Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: Towards effective anti-racist praxis

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Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racist praxis

Gabrielle Berman and Yin Paradies

Abstract

The practice of multiculturalism in modern liberal democracies has been hampered by lack of a clear definition of 'racism' and 'anti-racism' as well as confusion about the role of multiculturalism in addressing disadvantage and combating racism. This lack of clarity has contributed to a marginalization of anti-racism within multiculturalism. As a prerequisite to re-centring anti-racist praxis within multiculturalism, this paper disentangles the concepts of 'equity' versus 'equality', 'racism', 'anti-racism', 'multiculturalism' and 'disadvantage'. We then distinguish between policies and practices designed to mitigate disadvantage, and those designed to address racism. Taking Australia as a case study, historical and contemporary notions of multiculturalism are examined before considering their relationship to racism, anti-racism and disadvantage. It is only through a clear understanding and inclusion of anti-racist praxis that the potential of multiculturalism to address the challenges of racial diversity in modern liberal democracies can be realized.

Introduction

Multiculturalism as a means of addressing diversity within modern liberal democracies has often been uncritically applied in policy and legislation (Goldberg 1994; Solomos 1998), with Australia being no exception to this rule (Vasta and Castles 1996; Schech and Haggis 2001). Yet despite reports that one in ten Australians holds racist beliefs (Forrest and Dunn 2007) and that more than a third of the population believe that diversity threatens the nation (Dunn, Burnley and McDonald 2004; Forrest and Dunn 2007), policy and practice in

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Australia continue to narrowly define multiculturalism, too often omitting anti-racism as a critical component of these policies. This omission can be attributed as much to poor and confused conceptual understandings of racism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and disadvantage, as to a government reluctance to create controversy by explicitly naming racism (Babacan 2006).

This paper sets out to define and disentangle the key concepts of racism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and disadvantage, and to argue that, rather than remaining hidden behind the diversity rhetoric within Australian multicultural policy, it is vital that anti-racism be brought to the forefront of multiculturalism. The first section of this paper will set out to define racism and anti-racism before examining historical and contemporary notions of multiculturalism and their relationship to racism and anti-racism. This paper will examine the broader relationship between 'disadvantage' and 'racism', distinguishing between approaches that combat racism and those that address ethnoracial[1] disadvantage. We contend that a failure to delineate these relationships and approaches is the juncture at which anti-racist praxis becomes disconnected from public policy. In conclusion, we will briefly consider future directions for anti-racist praxis within multicultural policy in Australia.

Equity and equality

To understand the definitions of racism and anti-racism below, we first have to clearly distinguish between the concepts of inequality (aka difference) and inequity (aka disadvantage or disparity), which have frequently been confused by both researchers and policy-makers (Espinoza 2007). Inequality is simply the condition of being unequal. While the existence of inequality often highlights an inequitable situation, that which is unequal is not necessarily inequitable (and that which is equal is not necessarily equitable). Inequalities can be categorized into three broad types: (i) unavoidable; (ii) avoidable but freely chosen or accepted; and (iii) avoidable and imposed or not accepted (i.e. unfair).

Only the third type of inequality can be considered to be an inequity. For example, not all differences in outcomes across ethnoracial groups are a form of disadvantage because some are (at present) unavoidable or not amenable to change (e.g. in rare circumstances, members of certain ethnoracial groups may have an increased genetic propensity to specific diseases (Paradies, Montoya and Fullerton 2007)) and others are freely chosen or accepted by members of ethnoracial groups (e.g. a choice not to be employed as an expression of cultural distinctiveness (Rowse 2002)). Conversely, only equality that is either

unavoidable or avoidable but freely chosen or accepted can be considered equitable.

Clearly, any decisions contingent upon concepts such as *avoidability, amenability to change* and *freedom of choice* are both complex and fraught. Nonetheless, we believe that appropriate consideration of these issues is essential to understanding racism and engaging in effective anti-racist praxis. Such careful delineation is important not only in focusing efforts on inequity but in ensuring that anti-racism efforts do not become racist in themselves by pursuing equality through an insistence on sameness which ignores the agency of ethnoracial group members (Sanders 1991). It is important that cultural distinctiveness (difference) is not confused with disadvantage in the pursuit of anti-racist goals.

Defining racism

The concepts of racism and anti-racism have been subject to much debate and definition in recent decades by scholars from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Marxist approaches to racism relegate it to a by-product of class relations. Robert Miles (1989) draws from a neo-Marxist perspective in conceptualizing racism as an ideology that is both false (i.e. unscientific) and partial (i.e. supporting vested capitalist interests). He contends that through racist ideology social reality is distorted, obscured and clouded by dominant social groups who have an interest in hiding the exploitative nature of their relations with other groups (Miles 1989). A common approach to understanding racism is to consider it as a combination of *prejudice* and *power*. Essed, a prominent scholar in this field, defines racism as 'the definitive attribution of inferiority to a particular racial/ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group' (Essed 1990, p. 11). Goldberg (1993, p. 47) highlights the importance of 'premises about human kind' and 'the differences between them' as well as ethical choices such as 'domination and subjugation' and institutional arrangements in the perpetration of racism. Bonilla-Silva (1997) describes racism as a social system involving ethnoracial categories and some form of hierarchy that produces disparities in life chances between ethnoracial groups. In Australia, scholars of racism have characterized racism as an ideology of inferiority that devalues others and justifies inequality (Pettman 1986, p. 6).

Taken together, these definitions capture many aspects of racism. However, individually they can fail to recognize that racism does not necessarily depend on ideological premises, does not have to involve prejudice or promote capitalist interests, and can be perpetrated by individuals from ethnoracial groups with limited social power.

Furthermore, racism can occur even in instances where treatment is equal when, in fact, it is unequal treatment that is fair and just (e.g. affirmative action or positive discrimination).

Although legislative approaches to defining racism in modern liberal democracies tend to recognize the unfair effects of equal treatment (i.e. indirect racism as described below), such approaches suffer from other limitations. For example, no statutory definition of racism is provided in Canada or the United States (see Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission [HREOC] 2008, pp. 31–5). In Australia, there is a narrow focus on outcomes that impinge upon a 'human right or fundamental freedom', while the use of the term 'less favourable' treatment in the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union fails to make clear the possible effects of such treatment (see HREOC 2008, pp. 31–5).

To overcome these limitations, we define racism as that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups. Racism can be expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs), prejudice (racist emotions/affect) or discrimination (racist behaviours and practices). Racism is one manifestation of the broader phenomenon of oppression which also includes sexism, ageism and classism (Paradies 2006). Oppression is intrinsically linked to the phenomenon of privilege. As such, in addition to disadvantaging minority ethnoracial groups in society, racism also results in certain ethnoracial groups (e.g. Whites) being privileged and accruing unfair opportunities.

Racism can occur at three conceptual levels which co-occur in practice. Internalized racism occurs when an individual incorporates ideologies within their world view which serve to maintain or exacerbate the unequal distribution of opportunity across ethnoracial groups. Similarly, interpersonal racism occurs when interactions between people serve to maintain or exacerbate the unequal distribution of opportunity across ethnoracial groups. Finally, systemic (or institutional) racism occurs when the production and control of, and access to, material, informational and symbolic resources within society serve to maintain or exacerbate the unequal distribution of opportunity across ethnoracial groups (Paradies 2006; Paradies and Williams in press).

Internalized racism occurs in two forms – *internalized dominance* (i.e. privilege) and *internalized oppression* (i.e. oppression). Internalized dominance is the incorporation of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies about the inferiority of other social groups and/or the superiority of one's own social group. Conversely, internalized oppression is the incorporation of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies about the superiority of other social groups and/or the inferiority of one's own social group (Paradies 2006).

Racism can manifest in direct and indirect forms. Direct racism is defined as unequal treatment that results in unequal opportunity (e.g. medical care provided to a patient that is inferior to care provided to a patient of a different ethnorace). Indirect racism is defined as equal treatment that results in unequal opportunity (e.g. the provision of training in English to participants with other native languages). In the United States, direct racism is sometimes known by the term 'disparate treatment' while indirect racism is known as 'disparate impact'.

Defining anti-racism

Although less attention has been given to defining anti-racism in the literature, this phenomenon has been conceptualized in a number of ways. Anti-racism has been broadly defined by Bonnett (2000, p. 4) as 'forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism' and as 'ideologies and practices that affirm and seek to enable the equality of races and ethnic groups' (Bonnett 2006); while Gilroy (1990) contends that anti-racism is dependent on the delivery of 'justice and equity'. Some scholars have attempted to move beyond anti-racism as simply the opposite of racism to consider it as 'the construction of a positive project about the kind of society in which people can live together in harmony and mutual respect' (Anthias and Lloyd 2002, p. 16). As discussed above, definitions of racism can focus on prejudice, power, ideology, stereotypes, domination, disparities and/or unequal treatment. As such, anti-racism can conceivably be concerned with combating racism across any and all of these foci.

There is also a range of legislative approaches to anti-racism. The International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination [ICERD] relates 'special measures' to both 'development and protection' (i.e. addressing disadvantage and protection against racism) (ICERD article 2, p. 2). While Australia follows the ICERD definition, in the United States it is legal to address certain instances of racism but not societal disadvantage. In contrast, there is a focus on disadvantage within statute law in the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union and in Canada (see HREOC 2008, pp. 43–8). Nonetheless, Canadian case law has emphasized the importance of 'remedying or preventing' racism (HREOC 2008, p. 45). As with approaches to defining racism described above, it should be clear that a more consistent definition of what constitutes (and does not constitute) anti-racism is required.

Because of the necessary distinction between difference and disadvantage, anti-racism is best conceptualized as the endeavour to create equality of opportunity (which implies *equity* of outcome) rather than equality of outcome *per se*. As with inequality and inequity in

general, equality of opportunity is not synonymous with equality of outcome (which may be imposed when not freely chosen or may fail to occur as a result of free choice). It is equality of opportunity which is the more appropriate focus for an anti-racist praxis because a focus on such equality respects agency (i.e. choice) while opposing injustice. Given the above discussion, we can now define anti-racism as that which promotes equality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups.

As with the concept of racism, we can also distinguish between direct and indirect anti-racism. Indirect anti-racism is defined as unequal treatment that results in equal opportunity. *Positive discrimination*, *special measures* and *affirmative action* are all forms of indirect anti-racism which serve to combat indirect racism that would occur in the presence of equal treatment, as well as to redress disadvantage that is caused (in whole or in part) by a history of racism.

Direct anti-racism encompasses efforts to promote equal treatment that results in equal opportunity and hence addresses direct racism (i.e. unequal treatment that results in unequal opportunity). An example of direct anti-racism is action to prevent *racial profiling* in policing whereby members of minority ethnoracial groups are subject to unfair control, surveillance or investigation (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2007).

It should be noted that in addition to the conceptual considerations discussed above, the practice of anti-racism is necessarily limited to the subset of activities for which it is deemed appropriate to seek *equality of opportunity*. In all societies specific individual rights will, in certain circumstances, take precedence over anti-racist ideals. For example, the banning of men from antenatal classes at a community centre in Montreal so as not to offend Muslim women (i.e. to provide equality of opportunity to abide by their religious beliefs) was seen by many as breaching a man's right to attend antenatal classes with his pregnant partner (Cassin, Krawchenko and VanderPlaat 2007, p. 14).

Multiculturalism and anti-racism

Anti-racist efforts to achieve equality of opportunity are a direct response to the complex social phenomena that give rise to racism. Combating racism is therefore a multifaceted process that is increasingly intertwined with efforts to address the tensions of diversity (Putman 2007). Within this context, multiculturalism becomes critical. As noted by Lentin (2005, p. 382), 'a multicultural approach to living together in the diverse societies of the post-war western world was built on ways of conceptualising and suggesting solutions to racism'. As such, any discussion of multiculturalism needs to reference its anti-racist potential.

Multiculturalism has been conceived in a number of ways. Hartmann and Gerteis (2005) view it as the creation of social conditions under which diversity can be sustained and new conceptions of solidarity can be created within the reality of increasingly diverse societies. A more holistic view articulated by UNESCO defines multiculturalism as three separate but interconnected phenomena. First, multiculturalism can be seen as a description of the demographic make-up of modern states. Second, multiculturalism can be conceived as a set of norms or principles that uphold the right of all individuals to equal access and ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. Finally, multiculturalism can be seen as a government strategy. While the first definition describes a situation, the second articulates the values and rights related to this situation, and the third describes its implementation in policy and practice (Inglis 2007).

While the values and rights assigned to the multicultural situation are critical, these values hold little currency if there is a failure to implement them. It is for this reason that we will focus on the third definition of multiculturalism as government policy, holding a critical lens to its implementation.

Lentin (2005) has argued that multicultural policy has the direct result of shift[ing] towards culture as opposed to race, with the ultimate outcome being the evolution of a state of 'racelessness'. Such a state obviates the anti-racist efforts that are a necessary precondition for securing the rights of all members of a society. Multicultural policies that do not explicitly address racism run the risk of essentializing difference and denying the existence of racism through the operation of three potential unintended consequences.

First, adopting multicultural approaches that prioritize culture, religious or ethnoracial identity may effectively alienate the targets of racism by reinforcing binary notions of identity within a community, potentially focusing on the exotic, and failing to recognize and allow for the presence of multiple identities (Lentin 2005).

The second consequence of adopting multicultural policies and projects that fail to directly address racism is that they can unintentionally provide a focus on the lack of knowledge and experience that ethnoracial minorities have of dominant culture. Such a focus on the minority tends toward 'victim-blaming' and renders invisible the underlying racist beliefs and practices of the majority (Lentin 2005).

Finally, multicultural policies that fail to identify and address racism may prevent or discourage targets of racism from taking recourse against racism. This disempowers the individual and sends strong counter-signals to the broader community about the prevalence of racism in society (Lentin 2005). In this context, while multiculturalism presents a positive, solution-based perspective by its very definition, it

fails to recognize and therefore invite social and individual critique of underlying and often covert racism of an interpersonal and, more importantly, systemic nature. Multicultural policies and programs that do not explicitly reflect on racism can and often do presume that communities are equally positioned within society. These programs often fail to recognize that 'the boundaries of difference and the concept of diversity [are] determined by specific hegemonic and dominant groups' (Ang 2001, p. 14).

Despite these criticisms, contemporary multicultural policies and programs do play a key role in fostering positive community relations. However, without critical reflection on the totality of policies, programs and strategies such initiatives run the risk of framing multiculturalism in terms of policies and practices focused almost exclusively on disadvantaged ethnoracial communities, without changing the broader social discourse on diversity, inclusion, disadvantage and racism. In this framework, overt and covert racism within institutions and in everyday experience are easily disregarded. The following section explores the implications that follow for multicultural policy when efforts to address disadvantage are clearly delineated from anti-racist praxis *per se*.

Addressing racism and ethnoracial disadvantage

At the simplest level, attempts to combat racism are ultimately designed to prevent or redress the disadvantage caused by such experiences and to ensure equal access to and ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. However, efforts to tackle racism and to ameliorate disadvantage (whether caused in whole or in part by racism) are related yet distinct endeavours that warrant separate approaches in both policy and practice.

Only some differences in outcomes across ethnoracial groups in society are a disadvantage. Both historical and/or contemporary racism (either direct or indirect) may be a cause (or the cause) of such disadvantage. For example, contemporary disadvantage for Indigenous Australians has been directly mediated through the historical experience of racism, othering and colonization. This currently manifests as disadvantage with respect to health, and social and economic participation (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2007).

For many migrants, however, contemporary disadvantage need not necessarily reflect racist structural and institutional policies/ practices in Australia but may result from (at least in part) limited English language skills, lack of understanding of processes and policies, financial difficulties resulting from the pre-migration

experiences and physical and mental health issues resulting from these experiences.[2]

While being sensitive to causal pathways, addressing contemporary forms of disadvantage is critical. Any multicultural strategy in the first instance must explicitly reflect on contemporary disadvantage, whether resulting from the migrant experience or from colonization. A focus on health and social and economic participation for these groups is crucial in directly mitigating further disadvantage. When addressing disadvantage in this context, the target population for policy is the communities and individuals from the disadvantaged ethnoracial groups, with explicit consideration of the nature of disadvantage being experienced.

While policies and practices to address disadvantage may also serve to address a form of indirect racism, they are not able in and of themselves to combat direct forms of racism. Addressing direct racism (whether interpersonal or systemic) requires a specific policy focus on the broader community and institutional structures that reproduce racism, rather than the communities who are the targets of racism.

This distinction emphasizes the need for broad multicultural policies and strategies that primarily focus on disadvantage resulting from the migrant experience and reaffirm pluralism, and also include strategies specifically aimed at mitigating racism. Any strategy focusing on disadvantage and recognition of ethnoracial identity largely targets ethnoracial minorities as sites for intervention, whether through social programs (e.g. affirmative action) or cultural festivals (e.g. intergroup contact). Conversely, focusing on racism implies a consideration of societal changes both at an individual level and at an institutional /structural level. It is the latter need to foster change of the mainstream that can potentially be overlooked within multicultural approaches (Babacan 2006).

We contend that any diversity/multicultural strategy requires efforts to address contemporary disadvantage through targeted programs for ethnoracial minority communities as well as specific anti-racism programs predominantly focused on achieving individual, institutional and societal change. There is, therefore, a need to distinguish between policies and practices designed to mitigate contemporary disadvantage, and policies and practices designed to address contemporary forms of racism.

Table 1 provides concrete examples that highlight the distinction between addressing ethnoracial disadvantage and directly combating racism.

As described below, the distinction between the types of programs required to combat racism and those that address ethnoracial disadvantage is particularly relevant to the interpretation of

Table 1. *The differing responses to racism and disadvantage*

Combating racism		Addressing disadvantage
Institutional	Individual	
• Equal Opportunity legislation and mediation	• Dispelling false beliefs	• Access to affordable housing
• Institutional Ombudsmen	• Promoting empathy	• Access to appropriate health care
• Regulation of the media	• Intercultural contact	• Appropriate educational support
• Anti-racism public media campaigns	• Anti-racist educational curricula	• Appropriate welfare support
• Anti-racism auditing of organizations	• Workplace anti-racism training	• Employment support and training
• Regular reviews into the nature, prevalence and solutions to racism in institutional settings		• Translation services
• Increased capacity to monitor and report racist attitudes and behaviour		• Language classes
		• The provision and dissemination of information on processes, policies and rights to ethnoracial minorities
		• Programs focused on encouraging social participation by ethnoracial minorities (e.g. arts, sports)

multiculturalism as evidenced in Australian policies and strategies. Explicit anti-racism strategies need to be encompassed within broader multicultural policies, to ensure that, at both structural and individual levels, racism is recognized and that recourse against racist behaviour is legitimized, accessible and enforced. Such inclusion also fosters ongoing critical reflection on the manifestation of overt and covert racism and provides clear and consistent messages emanating from elite discourse,[3] as well as supporting systemic practices and legislative outcomes that classify racist behaviours and systems as unacceptable. Taking Australia as a case study, the following section provides a historical background to the evolving nature of multiculturalism and anti-racism, highlighting the marginalization of the anti-racism agenda.

Multiculturalism, anti-racism, disadvantage and the Australian context

Multiculturalism within Australia was first introduced in the early 1970s under a Labor government and from its inception has focused on migrants and their descendants, considering Indigenous Australians to be outside its remit.[4] Multiculturalism was not formalized into a Federal Charter but rather embedded in a series of Federal, State and Territory policies and agencies. As a result, multiculturalism has always been intimately embedded in the contemporary politics of incumbent State and Federal governments. In its early period multicultural policy was largely premised on a broader social justice agenda designed to address the social and economic disadvantages experienced by migrants. This notion of multiculturalism as social redress changed under a Conservative government in the mid-1970s to a more focused support for the maintenance of cultural and linguistic heritage among migrants within a dominant White cultural tradition (Wieviorka 1998).

The first full-scale public debate about multiculturalism in Australia occurred in 1984 following an address by the anti-immigration historian Geoffrey Blainey. Sparked by one event or another, such public debates have re-occurred on an almost annual basis (Hage 2002, p. 64). All these debates follow essentially the same script, beginning with anti-multiculturalists perceiving non-White Australians (whether migrants or native-born) as a threat to their well-being and the pre-eminence of White dominant culture. Such a claim is then followed by demands that non-Whites better integrate/assimilate into White dominant culture. In response, pro-multiculturalists note that cultural pluralism and a core Australian culture already co-exist but only in so far as this core is no longer exclusively White. Pro-multiculturalists then contend that such a multivalent core benefits all Australians and make a counter-demand that White Australians integrate into multicultural society (Hage 2002, pp. 64–6).

In response to such debates, the end of the 1980s saw multiculturalism attempting to combine cultural pluralism with social justice through the concept of multicultural citizenship (Castles 1997). This was expressed in the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (Commonwealth of Australia 1989) through a focus on social justice, social cohesion and economic productivity. The National Agenda noted that multicultural citizenship involves 'acceptance of one's own cultural identity . . . and a concomitant requirement to respect the identity of others' (Commonwealth of Australia 1989, p. 42). The Agenda also notes that Australia's 'own recent history has revealed instances in which lack of foresight has resulted in unfairness and unnecessary inefficiency, the prodigious wastage of overseas skills being perhaps the most telling example', and that the 'Government

seeks social cohesion, not social engineering' (Commonwealth of Australia 1989, p. 46).

In 1992, this idea of inefficiency through unfairness was transformed into the principle of *productive diversity* which pragmatically combined the discourses of social justice and economic rationalism (Kalantzis and Cope 1997). This multicultural agenda articulated the need for institutional reforms and attitudinal change without any explicit reference to racism. While identity and productivity had entered into the multicultural lexicon, racism remained confined to the *Racial Discrimination Act* introduced in 1975.

The omission of any references to the deleterious effects of racism and the need to address these issues created a tenuous position for anti-racist praxis within multiculturalism. The election of the Conservative Federal government, led by Howard, in 1996 unbalanced this precarious location, resulting in fewer social policies to support immigrants (Wieviorka 1998) and, over time, a downgrading of multiculturalism (Vasta 2007) as well as the eventual abandonment of an explicit Federal multicultural strategy in 2007. While vehemently denying the existence of racism in Australia, the Howard government handed down an assimilationist 'set of instructions to minorities' (Jakubowicz 2007) which required them to adopt core values derived from the dominant White culture (Jayasuriya 2005).

While the death knell of multiculturalism was sounded at a Federal level, the States and Territories maintained their policies in the tradition of the National Agenda, focusing primarily on targeting social services and enhancing community cohesion via festivals and specific community-based projects, with the aim of ensuring full and equal participation of ethnoracial minorities in all aspects of social and political life (Jayasuriya 2005). Although the existence of racism is still denied in Australia to such an extent that 'those offended by the term "racist" almost outnumber those offended by racists' (Hage 2002, p. x), there is now renewed interest in anti-racism under the Labor government elected in late 2007, with racism explicitly mentioned as a topic to be addressed within their social inclusion portfolio (Gillard and Wong 2007).

As highlighted above, although governments mitigate indirect racism by addressing disadvantage in minority ethnoracial communities through the provision of targeted social and language services, direct anti-racism efforts at the Federal and State level are limited to the complaints mechanisms, and non-binding recommendations of the National Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission [HREOC] and its State counterparts. While a few innovative anti-racism programs have been initiated at the State level, they are usually sector-specific, have limited geographic impact and are not sustained over the long term.[5]

The prevalence of racism in Australia

The absence of consistent anti-racism strategies as part of broader multicultural policies would be unproblematic if racism had been eliminated through the application of such policies. However, the limited available evidence would suggest otherwise. While not expressed overtly, racism in the form of opposition to diversity in recent years has consistently been expressed by a significant proportion of those surveyed. The most rigorous and extensive of these surveys included a study of 5,056 individuals from Queensland and New South Wales which found that 44.8 per cent agreed that ethnic diversity weakens the nation (Dunn, Burnley and McDonald 2004). A similar study in Victoria of 2,168 individuals found that 37 per cent of the respondents thought the nation was weakened by different ethnic groups 'sticking to their old ways' (Forrest and Dunn 2007). In fact, this same survey showed that 84 per cent of respondents believed that there is racial prejudice in Australia.

In terms of the experience of racism, the Queensland and New South Wales surveys found that 35.1 per cent and 24.5 per cent of those born outside of Australia had experienced racism in the workplace and educational settings, respectively. Over one in four of the Dunn et al. (2004) respondents reported having experienced disrespectful treatment or abuse on the basis of their ethnicity. Though somewhat outdated, the Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in 1991 noted that there was 'a widespread perception in the Australian community that racist violence was increasing'. Racism based on religious grounds has also increased. The Melbourne-based Australian Arabic Council recorded a twenty-fold increase in reports of vilification made to their Racism Register following September 11, 2001 (HREOC 2003); while the number of racist attacks against Jewish Australians in 2006 was 47 per cent higher than the average annual number of incidents for the previous 16 years (ECAJ 2007). Hence, rather than decreasing, it would appear that racism continues to be felt within Australia and may even be on the rise. As such, the Australian approach to multiculturalism needs to be critically examined to determine the efficacy of current policies and programs.

Beyond a 'complaints-based' approach to anti-racism

Despite evidence of racism occurring in both the social and economic realms at both the State and Federal level in Australia, there continues to be a wedge between multiculturalism and anti-racism, with significant reliance on the HREOC (and its State counterparts) to address racism. This is exacerbated by the absence of any constitutional reference to the principle of non-discrimination and the lack of

a specific Bill of Rights.[6] As noted by the HREOC Race Discrimination Commissioner, the absence of reference to anti-discrimination within a broader constitutional framework has left the protection against racism 'vulnerable to amendment and dilution by the Federal Government' (HREOC 2007).

Addressing direct racism through the complaints-based legal processes administered by the HREOC has a number of well researched limitations. It has been shown that current anti-discrimination law has little impact on employment behaviour in Australia, and research suggests a low level of awareness of anti-discrimination legislation by applicants (Bennington and Wein 2000). Furthermore, indirect and subtle forms of racism are difficult to prove under the current burden of evidence arrangements (Gaze 2002); and communities perceive that processes are complex, and that the likelihood of resolution is low (HREOC 2001; Gaze 2002; HREOC 2003).

A further concern is the role of the HREOC as the single bastion of anti-racism. The HREOC is an independent corporate body funded by the Federal government. This quasi-independence has its limitations. Reports and inquiries into racism undertaken by the HREOC and passed to the Attorney General are tabled in Parliament. However, unlike parliamentary Federal and State inquiries, there is no legislative requirement for a formal government response. Without ongoing and specific recognition of racism within State multicultural policies and public sector-wide anti-racism programs,[7] the Commission, its work, authority and funding, and hence the national anti-racism agenda, remain entirely vulnerable to the whims of the Federal government. Under the previous Conservative government, HREOC's budget was decreased by around $6 million during the three years 1996–7 to 1998–9. While some of these reductions were a consequence of restructuring and the removal of the hearing function to the Federal court, budget reductions over and above such restructuring resulted in sixty staff positions being abolished (HREOC 2003). During this period the position of Race Discrimination Commissioner became vacant and remained unfilled for the duration of the Conservative government's incumbency. While necessary for objective and critical inquiries and investigations, HREOC's arm's length relationship to government policy and practice limits the capacity and influence of the organization to create sector-wide changes.

Anti-racism policies and programs need an explicit focus on broader community and organizational change – programs that provide a critical reflective lens on institutional practices and policies, which educate, demythologize and, importantly, do not relegate anti-racism to a predominately complaints-based legal framework. Leaving the HREOC as the sole practitioner of anti-racism is ultimately problematic as anti-racism programs need whole-of-government

responses. What is instead required is explicit anti-racism programs embedded within multicultural policies and programs that complement the oversight role of the HREOC. Integration of anti-racist praxis into multiculturalism would allow an explicit recognition that social cohesion is not possible without actions to address various forms of racism together with evaluation to ensure that such actions are effective.

Conclusion

Existing definitions of racism focus on a mix of prejudice, power, ideology, stereotypes, domination, disparities and/or unequal treatment. In this paper we have defined racism as that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups, with direct racism being unequal treatment that results in unequal opportunity and indirect racism being equal treatment that results in unequal opportunity. Concomitantly, we have defined anti-racism as that which promotes equality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups, and contend that the key goal of anti-racist praxis is equity rather than equality. Direct anti-racism encompasses efforts to promote equal treatment that results in equal opportunity, while indirect anti-racism is defined as unequal treatment that results in equal opportunity.

Multicultural policies that seek to address disadvantage run the risk of alienating the targets of racism by reinforcing binary notions of identity, blaming ethnoracial minorities for their lack of knowledge of dominant culture, and discouraging targets of racism from taking recourse against racism. While such policies focus almost exclusively on ethnoracial minorities, combating racism requires mainstream changes both at an individual level and at an institutional/structural level.

Taking Australia as a case study, we have shown that despite evidence that racism in its various forms remains an obstacle to social cohesion, there has been little attention to tackling racism in approaches to multiculturalism. These approaches instead focus on targeting social services and enhancing community cohesion via festivals and specific community-based projects, while direct anti-racism efforts are limited to the complaints mechanisms and non-binding recommendations.

Anti-racism policies and programs within broader multicultural approaches are a requisite if multiculturalism is to ultimately accommodate diversity and eliminate racism. Policies and practices that seek to address disadvantage by focusing solely on targeted communities will do little to enhance relationships between

communities and are unable to tackle the systemic racism that is at the root of ethnoracial disadvantage.

Disentangling notions of disadvantage, multiculturalism and anti-racism makes it possible to bring anti-racism praxis to the fore via policies and programs that focus on broader community attitudes and social systems. It is only through such mainstream reform that nation-states will one day be able to provide equality of opportunity for all individuals to fully participate in the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of life.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   The terms 'ethnorace' and 'ethnoracial' are used to capture notions of both ethnicity and race which are highly interdependent in discourse and practice (Paradies 2006).
2.   This clearly does not include circumstances created by racist immigration policies and practice.
3.   In this context 'elite discourse' refers to comments and debates made in the public domain by influential public figures.
4.   This separation between Indigenous affairs and multiculturalism has resulted, in part, from the view that the history and experiences of Indigenous Australians are distinct from those of migrants. It has, however, been suggested that this dichotomy undermines the development of Australian anti-racism (Vasta and Castles 1996, p. 6).
5.   One example is the Western Australian Substantive Equality Unit. This unit conducts racism audits and formulates anti-racism interventions within public sector departments. This project, however, is under-resourced, focusing on only one unit within one department of the Western Australian government each year.
6.   The only exception being the Western Australian Substantive Equality Unit as described above.
7.   Although this issue has been addressed in Victoria through the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* which includes the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

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