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Lentin, Alana

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lentin, A. (2008). After anti-racism? *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 311-331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549408091846>

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After anti-racism?

Alana Lentin

University of Sussex

ABSTRACT Anti-racism as a political discourse and a form of collective social action has long been ignored as a serious field of research. In contrast, I envision the study of anti-racism as a vital lens on both 'race' and racism.

First, the heterogeneity of anti-racism is demonstrated, spanning both pro- and anti-state-based analyses of the origins of racism. Second, a parallel discourse of 'anti-anti-racism' within the radical Left reveals the reluctance of many on the Left to identify the anti-racist project with anything other than its officialized, state-endorsed version. This raises important questions about the possibility for autonomy from paternalist control in the construction of radical anti-racisms. The article examines the relationship to anti-racism within these three shifts from anti-racism, to anti-anti-racism, to post-anti-racism. It asks what conclusions can be drawn about the status of anti-racism today: has it indeed exceeded its political utility, or is it a political project that is, in fact, yet to be born?

KEYWORDS *anti-racism, diversity, post-anti-racism, radical Left*

Introduction

The prefix 'anti' condemns a politics to association with negativity and/or subversion. Anti-racism is often taken to task for failing to be 'proactive'. It is portrayed as offering nothing beyond critique. Because anti-racism holds institutions that are fundamental to 'our' self-perception as citizens of liberal-democratic western nations up to scrutiny, it is often rejected on instinct. The wager that anti-racism is unable and, it is implied, unwilling to offer solutions to the problems that it points out, preferring to wallow in the murk of dissent, is an easy argument for dismissing it out of hand.

Of course, this is but one view of anti-racism. In contrast is the belief that to oppose racism is integral to a commitment to values of equality fundamental to the principles of democratic polities. Rather than dwelling on the 'anti', this form of anti-racism is seen as founded on the idea that to oppose racism does not necessitate doing more than upholding the fundamentals – democracy, human rights, the rule of law, etc. – upon which the (western) state is purported to be based. Under this vision, the 'anti' in anti-racism becomes arbitrary. Such is the logic behind recent actions,

such as the 'All Different–All Equal' Campaign (www.kam-pan.cz/) spearheaded by the European institutions, whose slogan, 'Be the change you want to see', rejects anti-racism for its inbuilt negativity, preferring instead to be 'for diversity, human rights and participation'.¹

Assessing the status of anti-racism is complicated by the differences between these contrasting conceptualizations of the purpose of politics. Is anti-racism really an anti-politics, or has it been wrongly labelled and hence mistakenly associated with negativity rather than proaction? This special issue responds to the lack of analysis accompanying the apparent contemporary political preference for the 'anti': in other words, for a politics (almost solely) of reaction to phenomena constructed as 'threats' to the moral and political order. Anti-terrorism, or the 'wars on' drugs, knives, obesity and so on, are almost completely state-driven and authoritarian. In contrast, anti-racism is (on the face of things at least) a popular movement and/or an intellectual discourse that seeks to counter the authoritarianism of the state as it applies to immigrants and other racial 'undesirables'. Thus it potentially constructs an alternative morality that includes the state *within* the 'bad influences' that negatively affect society. Therefore, the anti-political nature of anti-racism may be based on an alternative view of politics which does not see the political as legitimate only if conducted within the arena of the state. Rather, it may be purposefully anti-statist or, less radically, anchored in civil society with little or no connection to government, parliament or party politics.

However, developing an analysis of anti-racism in terms of anti-politics is complicated when we interrogate the place of the diverse range of discourses and practices which can be grouped under the heading of 'anti-racism'. Despite the roots of anti-racism in abolitionism, and later the anti-colonial and autonomous black and migrant-led movements for change, such as the US civil rights and Black Power formations and the South-African movement against Apartheid, anti-racism has been co-opted by states and 'race relations industries'. In this arena, anti-racism appears to lose its contestatory function. The anti-racist policies devised by national and international authorities lack the determination, in both tone and substance, of the fight against terrorism or the war on crime. The 'anti' here appears less resolute. As a result, the struggle is often between the anti-racist groups 'on the ground' and the very states which have passed laws against racial discrimination. That struggle is not only against the institutionalized racism of the state, but also for the freedom of organizations in civil society to determine the terms of the anti-racist agenda: something which has been denied consistently as a result of co-optation and funding priorities.

In order to understand better the complexity of anti-racism and the relationship of the various forms that come under its heading to anti-politics, we have to see it as always split into several dichotomies: as



simply anti-racist (against racism) and as being against both the racism of the state *and* the state's anti-racist posturing. First, anti-racism always contains within it at least a 'double anti'. Second, anti-racism, differentially understood, has been opposed by those who declare themselves to be 'anti-anti-racist' from a variety of political perspectives. In continental western Europe in particular, anti-racism is condemned both by the Right, and by the extreme Left. This reveals the reluctance of many on the Left to identify the anti-racist project with anything other than its official, state-endorsed version. It also raises important questions about the possibility for autonomy from paternalist control in the construction of radical anti-racisms.

Third, today as we enter a purportedly post-racial era, based on a commitment to 'colour-blindness' rather than equality, the end of anti-racism seems to be on the agenda. The pros and cons of anti-racism are claimed triumphantly to have been overcome by the rejection of what is seen to be a negative, and therefore unproductive, anti-politics. Instead, the celebration of diversity seeks to rally a public alienated by the oppositional message inherent in anti-racism. What does such a 'positive turn' say both about the status of racism in a purportedly post-racial age (Goldberg, 2002), and the future of radical and progressive anti-politics?

Dissonant anti-racisms

Anti-racism has not been the focus of much study. *Racism and Anti-Racism in Europe* (Lentin, 2004) attempted to redress this by focusing on several European cases and adding to the small body of work examining anti-racism as both a discourse and practice of social movements in discrete national contexts (cf. Bonnett, 1993, 2000; Lloyd, 1998). As Bonnett notes, while racism has been the object of significant research from within a variety of disciplines, anti-racism has mainly been seen as a "cause", fit only for platitudes of support or denouncement' (2000: 2). This dismissal of anti-racism is short-sighted, particularly for historians and social and political scientists interested in racism, because anti-racism has been the main lens through which racism has been interpreted since the beginning of scholarly interest in deconstructing it. Since the 1930s and the pioneering work of anti-racist scientists and anthropologists, the most influential working definitions of racism have been developed by theorists with a desire to overcome racism. Following the end of the Second World War, the commitment to eradicate racism proclaimed by organizations such as UNESCO (1968) in its 'Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice' set the terms for how racism was to be understood: mainly as a defunct, pseudo-scientific concept. In other words, self-defined anti-racists from many different disciplines have provided us with most of the explanations of racism currently in use. They have changed over time, and crucially they



have reflected also the varying approaches to 'race' and racism taken by these different interpreters; approaches which more often than not are reflective of political standpoints.

The actors of anti-racist and 'minority community' organizations have been equally responsible for evolving conceptualizations of racism. Often it is through activism that new definitions of racism are accepted. The case of the inquiry into the death of British black teenager Stephen Lawrence, which produced the ruling of institutional racism, is a case in point.² In fact, black and anti-racist organizations in the UK had been struggling for institutional racism to be recognized since the early 1980s, following the Brixton uprisings. However, it took almost 20 years and the determination of the Lawrence family's campaign for justice to bring about the recognition of the (albeit still contested) existence of institutional racism. This contrasts strongly with received wisdom about racism as a matter of individual, almost pathological, ignorance; an aberration rather than an embedded aspect of western state structures.

Anti-racism, both as a discourse and practice of social movements, conceives of racism, in particular the relationship between 'race' and state (Lentin and Lentin, 2006), so differently that it can never be said to be unitary. The heterogeneity of anti-racism has been theorized as a 'continuum of proximity-to-distance from the public political culture of the nation-state' (Lentin, 2004: 1). Borrowing from Rawls's (2001) conception of public political culture,³ it has been argued that how close or far an anti-racist discourse can be placed from the rules of state public political culture determines its stance on racism. Put simply, the more an activist espouses principles such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality, tolerance, etc. as means of achieving anti-racist aims and overturning racism, the closer they stand to public political culture. The more sceptical a discourse is with regards to these principles and the greater the tendency to use alternative terms such as emancipation, empowerment, resistance, liberation, etc., the further away from public political culture it can be positioned.

The differential relationship of various anti-racist discourses to public political culture is context-specific. In the four countries considered in the present author's study of European anti-racism – France, Britain, Italy and Ireland – there are significant differences in how the relationship with the state was conceived by anti-racist groups. For example, French and Italian anti-racist organizations mobilize public political culture extensively in their discourse. In particular in France, 'mainstream' anti-racist organizations such as SOS Racisme see it as their role to take governments to task over their failure to uphold the anti-racist fundamentals which, the organization believes, are built into the ideological foundations of the French state. Principles such as liberty, equality and fraternity – the rallying call of the French Revolution – are represented as fundamental



anti-racist ideas that, if practised, would ensure racial harmony. SOS Racisme sees what it calls a ‘communitarian’ approach to tackling racism, namely the work of minority ethnic or community organizations, as divisive and potentially disruptive of the state’s duty to ensure protection against racism. Responding to the problem of the segregated neighbourhoods that are endemic in the suburbs of France’s large cities, the SOS Racisme representative interviewed remarked, ‘in fact, it was simply the application of the Republic that could stop the process of ghettoization in the neighbourhoods’ (Lentin, 2004: 202).⁴

Organizations such as SOS Racisme see it as incumbent upon themselves to take government funding in order to ensure that public taxes are used to anti-racist ends, which it views as wholly consistent with national principles of public political culture. In contrast, organizations at the opposite end of the continuum, which reject public political culture as the ideological basis for sound anti-racist discourse, see accepting public grants as a contravention of their principles. A representative of the Irish campaigning group, Residents Against Racism, remarked:

We feel that we would then be beholden to the state and we’re criticizing the state ... It’s state racism that Residents Against Racism ... that’s our particular agenda, because we feel that if racism is endorsed by the state it gives every petty little racist ... you know, they feel justified in the nasty things that they do. (Lentin, 2004: 286)

The issue of political independence finds resonance with groups such as Residents Against Racism, some of whose members come from the Irish Republican movement, and is echoed by black-led organizations whose inspiration is the anti-colonialist, civil rights and Black Power movements. The principle of black leadership is invoked often by British anti-racists who use historical legitimation to explain its importance. While organizations such as SOS Racisme or the Italian ARCI Associazione Nuova tend to equate the notion with separatism or what is often referred to as ‘communitarianism’,⁵ black leadership does not necessarily imply the exclusion of others. Rather, it is the grounding of anti-racist practice in the experiences of the racialized that is seen as key. As explained by the representative of the Italian organization Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei Paesi Emergenti (COSPE) with reference to ARCI, it is a commitment to anti-racism that is stressed over black leadership in the literal sense:

If you speak to a couple of people in ARCI, they will say to you what I say: that to be anti-racist it has to be black-led. That’s not what I said. What I always told them is that they cannot call themselves an anti-racist organisation if there is no anti-racist dimension in their day to day work, in the way they function. Their method of organising what they call the anti-racist camping once a year, that does not in any way make ARCI an anti-racist organisation. One could argue exactly the opposite, because last time I was there the only few black people, apart from those who came from the UK and from other



countries, the blacks living in the country they were only, or moving things from cars or cleaning and me and somebody else and that was that [sic]. (Lentin, 2004: 262)

The conviction that anti-racism must be founded upon the experience of racism creates the central dividing line between the different anti-racist forms. Those who advocate the principle claim that not to do so leads inevitably to tokenism and paternalism. Moreover, it can be dangerous, particularly when those who fear racist attack are spoken on behalf of by people whom they see as unelected representatives with an unrealistic view of the risks that they face. Such a criticism is often waged against the British Anti-Nazi League, whose high-profile demonstrations in areas with a large percentage of often disadvantaged members of minority ethnic groups have left them open to violent attack by the far-Right and/or the police. Despite the often virulent nature of the criticism that it faces, the Anti-Nazi League remains convinced of the importance of its commitment to oppose 'Nazis' and 'confront them physically' (Lentin, 2004: 231).

As Paul Gilroy (1987) and Alastair Bonnett (2000) have argued, the approach taken by the Anti-Nazi League is in line with the closeness of certain anti-racist discourses to elements of national identity, perhaps something to which it would appear to be antithetical. The position of various anti-racisms along the continuum of proximity-to-distance from public political culture also reflects the degree to which the anti-racist discourse concerned employs or rejects the importance of national allegiances. As Bonnett makes clear, the 'anti-racism of the powerful' (2000: 47) rather than that of the oppressed tends to mobilize national identity. In that proximity to public political culture entails a belief in the power of the instruments of the democratic state to provide solutions to racism, such a discourse also looks for historical and contemporary examples to back up this claim.

The anti-Nazi resistance in the Second World War in France and Italy, the crushing of Nazism by the British, the colonized past of the Irish, or the abolition of slavery as a result of the actions of both British liberals and French revolutionaries, are some of the legendary historical moments evoked by more 'nationalistic' anti-racists. These stories are brought to the fore by an anti-racism that stresses the fight against 'fascism' as being its ultimate aim. Such an emphasis is a further point of separation between anti-racisms, with those who see themselves as more grounded in a politics of the racialized tending to emphasize everyday institutional racism over the more spectacular opposition to the far-Right. However, undoubtedly this has changed over time and in relation to the context. The success of the French Front National in the 1990s and early 2000s certainly made resistance more urgent in a way that has not been as crucial in Britain since the 1970s, when the National Front made significant gains and violence against non-whites in 'street battles' was widespread.



The discourse used in countering the extreme Right often plays on the patriotic. As Gilroy remarks in relation to the Anti-Nazi League, the strategy that it employed dwelt on the idea of ‘British Nazis’ as ‘sham patriots who soiled the British flag by their use of it’ (1987: 131). Research with the revived Anti-Nazi League⁶ in 2000 uncovered an unchanged rhetoric:

I campaign on the streets against Nazis, not nationalists, but they hope to win the white working class who is proud of being British. It’s like the Nazis are going to march next week for St George’s Day [the patron saint of England]. The reason we’re opposing that march is because the National Front have called it and they’re the Nazi Party. If any other party had called it and if it was locals marching for St George’s Day, we wouldn’t oppose that because I don’t see those people as Nazis. Then you’re caught calling a lot of the population Nazis. (Lentin, 2004: 232–3)

Bonnett (2000) comments that despite the success of hegemonic forms of anti-racism – the ‘anti-racism of the powerful’ – which often use national identity and public political culture to prop up their arguments, they have not remained completely uninfluenced by their grass roots counterparts. For Bonnett, they are always pressured from below; the two ends of the anti-racist continuum, this article proposes, cannot exist in each other’s absence. It is undoubtedly the case that elements of multicultural policy-making, such as affirmative action and related measures, and certainly the acceptance of institutional racism in Britain in 1999, would not have come about if there had been no pressure from anti-racist social movements. Yet, it is *who* is listened to and *what* is done with the information gleaned from consultations with anti-racists that affect the state-initiated anti-racism which often has large budgets and high political stakes.

Some anti-racists prefer complete autonomy from the state in order not to run the risk of cooptation. Others seek collaboration either out of the belief, held by organizations such as SOS Racisme, that they ‘are the state’, or that it is shrewd to attempt to affect matters ‘from the inside’. The latter approach has certainly contributed since the 1980s to the growth in the UK of an influential group of black and minority ethnic ‘race relations professionals’, whose careers depend on the state’s continued commitment to its brand of anti-racism. The end result is that the anti-racist scene is divided along ‘state–non state’ lines, whether or not the organizations that can be identified with the state camp are formally independent from it. The ambiguity of this divide is felt by smaller minority community organizations on the periphery of the anti-racist movement who require state funding for their existence. While their internal discourse may be a radical one, they are forced to maintain a neutral political stance in the interests of retaining their much-needed funding. As we shall see in the next section, the dilemma faced by these types of organizations are seldom taken into account by a critique that reifies organizations which are not overtly political and autonomous as ‘sold out’.



An uneasy relationship: anti-racism and the radical Left

As has been made clear, the quite loosely-identified group of discourses, social movement practices and state policies commonly termed 'anti-racism' is significantly divided internally. Gilroy's (1987) point that it would be better to use different terms to distinguish between anti-racism and anti-fascism, and between grassroots anti-racisms and what he calls the 'municipal anti-racism' of the local state, is well taken. Although all of these different forms share an avowed commitment to anti-racism, their interpretation of racism and the solutions that they propose for dealing with it differ so greatly that they look like almost completely different, if not opposing, phenomena. They *look like* rather than *are* different because, to take Bonnett's point seriously, hegemonic forms of anti-racism cannot but be influenced by the call of the racialized, grounded in lived experience, for justice. This noted, we must remember that critiques of anti-racism generally work with a more unitary, often unproblematized, view of the target of their criticisms.

This section of the article looks at how anti-racism has been seen almost exclusively as a counter-radical political phenomenon and how it has been criticized on this basis. This critique comes both from within the anti-racist movement, broadly defined, and from beyond it. Although it could have chosen to focus on the right-wing attack on anti-racism, the set of critiques examined here are more illuminating because of their origins in the Left. The ambivalent relationship towards the certain forms of anti-racism they express is indicative of the problems surrounding the link of 'race' and class which continue to blight left-wing politics. This section picks up on two interrelated arguments made in the critique of anti-racism. The first sets it up as a hegemonic practice that universalizes what is seen as a culturally-specific problem: western racism; particularly racism as it has played out in the North-American context (Bonnett, 2006). The second critiques the culturalist turn purported to have been taken by the shift from anti-racism to identity politics. This argument comes from a more central position within the (broad) anti-racist movement. It fails to distinguish between top-down culturalism and what can be seen as a bottom-up negotiation over inclusion in the political arena by the racialized, which is read often as a retreat into narrow claims for cultural recognition. The upshot of both of these critiques is that the ability of those facing racism to make decisions that would determine the struggle against racism is put into doubt, with profound consequences for the possibility of relevant action in this field.

Universalizing 'race'

The first set of 'anti-anti-racist' critiques is concerned with the primacy of the concept of 'race' that anti-racism assumes. Such a critique is anchored in the postwar insistence on expunging 'race' from the realm of possible



political ideas, expressed for example by the UNESCO project.⁷ Following the full realization of the horrors committed in the name of 'race' after the discovery of concentration camps, it became urgent to erase 'race' from the lexicon. As David Goldberg (2006) notes, the predominance of Auschwitz as uniquely emblematic of all racism, at least for Europeans, led to the concomitant effacing of 'race' as it continued to define both colonialism and the segregated societies of the US and South Africa. The discussion around the continued conceptual usefulness of 'race' often centres on a continental European versus Anglo-American discussion, which falsely assumes that 'race' is no longer relevant for the former. I argue elsewhere that the silence about 'race' in Europe is at least partly responsible for current breakdowns in communication over multiculturalism and its proposed limitations (Lentin, forthcoming 2008). Nonetheless, the distaste for 'race' and racism as critical analytical concepts drives the first critique which will be discussed now: that the anti-racist conceptualization of the problem of 'difference' in multicultural societies forces a racialized account of unequal social relations that ultimately damages the Left.

The critique is brought into relief by the debate, usefully discussed in detail by Bonnett (2006), around Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1999) article 'On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason'. As the opening of the article states, its main assertion is that 'Cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999: 41). The authors single out the case of a US-American generalization of what they read as being a simplistic black/white dichotomy to the understanding of 'race' and racism universally. They look particularly at the case of 'race' in Brazil as studied by the American scholar, Michael Hanchard (1994). The authors claim that he applies context-specific US interpretations of racial divides to the Brazilian case, which in their view traditionally has been a counter-example to the US model. This has led to 'the particular history of the US Civil Rights Movement [being made] into the universal standard for the struggle of all groups oppressed on grounds of colour or caste' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999: 44).

As Bonnett (2006) explains, Bourdieu and Wacquant's irritation is with the exportation of 'race', which they see as being a 'US folk concept' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999: 48), into non-US contexts. Thus US anti-racists participate in an imperial politics under the guise of a transnational concern for human rights. In particular, the authors deny the relevance of what they see as a US binary black/white concept of race relations in all other societies. As Bonnett remarks, 'it seems that the mere fact of Hanchard's attention to Brazilian blackness was sufficient to excite Bourdieu and Wacquant's ire' (2006: 1088). Recognizing the problems in Bourdieu and Wacquant's position, nonetheless Bonnett is concerned to take a closer look at their contentions, and to move beyond the general rejection of their work as, to quote Couze Venn (2000: 93), 'bizarre' or provincial. He points

out the incongruity of rejecting Bourdieu and Wacquant's problematization of imposing US-American models of anti-racism as imperialist, on the grounds that they cannot be so because they are socially critical. Such a claim is based on the acceptance of all anti-racist projects as implicitly counter-hegemonic.

I accept Bonnett's criticism, also of my own work, that it does not always 'give sufficient attention to the close relationship that can exist between "resistance" and hegemony' (2006: 1091), especially, as he goes on to state, as 'we move towards a full "consumer society"; a polity in which images of rebellion, escape and liberation are integrated into capitalism's ideological repertoire' (2006: 1091). However, I also share Bonnett's warning that sometimes the resistance to Americanization can lead to a facile equation of multiculturalism, which is indeed complicit with capitalist neoliberalism in a myriad of ways (cf. Gilroy, 2000), with anti-racism. This is because no attention is paid by scholars concerned with the (more lofty) critique of 'Empire' to anti-racisms as multiple and internally divided – there is simply no interest in the subject (cf. Hardt and Negri, 2000). As Bonnett reminds us, much anti-US-American theorizing is so mired in this reductive equation of multiculturalism and diversity – concepts that unhelpfully reify difference and which have always served the 'racial state' (Goldberg, 2002) more than their avowed beneficiaries ('minority' groups) – to anti-racism, that it becomes possible to equate simplistically 'imperial racist theory and modern anti-racist theory' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 192).

Bonnett uses the debate initiated by Bourdieu and Wacquant to provide vital insight into the need for anti-racists to 'become more politically reflexive' (Bonnett, 2006: 1098) in the light of global capitalism. However, this article would like to return to Bourdieu and Wacquant's critiques to make a point about the *a priori* ideas being mobilized about anti-racism by the authors and the implications that they have for anti-racist action (rather than theory). Bourdieu and Wacquant's main beef is not with anti-racism, but rather with their presumption that capitalist interests (such as the publishing market) are imposing racial and culturalist (the two are interchangeable, for them) conceptualizations upon non-US terrains where, they contend, they are entirely irrelevant. They see US-American anti-racist scholars as complicit in the market-driven ploy to tar all societies with the brush of racism. This leads to the concept of racism losing its usefulness as an analytical tool, becoming 'a mere instrument of accusation' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999: 44). The authors argue that the US is the only country in the world to have defined 'race' according to descent and to have had institutionalized principles such as the 'one-drop rule'. They also claim that evidence for the irrelevance of 'race' for non-US societies comes from the 'virtual absence of the two typically US forms of ethnoracial violence: lynching and urban rioting' (1999: 45).



This sociologically incorrect claim (examples of rioting in the authors' own country, France, can be dated to well before 2005)⁸ is evidence of the deep mistrust of 'race critical studies' often displayed by European intellectuals who insist on separating 'race' from class, which then makes the former seem irrelevant.

The authors ridicule the possibility that we will soon see 'a handbook of *French–Arab Cultural Studies* to match its cross-channel cousin, *Black British Cultural Studies*' (1999: 47). They claim that subordinated disciplines such as cultural studies or what they call 'minority studies' (1999: 51) are those best placed to carry out the global imperial domination of US-American frames of reference over the rest of the world because they 'take on, in the eyes of writers from the former European colonies for example, the allure of messages of liberation' (1999: 51). Their critique is almost laughable in its assumption that their work, and that of other internationally successful academic writers, stands outside the logic of global capital and cultural hegemony. However, what is more interesting is their outright rejection of: (1) the relevance of race critical analytics for making sense of the colonial and postcolonial relationship of non-US societies (western European ones in particular) with the 'other'; and (2) its assumption that 'minorities' outside of the US would not have arrived at similar frameworks for making sense of racialized hegemonies in their own contexts without their imposition by US 'intellectuals of colour' (1999: 51).

The second assumption is of particular relevance for assessment of the Left's critique of anti-racism, particularly that of European leftists and academics. The refusal to engage with 'race', the assumption that racism is aberrant to 'our societies', denies the very bases for doing an anti-racism that is critical of the historical and current relationship between 'race' and state. Therefore, racism almost becomes false consciousness, and 'minorities' are seen to racialize themselves in order to gain recognition in a world that is predicated on a politically rewarding hierarchy of victimhood. All of this has consequences for the possibility of unifying anti-racism because it is based on a vision of subordinated 'others' as self-segregating, culturalist and ultimately apolitical.

The opposition to evaluating critically the role that 'race' continues to play in the definition of western polities has profound implications, not only for anti-racism, but also for a full appreciation of the imbrication of 'race' in state (Voegelin, 2000[1933]). Despite Bonnett's attempt at recuperating the useful elements of Bourdieu and Wacquant's critique of the complex relationship of progressive and neo-liberal agendas, it appears that they ultimately submit to the nationalistic concern to distance their own societies from the taint of 'race'. In their hands, 'race' and racism are separated almost completely from the colonial project and are confused with contemporary discussions of multiculturalism and academic disciplines



such as cultural studies. Thus they become almost completely useless, conceptually. It is in this confusion that we can note how anti-anti-racism works to marginalize racialized voices.

As we saw in the first section of the article, anti-racists have been divided among many lines, including the question of the degree to which anti-racism should be based on racism as lived experience. The rejection of the significance of lived experience comes from two directions. A first group, represented by 'mainstream' anti-racist organizations closer to public political culture, sees anti-racism as a universal principle which, in order to be politically successful, should be represented by anyone who wishes to take part. In practice, this noble idea has led often to the exclusion of subordinate groups from decision-making within anti-racist organizations or, when minorities themselves are involved, a subordination of the specific interests of the racialized to 'universal' principles such as 'human rights' or 'equality', which often fail to take account of the relationship between the idea of 'race' and these very principles (Balibar, 1994).⁹

Culturalist complaints

A further critique originates in radically-opposed political quarters and contributes to the arguments against anti-racism made by anti-imperialists and anti-capitalists such as Bourdieu and Wacquant. This critique comes from within the anti-racist movement broadly defined. It is mainly held by scholar-activists involved in the movement for migrant rights and the opposition to 'Fortress Europe', which has mobilized around the European Social Forum and groups such as the Frassanito Network.¹⁰ It professes its commitment to the political autonomy of migrants and proclaims, in the words of the Frassanito Network, that:

[T]he struggles of migration are manifold and heterogeneous and as such they need to be examined at the level of everyday life where they do not necessarily take the shape of open political and social struggles. (Frassanito Network, 2006)

Despite their professed commitment to autonomy and the recognition in the above statement of the material difficulty for migrants seeking to be the agents of political change, the actions of such networks deny their espoused principles in practice. Beyond the struggles for political ownership of movements that dog anti-racism, as they do other spheres of collective action, activism around migration is predicated often on a belief in the basic inability of 'migrants', and the racialized more generally, to go beyond their perceived communitarian commitments. This belief is related to the general confusion described above between anti-racism and multiculturalism and other identity-based claims for recognition that deradicalize any discourse or movement that is seen in some way to be connected to a 'community'. The definition of all anti-racisms that are grounded in the specific experiences of migration, or which emerge from



the historical struggles of a particular ‘ethnic minority’ group as apolitical, creates a divide between ‘communitarians’ and the self-professed ‘radicals’ who label them as such.

Problems inherent in the attempt to cooperate across this divide were expressed during an interview with an Italian member of the Frassanito Network.¹¹ The interview dealt, among other things, with the near total absence of ‘immigrants’ during meetings held by groups affiliated to the Italian Social Forum, such as the Tavolo Migranti, which are composed mainly of radical left-wing intellectuals, some of whom have contributed significantly to scholarship on migration and citizenship as a ‘social movement’ (cf. Barchesi, 2004; Mezzadra, 2002; Rigo, 2007). The interviewee does not deny the failures of the ‘white Left’ movement in Italy to dialogue effectively with ‘immigrants’. Yet in its defence, he mobilizes the culturalism and authoritarianism of ‘immigrants’ which automatically, it is assumed, places them outside the sphere of progressive politics:

From what I have seen over the years, many of these [‘immigrant’] groups are characterized by an extremely corporate political discourse that emphasizes the defence of certain phases of migration and that does not attempt a more general critique of the political meaning of immigration in Italy ... Certainly, some of these groups have such characteristics: very integrationist, despite the fact that the processes of migration bring to light the crises inherent in models of social integration. They are often strongly culturalist and I think that culturalist tendencies neutralize the more radical aspects of the issues that migration highlights. They are also very paternalistic towards newer immigrants. (Author translation from Italian)

The culturalism and integrationist tendencies of ‘immigrant’ groups is a way of bypassing a fuller explanation of the political differences that created divisions among anti-racists in Italy working within or around the Social Forum in 2002–3. The perception of migrant activists involved in the Tavolo Migranti, that their voices were not heard by the Italian activists in the network, led to the establishment of the alternative Comitato Immigrati in Italia (CII), an autonomous migrant-led network. The birth of the CII aroused suspicion in the Italian activists. The interviewee quoted above denied its significance and questioned its representativeness. Since its establishment in 2002, the CII has mobilized tens of thousands of migrants in Italy around its often ad hoc and spontaneous protests for justice. It is a loose network of individuals and organizations from more than 25 different national backgrounds, fusing religious and secular, trade unionist and radical left-wing, community-based and independent activists from all over the country. Many of its central protagonists were politically active in their countries of origin, while others were mobilized by the material conditions of immigration. The CII’s members do not conform to the Italian Left’s view of them as segregationist and culturalist. As experienced by subaltern movements in other times and places, the Right criticizes them for outspokenness and their purposeful anti-institutionalism. The Left



sees them as insufficiently radical because they do not shun religious or communitarian affiliation, but view it as part of what makes up the various and diverse realities of both migrants' lives and of doing politics across such a heterogeneous group.

The debate between the CII and the Italian 'migrationists' is emblematic of a Left 'anti-anti-racism' that, like Bourdieu and Wacquant's critique of the mobilization of 'race', simplifies the complexities of an autonomous movement of the racialized and equates it with the primitive. Bourdieu and Wacquant accuse US-American race critical scholars and activists of imposing a 'folk concept' on non-US contexts that, it is implied, are beyond the regressive need for 'ethnic identity'. To 'migrationists' who *have* accepted the conceptual usefulness of 'race', the idea becomes depoliticized in the hands of 'immigrants' who, they presume, take 'race' at face value by culturalizing structural problems of power and class. They fail to question the commonplace idea that identity politics is a purely bottom-up phenomenon, called for by minorities clamouring for equal recognition (Taylor, 1994).¹² As such, they mobilize a view of racialized activists as incompletely developed political actors. This paternalistic view is based on a refusal to accept that the inconsistencies, conflicts and confusions of the autonomous migrant-led anti-racist movement that has been organizing since the 1990s in response to the strengthening of 'Fortress Europe' are as inconsistent, conflictual and confused as the Left itself. In other words, these problems are not a consequence of political underdevelopment or culturalist biases, but of the general, and universally experienced, difficulty of doing progressive politics.

Conclusion

Post-anti-racism?

Despite the almost visceral reaction of many on the Left to the self-organized anti-racism of the racialized, the 'anti-anti-racist' phenomenon is a comprehensible one. Because the heterogeneity of anti-racism has gone almost unrecognized, it is identified increasingly with its state-endorsed, corporatist versions and less with its autonomous traditions. Anti-racism in post-immigration societies was viewed first with suspicion by the Left because it sought to go beyond class-based analyses. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, when it was taken on as a concern by the state, it was largely stripped of its 'race'/class analytical framework. Both psychological and culturalist explanations of racism were favoured and the creation of a body of 'race' professionals or state-endorsed anti-racist activists created the perception of anti-racism as largely depoliticized. Today, the growth of an autonomous movement in European countries where immigration is a recent phenomenon, such as Greece, Italy and Spain, sits alongside the relative impotence of anti-racists to mobilize effectively against the



criminalization of both migrants and ‘Islamists’ in countries such as Britain and France, which have longer anti-racist traditions.

The ‘anti-racist deficit’ in these countries is explained by the apparently paradoxical belief that our societies are post-racist. Although racism could be said to pose a more serious problem today, issues such as immigration and the ‘War on Terror’ are not predominantly associated with racism. This is a paradox because often explanations for terrorism, for example, rely on naturalized assumptions about Muslims that function in precisely the same way as racialization. The post-racial argument in the US (Goldberg, 2002) is based on assumptions of colour-blindness and has fuelled the rescinding of equal opportunities policies such as affirmative action. The US position comes from the presumption that ‘race’ no longer divides between people to the extent that it did in the past. Therefore, it is assumed to be possible to stop redressing discrimination because this is no longer a factor. However, as Cornel West reminds us in relation to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina:

[T]he average adult income in some parishes of the city is under \$8,000 a year. The average national income is \$33,000, though for African-Americans it is about \$24,000. It has one of the highest city murder rates in the US. (2005: 19)

In other words, declaring society ‘post-race’ has done nothing to address the fact that ‘race’ and socio-economic disadvantage are almost completely synonymous for many in the US, and increasingly elsewhere too.

In Europe, where affirmative action was never introduced to as great an extent as in the US, the assumption of post-racism comes out of the belief that ‘integration’ and the policies that have been implemented to encourage it, especially multiculturalism, have largely failed. The idea of post-racism – rather than the US-American ‘post-race’ – underpins the belief, now widespread across mainstream politics, that ‘too much diversity’ (Goodhart, 2004) is responsible for the social breakdown of our societies, and that it is the failure of ‘immigrants’ to adhere to national values that is largely to blame. The proposition that there is a ‘crisis of multiculturalism’, repeatedly voiced since 9/11, has led to the replacement of multiculturalism with ‘community cohesion’ and the promotion of citizenship, translated in practice as the requirement for non-nationals to learn ‘our way of life’ or leave.

Anti-racism cannot be unscathed by this. It must become ‘anti-post-racism’ and combat both the persistence of racism and the presumption that it is a thing of the past. It needs to counter the growing belief in the universality of racism as something natural which groups do to each other when caught in close proximity, which the post-racism agenda implies. This presumed naturalness of racism has led also to the belief that the racist tables have actually been turned, with whites more liable to bear the brunt. Reverse racism is underpinned by the idea, once voiced only



by the extreme Right, that the western way of life is ultimately the true victim in an even-handed 'clash of civilizations'.

The politics of fear which have dominated all politics since 9/11 have also turned racism into a depoliticized, dehistoricized and thus naturalized fear of the Other. So although the role of anti-racism is clearly more difficult, it appears to be clear-cut. However, in reality, the project of anti-post-racism is challenged by another, less perceptible reality: post-anti-racism, brought about by the belief that we are all 'post-race'. The apparently logical step being made, certainly by those on the Right, and less perceptibly (but nevertheless implicitly) by some on the Left, is that if 'race' is overcome, there is no longer a need for anti-racists.

Post-anti-racism is brought about by the voiding of the autonomous anti-racist space and its refilling by the state. Historically, those on the Left who have criticised anti-racism have opposed it because of its perceived culturalization and depoliticization. Bourdieu and Wacquant put that down to the global hegemony of US-American explanations of poverty and discrimination in racial terms promoted by 'minority' activists and scholars intent on 'racing' the world. In fact, the replacement of 'race' and class-based analyses of discrimination with culturalist understandings (in Europe at least) has been promoted by the state and supranational bodies such as the European Commission. It is easier, as already stated, to promote diversity than to oppose racism, especially if that racism is the racism of the state itself. The state and the European institutions' cooptation of anti-racism come with large grants to carry out projects to promote intercultural understanding and facilitate conflict resolution in schools, workplaces and among individuals. The 'bad apples philosophy' explains systematic discrimination and is seen as surmountable by an increased level of intercultural knowledge (Lentin, 2005). Anti-racist activists have to choose between participating in this agenda or purposefully opposing it. Many attempt to set the agenda from the inside. Others drop out. Only a small hardcore continue to resist.

This situation fuels post-anti-racism. Put simply, there is the idea that there is no need for anti-racism because racism is no longer of the same magnitude. Pockets of discrimination exist, but in official rhetoric, they pale into insignificance in contrast to anti-western terrorism or gun crime (purportedly the exclusive preserve of black gangs). In this sense, anti-racism is pitted against other forms of more institutionalized and much better funded anti-politics and policies. Despite the resistance to multiculturalism, culture remains the main lens through which these phenomena are understood and solutions proposed. Hence governments introduce policies that purport to promote social cohesion while allowing for cultural diversity; adherence to national values is demanded in return for the permission, within reason, to practice 'minority culture'. Racism is all but wiped off the agenda. In the post-relativist logic of cultural clash, all cultures are reified as such and seen as equally capable of becoming hegemonic.



Under a post-anti-racist agenda, governments seek to ensure the dominance of national culture while promoting a vision of their tolerance to 'other cultures', thus separating out the democratic West from its detractors. The persistence of racism, both as a result of this political turn and as it preceded it, is ignored by an agenda which sets the problem out as one of cultural incompatibility. This process gradually hides racism from view in order eventually to obscure it completely.

The critics of anti-racism are correct in their definition of state-endorsed anti-racism as culturalist. The cooptation of anti-racism by governments in western Europe has led to its decreasing association with social and political structures – the hard-nosed analytics of 'race' and class – and towards the wholesale confusion of racism with the natural incompatibility of strangers. This is the 'new racism' argument of the 1980s (Barker, 1981) come to fruition, far beyond the Right and into hegemonic common-sense. Where the anti-anti-racists are misleading, perhaps purposefully so, is in their association of this culturalist turn in anti-racism with the self-organized activism of the racialized. While, as Kundnani (2007) makes clear, self-styled authoritarian leaders of minority ethnic communities in Britain have certainly colluded with government to ensure a culturalist policy which ultimately contributed to the weakening of autonomous anti-racist action in the 1980s, they could not have done so in the absence of a political partnership. Self-organized anti-racists, women and queers of colour, and other 'anti-post-colonial' activists, have resisted both the erosion of anti-racism by culturalist policymaking and patriarchal tendencies within 'communities'. However, such tendencies never defined those known as minorities universally, just as Stalinism never defined the Left as a whole. In today's climate of post-racism, it is surely incumbent upon anti-racists and their left-wing critics to radicalize the immanent terrain of anti-post-racism as a struggle for our time.

Notes

1. Emphasis added. The official name given to the campaign, which ran between 2006 and 2007, is the European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation. The slogan for the campaign, 'All Different–All Equal', was taken from a campaign run 10 years previously by the Council of Europe, which was emphatically 'against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance'. However, wishing to replace what was seen as the negative message of the 1995 campaign, the proponents of the 2006 campaign aimed to:

motivate young people to participate actively in building a peaceful society based on diversity among nations and social cohesion, in the spirit of tolerance towards differences among nations and of respect and understanding.
2. The Macpherson Inquiry, set up by the New Labour government on coming to office in 1997, published its findings in 1999. Macpherson ruled that the

Metropolitan Police had been guilty of institutional racism in its failure to prosecute anyone for Stephen Lawrence's murder.

5. Public political culture in Rawls (2001: 5) refers to a 'set of familiar ideas', some 'more basic than others', that 'play a fundamental role in society's political thought and how its institutions are interpreted'. He goes on to say that:

[I]t is assumed that citizens in a democratic society have at least an implicit understanding of these ideas as shown in everyday political discussion, in debates about the meaning and ground of constitutional rights and liberties, and the like. (2001: 5)

4. In November 2007, riots in the suburbs of Paris broke out in response to the death of two teenagers in a collision with a police car. The riots were in reaction to the fact that the police did not react in time to prevent their deaths. The idea that republican principles can be applied to overcome the problems facing France's 'problem neighbourhoods' is denied by these events, which appeared to demonstrate that the Republic had not come to the aid of its citizens. As a commentator on the website of the *Mouvement des indigènes de le République* noted:

[T]he gap is widening between our youth in the neighbourhoods, who are extremely politically lucid and do not believe in the lofty ideals of republican equality, and French society and its institutions who turn social issues into the stuff of colonial management, policing and prison ... the future seems to be very bleak ... and the worst in terms of politics is not unimaginable. (<http://www.indigenes-republique.org/spip.php?article1130>)

5. Communitarianism in this context does not refer to the work of so-called communitarian scholars such as Amitai Etzioni. Rather it is a term, widely used in French political discourse, to describe any activity based within a minority ethnic community.
6. The Anti-Nazi League enjoyed significant success in the late 1970s but fizzled out some years later. It was revived in the mid 1990s in response to the rise of the British National Party.
7. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) project originated in the 1950 meeting of social scientists, biologists and geneticists convened by the organization to draw up a 'Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice'. It had two main aims: to disqualify the scientific validity of the 'race' concept, and to propose alternative ways of conceiving of human difference that would not evoke the hierarchy implied by 'race'. It focused on providing alternative explanations of human difference grounded in culture rather than biology, such as ethnicity, to replace 'race'. The project continues to inform the anti-racist practice of institutions, such as the various European bodies established to combat racism and discrimination as well as the agendas of a range of mainstream associations. The main problem for interpreting racism brought about by UNESCO is that by reducing 'race' to its pseudo-scientific dimension and by attempting to propose a culturally relativist approach to living with diversity, it encourages the idea that our societies are 'raceless' or at least 'post-race'.



8. In 2005, the *banlieues* (suburbs) of France erupted into rioting over two weeks. Similar incidents were witnessed almost precisely two years later in 2007.
9. Etienne Balibar (1994) argues, for example, that racism and universalism are imbricated in each other because the project of defining a general idea of Man behind universalist principles cannot be carried out without the definition, at the same time, of 'non-Man'. This in turn cannot be thought without a reliance on 'race' which, as a concept, was being developed in parallel (and largely influenced by) the ideas of the Enlightenment.
10. The Frassanito Network is named after a 'No Borders Camp' that took place at Frassanito, Puglia in 2003, at which I was present (for a declaration of the network's principles, see: <http://thistuesday.org/node/130>). Many radical pro-migration movements, more or loosely interrelated transnationally, exist (No Borders Network, No One Is Illegal, etc.). The view I represent here is not a general statement about movements which differ widely from locality to locality, depending on the political context and the histories of immigration and anti-racism that define them.
11. During the period 2001–4, the interviewee was active in the Tavolo Migranti of the Italian Social Forum, which mobilized for the inclusion of the issue of migration in the Forum's activities, from the anti-G8 protests in Genoa in 2001 to the first meeting of the European Social Forum in Florence in 2003.
12. See Lentin and Lentin (2006) for a complete discussion of the mislocation of the origins of identity politics by theorists of multiculturalism such as Charles Taylor. I argue that, based on a misunderstanding of Frantz Fanon (1986), Taylor traces authenticity back to Fanon's ambivalent stance on negritude. In contrast to the idea that cultural recognition underpins 'minority-led' anti-racism, I show how historically the multiculturalist state imposes a culturalization of formerly political struggles around 'race' and class.

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Biographical note

Alana Lentin is a lecturer in social theory and political sociology in the Department of Sociology, University of Sussex. She writes on 'race', racism and anti-racism from a critical perspective, as well as social movements and migrant collective action. Her books include *Racism and Anti-Racism in Europe* (Pluto Press, 2004) and *Racism: A Beginner's Guide* (OneWorld, 2008). She is also the co-editor of



Race and State (with Ronit Lentin, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006) and
The Politics of Diversity in Europe (with Gavan Titley, Council of Europe, 2008).
ADDRESS: Department of Sociology, University of Sussex, Falmer, Sussex BN1
9RH, UK. [email: a.lentin@sussex.ac.uk]