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#StopAsianHate in Australia: possibilities and paradoxes for local and global antiracism

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ABSTRACT

The #StopAsianHate movement arose as a critical community-led response to the (re)surge(nce) of transnational anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is growing North American scholarship on this antiracist movement through the lens of online activism, little is known about its in-person mobilization, and even less is known beyond the North American context. This paper thus focuses on #StopAsianHate's Australian iteration through methodologically foregrounding activist research principles with a particular focus on participatory meetings. It explores historical and ongoing manifestations of anti-Asian racism in Australia, rooted in the White Australia Policy and "Yellow Peril" anxieties, and highlights the Asian Australian Alliance's efforts in raising awareness, advocating for systemic change, and fostering (transnational) solidarities across diverse communities. The paper also captures #StopAsianHate's complexities, including mobilization considerations and ingroup internalized racism. It concludes with the importance of recognizing activist's unique experiences, along with sustained advocacy and intersectional solidarity, when enacting antiracism.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, quickly became a global crisis, affecting millions and disrupting daily life in different contexts around the globe. Beyond its significant health and economic impacts, the pandemic also fuelled a rise in xenophobic hate as well as racial discrimination and violence towards Asian communities in white majority countries. In the United States (US), a deluge of more than 10,900 reported instances of anti-Asian violence and verbal abuse (Yellow Horse, Jeung, and Matriano 2022) – including brutal attacks on the elderly, vandalization of business property, and physical assault (Zhou 2022) – reached breaking point in the Atlanta shooting case wherein a white male, a self-reported sex addict, killed six Asian women in three saunas on 16 March 2021. In response to this, #StopAsianHate – as a

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slogan and collection of both online and offline protests – emerged, aiming to raise awareness about this (re)emerging injustice and to unite people in the fight against racism and discrimination. It eventually evolved into a national movement in the US, spurring a reckoning across different industries, prompting new policies at State and Federal levels, and transforming broader awareness of anti-Asian racism (Zhou 2022).

In Australia, ongoing racialized violence against Asian communities was similarly illuminated and amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ang, Song, and Pan 2024; Ang and Mansouri 2022; Ballantyne and Giarrusso 2023; Kamp et al. 2023; Liu, Yu, and Wright 2024; Tan, Lee, and Ruppanner 2021). While the impacts of anti-Asian racism played out in equally egregious ways to the US, little is known about if, or how, #StopAsianHate, as a form of antiracism, translated to the Australian context. In fact, there remains a significant dearth of scholarship investigating how the movement was taken up *beyond* the North American context. Like the US, racial-colonial discourses entrenched in both historical and contemporary Australia mean that "Asians" – which in Australian vernacular vulgarly refers to anyone East Asian in appearance (Ang 2001) – are positioned outside the national imaginary, and thus as perpetual Othered foreigners within the overwhelmingly white Australian state. Simultaneously, "Asianness" in Australia is not engrained or a *fait accompli*, but rather, is infused with strategic potential to be political in nature (Ang 2014), where interpretations are deconstructed and reconstructed in a relative, complex, and dynamic interplay of power and (antiracist) contestation with/in the prevailing culture (Teo 2023). Accordingly, understanding the uniquely Australian inflections of #StopAsianHate – which positions itself as part of a broader fight against local and global forms of systemic racism (Wang, Zhou, and Kinneer 2024) – is germane for combatting (anti-Asian) racism in Australia, and informing broader transnational antiracist efforts.

To that end, this article interrogates the mobilization considerations, impacts, and implications of #StopAsianHate in Australia, drawing specifically on conversations between four antiracist State and National Convenors – Erin (National), Molina (National), Jane[1] (Australian Capital Territory), and Aaron (Queensland) – of the Asian Australian Alliance (AAA), the core national grassroots organization focused on advocacy, amplification, and political engagement and mobilization of Asian Australian voice in Australia (AAA n.d.).[2] Aaron (scholar-activist) and Erin (full-time activist) have co-authored the current paper, which reports on Erin, Molina, and Jane's respective experiences of organizing #StopAsianHate vigils in three Australian capital cities – Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. The paper focuses specifically on unravelling the ways that activists, community organizers, artists, and academics coalesced around #StopAsianHate and used both digital and physical spaces across Australia to raise awareness, share personal experiences, and advocate for systemic change. To provide closer insight into the Australian iteration of #StopAsianHate, and its transnational convergences and divergences, we first historicize anti-Asian racism in Australia. We link this to current considerations of Australian antiracism and theorize synergies with #StopAsianHate. Next, we discuss what is captured in North American #StopAsianHate scholarship, primarily through the lens of online activism. We then touch briefly on our methodology and present data from the Convenors' shared stories thematically.

The stories are told from an Asian Australian activist perspective and showcase mixed sentiments including anger and disappointment at the entrenched (anti-Asian) racism

that pervades different sectors of Australian society, along with a galvanized sense of hope for more racially just futures as catalysed by activism and broader antiracism. They touch on the converging ways that racial violence manifests transnationally, while also acknowledging the substantial structural similarities between the US and Australia, and the commensurate need for cross-fertilization between work on Asian American and Asian Australian experiences (Lo, Chan, and Khoo 2010). Further, the stories shed light on transnational divergences by way of context-specific complexities in forming intra-Asian alliances and other more diverse forms of intersectional activism. Overall, the stories capture the complex nuances of, and ongoing need for, addressing anti-Asian racism in Australia. We conclude by recognizing that while #StopAsianHate was a useful (re)ignition of more visible forms of antiracism in Australia, there is still much to be done in terms of countering anti-Asian hate and tackling larger systems of racism.

(Anti-Asian) racism in Australia

We are aware that our antiracist work as activists – through our roles as AAA Convenors – against anti-Asian racism "stands in a particular relationship to contemporary social and political realities" (6) and see our involvement in #StopAsianHate as a way of understanding and tackling more recent sociopolitical impacts of racism, both as an ideology and as a form of political mobilization (Solomos 2020). Simultaneously, we recognize the social-cultural-historical-political situatedness of racism (Lentin 2020) and the fact that "racism circulates in Australia … in different forms with different intensities" (Hage 2014, 232). We thus provide an historical overview of anti-Asian racism in Australia and subsequently link this to the current state of Australian antiracism.

Like the US, Australia is a settler colonial state premised on the violent dispossession of Indigenous sovereignty, lands, and resources. Such settler colonial states have developed a sense of nationhood modelled after, but also in some ways distinct from, the imperial homeland. In Australia's case, national identity revolves around white (British) colonial patriarchal logics which simultaneously manage and marginalize First Nations people and racialized "exogenous Others" differently (Townsend-Cross and Gatwiri 2024). In this context, even though white settler subjectivity lacks historical density (Ang 2001), the "superstructure of racism [continues to be] settler-colonialism's most powerful apparatus" (3296), allowing settler colonialism to persist as an ongoing permanent structure (instead of a finite series of events) (Townsend-Cross and Gatwiri 2024) which reinforces systemic and transnational injustices in relation to power and power asymmetry (Dong et al. 2023).

Vis-à-vis more expansive processes and manifestations of "race" and racialization which have been central in the construction of modern nation-states, racial-colonial logics permeate Australian institutions, workplaces, and everyday life (Bargallie, Fernando, and Lentin 2024). Yet, Australia positions itself as a tolerant country (Nelson 2015), masking a pervasive failure and unwillingness to acknowledge and address racism across different sectors. As such, racism has a significant – albeit contestable – effect on the hearts, minds, and bodies of racialized Others, such as Asian Australians (Teo 2021). As non-Indigenous migrants, Asian Australians are conceived as national threat and thus differentially "racially stratified through racist migration regimes, temporary visa categories" (Bargallie, Fernando, and Lentin 2024, 1536). Of course, such

manifestations of "numerological racism" (Hage 2014) have its roots in an anti-Asian "Yellow Peril" discourse that was so central to nation-building that the "ideological links between racism, populism and nationalism were sanctioned by the state, for whom racialist nationalism became a central ideological project" (Ang 2001, 102; Teo 2023). Beyond this notorious racist history of supposed Asian *threat* as manifested in the White Australia Policy, Asian Australians have simultaneously been conceived – both historically and contemporarily – as model minorities (Walton and Truong 2023) and an *opportunity* for the nation. Nevertheless, the centrality of Australian whiteness regulates the unspoken but ever-present potential to revert Asian Australians from opportune model minority to vilified threat of dangerous invasions, influxes, and floods (Martin 2022).

Such "ethnonationalist understandings about what it means to be Australian by implicitly centring (Anglo) whiteness as the defining feature of Australian national identity" (Martin 2022, 1478) continue to persist contemporarily, leading to overt acts of racial discrimination in times of (national health) crisis (Teo 2021). Indeed, during the early stages of COVID-19, well before the publication of related COVID-19 racism-related scholarship, the Australian Human Rights Commission indicated that a third of the racial discrimination complaints it received in February and March 2020 were related to the pandemic (Fang, Renaldi, and Yang 2020). These experiences with overt anti-Asian racism were partly a result of media coverage that connected the virus' outbreak to China, and the circulation of fake news on social media and sensationalist reporting (Zen 2020), as well as a surge in online mis- and disinformation about Asian Australians shared by racist ultra-nationalist groups (Wilson 2020). These occurrences cohere with broader Australian literature on the increasing use of online spaces as simultaneous breeding grounds and echo chambers for (anti-Asian) racism, seen from the fact that 66 per cent of Asian Australians who experienced COVID-fuelled anti-Asian racism experienced it online (Kamp et al. 2022).[3] Indeed, online mediums risk legitimating racist narratives by allowing racism more extensive and expeditious reach, while also allowing perpetrators to hide behind anonymity (Kamp et al. 2022; Oboler 2022). This holds true in the case of anti-Asian racism, where Asian Australian community leaders express concern around reduced inhibitions when perpetrating racism online versus offline, and a general lack of transparency in online moderation (Oboler 2022). Perpetrators of online racism evade regulation and escape punishment in this anonymous and transient environment at the expense of Asian Australians' mental health, wellbeing, and belonging. In fact, the impact of online racism on Asian Australian non-belonging and morbidity were concerningly more pronounced for those who experienced online racism compared to those who experienced racism in other offline contexts (Kamp et al. 2022).

Theorizing #StopAsianHate and (Australian) antiracism

Within such a climate where a pervasive white national imaginary endures (Martin 2022), anti-Asian racism calls for an immediate response and to be dealt with as a matter of urgency (Teo 2021). In this regard, theorizing #StopAsianHate as immediate explicit action in broader antiracist agendas is productive since there tends to be a lack of agreement about what antiracism means, both at ideological and political practice levels

(Solomos 2020). As Bonnett (2000) reminds us, while racism and "discrimination are under continuous historical and sociological examination … anti-racism is consigned to the status of a 'cause', fit only for platitudes of support and denouncement" (as cited in Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020, 3). This investigation of #StopAsianHate is thus timely in advancing explicit understandings of local antiracism within the global rise of openly antiracist movements and ideas that aim to offer new political and ideological perspectives on combating racism and fostering ways to coexist with difference (Solomos 2020). Through this framing, this paper adds to "formative conversations that have arisen between anti-racist movements and theor[ies] of racism" (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020, 2), where we acknowledge the lengthy tradition of complementarity between the two in theorizing about antiracism as an ongoing process shaped by street struggles and scholarship (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020).

While this investigation contributes to broader considerations of what kinds of counterstrategies can be adopted to challenge new forms of racist mobilization (Solomos 2020), we acknowledge that such antiracism needs to be understood "in terms of the historical precedents, legacies and projects they reference or are implicated in" (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020, 2). We recognize that the act of publicizing racism as a public problem – through movements such as #StopAsianHate – is heavily influenced by national and political context and identity models that are culturally embedded. Indeed, consistent with the racial-colonial matrices that still structure the nation state, Nelson (2015) highlights how silencing and denial is a feature of modern racism at both personal and political levels in Australia. Nevertheless, she also provides encouragement via the reminder that "speaking" (openly about) racism acknowledges the problem and functions as a productive antiracist step. Put differently, the ability to publicly name racism – via #StopAsianHate – as systemic and systematic is long overdue, since it can catalyse antiracist mobilizing that seeks to combine justice-oriented critique with analysis and alteration of practice (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020). Because racism in Australia has been characterized as being "everywhere different", nuanced and localized approaches to antiracism are required (Nelson and Dunn 2017; as cited in Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021) to break through the ideological rejection and denial of structural racism that permeates public discourse and informs institutional governance in Australia. We thus explore localized articulations of #StopAsianHate in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane in the main body of this paper following an overview of the scholarship on #StopAsianHate in the US and a summary of our methodology in the next sections.

#StopAsianHate activism in the US

Antiracist activism leverages collective identity and relies on the actions of like-minded people seeking change (Chon 2023). It takes place in both offline and online fora, with the former referring to cause-oriented activity where individuals participate in activist events through physical assemblies (Chon and Park 2020; as cited in Chon 2023). Interestingly, scholarship on offline organization for #StopAsianHate in the US is scarce. We know more broadly that online activism does not necessarily operate in isolation – in many cases, online and offline activist activity is mutually constituted. Online activist spaces provide platforms to advertise and organize offline gatherings, allow bottom-up mobilization of offline events through *interpersonal* networks, and have an *intrapersonal* effect on

stimulating online activists to also protest offline (Greijdanus et al. 2020). In terms of #StopAsianHate, the sharing and documenting of collective experiences via social media not only promotes activism in online communities, but also helps facilitate offline communities to act, build community, and engage in norm formation (Jacques et al. 2022). In other words, social media and online activism are instrumental (albeit not obstacle-free) in mobilizing potential new participants for offline action, while supporting other forms of antiracist activism (Lee, Tao, and Li 2022). Relatedly, information about past or ongoing offline events can be extensively shared on online platforms, increasing overall online engagement (Tong et al. 2022).

Unsurprisingly, the accessibility and virality of social media platforms – which function as powerful tools in facilitating conversations around connection and resilience building for diverse Asian communities during COVID-19 (Dong et al. 2023) – has translated to significantly more scholarship on #StopAsianHate as enacted online. Such online spaces elicit both proactive and reactive communication behaviours (Chon 2023) to mobilize support against anti-Asian racism in the US (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020). As a form of hashtag activism, #StopAsianHate functions as a logistic shortcut to increase visibility while also weaving in information and experience relevant to the hashtag. In general, hashtag activism is useful and powerful for organizing, mobilizing, directing, advocating, (counter)storytelling, and allyship (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020; Lee and Lee 2023). Hashtags also function as a mode of curating and imagining one's community, allowing marginalized individuals to connect with similar others and affectively mobilize publics by narrating their stories. As Kuo (2018; as cited in Lee and Lee 2023) writes, "hashtags function as a discursive form that links together streams of information that allows people to 'feel their way' into politics" (3). In stark contrast to the racially discriminatory #Chinesevirus and #Kungflu (Chon 2023), #StopAsianHate – as a form of hashtag activism – can be understood as a practice for identifying racism and (re)building agency, connection and community among disparately scattered individuals (Wang, Zhou, and Kinneer 2024).

Evidently, social media can raise awareness of racial discrimination, impact attitudes and behaviours, and reinforce racially-just norms (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). It is thus no surprise that much of the North American literature on #StopAsianHate focuses on the ways the movement leveraged various social media platforms including Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. This growing corpus of work captures the role of Twitter as a vital platform for collectively combating overt racism online, distributing information and stimulating discussion about social justice (Wang, Zhou, and Kinneer 2024), creating entry points into news media, advancing counterstories of – and empowering – the marginalized, and building networks of dissent (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020). Other scholarship also captures the sheer reach of #StopAsianHate – where the hashtag garnered more than two billion views as of Nov 2022 (Lee and Lee 2023) – on platforms such a TikTok, which can be used as a space for marginalized groups to raise consciousness on injustices (Jacques et al. 2022) and work in solidarity by building allyship with other marginalized communities (Cao et al. 2022). Amidst #StopAsianHate, TikTok – like Twitter – enabled a carving out of discursive spaces to (re)claim power through female creators' agentive, visual presence on themes such as physical hate crimes, Asian fetishization, and racial microaggressions (Lee and Lee 2023). Work on social media visual cultures during #StopAsianHate also captures how a similar platform like

Instagram encouraged "counter-hegemonic imaginaries pushed forward by social movements" (Treré, 2018; as cited in Narayanamoorthy 2023, 67). Further, Instagram facilitates organization and opposition to exclusion, inequality, and injustice, while also allowing for the visibility and representation of marginalized groups (Narayanamoorthy 2023). As Narayanamoorthy (2023) eloquently argues, the use of Instagram alongside #StopAsianHate "creates a space for rewriting colonial history with collective histories and genealogies of vulnerable and oppressed communities and forges the means to dismantle and recenter the foundations of colonial knowledge through the use of hashtags" (82). Beyond previous shows of solidarity (e.g. black square for BLM) or fundraising (GoFundMe), Instagram, and Instagram Stories in particular, were also used for more immediate hands-on purposes stemming from a distrust of authorities, inadequate reporting mechanisms, and a lack of personal confidence in Asian Americans' abilities to respond to racialized violence. In this case, Instagram Stories were used to mobilize 100 volunteers trained in peaceful bystander intervention, and who also offered strategies for de-escalating violent situations (Basu 2021).

Scholarship on #StopAsianHate and social media in the Australian context is far less developed. One Australian-founded platform that *is* captured in the literature is the now transnational 1.7-million-strong Facebook group *Subtle Asian Traits* (SAT), which was a space for (East) Asian diasporas to engage – via the 1200 new posts added daily – in cathartic sharing, mutual care, and discursive activism amid rising anti-Asian racism during COVID-19 (Abidin and Zeng 2020). Although not explicitly tied to #StopAsianHate, SAT similarly held space to share lived experiences about what it meant to be Asian during the pandemic (Abidin and Zeng 2020). Beyond providing space to speak out, SAT was also used to launch various online counter campaigns, along with escalation and problem-solving by amplifying the reach and visibility of cases of anti-Asian racism as well as intervening in ongoing cases. SAT also championed Asian representation through leadership and advocacy work offline. For instance, it supported grassroots efforts to provide small-scale relief to Asian businesses targeted by racial violence, offer strategies for educating elderly family members about COVID-19 misinformation, and offer suggestions for maintaining personal wellbeing (Abidin and Zeng 2020)

A common thread through this existing corpus of work is that social justice campaigns like #StopAsianHate – whether enacted online or offline – are deeply entangled with/in racial, cultural, and political factors (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020), making them complex assemblages that warrant further investigation. We briefly explain our methodology before sharing our stories that extends understanding around #StopAsianHate activism.

Methodology

This article draws inspiration from a qualitative multi-site case study approach, which, in this paper, provides "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon" (Merriam 1998, xiii) like grassroots antiracism against anti-Asian racism. It expounds on the particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic imperatives (Merriam 1998) of #StopAsianHate in Australia, focusing specifically on organizers' stories about the transformative possibilities of confronting the spatial and temporal workings of dominant discourses of power. Importantly, as a form of "activist research" (or AvR) – defined as "collective

processes of cooperation between academic researchers and non-academics while producing sociological knowledge and inciting actions aiming to change social problem[s]" (Martinez 2024, 834) – we are mindful of foregrounding a "methodological toolbox" from which we draw (Martinez 2024). In utilizing this toolbox, we adjust our focus from a single methodological "rule book" to the following five "tactical tools" in enacting AvR (Martinez 2024, 13–14), thereby engaging in action that sustains and embodies in us the continuing power of alternative practices to support a collective pursuit of justice:

1. Establishing cooperative relations and agreements between academics and activists early on
2. Seeing activists as knowledge producers
3. Engaging in collective processes of knowledge production
4. Privileging certain methods, including participatory meetings as a primary data source
5. Engendering social, political, economic and/cultural change

In line with these principles, data was collected by way of an extended online participatory meeting lasting approximately two hours, followed by a collaborative and iterative process of writing up the paper. It is worth noting that initial discussion and ideation for this paper had already been taking place in our conversations as co-convenors six months before the participatory meeting. NVivo software was used to thematically code the points raised during discussion and an inductive grounded theory analytic approach was used to analyse perceptions. Aaron independently led data analysis, before meeting with Erin and Jane to resolve any discrepancies and arrive at shared meaning on analytic interpretations. This article is part of the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee project code ETH2025-0145.

Discussion

This section showcases the convergences and divergences with broader #StopAsianHate literature via the following four themes: (1) Shared motivations and contextual differences, (2) Mobilization online and offline, (3) Complexities in #StopAsianHate and broader antiracism, and (4) Accessibility, representation and empowerment.

"Why are we not doing anything in Australia?": shared motivations and contextual differences

As AAA Co-Founder and National Convenor, Erin – an Australian-born Asian with Malaysian heritage – lives between the US and Australia. Her unique transnational living situation and positionality as a full-time activist inspired her to initiate the Australian iteration of #StopAsianHate following the realization that nothing was being done to respond to the spike in overt anti-Asian racism in Australia during COVID-19. Erin proudly notes that the local #StopAsianHate vigils organized through the AAA were the "first in modern [Australian] history", reinvigorating a renewed *and* specific focus on Australian anti-Asian racism, following much earlier collective activist action against Pauline Hanson's infamous 1996 maiden speech about Australia being overrun by Asians. She further shares that, like the US, the Australian in-person vigils were organized

following the Atlanta spa shootings, with key focuses including "mak[ing] a statement" that racism is not a geographically isolated phenomenon, while also building a sense of community unity despite the sheer geographic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of Asian Australians.

> There hasn't really been anything that is more targeted at Asian Australians. So … all those years, you know, decades after, this was just something to reinvigorate that issue and that sense of community. The most important thing [was] that we wanted to merge that sense of community … You know we may be everywhere, but we do have a community.

Molina – an Indian-born economic migrant – who is a Principal Lawyer as well as AAA Co-Founder and National Convenor, shares similar sentiments around the importance of Australian #StopAsianHate in coalescing with the broader transnational movement to send an impactful message.

> It was important for us to do that, just to show that … what is happening is not right, and that we need to take action against that. We were, of course, inspired by what was happening in other parts of the world as well. And we wanted, you know, the media, the government, and others to take notice to create an impact.

Despite these motivational similarities with US #StopAsianHate, Erin is quick to note Australia's contextual nuances that contrast the strong uptake in North America.

> [#StopAsianHate here is] slightly difficult, because … our environment is [the] same, but also very different. #StopAsianHate in Australia is very complex and involves negative narratives relating to China and other geopolitical issues on top of COVID-19 racism. The fact that Australia is located with the Asia-Pacific makes these geopolitical issues closer to home. With the current negative narratives strung up by Australian media, commentators, and politicians about China, this impacts anti-Asian hate in Australia and how our Asian Australians react … [hesitantly] to #StopAsianHate locally.

Undergraduate student-activist, Jane – who was born in Canada and has lived in a string of settler colonial contexts where her mixed Asian cultural identities have been questioned, contested, and commodified – concurs with this assessment.

> In Australia … it wasn't the same kind of extent as the activism reached in the U.S. I think Australia is very laid back, and there just isn't as much [happening here].

"Good for engaging and empowering": mobilization online and offline

Echoing some of the discrepancies between the US and Australia in antiracist activist engagement, Erin, Molina, and Jane shared different stories of offline #StopAsianHate mobilization. For Erin, the Sydney vigil drew 500–600 participants with mixed prior experience engaging in activism.

> For some of the Asian Australians who came to the Sydney vigil, they mentioned … that this was the first time that they ever decided to come out for an issue that they care about. So, a lot of people there [had never been] to a protest; [they] probably didn't feel like they [previously] had the courage to stand for an issue.

Consistent with the US #StopAsianHate and social media scholarship, the three Convenors also relied strongly on online platforms for #StopAsianHate in Australia. Speaking about logistical considerations for the vigils, Erin shares about the use of GoFundMe

and online flyers, while Molina shares how AAA leveraged existing or #StopAsianHate-specfic partnerships for financial backing and awareness-raising online for the vigils.

> [Our partners] were posting about us. We were posting about them.

For Jane, who was still in high school at the time, #StopAsianHate was her first foray into in-person "tangible activism", and interestingly, it was a combination of her innate sense of justice and subsequent social media (Facebook) engagement that led to her organizing the #StopAsianHate vigil in Brisbane.

> I definitely … connected those experiences of racism around me to what I'd been seeing in the news, and from … the U.S. to Australia to like the hate crimes. The Atlanta Spa shooting like those kinds of things … really made me feel this urge to go out and do something about it.[4]

Reflecting further on the role of social media in her personal antiracist journey and for broader mobilization of "racial counterpublics" (Fraser, 1990, as cited in Lee and Lee 2023),[5] Jane remarks, that:

> Social media is good for engaging and empowering the community. [It] is a great vehicle for promoting change and getting people to not only be aware of these kinds of things, but to have the energy to go out and support [the movement], because it is good at building that sense of *why*.

She notes, with reference to the ongoing Free Palestine campaign, that online "virality is important" with such social justice movements. She shares the impact of such virality in the Brisbane vigil, which attracted fifty attendees.

> One of the performers … he was able to post on Instagram with … one of the radio networks in Brisbane, and that was … really good.

Mirroring the US literature, Jane also highlights that both online and offline forms of mobilization need to work in tandem for best effect.

> It's easier … to repost a story than to organise or go out to a rally [but a lot of the examples I've seen are] promoting people to go out to a rally. And when you see that kind of thing, you get the impression that, "Wow! This is really big – I should care about this, and everyone's going to this." … Maybe I wouldn't have heard about it otherwise if I hadn't seen it. So, I think it's important to take an integrated approach.

A "lukewarm response": complexities in #StopAsianHate and broader antiracism

While Erin's Sydney #StopAsianHate iteration was well-attended, it was not without its challenges. For instance, there was reluctance from associated groups to take charge of organization. There were also regulatory and logistical challenges, which prevented AAA from running #StopAsianHate as a protest march similar to the more largescale #BlackLivesMatter a year prior (Townsend-Cross and Gatwiri 2024). Settling instead on vigils in three capital cities, these logistical challenges continued to negatively impact Molina's Melbourne vigil, which was relegated to a corner in Fed Square.[6] This lack of centrality of location, ongoing draconian COVID-19 lockdown laws in Victoria,[7] and a perceived "lukewarm response" or lack of Asian Australian solidarity, led to low (25) vigil attendance which disheartened Molina.

> There was obviously a lot going on around that time, but we thought we would have generated a bit more interest. I'm not quite sure what was the reason for not many people turning up. So, I mean … I would say [at least] we did it. After that we just [used] social media … so we got the word out. But I think … I just feel there's that lack of interest … It's a bit deflating because you think that people *would* want to come out and actually protest against things that are worthwhile raising, but they just don't make that effort.

She elaborates on the lack of Asian Australian community support as a recurring challenge during #StopAsianHate and beyond.

> There is always push back to activism but sometimes within your own communities … it's not so much pushback as lack of support.
>
> They don't really want to support you because they don't want to be the ones, you know … aspiring for various things that they will lose out on if they support those causes. Those who do achieve those positions don't want to say much … because then they will risk losing their own position.

Erin similarly laments this lack of community support, analysing it through the lens of Asian Australian internalized whiteness.

> I've always been very critical that we do not have that groundswell, and that's one of the biggest problems holding our community back.
>
> There is a lot of lateral violence that goes on within our groups … I've been personally criticised by what I consider the elders of the community. "Why are you making us sound like victims? Why are you bringing up this issue? Why are you angering politicians?" This idea that we have to kowtow to the government. Yeah … [it] kind of like baffles me as to why? But … our Asian Australians are like that. They want to just have those lovely banquets where the politician or minister will come in and say, "Namaste", "Ni Hao", "Xing Nian Kuai Le" in a bad accent. They're satisfied with that, because they feel accepted. One of the biggest issues in Australia is that our own Asian community still wants to be in proximity to whiteness.[8]

Adding to the complex ways racial-colonial matrices continue to shape Asian Australian willingness to engage in antiracist action, Jane provides further analytical depth in referencing the model minority myth (Walton and Truong 2023). Like Erin, she acknowledges the diversity of ethnic and migratory "Asianness" in Australia, and the intersectional complexities that concurrently shape community support, or lack thereof.

> I think there's a lot of … the model minority kind of stereotype … [With] Asians in Australia … there's not as much unity as … in the U.S.
>
> Or perhaps, [there's the] immigrant mindset where it's like, just keep your head down and don't cause any trouble, or, you know, don't shake the boat too much.

The model minority myth's negative impacts resonate with Erin.

> It works to our disadvantage, because then we're just seen as a group that won't speak up when required. That will just listen and that would prefer to be in proximity to whiteness than to speak on other issues.[9]

Jane concludes with further intersectional complexities of galvanizing antiracist action, particularly with other youth. She shares numerous accounts of being questioned about her involvement in activism while simultaneously dealing with peers who are "disaffected and … removed from politics".

> I think in my kind of community, people were a bit surprised, like I was in a community that doesn't really engage in these kinds of things. So, it was … like, "What are you doing? Why would you do that?" And as well like at my … age, people don't really expect those things or people my age don't tend to engage in [political] things … It's connected to politics, but it's also connected to something that I experience everyday as someone with this identity. And you know, I think it's a very big privilege to be able to be like, "Oh, I'm not into politics," when it comes to things like racism and other kinds of discrimination.

"Building solidarity and momentum": accessibility, representation, and empowerment

Reflecting on being questioned about #StopAsianHate in Brisbane and potential ways forward, Jane explains:

> [I was repeatedly asked,] "Is there a need for it?" And it's like, yeah, there *is* a need. So, it's a bit difficult to try … and articulate what that need is, and the … *extent* of it. So … there's first of all a need for building solidarity and momentum *within* our community, I think, as well as outside of the community.

One way that AAA sought to achieve solidarity and momentum through in-person #StopAsianHate was its strategic choice of speakers, who shared common stories about racism and microaggressions that could be leveraged to bring out public mourning and acknowledgment (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020). Erin clarifies:

> We decided to [ensure] that the people we invited were from diverse Asian backgrounds, [and] also from different sectors. And we wanted not just people talking, but people doing creative stuff to show [attendees] that we can express our fear, our anger, our trauma and our sadness in different ways.[10]

Erin and Molina worked with key stakeholders like Diversity Arts Australia, Amnesty International, Victorian Multicultural Commission, York Justice Centre, and Member of Parliament, Jenny Leong, and involved slam poets, dancers, and rappers to share personal stories of how racism "impacts them and … the politics behind it".[11] This accessible and representative space is something Jane is grateful for.

> [It was great having] different collaborators and people who spoke into different things … There was so much diversity … from creatives to politicians to a [then] high schooler like myself, and I think it was really important to platform different backgrounds as well as different methods of … performing activism, whether you're doing that creatively through a song or a rap slam poem, or whether you've got like a political background, and you're giving more of a traditional speech … It goes to show that … you can do [antiracism] in very different ways, and it's open to everyone, no matter how old you are, or what your background is.

Jane further explicates how this accessible and representative approach created a sense of personal empowerment for broader momentum and impact.

> What was big for me was that realisation that you CAN do something, and then I think, part two to that is the realisation that from doing something, there *is* impact, and … you can see results from that. And you can kind of see the people that you're speaking to and the people that you're affecting or building solidarity with.[12]

> It's very important to … build that sense of, "why should I come out to create that momentum in the first place?" I think COVID and #StopAsianHate was really important for that, because I think before … Asian racism wasn't something people thought about as much.

Molina and Erin concur with Jane's assessment, highlighting that all three vigils created the desired impact of fostering unity and raising broader awareness of the issue of Australian anti-Asian racism. One such example can be seen in SBS News (2021), which makes explicit reference to how the Australian #StopAsianHate vigils called on the government to "condemn racism, strengthen anti-racism laws and protections, and roll out compulsory anti-racism education in all public and private institutions" (para. 6).

Implications

This analysis of #StopAsianHate in Australia has provided localized insight into anti-Asian racism and activism, raising pertinent themes for broader antiracism moving forward. Drawing on Walton et al.'s (2019) proposed "5Rs" social justice framework for activists, this paper sheds light on how such mobilization can "recognize, reveal, reject, and replace injustices, systems of oppression with intersectional, coalition-led practices" (133). This paper also directly functions as the fifth "R" – Reflection – which occurs post activist action (i.e. the movement's epilogue) when participants conclude activities and reflectively translate their actions into learning points.

One such learning point is the unique experiences of minority women's activism within the context of Australian #StopAsianHate. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to deep dive into how interest in activism is shaped both by differing life-histories and by the locational politics of antiracism, Erin, Molina, and Jane's stories confer valuable intersectional insights for antiracist action (Ang, Song, and Pan 2024). Their stories also remind us – in brief – of intersectional challenges, i.e. that Asian females experience more (intragroup) racism – via being questioned or undermined – than male counterparts (Ang, Song, and Pan 2024). Kelbert's (2018) reminder about taking minority women's activism seriously by recognizing minority women's contributions in activist organizing resonates deeply. Considering such questioning/undermining, we see this paper as agentive re-stor-e/y-ing, where minority women have space to be experts in their own fields, simultaneously writing with regard for the "space needed for an active and critical engagement with history, necessary to understand current challenges facing minority women" (Kelbert 2018, 2315). We call for more of such scholarship to come forward.

The second learning point concerns the role of media, which increases situational perception (Chon 2023) and "plays a central role in modern society by setting the agenda for public discourse, political debates and cultural transformations" (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021, 211). We acknowledge it as a tool of power in the construction of race, and, against a history of being dismissed in mainstream media via accusations of playing the race card, political incorrectness etc. (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021), we contend that media rhetoric urgently needs to shift. Through #StopAsianHate, we see how social media has enabled grassroots initiatives where marginalized voices have been amplified in mainstream media (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). Mirroring work on other forms of minority social media activism, we are reminded of social media's function as a platform for foregrounding wellbeing and resilience, and recognizing cultural group strengths and talent (Carlson and Berglund 2021). Social media enables opportunities to centre mainstream-media-marginalized perspectives and paradigms, and (re)claim minoritized means of production (Carlson and Berglund 2021). By dismantling and shifting racial-colonial metanarratives, social media encourages sharing

experiences that re-stor-e/y life, culture, and history, simultaneously holding and creating space for connection through a "radial relationality" (Baldy, 2021; as cited in Carlson and Berglund 2021). Importantly, social media for activism is "where we can rally support [against] injustices we face and come together to support each other in our trauma, our anger, our joy, our hope" (Carlson and Berglund 2021, 13).

On further reflection about #StopAsianHate in Australia, we also note that such campaigns should explicitly challenge racism and promote anti-racism as a necessary norm. They should visibly include the affected group, collaborate with media professionals to alter media portrayals, create opportunities for cross-group discussions and interactions, proactively address potential counterarguments, and aim to garner broader support and influence policy (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). With this as a template, we encourage future considered activist engagement with social media to ensure "honest recognition and deeper conversations about the role of structural racism in Australia" (Townsend-Cross and Gatwiri 2024, 3296).

Our final learning point pertains to the need for ongoing momentum vis-à-vis broader antiracism. As Erin observes:

> [#StopAsianHate] *has* to have propelled us to do … other different projects, [i.e.] international collaborations which [are] ongoing.

Among other things, she shares AAA's plans for official government acknowledgement around anti-Asian racism in Australia, an Asian Australian heritage week or month (in line with Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month), and to eventually become a permanent body that works closely with politicians. Taken alongside the earlier-mentioned concerns around lack of community support, desired proximity to whiteness, and being model minorities, such aspirations are not without their tensions in enacting effective antiracism. Considering the "lateral violence" within Asian Australian communities – which, as Teo (2023) explains in his concept of "Gold Noise", is an inseparable part of Asian Australians' negotiation of racism – future initiatives need to clearly delineate what antiracism means for Asian Australian communities (and beyond). This delineation needs to cohere with Bonnett's (2000) reminder that antiracism "cannot be adequately understood as the inverse of racism" (2; as cited in Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020), but rather, that deliberate, concerted action to disassemble entrenched systems of racial injustice is what is needed. Antiracist language and action needs to work in tandem (Nelson 2015) to challenge the politics of irrationality (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020) through genuine collaboration among key stakeholders in specific locations, and in so doing, avoiding silence or opposition, which undermines its impact (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). Such antiracist considerations need to respond to old and new (cultural-religious) racisms and raise awareness of whiteness and white privilege (Nelson 2015), and as such, apply beyond Asian Australian communities, too.

Learning from Australian #StopAsianHate, we advocate for future antiracist initiatives to prioritize intersectional considerations both within Asian Australian communities, and in engaging with other marginalized groups. We agree with Gilroy's (1990; as cited in Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021, 323) reminder that "the commonsense ideology of anti-racism has … drifted towards a belief in the absolute nature of ethnic categories and … the insurmountable cultural and experiential divisions [that] are a feature of racial difference" (192). Indeed, Jane's observations about the diversity of migration,

ethnicity, and age (among others) reinforces that effective antiracism is concerned with more than singular identity markers (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). Prioritizing intersectionality through alliances with other groups is crucial, too. This engagement is not shaped by the logics of "competitive grief olympics" (Ask and Abidin, as cited in Abidin and Zeng 2020), but rather, is a foundational consideration in combatting white supremacy and collectively building political power (Zhou 2022). Such an approach not only builds "pan-Asian solidarity under the broader concept of "Asian-ness", based on … shared history, culture, and experience of racism" (Lee and Lee 2023, 8),[13] but also addresses the weaknesses of broad mobilizations that fail to make space for the complexity of intersectional identities (Cespedes et al., 2017; as cited in Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020). This productive interchange and mutuality across movements (Bhattacharyya, Virdee, and Winter 2020) then provides opportunities to reinvigorate transnational antiracist solidarity (Townsend-Cross and Gatwiri 2024).

Conclusion

This paper has explored historical and ongoing manifestations of anti-Asian racism in Australia rooted in the White Australia Policy and "Yellow Peril" anxieties. It has also theorized, and shed light on, antiracist activism via the transnational #StopAsianHate movement. Through this localized interrogation of anti-Asian racism vis-a-vis both online and offline activism, it raises pertinent learning points for antiracist actors including learning from the unique experiences of minority women activists, shifting the media's status quo rhetoric, and prioritizing an intersectional approach to antiracism both *within* and *between* marginalized communities. Nevertheless, these learning points do not detract from the fact that in some respects, #StopAsianHate can be seen as mere negotiation. Simply asking racists to "stop hating" us does not address the underlying systems that perpetuate and legitimise such hatred. As Erin, Molina, and Jane remind us, while #StopAsianHate is a powerful call-to-action, it is not the ultimate goal. Asians – in Australia and other settler colonial states – need to engage in more radical and sustained intersectional antiracism with other marginalized groups. Demands to end anti-Asian hatred is necessarily accompanied by efforts to dismantle white supremacy and the systemic use of race as a tool of oppression. Otherwise, the risks of remaining a model minority – silent and complicit in ongoing racial injustice provided it does not impact one directly – are inevitable, as is the continued positioning of Asian Australians as perpetual Othered foreigners within the overwhelmingly white Australian state.

Notes

1. Pseudonym.
2. We thank reviewer two for their reminder about "Asianness" and the white gaze and note here that AAA adopts a similar repurposed political understanding of the term "Asian", and its subsequent intersectional antiracist approach to advocacy. We expand on this approach later in the paper.
3. We understand online racism here as "any form of communication via electronic or digital media by groups or individuals which seeks to denigrate or discriminate against individuals (by denying equal rights, freedom and opportunities) or groups because of their race or ethnicity" (Bliuc et al., 2018; as cited in Kamp et al. 2022, 4). We note that while online racism

warrants further investigation, an in-depth discussion of the phenomena is beyond the scope of this paper and have thus opted for an economic analysis herewith to add to the existing scholarship.

4. Jane's sense of justice meant that she was motivated to understand and solve perceived injustice and subsequently involve herself in collective activism and advocacy, ergo a mobilizing of personal (information) behaviours to collectively solve racial inequity (Lee, Tao, and Li 2022).
5. This refers to the participatorily equal discursive space "where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) in response to dominant racialized public exclusion.
6. A hub for public events at the edge of Melbourne's CBD.
7. Although, in some cases, lockdowns can lead to increased online activist activity (Tong et al. 2022).
8. Put differently, this is a form of internalized racism (Teo 2023) where Asian Australians are complicit in "fighting racism with racism" (Abidin and Zeng 2020).
9. Erin's comments are consistent with other "Asians as model minority" scholarship including Asian American preference for non-assertive approaches and a predisposition towards "easy and culturally compatible way[s] for them to vocalize their opinions and fight against" racism (Lee, Tao, and Li 2022, 10). Of course, not making a scene results in continuing to be invisible victims of racism (Chou and Feagin, 2015; as cited in Abidin and Zeng 2020).
10. Indeed, as Dong et al. (2023) argue, such storytelling creates a broad yet deeply personal bond among people from various backgrounds, fostering a shared learning community. By sharing life stories, individuals engage in powerful collective acts that shape community identity and strengthen relationships.
11. Artwork – comedy, poetry, performance art, etc – was used in U.S. #StopAsianHate and was crucial in raising public awareness of awareness, facilitating the movement, and uplifting Asian American communities (Cao et al. 2022). Indeed, the emergence of aesthetic forms of engagement demonstrates a "low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement" (Kang et al., 2019; as cited in Narayanamoorthy 2023, 67).
12. Arguably, Jane's affective empowerment was foundational to affecting others. In this sense, affect is "productive emotion" which mobilizes individuals to find and create counterpublics to share experiences of injustice with others (Lopez 2014, 425).
13. This is consistent with Lee, Tao, and Li's (2022) work, which shows how Asian Americans' felt "oneness" heightens awareness of injustice and efficacy in response to Anti-Asian sentiments, and how this awareness further stimulates motivation to combat racism, including subsequent online and offline collective actions. This then creates new publics of other individuals who are willing to engage in collective action to support minority groups.

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