

ARTICLE

Rethinking geographies of race and austerity urbanism

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Abstract

Austerity has become a key consideration for studying ongoing state restructuring of the urban since the economic crisis of 2008. However, academic debates have yet to fully interrogate the role of race in this process. This article reviews geographic literature on race and austerity. It outlines the emergence of austerity urbanism, and the geographic, sociological, and political science literatures from which it draws its origins from. Focusing on the interplay between race/racialization and austerity, this article engages with critical theories of race to better understand the “raced” nature of austerity, and how these processes shape cities. Critical theories of race have been influential in linking race to forms of state power and governance in geography, while also exploring racism as a material and discursive formation that is connected across space and time by capital. Austerity urbanism literature has yet to develop a sophisticated analysis of the racialized dimensions of austerity in the U.S. context. Rather, scholarship up to date theorizes race through fixed categories, where racialized groups are seen and mapped onto austerity policy outcomes. In this paper, I propose that critical theories of race can provide an analytical framework for geographers to better understand the relations between race and austerity through the lens of racial capitalism by revealing how periods of neoliberalization are organized along racial lines and operate through and upon terrains of racial domination and empire. This means framing race and racism as a

process (i.e., racialization) that is inextricably embedded in the logic of the neoliberal project. This paper concludes with commentary on possible future directions, both empirical and conceptual, that engagements with racial capitalism can offer to the literature on austerity urbanism to interrogate race, power, and justice across the Global North and South.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Following the 2008 economic crisis, trillions of private banking debt have been offloaded to the public sphere in which the consequences are being measured in terms of a deeply embedded fiscal crisis of the state (see Blyth, 2013; Peck, 2015). Since then, the cost-savings logic of neoliberal regulation has advanced policies of austerity. Extreme budget cuts and resulting deterioration of the welfare state have been justified in the name of bailing out banks and investors. In the fields of geography, political science, and sociology, austerity policies have become a key consideration for studying ongoing state restructuring of the urban and the socio-spatial repercussions. The debate on contemporary austerity tends to highlight that fiscal retrenchment goes past the management of the financial crisis and is rather a fundamental aspect of a longer term neoliberal project which aims to redefine and reinvent the state at the local level (Donald, Glasmeier, Gray, & Laboa, 2014; Krugman, 2012; Peck, 2012). The pattern of “rolling back” the state to facilitate the privatization of the urban has become a key feature of neoliberalism. The examination of this concern is most recently discussed in the literature on austerity urbanism, characterized as disempowering and dismantling systems of social protection; restructuring, rescaling, and downsizing the state; and shifting the locus of risk and responsibility on to the public and to the poor and marginalized, in particular.

In this paper, I argue that there is lack of engagement with topics of race and austerity urbanism that conceptualize such processes as working in unison. What I am proposing is that austerity is always racialized, and thus, more research in geography is needed to examine the variegated interactions of racialized austerity to reveal that such policies do not govern in a homogenous manner but rather operate on historically and geographically distinctive terrains of racial domination and empire. Such absent of analysis has limited the ways in which we understand state restructuring, financialized capitalism, and the reconstitution of historical processes of racial domination into new urban forms. The first section of this paper provides a brief overview of the literature on austerity urbanism. By drawing on discussions of the origins of austerity urbanism, along with discussions of the social implications of austerity policies, I argue that the current austerity urbanism literature treats race as merely an afterthought when theorizing economic and political processes of austerity. The next section draws on varying perspectives in geography that attempt to centralize race, followed by an overview of emerging literature that looks at austerity urbanism through the lens on racial capitalism. Cedric Robinson developed the term “racial capitalism” in 1983, arguing that racism was a structuring logic of capitalism. Rather than treating race as a social position, my analyses will offer an understanding of racialized austerity by framing race as a process and bringing forth literature which theorizes how racism can be harnessed by economic processes and the ways in which this materializes in the urban. As a way to better understand uneven geographies of austerity, critical theories of race can offer nuanced perspectives about the ways in which neoliberalization operates through and acts upon socio-spatial relations of race. The final section discusses the critical importance of having more discussions of the relationship between race and austerity, calling for greater considerations for international comparative approaches across the global North and South.

2 | RACE AS MORE THAN JUST A SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF AUSTERITY URBANISM

Austerity has been understood and theorized in a number of different ways. Some scholars theorize the political and ideological institutions of austerity, focusing on the intellectual genealogy of the term (Blyth, 2013; Callincos, 2012; Crotty, 2012), or the ways in which certain doctrines of austerity have been used to contend the dangers of debt and deficits to erode the welfare state (Krugman, 2015). Other scholars have understood austerity as an emergent technique of governmentality or mode of citizenship which demands we speak to those lives that are being restructured. Instead of examining financial and economic implications of austerity, some feminist literature in political economy and urban geography has researched personal and intimate geographies of austerity, that is, the ways in which austerity seeps into personal and family lives (Gray, Edwards, Hayes, & Baxter, 2009; Hall, 2015; Harrison, 2013; Jensen & Tyler, 2012; Pollard, 2013; Smith, 2000). This literature understands state economic restructuring as produced through and productive of social relations of difference. For instance, Hall (2015) engages with the financialization of everyday life and family practices to show the importance of incorporating emotions and relationships that are a part of everyday life to understand how individuals and families are dealing with the impact of austerity (p. 326). Hall's (2017) work is also about the materiality of austerity—more than policy, it is understood as a lived reality. Other studies such as Gray et al. (2009) and Harrison (2013) have also explored everyday family experiences of the recent economic recession.

The body of work that I will draw on for this paper is from those who conceptualize austerity as a process of ongoing state restructuring, theorizing cities as central sites of the uneven advancement of neoliberal restructuring projects. Scholars such as Peck, Theodore, and Brenner (2009), Brenner and Theodore (2002), Jessop (2002), Swyngedouw (1997), and Harvey (1989) focus on the path-dependent interactions between neoliberal projects of restructuring and inherited institutional and changing urban landscapes over the last several decades. The historic financial vulnerability of cities is understood to be the result of decades of global economic restructuring. Theorized through the lens of neoliberal urbanism, that is, previous forms of entrepreneurial governance (Davidson & Ward, 2014; Harvey, 1989), high-risk, speculative growth strategies devised left cities exposed to the volatility of the financial and housing markets (Davidson & Ward, 2014). The deregulation of capital and the decline of state-revenue sharing facilitated a municipality's reliance on continuous bonds and speculative investment to finance their spending and day-to-day operations. This work has engaged with the concept of "actually existing neoliberalism," as a way to explore the ongoing production of neoliberal reforms within local spaces "defined by legacies of institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices and political struggles" (Peck et al., 2009, p. 50). Through this lens, cities are argued as central to the reproduction and mutation of neoliberalism since the 1990s (Peck et al., 2009).

My focus is on the latest round of state restructuring in the form of austerity urbanism that was perpetuated by declining city revenues as result of broader macroeconomic forces following 2008, such as unemployment, stagnant wages, and lagging property values in the midst of a real estate crash (Hinkley, 2017, p. 60). The origins of austerity urbanism are reflective of the prevailing structural deficits present in U.S. cities, and previous rounds of neoliberal state restructuring (Tabb, 2014, p. 91). However, post-2008 financial crisis led to new forms of extreme austerity. Hackworth (2007) understands cities operating in a longer term, systemic age of austerity due to their increasing reliance on credit markets to access capital to fund social services and finance capital infrastructure. His work finds that the decline in federal support for urban development has been simultaneously replaced by an increase in municipal debt (p. 769).

The idea that cities are suffering from the effects of extreme austerity post-2008 is well documented in the literature (Donald, et al, 2014; Gonzalez & Oosterlynck, 2013, Peck, 2015). For instance, case studies illustrate these struggles in the form of budget service cuts, downsizing government operations, eroding workers' benefits, and increasing user fees/rates. These are just few ways in which cities are coping with the effects of the crisis. One main theme discussed in the literature is the tendency of nation states to respond to fiscal shocks by passing responsibility to lower tiers of government and this converges around *how is it* that certain marginalized groups have come to be

particularly affected by contemporary austerity policies (Donald et al., 2014; Peck, 2012). Scholars discuss austerity as a politics of displacement and emphasize the relational aspect of austerity, highlighting the intra-urban geographical consequences of austerity (Donald et al., 2014; Hinkley, 2017; Peck, 2012, 2015). By rescaling the state through downsizing via service cuts, literature has examined their differentiated impacts on those marginalized.

For instance, Donald et al. (2014) provide a compelling look through empirical evidence at how austerity measures disproportionately impact low-income, marginalized communities through increases in level of intra-level inequality to consider the social implications of austerity on racialized groups. As Donald et al. (2014) explain, cuts in funding for local governments, along with policy shifts that include significant reductions in welfare benefits and a shifting of responsibility for certain social services, have major impacts on the poor and economically vulnerable (p. 10). Their examination of racially segregated neighborhoods in San Francisco show increased levels of concentrated poverty since 2007, where marginalized communities are left with fewer assets and resources, such as good schools, and health facilities and open spaces, such as unwanted lands uses such as contaminated brownfield sites (p. 9).

Moreover, Davidson and Ward (2014) argue cities that are financially struggling are generally faced with the greatest pressure to downsize are also the ones that face the greatest difficulties in managing populations “disadvantaged” by the fiscal crisis. Peck (2015) further notes that financially struggling cities are unable to absorb the costs and risks that have been downloaded onto them by higher levels of government and the financial sector, and thus, these cities will have no choice but to reciprocally offload themselves (i.e., implementing their own austerity measures to city services) and the adoption of fee-based systems which “will have devastating consequences for communities of color” (p. 19). Other work, such as Hastings, Bailey, Bramley, and Gannon (2017), examines the mechanism by which austerity cuts are being transmitted to the marginalized, and how these service cuts are experienced by marginalized groups. Comparing U.S. and U.K. cases together, they show the ways in which service reductions accumulate more quickly and more intensely in poorer and more marginalized neighborhoods. Second, they find that the reason why the worst impacts of austerity cuts were experienced by poorer groups was a result of the notion that better-off users had more of a capacity and the resources to protect themselves from the damaging consequences of austerity (Hastings et al., 2017, 2020). Through the concept of “dual regressive distribution,” they argue that austerity urbanism involves a relational strategy: Targeting cities leads to targeting the poor and marginalized.

Throughout this literature, uneven development and the unequal social implications are argued as key to understanding austerity urbanism in the U.S. context (Davidson & Ward, 2014; Peck, 2012, 2014; Tabb, 2014), which includes discussions of the gendered, classed, and racial consequences of austerity. However, academic debates have yet to fully interrogate the role of race in analyses of austerity urbanism. Particularly, in both conceptual and concrete terms, examining why certain marginalized groups experience the costs of austerity the way they do, particularly for racialized communities, is absent in the literature on austerity urbanism. Very little research includes a discussion of race and racialization in contributing to the origins of urban austerity. In the current literature, racialized groups are seen and mapped onto austerity policy outcomes, rather than revealing how periods of neoliberalization modify the way in which race and racial inequalities are experienced in society, or the ways in which race and racism as inextricably embedded in processes of neoliberalism.

3 | CENTRALIZING RACE IN GEOGRAPHY

Recent geographical scholarship has begun to incorporate critical theories of race, taking “race” as the central organizing principle of the economy, while also framing “race” as a process, that is, racialization (Inwood and Bonds, 2013; Wyly, Moos, Hammel, & Kabahizi, 2009; Bentley et al., 2015; Parks, 2012; Derickson, Hankins, & Cochran, 2012; Woods, 2012). Critical theories of race reject the notion of race as simply being a fixed, empirical marker of social identity—and instead use racialization to understand the racially grounded social relations embedded in economic processes (Kobayashi, 2012, p. 646). Racialization is a term used by scholars to emphasize that

racial categories are social constructions that change in time and space. For instance, Omi and Winant (1994) offer a racial formation theory to describe a sociohistorical process that emphasizes for us to not envision a single, monolithic, and dominant racist project but rather to view race as existing in a dense matrix, operating at varying scales, networked with each other in formally and informally organized ways, and is actively working through social relations, institutions, identities, and experiences (p. 55). Their arguments point to the importance of asking whether how and why state structures enforce a racially unjust set of institutions producing inequality. Omi and Winant's (1994) discussion on racial formation has been influential, particularly to geographers in asking important questions related to power, such as what does the racial state have at stake in this process of creating inequalities?

Considering race a process, other critical theories of race have provided human geographers with a relational approach for examining race in markets and the economy, and to explore the changeable construction of places in ways that emphasize both the structural dimensions of capital accumulation as well as contingency, difference, and complexity (Massey, 2004). This means emphasizing race as not just an effect of capital relations and accumulation, but rather is "a systemic presence that is thoroughly embedded in economic paradigms, institutions, practices, and actors" (Bonds, 2013, p. 399). Such a relational approach has enriched our understanding of thinking about the co-production of racialized power working through uneven economic geographies, and the ways in which processes of racialization coincide with and transform changing economic conditions (Bonds, 2013, p. 403).

In understanding the relationship between race and state restructuring in an austerity context, I argue that scholars should draw on critical geographies of race (Bonds, 2013; Inwood & Bonds, 2012; Kobayashi, 2014; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Price, 2010), which includes work on Black geographies (McKittrick, 2011; McKittrick & Woods, 2007), and critical race theory (Omi & Winant, 1994) to frame race as a process (i.e., racialization) that pre-conditions austerity measures. Taking the centralization of race seriously, both analytically and politically, in topics of geography has mostly been informed by critical theories of race in engaging with questions of scale, belonging, and displacement (Price, 2010, p. 153). Kobayashi and Peake (2000) for instance describe racialization as a process, "by which racialized groups are identified, given stereotypical characteristics, and coerced into specific living conditions, often involving social/spatial segregation and always constituting racialized places" (p. 393). In this sense, racialization is framed as always having a specific geography and spatial expression where inequalities between racial groups are operationalized through spatial relations (Bonds, 2013, p. 399).

Scholarship on Black geographies, such as the work by McKittrick and Woods (2007), notes the current geographic management of blackness, race, and racial difference hinges on longstanding planation past and forms of imperialism. They call on scholars to analyze the ways in which we are still living in the legacies of these processes and thus to situate racial inequalities within this framework (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 6). Particularly in relation to the urban, McKittrick (2011) utilizes the term "urbicide" to explain the deliberate death/decline of a city and conceptualize the ways in which the very fabric of colonial relationships serves to mark black bodies as placeless entities, justifying their visible and invisible death in the city that works through capitalist systems.

Employing critical theories of race to understand the omnipresent and spatial expression of racialization can help geographers explore how racialized difference is reconstructed within neoliberal regulatory regimes. This would offer important insights into the multiplicity of ways race and racism are inextricably linked to economic modes of production on behalf of the state by considering how the racial state came to be what it is and follow the logics it does, when governing the economy. Mullings (2012) argues that while human geographers have utilized political economy approaches to examine inequalities that affect different racial and ethnic groups, "few have looked at the discursive and material practices and processes by which social constructions of race and ethnicity structure and transform economic relations" (p. 411). For instance, some have examined race in the context of neoliberalization moving towards a more nuanced epistemological approach where "institutions matter" in the making of economic geographies (Wyly, 2009; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Theodore, 2007) and have attempted to fill gaps in the literature by moving away from an economic reductionist approach and incorporating forms of regulatory capacities, governing routines, and institutional regimes to highlight how race is produced and maintained.

Drawing on historical and geographical legacies of residential redlining, some work has demonstrated that geography and race influenced capital flows during the subprime mortgage crisis. Predatory lending for subprime mortgages targeted racial groups, perpetuated old racial hierarchies, and left communities vulnerable to foreclosure and debt burdens (Aalbers, 2009; Wyly et al., 2009). Loss of revenue from the decline of property tax revenue and reductions in spending reforms have placed some local governments into a series of fiscal crises, paving the way for austerity. Through this lens, austerity can be seen as a racialized process when examining cuts to localized welfare programs and the effects this can have on communities of color who in times of economic crisis are less financially secure to cope with job and wealth losses and heavily rely on the welfare state.

Thinking about the racialization of austerity programs as state restructuring that has been uneven, and historically organized along racial lines, would provide a way to examine how the current postcrisis moment allowed for the development of new discourses and policy practices that reinforce and justify processes of exclusion via state restructuring and austerity cuts. From this lens, it is important that austerity urbanism research finds ways to re-examine the ways in which neoliberalism and race are conceptualized in geography, arguing for the “need to consider race as an organizing principle of society that neoliberalism just reinforces and modifies” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 250).

Taking Roberts and Mahtani (2010) conceptualization of race as central to the reproduction of neoliberal urbanism, rather than simply a consequence or unfortunate outcome of it, calls on scholars to do more than map how processes of neoliberalization have racialized results and instead focus on the ways neoliberalism is fundamentally raced understanding that such policies reinforce racial hierarchies and racist ideologies in society. To show this, they draw on shifts in media discourses that previously demonized new immigrants to now a focus on the utility and productivity of immigrants for benefitting Canada's economy growth—depicting a relationship between racialization representation in fostering neoliberalism (p. 251). They call on scholars to explore austerity urbanism post-2008 in the context of ongoing state rescaling as a social process that is connected to neoliberal regulatory regimes that draw on discourses of individual responsibility and anti-welfare redistribution that actively produced racialized bodies (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 248).

To address the interconnections between race and austerity that is sensitive to the inter-scalar conditioning of governance and policy, Bonds (2013) refers to as a “relational racialization” that examines the co-production of race and economic processes, and how racialized difference is constitutive of the economy—where race is not only embedded but also a precondition for the functioning of economic systems. Such approach requires a “centralizing of race” (Price, 2010, p. 3) on topics of political economy. Geographic studies on recent topics such as residential segregation, redlining and racist lending practices, transportation agendas, all demonstrate the ways in which race is linked to forms of governance, certain cultural ideologies, and state apparatuses, to provide certain elements to sustain the circulation of capital that is geographically embedded. In the work on austerity urbanism, this means thinking about the uneven spaces of austerity policies, decades of downloading public service responsibilities to local governments that has intensified post-2008 in conjunction with systems of institutional racism to narrow-in on who “austerity bites” within cities themselves, and why the consequences of austerity impact racialized groups the most severely.

4 | RETHINKING AUSTERITY URBANISM THROUGH THE LENS OF RACIAL CAPITALISM

Critical theories of race have given scholars the analytical tools to unpack the ways in which capitalism engages with racialized concepts to further reproduce itself in the urban. A growing number of scholars (Lowe, 2015; Pulido, 2016; Ponder, 2018; Ranganathan, 2017; Bonds, 2019; Danewid, 2019; Ponder & Omstedt, 2019) are conceptualizing austerity urbanism as part of a larger process of racial capitalism. Those writing on racial capitalism argue that capitalism depends upon the social construction of race to reproduce and extract value whereby “economic value is

derived from devaluing spaces, places, and labour of racialized groups of people" (Ponder, 2017, p. 15). As Melamed (2015) asserts, "capitalism is racial capitalism" (p. 77), and this is revealed by two historical examples of processes of racial capitalism that have shaped geographies of development in the North American context: settler-colonialism and chattel slavery.

Within geography, there is increasing attention on racial capitalism as it relates to how racial difference and inequality are produced, and most importantly, how is that relative valuation gets operationalized in the contemporary urban (Lowe, 2015; Ponder, 2017). This means exploring not only how ideas and practices of the devaluation of race circulate throughout state restructuring processes but also how they become institutionalized, and the implications this has for the racially subordinate and dominate. To attend to the racialization of urban austerity through the lens of racial capitalism, geographers are exploring topics of social reproduction (Ponder, 2018; Bhattacharya, 2018), financialization (Bonds, 2019; Ponder & Omstedt, 2019; Danewid, 2019), and political ecologies of racial capitalism (Pulido, 2016; Ranganathan, 2016). This growing literature centers on the notion that capitalist relations depend upon the social construction of race to provide and extract value. This means thinking about how processes of racialization are being baked into the social and material workings of capitalism itself, and how state-restructuring regimes are connected through institutions that facilitate capital accumulation in ways the perpetuate racial hierarchies. Understanding such correlation cannot be fully grasped by simply examining austerity urbanism as reduced only to class relations, but instead, urban state restructuring needs to be understood as part of a larger historical and ongoing imperialist terrain (Danewid, 2019, p. 4).

Looking at the financialization of racial property regimes, Bonds (2019) examines property in Milwaukee through the lens of racial capitalism and centers property as a race-making institution. Her work shows the ways in which the criminalization of Blackness augmented Milwaukee's segregation and constituted disinvestment in Black neighborhoods. Bonds theorizes the politics of residential property, which include policies protecting of white properties and resistance to this, as connected to practices of policing of urban space (p. 5). Race is shown to work not as an intersecting force, or as the literature on austerity urbanism suggests, as an unequal outcome of capitalist processes. Instead, anti-Blackness is essential to the very workings of capitalism and its reproduction over time and space.

Similarly, Bledsoe and Wright (2019) go further in their work on racial capitalism to illuminate how anti-Blackness in fact conditions the realization of capitalist reproduction. They suggest that capitalism's recent round of accumulation requires "spaces that were once marginal or peripheral to the perpetuation of capital accumulation becomes sites of appropriation precisely because the (Black) populations occupying them receive no recognition as viable spatial actors" (p. 13). This assumed from of "a-spatiality" of Black populations contributes to places in need of appropriation and removal. Such spatial arrangements devalue Black populations as inhuman and spaces attached to Black populations are deemed as lacking a legitimate form of occupation and usage for capital accumulation. The reliance on capital through such notions of "empty, lifeless, Blackened spaces" have contributed to practices of uneven development through practices such as white flight, gentrification, urban renewal, incarceration, and policing (p. 13). Austerity urbanism, then, needs to be understood as a governance strategy used to facilitate such practices that rely on the ever-present logics of anti-Blackness. To understand race working as a process, both Bonds (2019) and Bledsoe and Wright (2019) show the ways in which anti-Blackness works as a precondition for capitalism allowing it to constantly renew itself by associating spaces with Black populations as open for dispossession, occupation, and appropriation.

Rather than treating some of the structural origins and socio-spatial repercussions of austerity urbanism as race-neutral, other scholars are examining the financialized geographies of the urban as a form of racialized social reproduction that "ruthlessly reshapes the lived experiences of racialized people" (Ponder, 2017). Ponder attempts to illustrate this by tracing the impacts of financial market liberalization brought on by rising pressures to increase the liquidity of value production—on the lives, homes, and cities of Black Americans. Ponder (2017) argues that under financialization, racialized dispossession and processes of urbanization happen through the extraordinary reach of the debt relation and corresponding processes of collateralized accumulation, such as through housing and even

infrastructures. Households and cities are increasingly funding basic essentials like housing, water systems, and other necessary infrastructure by way of private debt, with uneven racialized outcomes.

Ponder (2017) illuminates the ways in which majority-Black cities like Detroit depend on the accumulation of bond debt to distribute public goods to citizens and establish attractive physical environments for private investment. Her work shows a direct relationship between debt, city-building, and race that she argues has been underexplored in the field of geography. For example, through an empirical study of the U.S. municipal bond market, she shows an astronomical increase in the municipal bond market since 1980, most evidently for majority-Black cities who have historically been charged higher interest rates on bonds compared to other cities, consequently forcing these cities to use risky financial arrangements to finance bonds (2017, p. 111). Ponder (2017) proposes scholars to think about the racialized emergence of urban austerity as a form of reproduction of racial capitalism that is connected to financialization (p. 23). By drawing on theorizations of the types of institutional structures that are needed to facilitate racial capitalism, Ponder's work offers new avenues for thinking about the interconnections between the systemic processes that derive social and economic value from the racial identity of another person, how this creates challenges for municipal finance, and makes spaces vulnerable to austerity urbanism.

In more recent work, Ponder and Omstedt (2019) explore further to understand austerity urbanism as a raced process by connecting austerity governance to the violence of municipal debt and the racialized harm that is produced. By using a case study of Detroit's water crisis and placing U.S. municipal insolvency as a condition of financialized racial capitalism, their work links the financialization of water services in Detroit to increases in water bills, and the racialized harm inflicted on residents through mass water shut offs. From their perspective, by unpacking austerity urbanism for their effects on the "reproducing and retrenching of raced socio-spatial fictionalities of accumulation and dispossession," such racialized harm is made possible because of the actively or passively devaluation of racialized groups, leaving opportunities for accumulation (p. 4). In attending to racialization at the intersection of austerity urbanism, there is much to be gained from this work that draws on understandings of racial capitalism to make sense of recent urban fiscal crises. The logics of racial capitalism serve as a powerful tool to locate connections between austerity and the raced-expressions of geographies of financialized capital.

Drawing on the case of the Flint water crisis, both Pulido (2016) and Ranganathan (2016) contextualize the underlying causes of the city's lead poisoning through a long-standing, historical devaluation of Black populations. Ranganathan (2016) views the decline of federal and state support to Flint, along with decline of their tax base, as rooted in structural and historical processes of racialization. By tracing periods of white flight, and property depreciation in Flint, Ranganathan describes how these events facilitated water infrastructure abandonment. Such neglect left Flint residents extremely vulnerable to an "unjust urban nature" setting the stage for a water crisis which disproportionately poisoned young African-Americans.

In a similar vein, using the concept of racial capitalism to explain infrastructure failures, Pulido's (2016) work discusses how Black communities are seen as second to repaying bondholders in the postcrisis austerity moment the city was undergoing. Pulido (2016) argues that under the context of austerity urbanism, "people are so devalued that their lives are subordinated to the goals of municipal fiscal solvency" (p. 2). Their value represents their expendability that is reflected on them. Flint and other declining cities are considered disposable by virtue of being predominantly poor and Black. From this, we can understand racism then as a process that shapes places and, in this case, produces a racially devalued place. Infrastructure abandonment is not produced solely by capital flight but is argued by Ranganathan (2016) to depend also upon a culture of racial liberalism, that is, anti-statist notions of the welfare state based on racist ideologies. In this regard, municipal governance is instilled with value-weighted concepts rooted in liberal-democratic norms, such as utilitarianism or "best possible use" of land/resources in which local governments ascribe to, thereby harming Black spaces who do not fit into such formulations.

Pulido (2017) calls for geographers studying neoliberal state restructuring to incorporate theories of racial capitalism to require greater attention to the essential processes that have shaped the modern world, such as colonization, primitive accumulation, slavery, and imperialism. Racial capitalism as a concept captures the idea that actually existing capitalism exploits culturally and social constructed differences and is lived through particular uneven

formations as has been outlined above. As a result, austerity urbanism literature should be sensitive to the ways in which state-restructuring practices operate on already unequal socio-spatial landscapes of race. An important question that needs to be considered for future research is how then are racial hierarchies being reproduced under austerity urbanism?

Although this body of work considers the contextually and path-dependency nature of processes of neoliberalism, they also are sympathetic to the contingency of neoliberalism as well and the role of race works through such contradictions. Austerity urbanism literature would benefit from the above contributions that are operationalizing racial capitalism in a way that illuminates how racialized value is made through spatio-temporal relations and works through various rounds of state rescaling. In the U.S. context, racialized processes linked to the origins of urban fiscal crises are at the core of this. Adopting ideas of racial capitalism will force scholars working on austerity urbanism to place contemporary forms of racial inequality in a historical and materialist framework in order to illuminate the contemporary state and capitalist socio-spatial processes through which racial difference is made to matter in the production of value.

5 | CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Much of the literature on austerity urbanism tends to treat race as a secondary effect of the current round of state restructuring. By outlining the formative and recent work on racial capitalism, this paper points to how analyses of austerity urbanism are in need of a more thorough engagement with prevailing patterns of racial domination to better understand how contemporary capitalist and financialized processes rely on certain racial preconditions to reproduce itself. While scholars like Ponder (2018) and Pulido (2017) have made important interventions, there is further work to be done on tracing race in the conceptual DNA of austerity urbanism. Such analyses would highlight the deeply engrained racialization of state restructuring in cities. It is important to engage with conceptualizations of race and racialization to truly understand how and why urban austerity is most deeply felt in Black-majority U.S. cities. More importantly, one cannot fully interrogate the current social implications of austerity urbanism without examining the racial-financialized processes embedded in urban realities.

As it has been noted on the literature on racial capitalism, austerity policies work through racial capitalist processes and institutions—transforming urban spaces. These emerging research agendas theorizing the racialization of austerity introduce “race” as organizing principle of society, rather than just “race” serving as simply a backdrop in economic relations. Critical theories of race provide important conceptual tools for those studying austerity urbanism that argue something much deeper and hegemonic that lies behind various policies—economic and political processes working through a racial state, such as racial capitalist underpinnings of a global financial system that unevenly distributes risk in ways that reinforce racial hierarchies. Recent theory-building and research agendas focused on racial capitalism has provided geographers with a promising lens to interrogate how power is exercised within economic networks and markets, the idea that capitalism depends upon the social construction of race to produce and extract value, and furthermore, how racialized value is made.

Although scholars like Robinson (2016), Roy (2011), and Hart (2018) have all made the case for a methodology comparing cities across the global North and South, little empirical work has actually been done. Given the North American bias of austerity urbanism literature, there is a pressing need for more international comparative approaches. To that end, work on austerity urbanism would benefit from broader investigations that connect forms of racial imperialism and colonialism to urban austerity across the global North and South. For instance, recent work by Powers and Rakopoulos (2019) calls for the literature on austerity to be considered in comparative contexts by bringing together analyses of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the Global South and austerity measures in the Global North as a way to provide a more comprehensive analysis and better understanding of transnational policy assemblages. Doing so would elucidate forces of global relational and territorial linkages of austerity urbanism and race.

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