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Race lines and spaces of political action among migrant youth

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Recently proposed Anti-Racism Strategy established within a framework of the Australian Government's multicultural policy, *People of Australia*, identifies 'youth engagement' as one of the key areas that needs to be promoted and supported. Young people have been invited to join youth councils and youth forums and work with national, state and local policy-makers. Some have taken up this challenge and became public faces and active members of anti-racism campaigns. Others, however, either remained silent about the discrimination they face, or organised their own grassroots youth-based and youth-led initiatives. This paper discusses individual and collective responses to racism among young people in Australia, focusing on Melbourne, and examines possibilities in which racism, as a common experience among migrant youth, can be utilised to form alternative spaces for political action, challenging not only interpersonal, but also systemic forms of racism. By drawing attention towards institutional and systemic forms of racism, and the historical perpetuation of racist practices, these youth initiatives rely on legal measures, and argue that racism should be discussed in the context of the broader Australian society, not only in relation to minority groups.

Keywords: migrant youth; political participation; alternative counter-publics; youth-led initiatives

Introduction

Since federation of the Australian colonies in 1901, nation-building and the accompanying construction of national identity have carried significant racial overtones. Racism was institutionalised through the 1901 Migration Restriction Act (better known as the White Australia policy) that remained in place until the 1970s, when it was officially abandoned and subsequently replaced by multiculturalism; a markedly more progressive policy, which brought about a new set of policy approaches to manage cultural diversity. The shift towards a more formal recognition of cultural diversity in the 1970s, and the institutionalisation of multiculturalism did not eliminate some of these deep-seated, racially determined approaches and pre-conceptions. Even though Australian multiculturalism was driven by cultural pluralism, it nevertheless retained the values of an Anglo-Celtic core culture, along with the dominant ubiquity of Judaeo-Christian morality (Stratton and Ang 1998). Therefore, multiculturalism repressed the issue of race, and remained silent on the history of racial contact, colonialism, and the inherent power relations between the Anglo-European majority, other ethnic minorities and the

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Indigenous population. In this respect, multiculturalism in Australia was conceptualised as an ahistorical national project.

In the last 15 years, and especially after the events of 9/11, reports of experiences of racism among minority groups around the world, including Australia (Mansouri et al. 2009; Markus 2013), have increased. Whilst there has been much discussion about instances of racism, not much has been written about the reactions to this racism by those it is perpetrated against. This paper focuses on the diversity of responses to racism from young Australians with African, Pacific Islander and Arabic-speaking backgrounds, examining the ways in which their reactions could be seen as politically transformative. The focus here is on: (1) their immediate reactions to overt forms of racism; (2) the extent to which they resist and fight back, as opposed to accepting and/or internalising racism; and (3) the responses to more covert forms of racism. The latter, in particular, are engrained within institutions, sociopolitical systems and the discourse of mainstream media. Decisions about how to react, and why, whilst individual, are often influenced by experiences and reactions of family members, peers and colleagues, and are in this way not only individually, but also collectively imagined. As such, the concepts of multiple publics and alternative counter-publics (Fraser 1990) are used to contextualise these relational responses of migrant youth through social and political networking, wherein it is argued that alternative counter-publics that are initiated by migrant youth emerge in opposition to systemically engrained discrimination and everyday racism (Essed 1991). It is also proposed that they are engendered as a response to largely prescriptive policies, which attempt to design inclusive spaces for migrant youth, but fail to listen to their interests, or ignore already existing networks that they themselves have already initiated.

About the project

The research project from which this paper is drawn is the result of collaboration with industry partners that are on the cusp of challenges associated with migrant integration and adaptation: the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and the Australian Red Cross (ARC). Data collection for this project was conducted among migrant youth in Melbourne and Brisbane, with 'migrant youth' defined as an age-specific category (15–23 years of age) comprising local- and overseas-born youth from English and non-English speaking backgrounds.

A total of 587 young people participated in the project, with 484 people taking part in the survey component and an additional 103 in the focus groups and interviews across both states. Migrant youth were selected among three broadly clustered ethno-cultural groups: Arabic-speaking, Pacific Islander and African. These groups were chosen for participation because they are arguably among the most vulnerable and marginalised in Australia (Mansouri et al. 2013). Their vulnerability has been seen in recent high-profile cases linking them to the manifestations of prejudice, stigmatisation, racism, public disorder and inter-communal conflict.

In Melbourne, participants were recruited mainly through high school education sectors (Department of Education, Catholic and independent sectors) as well as through service providers in the region (including CMY).

Qualitative data were elicited through semi-structured interviews and six focus groups, one per migrant youth group in each city. For the data included in this paper, a total of 57 interviews were collected during the second and third years of the project. As a part of the content analysis of qualitative data, a coding scheme was developed using

nVIVO software. Altogether, 21 thematic concepts were used to analyse content (corresponding to the themes explored in each of the interviews), with 2 of them (formal networks and informal networks) including several subthemes. The content analysis was linked to a contextual analysis of the interview data, which reflected the key research themes explored in the broader project.

Contextualising racism in multicultural Australia

A common approach to understanding racism is to consider it as a combination of prejudice and power. In this regard, racism can be viewed as ‘the definitive attribution of inferiority to a particular racial/ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group’ (Essed 1991, 11). Some have argued that racism is a question of ideology and not just a question of group characteristics, stereotypes or inter-group relations. As Castles states (in Castles and Vasta 1996, 31) ‘racism is linked to democracy in the sense that it reconciles ideologies of universalism and equality with the practices of hierarchisation and segmentation which are central to the economic and social order’. In this sense, racism is connected to other forms of social control, repression and class domination. But the individual and psychological nature of racism, especially for those who are subjected to it, means that cognitive and embodied dimensions cannot be underestimated either (Howarth and Hook 2005).

Here, racism is conceptualised as, on the one hand, a distinctly affective experience that most often takes place in a shared, public space, where negotiating race, ethnicity and cultural difference occurs on a daily basis (Amin and Thrift 2002, 291), and, on the other hand, as a structural, systemic and institutionally engrained force that underlies these everyday experiences. Race inscribes firm societal boundaries and can clearly determine one’s life choices. As a category, it regulates one’s way of ‘being in the world, of living, of meaning-making’ (Goldberg 2009, 152).

Experiences of racism in contemporary Australia do not exist in a historical vacuum. Interventionist practices and policies utilised by successive governments in respect to Indigenous Australians institutionalised race and racism in Australia. While Indigenous and multicultural issues have been traditionally addressed separately from each other in Australia, politically ethnic and Indigenous groups have suffered from a similar sense of disempowerment. More recently, with the decline of the welfare state and a focus on individual responsibility, ‘mutual obligations’ and moral responsibilities, any meaningful sense of reciprocity between the state and its citizens has been reduced. It is incumbent on individual people to adhere to the demands of the market, which means that minority individuals and groups are responsible for their own integration into the Australian ‘community’, with or without the resources to do so (Vasta 2004).

Nevertheless, large-scale migration to Australia endures, and migrants have continued to transform the cultural and racial profile of the country. Almost a third of Greater Melbourne’s population is now born overseas, with the largest reported non-Australian born groups being English, Indian and Chinese (ABS 2011). The challenges of an increasingly diverse society have not, however, significantly weakened the desire of white Australians to remain the decision-makers and affirmers of a quintessential Australian identity. Services for culturally and linguistically diverse groups received increased funding throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but this did not weaken a requirement of migrants to adhere to the ideals of a multicultural but unified Australian national identity and adopt a set of ‘overarching values’ (Vasta 2004, 201). The underlying

historical racism came to the surface more clearly again in the 1990s, during the Conservative Government of John Howard, who incrementally replaced multiculturalism with a focus on cohesion, national identity and citizenship. By the end of the 1990s, multiculturalism had suffered a backlash, not only in Australia, but also in other Western countries. The issue of race, now repackaged in the discourse of illegal immigration and border security, remained at the forefront of political campaigning.

Race and racism have not been traditionally discussed within multicultural frameworks, until recently, when anti-racism strategies entered public policy more decisively, with a renewed political interest in racism and anti-racism campaigning, the appointment of the first full-time Race Discrimination Commissioner in 2011 and the unveiling of the National Anti-Racism Strategy in 2012. Consolidated data released from the *Challenging Racism* project (Dunn et al. 2011) showed that 84.4% of approximately 12,500 Australians completing the questionnaires between 2001 and 2008 thought that racial prejudice exists in Australia. The research found that the most common forms of racism are everyday incivilities such as racist insults, disrespectful treatment or mistrusting someone, because of their ethnic background. Places and situations where people most often encountered racism were at a shop or a restaurant (17.8%), in the workplace (17.5%) or at educational facilities (16.6%).

The Anti-Racism Strategy, included in the national Multicultural Policy 'People of Australia' (2011), relies heavily, as with multicultural policy itself, on the notion of individual responsibility. But this emphasis has not stopped community organisations, corporations and peak agencies from supporting this initiative despite its apparent limitations. Indeed, the strategy may be seen as a significant step in discussing issues of race and racism in Australia, even though the main challenge for many young people of migrant backgrounds in Australia – systemic racism – remains largely unchallenged. However, as the strategy is still relatively new, its effects are yet to be seen. The new Australian Federal Government, sworn in September 2013, made some significant changes to social inclusion principles guiding many youth programmes (particularly the scrapping of the Social Inclusion Unit). With these changes, the responsibility for the community sector, volunteering and philanthropy was re-directed to the Minister for Social Services. The real consequences of these changes to migrant communities, and migrant youth in particular, are also yet to be seen.

'Ganging Up' ethnic youth: problematising youth in the media

Reports on migrant youth in the Australian mainstream media typically draw on stereotypes and negative portrayals of minority youth, with a focus on largely antisocial, criminal and gang behaviour (Nolan et al. 2011; Phillips 2008; Phillips 2011; Quayle and Sonn 2009). In recent years, it was not rare to come across titles such as 'Anarchy of a gang and two AK47s' (Olding 2012), 'Police pushed to the limit as teenage thugs inflict reign of terror with frightening series of armed robberies across city' (Devic 2013) or 'In Sydney, disaffected Lebanese kids caught in spiraling [sic] Gang Violence' (Neubauer 2013), all of which referred to minority groups. Even though the criminal activity, including gang-like behaviour between groups of young people is of real concern, especially in larger Australian cities (where it is concentrated), the conditions and reasons for the existence of youth gangs are typically not explained by mainstream media journalists. Therefore, even though there is a reality to group formation based on violence among minority young men (White 2008), the Australian mainstream media, including

major newspapers and talkback radio, have been unjustifiably biased in their linking of criminal activity to particular ethnicities of marginalised youth. Many reports tying ethnicity to crime have later been proven to be untrue, or largely incomplete. This happened, for instance, after the murder of a 17-year-old Sudanese teenager Liep Gony in Noble Park, a suburb in Melbourne's south-east, in September 2007 (Davis and Hart 2007). Even though Gony's attackers were of non-Sudanese background, media reports overwhelmingly focused on the gangs and violence discourse and represented Sudanese youth as criminal and problematic (Nunn 2010). Sensationalist media portrayals drew on the general feeling of uncertainty between people and the perception of dwindling social norms, of which an apprehension about juvenile delinquency (Windle 2008), and social marginalisation and exclusion, based on ethnicity (White 2008; Alexander 2000, 2004) are a part. Celebratory populist tones relating to cultural difference have been largely replaced by a focus on shared values and strong communities and the related exclusion of those who seemingly do not adhere to these values – not only in Australia, but also in many other countries, which have been traditionally imagined as migrant places. In public debates, 'gangs, crime, violence, and migrants have become intertwined' (Van Gemert, Lien and Peterson 2008, 8). This has mobilised governments and police forces to work against rather than for marginalised youth, who often belong to the urban poor; an approach that in turn does not offer any positive solutions, and 'only aggravates the very ills it is supposed to treat' (Wacquant 2008, 7).

Furthermore, it is often forgotten that criminalising youth affects the entire family structure, not only individual young people who are exposed to police interventions, such as stop-and-search techniques or harassment by police on the street. Even though this discourse is largely gendered in that it stigmatises predominantly young men who are portrayed as dangerous and 'un-Australian' (Collins and Reid 2009), it affects, through generalisations and gendered stereotypes, both men and women. This is clearly reflected in events such as Cronulla riots in Sydney in 2005 that was characterised by a complex relationship between ethnicity, class and gender (Noble and Poynting 2010).

Racially polarised spaces in Melbourne

Racism is a spatially determined experience. Locations and spaces are the important determinants of the racialisation process for young people. Participants in the study generally distinguished between 'white spaces', such as shopping malls, which were where their sense of belonging was often challenged, and their local neighbourhoods. Melbourne city streets and public transport were also considered primary spaces where overt racism occurs.

Neoliberal global cities are not de facto inclusive or fair places. Systemic racism, with its complementary socio-economic stratification, often produces inequality, due to the inherent, though oft unvoiced gains in productivity. In essence, these neoliberal economies are based on both race and class stratification so that capital or wealth is not distributed, but kept to those groups already in power. Amin (2002, 2) argues that in globalised urban areas, everyday intolerance and conflicts are sustained through geographical patterns, and that these intolerances and conflicts, which often remain unspoken, get ingrained in the geography of cities. Dominant national discourses govern central public spaces, displaying the power of major racial groups, which are reflected in the arrangement of space, including the regulations detailing the correct and acceptable usage of public space.

While the argument that in contemporary Australia the suburban multicultural mix is 'more peaceful' and there is 'relative absence of ethnic ghettoisation compared to other multicultural nations' (Harris 2013, 68) is sound, this does not mean that suburbs of Australian cities are devoid of informal segmentation along socio-economic and racial lines. Racism, interwoven in socio-economic circumstances, impacts and determines the geography of Australian cities, including Melbourne. Recent research has shown that even though Sydney is ahead of Melbourne on the social polarisation scale (Colic-Peisker 2014; Chamberlain and McKenzie 2008), Melbourne is not that far behind. Baum's 2008 analysis of socio-economic polarisation based on suburb rankings of both Sydney and Melbourne according to the General Deprivation Index supports this contention, which indicates that ethnicity is one of (though not the only) the factor which determines both socio-economic status along with the suburb in which one lives (Baum 2008).

The issue of racialised spaces in Melbourne more recently drew public attention after several attacks against Indian students and taxi drivers between 2007 and 2009, and increased reports of African youth being stopped and searched by Victorian Police. With the introduction of the so-called Protective Services Officers, a special police force trained to patrol trains and train stations in Melbourne, reports on place-based race discrimination, especially from young African men increased (SJFYP 2013). Research, conducted primarily in the non-governmental sector, supports the view that race is systemically shaping Victorian policing practices, either consciously or not, in a manner that is unlawful, unethical and unnecessary (Smith and Reside 2010; SEAAC 2008; VEOHRC 2013).

In February 2013, Victoria Police and a group of six young men of African descent agreed to an out-of-court settlement, after the men presented racial profiling allegations against the Victoria Police in the Federal Court (Chadwick 2013). According to one of the reports (Gordon 2012) used at the time of the court procedure, during 2005 and 2008 African men around Flemington and North Melbourne were roughly 2.5 times more likely to have their interaction recorded by police than the rest of the population, even though they have committed significantly fewer crimes than men of any other ethnicity.

As a part of the settlement, Victoria Police acknowledged, for the first time during the five years when the case was being prepared, that racial profiling is unacceptable, and agreed to conduct an inquiry into so-called field contacts¹ and multicultural training within the police force. As a part of the inquiry, over 68 public submissions were received; for instance, stories of young people collected at the 2013 People's Hearing into Racism and Policing, organised by a youth-led advocacy group IMARA Advocacy², where a number of young people talked about experiences of exclusion and racism in public spaces in Melbourne, or interviews compiled by Smart Justice for Young People (SJFYP)³ in Melbourne in 2013, and published in a report 'Safeguards against Discriminatory Policing'.

Even though Victoria Police is not the only institution where migrant youth reportedly experience more discrimination than their Anglo-Australian peers, it is the institution that is particularly critiqued by youth organisations in Melbourne.

Spatially determined experiences of racism among migrant youth

In Melbourne, struggles against racial discrimination amongst younger generations of migrants, who are visibly different, point to the fact that racist practices are far from eradicated in Australian streets, other public spaces and institutions. In our interviews,

entering distinctively *white spaces* identified as shopping malls and certain suburbs often proved particularly uncomfortable to young people from all three groups (Arabic-speaking, African and Pacific Islander). In the interviews, 'White' was often used as a category to describe majority, Anglo-Australian, middle-class values and sociopolitical practices. Class has played a significant role in identifying racial identities in opposition to a majoritarian 'White' identity, and confirmed the view exemplified by post-Marxian and feminist social theorists (Bourdieu 2004; Anthias 2005; Frankenberg 1993; Wacquant 1991) who argue that both 'whiteness' and 'middle-classness' have to be examined in the context of complex sets of practices reflecting ideological constructs, which are 'invented' and 'blend history, culture, assumptions, and attitudes' (Babbs 1998, 10).

Even though a complex constructed category, *whiteness* was seen as a fairly homogenous racial category implying a sense of dominance and it remained largely unquestioned by our interviewees. A 19-year-old Daniel⁴ of Sudanese-Ethiopian descent said, for example, that he feels like his identity is challenged in certain areas or suburbs in Melbourne and that he feels 'very awkward' in areas 'full of white people or full of other races'. He said that he does not 'feel comfortable going through the shopping centres or the streets' without someone from his cultural background accompanying him.

Some Pacific Islander interviewees also reported verbal conflicts in public spaces, and on the streets. An 18-year-old Adam said:

We kind of like, had a little argument with these Aussies, between Samoans and Aussies. I was just standing there and watching them. And then they start talking and saying stuff like we should go back to our islands and that we don't belong here.

For most young people in the study, the racism that they experienced was thoroughly spatial, and challenged their sense of belonging. Even though remarks about policing and criminalising youth in public spaces were made, especially among African young people in the study, exclusions based on race that interviewees talked about related to their various everyday experiences. Majid, a 20-year-old Sudanese man for instance talked about how he felt *different* only after he came to Australia, even though he lived in several different countries before settling in Melbourne. It was not just his skin colour that made him visibly different; he also 'stood out' in his circle of 'only white friends' because he, as a Muslim, did not want to engage in some of the social bonding activities common among Australian youth, such as drinking alcohol. He had not 'questioned himself' before he came to Australia and had not previously thought about 'what races mean'. Here, Majid's statement reveals the intersecting complex nature of racism as he conflates his 'religious belief' with his 'ethnic background' and relates these two categories to the incomprehensible nature of 'races' he is referring to.

Whilst many interviewees talked about 'the street' as a typical public space where racism occurs, many mentioned also the school as an exclusionary space. This was particularly the case with Pacific Islander youth participating in the study. David, a 16-year-old youth of Cook Islander descent for instance mentioned that exclusionary remarks based on race are a constant in the school environment. He said that 'there's always someone saying something about us, Cook Islanders ... someone from a different kind of race'. When asked to elaborate on his experiences, he said:

Well it's usually around um ... the Australian kids at school. Like, if they're doing something and then I like ... wanna sort of just join in for a bit ... they all say like 'ah no you can't do

that' and I'm like why, they say 'coz do you see the people around you?' and I'm like 'yeah', and they're like 'you don't belong'. And then I'm like 'oh, bye' and just walk off and talk to my mate about it.

David's reaction to exclusionary remarks at school shows how *everyday* the experience can feel, but it also illustrates how complex the situation really is. Racism calls for a response of the person racism is directed towards. This reaction of walking away from the situation indicates that he tried to ignore racism directed at him; he felt powerless in dealing with it. He did not report remarks to school officials, though he did discuss them with a friend.

Findings of the study also show that there is a divide in how different young people conceptualise and understand racism. Sahar, a 21-year-old Palestinian Australian said that at school 'it was more like, "why are you wearing the scarf"' and when she would explain, people would not accept it: 'I explain something to them but they don't want to accept it so they keep asking ... it's really annoying'. She did not regard this questioning as racist. On the street, on the other hand, she thought that racism exists. Young people generally regarded the street as more exclusionary and more racist than the school. However, in terms of the emotional impact, *where* the racism happened did not prove to have significantly different effects on the young people.

Migrant youth's responses to racism

Racism is an emotionally challenging experience for young people, but even though health impacts on children and youth and the need to study them have been recognised in Australian and international research (Ahmed, Mohammed, and Williams 2007; Paradies 2006; Paradies, Harris, and Anderson 2008; Priest et al. 2013), there are not many studies that have examined emotional challenges experienced by young people. One reason for this is conceptual and methodological. In mostly quantitative studies that focus on migrants and well-being outcomes report high levels of life satisfaction or happiness (which was also the case in our study), and, as Fozdar and Torezani (2008, 33) suggest, most often contradict much of the gathered qualitative data.

Findings of our study suggest that racism and racist stereotypes create an everyday condition for many young people in Melbourne and that interpersonal and systemic racism often invoke feelings of anger and frustration. A previous research project that focused on racism and its impacts on the health and well-being of young Australians (Mansouri et al. 2009) found that 70.1% of 823 Australian high school students (12–19 years old) involved in the project experienced some form of racism, with the majority of racist incidents being experienced on an occasional basis.⁵ The report points to a concern that most racist incidences provoking feelings of anger, depression and frustration in young people remain unreported. At the same time, teaching practices and frameworks in Australian schools often rely on normalising 'White practices' (Walton et al. 2014, 120).

Many interviewees in our study also talked about letting experiences of racism 'slip away', not outwardly reacting to them, not talking about them and walking away from confrontations. For instance, Mark, a 19-year-old man of Sudanese descent: 'I don't talk to anyone about that. I don't want to talk about those sorts of things'. Or, a 16-year-old Dominic of Cook Islander descent, who migrated to Australia from New Zealand, who said: 'I just kept it to myself', and also: 'they make me feel like I want to move back'. To the question 'where is "back?"' he responded 'Any. I just want to get out of here'.

In the context of everyday racism, where racism is more insidious, engrained in the systems and relations of power, young people often internalise it. Even though they think it is not right to not be regarded as an Australian when one lives in Australia (and is an Australian citizen), they seem to adhere to its social norms and participate in the society and often do not tend to problematise their social positioning. For instance, an 18-year-old Sarah who has a Samoan, Tongan and Croatian background talked about how friends within her social networks influence her sense of belonging and her identity, because the girls in her group who are ‘full white’ see her as an Islander, an outsider, and not really Australian, which bothers her because she feels Australian and Australia is ‘the only place I have grown up and I know’. Later in the interview when we talked about whether she would do anything about it, and whether she feels like she *can* actually do something about challenging this perception, she responded: ‘I’ve actually never thought about that before. I suppose I don’t see where I’m at as a problem’.

It is important to see how systemic racism works here. People react to racism emotionally, but on the surface they do not see it as a problem, it is just the way things are (Hage 2011). We spoke, however, to many young people who have been profoundly disappointed with others who did not try to understand the challenges of migrant youth and the circumstances that led them to migrate, especially those who arrived in Australia more recently. For example, a 23-year-old Nadia of Lebanese Syrian descent pointed to the sense of isolation stemming from unwillingness of many people to ‘understand what’s going on for you and why. And so many people don’t try to work out why’. Even though individual reactions to racism of young people often involve walking away and not reacting to racism in the moments when it happens, internalising their dissatisfaction or anger, we also observed that young people tend to discuss these events with their friends, usually of the same race.

There are now several youth-led, non-profit organisations in Melbourne, which specifically address issues related to racism and discrimination. African young people have especially become more politically engaged and visible after cases of racism experienced in public spaces, and the aforementioned Liep Gony’s murder (Davis and Hart 2007), as well as another case of a missing 22-year-old Michael Atakelt, an Ethiopian-Australian, who was later found dead in the Maribyrnong River in Melbourne’s west (Ryan 2011; Ryan and Fogarty 2012). These initiatives, brought together by common experiences of racism and racial and religious profiling, represent a collective response to racism.

‘Challenging Racism’, a guide produced by ‘Western Young People’s Independent Network’ (WYPIN) and published in 2011, opens with the following sentence: ‘Racism happens every day. From mumbled comments on the bus to aggressive behaviour by police, many young people experience racism and many others see it happen’ (WYPIN 2011). The guide is designed as an anti-racism resource kit, advising young people on strategies they can use to ‘stand up and say no to racism’. Titling responses to racism as ‘self-advocacy’ and ‘group advocacy’, they suggest forming groups between friends to share stories, forming larger groups in communities, discussing anti-racism activities, writing letters to MPs, networking through Facebook, putting up events, posters, shows, etc. The next page of the toolkit points out the legal services and community representatives young people can turn to and network in case they have been racially abused, which is exactly what some groups of young people in Melbourne, especially African youth, have done more recently, resulting in more politically effective dialogues with institutions affecting them, such as, for instance, Victoria Police.

Forming support groups, networks, organisations, advocacies and social enterprises, and largely counting on support through social media, is a newer form of responding to racism and other challenges informing the realities of everyday life for many migrant youth.

Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera (2005, 33) argue that youth are agents who have the potential to act and help transform the conditions in the neighbourhoods and communities in which they live. Youth organisations are connected to their local environments, other local youth groups and networks as well as to international networks. Associations such as IMARA Advocacy, WYPIN, Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees (RISE), etc. adopted a social justice approach rather than multicultural frameworks and utilise networks from community, legal and policy spheres to build on the public presence of youth voices and principles of social justice.

Community-based youth organisations and initiatives can be seen as alternative spaces for civic participation and civic development for young people, who are often marginalised by broader society (O'Donoghue 2013, 229). These organisations can provide contexts where young people can be empowered to become public actors. They can be seen as extending the notion of the public, detaching it from the theory of liberal justice (Rawls 1971; Habermas 1989) in which the public designates a group of rational-critical individuals, debating about issues that matter to them – a view that has been criticised for not acknowledging power positions between different groups of people. As Nancy Fraser argues (1990), public space is not a harmonious place based on peaceful agreement between parties, but is on the contrary, in itself an exclusionary space. In such space, young people do not in fact have the right to have their own voice presented, even though their presence is not rejected. Acceptance is premised on decisions made by dominant groups, which are structured along gender, race and generational lines. According to Fraser, 'a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction' (Fraser 1990, 60) and instead of one public, in stratified societies the idea of multiple publics should be promoted, and the practices of 'subaltern counter-publics' should be endorsed. Difference, layered across racial, linguistic, cultural, religious or generational lines, that marks migrant youth, connects them into a network that acts as a counter-public.

The difference between community organisations in the past, such as ethnic community organisations and community based, youth-led organisations discussed in this paper is that youth organisations are a response to a systemic problem and issue that concerns all Australians, not only migrant youth. Even though multicultural organisations have in principle also been dealing with multicultural issues as national issues, their struggles have been painted in the context of minority cultures and minority identities, which implies that as long as migrants will be given the right to express their traditions and customs in public they will be happy, and that the core institutional framework of the nation will not be shattered. Racism and anti-racism frameworks, along with the discourse presented by migrant youth, on the other hand, explore challenges that the Australian society as a whole faces, such as institutional discrimination and systemic injustices. This collective, political action of young people advances racism and anti-racism debates in Australia, and extends them beyond sensationalist reports of overt forms of racism, such as racial taunts and slurs that usually occur in public spaces, and people's instantaneous reactions to them.

For anti-racism strategies to be successful, there needs to be a dialogue between individual, institutional and cultural agencies, and between top-down and bottom-up

approaches (Pedersen, Walker and Wise 2010). Youth collective actions are most successful when they deal with local issues, which are then applied to other levels of governance. Even though experiences of collective action groups in Australia can certainly be compared and generalised with those from elsewhere (particularly from the UK, Canada and the USA) – where they have been broadly documented and analysed (for instance, in Abboud et al. 2002; Huq 2008; Lund and Nabavi 2008), the Australian social context reflects a specific historical background and idiosyncratic current political attitudes towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and is therefore unique (Pedersen, Walker and Wise 2010).

Conclusion

The study among young people of Arabic-speaking, African and Pacific Islander descent in Melbourne showed that racism takes many forms and is not understood by recipients of racial abuse in a uniform manner. Community-based youth-led organisations present an important political sphere where responding to racism can be based within a broader structural and systemic critique of institutionally imbued discrimination, which concerns the Australian society as a whole.

Youth-led organisations critique a belief that racism is quintessentially ‘un-Australian’. They tend to focus on specific instances of racism – racism that is place-based and tangible – as in the case of legal action taken against ‘stop-and-search’ and racial profiling techniques used by the Police – that enables them to address broader, systemic forms of racism, in meaningful and powerful ways. In a video published ahead of the ‘People’s Hearing into Racism and Policing’ (August, 2013) organised at the Melbourne’s Town Hall by migrant youth and IMARA Advocacy, young people talked about the importance of recognising subtle and engrained forms of racism, such as racism in the legal system, or within the police force, employment and education, that people, whilst focusing on the ‘smaller bits of racism that you can see’ [*sic*], often tend to deny.

Responses to racism that take on this next step of engagement with structural, institutional and systemic forms of racism through unveiling everyday experiences and encounters within institutional settings (primarily with police, but also in other, professional and educational environments) can be seen as particularly effective way of challenging racism or at least having a discussion about it. Bottom-up, community-based organisations, involving grassroots principles and marginalised or excluded voices, do form counter-publics; a practical and oppositional response to bureaucratic inclusionist principles which tend to take voices away from the actors meant to be producing them, forgetting about their already existing participation, their intelligence and networking capabilities. This is not to say that there should be no governmental support for additional programmes that would enhance participation of migrant youth in a broader society and their political participation. What we argue is that their utterly political voices should be given more space to create and contribute to such programmes.

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Notes

1. According to Victoria Police, 'field contact' is a term which refers to 'times where an officer approaches someone and requests details because the circumstances appear suspicious, or they have contact with an individual as a result of or in a specifically identified situation' (Victoria Police 2013, 5). Victoria Police distinguishes between 'field contacts' and 'public contacts'; the latter referring to talking to people in public not with the aim of suspicion but community engagement (Victoria Police 2013). One of the recommendations of 'Smart Justice for Young People' submission to Victoria Police in the context of the out-of-court settlement agreements (to undertake community consultations) was that the distinction between 'field' and 'public' contact should be removed, because it is artificial and not apparent to young people in their everyday lives (SJFYP 2013, 10).
2. IMARA Advocacy is a youth-led lobby group, which was founded in Melbourne after the death of a young Ethiopian-Australian man in Melbourne's inner west in 2011.
3. SJFYP is a broad coalition made up of youth advocates from community legal centres, youth services, peak bodies and other community organisations interested in the legal and justice issues of young people, which was launched in Melbourne in 2011.
4. For the purposes of anonymity and privacy, all the participants' names in this paper have been removed and replaced by fictitious names.
5. Over 80% of participants from various non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds reported being subjected to some form of racism. However, also 54.6% of Anglo-Australians reported they had been subjected to a form of racism.

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