



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence

This is the Published version of the following publication

Sonn, Christopher, Agung-Igusti, Rama, Dau, Anyuop, Deng, Ez Eldin, Ruach, Ruth Nyaruot, Komba, Geskeva and Akoul, Nyakeer (2021) Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 12 (2). pp. 1-19. ISSN 2163-8667

The publisher's official version can be found at
<https://www.gjcpp.org/en/article.php?issue=39&arti...>
<<https://www.gjcpp.org/en/article.php?issue=39&article=233>>
Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/42146/>



Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence

Rama P. Agung-Igusti¹ and Christopher C. Sonn¹

In collaboration with Colour Between the Lines

Keywords: Self-determination, African diaspora, racial justice, home-places, community-engaged

Author Biographies: *Rama Agung-Igusti* (he/him) is a PhD student at Victoria University on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. His research interests include ways individuals and communities respond to and resist racialisation and structural racisms, how identity and belonging is negotiated in the context of Australia as a settler colonial nation, and ways creative practices are mobilised for social change and the radical imagining of new ways of being and doing. *Christopher C. Sonn*, PhD, is Professor at Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia on the land of the Wurundjeri of the Kulin nation. He is a fellow of the Institute of Health and Sport and teaches in the Applied Psychology Programme in the College of Health and Biomedicine. His research is concerned with understanding and changing dynamics of oppression and resistance, examining structural violence such as racism, and its effects on social identities, intergroup relations and belonging. He holds a Visiting Professorship at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. He is co-editor of *Creating Inclusive Knowledges* and co-author of *Social Psychology and Everyday Life*, and Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Community Psychology and Community Psychology in Global Perspective*. *Anyuop Dau* is an artist facilitator & multidisciplinary creative practitioner ranging in film, handcrafting & creative directing

¹ Institute of Health and Sport, Victoria University

in styling. Anyuop is also a lead facilitator in the cohealth Arts Generator program Sisters & Brothers which is a program that works with young primary school students to deliver workshops on race-based discrimination using art forms of Dance, Acting & songwriting. Anyuop believes in the power of words to transform people and also gains pleasure from working with intergenerational communities. *Ez Eldin* Deng is a South Sudanese film and music video director, producer, and writer. He has directed and produced numerous music videos, which have reached millions of views in total on YouTube. Deng first arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 2004 with his family and to this day, Melbourne is still his home as he continues to break new grounds within the Australian film and television industry. He currently also works as an assessment trainer at Pulse Studio in Geelong. *Ruth Nyaruot Ruach* is a South-Sudanese multidisciplinary artist, who uses art to heal, explore her surroundings and create comfort within her blackness. Ruth's art explores the experiences of being an African of the diaspora although she is strongly influenced by, decolonising language, tone and the cultivation of shared perspectives in place of assimilation. *Geskeva Komba* is a creative humanitarian of Comorian and Tanzanian heritage. Raised in the Western suburbs of Melbourne she has experience combined in community development, theatre, spoken word as well as music. Geskeva continues to work in spaces that combine critical thinking, art and community. *Nyakeer Akoul* is an artist who loves to support broader community members to participate and take action on social justice issues. Nyakeer facilitates multidisciplinary artistic workshops which support platforms for marginalised voices and takes action around Mental health, race-based discrimination, family violence and more.

Recommended Citation: Agung-Igusti, R.P., Sonn, C.C., Dau, A., Deng, E.E., Komba, G., Akoul, N., & Ruach, R.N. (2021). Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 12(2), 1 - 19. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).

Corresponding Author: Rama P. Agung-Igusti, Institute of Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. Email: rama.agung-igusti@vu.edu.au

Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence

For many people from communities of the African diaspora in Australia, raced-based discrimination through mechanisms of structural violence frames day to day lived experiences. Yet, while racialised and other forms of structural violence pervade the lives of black people and other marginalised groups, individuals and communities also resist and survive every day. Resistance and struggles for survival are evident in the creation of alternative settings that are important for affirming culture and histories, and for providing opportunities for a sense of community, consciousness raising, and constructing new and alternative narratives to those that pervade dominant cultural contexts. The focus of this paper is to examine the formation of a self-determined alternative setting within the broader context of race relations in Naarm/Birraranga (Melbourne). A secondary focus of this paper is to describe community engaged ways of working that were engendered by the setting, as university-based researchers collaborated with a collective of creative practitioners to document the project. The alternative setting examined is called Colour Between the Lines, a self-determined initiative comprising a collective of five creative practitioners from the African diaspora. We describe the emergence of CBTL as an enactment of racial justice through the self-determined activity that has emerged from a group of people who individually and collectively continue to be subjected to racialised structural violence. We suggest that CBTL can be understood as an alternative setting that further engenders important forms of resistance and community making, and that is shaped and constrained by social power relations. Thus, we argue the need as community-based researchers to work with and within communities, engaging in critical and collaborative forms of anti-racist and decolonial praxis to support the creation of such settings.

Author Note: Colour Between the Lines is a collective of five creative practitioners consisting of Anyuop Dau, Ez Eldin Deng, Geskeva Komba, Nyakeer Akuol and Ruth Nyaruot Ruach (<https://www.nextincolor.com/about>), this paper was written in collaboration with the collective.

The recent global protests against anti-black racism, racisms and deaths in custody, police brutality, and the recentering of Black Lives Matter has brought again to the forefront the continuities of racialised oppression in contemporary times. Wilderson (2019) noted that violence saturates the lives of black people: “violence spreads its tendrils across the body, chokes the community, and expands, intensifies, and mutates into newer and ever more grotesques forms ...” (p. 217). For many people from communities of the African diaspora in Australia, raced-based

discrimination through mechanisms of structural violence, frames day to day lived experiences. Structural violence refers to “the production, maintenance, and reproduction of social inequalities and oppressions. The concept refers to social systems, as well as mechanisms through which they produce and normalise marginalisation, exclusion and exploitation (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 1-2). Yet, while racialised and other forms of structural violence pervade the lives of black people and other marginalised groups, individuals and communities also resist and survive

every day. Resistance and struggles for survival are evident in the creation of alternative settings that are important for affirming culture and histories, and for providing opportunities for a sense of community, consciousness raising, and constructing new and alternative narratives to those that pervade dominant cultural contexts (Rappaport, 1995; Sarason, 1972; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Alternative settings are “radically different ways of perceiving, enacting, and experiencing...basic relationships and life activities...it is a protest, a reaction, an attempt to find a better way, a rejection” (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000, p. 360), and in some ways, sites for infrapolitics, a politics from below (Scott, 1990). Many scholars and activists in critical community psychology have signaled the importance of these settings and advocate for research and action to be oriented towards disrupting oppression and to be engaged in the everyday struggles, reimagining and contributing to pathways for self-determination (Coimbra, et al., 2012; Seedat, Suffla, & Christie, 2017).

The focus of this paper is to examine the formation of a self-determined alternative setting within the broader context of race relations in Naarm/Birraranga² (Melbourne). A secondary focus of this paper is to describe community engaged ways of working that were engendered by the setting, as university-based researchers collaborated with a collective of creative practitioners to document the project. The alternative setting examined is called Colour Between the Lines, a self-determined initiative comprising a collective of five creative practitioners³ (see Table 1) from the African diaspora, each of whom bring their biographies, experiences, and varied cultural heritage to shape the vision and mission of the setting, conscious of the fact

that African migrants occupy a unique position in Australia.

Whiteness, Racialisation and Violence in Australia

Raced-based discrimination is an enduring facet of day-to-day life for many groups in Australia. For these groups race is applied as a meaningful marker of social difference that informs inequitable relations of power and systematic forms of violence (Stevens, 2014), this is a process of racialisation that both constrains subjectivity and constructs new racialised subjects (Stevens et al., 2017). Racialisation can occur through harmful dominant group narratives propagated through news media as well as in political rhetoric that perpetuates misrecognition and legitimates forms of structural exclusion that deny people access to opportunities and resources required to construct healthy selves and communities (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Han & Budarick, 2018; Windle, 2008). The link between the impact of these stigmatising and pervasive dominant narratives and adverse outcomes for the communities targeted have been well documented (see e.g., Mansouri, Elias & Sweid, 2017; Markus, 2016) with deleterious effects on individual well-being and the opportunities available for both individuals and communities (Paradies et al., 2015; Priest et al., 2013). This is further compounded by what some have described as hegemonic and normative “whiteness” that preserves ways of knowing, being and doing (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007). In the Australian context racism rooted in Eurocentrism normalizes and privilege traits associated with whiteness (Hage, 1998). Hence whiteness refers to the dominance and normativity of Eurocentric ways of being, doing and knowing the world – in short, the ideology of white supremacy

² These are Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung names for the area around Port Phillip bay and for the area of Melbourne.

³ The collective is currently comprised of [Anyuop Dau, Ez Eldin Deng, Ruth Nyaruot

Ruach, Geskeva Komba and Nyakeer Akuol. However, at its conception the collective also included Tiyami Amum whose insights are also presented in this paper. The collective members have also chosen to be identified in the text.

(Moreton-Robinson, 2015). However, many people from the African diaspora, as well as other communities who bear the brunt of racialised structural violence do resist and survive everyday through the active creation of settings. These settings are safe

family and community spaces, and also arise through the construction of self-determined culturally anchored activities through they can affirm histories and cultural heritage and also challenge

Table 1:
CBTL Collective Members

Anyuop Dau	An artist facilitator & multidisciplinary creative practitioner ranging in film, handcrafting & creative directing in styling. Anyuop is also a lead facilitator in the cohealth Arts Generator program Sisters & Brothers which is a program that works with young primary school students to deliver workshops on race-based discrimination using art forms of Dance, Acting & songwriting. Anyuop believes in the power of words to transform people and also gains pleasure from working with intergenerational communities.
Ez Eldin Deng	A South Sudanese film and music video director, producer, and writer. He has directed and produced numerous music videos, which have reached millions of views in total on YouTube. Deng first arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 2004 with his family and to this day, Melbourne is still his home as he continues to break new grounds within the Australian film and television industry. He currently also works as an assessment trainer at Pulse Studio in Geelong.
Ruth Nyaruot Ruach	A South-Sudanese multidisciplinary artist, who uses art to heal, explore her surroundings and create comfort within her blackness. Ruth's art explores the experiences of being an African of the diaspora although she is strongly influenced by, decolonising language, tone and the cultivation of shared perspectives in place of assimilation.
Geskeva Komba	A creative humanitarian of Comorian and Tanzanian heritage. Raised in the Western suburbs of Melbourne she has experience combined in community development, theatre, spoken word as well as music. Geskeva continues to work in spaces that combine critical thinking, art and community.
Nyakeer Akuol	An artist who loves to support broader community members to participate and take action on social justice issues. Nyakeer facilitates multidisciplinary artistic workshops which support platforms for marginalised voices and takes action around Mental health, race-based discrimination, family violence and more.

misrecognition and claim the right to belonging, and fair and just treatment (Sonn, Baker, & Agung-Igusti, in press). Racism and its concomitant racialising forces are shrouded in complexities and continues to change across time and place (Stevens, 2018). The language and discourses of racism, its supporting ideologies, have all proven transitory as it takes different shapes and attaches itself to different shared understandings of the world (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Yet, this does not foreclose on our capacity to seek and

enact change, and racism in its complexity, must be addressed at multiple levels and in multiple ways.

Critical scholar activists have argued, social change requires the involvement from and needs to be rooted in the experiences of those affected by oppressive systems in pursuit of liberation, community and wellbeing (Lykes, 2013; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). In pursuing approaches that desire to build change we must then seek to foster and sustain the creation of alternative

spaces and support the mobilisation of communities facing racialisation and violence in deeply meaningful ways. The development of CBTL we argue is an example of a grass roots initiative that seeks to produce racial justice through the creation of self-determined alternative settings. In these settings people develop strategies to tackle racism and create and affirm cultural and community narratives that provide positive resources for identity, belonging and wellbeing.

The emergence of CBTL: Self-determination and Racial Justice

The CBTL project is a proactive response to interconnected forms of racialised structural violence and is grounded in the lived experiences of the collective members and broader racialised communities of the African diaspora in Melbourne. The initiative was an outcome of strategic planning that drew on community engagement approaches through a framework focused on social determinants of health, within a public health context. The initiative had emerged through years of work that had mobilised community arts for racial justice, through the Arts Generator, a participatory arts space that seeks to build connections within and across communities, supporting the development of positive social identities and increasing wellbeing and agency through participatory arts practice. At the heart of Arts Generator's approach is focus on relationality and community building that brings diverse young people together through creative practices and a desire for equity and social justice (cohealth, n.d.). The Arts Generator is situated within cohealth, a community health organisation that focuses on reducing health inequities for those who experience marginalisation and stigma. cohealth's approach is premised on working in partnership with communities and is underpinned by a model that envisions the interlinkages between caring for individuals, communities and society more broadly (cohealth, 2018). This entails awareness and capacity building projects to

support community members in civic participation and advocacy efforts, as well supporting efforts to influence policy change at the level of government and various service design and delivery organisations. Thus, the Arts Generator was an important avenue through which cohealth could address social determinants of health, such as race based discrimination.

CBTL Presents: Next in Colour

The genesis of CBTL can be traced back through relationships emerging through many of the projects that developed out of the Arts Generator. The initiative is situated within the collective knowledges that each of the creative practitioners involved have brought to the project: from their communities; from the work they have done and continue to do, whether within the creative arts, community development or elsewhere; from their experiences of being of African heritage in Australia; from their engagement with decolonial understandings and approaches to inform what they do. Many of its members had facilitated or developed projects and programs through Arts Generator and had been brought together by the organisation's former Program Coordinator to extend this work but in a more self-determining way. In the following paragraphs CBTL write together to describe their intentions for the Next in Colour project.

Creating Our World. Through the Next in Colour project we want to create a world for creatives to find a safe place to live in and to give an opportunity to build close connections with other artists and groups in our local and wider community. We want to shape a road map that builds a strong foundation that is clear for the younger generation to continue to be their own leaders and empower their own generation. We want to advocate for the rights of individuals within our community and for the wellbeing of our community, to empower them by making a positive change. We want to do this by providing a space that acknowledges the traditional

owners of the land and that operates in multiple ways, ensuring accessibility for all people. Storytelling is one of the ways that gives everyone the opportunity to explore their ideas, and storytelling through art is a way that a narrative can be created.

Changing the Narrative. Creative practices have power that can shape and create the narrative for our people. Through the exchange of cultural knowledge. Through combating persistent negative media representations of African Youth by providing other young people with our own positive stories that are written, directed and produced by people of colour. Changing the narrative is about taking autonomy back and re-writing the stories from our experiences and perspectives, instead of assimilating into a narrative that has been told by people who are not from our communities. It is not just about mere representation but about creating a narrative that is embodied in our everyday practice.

Configuring Brave Spaces. Our intention is to also create brave spaces to engage with people and the structures they work in to make change. Being a part of the CBTL collective has been an opportunity to learn the process of running a creative initiative and working with community and government organisations. These processes are not always easy as we as a collective have been met with major challenges in configuring our space to the means of what we set our values and morals to be. Using our own agency was and is important to the work we do and how we wanted to enable ourselves. This self-determination is paired with our own individual beliefs and values but has also manifested as our groups core principles to how we work: respect, wellbeing, communication and passion. We believe in a reflexive practice whereby what we share as our values we want to bring forward as part of the actioning in what work we do, how we work and why we work.

Co-Researching with CBTL as Community-Engaged Praxis

As university-based researchers we (Rama and Christopher) have sought ways to support the justice and action-oriented works of the communities we are embedded in, finding opportunities to shift resources and opportunities from institutional university settings to alternative settings engaged in the work of resistance and creation. This has involved the development of enduring relationships with a community of creative practitioners from the African diaspora, from which CBTL emerged, across differing and evolving creative and emancipatory projects. This relationship has taken both formal and informal shapes, from which material supports and critical friendships have emerged. As university-based researchers, this has also meant shaping our own ways of working to reflect the alternative settings that members of this community have created. Values, reflexive practice, and ways of working that support self-determination are central to the CBTL project and must underpin the work of documenting the project and the research context.

Our approach of community-engaged praxis seeks to honour these desires and resonates with calls across various fields including critical community and liberation psychology for focussed social change and equity (Coimbra, et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2017; Kagan et al., 2019; Sonn, Stevens, & Duncan, 2013). Community-engaged praxis is informed by a range of methodological approaches and epistemological projects, such as Community Based, Participatory, and Action Research. Community-engaged praxis draws from critical race, feminist and Indigenous scholarship, and centers reflexivity, collaboration and care in research, evaluation, and action, embodied in the relationships formed and the troubling of researcher/researched dynamics (Sonn & Quayle, 2013; Sonn et al., 2013). This praxis entails a rejection of damage-centered research that leverages pain and suffering to effect social change,

perpetuating constructions of vulnerability and dysfunctionality that serves to disempower (Tuck, 2009). This is further underpinned by a goal of epistemic justice, which seeks to privilege lived experience and knowledge and support marginalised communities, as knowers of important frameworks through which they can understand their social worlds and validate a sense of self (Fricker, 2013). This goal of epistemic justice further involves an intention of unsettling what knowledge is valued, and consideration of how knowledge and knowledge production can be democratised so that various communities' histories and cultures can be nurtured, valued and strengthened (Stevens, et al., 2013). This is particularly important given the evidence of strong links between positive cultural identities, experiences of inclusion, and links to psychosocial indicators of wellbeing (Renshaw, 2019; Vichealth, 2005). Therefore, expanding opportunities for cultural and self-determination can enact epistemic justice, which in turn can contribute to the health and wellbeing of people and communities.

Through our long-term collaboration university-based researchers have created a community of praxis with CBTL, carving out meaningful and respectful ways to gather information to inform action. This collaboration has involved engaging in deep, meaningful and respectful relationship building with the group to ensure that we were able to design data collection strategies that are sensitive, appropriate and reflect the values of the collective. Ongoing discussions with the collective from the beginning of the project were held to conceptualise what they saw as important to be documented in the project: processes of self-determined knowledge and community-making, and how intersecting structures of racism, sexism, ableism are navigated.

Some examples of these processes of collaborative decision making are captured in how data collection tools were developed

and also how information was analysed and thematised. Drafting schedules and questionnaires to capture reflections on people engaging with the outputs of their project occurred with the collective who drew on shared epistemic resources which provide important knowledge to guide what questions should be asked, and how. For example, some members of the collective raised that discussion of accessibility in the creative industries was often framed solely by disability, prompting a discussion around accessibility of racialised communities into white spaces, and the intersections of both. These were ongoing conversations, and these spaces further enabled a dialogical process that informed our analysis. Together we have devised methods to document the ways CBTL have navigated various settings and institutions and the ideologies of race and whiteness that circulate in these that inform everyday interactions, relationships, subjectivities, and possibilities for action. Hence, a vital part of the critical project of creating alternative settings is to document and make visible the dynamics of race and whiteness, that is, the circuits of privilege, that shaped the collective towards an enactment of racial justice through self-determination (Weis & Fine, 2012). Experiences of everyday racism persists despite discourses and practices of inclusion and valuing diversity that is expressed in policy and organisational values. Thus, the need remains to hold fast and deconstruct the elusory and furtive flows of racism.

Through close analysis of interviews with the collective, important personal stories and collective narratives were identified, which show the many ways the work of CBTL is grounded in individual and community experiences. Narratives create meaning and make sense of our complex social worlds (Bruner, 1990), shaping social identities and understandings, and thus constituting powerful cultural resources (Rappaport, 1995). Narratives are also an important site for examining the workings of power and resistance and various ways

race and other structures are reproduced through discursive, symbolic, and material means (Ladson-Billings, 2002). The narratives shared by CBTL members clarifies how the initiative is a response to structural violence such as racism and racialisation as well as the enactment of hope and desire for safe and healing spaces for community making.

Analysing Stories: Forms of violence, resistance, and liberation

Through the analysis of narrative, individual and community experiences are contextualised through the cultural resources which are drawn on. In documenting the narratives shared by the collective members, the setting they have created can be situated within the lived realities of structural violence faced by themselves and their communities within the Australian context, as well as the forms of knowledge they have collected navigating previous settings. Further, it is from these experiences that powerful forms of counter-storytelling can emerge. Thus through these narratives the collective *name racism as structural violence*, detailing the specific ways this is experienced and manifesting culturally and materially with psychosocial consequences. It is this meaning-making that necessitates the need to respond to violence and allows resistance strategies to cohere. For CBTL these resistance strategies entail the creation of alternative settings, *home-places and healing spaces*, for themselves and their communities to 'declutter'. It is from these settings, that CBTL are able to engage the decolonial actions of *counter storytelling, authentic visibility and building solidarities*, and together to *radically reimagine relationships and ways of working*. The next section draws from interview data to illustrate the interconnected processes and practices of structural violence and politics of resistance.

Naming structural violence: "... They feel like they're going to be judged"

For the collective structural violence was acutely felt by both them and their communities through particular expressions of racism that worked to vilify, inferiorise and commodify black people. Firstly, stereotyping and forms of everyday racialisation work to vilify through the construction of people of African descent as, criminal or deficit:

...cause a lot of the times, what I see is the youth, they feel uncomfortable to reach out to white spaces because they don't feel like they're wanted or they feel like they're going to be judged before they approach. It's like there's all this talent in the community but they don't know what to do with it because, they've been already looked at like, "You're criminal. You do this and you do that. (Anyuop Dau)

The devaluation of cultural, intellectual or creative products and identities, inferiorise as particular ways of being in the world are constructed as lesser than or signal deficit:

...when it comes to being around people who aren't from your community, you have to change yourself.... you've got to speak a certain way. If you speak and people don't understand you, you're automatically seen as unknowledgeable. Having to ensure that you are educated and you know what you're doing around the people you're with so that you're not categorized as something you're not. (Nyakeer Akuol)

Such devaluation of social identities places a burden of labour on racialised individuals and communities as these representations are navigated and challenged (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018).

“Blackness” can also become commodification as individuals of African descent are rendered objects, and their “Blackness” consumed. In doing so White norms are upheld through “the othering of constructed Black culture and identities” and applications of white ideals to Black bodies” (Nguyen & Anthony, 2014, p. 771). Through the lens of Whiteness, Black cultural products and identity are defined and assigned value. In the context of the creative industries, this can manifest in how creative works are made niche, or constrained to particular content that serves to construct “Blackness” in particular ways:

There's a lot of space that exists for people of colour to just be. However, those spaces are so poisoned nowadays because you go to an art gallery or you go to an event where people can overly consume you as an artist or overly consume me as a person because they have their own connotations of who you are or they have their own ideologies of who you are. Sometimes that imagery does not fit you. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

This often occurs in a context of “white” organisations that seek to maintain control of spaces and filter diverse ethnic and cultural identities and experiences through the lens of whiteness:

There's not a lot of places that cater to black bodies and black people. It's always, we're under the ice grip of whiteness, and to be able to have a space where [people in our community] feel comfortable and that no one's looking down on them or they're being controlled by an organization or an individual in order for them to do what they need. (Anyuop Dau)

This form of racist structural violence, whilst different to the vilifying discourses of criminality and deficit, depicts the

experience of being black under a controlling gaze, “looking through ... a lens of you”. The controlling gaze works towards limiting the ways individuals can identify or represent themselves. Often such forms of structural violence can be seen as celebratory or employed within discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. These discourses reduce “Blackness” or “Africanness” to overdetermined categories that still maintain “otherness” and constrain people within dominant group narratives (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018).

Structural violence works to exclude racialised people from equitable access to important resources and opportunities through acts of interpersonal and institutional racism, both overt and covert:

A lot of the times when we wanted to go use a space, they would kind of agree and it would be great over the phone, it would be great over email, and it's a totally different story in person. That's just kind of like, well, the only thing that's different now is that you've got a chance to see me, and you're just like, "It's a bunch of Black kids. I don't know if we can really count on having you." (Tiyami Amum)

There also is an added cost for racialised individuals and communities who must navigate structural violence conveyed in narratives and stories about the capacity of racialised people. This cost is the emotional labour involved in resisting misrecognition and misrepresentation and asserting complex identities and telling complex stories (Evans & Moore, 2015). This is an everyday form of labour that is produced by an everyday form of racism. Emotional labour, like “burn out” as an example, takes a deep psychosocial toll as individuals navigate racism:

There's also a lot of stolen time in having to explain my blackness and having to explain why that's the thing that I have to explain, and then

having to explain why that's the thing that you should stop doing to me. That's a lot of stolen time, a lot of stolen energy when I could be expressing something so much more. (Tiyami Amum)

This product of structural violence frames interactions and relationships and is often unseen and unaccounted for. Thus, it is important that it is recognised and understood when examining how racialised individuals and communities both respond to structural violence, but also form relationships and interact with individuals and organisations across contexts.

Home places, healing spaces: “Our own space is like you can just declutter there”

For CBTL, an important way to respond to structural violence is the creation of alternative settings through the activation of a physical space from which projects and the collective can be based, but also that is both for and shaped by community. Whilst many of the events and workshops CBTL have undertaken, can and have been located within other spaces both physical and digital, having a physical space is an integral part of self-determination and the creation of home-places that allow criticality, healing, the fostering of relationships and cultural safety. Such a space allows for the maximisation of resources. It connects communities. It is imbued in its own symbolic meaning, of home place, of autonomy.

If you don't have a home, you're considered homeless. We need a space to call a home for us to be free. Get up, have breakfast, and also we have family without a judgement. You could do what you needed to do, as long as you've got respect and you've got a vision. Then in that home, you can go anywhere, but you're going to come back and share your stories with the family. You're not generating any

negative impact. You're just building a relation. (Ez Eldin Deng)

Importantly, such a space would be self-determined, free from the overdetermining and racialising gaze of whiteness, manifest through individuals and organisations. Such as gaze constrains agency and seeks to shape representation within the parameters of dominant narratives, thus enacting specific forms of epistemic violence that creates unsafe spaces. On the one hand, for many creative artists from racialised communities, systemic inequities have constrained their ability to find spaces at all within which they can create and produce. On the other hand, when there are spaces made available it is often on the terms of others which can discourage collective and community forms of working and wrests away control over the creative and subjective representations of artists.

Such a space would also serve an important role beyond moves towards structural inclusion within the creative industries, or simply gaining autonomy over representation. Watkins and Shulman (2008) speak of building communities of resistance, and extending on the writing of bell hooks (1990), fostering public homeplaces through cultural work. Such spaces are counterspaces that engender humane relationships and networks that seek to enact collective care and healing, form a sense of community, as well as engage in positive meaning-making relating to self, community, and imagined futures beyond the frames of dominant systems. It allows for processes of collective remembering, across communities, and across generations (Case & Hunter, 2012). As noted by one of the participants, such spaces make it possible to create the conditions to be vulnerable, to be reflective and to decolonise one's own “psychic space”, a space within individual's minds that enables “creativity, play, symbolisation and meaning-making, as well as the on the growth processes that rely on these functions to take place” (Rapoport, 2014, p. 1533). This psychic space can be subject to

colonisation as racialised bodies and minds absorb the meanings and products of a society shaped by racism (Oliver, 2004).

Creating a space or allowing a space to be created collectively by community is so important because it's not only operated and run by a collective of people that understand the language of being marginalised and the importance of having a space to just be, it's like we're creating a sense of home. We're creating a space where you can be vulnerable and where you can deconstruct stuff for yourself. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

Whilst there are many opportunities to develop projects, whether workshops or performances, that access and utilise existing spaces, these spaces are both temporary and dependent on other organisations and institutions. It is not to say that important meaning making does not occur in such spaces, or that it prevents collective forms of healing, or the flourishing of networks. It is an impermanence that is linked to wider patterns of structural inequity and devaluing of social identities. It is an impermanence that solidifies the power of white institutions as arbiters of control and access and upholds this arrangement through ongoing processes of misrecognition. Thus, the possibility of self-determined space, shows the cracks in this logic and reasserts a control over self and communities.

To be able to have this space and then allow people to really thrive and create how they feel like they should be creating ... for us to be able to support that, foster that, empower and encourage that, and then see what comes out of that. It would then speak for itself. (Tiyami Amum)

Counter storytelling, authentic visibility and building solidarities: "We're not these kind of people that you see on the news all the time"

From these nurturing and relational spaces, and through these ways of working, CBTL can create and surface powerful counter-stories to the damaging and harmful narratives that denigrate Africans in Australia. Counter stories are the obscured stories that emerge from those people and communities who experience oppression and marginalisation, they are challenges and responses to damaging dominant modes of understanding circulated within a society (Delgado, 1989). Counter stories as a form of self-representation are an important way for racialised communities to resist structural violence. They can be thought of as resistance stories that fight the negative representations of the dominant society and the inequitable systems they uphold (Bell, 2010). It also creates resources for people within those communities to construct identities and understandings of the world, drawing on their own experience and knowledge grounded in community and cultural histories.

For me, they can be able to learn what we do and not just see us from a lens of negativity or what the media shows them and being like, "These people are actually like grinding out here." They want spaces, they want to do better and we're just, we're not these kind of people that you see on the news all the time, but we're trying to create change for our community and trying to better ourselves for the next generation... (Anyuop Dau)

Self-determination is central to efforts of self-representation, and the project itself, is:

It was an important thing because it was about our representation, but also visibility, authentic visibility. Also, it's about having autonomy

and self-determination over the work that we do and how we deliver it. (Geskeva Komba)

To be autonomous and able to self-determine, enables communities to develop their own resources and opportunities, to develop projects and programs that actually meet their needs, and to privilege knowledges and ways of being and doing grounded in community histories and experiences (Rappaport, 1995).

Whilst a project such as CBTL may realise autonomy and self-determination, it still exists within the context of the creative industries or social delivery sectors, and the various organisations within these spaces. There are various interactions and relationships that must be navigated, and for CBTL, this means conceptualising how partnerships and collaborations can occur, and providing opportunities for organisations to reflect on and learn from their interactions with various communities.

Within organizations, the changes that would definitely be made is the way that the African diaspora, the Indigenous community and people of colour are being seen. There'll definitely be a conversation on the ways that we work together or the ways that we have delivered a project or ways that these organizations could work better in being aware, being culturally aware in their platforms or in their organizations. (Nyakeer Akuol)

Counter-stories are deployed within these important settings where structural violence is experienced, seeking to transform relationships and ways of working in these contexts.

The project also seeks to build solidarities with other racialised and marginalised communities. Structural exclusion for marginalised communities translates to a scarcity of resources and opportunities,

creating an environment of competition. For many of these communities there are similar sets of racialised experiences perpetrated by the same structural mechanisms.

All of us, Indigenous community, Pasifika communities, we are all looked at from the same lens, from the white perspective. To be able to have that connection with them and being like, "Hey, you're doing this and we're doing that, let's collab." Cause if we don't help each other, no one else is going to help us. We have to work through these spaces so that we can give our own communities the same benefits. (Anyuop Dau)

In fostering these solidarities, engaging in cultural sharing and understanding, and connecting shared experiences within the Australian settler colonial context, exclusionary structures can be better challenged and shifted, and new narratives created.

Radical reimagining of relationships and ways of working: "It's understanding our identity first, collectively"

Key aspects of the CBTL project is deconstructing taken for granted ways of being and doing, and ultimately creating a framework through which future generations can self-determine and access important resources and opportunities. To work towards these goals, internal and external relationships and processes are equally important. The collective has had to conceptualise ways of relating with each other, other organisations, partners and collaborators, and various communities. The collective has also had to consider how the organisational practices and processes they develop, define these relationships, reflect their values and form a basis for their broader goals. For this the collective engage a radical imagination from which they are working and imagining from a different set of ethics and principles to the settings they are responding to.

With the CBTL project, the collective members have had an opportunity to draw on their experiences with and within various organisations and projects to deconstruct their approaches to the work they are doing. This includes structure, how they've constructed their roles within the project, and particularly a commitment to non-hierarchical ways of organising. It also includes their internal practices and processes, how they make decisions, how they communicate, take and hold accountability, learn and grow, and share successes and failures. This praxis emerges from radical decolonial reimaginings that asserts humanity and recentres relationality,

We all agreed that to move forward and to develop community, we have to use a practice that is so healing and is so connected to ourselves, and connected to our souls. I think that change is not changing the exterior, but also changing the internal... I feel like CBTL we have our intentions, we have our values, we have the structure, how we want it to look like but it's always changing because we're individually growing. We'll bring in different things and different perspectives. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

For the collective, this change needs to be grounded in a core set of shared values that guide and frame the intention behind these important decisions. However, importantly, there is also an ongoing commitment to reflection and learning. As the members of CBTL grow individually and collectively, there is an openness to draw on new experiences to re-think and re-imagine their approaches to doing this work. Yet, whilst the collective has much agency in shaping these aspects of the project, there are some important contexts which also impact decisions around structure, process and practices. CBTL, are not apart from, but rather are a part of the communities of the African diaspora. Thus, the histories and

knowledge from these communities have also played a part in shaping the project. A central goal of CBTL is to, as one collective member tells, "[build] a constructive map that we will leave to our young generation to follow". The project aims to create a foundation, and resources that younger generations can then access, and not having to face many of the challenges that are experienced currently. This goal is also dependent on the sustainability of the project beyond the lifespan of a single grant, or within cycles of grant applications.

At this point, it's just a learning process and creating events and workshops that will have people come in and offer their opportunities and to learn more things so that those people can take what they've learned and build something for themselves or within their own community or within their own space. (Anyuop Dau)

This goal is also premised on building capacities of young people to become part of CBTL, taking it further, or extending opportunities to other areas and communities. In this way CBTL, is less about the collective which currently constitutes it but rather how this collective can create a framework and praxes for communities of the African diaspora to self-determine.

The practices and processes CBTL develop also shape the relationships and interactions they have with various communities and organisations,

For myself, I think that being true to the values of self-determination, transparency, intersectionality. Then communicating those values to people or an organization that we would be collaborating with that they believe that they... share those values. (Geskeva Komba)

By ensuring that partnerships and collaborations are grounded in shared values, and centring this within relationship

building, there are opportunities for organisations and individuals to reflect on their own practices and processes. This focus on values, works towards creating culturally safe spaces and collaborations, but also raises broader questions and considerations about working alongside and within various communities. Within building these relationships with various organisations, there are also opportunities for more structured learning and change processes.

The collective members position CBTL as embedded within communities of the African diaspora but also as point of contact between different groups and organisations. The project has been envisioned as building networks and facilitating new and stronger relationships, recognising and supporting the resources and opportunities that currently exist. This creates an important condition of dialogue between the collective and communities of the African diaspora, in shaping the project's outputs and approaches. However, this community-based relationship building seeks to enhance how resources and opportunities are made accessible. This collaborative approach can also maximise resources and lead to new opportunities being created.

Discussion

In this article, we described the emergence of CBTL as an enactment of racial justice through the self-determined activity that has emerged from a group of people who individually and collectively continue to be subjected to structural violence. We suggested that CBTL can be understood as an alternative setting that further engenders important forms of resistance and community making, and that is shaped and constrained by social power relations. The work alongside the initiative to date has further provided new insights about the delicate task of crafting research practice at the university-community interface. While we have taken guidance from the long tradition of community based and participatory action research, our activity

has further blurred the boundaries between research and practice and researcher and researched opening up a dialogue that makes possible mutual and co-constructed processes of meaning making.

Through various methods we have documented the stories of struggle for racial justice by this group within and across settings. Many settings which racialised communities and individuals encounter replicate structures and symbols of white supremacy. The creation of new and alternative settings creates a safe and healing space for these communities and individuals, but also fosters radical approaches towards working toward racial justice and creates powerful counter-stories. Sarason (1972), noted two key insights for the success of a setting. That what precedes the creation of a setting, the contexts from which it emerged from, those who supported and constrained it, and the sparks which gave the very idea of the setting life, play an immense role in the success of the setting. Secondly, that setting success is further dependent on external relations with other settings it engages with (Cherniss, 2012). Whilst alternative settings offer some reprieve from oppressive structures, they must still engage with those same structures and exist within a broader oppressive social context. Thus, documenting the formation of CBTL as a setting, the values they hold, their ways of working and relating, and the narratives which sit at the centre of their initiative, provides us important insights into the dynamics of oppression and resistance.

By using the notion of structural violence, we were able to explicate how racialisation was enacted in everyday language to maintain privilege while marginalising people with emotional and psychological cost. Structural violence is expressed and manifest through the vilification, inferiorisation and commodification of "blackness" and black people constraining self-determination over stories, histories and identities. A product of these expressions of structural violence is

emotional labour, which continues to structure the experiences and relationships of individuals within racialised communities.

Structural violence is also met with resistance and desire. The formation of CBTL is resistant and emancipatory action. Critical scholars have long shown the benefits and functions of homeplaces (hooks, 1990) and alternative settings in the lives of oppressed communities. It is in these settings that people are able to come together to imagine alternative ways, affirm community cultures and histories, provide mutual support, and craft alternative visions. These alternative settings can be conceived as relational healing spaces grounded in collectively held values of care, recognition, reciprocity. Important, both CBTL and the spaces they create continue to exist within contexts of race and coloniality, and so the products of re-imagining and pre-figuration reach back out through counterstories and authentic forms of visibility, that seek to form solidarities and broader practices and ways of relating within the creative industries.

Furthermore, these insights can shape our ways of working within critical community psychology. As we align ourselves in the struggles for liberation and racial justice, we should always seek to be grounded in the ways justice is imagined by those who have been racialised and marginalised. Our capacities for supporting and enacting change lies in the relationship of trust we nurture through dialogue. Ratele and Malherbe (2020) call for an anti-racist psychology in which,

the point, instead, is to realise one's own agency (i.e., become one's own foundation) through rejecting habitual iterations of racism, asserting the dignity of the racially oppressed within the everyday, and altering racist culture so that we might transform racist structures (Cooper & Ratele, 2018, p. 3).

This call is a commitment to criticality in our reflexive practice across all domains of everyday life. It is also a call to relationship and accountability in line with the assertion that decoloniality is a collective project that builds from below and entails a radical transformation of knowledge, the aesthetic and a commitment to action (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). What radical possibilities lie in our relationships, in our partnerships and collaborations, in our ways of working and walking alongside? Thus, racial justice must be born through radical imagination, both an act of world-making and world-imagining. These potentialities not only configure the creation of alternative settings, but also our ways of working within a community-engaged praxis.

References

- Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] (2017). *Racism it stops with me – About racism*. Retrieved from <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/about-racism>
- Bell, L. A. (2010). *Storytelling for social justice: Connecting narrative and arts in antiracist teaching*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning* (Vol. 3). Harvard university press.
- Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for understanding the role of settings in marginalised individual's adaptive responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 50*, 257-270. doi:10.1007/s10464-012-9497-7
- Cherniss, C. (2012). Seymour Sarason and the creation of settings. *Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(2), 209-214.

- Cherniss, C., & Deegan, G. (2000). The creation of alternative settings. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology* (pp. 359-377). New York: Springer Science and Business Media.
- cohealth. (n.d.). *arts generator*. <https://www.cohealth.org.au/health-services/arts-generator/>
- cohealth. (2018). *Strategic Plan 2019-2023*. <https://www.cohealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/cohealth-Strategic-Plan-web-FINAL.pdf>
- Coimbra, J. L., Duckett, P., Fryer, D., Makkawi, I., Menezes, I., Seedat, M., & Walker, C. (2012). Rethinking community psychology: Critical insights. *The Australian Community Psychologist*, 42(2), 135-142.
- Cooper, S., & Ratele, K. (2018). The black consciousness psychology of Steve Biko. In S. Fernando R. Moodley (Eds.), *Global Psychologies: Mental Health and the Global South* (pp. 245-260). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, 87(8), 2411-2441.
- Dutta, U., Sonn, C. C., & Lykes, M. B. (2016). Situating and contesting structural violence in community-based research and action. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 2(2), 1-20.
- Evans, S. D., Duckett, P., Lawthom, R., & Kivell, N. (2017). Positioning the critical in community psychology. In M. A. Bond, I. Serrano-Garcia, & C. B. Keys (Eds.) *APA Handbook of Community Psychology: Vol. 1: Theoretical Foundations, Core Concepts, and Emerging Challenges*, 107-128. American Psychological Association.
- Evans, L., & Moore, W. L. (2015). Impossible burdens: White institutions, emotional labor, and micro-resistance. *Social Problems*, 62(3), 439-454.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Fricker, M. (2013). Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom? *Synthese*, 190(7), 1317-1332.
- Green, M. J., Sonn, C. C., & Matsebula, J. (2007). Reviewing Whiteness: Theory, research possibilities. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 37(3), 389-419.
- Hage, G. (1998). *White nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Han, G., & Budarick, J. (2018). Overcoming the new kids on the block syndrome: the media 'endorsement' on discrimination against African-Australians. *Continuum*, 32(2), 213-223.
- hooks, B. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Kagan, C., Burton, M., Duckett, P., Lawthom, R., & Siddiquee, A. (2019). *Critical community psychology: Critical action and social change*. Routledge.
- Kwansah-Aidoo, K., & Mapedzahama, V. (2018). "There is really discrimination everywhere": Experiences and consequences of Everyday Racism among the new Black African diaspora in Australia. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 39(1), 81-109.
- Lykes, M. B. (2013). Participatory and action research as a transformative praxis: Responding to humanitarian crises from the margins. *American Psychologist*, 68(8), 774.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). *Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality*. Paris: Frantz Fanon Foundation.
- Mansouri, F., Elias, A., & Sweid, R. (2017). *The doing diversity project: Revitalising multiculturalism through an intercultural lens and deliberative interventions*. Melbourne: Deakin University Publishing.

- Markus, A. (2016). *Australians Today: The Australia@2015 Scanlon Foundation Survey*. Retrieved from <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Australians-Today.pdf>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The white possessive: White possession and Indigenous sovereignty matters*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nguyen, J., & Anthony, A. K. (2014). Black authenticity: Defining the ideals and expectations in the construction of "real" blackness. *Sociology Compass*, 8(6), 770-779.
- Oliver, K. (2004). *The colonization of psychic space: A psychoanalytic social theory of oppression*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Paradies, Y., Ben, J., Denson, N., Elias, A., Priest, N., Pieterse, A., ...Gee, G. (2015). Racism as a determinant of health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 10(9), 1-48.
- Priest, N., Paradies, Y., Trenerry, B., Truong, M., Karlsen, S., & Kelly, Y. (2013). A systematic review of studies examining the relationship between reported racism and health and wellbeing for children and young people. *Social Science and Medicine*, 95, 115-127.
- Rappaport, J. (1977). *Community psychology: Values, research, and action*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 795-807.
- Rapoport, E. (2014). Psychic Space, Colonization. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology* (p. 1533-1535). New York, NY: Springer.
- Ratele, K., & Malherbe, N. (2020). What antiracist psychology does and does not (do). *South African Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246320947361>
- Renshaw, L. (2019). *A positive sense of identity and culture: Defining and measuring progress for children and young people in Australia – a literature and scoping review on developing better indicators*. ARACY.
- Sarason, S.B. (1972). *The creation of settings and the future societies*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press.
- Seedat, M., Suffla, S., & Christie, D. J. (Eds.). (2017). *Emancipatory and Participatory Methodologies in Peace, Critical, and Community Psychology*. Springer.
- Sonn, C. C., Baker, A. M., & Agung-Igusti, R. (in press). Promoting Epistemic Justice: Community Arts, Identity and Belonging among African Diaspora in Australia. *Decoloniality and Epistemic Justice in Contemporary Community Psychology*.
- Sonn, C. C., & Fisher, A. T. (1998). Sense of community: Community resilient responses to oppression and change. *Journal of community psychology*, 26(5), 457-472.
- Sonn, C. C., Stevens, G., & Duncan, N. (2013). Decolonisation, critical methodologies and why stories matter. In *Race, Memory and the Apartheid Archive* (pp. 295-314). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Sonn, C. C. & Quayle, A. F. (2013). Developing praxis: Mobilising Critical Race Theory in community cultural development. *Journal of Community and Applied Psychology*, 23, 435-448. doi:10.1002/casp.2145

- Stevens, G. (2018). Raced Repetition: Perpetual paralysis or paradoxical promise? *International Journal of Critical Diversity Studies*, 1(2), 42-57.
- Stevens, G. (2014). Racialisation. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Stevens, G., Bell, D., Sonn, C. C., Canham, H., & Clennon, O. (2017). Transnational perspectives on Black subjectivity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 47(4), 459-469.
- Stevens, G. E., Duncan, N. E., & Hook, D. E. (2013). *Race, memory and the apartheid archive: towards a transformative psychosocial praxis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trenerry B., Franklin H. & Paradies Y. (2012). *Preventing race-based discrimination and supporting cultural diversity in the workplace (An evidence review: full report)*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428.
- Vichealth. (2005). *Social inclusion as a social determinant of health*. https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ProgramsandProjects/Publications/Attachments/Social_Inclusion_Final_Fact_sheet.pdf?la=en&hash=A4B9ACB5FDCE6470975B85CD0F041F84B8491A57
- Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). Communities of resistance: Public homeplaces and supportive sites of reconciliation. In *Toward psychologies of liberation* (pp. 209-231). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Watts, R. J., & Serrano-García, I. (2003). The quest for a liberating community psychology: An overview. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1-2), 73.
- Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2012). Critical bifocality and circuits of privilege: Expanding critical ethnography theory and design. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(2), 173-201.
- Wilderson, F. (2020). *Afropessimism*. Liveright Publishing.
- Windle, J. (2008). The racialisation of African youth in Australia. *Social Identities*, 14(5), 553-566.