are much broader than those we examine, including, for example, activist activities that can come together as wider-scale political movements (Bonnett, 2000; Bonnett, 1993). However, an examination of these forms of anti-racism is out of scope in this review. Our emphasis is on formal localised anti-racism.

The [Project] is an applied research project with an interest in, initially, the spatiality of racism and later, responses to racism. As might be expected, from a project commenced by geographers, the [Project] has asserted that responses to racism should pay attention to regional variations in racism, to context and to local specificities. Underpinning this scholarship was an assumption that localised action was a meritorious means of advancing anti-racism broadly, rather than relying on national level policies and programs. Remembering that we are looking at formalised, largely state funded initiatives, this paper asks, in the context of neoliberal governance, what have we learned about the merits of localised anti-racism? This is a meat and potatoes question for geographers working against racism.

Our argument running through this review is that neoliberalism can depoliticise and deracialise localised community relations initiatives. Our empirical focus is on the

activities undertaken by local government and community organisations to address racism. These programmes have the promise of being responsive to local inflexions in race relations. However, a neoliberal political context presents challenges to localised anti-racism. Our review points to five key and related challenges to the geographies of anti-racism:

1. A depoliticising of programs;

2. A denial of racism in the interest of place defending;

3. Inadequate resourcing;

4. Competition among local agencies rather than coalition building, and;

5. Spatially uneven and non-strategic action.

Neoliberal subjectifications construct councils, communities and individuals as 'locally responsible'. However, without adequate resourcing and strategy such 'roll out neoliberalising' could severely limit anti-racist effort.

II. Racism as everywhere different

Once geographers had identified the spatial variability of the issue (racism), there then followed calls for localised, context specific anti-racism activity (see Dunn and McDonald, 2001: 38-41). Sociologist of ethnic studies, Stephen Castles (1996), argued for anti-racism strategies that 'address specific *racisms,* as they affect particular groups in various locations and times' (18, emphasis in original). The geographer, Alistair

Bonnett (2000), argued against thinking in terms of a spatial centre of racism. He advocated anti-racism discussions that address specific types of activities and that are located at a particular place and time. If racism varies by place, anti-racism may be most effective when it is place specific. Kobayashi and Peake (2000: 398) described the political task of anti-racism as 'situat[ing] antiracist struggles in those sites where they will have most effect'. Forrest and Dunn (2006: 184) asserted that 'Public policy initiatives... have to take into account the fact that 'geography matters''. Social psychologists (e.g. Pedersen et al., 2005; Pedersen et al., 2007) concurred, emphasising the need for regionally specific anti-racism initiatives.

The need for regionally-sensitive anti-racism has gained some traction within policy circles. In Australia, for example, the Federal Government announced that anti-racism 'campaign messages and strategies have to be tailored for different audiences and for different parts of the country' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998: 1). A Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report to the World Conference Against Racism in Durban called on the Australian Government 'to implement a program involving local councils, local consultations and local action plans to address racism locally' (2001b). The Commission also recommended that local governments and communities develop local anti-racism plans (2001b; 2001a). Within the strongly hierarchical policy structure, addressing spatial variations of racism still

requires central government resourcing and guidance – 'these initiatives require substantive central government support and guidance, as well as rigorous critical evaluation' (Dunn and McDonald, 2001: 40). The inferred anxiety was that directing responsibility for anti-racism to local governments or specific communities could be a strategy through which central governments and agencies could deflect responsibility. This is an issue that we overtly address later in our review.

Communities are increasingly seen as an appropriate site for remedying a host of social problems, from poverty and unemployment to social exclusion and racism. Moves towards place-based social policy are part of the 'revival of the local', according to Brenner and Theodore (2002: 341), who describe new localism as a powerful call to arms for grounded resistance to national or global political and economic forces. Some have detected a policy shift from functional domains (e.g. welfare, schooling, planning) to spatially-determined portfolios (e.g. local area planning, precinct officers) even within municipal governance (Amin, 2005). Similarly, the community or social cohesion agendas in the United Kingdom and Australia have reflected a more spatial approach (e.g. Dwyer and Bressey, 2008; Andrews, 2007; Cheong et al., 2007; Jupp et al., 2007). In Australia the National Anti-Racism Strategy (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012) had an emphasis on individual and community action against racism. In addition, the main funding for anti-racism initiatives came from the *Diversity*

and Social Cohesion Program, which had an overtly local focus. But in spite of this policy focus, scholarly investigation of localised anti-racism has been relatively sparse with much of the key literature in this area dating back to the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Bonnett, 1993; Carrington and Bonnett, 1997; Thompson et al., 1998; Dunn et al., 2001; Edgington and Hutton, 2000/01; Frisken and Wallace, 2003). Exceptions to this have primarily focused on the role of local government (Mansouri et al., 2007).

III. Scale and 'the local'

Too often, scale is used simplistically and hierarchically, structuring funding regimes, policy frameworks and social analysis. This pertains in public discourse, policy debate and in academic work. A naïve construction of scale positions 'the local' as simply a site, an effect or outcome, or an object that is influenced from above. Marston (2000) argued for a much more critical engagement with scale, especially for social and cultural geography, which in the last two decades had lagged behind economic and physical geography in countenancing scale. Marston's review in *Progress in Human Geography* in 2000 was a timely call to social and cultural geography to not only discuss scale, but to do so in a critical way. Narrow views of the local as lesser, as an outcome or site of social constructions, can have material implications and narrowly define place and the prospects for social justice. This naïve view of the local can be disempowering of activism, and can over-determine the influence of supra-local

processes and players. A relational approach to place allows us to eschew the dangers of this simplistic construction of scale (Amin, 2004), viewing place not as spatially bounded but as linked in to dynamic networks (national, transnational and global) of social, economic, political and cultural relations. Under relational understandings of place the assumed boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' a locality become problematic. Under globalisation and the prominence of regional and transnational networks, place must be conceived of relationally, rather than territorially (2001). Amin places ontological priority on fluid social, economic, political and cultural relations, rather than static scalar nodes. The relational approach avoids the disabling effects of perceiving the supra-local as powerful and causative. In the review which follows we attempt to marry conceptual understandings of place as relational with the hierarchical political structure within which formalised initiatives to address racism operate. We argue that the formalised local initiatives we analyse are subjected to neoliberal rationalisations which narrow the range of anti-racism action possible.

III. Neoliberal localised responses to racism

Racism is deeply embedded within economic, social and political processes. Theorists have traced racism to structures like capitalism, colonialism, or even ruralism (Vasta and Castles, 1996; Vaughan, 1995; Wirth, 1938). Like Gilroy (1987), Lentin (2004) has argued that racism is embedded within the structures of the nation state, strongly

influenced in contemporary times by neoliberalism. Racism is reproduced within such processes, it is shaped by those processes, but also it is a distinct force. For example, scholars have made incisive critiques of the disabling and oppressive effects of neoliberalism on multiculturalism policy.[1] The implications of neoliberalism for local responses to address racism are central to this paper. Peck and Tickell (2002: 380) described neoliberalism as providing 'a kind of operating framework or "ideological software" for competitive globalization, inspiring and imposing far-reaching programs of state restructuring and rescaling across a wide range of national and local contexts'. They make a distinction between two phases of neoliberal policy approaches: 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neo-liberalism. While roll-back neoliberalism was characterised by deregulation, state withdrawal from social service provision and reforms of the public service, roll-out neoliberalism is a consolidating phase involving 'active state-building and regulatory reform' (p.384). Goldberg (2009: 333) argued that contemporary forms of neoliberalism seek not to do away with the state altogether, but attempts to 'radically

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[1] Melamed (2006, p.1) is highly critical of the relationship between multiculturalism, anti-racism and neoliberalism: "Race continues to permeate capitalism's economic and social processes, organizing the hyperextraction of surplus value from racialized bodies and naturalizing a system of capital accumulation that grossly favours the global North over the global South. Yet multiculturalism portrays neoliberal policy as the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity". Melamed (2006) argued that neoliberalism manages to subsume multiculturalism and use it in a self-justificatory way, all the while "obscuring the racial antagonisms and inequalities on which the neoliberal project depends". Melamed describes neoliberal multiculturalism as an ideology to manage racial contradictions in the service of U.S. led neoliberalism. Formalising anti-racism, making it official, attaching it to the state, prevents action against "the biopolitics of global capitalism" (p.3). For many scholars of anti-racism the key structural challenges flow from the related issues of entrenched ethnic privilege and the legacies of colonialism (e.g. Baldwin, 2012, Frankenberg, 1993, Cowlishaw, 2004, Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). However, anti-racist activists and policy makers are unlikely to be convinced that their work will not advance without the end of capitalism.

shift its priorities, to redirect it to represent different interests, to do different work'. Social spending does not necessarily cease under neoliberalism; it may be reduced or redirected into private hands, allowing those with capital to direct social and welfare spending differently (Goldberg, 2009). Central to the roll-out phase of neoliberalism is the 'stretching' of neoliberal policies into extramarket forms of government and regulation. Under roll-out neoliberalism 'local communities' have been reconstituted as 'governance objects', to be thought of as governable and to be governed (Corry, 2013: 54). For example, local governance 'partnerships' are created, and volunteer groups and faith based organisations become key governance modalities. In terms of racism this might involve shifts of funding to not-for-profits or even companies for non-controversial programs that promise dividends to workplace productivity and creativity. Since the late 1990s the idea of 'productive diversity' has advanced this form of anti-racism, operating from the assumption that additional profit is available if the costs associated with workplace racism can be assuaged (e.g. labor turnover, absenteeism, the regulatory burden of complaints handling) (see, for example, Triana et al., 2010; Richard, 2000; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Berman et al., 2008; Trenerry and Paradies, 2012).

Under a neo-liberal ideology local communities are 'governmentalised', rather than being understood as organic, grassroots forms of social organisation (Delanty, 2003;

Worley, 2005). Local councils and community or not-for-profit organisations assume formal responsibility for tasks that have previously been bailiwick of central governments, such as providing social services. The outcomes of this approach can have deleterious resource implications, producing 'the political effect of disburdening the state of responsibility and diluting social citizenship' (Delanty, 2003: 88). Responsibilities are devolved to organisations, often without requisite resources or rights (authority) to adequately address the issues (Rentschler, 1997). The governmentality of 'community' is an issue taken up by Amin (2005) (following Foucault (2011)). While Amin asserts the importance of context is a necessary first step of nuanced policy, he is concerned that this has led the local to be 'reimagined as the cause, consequence, and remedy of social and spatial inequality' (p.614). When Amin (2004) argued for a relational understanding of the local, he was not convinced that local actors would have effective control or authority over defined geographical territories. A relational reading of cities and regions offers an approach to place politics whereby the local is seen to bring 'together different scales of practice/social action' (Amin, 2004: 38). Sharing responsibility for anti-racism among both local and national authorities makes sense, as does a distributive responsibility across communities. The latter needs to be distributed vertically and horizontally, reaching to the micro-politics of relations between peer groups, families and individuals (Nelson et al., 2011b). This distributive responsibility does evoke the concerns of neoliberalising subjectification, in

which individuals and 'communities' are asked to self-discipline and govern themselves. However, in the field of anti-racism our argument would be that the role of the subject has been under-played. Anti-racism governance has tended to have a predilection for state programs, national laws and corporate targets. The 'local' is therefore a site of anti-racist action where multiple players could potentially contribute, using programs that are sensitive to the specific manifestations of racism, which are cognisant of the structural underpinnings of racisms, and which leverage micro-political action.

The literature on new localism grapples with deep ambiguities around the potential for the local to resist *supra*local forces, introduced earlier (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). The extent to which local councils and community organisations have the capacity to drive localised responses to racism remains under question, as does the role of political-economic forces in determining or constraining localised action. When it comes to local responses to racism, are localities sites of mobilisation against neoliberal forces (Nash, 2003; Laurie and Bonnett, 2002)? In the introduction to a special issue of *Antipode* on the new localism and neoliberalism, the editors reflected that the potential for resistance in localities was not yet sufficiently contemplated. According to Brenner and Theodore (2002: 346), while localities and cities are neoliberalising, they 'remain vibrant socio-political arenas in which alternative practices of everyday life, a whole range of

institutional experiments, and various traditions of political utopianism continue to flourish'.

In his research looking at race equality consciousness amongst educators in the UK, Bonnett (1993: 33) made a distinction between liberal anti-racists, for whom anti-racism was consensus seeking and apolitical, and could occur within the existing social framework, and radical anti-racists, who saw societal transformation as a necessary condition for effective anti-racism. Liberal anti-racism was self-assured, while radical anti-racism was more vulnerable to self-consciousness. Twenty-five years later, we could add neo-liberal anti-racism to this classification. Neo-liberal anti-racism might frame the importance of anti-racism in terms of productivity increases or economic gain, it would look to community as a disciplinary (economic, social, cultural) mode of governance, and emphasise individual culpability for racism and individual responsibility for anti-racism. The way the individual and 'local communities' are implicated in neo-liberal anti-racism could go hand in hand with so-called post-racial discourses, the idea that we live in a period where race no longer determines life chances and outcomes (Lentin and Titley, 2011). These are perceptive theoretical insights, and ones we use when reflecting on localised anti-racism action in Australia. We now turn to the key challenges for localised anti-racism that our work in this area has raised.

V. Depoliticised anti-racism?

In the Australian context, the policy role of local government in responding to racism has been thought of as twofold – celebratory and regulatory (Dunn et al., 2001). These terms directly map onto the terminology used in the British context, with celebratory initiatives coming out of a multicultural space and regulatory initiatives being more closely aligned with anti-racism. Our experience suggests that celebrations are the dominant localised initiative in Australia, and are far more common than strategies to deal with everyday discord. We offer a critical analysis of neoliberalised anti-racism, and we explore reverberations that follow. In the Australian context, anti-racism activity often takes place within programmes primarily designed to achieve another goal, such as a celebration. This could be a NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) week celebration at a school, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and achievements are celebrated, but activities also build in opportunities for students to reflect on the current experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. Some teachers would push to use the opportunity to generate a critical awareness of colonialism and settler privilege, while others would settle for a celebratory event, or simply fly the Aboriginal flag. Following Troyna and Williams (1986), we see schools and other localities as 'sites of struggle', viewing them

as the settings in which responses to racism are debated and negotiated, involving, at times, both conflict and contradiction.

We found that anti-racism actors have highly developed **critical literacy** about multiculturalism and anti-racism. We use the term critical literacy here to describe the awareness and reflexivity our informants applied to their local anti-racism projects[2]. For example, many participants in our research were aware of the limitations of celebratory initiatives, which have been heavily critiqued in academic literature. Critiques include the way celebrations of diversity can stereotype and commodify otherness (Jordan and Weedon, 1995; Poynting and Mason, 2008; Mansouri et al., 2007; Kymlicka, 2010), and fail to address racism (Rothenberg, 2000; Babacan and Hollinsworth, 2009) or neglect economic and political inequalities (Kymlicka, 2010; Marotta, 2006). Lentin and Titley (2011) distinguish between what is seen as 'good' diversity, which must be cultivated and celebrated, and 'bad' diversity, which, like the headscarf, 'belongs to the resistant, risky, communitarianism of the multicultural past' (p.176). What this indicates is that only some types of difference, or forms of diversity, are seen as suitable for celebration (Balint, 2010).

> *I realise that most programmes are still based on celebrations, they are important – I'm not*
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> *saying they are not. They are important because they are part of everybody's culture. But it*

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[2] Critical literacy is a term borrowed from education, where it is used to describe one's ability to critically evaluate texts and to understand how texts influence and shape our lives (see, for example, Luke, 2013; Thompson and Clay, 2008).

keeps understandings of multiculturalism to like food and clothing – nothing else which is really – I don't know if they are reviewing citizenship tests for example... I disagree with Australian values based on Judeo-Christian – I don't know, I think they need to take care of this as well... [Later] Have a big festival once a year and then 364 days don't do anything kind of projects – they are important but not enough. [Pejna, NSW]

...we do celebrations on purpose and I understand entirely where they're at but as a public awareness raising exercise even for the staff it's not a bad thing. [Karla, SA]

Doesn't it show then that stuff about having Reconciliation Week and having multicultural weeks and lovely assemblies and sharing foods and – doesn't impact on people's mindsets to a significant degree. [Natasha, SA]

Local interviewees, Pejna, Karla and Natasha, were aware that the effectiveness of celebrations for effecting a sustained reduction in racism may be limited. Pejna expressed frustration that celebrations were used to limit the scope of anti-racism, suggesting that these one-off, time-limited projects allowed the issue of anti-racism to be 'ticked off' without really engaging with what she saw as the structural issues associated with (neo-)liberal citizenship and belonging – the neoliberal assumption of a free and equal society (Hindess, 2002). Karla was familiar with the critique of celebrations, but she justified their use for raising awareness amongst staff. Natasha felt that anti-racism really needed to affect people's mindsets, and that celebratory initiatives do not achieve this. In her work as a school principal she had felt the inadequacies of celebratory approaches, and in other parts of the interview described the way she sought out alternative strategies that potentially have a deeper effect. She

recognised that unsettling people's mental models (a cognitive level intervention) requires much more than sharing food and multicultural assemblies.

In a study of a local government area in Victoria, Australia, Mansouri et al. (2007) also found a high degree of critical literacy with regards to celebratory initiatives. In other words, local actors were aware of the limited impacts of less ambitious interventions, as well as the parameters set around how they could describe the nature of their interventions, and were attuned to how they could exceed those limits. Citing the work of Claus Offe, Bonnett (1993: 8) identified the centrality of contradiction for his interviewees in the UK, particularly the radical anti-racist educators.

> The public professional is an egalitarian, but also a capitalist, socializer and trainer. He or she is both 'for and against' welfare capitalism. It is suggested that educators resolve this tension into forms of rhetoric and action that conceal and cohere their 'non-market' and 'pro-market' political ambitions.

Twenty years after Bonnett's work our interviewees were in a similarly ambivalent position. They recognised the limitations of celebratory approaches to community relations, but were in a position where they had to undertake this type of initiative nonetheless. In an early study of anti-racist educators in Britain, Troyna and Williams (1986) found that policy-makers were forced to reconcile anti-racist education, that largely targeted individual level racism, with their recognition of institutional racism, that racism is deeply embedded in the structures of British society. In our fieldwork,

anti-racism actors resolved this tension by constructing anti-racist and multicultural, or celebratory, initiatives as complementary, with most simultaneously endorsing both types of community relations strategies.

Neoliberalism threatens to depoliticise and deracialise community relations initiatives. Reframing anti-racism as 'harmony', 'understanding', and 'respect' serves to deny racism (Nelson, 2015; Nelson, 2013). The discursive side-lining of the term anti-racism, and its replacement with harmony, has been prevalent in Australia since the mid-1990s and reflects trends in the UK as well (Dunn and Nelson, 2011; Dunn et al., 2011; Ho and Dreher, 2006; Nelson, 2013). There was a critical literacy in the way anti-racism actors negotiated denial and the reframing of anti-racism as harmony by funding bodies and others.

> *We seem to have taken several steps forward in terms of combating certain -isms over the years, and we feel like that the media and government policy in some respect has taken us back a few steps, and there were certain things that were uncool to be a part of. So you've got to work in a very different way to deal with those same issues. Brand those things differently, if you know what I mean, because as soon as you use that branding around racism or anti-racism, it becomes really uncool, and people start getting really worried about selling it... It might be what you're doing, but if you want funding in order to do stuff, it's about community harmony. And that's all very well and good, that's one strategy, but it can't be the only strategy. It can't be the only way that we deal with things.* [Ivana, NSW]

Rosa (NSW) also reported that racism was not 'sexy' on a program funding application and that her community centre needed to think about 'spinning our funding submissions' if they wanted to do anti-racism. Under neoliberalism, funding bodies generate incentives for local actors to emphasise the positive in community relations. However, there is a hint here of local anti-racism actors resisting the neoliberal anti-anti-racism sentiment, circulating within funding bodies. Government distaste for the term anti-racism resulted in some community workers *rebranding* anti-racism in some other way to successfully secure funding and support for anti-racism. Roll-out neoliberal anti-racism empowers local agents to bid for resources and this engenders a responsibilising governmentality, although the local actors also exercised some agency in this process. Our respondents demonstrated awareness that their interventions were working across the rigid resource, discursive and policy priority boundaries that were set by government.

Consumerist discourses, including concerns about branding, are prominent under neoliberalism. Race and deep-seated inequality are invisible in 'community harmony' initiatives. Marketing community relations initiatives as 'community harmony', as Ivana suggests here, potentially moves programmes away from anti-racism, depoliticising and deracialising local action. Consumerist subjectification is a neoliberal discourse that may be influencing funding bodies' preference for 'harmony' rather than

'anti-racism'. The conceptual links between neoliberalism and harmony discourses (rather than anti-racism) are not clear. It may be that the harmony preference is more associated with push-back from the culturally privileged classes in colonial settler societies, rather than a neoliberal inference. Our interviews revealed both coherence and resistance to harmony discourse, with some interview participants framing their projects in celebratory terms for the purposes of acquiring funding, but attempting to resist this force by actually going on and doing what they perceived to be needed. This local disruption of 'community harmony' and 'celebrations' offer a glimmer of hope for anti-racism, and suggests that we must be cautious about overstating the neoliberal threat to anti-racism. The neoliberalisation of local anti-racism can be thought of as a dialectical process of power, for example, promoting the state's harmony agenda through their funding programmes, and resistance where communities subvert these programming priorities based on their needs.

VI. Local anti-racism and relationships to place

1. Local knowledge/needs

Relationships to place are a defining feature in localised anti-racism initiatives. In our experience local anti-racism actors make strong claims to their local knowledge and understanding of local needs in relation to interethnic community relations. The way local needs were constructed by our informants was no doubt linked to their

organisational positioning, within state based or (largely) state funded organisations, as well as their relationships to place. Addressing community needs was seen as a first order benefit of local anti-racism, particularly by those employed in the community services sector. Karla described the dynamism and flexibility of local anti-racism, outlining how projects can and should change with shifting community needs.

> *...that will die one day [a given program] because there won't be as many kids or someone else will come in and go why are we doing homework club when we could be doing something better with our time? But it's about understanding the needs of the community as a whole and trying to be able to – where we can – value add, plug the gaps, react to the issues.* [Karla, SA]

Karla characterised her organisation's role as somewhat reactive. This was in contrast to other local anti-racism actors who sought to be proactive and involved in projects with a preventative orientation. This may reflect Karla's status as an employee of local government, an organisation responsible for responding to the unknown future needs of its constituents. It may also reflect the dynamism of the local area within which Karla worked, itself a reflection of forces operating both within and beyond 'the local'. Localised anti-racism activity has the capacity to respond to the varied and shifting needs of newly arriving groups in a local area. For example, we were told about an after-school basketball programme that was developed to bring together and ease tensions between recent African migrants to a locality in South Australia and local Aboriginal young people. The capacity of local anti-racism to challenge racism can also

build on the well-developed critical literacy skills of those working on programmes, who are capable of locally negotiating the proscriptions on terminology like racism and anti-racism. The basketball initiative was not framed as an 'anti-racism' programme, but reducing interracial conflict was a core ambition.

2. Place defending and hiding local deficits

Denial of racism is a key feature of modern racism. It has been argued that denial of racism by central governments narrows the range of anti-racism activity undertaken (Nelson, 2013). Relational analyses demonstrate that an important driver of denial is the desire to defend one's local area against an accusation of racism (reference withheld for peer review). One way denial is made manifest is through place-defending (reference withheld for peer review). Place is defended by making favourable comparisons between one's local area and another place(s), in order to construct a claim for an absence of racism in one's own locality or place. Nelson et al. (2011a) discuss spatial deflections but in reference to the nation, where spatial denial posits that 'racism is worse in other countries' (p.162; see also Fozdar, 2008; Penrose and Howard, 2008). When contemplating local responses to racism – which draw strongly on scalar notions of place – spatial deflections operate primarily at a more local level. For example, two participants discussed the attacks on Indian students in Melbourne (in 2009) and asserted the situation was much better where they were located in Sydney and Adelaide.

However, the desire to protect one's local area from being branded as a racist space is a potential threat to local anti-racism action. Local anti-racism actors and local journalists commonly perform their place as tolerant, seeking to defend their locality from being characterised as a racist place (reference withheld for peer review). This might be a particularly potent version of denial when there is a neoliberal competition among localities for citizen investment and business relocation. One nefarious outcome of such place defending is that problematic existing power relations are not challenged, and are reproduced. Going the other way, acknowledgement of racism could help mount a case for anti-racism resources and action. Neoliberal policies and practices, and the social practices of racism more generally, are internalised by local actors, re-emerging in grant applications, work practices or media statements. Individuals working on these issues are oftentimes protective of the reputation of their local area, yet are simultaneously expected to acknowledge and take responsibility for addressing local discord. In this way the citizens self-govern, and they perform neoliberalism with little state coercion. For localised anti-racism to be successful, a careful balance between reputation and responsibility is negotiated. When local actors practice neoliberal anti-racism the scope and range of activity is curtailed.

VII. Resourcing of local anti-racism

Under neoliberal governance, resourcing and funding arrangements can inhibit community organisations and municipal agencies from responding to local needs.

> In the asymmetrical scale politics of neoliberalism, local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power, while international institutions and actors were gaining power without responsibility: a form of regulatory dumping was occurring at the local scale, while macrorule regimes were being remade in regressive and marketized ways (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 386).

Peck and Tickell's observation rings true in the Australian context. One of our informants, Rosa (NSW), talked about the way state and federal government priorities (and hence funding availability) were sometimes different to the areas of need identified by those in the community sector. These varied priorities impact upon the ability of community organisations to respond to local needs. For example, Rosa was frustrated with the neoliberal agenda that framed the government's focus on English language provision instrumentally, as a means to gain employment, rather than equipping all new migrants with daily living skills. This meant that there was no investment in teaching English to single mothers who were unlikely, in the short term at least, to enter the workforce. Zoe (state/federal official), who worked closely with local government, felt that the funding guidelines often stifled creativity among local councils. She suggested allowing local-level government authorities, or councils, themselves to generate suggestions for programmes that may lead to better outcomes and value for money for funding bodies.

Limited funding for work in anti-racism is a common difficulty. Securing funding often relies on staff's own personal commitment and conviction in the area. This is in line with Schwarz et al.'s (2007) concern that the current Australian government focus on local anti-racism is not coupled with adequate resourcing (for discussion of Canadian context see also Edgington and Hutton, 2000/01).

> *Um... we live on grants [Laughs]. Our school would not function if it wasn't for the initiative of our staff and our governing council to recognise opportunities that come along, to fund programmes. [Later] So there's a lot of financial management and acquittal responsibility for the people that do these things. That holds some teachers back from doing it of course because it's a workload issue. People have to be really passionate, have a really strong sense of social justice. It's political work at every level.* [Simon, SA]

While there is an expectation that local organisations will undertake anti-racism, as Simon and others discussed, they are often not adequately funded to do so. This relates to the earlier discussion about the risk of schools, community organisations and not-for-profits becoming governmental technology of the state (Delanty, 2003). Working in Canada, Frisken and Wallace (2003: 153) came to a similar conclusion, reflecting that 'municipal agencies are unlikely to devote resources to helping the immigrant settlement process without financial and legislative support from central governments'. The neoliberalisation of funding programmes, which includes the centralising of responsibility for setting the parameters and outcomes without delegating rights for

local councils and community organisations to self-determine a course of action – itself a central feature of neoliberalisms in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States – can set up local anti-racism initiatives to fail.

VIII. Local pre-occupations and spatial unevenness

The efficiency of localised anti-racism as an approach to national social policy also warrants consideration. If each local area must develop programmes from scratch, anti-racism development in a locality would be a highly onerous process. Worse still, our participants discussed the competition that develops at times amongst organisations working in this field. For example, Pejna (NSW) reported that community organisations 'jump on each other's throat when it's time to get something out of funding bodies because of the tendering process'. Roll-back neoliberalism involves a retreat of government funding, and roll-out neoliberalism sets up competitive grants process in which actors set out the merits of their programs and the need they would address. This creates an environment where 'a new regime of highly competitive interlocal relations' are legitimised and reinforced (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 386). Stern and Hall (2010) analysed the 'proposal economy' that came to drive local development in a small rural town in Northern Ontario. They tracked the move away from funding provision through the welfare state, towards 'social funding based on application, adjudication and award'

(p.243). They argued that the externally adjudicated development grant shapes the specific development activities undertaken in the town.

> *Not only is the funding itself limited and restricted, it limits and restricts the understanding of what is possible, and who participates in defining that understanding… As currently organized, development grants are meant to enable the town and its citizens to prepare for some, often unspecified, external opportunity, rather than to meet locally oriented social requirements. Many in the town and on the town council would prefer to have the funds to provide a consistent and high level of social services – something that the proposal economy does not seek to provide* (Stern and Hall, 2010).

The municipal leaders managed to maintain high levels of social services and to upgrade public infrastructure using grant money, despite this not being the intended purpose of the funding, suggesting that local leadership was able to maintain some autonomy in determining local need. Neoliberal subjects may enjoy the tactical possibilities that come from local responsibility. However, in Frisken and Wallace's (2003) work members of small ethno-specific organisations expressed concern about the degradation of collaborative partnerships, taking specific issue with the structural inequality in partnerships. Devolved local action can also lack the 'birds-eye view' that allows wider trends to be identified and relative deficits to be revealed, this could pertain to wider systematic issues (e.g. anti-asylum seeker sentiment, Islamaphobia, legacies of colonialism) and systemic inequality. This is the antithesis of building on the strength of local knowledge.

Sharing of resources can be important to mitigating the risks associated with distributive funding and responsibility. A localised approach to anti-racism needs to be strategically organised and spatially consistent. Evaluation of programmes and sharing of knowledge of what works and does not work is also important. Participants in our research felt local anti-racism initiatives were evaluated too seldom and commonly attributed this to their limited resources. A clearinghouse of resources related to undertaking local anti-racism projects would aid localised anti-racism effort. Yet little such co-ordination is reported to us, other than ad hoc cross-regional efforts of individual council groupings. These networks were generated by passionate local actors, suggesting there does exist potential to mitigate spatial unevenness should these types of initiatives be expanded and sufficiently supported. The central government sponsorship of such sharing has been sporadic in Australia. Networks of anti-racism activists (from outside local government and community organisations) working across localities, regions or nations could well exist and networks of activists may transcend the dangers of localism, but our work to date has focused on those working in government and community organisations. The relational geography of those within anti-racist political movements remains a question to explore.

Spatial unevenness is a risk from a localised approach to anti-racism (Edgington and Hutton, 2000/01; Carrington and Bonnett, 1997). Again, this can be linked to the economic rationalisation of funds that is required under neoliberalism, under which factors other than social need determine funding allocations.

> …national and transnational government funds increasingly flow to cities on the basis of economic potential and governance capacity rather than manifest social need, and do so through allocation regimes that are competitively constituted (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 395).

Observations about uneven skills or capacities across local government were made by those working at state or federal level, who had a view across localities.

> *I mean the biggest risk I feel is that – that there's uneven skill across councils and so if you happen to land in the wrong one you're not going to get much help.* [Brigid, state/federal]
>
> *...I think the local level is the most important level. Well, it's not the most important level, it's one of the most important levels. The other really important thing is very high level national leadership and the second – and sorry equally important is local level. So I don't think there are any limitations at all, the only difficulty is that some localities might be doing brilliant things and others might not be. And getting that even spread can be difficult.*
> [Richard, state/federal]

Our interviews point to the need for a rescaling of anti-racism rights and responsibilities; a rescaling that would direct more rights (and funding) for anti-racism action toward the local-level and local actors, and more responsibility for the state to produce regional and/or national anti-racism strategies (and funding) to address the structural drivers of racism. In the quote above, Richard, a senior bureaucrat, described

both local anti-racism and national political leadership as imperative in addressing racism. Though Richard initially said there were not 'any limitations at all' to local anti-racism, he went on to acknowledge the potential for local anti-racism to be uneven and inconsistent. This is in line with a survey of local government across Australia that found varied levels of commitment to local multicultural policies (Dunn et al., 2001) – anti-racism policies specifically were not explored in the survey. In the survey, conducted in the late 1990s, 17 per cent of General Managers described multicultural policies and programmes as 'essential' and a further 43 per cent as 'moderately important'. Other respondents perceived multicultural policies to be outside the core functions of council. The risk of spatial unevenness associated with localised anti-racism could be mitigated, to some extent, by state and federal government leadership, support and possibly even regulation, or by stronger coalitions of actors working both within and across localities. This is reflective of roll-out and roll-back neo-liberalism. Distributive responsibility is laudable, so long as resourcing accompanies the distribution of responsibility, and so long as there are the skills and commitment in place to advance that work.

IX. Localised anti-racism in a neoliberal age

Based upon empirical findings that racism is everywhere, yet everywhere different, some anti-racist scholars, and geographers prominent among them, have championed

locally-focused anti-racism (Dunn and McDonald, 2001; Forrest and Dunn, 2006; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Vasta and Castles, 1996). This review of the geographies of anti-racism provides insight into the challenges that local anti-racism initiatives face in this neoliberal age. Our review has also explored possibilities for local anti-racism, making reference to interviews undertaken in two Australian localities, and we also provided some suggestions on research frontiers in this field of geographical work.

One of the key strengths of localised anti-racism is the way local programmes build on local expertise. Those implementing formalised anti-racism and multicultural programmes often have highly developed critical literacy around what constitutes efficacious anti-racism and insight into what works and what does not work in their localities. Local understandings of efficacious anti-racism are relatively well aligned with social scientific knowledge. Given the dynamism of cultural diversity in many parts of the West, being responsive to local need, and *changing* local needs, is beneficial. The three-fold benefits of localised anti-racism include:

1. The ability of the localised anti-racist effort to draw upon local knowledge of the issues and resources.

2. The manner in which anti-racism can be locally-owned and embedded, with the possibility of changing norms.

3. The ability of action to be responsive to changing needs; to be dynamic.

Those working on localised anti-racism are constrained at times by the predilections of centrally-controlled funding schemes and their associated politics. This diminishes the ability of localised anti-racism to be locally determined. Our interviewees were oftentimes in ambivalent positions, wanting to 'do anti-racism' but needing to frame initiatives in depoliticised and deracialised terms to secure funding. At times this dissonance was resolved by constructing multicultural and anti-racist initiatives as complementary, while at other times there were hints of resistance to anti-anti-racist sentiment, with some local participants critical of the invisibility of race and deep-seated inequality. This latter group attempted to engage with racism in their projects, irrespective of how the project was framed during funding processes. The neoliberalising of responsibility in some ways left room for that resistance. However, these are funding regimes that are local yet nationally determined, and which oftentimes failed to address key structural issues. We found little evidence to suggest that localised anti-racism projects were engaging with issues like Islamaphobia, colonialism, anti-asylum seeker sentiment, and entrenched white privilege. However, challenging these broad issues in a grounded way is important. Relational understandings of place direct us to move beyond the local/non-local binary and look at the way broad issues, like Islamaphobia, are performed and experienced in place. Future research could utilise qualitative techniques to unravel the scale discourses of localised anti-racist activists

and programs. Do they deploy characterisations of the local and national that disempowers action? Does a naïve construction of scale explain why localised anti-racism might eschew structural issues such as Islamaphobia, colonialism, anti-asylum seeker sentiment, and entrenched white privilege? Are these seen as non-local concerns? Important too will be an examination of the extent to which anti-racist activists and political movements more generally come up against these constraints, or to envisage what the role of these groups and coalitions might be in a more far-reaching critique or radical undermining of racism. We know too little about the traction and success these groups have within localities.

Neoliberal modes of governance localise responsibility, making structural and collective problems 'local' and 'individual'. One problem with neoliberal anti-racism is that the responsibility for action is not matched by delegation and rights to determine action, and this is a threat to localised responses to racism. There is also the problem of spatial unevenness – a locality based approach to anti-racism may result in very varied outcomes across time and space. Neoliberalism has created an environment where highly competitive intra- and inter-local relations are legitimised and reinforced. In this context, factors other than social need determine funding allocation. It is important that racism is addressed in all localities, and not just in patches. Mitigating against the risk of spatial gaps is a challenge. Symbolic leadership from state and federal governments,

as well as material support and resourcing for localities, is a critical starting point. In addition, there is a risk that local anti-racism only reaches a narrow cross-section of the locality, most likely those who are already positively disposed to diversity. The primacy of celebratory approaches in the Australian context suggests that this is a serious risk, as this form of anti-racism may be unlikely to engage members of the community who are negative or anxious about diversity. The types of diversity that are suitable for celebration also means that deeper, often ideological, differences are not engaged with in these types of programs. Local anti-racism ought to have a broader reach, engaging a wider range of people and attempting to engage with more meaningful, 'bigger', ideological differences. By way of summarising, the problems and limits of localised neoliberal anti-racism include:

1. The setting of priorities can be determined extra-locally by central government agencies, thus for example, prioritising some forms of anti-racism over others, despite local need.

2. The action can be non-strategic, as it relies upon local effort in responding to what are perceived to be the local priorities. And, local action relies upon idiosyncratic commitment and volunteerism.

3. The response to racism will be uneven, and areas of most relative need may not necessarily receive sufficient attention, if such areas do not have the activism, leadership or resources to enact anti-racism.

4. There is insufficient sharing of success and learning from failures, and this is linked to the wider issue of there being too little robust evaluation of programmes.

5. The pride that people have in their communities and places can undermine local anti-racism, as such action presupposes an acknowledgement of local racism. Place-defending can lead to a denial of racism in a locality, threatening the case for anti-racism.

This is increasingly a global age, in which the racism in one place can quickly disseminate to another. Some have questioned the extent to which social relations are locally anchored. Yet, while racism is everywhere, and while it may share certain structural features and be mundane in its morbid effects, it is nonetheless 'everywhere different'. Distributive responsibility that includes localised responses to racism is laudable, so long as the resourcing accompanies that distribution of responsibility, and so long as there are the skills and commitment locally to advance that work. In a globalised, neoliberal world local anti-racism is likely to continue to be an attractive strategy, but must be adequately resourced, linked to wider coalitions, and must address the 'non-local' everywhere issues that underpin racisms.

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