

## Revisiting histories of anti-racist thought and activism

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### ABSTRACT

This piece reconsiders histories of anti-racist thought and practice, including the linkages between anti-racisms and other traditions of liberatory thought. We argue that anti-racism should be understood as a strand in radical thought linking internationalism, institutional critique and street activism, in the process interfeeding with other social movements. The traditions of anti-racist thought discussed in this special issue exemplify these cross-cutting influences.

**KEYWORDS:** Anti-racism, racisms, colonialism, far Right, Intersectionality, emancipation

Racism is increasingly entangled with the politics of many places. Far from entering the promised post-racial era, we are living through times when all manner of disputes and divisions can become racialised, sometimes with little warning. We have seen the rise of racist, populist parties across the whole of Europe; popular racism against refugees, migrants and Muslims, including discrimination and violence; increased evidence of police racism and violence against Black Americans; and the emergence of new forms of racism across the globe and the racialisation of terror across the West. This is happening in a moment of economic depression and implementation of austerity which has disproportionately impacted on racialised minorities and migrants, and has been accompanied by a 'divide and rule' between them and the so-called 'white' working class. That said, we have also witnessed the emergence of new and significant progressive movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, various Decolonial initiatives and the formation of refugee support networks and others. While these, like the particular forms of racism to which they respond, are new they must be understood both sociologically and historically in terms of the historical precedents, legacies and projects they reference or are implicated in or cut off from.

Arising out of the ESRC-funded seminar series Racism and Political Mobilisation, this collection brings together new historical work with historical and contemporary intellectual and activist approaches to, and debates on, the traditions and transformation of social movements and strategies against racism. At a time of increasing interest in the intellectual histories of anticolonial and antiracist movements, this volume offers fresh insights into the synergies and divergences of anti-racist thinking and practice in different moments and locations. This special issue addresses central aspects of debates reshaping the practices of the social sciences. In particular, the volume brings together a re-evaluation of the 'sociological canon' with an eye on the impact of struggles over the nature of knowledge in (post)imperial spaces and the formative conversations that have arisen between anti-racist movements and theorists of racism. Each of the essays offer routes to understanding the place of key figures from the black radical tradition in relation to other strands of sociological thought, while also giving space to a discussion of how movements for decolonial thought and the anti-racisms of wider social justice movements have incorporated engagement with the intellectual traditions of black struggles. Importantly, the articles here re-locate key themes in

anti-racist theorising in their wider intellectual milieu, enabling readers to appreciate the theorisation of racism as an endeavour shaped both by street struggles and by scholarly interchange including with those from different traditions of thought. In this, the collection seeks to unsettle the apparent gulf that has been depicted between social theory and activist sociologies, uncovering instead forms of intellectual life and activism that have long histories of complementarity.

When coordinating the series and compiling this volume, we found, predictably, that as editors we brought differing experiences and understandings of anti-racist traditions. Our interests have been shaped both by differing life-histories and by the locational politics of anti-racism. Instead of striving to tell a unified story, we have tried to leave space for these differences to be articulated. Our shared project can be characterised as a commitment to rebuilding spaces of scholarly and activist interchange as a means of constructing a collective analysis. The varied 'tradition' that we seek to outline and enable centres on the resistance to racist dehumanisation that has sprung up in the most hostile of contexts. Here we argue for a retrieval of the distinctive histories of anti-racism, beginning with an anti-racist corrective to histories of capitalism that forget the agency of the enslaved and colonised or histories of anti-racism that privilege liberal state and institutional approaches over more radical ones.

### **Slavery and the promise of liberty**

In contrast to the growing body of scholarship that understands colonialism and racism as constitutive elements of the capitalist world-system (Marx 1976; Robinson 1983; Goldberg 1993), work focusing on opposition to racism constitutes 'the important missing perspective in studies of racial inequality' (Bowser 1995, xxiv). In fact, it could be argued that while racism and 'discrimination are under continuous historical and sociological examination ... anti-racism is consigned to the status of a 'cause', fit only for platitudes of support and denouncement' (Bonnett 2000, 2). Such academic neglect of the question of resistance has contributed to a flattening of history giving the impression that the emergence of colonialism and racism went largely uncontested (see, for example, Miles 1993). In this view, the racialised and colonised were in some sense helpless victims in the face of an unstoppable locomotive called progress. This, then, is one aspect of the unacknowledged tradition of anti-racist thought, the uncovering of this other agency that seemed to have no place in theories of transformative social change.

It is only when we turn to the rich and textured accounts of rebellion and revolution produced by activist scholars like WEB Du Bois (1936/1999), CLR James (1938; James 1985) and Herbert Aptheker (1943) that we encounter the emancipatory impulse and agential capacity of the racialised and colonised. In their distinctive ways, James and Du Bois demonstrated how those subject to the structuring power of racism, came to understand themselves as having interests in common and began to move, collectively, in opposition to the social forces of racist reaction (Meer and Du Bois 2018). The American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century in particular unleashed the strongest challenges hitherto to racial slavery. Whilst the contrast between the rhetoric of most of the American revolutionaries and the reality of slavery was self-evident, the discourse of freedom and liberty they employed to cohere and then mobilise the population to secure independence from British colonial control was to reverberate far beyond their intended audience. The number of slave rebellions grew exponentially over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century (James 1985;

Aptheker 1943) as African Americans tried to force the state to make good on the promise contained within the Declaration of Independence that 'that all (sic) men are created equal'. Later, such black collective resistance helped inspire some white Americans to move towards the politics of radical abolitionism undergirded by a more expansive re-reading of Christianity, and it was this conjoining of social forces that led to a brief flourishing of multi-racial democracy in the period we refer to as Reconstruction (Du Bois 1999).

Alongside these desires and struggles for liberty emerging in the English-speaking world, a more secular revolution began in France in 1789 during which the monarchy was overthrown in the name of 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. Just as in the case of the American Revolution, however, the French revolutionaries could not at first imagine extending this desire for equality to the African slaves of the French Empire. Instead, it required the self-activity of the slaves themselves to force the new French regime to actualise the promise of the revolution for all. In the summer of 1791, a huge slave uprising took place in the French colony of St. Domingue (now Haiti) that defeated the French colonial planters. By 1792, and under the leadership of a black coachman called Toussaint L'Ouverture, the slave army captured all the ports on the north of the island. Just as the original aims of the French Revolution had inspired the African slaves to demand their freedom in St. Domingue, now the actions of the slave army impacted back on the French revolution with the French issuing a decree abolishing slavery premised on the 'aristocracy of the skin' (James 1938).

It is sometimes forgotten that in this moment of revolutionary upheaval, the slave revolts in the periphery of the modern world-system actively conjoined with the freedom dreams of subaltern classes in the core with transnational racialised outsiders serving as linchpin (Virdee 2014). It was a freed slave, Olaudah Equiano, who brought first-hand experience of slavery to the attention of the British public with his remarkable autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Equiano was also a member of the London Corresponding Society and a friend of its founder and secretary Thomas Hardy. These corresponding societies were key meeting places for the exchange of radical ideas about working-class freedom and Irish national liberation. And it was through these same networks that ideas of black freedom also circulated, and entwined with those other causes expanding the democratic imaginary of all such that Thomas Hardy could declare that the liberty of blacks and whites was indivisible (Fryer 1984, 210), while John Thelwall – Jacobin and abolitionist – actively fused the struggles against slavery abroad and class exploitation at home with his incendiary statement that 'The seed, the root of the oppression is here, and here the cure must begin' (Fryer 1984, 212).

### **Marxism, the Russian revolution and the anti-imperialist imagination**

Despite Marx's call for 'workers of the world to unite' the vast bulk of the European socialist movement organised in the Second International and representing such workers did its best to prove him wrong. Socialists in fin de siècle Europe manifested a deep attachment to a racialised conception of the nation and offered enthusiastic support for their respective state's imperialist adventures (see Virdee 2017). Over the course of the so-called 'revisionist debate' of the late 1890s, Eduard Bernstein, a leading intellectual of Europe's largest socialist party – the German SPD – was also one of the strongest advocates for a socialist colonial policy on the grounds that the allegedly higher civilisational culture of Europeans would help to uplift to the so-called inferior races of

mankind. And such advocacy was laced with a warning that '[r]aces who are hostile to or incapable of civilisation cannot claim our sympathy when they revolt against civilisation ... savages must be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilisation' (cited in Virdee 2017, 2398–2399).

However, just when it seemed that Marxism's emancipatory promise had been contained within the boundaries of the nation-state, the Bolsheviks broke the chain of the capitalist world-system at its weakest link. The significance of the Russian Revolution for anti-imperialist politics was that Lenin in particular recognised that the uneven development of historical capitalism and the division of the world into imperialist and colonised nations had effectively blown off course the unfolding of the global class struggle along the lines that Marx and Engels had predicted in *The Communist Manifesto*. Instead, he proposed a more thorough engagement with the national question. In particular, through his discussions with the Indian Marxist MN Roy and others, he came to believe that the nationalisms of the oppressed contained a democratic and potentially emancipatory impulse, and should be brought into the orbit of a socialist project in the age of imperialist conflict and world war (Virdee 2017). That is, it was a key task of socialists to find ways and means of synchronising or bringing into articulation the struggles against exploitation with those against oppression, as neatly captured in the political slogan of the Third International, 'Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite'.

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s then, an already existing wave of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles from America to Asia now became more entangled with Marxism, and communist politics. Former members of the African Blood Brotherhood like Cyril Briggs became the first black communists in the US (Makalani 2011) while Indian anti-colonial activists such as Bhagat Singh previously inspired by the politics of the transnational Ghadr movement now attached themselves to the red flag of communism. These activists were drawn to the Bolsheviks because of their resolute opposition to racism, nationalism and imperialism and their strong commitment to socialist internationalism manifesting itself not just in rhetorical statements but the creation of a vast infrastructure to facilitate anti-imperialist revolts in the name of world socialist revolution. In the eyes of such activists then, the Russian Revolution reinforced their belief in a better future for all humankind, one which offered redemption for the oppressed and exploited of the world. In this sense, the Russian revolution was interpreted as a revolution for hope as these words from Claude McKay, African American poet and black Bolshevik testify:

The Third International stands for the emancipation of all workers of the world, regardless of race or colour, and this stand of the Third International is not merely on paper like the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. It is a real thing (1923).

### **Anti-fascism and anti-racisms**

We highlight this often overlooked history of affiliation between leading anti-racist thinkers and the revolutionary left in order to reposition discussions of anti-racism in these traditions of resistance. The histories of anti-racist communists and their wide-ranging engagement with struggles for justice

and survival exemplifies the contribution of anti-racist analysis to the conceptualisation of global social justice, including, importantly, in response to the threat of fascism.

Today we find ourselves in a troubling moment characterised by a renewed confidence among far right groups, demanding a similar renewal among anti-racists and anti-fascists, not least in the face of alliances of the far right made more confident and emboldened by the election of Donald Trump, with his white nationalist rhetoric and policies. The far-right 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on 12 August 2017, which ended in the murder of counter-protestor Heather Heyer at the hands of Vanguard America associate James Fields, brought Antifa and wider anti-fascist activism to the attention of the American public, media and political establishment. It was not without ideological and political mediation as President Donald Trump constructed a false equivalence blaming 'many sides' for hate and violence in Charlottesville and many on the right attacked Antifa, as opposed to fascists and racists, as a threat to democracy because of their left-wing, and particularly anarchist, politics and history (if a longer history beyond the present-ist moment were acknowledged) and the current preoccupation of the Alt-Right and Alt-Lite with 'Cultural Marxism', an anti-left, but also anti-Semitic trope and conspiracy about left-wing Jewish influence on, attempts to 'de-Christianize' and control culture and society. Anti-fascism originated in what Eric Hobsbawm called a 'nationalism of the left', which emerged in response to Italian fascism under Mussolini, and would combat fascisms under the Nazis in Germany, the Vichy regime in France, Franco in Spain, Mosley's Black Shirts in Britain and American First fascism in the 1930s and 40s. The latter which is frequently evoked in relation to Trump and the formation of the Anti-Nazi League by Samuel Untermyer in 1933. On 20 February 1939, the German-American Bund, so emboldened, hosted a 'Pro-American Rally' with 22,000 people at Madison Square Gardens. The response was 50,000 protesters organised by the Socialist Workers Party and including members of the Jewish community and Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. A significant moment in solidarity amongst communities, anti-fascists and anti-racists. There were also later manifestations, such as the Communist Workers' Party fighting against the Ku Klux Klan in Greensboro, North Carolina in the US and Anti-Nazi League and Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) opposing the National Front in Britain in the 1970s, Rock Against Racism in the 1980s, Anti-Fascist Action and the relaunched Anti-Nazi League in the 1990s Britain, as well as Antifa, Hope Not Hate, Unite Against Fascism and Stand Up to Racism against the resurgent far-right in the US and Britain today (Copsey 2016; Bray 2017; Renton 2006; Smith 2009, 2017). Many of these occupied the streets and published important material that reported on and analysed the phenomenon (e.g. Searchlight, CARF, Temporary Hoarding and today, the anti-fascist networks It's Going Down and We Hunted the Mammoth).

The diverse organisations and activist groups that constitute anti-fascism also represent diverse intellectual and strategic traditions, as well as factionalism, on the left. Something Paul Gilroy examines in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), as well as its relationship to anti-racism. That is traditions of activism and activist scholarship addressing diverse, entrenched, institutional and structural, as well as extreme, forms and modalities of racism, from colonialism and slavery as discussed in the section 'Slavery and the promise of liberty', to the present. One of the criticisms of anti-fascist theory and activism (as well as the wider left), is that it focuses attention on fascism as opposed to racism in terms of the experience and agency of racialised subjects, the legacies of colonialism and contemporary imperialism (unless it is a fascist state) and, from the left (where it focuses on/opposes fascism in relation to capitalism), the ways in which racism is intrinsic to

capitalism and capitalist reproduction (examples of different critiques include: Gilroy 1987; Virdee 2014), as well as on street-level activism as opposed to strategies to address structural, institutional and state racism. It is important to note that the anti-fascist activism and mobilisations mentioned earlier was made possible by first-generation organisations from the likes of the Indian Worker's Association (IWA). Founded in London in the 1930s by immigrant workers from India, the IWA and represented the establishment of racialised consciousness, anti-racist activism and community, as well as labour, organisation that was not collapsed into Marxian orthodoxy (and racism not collapsed into fascism). We also see this aspect in the emergence and mobilisation of the Asian Youth Movements and wider activism against racism and political inaction in the wake of a series of developments and events in the 1970s, including National Front marches and the racist murder of Altab Ali on 4 May 1978. Anti-racist activism led by racialised communities would also play an important role in opposition to both the far-right and police, as well as wider state and institutional, racism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and continuing today.

In addition to it being a matter of analysis and strategy, movements and mobilisations also emerge from different historical, political and theoretical traditions, and circumstances. Although with Trump in office and the mainstreaming and normalisation of racism and fascism, something also seen in the UK post-Brexit these are increasingly overlapping and intersecting (Winter 2017). Anti-racist activism, and that focused on institutions and/off the state has also gained new and widespread attention in the US with the formation of Black Lives Matter (Lowery 2017), particularly after a 2016 protest in Minnesota and Beyonce performance at the Superbowl in which she evoked both Black Lives Matter and the Black Panthers, linking the former to the history of militant Black anti-racism, led to attacks on her and Black Lives Matter as there had been against Antifa, but racialised and racist. In fact, both Antifa and so-called 'Black Identity Extremists' are now targets of FBI investigations. This mirrors state countersubversion measures against 'communists' and civil rights activists in the 1950s and against the Black Panthers and other so-called 'Black Extremists' (less acceptable than the NAACP and other reformist civil rights anti-racist activists they eventually came to accept), as well as the 'Revolutionary Left', in the 1960s and 1970s (Cunningham 2004; Winter 2017, 2018). At the same time, we are seeing anti-racist, and particularly decolonial movements on university campuses, calling for decolonising the curriculum and Rhodes Must Fall. This exists alongside other, intersecting, feminist and LGBTQ+ movements. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the resurgence racist (and misogynist) right, specifically the Alt-Right, is targeting universities with free speech and white rights campaigns.

At least at that point in history in the 1960s and 70s, the federal government also went after the Klan and passed civil and voting rights unlike the backlash, roll back politics of the Trump administration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. This raises the issue of a state and state supportive anti-racism which has been effective in terms of legislation and reform, but not radical change. An example of this would be the former Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in the UK, now rebranded as the distinctly non-race/racism specific Equality and Human Rights Commission. To make too clear a distinction not between anti-fascism and anti-racism as movements, but fascism and racism as targets would be to miss those activists who can bridge them. One notable example in the UK is the left-wing Institute for Race Relations (IRR), formerly led by A. Sivanandan, which works on state, structural, institutional, and far-right racism and publish the activist-scholarly journal *Race and Class*. In the US, we see the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) take on the far-right and state racism.

In terms of the IRR and Sivanandan, who provided an intellectual imperative, inspiration and resources to the struggle, according to Jasbinder Nijjar, 'He recognised and explained daily racism in all its various forms as a problem stemming from politics, rather than personal prejudice or "hate", and, in doing so, empowered generations of campaigners to organise and resist accordingly' (Nijjar 2018). Yet, he was critical of the direction of anti-racism as it became increasingly mainstreamed and professionalised: 'the fight against racism moved from the streets and the shop-floor to the town halls and the committee rooms where bureaucrats sought neatly packaged solutions to throw at "the problem" and its vocal spokespeople' (quoted in Gidley 2018). He would later argue that 'The anti-racist struggle as we knew it is over. We've got to fight new racisms such as xeno-racism and anti-Muslim racism that globalisation and the war on terror have thrown up – within the larger framework of the fight against a growing state authoritarianism and its bedfellow fascism' (interviewed in Gordon 2014). This encapsulates the multifaceted and intersecting forms we now face and which demand urgency in activism and analysis.

Activism and analysis can focus attention and strategies on different, but intersecting, sites of racism, resistance and change, from street level fascism to state policy and practice (Bonnett 2000; Braham and Rattansi 1992; Gilroy 1987), not to mention different target groups, be they Black, Muslim, Jewish, Roma, racialised migrants and refugees, and others. It is for this reason, as well as renewed attention and urgency brought about by an emboldened and resurgent fascism, state racism and anti-anti-racism in many countries, that the history, underlying theories and relationship between anti-fascism and anti-racisms need to be examined and discussed and included in any remapping of the histories of anti-racism.

### **The violence of the state**

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the criticisms of anti-fascism, was a lack of attention to state racism. Anti-racist activism does pay attention to the state and, as mentioned, the state has paid attention to both, and not in always positive ways as the cases of Antifa and Black Lives Matter (and the Black Panthers before them) show. The election of Trump, police shootings, the 'Muslim Travel Ban', immigration raids by ICE and border wall planning in the US, and Brexit, Go Home Vans, Prevent and the content of the Lammy Review on racial inequality in the criminal justice system, are examples of what Sivanandan, refers to as the new racism and growing state authoritarianism (with its bedfellow fascism). They have not only increased the need for and profile of anti-fascist and anti-racist activism, but the significance of state racism in protest and analysis. At different points in history, the focus on state racism might have been subject to criticisms that it missed extreme, structural or everyday forms of racism, or that between the end of Apartheid and emergence of the post-racial or 'colour-blind racism', there has been a receding of state racism. The most explicit manifestation of this has been in the US, where the passing of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, as well as temporary defeat of the Klan in the 1960s, allowed for celebration of the end of racism which met its apogee with the election of Barack Obama. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), the colour-blind (or post-racial) society is constructed through or based upon the 'Abstract Liberalism Frame' where equality is believed to have been achieved, proof of which is based on individual achievement universalised, most notably the election of Obama, which makes that a reality both nationally and in terms of the state. America votes as a colour-blind nation but becomes

a symbolic anti-racist state in the process. While state racism can be seen most explicitly in officially racist (including fascist) states such as Jim Crow America, Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa, state racism can be more deeply embedded and diffuse through various institutions, such as the criminal justice system, immigration and security services, and their continuing operations. Colour-blindness and post-racial liberalism allow for societies to not only ignore, but even justify these processes. This can occur through liberal racism that separates itself from old illiberal racisms of the Nazis, Jim Crow, Apartheid and far-right and focuses on whether the 'other' can adapt to western liberal democratic society and culture, often defined by progressive narratives appropriated from activists and weaponised against Muslims by the state and conservative mainstream (Mondon and Winter 2017). Despite the liberal framing, it often serves to justify, legitimise and normalise the racist scapegoating and securitisation of communities (Mondon and Winter 2017), as well as rejection of refugees, who are left to die in the sea. This is something exposed by the return of hard state racism in the era of Trump, Brexit and success of European far-right parties, and accompanying revival of white nationalism, nativism, fascism and, in the case of the latter, nostalgia for empire. It also calls for a reassertion of discussion and analysis of, and opposition to, state racism.

In *The Racial State* (2001), David Theo Goldberg argues that race is integral to the emergence of the modern nation-state in the 19th century and its management, as well as of its populations. It would also be central to the expansionist colonial empire building that European nation-states committed. Goldberg would also debunk the post-racial thesis in the more recent *Are We Post-racial Yet?* (2015) citing not only structural racism, but police killings which informed the creation of Black Lives Matter and have seen it expand and inspire internationally in the fight against state racism and racist violence. The post-racial myth would be further exposed by the return of white nationalism of Trump and Brexit. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander looks at 'Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness', focusing not only on state racism in the traditional sense, but the historical origins in colonialism and slavery, its legacies through to today and the emergence of neo-liberal privatisation policies and developments which hand power to private corporations, something which can also be seen in immigration and asylum detention and deportation and counter-terrorism in many countries. The increasing significance of state racism and need to research and oppose it is argued for in the collection *Race and State* (2006) edited by Alana Lentin and Ronit Lentin, where contributors look at the ways in which state racism has continued, become more acceptable and rolled back progress gained by the civil rights movement in areas such as racial profiling, immigration and asylum detention and deportation.

In addition to this, in *The Racial State* (2013), edited by Virinder Kalra, Nisha Kapoor, who also contributed to the ESRC series, and James Rhodes, contributors look at the contemporary racial state, exploring race and racism in relation to the functioning of state institutions and policies in areas such as the military, education, surveillance, migration and asylum. There has also been a wealth of work in these, and other, areas of state racism, including security and counterterrorism (Kundnani 2014; Rashid 2016; Mondon and Winter 2016, 2017), migration and asylum (Bhattacharyya et al. 2017; Kapoor 2018), criminal justice (Alexander 2010; Winter 2016; Weissinger and Mack 2017). In addition to, and overlapping with some of this research, there is also, returning to the previous section, activist opposition to manifestations of state racism, including Black Lives Matter and a range of anti-detention, anti-deportation activist and anti-police racism and anti-poverty groups organising across the world, including the work and seminar series contribution of



activist scholar Jaime Amparo Alves on police terror and black urban life in Brazil (2018), increasingly at borders between countries and in declared and undeclared war zones.

In the series of events that inform this volume, speakers from a range of anti-racist groups exchanged ideas with international scholars of racism, in an attempt to grapple with emerging techniques of the racial and racist state while also registering the ordinariness of continuing racisms. This is another aspect of anti-racist traditions that we wish to highlight – the anti-racism that is domesticated and/or mundane.

### **Mundane structures and the domestication of anti-racist practices**

Alongside the revolutionary traditions of anti-racism and the urgency of resisting racist violence in all its forms, there is also another element of anti-racist traditions that arises from the identification of racism as everyday dehumanisation. This approach to understanding the workings of racism can be discerned in Arendt's warning about the interdependency of racism, colonialism and totalitarianism and in Fanon's experiential account of the body that creates those who question. Long before we have learned to speak of micro-aggressions (Fleras 2016), the analysis of racism as an everyday practice that infects the practices of life, both institutional and interpersonal, comes to inform the response of anti-racists (Essed 1991; Bourne 2001).

This is a mode of understanding racism that refocuses attention on the business of everyday life. Whereas an understanding of the immense cruelty and exploitation of empire and the world-changing threat of fascism informed the scholarly inquiry that is the basis of recent anti-racist thought, the translation into public policy has been based, largely, on an understanding of racism as an outcome of (flawed) institutional practices combined with a culture of everyday prejudice. This is work that refocuses analyses of the dehumanisation of racism in mundane settings – the school (Macdonald et al. 1989; Gillborn 1995; Heitzeg 2016), the hospital (Esmail 2004; Jee-Lyn García and Sharif 2015), the workplace, the housing market (Huttman 1991). Perhaps inevitably, the turn towards the everyday was vulnerable to reclamation by more liberal and individualised accounts of racism. As a result, this phase of anti-racist activity is complicated by institutional responses that sought to identify and alter individual behaviours through such practices as Race Awareness Training (for a famous critique, see Sivanandan 1985) or, more recently, the rise in the global industry challenging 'unconscious bias' (Nordell 2017).

### **Bureaucracy, diversity and other diversions from justice**

However, great the change in institutional landscapes, including the rise and fall of the organisational framework of welfare capitalism, the accusation of institutional racism has remained a recurring theme in the last five decades of anti-racist thought. The ability to name racism as systemic and systematic signals the beginning of a phase of anti-racist mobilising that also seeks to combine world-changing critique with analysis (and change) of details of practice (for a refashioning of such practices to address institutional communalism, see Singh 2015). Sadly, one lesson of attempts to dismantle institutional racism has been the difficulty of enacting such institutional change, not least due to the continuing challenge of naming racism, as opposed to some other factor

such as alleged cultural deficit (Rodríguez and Araújo 2017). Despite the many hours that have been devoted to monitoring, lobbying, amending policy, setting targets and assessing outcomes, not to mention the mammoth task of agitating for legal change and contributing to the formulation of legislation and guidance, institutional outcomes continue to show racialised gaps. There are continuing questions about the racialised workings of the criminal justice system, and distrust of the police becomes amplified by the global reach of campaigns against racist state violence (Alves 2018) and racist state indifference (Palmater 2016). These continuations of longstanding institutional failures take place alongside renewed racisms arising from the slow (and not so slow) demise of welfare capitalism (Kaika 2017), the intensification of everyday bordering (Jones and Johnson 2016; Brambilla, Laine, and Bocchi 2016), the deregulation of labour markets casting increasing numbers into precarity (Standing 2014) and the re-militarisation of society through an apparently endless war abroad and at home (Enloe 2016). In this context of racisms that, once again, both stay too much the same and proliferate into new versions of familiar horrors, it becomes more urgent than ever to pool our resources of analysis, understanding and memory.

### **Intersectional energies and new/old liberation movements**

Recent remakings of anti-racist thought reveal the deep influence of black feminism and, increasingly, the analytic insights of black queer activism. This goes beyond the explicitly feminist movements against cuts to services or for the rights of migrant women to create ways of doing politics that seek to embody the hard-learned lessons of feminism, including the always fraught attempt to be accountable to each other (for an account that references the impact of feminist analysis and modes of organising on the wider left, see Maiguashca, Dean, and Keith 2016). As we begin to acknowledge to each other the full range and extent of sexual violence and the impact of this violence on our ability to be and do together, the belated respect given to black feminist thought offers one set of resources through which to remake our relations to each other.

The queering of anti-racist politics both continues a far longer, if somewhat submerged, history and opens a long-awaited opportunity to expand conceptions of community, rights and culture beyond tightly heteronormative modes of nationhood. Importantly, queered anti-racism has been at the forefront of battles against state violence – in prisons, in hospitals and at/through borders (Ritchie 2017) – and this queering of the terms and institutions of citizenship suggests a move forward in anti-racist thought and practice that has the potential to finally disrupt our unhealthy preoccupation with belonging to the familial nation.

This volume seeks to map some of the connections between a longer intellectual tradition against racism and the recent re-energising of social justice movements that include anti-racism among their influences. We make no claim to provide an exhaustive mapping of such tendencies. However, we hope that readers will appreciate our wish to acknowledge and celebrate multiple influences and to look towards recent and emerging forms of anti-racist activism as an important site where the intellectual traditions of anti-racism can be renewed. In our moment, this discussion necessarily spans movements against state violence and battles to remake spaces of education, migrant solidarity and defences of public services, struggles over both workers' rights and cultural representation and builds on the renewed struggles against militarism, state racism and corporate exploitation. This might include contesting the terms of Muslim femininity as a means of forging

activist identities against war (Massoumi 2015) or critiquing the erasure of black feminist and black queer agency in the mainstreaming of social justice movements (Lindsey 2015).

The traces of anti-racist consciousness can be discerned in each of these battles, yet, on the whole, these are not forms of politics informed by the structure of a party or any articulated larger programme or politics. Alliances are formed and the public utterances of activists and the formulation of demands reveal the interfeed between key areas, so that anti-racism becomes a claim for fair pay such as the \$15 and a union mobilisations across fast-food outlets in the United States (<https://fightfor15.org>) or saving services or stopping war or resisting state violence (Richie 2015) or defending access to housing. Each of these moments of mutual amplification is made possible by longer traditions of anti-racist mobilisations, many of which focused on particular instances of racist injustice, with the understanding that each instance symbolised a larger vicious whole. Across these differing yet interconnected movements, we can trace the influence of earlier moments of anti-racist thought and practice. At times, this can be an attempt to correct the perceived weaknesses of mobilisations that failed to make space for the complexity of intersectional identities (Cespedes, Evans, and Monteiro 2017). At others, it can be a folding of anti-racist ways of understanding into other battles, a version of the productive interchange and mutuality across movements described by Dixon (2014).

In this resurgence of anti-racist activity, the struggle against racism becomes intertwined in other goals and movements, building on the practices and vision of the anti-globalisation and occupy movements (for an account of this interfeed between struggles, see Davis, 2016). The intellectual influences of anti-racist and anti-imperialist traditions return in these re-worlded offspring of the movement of movements. Old names and old hopes become fresh again in the mouths of new generations. Despite ourselves, we are connected.

### **Conclusion – still dreaming of freedom**

The articles in this special issue represent a diverse selection of contemporary anti-racist thinking and scholarship and suggest routes to expanding sociological debate to encounter other intellectual resources.

Andrew Smith's imagined conversation between C.L.R. James and Henri Lefebvre reconnects the questions raised by black radical traditions and parallel questions about the unevenness of capitalist development. Smith reworks the concept of 'correspondences' from James – a stretched term to encompass both modes of interaction and communication and a method enabling dialogue between parallel analyses, a way of letting intellectual works 'speak' to each other. Smith charts an imagined interaction between the work of James and of Lefebvre in order to reveal the necessary kernel of anti-racist and anti-colonial understanding in any attempt to restate the intrinsic value of human life.

In a piece bringing together traditions of community co-learning and the place of shared memory in articulating a critique of racism that is grounded in everyday black experience, Lisa Palmer revisits the need to challenge common-sense racisms through building and sharing collective understanding,

including the important but often forgotten histories of self-organised education and archiving. Her work reflects on the important work of multiple media in documenting and articulating black radical traditions, including the necessary work of registering the everyday and its mundanity and pleasure. Palmer concludes with a timely reminder of the diversity of racialised communities and the valuable lessons that can be excavated only by hearing the voices of women, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities.

The institutional framing of anti-racism is revisited in the pieces by Paul Warmington and Marcelle Dawson. Dawson brings together a critique of the neoliberal university and of the neoliberalisation of education more generally, and the calls to democratise education as an aspect of decolonial projects. These are movements that place access to intellectual resources and educational space at the heart of anti-racist claims. At this time of a differentiating marketisation that seeks to commodify all aspects of learning, the long shadow of racialised dispossession is remade again in the practices of the university. Warmington's piece complements this with a wide-ranging assessment of the possibilities opened through Critical Race Theory. Warmington seeks to historicise the emergence of Critical Race Theory, both in its intellectual and institutional context, inviting us to recognise the significance of modes of thought that enable conversations about the character and persistence of racism. The piece places the UK adoption of Critical Race Theory as formed through histories of anti-colonial and anti-racist politics, representing a framework through which to make racism visible and open to challenge. Both pieces allude to the considerable resistance to change from within academic institutions, including from colleagues. In doing so, both Dawson and Warmington remind us of the continuing significance of such anti-racist battles over the terms and reproduction of knowledge.

Gargi Bhattacharyya's piece continues the analysis of language by considering the poetics of anti-racist utterances. Alongside the increasing professionalisation of knowledge economies, including through the corporatisation of education, we have been witnessing a parallel opening of other spaces of exchange and learning, a parallel sphere that references the resources and materials of formal learning but redeploys these ideas as talismanic reference points in the struggle to articulate an anti-racist consciousness. Bhattacharyya suggests a re-evaluation of tactics of repetitive aphorism as a form of everyday choric practice, not as an alternative to critique but as something that occurs alongside other intellectual practices, in the process remaking, potentially, the terms of who speaks and who can be heard.

The final and much-anticipated piece comes in the form of an interview with Errol Lawrence. Through his contribution to *The Empire Strikes Back*, Errol Lawrence has influenced generations of scholars and practitioners. His critique of 'common-sense racism' continues to inform our shared understanding of how racism becomes normalised, a discussion continued in Lisa Palmer's piece in this volume. Here he reflects on the continuing popularity of 'The Empire Strikes Back', the constitution of common-sense racism today and the need for anti-racists to challenge the politics of irrationality. This conversation is not a call to any particular theoretical paradigm or methodological approach. However, it is a reminder of the importance of working to understand and of the urgency of working together to formulate serious analyses. More than anything else, it is this call to collaborative knowledge that links the pieces in this collection.

In this moment of renewed racisms, and their increasing normalisation and mainstreaming, as well as a resurgence of mobilisations against racism, this volume seeks to return to an examination of the ongoing conversation between intellectual and activist traditions. We hope, most sincerely, that this is only one among many new starts.

### **Disclosure statement**

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