



# The Embodied Politics of Pain in US Anti-Racism

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## Abstract

Scholarship in geography has underscored the importance of emotions to our understanding of space and society. However, the dimension of emotion in politics, particularly anti-racist politics, has not been adequately explored. This paper reads these politics through a largely feminist poststructural conceptual framework. The ideas of race and racism underlying anti-racist training and activism promote tears and anger – a politics of pain. Anti-racism training elicits sadness and contrition as a means to bring white people to cognizance of privilege. This could make participation more difficult. Strategies adequate to the task of confronting manifold racisms require more than tears and guilt, thus I make some proposals for anti-racist politics. Though not a comparison with Australian race politics, the paper does draw on several antipodean scholars to suggest an embodied anti-racist ethics. The critiques and proposals made here owe a debt to feminist theories of embodiment and difference as they have been articulated by geographers, cultural studies theorists and philosophers.

**Keywords:** emotion, anti-racism, race, embodiment, feminist theory

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## Introduction

Emotion is central to how race is felt, discussed and produced in the US. Race is embodied in emotions – pleasure, pain, love, rage, shame, fear, boredom, tranquility – that connect people and places. This paper explores white and nonwhite people’s emotional responses, particularly of pain, in anti-racist advocacy. The paper’s context is a growing interest in emotion and affect within human geography, but it addresses an area not much covered: emotion in the realm of progressive political activism against racism. Considering the question, ‘what do emotions do (Berlant, 2001; Ahmed, 2004) in anti-racist politics’, I suggest that sadness and anger spring from the way race and racism are conceptualized and activated in anti-racist activism and training. The concept of race is static and sharply drawn; racism is elaborated without geographic or historical multi-dimensionality. Pain constitutes the politics I describe here in ways that are not especially useful. As I will suggest, there are other ways of embodying anti-racism.

## *Foundations and Caveats*

Emotions are materially important. They are constitutive of space, residing in both bodies and places. Studies of emotional geographies were inspired and enabled by feminist geographers’ work on the body (see e.g. Rose, 1993; Duncan, 1996; Callard, 1998; McDowell, 1999; Moss and Dyck, 1999; Longhurst, 2000; Bondi, 2005; Mountz, 2004; Desbiens, 2004). Emotions are “relational flows, fluxes or currents, in-between people and places” that are potentially transformative of both (Bondi *et al.*, 2005, 3). Emotional geographies are useful to understand how power works through what can and cannot be said. In the Scottish highlands, these dynamics work to silence some emotions (Parr *et al.*, 2005, 98). The embodiment of emotions positions bodies spatially, making them feel out of place or comfortable, visible and invisible in specific ways (see Longhurst, 1997; Nast and Pile, 1998; Longhurst, 2001). Documenting emotional responses can also reveal how norm transgression and endorsement are embodied (Gatens, 2004). Emotions involve the body’s mechanisms and capacities and cannot be subsumed within the cultural. For example, shame rises with a glance at your bunions that remind you of childhood’s too-tight shoes, stretched budgets, and losing a pair of new shoes (Probyn, 2005, 63). Thus emotions are not limited to mediating and replicating existing social categories (Anderson and Harrison, 2006). The work of sorrow, in this paper, enables a politics: groups form, take up ways of acting, stick together with the glue of guilt and disintegrate when people tire of feeling bad. Metaphorically and physically, these politics divide. As an emotional geography, they bring bodies together in the spaces of ‘white’ and ‘of color’. The anti-racism discussed here makes spaces of pain in which race has more clear cut edges than it can accommodate genetically and theoretically. This paper explores the participation of sadness and anger in the production of a form of anti-racism. While debate over the politics of a focus on emotion *or* affect exists, this paper does not

have room to address itself to that discussion (but see Thien, 2005; Anderson and Harrison, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006 and see the approach of Probyn, 2005).

Emotions are integral to human society – people make sense of life through them, however differently, and they have a place in research and the public sphere (Narayan, 1988; Anderson and Smith, 2001). Emotion figures in relations of power and confrontations to change society. Rage over racism is inescapable, necessary. Making that anger known and speaking about pain have been important in the history of marginalized groups; it can provide politics with a sense of urgency (Ahmed, 2004). Notes Cowlshaw, writing of Aboriginal violence in Australia, “[i]t is useful...to imagine public violence as a way of breaking through the suffocating, complacent façade of national solicitude. Rioting can be seen as expressing rage consequent on the recognition that true recognition never occurs” (2003, 121).

Eliciting or expressing pain is an important element of anti-racism (see Burman and Chantler, 2004; Lee and Lutz, 2005; Srivastava, 2005). I use the term ‘pain’ to mean feelings of sorrow, sensations of blushing, tears and tightened throats as well as the anger from whites against other whites and nonwhites against whites and the further sadness that such anger brings (see Ahmed 2004). My argument concerns the invocation and expression of intense feelings of sadness in multi-racial, anti-racist activism as the primary means to induce thought and activism. This method seems an unsustainable foundation for confronting manifold racisms. I am critical only of the politics I discuss in this paper, in which guilt, sadness and anger are the key strategies, not of all emotion, nor certainly the project of anti-racism. Equally, the point is not to position (good) reason against (bad) feeling nor to label this pain as maudlin or melodramatic. Further, I am not critical of anti-racist training and activism because it employs a politics of injury in which subjects of color become invested in their pain (see Brown, 1995). Instead, I am concerned with an anti-racism that tugs on white peoples’ feelings of guilt and sadness, pulling them out, as a means to dismantle racism.

### ***Methodology***

The empirical basis of this paper is participant observation of anti-racism training and activism conducted between October 2003 and October 2005. In the first sub-section I write about my participant observation of four anti-racism training sessions led by four separate organizations, all in the US. In the next, I discuss the day to day work of an anti-racism group, ARG, (a pseudonym). Adding to the complexity, two of these trainings were requested by the ARG and were performed by two different anti-racism training organizations. The ARG is a committee of a larger group, the Alliance (also a pseudonym); the Alliance is a non-profit, national coalition with over 300 members that engages in policy and programmatic work in an area of social change. Alliance organizations are dispersed across the US. ARG committee members, also coming from a diversity

of places, mostly hold positions as directors or mid-level staff of organizations active in the Alliance.

The quotes, all anonymous, are a combination of actual emails to me and to the ARG members, verbatim notes and close approximations of conversations. I use them to indicate general tendencies that I observed. The paper is not an account based on interviewing others for their views; it is a partial perspective derived from my observations supplemented by the quotes of other participants. Someone else might highlight other aspects of this experience. Nonetheless, that fact does not diminish the paper's effort to think about the anti-racism discussed here through poststructural scholars' theories of difference, race, geography and history.

Throughout the paper I have used terms such as 'brown' 'nonwhite' 'light-skinned' to identify bodies. I also use 'white' and 'of color', which were the two terms most often used by the ARG and the anti-racism trainers. Of color is derived from a politics that suggests that the diversity of nonwhite people should recognize themselves as united through the experience of being of color in a white supremacist society even though they may be divided by class, culture, nation, gender and so on. I use multi-racial to mean different raced bodies were present but the very term "many" plus "racial" suggests there are 'races' when there are not. One consolation is that 'multi', unlike 'inter', could mean the embodiment of mixing, even though what we see is shades of pink and brown. While I recognize that all of these are imperfect terms, it being theoretically impossible to apply racial categories to any individual, they are, nonetheless, ways in which people are embodied in racist society. In anti-racist activism consciousness of racial phenotype is acute. It happens to be acute in essentialist terms. I do not buy into the categories that I use to mark who said what but in this context, there is some tendency for connections to occur between practice, skin and sadness or anger. It is also interesting to note when connections occur that do not line up.

My participation in the ARG was very important to me. I wanted to be engaged in anti-racist work because racism is a deeply embedded and disastrous aspect of this society. As a white woman, it mattered greatly to me that I act. The work was important emotionally – at the time, these were the people with whom I interacted most regularly, mostly by conference call and email conversations (and infrequently in person). My participation also helped me to develop my ideas about race, racism and anti-racism. As I will discuss below, I approached my work in the ARG with zeal – too much. As one nonwhite colleague in the ARG remarked (without intent to judge), I was often ahead of the group in terms of the time I could commit (I was then unwaged), the things I was able to write and the questions I was raising. This zeal was so powerful that I at first did not apply the theoretical position that I now use in this paper to my work with the group. Gradually, as things happened that made me think, 'but wait a minute', I would raise these concerns. Further, I had a troubled role in the trainings. On the one hand

I had read a lot and wanted to observe, on the other I was expected to participate. It was inevitable that from this experience, I would draw theoretical and political conclusions. Again, mine are not the only conclusions to be drawn.

The following section presents the research in two parts, one on anti-racism trainings and the other on the ARG's activism. I look at four difficulties I find with both the trainings and the activism. I have titled these 'Emotional intensity', 'Racism first', 'Non-specific geographies and histories' and 'Essentializing whiteness'. I then analyze the empirical data as evidence of a politics of pain and, in the next section, offer other ways that anti-racist training and activism might conceptualize race and racism. The second to last part proposes an embodied anti-racist ethics.

### **Emotional anti-racism**

When some white people talk about race in a space where they are asked to think about white privilege and the history of raced oppression in the United States, they feel anguished, torn, scared, confused, guilty (see also Cooper, 1997). Much anti-racism training is specifically designed to force white people to see that they gain from and perpetuate the negative historical legacy of whiteness. Thus in anti-racism training, white people come to know ("feel") that they are white (Alcoff, 1998, 7).

### ***Anti-racism training***

Formal anti-racism training began with diversity workshops called 'ethnotherapy' in the 1960s, which then gained strength in the 1980s (Lasch-Quinn, 1999; 2002). In addition to earlier efforts aimed at consciousness-raising, two strands of training developed: one focuses on individuals, inter-personal relations and cultural beliefs, another, anti-racism, confronts the structural relations of racism. The first strand is referred to as diversity training, which teaches people to accord equal respect to all cultures (Lasch-Quinn, 1999). Diversity training explores all differences. Similarly, the 'unlearning racism' or prejudice model suggests that racism consists of misconceptions about nonwhite groups (Scott, 2000). The majority of trainers focus on inter-personal relations whereas a minority analyzes institutional racism (the anti-racism strand) (Shapiro, 2002). Despite these differences in approach, techniques to get people in touch with their feelings seem to be applied by both (Scott, 2000). Indeed, even though the institutions that support racism are emphasized in anti-racism, the method relies on evoking individuals' emotions. Trainers of any type conduct one-off trainings of 1-3 days, day-long workshops and/or a process that spans several years. They take place in the workplace, whether corporate or nonprofit, universities and churches. This paper concerns trainers who use the anti-racism approach.

*Emotional intensity* Emotional response is central to the learning process in anti-racism training. It has two purposes: for whites, it enables an “emotional confrontation with no exit”; for nonwhites, the emotional impact is designed to “melt [away] denial, apologetics, and an identification with oppression” (Luft, 2005, 11).<sup>2</sup> The spaces of anti-racism training are meant for soul-baring. Here emotional displays of sadness are acceptable, whereas in other arenas they may not be. The training can be an emotionally harrowing experience for whites, but not necessarily for people of color. Anti-racism training explicitly does not invite people of color to explain racism unless they want to and does not ask for their testimonies. This method is based on the understanding that nonwhites should not be burdened with the responsibility of explanation or asked to demonstrate suffering.

One of the more wrenching exercises of one training required participants to form a bunch on one side of the room. The trainer then asked all those who consider themselves nonwhite, to cross over to the other side. When both sides face each other, each side is asked to ‘feel what it’s like to be on this side, looking over’. In my experience, a small group of nonwhite people faced a large group of white people. The distance created by our colleagues moving away and their act of looking back is a tremendously difficult experience, at least for the white people I saw. By the end of the exercise, which went through disability, poverty and so on, many participants had tears in their eyes. On another occasion, small groups were asked to discuss the question ‘why is racism important to you?’ Clearly not convinced by my arguments about social justice, the woman of color leading the group asked me, “but how do you *feel*?” Regardless of how much I had thought about racism, it was an emotional response that the other participants (all non-white) in my group wanted.

Some anti-racism training exercises reinforce racial division. During one training, a group of participants listened to some young people talk about participating for several months in a multi-racial youth group. One college age white man said he felt jealous of his nonwhite friends who, he thought, had something that bonds them and leaves him out. He said, “sometimes I wish I were [brown] like them”. A young woman of color responded, “that really hurts me to hear you say that”, as she started to cry. The contagion of tears meant that there were few dry eyes as she spoke about the pain of racism and why he should *not* desire to be a person of color. While I cannot question the validity of her sadness, I do wonder at the perspective that suggests his wish is hurtful, particularly given that we, the participants, knew he was struggling to think about race and privilege.

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel Luft’s paper is a work in progress. I am grateful for her willingness to let me cite it.

*Racism first* A model of oppression that privileges racism is used in the trainings. Rachel Luft (2005), an anti-racism trainer with the People's Institute, describes anti-racism training as one of the few surviving examples of single issue identity politics that eschews an examination of other oppressions. The reasoning behind the approach is that if racism is to be deeply understood, other oppressions cannot be discussed. Further, this training pursues an additive concept of oppression – it is always worse to be someone of color and GLBT or poor.

Defining race is a standard training activity. Part way through one such discussion, a woman (light-skinned and indigenous) wanted to add 'economic' to the definition of race conceived in the training. She argued that rural poor whites are oppressed almost as much as people of color as they have the least social capital. The trainer asked if this participant thought that poor whites were oppressed because of race, because they are white. A young white woman answered "Yes, in a way – they're called white trash". The trainers insisted, along with others in the group, that poor whites are oppressed by class but not by race and therefore cannot be included in the definition of race. This would suggest that a dominant form of whiteness is not oppressive of those groups that did not meet its standards. Yet, if one is named 'white trash' then one is immediately defined by race (Skelton, pers. comm. September 25, 2007). Unpacking the whiteness of white rural poor Southerners, Jamie Winders (2003) suggests moving beyond the framework that claims that with whiteness necessarily comes privilege (see also Jarosz and Lawson, 2002). Class and geography need to be central to analyses of race if scholars (and activists) are to challenge representations of race (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000 cited in Winders, 2003). Trainers, further, argue that when white people mention differences such as 'white trash', gender or class, it is to divert attention and subvert the central message which is about white privilege. Luft describes questions raised about anti-Semitism or gender as attempts to find "a release valve to the intensity of confrontation with racism and anti-racism that the trainers were specifically attempting to cultivate" (2005, 13).

*Non-specific geographies and histories* The trainings that I have seen are not tailored to the audience, the place nor to the issue the trainees work on. Similar exercises and the same conception of race were used by four organizations in trainings for a) a mostly white group confronting white hostility against nonwhite immigrants b) at an anti-racism workshop during an Alliance conference c) in an ARG-organized training and d) in a workshop with anti-racism trainers to discuss the need for an anti-racism training.

The history explained in the trainings that I attended is the history of African Americans and white people. Dates establish the birth and progression of racism. While 1492, the year Columbus arrived in the Caribbean is noted, the history of racism for these trainings begins in 1607 when Virginia was established and laws to institutionalize racial inequality were created. According to the trainers,

the 1640 uprising of indentured Black, Dutch and Irish servants established a clear separation—as punishment, the latter two groups were given four more years of servitude, the black man received a sentence of servitude in perpetuity. Law was the vehicle by which racism was institutionalized – for instance, the rule of hypo-descent<sup>3</sup>. A nonwhite woman from outside the US suggested that racism was alive before 1607, but her claim was not addressed. Left out was how US forms of racism were connected to or distinct from racism in other colonized places, slave economies or Europe over the ages. Equally absent was geopolitical considerations like race and imperialism in the Philippines (see San Juan, 2002) and the subtleties of race in North and South America (see Dzidzienyo and Oboler, 2005). The training evinced scant spatial or temporal specificity, while these are arguably elements of critical importance to any anti-racist practice (Bonnett, 1993a; Nayak, 2003).

*Essentializing whiteness* Anti-racism training tends to present an essentialist theory of whiteness and ‘color’. The training philosophy promotes the principle that “racial color is the lifeblood of resistance” (Luft, 2005, 10). It draws on ideas such as “[the] culture of color is authentic,” and “whiteness is organizational culture, characterized by bureaucratic norms of individualism and linear thinking” (Luft, 2005, 10). According to the trainers whose material I analyzed, nonwhites with power will never be racist because people of color can only be prejudiced but not racist. And though, as one trainer argued, not all whites are ‘in charge of things’, all white people are on ‘the line of white privilege’ together. Ultimately, because of the benefits that accrue from white skin, this means that all whites are racist – the take home message of anti-racism training that is left to be spoken on the final day. All the exercises are means to prepare participants to accept that statement.

Trainers also ask trainees: what do you appreciate about your culture, what are you proud of? This is done to show that whiteness has no culture – it is so empty that it must appropriate everyone else’s (see Bonnett, 1993b for counter argument). Some replied nothing or, sadly, ‘now I see and I’m ashamed of my culture’. One white man noted that the diversity training in which his organization is engaged has been “an emotional process” and that now he thinks of himself “as having grown up in a cultural prison – really white, really wealthy, I remember feeling imprisoned by that, and I look back on my desire to know people who were different from the box I was in”. At one point, I questioned whether the relationship between nonwhite culture and whiteness was always one of theft (as the training proposed). The trainers argued, yes, whiteness was a process of taking

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<sup>3</sup> Hypo-descent, or, the ‘one drop’ rule, categorized someone with an African American ancestor as African American. “The rule of hypo-descent is, therefore, an invention which we in the United States have made in order to keep biological facts from intruding into our collective racist fantasies” (Harris, 1964, 56 cited in Omi and Winant, 1986).



what was not a part of white culture and exploiting it. Alcoff proposes that the argument of appropriation needs some nuance (see her discussion of cultural crossover and the blues, 1998, 19-21).

Lines of difference are precise in the trainings in order to ensure that white people understand white privilege and to prevent backsliding away from an acknowledgement of that privilege. One woman who refused to identify as anything but 'human' was pressed repeatedly to claim her true (white) identity. Whites commonly engage in a "flight from feeling" which "accompanies a desire to 'not see' difference", both of which serve as a means to evade recognition of power (Frankenberg, 1993, 155, 14). And even if the white people are anti-racism trainers themselves, they will have a tough time figuring things out: one white trainer told us that the white people in her organization thought long and hard about privilege and when they came back to the people of color and reported their self-analysis, they were told, "you're not even close."

Anti-racism training divides people into 'caucuses' of whites and people of color. Groups go into separate rooms to ensure privacy. In these caucuses, each group, respectively, talks about how white supremacy and oppression are internalized. If the training will lead to work over several years, these caucuses will continue working separately, but some members of each caucus will also meet as a 'change team' to address institutionalized racism. The caucuses are designed to confront a problem identified by anti-racism trainers that white anti-racists tend to work with people of color, when, ideally, they should work in white groups. On the other hand, trainers also stipulate that no white group should act on its own against racism without doing so collaboratively with a group of color.

Questions about difference are bound to come up, but while there is space for emotional outpouring, there is little place for sustained examination of the complexities of social difference. A woman of color noted at a training that sometimes she feels more like a man than a woman and was unsure of when to cross over in the exercise described above, but she crossed when women were asked to cross over. A young woman with light skin whose father is white and whose mother is *mestizo* felt unsure of which caucus she belonged in. Her sister identifies as a person of color. A nonwhite woman told her, 'but you can't just choose to be a person of color'. She ended up in the white caucus. A woman who could pass as white but identifies with her indigenous ancestry, was welcomed when she joined the nonwhite caucus. At another training, a young white woman said that while she has white skin, half of her family is black and she feels more comfortable with that side of the family. "But," insisted a woman of color, "you are white and you have white skin privilege." A moment later the same woman of color included Jews as "people of color who have been oppressed for generations". These junctures are important places for re-examining identity-based truths, yet the anti-racist model applied in these examples is designed to avoid them. Anti-racism

tends to require that people make clear choices about which racial grouping they fit. I turn now to an analysis of the ARG's activism – its meetings, composition, decisions and strategies.

### ***The Activism of the Anti-Racism Group***

The active membership of the ARG, at the time I joined, consisted of two nonwhite women chairs, a white man who later become co-chair and a white Jewish woman, two men of color, a white woman representative from the Alliance, and, occasionally others who were white, indigenous, Indian and black. Active membership consisted of being on all or most monthly conference calls and participating in emails almost daily. It meant further, contributing to ARG internal policy and pursuing its work plan goals. Most ARG members had full time jobs in organizations associated with the Alliance, a fact that made it difficult for many to devote much time to the ARG. Nonetheless, the ARG members put together a work plan, wrote various statements, held a meeting with anti-racism trainers, board, and staff, conducted a series of sessions at the annual Alliance conference on racial justice and organized an anti-racism training. The ARG's activism made racism visible within the Alliance, which had not considered this dimension in their work.

*Emotional intensity* Relations within the ARG and between the ARG and the staff, board and some representatives of other organizations in the Alliance were tense throughout the two years. Significant bouts of hostility occurred among group members. The fact that the ARG conversed monthly on a conference call but used email as the primary mode of communication was partly responsible for the destructive atmosphere. We all assumed the worst of each other, misunderstood communications, flamed in response, shouted in caps, wrote lengthy emails to explain, justify or pontificate and so on. Ultimately one nonwhite co-chair left the group, in part as a consequence of these hostile relations.

Unfriendly relationships between ARG members and other Alliance members had developed over the decade of the Alliance's existence. The Alliance staff had been white for most of its short history. The assumption was that when people disagreed with the ARG, institutionalized racism was at the root. On the Alliance side there may have been a sense that racism was peripheral to their work and instead that class was the difference that mattered. ARG members were certain that the Alliance staff was at best resistant to change and at worst, deliberately thwarting ARG efforts to have an anti-racism training. This training, if it could happen, was seen by ARG as the necessary catalyst for real change. This idea was so strong that at times it seemed we could not develop our own analyses and definitions, we instead had to wait for the training.

After this tension over thwarted agendas had continued unabated, a meeting was held to discuss tensions between the ARG and the Alliance (board and staff). To lead off the discussion, the woman of color co-chair of the ARG noted how

much pain people of color felt at the annual conference one year ago. The response from an Alliance board member was: “we didn’t realize that you had experienced such pain, we really didn’t know. And if we had known, we would have paid more attention.” Another ARG member, over the years, had used anger and accusations of racism against Alliance board and staff, which did not move the anti-racism process forward collectively and certainly not as well, apparently, as the expression of pain did. In any event, the Alliance agreed to put racism on its agenda, to address it at the next conference and to begin a training process.

*Racism first* The ARG chose to focus on racism rather than the articulation of oppressions in their area of work. It was not as if ARG members did not recognize class or gender, but they made a strategic decision to address racism because of its invisibility to Alliance members. The ARG’s primary concern was that resources and decision making power were not shared equally between white groups and groups of color within the Alliance as a consequence of institutionalized racism. Another concern was that the staff of many organizations did not reflect, racially, their client base (nonwhites) and their internal processes (hiring, decision making) were derived from dominant, white society. The ARG knew that many in the Alliance understood class to be central to the problem the Alliance addresses. An indigenous man, an intermittent member, in a conversation about what the ARG’s focus should be noted, “there are many poor whites, you know”. Silence – and the conversation died there. In discussing whether a call for sessions for an Alliance conference would include the word class in addition to race, a white male ARG member commented that using class might bring people who do not relate to race “in through the side door” which did not seem honest to him (because this would indicate that the term race makes them uncomfortable or they are blind to racism).

*Non-specific geographies and histories* The ARG membership represented a diversity of racialized groups but this diversity was not a resource for the group’s analysis of race or its activist practice. While racisms must continue to be revealed, the ARG tended to be unreceptive to the significance of variably located racialized differences whether outside the US or within. Anti-racism in Texas or Atlanta might be approached differently than in New York or Maine. For instance, the mostly black organizing committee for the 2005 Alliance conference (held in a southern city) was not pleased with the ARG blurb (that I wrote) announcing racism as a new, central interest of the Alliance. The chair of the organizing committee noted, that their city ‘is not just about Martin Luther King anymore’. Further, in planning for the same conference, slavery and civil rights were aspects that some ARG members proposed highlighting. A conversation ensued about the indigenous and Latino migrant histories and present day lives that are part of this city’s landscape as well, but the group decided to focus field trips on the history of civil rights (see Alcoff, 2003 for a discussion of the black/white binary). Finally, an ARG member from an indigenous nation pointed out that many American Indians

are more comfortable remaining out of view rather than in the confrontational anti-racist politics that the ARG practiced.

The centrality of a painful interpretation of history encouraged what were unspoken certainties about race, racism, white privilege and anti-racism. The ARG insisted on the importance of people of color leadership and the need to recognize the capabilities and constraints of people of color. But it left unanalyzed questions concerning how exactly people are differently racialized, the role of class and gender and what those differences mean for its own area of work. Embedded in a US movement concerning a global issue, the ARG membership did not consider the complexities of race, anti-racism and racism within and outside the US. The geography of race and its connection to practice was not analyzed. My argument is not that the ARG was wrong to focus on racism. As Cindi Katz (1998, 258) notes, politics requires “figuring out which differences matter when” in order to work through alliance for meaningful change. Alliance was disabled due to the ARG’s inability to work with the frictions of difference (see Tsing, 2004).

*Essentializing whiteness* White people in the ARG tended to react harshly toward themselves and other whites in anti-racist activism. This occurred when white people felt that someone failed to understand the analysis or when they wanted to prove their anti-racist credentials. For instance, in reply to a white woman explaining that she had experienced racism as a girl at the hands of nonwhite students, I said, “but the training would help you to understand that only white people can be racist”. Expressing some fear but also desire to prove she could be anti-racist, an Alliance staff member, a white woman, new to the ARG noted in an email to me,

...I really want to understand...how I can be an effective ally and not an obnoxious wannabe “good white”! That is very important to me. I feel like I’m still building trust and relationships in a very charged and tricky environment that I don’t understand very well, which makes me very cautious about what I say to whom. But I am planning to hang in there and hoping I can contribute more over time (2004).

White people are understood to be unquestionably “obnoxious” if they want to be “good whites” (liberals who just want to ‘get along’) and they are better when they have figured out the way to be allies. A white man who became an ARG co-chair was often apologizing to people of color in the group and being careful not to challenge them. After this same co-chair wrote a harsh email to the Alliance board for being too slow in getting on the ‘anti-racism train’, he apologized profusely to us and the Board (and was reminded for months after by some ARG members of his wrong doing). When I wanted to quit the ARG out of frustration, I was told by this white co-chair that this is the luxury of white privilege – to be able to walk

away from the struggle of anti-racism and thus, to counter my white privilege, I should continue.

The volatile environment was also produced by people of color. On three occasions, white women were subjected to harsh words by C\_\_ a man of color. One was silenced for a suggestion she made and another was held responsible for something far beyond her control. No one rebuked him. White people were sometimes described in conference calls as falling back on the safe language of diversity. They were guilty, some thought, of jumping on the ARG bandwagon when they had not previously shown interest, but then were criticized for not joining soon enough. In our online and phone conversations, white people were encouraged (not required) to wait for the nonwhite people to speak. To speak first would mean deploying the privilege that enables that speech and further institutionalizing the silencing of people of color. Some of us (like me) did not always adhere to this principle, but felt guilty when we did not.

At the 2005 Alliance conference the ARG held two meetings, the first to invite new members and the second to enable more discussion. I went to the first during which time, a white woman, N\_\_, suggested that the role of white people in the ARG should be discussed in the second meeting. The second meeting began with introductions and answers to the question of why we were interested in the ARG. The white co-chair said that as a participant in institutionalized racism, he is less than human. By being part of anti-racist work, he regains his humanity. C\_\_ (mentioned earlier) expressed the pain he had felt from a personal experience as a teenager and then later in life when his professional credentials were questioned. Introducing myself, I explained my research on whiteness and anti-racism and described my work with the ARG over the past two years. Before the next person had gotten through her introduction, a man of color new to the ARG, J\_\_, interrupted her saying he was uncomfortable with my research, did not want to be a subject and further said, as he began to weep, that if I were in his neighborhood in New York, he would “settle this on the street”. The mostly white audience then peppered me with questions, but I was not given time to answer. One white woman said she didn’t agree with the research if it was only for my benefit. Older grievances were brought up. My stomach twisted. A woman of color who had recently become active on the ARG burst into tears while expressing the pain I had caused her when I had (accidentally) interrupted her on a conference call. She added, “you’re doing research on racism, but practicing white supremacy”. An interchange between me and N\_\_, was the first time I could speak. It went like this:

N: Did you hear J\_\_?

RS: Yes, I...

N: (interrupts) No. I need to know that you heard him.

RS: Yes, I did hear him.

N: Tell me what he said.

- RS: He said he feels pain.  
 N: Why do you think he feels pain?  
 RS: Because he is upset about my research, researching here  
 N: Say why he feels pain.  
 RS: Because he did not agree to it, but I thought...  
 N: (interrupts). And what does he want you to do?  
 RS: He wants me to stop taking notes.

Eventually the group voted to ask me to leave the meeting, which I did, turning over my notes to one of the white, women members, a friend of mine, who said she had to do it if she wanted to continue working with the group. During this process, C\_\_ said that if I did not turn over my notes he would personally go to my university and get me fired. When I expressed my fear of further repercussions from the group, a woman of color who had recently joined the ARG said, “but we’re not like you”, indicating that while the group could be trusted, I could not. As I began to walk downstairs, a young black man called out to me. He said he could not let me walk away without speaking to me. This man told me that he had not known what to say in the meeting but he wanted to tell me that he didn’t feel that I was hurting him in the way that the others did. He noted that I seemed to become very powerful in the eyes of the participants – that I became larger than life. “The others let you take away all of their power”, he said. And the fact that neither my voice nor my hands shook and I did not cry, he thought, made me even more of an imposing figure. Later that evening a white woman who had been present explained to me, that if I had just showed some emotion, if I had cried, they might not have been so tough. As Tracy Skelton points out, these demands are gendered (pers. comm. September 25, 2007).

### ***A Politics of Pain***

It is no wonder that these emotions spark forth and leak out when race is addressed in this way – anti-racism, in these cases, is a politics of pain. It is pain that is deployed, gets attention and is legitimized (‘oh, you were in pain, we didn’t know, now we’ll pay attention’). On the one hand, pain is truth. The pain of subalterns, because of its source, is universally intelligible and already available as knowledge (Berlant, 2001). Pain, as the focus of interaction keeps anti-racist politics in the realm of ‘what was done *to* you’ ‘by’ white people. By keeping the actions of others as well as the past foregrounded might preclude attention to the future. Further, if emotional response is the primary means by which racism gets attention, this belittles racism’s historical and structural significance. Additionally, regarding white privilege, it is only through painful emotional experience, from which there is no escape, that whiteness can be learned, according to anti-racism trainers. Perhaps for some white and nonwhite people this method is cathartic, but it is also exhausting. Sentimental politics mobilize empathy through stories of others’ pain (Berlant, 2001) and, in this case, guilt about the white-nonwhite

relation. However, for some middle class white progressives, thinking about others' suffering could well be transitory; you feel sadness, perhaps quite deeply, and then, you stop weeping and life moves on. It does not help anti-racism if people feel sad and guilty about their privilege, bow and scrape because they have been 'bad whites', lash out at each other or, finally, leave. This emotionalism grows from the anti-racist thinking described above.

A "harangue-flagellation" (Lasch-Quinn, 2001, xv) model of anti-racism that emerged in the 1960s became the basis of present day training techniques. Initially, this model called for rage on the part of blacks and restrained submission via admission of guilt for whites (Lasch-Quinn, 2001, xv). Since then, anti-racism has been 'enterprised-up' into a marketable object that continues to rely on emotionalism rather than critical, subtle analyses. Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz (2005, 19) wonder whether the confessional style of moral education applied by anti-racism will be effective and whether greater awareness of suffering will do more than make whites feel guilty or simply feel bad. A moral preoccupation is evident in anti-racist social movements whereby therapy and emotional expression become associated with social change (Srivastava, 2005).

It is crucial that white people are part of anti-racism and they clearly do need to recognize the privilege that comes with certain forms of whiteness. However, the theory and method of anti-racism training and advocacy lend an emotional intensity to the politics that makes white participation and recognition of privilege very difficult. Even though anti-racist discourse emphasizes institutionalized oppression, the techniques are personalized to make people think about their *own* privilege. And despite the acknowledgement, eventually, of privilege, there is a built-in futility – it will take an inestimable amount of time before white anti-racism trainers entirely understand their privilege, let alone those who are not trainers. This task of understanding racism is difficult, but the emphasis on its near impossibility frames racism as a permanent divisive (interpersonal) presence.

Pain, whether articulated from the position of victim providing a biographical account or called up by nonprofits to make a point, can escape accountability and slip around the strategies that aim to harness it. As a researcher, Gerry Pratt (2007) questioned her right to make people re-experience their pain, to bring people to tears. She described her feelings about this which occurred when, while giving a speech, the audience dissolved into tears. At that point someone in her audience said, 'let's change the tears to anger' (see also her discussion of melodrama, Pratt, 2004). But unlike researchers, organizations or movements may not question this right to move people, continuing to use emotion and supplanting social justice with sentimental politics and the staging of tears. When organizations raised money to fund advocacy on behalf of young women murdered in the border town of Ciudad Juarez (see Wright, 2001; 2006), they were susceptible to the

accusation of selling pain (Wright, 2007). Non-governmental organizations fought over who had the most mothers of the murdered as members and traded on the legitimacy of the personal testimonial, evoking sorrow that comes to stand for collective experience. The repetition of stories of pain took diverse experiences and bundled them into a static image of women as mothers of murdered daughters (not daughters who live with abuse or women who are not mothers etc.) translatable across audiences (Wright, 2007). Suggests Lauren Berlant, “[i]f identity politics is a literacy program in the alphabet of pain, its subjects must also assume that the signs of subordination they feel also tell a story they do not feel yet, or know, about how to construct the narrative to come” (2001, 154).

### **Productive uncertainty and the fuzziness<sup>4</sup> of race**

Anti-racist training describes hesitancy as simply whites trying to avoid knowing they have white privilege rather than a moment when whiteness falters. Progressive whites may be desirous of anti-racist change, but they have questions and uncertainties. Uncertainty is part of the preoccupation with race and it too is productive; it can create a space for extending ourselves towards others because our differences incite interest. For instance, Probyn (2005, 94-97) recounts her actions (and emotions) at an historic gathering after the release of the report on the Stolen Generations.<sup>5</sup> While everyone stood and turned their backs on a government official who was apparently saying the wrong things, she sat with her head in her hands, completely unsure of what to do, ashamed over not knowing, but wanting to be part of that gathering. Not all hesitation is a moment when identity shifts and loses strength, but whiteness hesitating does not necessarily reflect a desire to avoid engagement with anti-racism. There are, of course, many people who think in stereotypes or who do not acknowledge structural racism. They too figure in the future. I am doubtful that eliciting pain and sadness toward understanding white privilege will work in their case (see Hartigan, 2001; Nayak, 2003). Anoop Nayak (2003), for instance, finds in his ethnography of white youth in Northern England, that they are not opposed to the tenets of anti-racism, but feel left out and treated unfairly by it.

The junctures I have documented, in which people offered other ways of conceptualizing difference, were not taken as opportunities to develop a more

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<sup>4</sup> This term from Saldanha, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> ‘The Stolen Generations’ refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly those of white fathers and Aboriginal mothers, who were taken from their families to be raised by white parents with the intent that the children and their offspring would become, over time, pale skinned and culturally white (see Bringing them Home of the Australian government’s Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/>)



subtle and thus stronger analysis of race, racism and oppression. If they had been taken as opportunities, there might have been more space for the Alliance staff woman who is light-skinned but her family is mixed Anglo and Latino to wonder in which caucus (white, of color) she belonged (anti-racism training section). Linda Martín Alcoff elaborates on this racial fuzziness:

...I need to tell something about my own identity, which, like an increasing number of others in this country, is racially complex. In some places in the US, I am perceived to look “white” and am assumed to be white. This means that, in those contexts, in one sense I am white, and therefore I know something about white privilege from the inside...My mother and stepfather are white southerners, with all that that can imply. However, my father was Latino with mixed Spanish, Indian and African heritage...Growing up in Florida, my sister and I were generally introduced to newcomers as my mother’s “Latin daughters.” So I have also known something about white chauvinism, mostly of the cultural sort (for example, “You must be so thankful to be in this country” and other assorted baseless assumptions) (1998, 9).

In white struggles against racism, Alcoff notes that a sense of self-love is important. Yet the ‘new abolitionism’, which asks white people to become ‘traitors’ to whiteness, toward its eventual abolition (see Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996), requires a portrait of white racism that reveals how white self love has been derived through killing people, taking their resources and obliterating their knowledge systems. To present this as the complete picture of whiteness “threatens [whites’] very ability to be moral today, because it threatens their ability to imagine themselves as having a socially coherent relation to a past and a future toward which anyone could feel an attachment” (1998, 18-19). In exploring this abolitionist sentiment, Alcoff wonders, “[i]s it possible to feel o.k. about being white?” (1998, 8). Rejecting the suggestion that to be anti-racist whites must discard or disdain white identity, she answers that it is possible. Whiteness takes many dangerous forms (that are not only the purview of whiteness)—imperialism, militarism, colonialism, racism, cultural and economic exploitation—and also takes forms emboldened by curiosity, love or a sense of responsibility. Whiteness, moreover, also encompasses an interest in other non-supremacist ways of being white. It comes in the form of appreciation, anti-oppression work and desiring proximity to difference. These explorations potentially open doors to critical knowledge about all racialized difference. The wish to be nonwhite in order to be part of a group expressed by the young white man in the section on training might be acknowledged neither as white betrayal, nor as white insensitivity to privilege, neither with adulation nor with tears. Instead it could be simply interesting or an opening for discussion.

The subjective investment of white youth (and others) in anti-racist politics is desirable, but the means to encourage such investment is to connect local histories and lived culture to the anti-oppression agenda (Nayak, 2003). The breadth of histories and geographies of race and racisms is important to continue researching. This does not mean an emphasis on ethnic whiteness that dissolves the power of whiteness into national diasporic identities that practice discrete, intact forms of white culture. In England, white subject positions are tenuously held and cannot be exhaustively explained by their embeddness in an imperialist past (2003, 156). After all, people of color have been known to work in racist alliance with whites against other groups of color suggesting the need for a plural concept of racisms (Nayak, 2003). Nayak writes,

I would suggest that making slippery the frozen status of white-Anglo ethnicity may allow for new points of connection to emerge for white youth. Moreover, if these emergent ethnicities can be encouraged to flourish outside the ideological nexus that merges whiteness, racism and nationhood, there remains cause for hope.

This hope might be extended across the Atlantic.

In the US, Cindi Katz calls for ‘countertopographies’ connecting the lives of youth from Howa, Sudan and Harlem, NY, as a means to “slice through the lethal binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’, calling forth political projects that confront what it means to live – everywhere...” (Katz, 2004). Katz’ contour lines link the ‘fates and futures’ of people in places around the world (see also Massey, 2005). These contour lines reveal material connections that disrupt rigid delineations of oppressed and oppressor. A grounded, translocal politics shows how globalized capitalism builds upon gendered, racial, class and nationalist oppressions. “What politics might work the contours connecting carceral California, sweatshop New York, maquiladora Mexico, and structurally adjusted Howa, and back again?” (Katz, 2001, 1231). A ‘countertopographic’ anti-racist activism might condemn resurgent white nationalism in France (see Stoler, 2005), confront policies erected against Latino immigrants in the US, enable a progressive sense of place and reject the feminization of the global assembly line. Saldanha suggests:

Responsibility, activism and anti-racist policy will only follow from feeling and understanding the geographical differentials that exist between many different kinds of bodies: between a Jew and a black soldier, between a woman in the Sahel and a woman in Wall Street, between a Peruvian peasant and a Chinese journalist (2006, 21).

This anti-racist ethics involves feeling and understanding and feeling of a different sort than what I have described earlier. This is an embodied, ethical sense of these differences involving a form of relation to the self in which relations with others are not optional (see Probyn, 2000, 55). Configurations of power look more

complex with greater knowledge about what keeps bodies physically in place and what limits possible forms of difference as well as with openness to the potential in the connections among bodies.

The anti-racist thought underlying the trainings and the ARG's activism ensures emotionalism. It forces people to think in terms of oppressor and oppressed in which whiteness and 'nonwhiteness' stand in uncomplicated opposition to each other and the power of whiteness is complete, towering. All too familiar binaries such as 'being racist; experiencing racism; being an oppressor; not experiencing oppression; silencing; not being silenced' (Bonnett, 1997) create a space in which white people often shed tears and feel contrite for being white. The essentialist theory of whiteness that at least some anti-racism training and activism employs imbues whiteness with only negative possibility—white people cannot see their privilege, will not understand its effects and will not be able to know these effects but through emotionally fraught teaching in which all 'ways out' are closed off. With this strategy, the ARG could not see possibility in "pleasure, curiosity and concern" that could conceivably accompany phenotypical difference "outside of common-sense taxonomies" (Saldanha, 2006, 21). With race, there is an always incomplete range of possibilities inclusive of many consequential connections in mundane life, companionships and animosities, forms of injustice, unexpected articulations and negotiations toward other futures. Re-theorizing race in ways that do not bind white/brown together in constant opposition is important to the anti-racist project and to making anti-racism less of a politics that relies on pain.

### **Toward an embodied anti-racist ethics**

How *do* people become willing to think about who they are, and then what's to be done to confront racism? The concept of shame that I will discuss next seems most useful in the arena of ethics. It may be less helpful to the realm of politics—either those politics from within to change institutions (described here) or from without to set them on fire.

Accounts from the Australian context provide some guidance on these subjects. I want to agree with Elspeth Probyn's<sup>6</sup> proposal in *Blush* (2005), which is, finally, about the embodiment of ethics, that a particular form of shame is something to welcome. As she notes, this is not a typical argument as people tend to want to overcome or avoid shame in favor of pride. But shame is important, she writes, because it arises out of an interest in the world. It comes from a desire for connection that remains unfulfilled. People feel shame because they want that interest to continue. Because "the reduction of interest that prompts shame is always incomplete[,]. . . shame promises a return of interest, joy and connection"

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<sup>6</sup> I realize that Elspeth Probyn is a Canadian living in Australia.

(2005, xiii). This is different from self pity or guilt/resentment. Unlike guilt, shame requires a deeper evaluation of the self because it concerns how others think of us, but also how we see ourselves. Avoiding shame allows guilt to flourish. "...[S]hame, left unspoken, solidifies as a layer of intensity that never seems to go away" (Probyn, 2005, 47). There is a difference between shaming by others and having one's own sense of shame. Guilt in social movements is derived from moral reproach and can be undone by a fix of some sort such as an apology that, once accomplished, can remove a sense of responsibility.

Whiteness is an abstract concept that can be explored empirically and theoretically from several angles. It can be discussed impersonally. But racial identity is also, clearly embodied emotionally. Probyn's examples through which she came to see the value of shame include interactions with her mixed race lover (2001), her (2005) reading of various texts, engagement with her grandmother's poetry and her response to seeing Uluru (surprise, wonder and sobbing). Her sense of shame probably did not come from someone else who trained ideas into her or from political activism. Somehow she acquired the interest to think critically about settler society and her place in it. However, she is exemplary in that she is able to offer generous consideration to outback white pastoralists and the white middle of Australia, among others, by acknowledging the "physiological-psychological-sociological complexity" and "delicacy" of (white) shame (see pages 70-71). This critical generosity could feature in anti-racism. Reading Probyn then, ethics is embodied through skin, emotion of various sorts, knowledge and kindness.

Drawing on Probyn, a paper produced from interviews with white Australian tourists to Uluru argues that 'moral gateways' can open the self to shame, therefore rendering their Australian subjectivities unfamiliar and encouraging reconciliation (Waite *et al.*, 2007). Their paper is an example of the desire to support practices enabling joint, nearly impossible futures (*cf* Cowlishaw, 2003). Because of this, perhaps, the authors seem to be somewhat too certain of what constitutes successful (feeling shame) and unsuccessful (guilt, Enlightenment rationality, impartiality) results of the tourism. Most of the interview subjects fall well short of the authors' expectations. The authors appear to suggest that there is a point that they can discern, after which, subjects 'get it' (when the "moral gateway" swings open). Nonetheless, they do provide some documentation of how things like educational materials, Aboriginal guides, decisions not to climb the rock, the embodied experience of the place and openness to other ideas combine to encourage the reflexive process. They suggest that feeling guilty about being a white Australian is not a way forward. They propose, instead that "the Park [can be seen] as a moral gateway suspended in-between indigenous and non-indigenous

cultures: fundamental to Anangu<sup>7</sup> culture yet always partially disengaged from it; secondary to the settler nation yet many non-indigenous people are attached to Uluru emotionally and historically” (Waitt *et al.*, 2007, 260-261). This recognition of such in-betweenness is useful. Further, like Probyn’s approach to whiteness and her concept of shame, the embodied engagement with a rock, histories and oneself, undertaken without induced tears and hostility, could be another way of practicing anti-racism.

Probyn notes that the effects of shame are not always good. In some politics, shame can become a weapon of moral reproach used against those seen as outside the cause (2005, 106). She writes, “[a]t the personal and individual level [shame] may be the wellspring for all sorts of actions” (2005, 79). Shame can allow for “...knowledge to circulate, softened by the affective cloaking of shared emotions” because, rather than through the vehicle of the moral lecture, the “...public acceptance of shame [allows] people to own up to their own ignorance” (2005, 99). Returning to my example, perhaps anti-racism training, for those who have not thought about racism much, ignites the interest that cannot be fully followed through. It is most likely that anti-racist trainers would argue that they encourage this interest, rather than guilt. However, it is unclear how they could do so given the moralizing and personalizing bent of the training. Further, as I will suggest next, if the question of race is presented as clear and certain, it might thwart the rise of shame through interest in the world.

An ethical obligation to others recognizes that the social imaginary of a place continues in present-day institutions and national narratives. This means that those who live in the present cannot escape responsibility for how these institutions were built and what they continue to do. But social imaginaries consist of many overlapping imaginaries, and the past of both Europeans and Indigenous peoples is multiplicitous, as Australian philosophers, Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd note (1999, 148). These histories are intertwined in ways that are not as neat as anti-racist teaching tells us – they were genocidal and co-existing, they were cruel and perhaps caring. Trans-cultural and intergenerational proximities potentially forge new relations through different affective experiences (Probyn, 2005). Without erasing the violence of settler societies and acts of rape, it can also be said that some part of the history of contact is its mixed offspring (Probyn, 2005). The fact of mixing is potentially productive of bitterness and positive engagement, of erasure and ongoing connection. Encounters among significantly different others may open one imaginary to another, offering perspectives and opportunities for the re-negotiation of identity as well as occasion for conflict (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999). However, acknowledgement of marginalized groups and different others cannot be

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<sup>7</sup> Waitt *et al.*’s term, meaning human being or person in the language of central and western Australia.

purely cognitive, it “must involve an affective and corporeal transformation of the way we experience self and other, identity and community” (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, 131-132). Ethical, emotional, ‘topographically’-inspired citizenship requires “an immanent, embodied and ongoing negotiation [among] multiple forms of sociability” (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, 149).

## Conclusions

This paper has analyzed instances of anti-racist activism and training in which sadness is drawn out of white participants. Pain as a means to attract concern from whites about racism is too fleeting a basis for anti-racism and may even work against it. This pain is elicited by using a notion of race that essentializes whiteness and does not acknowledge the fuzziness of race and the productiveness of its uncertainty. White people need to be involved in anti-racism, but these elements militate against such involvement. Further, the geographical imaginaries of this anti-racist practice omit differences in how racism manifests and what to do about it that are specific to place. This geographical understanding of the world tends to reduce racism to US-centric binaries and the ‘black-white’ divide, excluding other power geometries. I agree with those who have argued for greater pleasure, humor, absurdity and celebration in politics (e.g. Torgerson, 1999; Grosz, 2001; Merrifield, 2002), but I do not have examples of an anti-racist politics of joy.

Though it is important to point out the complicities and pitfalls of identity politics, particularly in the face of continued efforts to build such movements, there are no definitive answers (Joseph, 2002). I suggested the benefits of shame/interest, anti-racism as if geography mattered, race conceptualized as fuzzy, whiteness as multiple, imaginaries as overlapping and racism as more tangled. I proposed that anti-racism include the difficult work of building counter-topographies that recognize which differences matter when and that reveal the links among racism, geopolitics, class and gender. I have made these arguments in the interest of a stronger anti-racist politics.

Feminist scholarship on the body has laid part of the groundwork for the current interest in the geography of emotion. Embodiment, a conceptual opening, has helped me to think through not only pain and sadness, but also race and anti-racism. Shame, an emotional and affective interest that is not yet returned, is an ethical engagement with who we are becoming. All bodies become through connections and actions, not through stable identities that ‘are white’ or ‘are of color’ or that fit neatly into positions of victim and oppressor within the dynamic matrix of racism. Emotion is not a distortion of reason. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) refer to reason as an embodied capacity that arises out of a collective process. The development of reason and reasonable citizens depends “...on our ability to become something other than what we were through the collective endeavour to understand something we did not understand before...” (1999, 127). Other embodiments of anti-racism could work from these positions.

An anti-racist ethics seems an important start and one which has greater potential as a basis for social change than the anti-racist politics described in this paper. Ethics is a relation with the self and an obligation to others or, responsibility to “what there is and what debts we owe it” (Grosz, 2001, no page). As such, it is a critical basis of social change efforts. A person is a body, both sexed and raced, who has to relate to other bodies. Ethics, then, is an embodied relation in the sense that reflexivity, reason and emotion emerge in encounter with the self and others. This sense of embodied ethics would be part of a different anti-racism that includes greater humor and fewer tears, more laughter and less anger. Generosity, moreover, is an alternative bodily extension toward others who are angry, uncertain, or who deny racism. An embodied anti-racist ethics would draw on reflexivity and reason to produce analyses of race that enable the many emotions associated with its fuzziness – love, sorrow, boredom, wonder.

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