GAVAN TITLEY
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

No apologies for cross-posting: European trans-media space and the digital circuitries of racism

ABSTRACT

This article proposes points of departure for researching the circulation and assemblage of racist ideas and racializing discourses in the trans-media space of interactive, hybrid digital media. It contends that racist mobilizations are increasingly invested in organized and opportunistic communicative actions that depend on the integration of interactive digital media to a wider media ecology and European political environment. Further, if social media can be understood as a constant 'invitation to discourse', then they also provide an invitation to discourse on the nature and scope of racism in a putatively 'post-racial' era. In contending that the affordances and dynamics of social media networks are politically generative in relation to the politics of racism, it proposes working with malleable resources in the sociology of racism to develop approaches that are not limited to the established focus on extremist sites, but that can account both for the circuitries of digital media exchange and the particularities of regional racial formations.

KEYWORDS

racism
social media
post-racialism
Europe
North America
discourse

1. Such exchanges have generated an extensive vocabulary for describing situated forms of destructive, unsettling or contrarian engagement. In Sharma's quotation, the phrase 'griefing' refers to a concerted attempt to disrupt online communities. In this sense it was first used in online gaming networks to describe individual or collectively organized disruption of other players in multi-player games, but has expanded to include, for example, organized interventions in Wikipedia's crowd-sourced editing processes, or Facebook pages maintained by identifiable interests, and so forth. The term 'trolling' is similar, though it tends to be applied to disruptive interventions in the discursive flow of online discussions (through off-point, inflammatory, absurd, insulting or sarcastic interventions), and given its subjective quality, has become something of a floating signifier for a disparate range of engagements.

2. A hashtag is a word or phrase prefixed with the hashtag symbol # that allows Twitter users to coordinate, group and search for related posts and threads. Hashtags that are quantitatively popular or that are being applied to posts with significant temporal intensity may 'trend' on Twitter, i.e. be listed on the user interface as the top hashtags in the given (inter)national environment at a certain moment. For further details see Bruns and Burgess (2012).

INTRODUCTION

If Europe can be understood as a 'new space of digital crossings', an examination of this mediated and mediating trans-media space of diasporic communicative action must also approach it as a space of 'cross-posting'; where 'migrants' and diasporic subjects are endlessly racialized, and their presence abstracted and rendered as a productive political question for (European) majority deliberation. As Koen Leurs argues, '… digital spaces are not mute, neutral and external backdrops of identity formation, but distinct expressive cultures filled with ideologies, hierarchies and politics' (Leurs 2012: 22). Online communications and networked social media interactions provide key sites for the delineation of hierarchies of belonging, and the expansive rehearsal and contestation of racializing discourses, tropes and rationalities. The aim of this article is to complement the focus on 'cultural crossings' by integrating a focus on the settling and unsettling of racisms into the study of these convergent digital media spaces.

In so doing, the conventional disclaimer that this article provides a limited and partial assessment is amplified by the challenges to theory posed by the 'turbulence of networked communications' (Dean 2010: 1–3). Circuits of social media exchange,[1] as Sanjay Sharma argues, generate a 'racialized info-overload' of 'casual racial banter, race-hate comments, "griefing", images, videos and anti-racist sentiment (that) bewilderingly intermingle, mash-up and virally circulate' (2013: 47). However, this article departs from the observation that, for the most part, this 'racialized overload' is currently marginal to research into racisms online. Arguably this is not only despite but also because of the ways in which networked digital media practices have – in a very literal sense – made the headlines over the last two years when it comes to the politics of racism. Three instances where social media dynamics have been instrumental in the racialization of diasporic populations develop this observation, after which the approach and structure of the article will be outlined.

First, in autumn 2012, the film *The Innocence of Muslims* was posted on YouTube, the digital video sharing platform, and in a thinly veiled 'parody' of the life of the Prophet Mohammed, strung together a range of established forms of provocation, among them the depiction of Mohammed as a pedophile. This 'viral' video sought to infect divergent body politics by stimulating latent conflicts over blasphemy, freedom of expression and the putative 'limits' of multiculturalism and legitimate presence in the public sphere. Shortly afterwards, international attention was drawn to the second example, a disagreement between the social networking/micro-blogging site Twitter and the French state and allied NGOs over the legality of tweets circulated under the hashtag[2] *#unbonjuif* ('a good Jew') and *#unjuifmort* ('a dead Jew'). The decision of the Union of Jewish Students of France to take legal action against Twitter – for refusing to disclose the identities of account holders deemed to have broken French laws prohibiting Holocaust denial – focused much of this international coverage on the tension between Twitter's recourse to a First Amendment defence of free speech, and public communications in European jurisdictions with explicit – if complex – laws on hate speech (Edwards and Matwhshyn 2013; see also Bleich 2011). However *#unbonjuif* emerged in an overlapping sequence of trending hashtags – *#UnGayMort* ('a Dead Gay') *#simonfilsestgay* ('if my son is gay'), *#simafilleramèneunoir* ('if my daughter brought home a black man') – that stoked intensive discussion about the conduct of public debate in France during 2012 and early 2013.

The third and most significant event to draw concerted attention to digital media-based racist activity was the circulation of Anders Behring Breivik's hyper-textual compendium *2083* in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of July 22 2011. Frequently described as a 'manifesto' in media reports, Breivik circulated his document to a selected readership on the morning of the attacks, and it combines diary entries, weapons information and a survey of anti-Muslim conspiracy theories with a call for a final victory over multiculturalism and Muslim invasion by the year 2083 (see Titley 2013). Within days of the attacks, the political blog Think Progress had produced a simple visualization of gross citations (see Clifton 2011), showing how Breivik had drawn ideological sustenance and textual resources from a dense and predominantly transatlantic network of the 'counter-jihad blogosphere' (Lean 2012). This precipitated an intensive debate not only about 'lone wolf terrorism' and online radicalization but also about the moral and ideological responsibilities those cited may have for the compendium author's actions (see Bartlett and Soremshaugen 2012; Titley 2013).

As Geert Lovink has argued, 'new media have definitively passed beyond an introductory phase, but they continue to clash with existing social and political structures, as corporations and traditional knowledge institutions face the disruptive implications of networking' (2011: 2). Faced with these political disruptions, dominant responses sought to restore these digital media irruptions to the sidelines of a properly functional public sphere. Meredith Tax, in emphasizing the *Innocence of Muslims*' aesthetic limitations and hyper-trolling intent, summarizes a prevalent recourse to rational restraint when she argued that 'the film was designed to insult, but nobody forces people to go crazy when their religion is insulted' (2012). The French Minister for Women's Affairs, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem argued in a widely quoted 2012 *Le Monde* article that the cumulative hashtag activity listed above represented an 'absolute contradiction of the values of our Republic'. And after Utøya, many commentators overlaid the presumed psychopathology of the killer onto the projected political pathologies of the anti-Muslim blog network, deadly but marginal phenomena when compared to the trans-partisan unity of Norwegian society's response (Bangstad 2013).

Yet there is a double elision at play here, beyond the re-centring impulses detected by Lovink. The 'virtual and immaterial racism' (Gilroy 2012: 382) generated and contested in and through social media platforms and digital spaces also disrupt social and political structures by complicating official imaginaries of post-racial societies, and generating new events, spaces and scripts through which racisms are configured and rehearsed. *The Innocence of Muslims*, for example, certainly sought to detonate ideological fault lines in the political tumult of Egypt and Libya. But, by seeking to emulate the strategy of, for example, the Dutch right-wing member of parliament Geert Wilders' anti-Islamic visual pamphlet *Fitna*, it was designed to rekindle intensive and often coded debates on the boundaries of European values and civilization that have resulted from other rapidly circulated visual representations of Muslim 'incompatibility' (for a discussion of the dissemination strategy for *Fitna*, which was originally published on Liveleak and recirculated on YouTube, and subsequent contestation strategies, see Liesbet van Zoonen et al. 2011).

While the hate expressed on Twitter undoubtedly runs contrary to the stated values of the Republic, these values are not stable; the dissonance between the stated values of the Republic and the social and political status of French citizens *issus de l'immigration* is a key site for 'decolonial' and diasporic contestation of racialization and marginalization in France (Khiari 2006). And, while Breivik's ideological formation is heavily indebted to what Nathan Lean has

recently termed the transatlantic 'Islamophobia Industry' (2012), the *Foreign Policy* contributor Paul Hockenos was not alone in relating Breivik's obsessions to a much broader and ideologically striated anti-Muslim racism, where the '… political mainstreaming of Islamophobia would have been inconceivable without the post-9/11 anti-Islamic discourse across European media and the blogosphere. In large part, this trail was blazed by intellectuals who defended their positions in the name of liberalism and human rights' (2012).

These thinly sketched examples are offered here in broad, heuristic terms, for they open out three key dimensions of researching the settling and unsettling of racisms in convergent digital media spaces. First, racist mobilizations and practices are heavily invested in organized and opportunistic communicative actions that recognize and depend on the integration of interactive digital media to a wider media ecology and European political environment. As Jessie Daniels notes, 'the internet is a site of political struggle over racial meaning, knowledge and values' (2012:10). This is clear, but these struggles on the 'Internet' – the intensive production and circulation of scripts, tropes, memes, images, references, and 'facts' – are increasingly folded into a broader politics of racism, and need to be treated as such.

Second, and concomitantly, this environment is marked by intensive, mediatized conversations and contests as to the scope, nature and legitimacy of the idea of 'racism'. Social media, as Nick Couldry argues constitute a ubiquitous 'invitation to discourse' through their formal properties, integration into the wider media system, and ambient and banal integration into everyday practices (2012). This invitation is intensively extended in relation to mobilizing political events and news items pertaining to, for instance, immigration and multiculturalism. More broadly, social media interaction provides key sites for everyday explorations of the confusion and contestation of racisms in a political moment frequently characterized as 'post-racial' (Goldberg 2009). The constant 'invitation to discourse', then, is also a constant conflict of definition in a putatively 'post-racial' era, and a contest over who gets to define, when everyone gets to speak.

Third, these examples illustrate how the affordances and dynamics of social media networks are politically generative – from the new modes of globally accretive propaganda events hosted by YouTube (Van Zoonen et al. 2011); to the dynamics of emergent 'hashtag publics' (Bruns and Burgess 2012) over-compressed time and in reflexive relation to wider publics; to the post-22/7 anxiety in Norway and Europe over the ways in which news-site comment threads, Facebook pages and other interactive spaces further mediate and disseminate the scripts and tropes of the anti-Muslim blogosphere (Andersson 2012).

In what follows, this article aims to make a limited and initial contribution to identifying key directions for analysing social media's 'racialized info-overload', in the context of an involved 'resurgence' of racism in Europe. In the next section, I argue for thinking through productive metaphors of racism's complexity and mutability as ways of building approaches to the flow and exchange of digital media networks across overlapping but different geopolitical and spatio-temporal modes of race making. This is particularly important given the predominant focus in the current literature on North American racial formations.

RACIAL DEBRIS, MASHED-UP

'Mediatized conversations about race' Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White observe, 'whether on the Internet with human interlocutors or with the torrent of digitized media texts, have become an increasingly important

channel for discourse about our differences' (2012: 5). These conversations, from highly strategized and networked interventions, to concentrated communicative engagement with transnationally suggestive events, to the everyday generativity of the 'perpetual machine' of comment cultures (Lovink 2012), also rehearse, extend and refine the vocabularies, codes and strategies through which everyday racializations are enforced, and, increasingly, through which broader public conversations are inflected. In Europe at this political conjuncture, where anxieties over security, individualized autonomy and cultural (in)compatibility intermesh in the complex racial politics of the 'War on Terror' decade, such conversations frequently convene and cohere around racializing evaluations of the legitimacy of diasporic presence (Lentin and Titley 2011).

Consequently, analysis of the digital production and circulation of racisms must involve approaches that are attentive to the form, dynamics, affordances and techno-social dimensions of specific media forms and practices. However, as the introductory examples suggest, social media 'disruptions' are, increasingly, politically generative, and the mediatization (see Couldry and Hepp 2013) of racism – and the ways in which it is contested and understood in the multiple, overlapping media spaces that condition public debate – involves far more than the simple extension of racist practices and counter-struggles online. Arguably, contemporary racisms cannot be understood without greater attention to their mediation, as 'mediatized conversations about race' are integral to shaping racism in an era where the discourse of what racism is and who gets to define it, and in what ways, is so unstable.

If this contention has validity, then arguably the political generativity of social media, and the wider circuits of 'racialized info-overload' theorized by Sharma (2013), extend and retrench the pronounced elisions identified by Daniels (2012) in her recent review of 'race and racism in Internet Studies': 'The Internet has not provided an escape route from either race or racism, nor has the study of race or racism proven to be central to the field of Internet Studies' (2012: 2). While racism has not been central to the wider field, the preponderance of research into racism online in Europe and the United States has centred on the development, mobilizing possibilities and discursive adaptations of far-right and supremacist sites. In Western Europe, the early years of 'Web 1.0' overlapped with the period described by the political scientist Cas Mudde (2004) as the 'populist zeitgeist' in Nordic and Alpine Europe. Consequently, multiple studies have examined the online strategies of far-right movements and populist parties in this period. Clare Bratten (2005), for example, has demonstrated the importance of web presence to the French Front National in the years preceding Jean Marie Le Pen's progress to the final round of the Presidential election of 2002. In his recent study of the British National Party, Matthew Goodwin (2011) examines the influence of the FN's strategy on that of the BNP, which, he argues, had one of the most successful web strategies of the period.

Studies of the extreme right online have burgeoned in the United States, focusing, as Daniels summarizes, on two broad categories of racist activity online: '(1) *overt* hate Web sites that target individuals or groups, showcase racist propaganda, or offer online community for white supremacists; and (2) *cloaked* Web sites that intentionally seek to deceive the casual Web user' (2008: 129, original emphasis). Many comparative studies have been conducted of groups based in or networked to Europe, and these studies have employed discourse analysis and theories of alternative media (Atton 2006) to examine the development of, inter alia, what Priscilla Meddaugh and Jack Kay

3. The work of O'Callaghan et al. (2012) proposes several interesting methodologies for examining the networking of right-wing extremist sites to Twitter, and extremist clusters within Twitter networks. The think-tank Demos has recently produced a series of studies examining the Facebook page information strategies and interactions of populist right parties in Europe, see http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/insidetheedl.

(2009) term the 'tempered, pseudo-rational, reasonable racism' of adaptive, legitimating strategies more attuned to the post-racial consensus.

Researching these actors, of course, remains crucially important, and research[3] is beginning to address how, as the London-based Institute of Race Relations' 2012 report 'Pedlars of Hate: The Violent Impact of the European Far-Right' notes, 'The new social media allows the far Right an important new way to increase its support-base and to disseminate conspiracy theories, and the pattern of violence often starts with intimidation against Black and Minority Ethnic communities and political opponents in the virtual world' (2012: 7). However, if research on racism as a dimension of political extremism – increasingly framed through academic and institutional attention to 'radicalization' online – is beginning to address the impact of the broader social web, there is, as Andrew Jacubowicz notes in another 2012 survey article, an absence of studies that examine how 'racist mobilization has been extended through Twitter, Facebook and SMS communication'.

Beyond the study of organized and networked extremism, Daniels' evaluation of a general lack of focus on race and racism in Internet Studies could be extended to note that there is scant attention to issues beyond North American racial formations, while this positioning is rarely acknowledged in overviews of the field. As Nakamura and Chow-White contend in their recent (2012) survey, 'critical race studies must take account of the digital, and digital media and technology studies must take account of race' (2012: 6), and they advocate a deepening of the interdisciplinary work that 'started with a forceful critique of the utopian discourse that characterized early digital media studies' (2012: 7). Daniels (2012), and Nakamura and Chow-White's (2012) overviews are comprehensive and timely, mapping accounts of race in shifting understandings of the socio-economic factors shaping access and 'racial digital divides', and turning towards accounts of 'digital segregations' in social network sites; the racialization of technologies and interfaces and an evolving focus on 'race as code' in biotechnology and infomatics; identity discourses, racialized communities and formations, and the shift from consuming to performing and contesting stereotypes in an evolving, interactive politics of representation played out in games, virtual spaces and user-generated communities.

The vast preponderance of this work is focused on approaching race in relation to US racial formations; indeed Nakamura and Chow-White's collection is explicitly situated in relation to the 'postracial' paradox whereby 'Obama's presidency coincides with some of the most racist immigration legislation seen in recent years, as a well as a prison industrial complex that continues to thrive and target black males, and a financial and housing crisis that has disproportionately harmed black and Latino Americans (2012: 1). The politics of race and racism in Europe only features substantively in these reviews in Daniels' discussion of the disjuncture between the free expression/hate speech provisions referenced in the introductory French example (2012: 12–13). However, as both surveys emphasize, social media networks are producing an intensified transnational and trans-media environment, one where simply transposing an imaginary of geopolitical space onto racially productive digital networks – to produce a 'European research agenda' – is as limiting as unreflective applications of the North American-focused literature. The analysis of racism, as Ian Law outlines in his study of post-communist contexts, requires '… maintaining a careful balance between specifying both the autonomous forms of ideas, behaviours and practices and identifying (their) complex interconnections, interrelations and intersections' (2012: 3).

On the specific question of racisms produced and circulated within social media's networks of exchange, Daniels notes how the 'overwhelming majority of the research reviewed' in her survey '… focuses on some aspect of racial identity, while only a small portion focuses on everyday expressions of racism on the Internet' (2012: 15). Arguably, the unifying nature of this lack may allow for ways forward. In addressing this neglect, the challenge for studies that examine racism in European trans-media space is to develop approaches that can account for configurations of racist practice, racializing mediations and flows of racial meaning that accumulate across networked sites, while examining for the particularities of their assembly and force in given exchanges and contexts.

One point of entry into this challenge is to think with those theorizations of racism that have productive affinities with the networked, archiving and remediating dimensions of social media. Racism, as John Solomos and Les Back argue, is a 'scavenger ideology, which gains its power from the ability to pick out and utilize ideas and values from other sets of ideas and beliefs in specific socio-historical contexts' (1996: 213). Digital spaces provide sites of abundance for this scavenger work, and do so within a transnational media space characterized by the travel, translation and appropriation of issues, images, tropes, memes, strategies and associations. Scavenger work, then, has obvious affinities with the argument that *bricolage* – the combination of disparate elements in new forms, with a particular emphasis in this sense on multi-media combinations – comprises a defining feature of digital media culture (Deuze 2006; Lievrouw 2011).

Yet, much as the recombination, juxtaposition and pastiche of elements that informs bricolage as a subversive technique requires an adversarial relationship to dominant ideologies and hegemonic arrangements, the cohering register of scavenger work must be accounted for. Back and Solomos's contention that power is accumulated through purposive selection in specific socio-historical contexts is not invalidated simply by the fact of the radical abundance of the Internet. As Sara Ahmed argues in her discussion of 'affective economies' of hate and the media coverage of asylum-seekers, we must account for 'stickiness in circuitries of hate', where 'figures of hate circulate, and indeed accumulate their affective value, precisely insofar as they do not have a fixed referent' (2004: 47). What is scavenged must also stick, and this must be explained; how associations become attached to particular bodies through repetition, how they gain credence and shed their histories of social construction, and are reproduced – in this instance in relation to asylum-seekers – in powerful narratives of threat, loss and invasion.

Stickiness, therefore, implies not only moments of discursive concentration and circulation in networks of exchange, but also historically generated repertoires, vocabularies, indices and symbolic relations that, to extend the metaphor, have varying degrees of adhesiveness according to the context of production and reception. In another suggestive metaphor, Ash Amin (2010) offers the notion of 'racial debris' as a way of approaching the re-articulation of racial references, orders and logics held to be 'past' but which recur – and are remediated – in the 'current racial present'. Amin's purpose in his article 'The remainders of race' is to examine the temporality of race, and to explore the conditions in which 'mixes of past and present racial practices become especially vengeful towards the racialized other' (2010: 3). Amin presents a temporality of race that imbricates 'newness, repetition and immanence':

> … first, a restless impulse of variety and novelty, always disrupting and
> challenging settled patterns of racial formation and behavior; second,

the potential to return sameness if the forces of repetition are strong, perhaps organized and channeled; and third, the potentiality of accumulated racial debris, variegated and dormant from different eras, ready to be instantiated in unknown ways.

(2010: 5)

Trans-media spaces provide extensive opportunities to sift and assemble debris, debris that can be drawn from an extended archive and repertoire of racial conceptions and associations given that 'the visual turn and the technological turn are converging as images migrate and proliferate onto digital platforms' (Nakamura and Chow-White 2012: 5). The following section provides an example of how these ideas may provide a basis for an analysis of communicative forms, dynamics and racializing discourse.

DEBRIS, EVENT, FORM

In a recent edition of the Australian cultural and political journal *Overland*, the journalist and activist Malcolm Harris described Twitter as a 'global city made of text' (2012). One of his illustrative 'walks through a city made of words' involved the short-lived twitter account @Anti_Racism_Dog, suspended by Twitter after multiple complaints from those targeted by the account. @Anti_Racism_Dog's mode of interaction never varied; it barked at racists. As Harris argues, the unsettling quality of @Anti_Racism_Dog is the account's complete simulation of the character of an animal; it barks, and just keeps barking, regardless of attempts at engagement. It is this complete refusal of engagement in an interactive medium that is crucial, but its significance requires some explanation, and is developed here through an analysis of one particular interaction.

In this May 2012 exchange, Twitter user @SmashTheSystem tweeted:

Fascist multiculturalist scum demotes fire captain for STATING HIS OPINION, while off-duty, on his facebook page cbsn.ws/KLdoAu #WPWW

@SmashTheSystem's initiating tweet refers and links to a story concerning Brian Beckmann, a Miami Dade fire captain, who was demoted for a Facebook status update posted in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in February 2012 by George Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watch volunteer. In his update, Beckmann wrote: 'I and my co-workers could rewrite the book on whether our urban youths are victims of racist profiling or products of their failed, (deleted expletive) ignorant pathetic welfare dependent excuses for parents'. Beckmann's status update compresses some of the key elisions of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) terms 'color-blind racism' in the US context, both denying the salience of racial profiling to Martin's murder, while drawing on what Dana-Ain Davis (2007) calls the 'racial indexing' that renders references to 'welfare' or 'quotas' as intelligible only in terms of the presumed, perpetual dependency of undeserving African Americans on the state.

@SmashTheSystem's outrage is motivated by Beckmann's demotion, effected despite his defensive contention that he had cut and paste the comment to his Facebook page from a comment site, thus lessening the responsibility of authorial intent through the distance of remediation.

Countering the municipal disciplinary investigation's contention that there is 'no such thing as being off-the-clock' for public servants in a multi-ethnic community, @SmashTheSystem posits the Facebook comment as having been made when off-duty, a condition deemed sufficient to resolve the 'privately public and publicly private' ambivalence of social media postings (Papacharissi 2010: 142).

@SmashTheSystem's generic complaint of 'fascist multiculturalism' locates his reaction in a broad, transatlantic terrain of anti-multiculturalist sentiment, where 'multiculturalism' functions as a capacious signifier of aversion and discontent (Lentin and Titley 2011). His hashtag, #WPWW is far less amorphous, as it stands for 'White Pride World Wide', a supremacist acronym that pre-dates its hash-tag use. As Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess suggest, 'using a hashtag can be seen as an explicit attempt to address an imagined community of users' (2012: 804). Hash-tagging this story, in this way, seeks to position it as yet more evidence, globally accreted, of ideological assaults on white supremacy, testimony provided to anybody who may establish a communal connection to activity under the hashtag. In their study of social media use among dedicated extreme right groups, Derek O'Callaghan et al. located heavy use of #WPWW among white power/white supremacist groups in the United States, and at the time of their study, noted the ancillary use of a #trayvontruth hashtag, where 'it appears that this story is being used to propagate a message of alleged persecution against whites' (2012: 7).

#WPWW is both heavily mediated within North American white power and national socialist networks, and also an acronym used to coordinate 'global' events and activities by supremacist groups around the (western) world. As a hashtag, it is visible and searchable for Twitter users and web browsers beyond those who actively associate with and in relation to it. Perhaps as a result of surveillance of this hashtag, @Anti_Racism_Dog tweeted three times in response in quick succession:

> AWOOO AWOOOO woof wooof
> AWOOOOOOOO AWOOOO WOOF WOOF AWOOOO
> Awooo wfooof woof

In response, @SmashTheSystem tweets back a series of responses:

- tell me what's racist about supporting free speech
- 1. The belief that race accounts 4 differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others
- 2. Discrimination or prejudice based on race
- i'm directly challenging you to tell me what's racist about what I just posted

These responses go unanswered, until @Anti_Racism_Dog tweets:

> AWOOO AWOOOO woof wooof AWOOOOOOOO

When challenged, @SmashTheSystem's purposive appeal to an avowedly supremacist hashtag 'community' is relegated to the status of debris from the past in favour of adopting the tweeting position of what Ruth Wodak has called the 'victimized majority', and rehearsing the key discursive strategies of what have come, over the last decades, to be called 'new racism' or 'cultural

racism'. The previous appeal to white pride is effaced through what John Durham Peters (2005) calls the 'recursive' nature of debates about 'freedom of expression' – that is, the particular issue in question is frequently subsumed to a debate about the guiding, and abstract, normative principle. Freedom of speech provides a *scavenging* defence, shifting the focus onto a question that has become central to debates about Internet freedom (see Herz and Molnar 2012), and one where the recursive turn strengthens the idea that the 'victimized majority' is being unfairly treated.

In the two definitions subsequently offered, @smashthesystem explicitly distances itself from understandings of racism as tied to pseudo-science and explicit forms of racial hierarchy. Having established such reasonable distance, telling uncomfortable truths cannot, by definition, be racist. Thus any attempt to counter its arguments in such terms involves censorship, 'politically correct' bullying by a multicultural elite, reverse racism, and a repertoire of other such claims. This repertoire is anything but novel: two recent works of intellectual history in the United States – Daniel Rodgers' *Age of Fracture* (2012) and Corey Robins' *The Reactionary Mind* (2011) both emphasize how the conservative right in the United States prospered politically in the post civil rights period by 'absorbing and transmuting the idioms' and analytical approaches of progressive movements. Thus, in specific pursuit of white privilege, the conservative intellectuals of the period drew on the established tactic of presenting any challenge to existing inequalities as a paradoxical form of victimhood, while also assimilating and inverting philosophies of cultural recognition and constructivist critiques.

Older, seminal works of European sociology have also emphasized these forms of reflexive capture. The so-called 'neo-racism' specified since the 1970s by Étienne Balibar (1991), Martin Barker (1982) and others differed from racism as conventionally understood through its apparent post-Holocaust rejection of racial hierarchy in favour of appropriating the putatively progressive idea of a 'right to difference'. Cultural recognition, like immigration, is posited as a zero-sum game – *to give to a minority inevitably involves taking from a majority*, and it is in this move that the power relations of recognition-based philosophies are inverted.

However, given that these tactics are structured as a series of counter-arguments directed at supposed multiculturalist hegemony, what is significant is the opportunity structure provided by social media forms for the extension of these discursive strategies. The posts on Twitter by @Anti_Racism_Dog are shaped as a response to these strategies, as it explicitly denies an opportunity to mount a defence against the 'unfair accusation' of racism, a point of departure critical to this 'post-racial' discursive formation. @Anti_Racism_Dog refuses a turn-taking flow, forcing @smashthesystem to rehearse counter-arguments in a void. As Harris points out, 'although these moves are predictable, they're hard to combat rhetorically since they're able to ingest the conventional opposition scripts' (2012). @Anti_Racism_Dog recognizes the condition of the script's stickiness, and by leaving @smashthesystem without an answer, ensures that it must project the necessary oppositional scripts, and is rendered absurd by accusing a barking dog of being against freedom of speech. By refusing to allow @smashthesystem to reduce the exchange to one of personal outrage at an unfair accusation, the strategy of @Anti_Racism_Dog is to recall that racism is a question of practices, not intent, and has to be 'comprehended in terms of its consequences, not as a matter of intentions or beliefs' (Winant 2005).

What is of interest in this extended example is that @Anti_Racism_Dog, as a digital artefact, displays a political and analytical understanding of the interdependence of discursive strategy and communicative form. The inter-action between both users illustrates the compressed sorting and sifting of 'racial debris', assembled and countered when concentrated in reaction to a contentious event. While the killing of Trayvon Martin must be firmly under-stood within the violence and disavowal of the US (post)racial order, the racial repertoires, discursive formations and mediating forms and conventions are not limited to this mapping. Instead, they suggest ways of thinking about connectivities and overlaps that allow for an attention both to what David Goldberg terms 'racial regionalizations' (2009: 67–70) and to the circuitries of exchange in digital media. Nevertheless, the question remains as to what issues such a regionalization would focus on in relation to contemporary European trans-media space.

CONCLUSION: EUROPE AND RACISM BEYOND THE 'SITE'

'Racism', according to Malcolm X, '… is like a Cadillac, they bring out a new model every year' (see Lipsitz 2006: 183). Malcolm X's caustic metaphor unset-tles complacent investments in visions of historical progress towards a post-racial settlement. It also underlines the fact of racism's ongoing production and the purposive nature of 'scavenging'. Its emphasis on the historical muta-bility of modes of oppression also underlines the critical urgency of address-ing research gaps in the mediation and discursive production of racisms. The digital production and circulation of racisms within networked public cultures is significant because they are politically generative beyond the simple 'exten-sion' of racist discourse and practices into more and varied communicative forms and sites. This article has suggested that contemporary racisms cannot be understood without an integrated examination of how 'mediatized conver-sations about race' are central to shaping racism in an era where the discourse of what racism is and who gets to define it, and in what ways, is so contested and unstable.

Consequently, moving beyond a dominant focus on the 'extremist site' is important not only in grasping political processes of mediation and mobiliza-tion, but in unsettling the idea that extremists sites, and thus extremist groups, form the exceptional loci of racism in contemporary Europe. This over-deter-mining focus is arguably vulnerable to the reproduction of a post-racial logic, and therefore the focus on 'sites' must be integrated into a more fluid consid-eration of circulation, transposition and translation in a trans-media environ-ment. What is required now – as the example of @anti_racism_dog suggests – is more focus on how the strategies and discourses honed in these spaces and communities of mobilization are disseminated through the arteries and capillaries of networked publics. The challenge for studies that examine racism in European trans-media space is to develop approaches that can account for configurations of racist practice, racializing mediations and flows of racial meaning that accumulate across networked sites, while examining for the particularities of their assembly and force in given exchanges and contexts.

An adequate survey of trajectories of racialization in Europe is clearly beyond the scope of an article such as this, yet a useful starting point is to note that, much as Nakamura and Chow-White (2012) can locate their review in the context of a post-racial disjuncture, attention to racial discourse in Europe must depart from an account of the European post-racialism that has, in part,

limited the parameters within which research is conducted. As Barnor Hesse argues in his historical account of 'postracial horizons', within the European Union '… signifiers of a postracial horizon have found their most elaborate expressions in those institutional and urban domains where political indictments of race and racism are either regularly disavowed or casually identified as anachronisms' (2011: 1). In other words, the political story of Europe is narrated as one of exceptional progress beyond the dark horizon of twentieth century Nazi – and to a far lesser extent, colonial – racisms. In other words again, there is nothing to worry about since we stopped producing what are dominantly recognized as Cadillacs. Yet, depending on the position of the narrator, this prevalent story takes no account of punitive asylum-regimes and securitized immigration systems (Tyler 2012); of the concerted and racializing focus on 'diasporic' Europeans compatibility with putatively European values and practices; and the re-production of 'Europe' as a racial horizon (see Goldberg 2009).

Arguably, then, future research could begin to conceive of networked social media interactions, which are reactive to and generative of mediated events and antagonistic concentrations of public definition and evaluation, as a discourse laboratory within which the terms of post-racial disavowal and antiracist contestation are being played out, and developed; within a transnational media space that generates a broad repertoire of issues, associations and 'debris' for possible translation and transposition; and within which the 'cultural crossings' of those who are so easily defined or recalled as 'Other to Europe' involve negotiating and contesting the racialized overload.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Gavan Titley is a lecturer in the Centre for Media Studies in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. His research focuses on racism, discourse and politics in Europe, and has been published in such journals as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journalism* and *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*. He is the author, with Alana Lentin, of *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (Zed Books, 2011). He is currently writing a book *Racism and Media* for Sage Publications.

Contact: Gavan Titley, Department of Media Studies, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.
E-mail: Gavan.Titley@nuim.ie

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Clothing Cultures

We all wear clothes. We are all therefore invested at some level in the production and consumption of clothing. This journal intends to embrace issues and themes that are both universal and personal, addressing [and dressing] us all. Increasingly, as we all become accomplished semioticians, clothing becomes the key signifier in determining social interaction and behaviour, and sartorial norms dictate socio-cultural appropriateness. Following the rise of fashion theory, on an everyday level, we all understand that our clothes 'say' something about us, about our times, nation, system of values. Yet clothing is not fashion; clothing is a term derivative from 'cloth', to cover the body, whereas fashion alludes to the glamorous, the ephemeral and the avant garde. We wear clothes, but imagine fashion – an unattainable ideal.

This journal also offers a forum for the discussion of textiles and their significance in the production and consumption of clothing and thus solicits papers from textile historians, designers and design professionals.

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Editors
Jo Turney
Bath Spa University
j.turney@bathspa.ac.uk

Alex Franklin
University West of England, Bristol
Alex.Franklin@uwe.ac.uk