Article

Racial Othering and Relational Wellbeing: African Refugee Youth in Australia

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Abstract: Racialised and culturally distinct refugee groups increasingly face hostilities and negative representations in countries of resettlment. The experience of African refugee youth in Australia illustrates this general trend. This paper explores how racial Othering discourse seriously undermines the group's wellbeing. The article concentrates in particular on two aspects of relational wellbeing, the capacity to move in public without fear or shame and the ability to feel a sense of belonging to the place where one lives in. Theoretically, the paper draws together work on wellbeing from a capability approach and relational perspective with interdisciplinary literature on racial Othering. Empirically, the paper demonstrates the pervasive culture of racial Othering through media identifications of African youth with criminality and gang violence and illustrates impacts on young people's wellbeing through data from interviews with African refugee youth. The youth's accounts show how it feels to be a problem and what it means not to belong.

Keywords: African refugee youth; Australia; racial Othering; wellbeing; refugee integration; the capability approach

1. Introduction

> *Being a Black young person is challenging. Right now, they identify us with criminal activities. Your skin colour makes you a target. . . . But what can you do?*
>
> (Congolese-background male university student)

In refugee destination societies, the arrival of people perceived as 'Other' at national borders and neighbourhoods has activated xenophobic reactions, reinforcing populist political movements. In many historically liberal democratic societies, the rise of *excessive nationalism* is defined with political ruptures and racial tensions (Castells 2018). With the electoral successes of populist politicians, refugees face a more hostile environment. People with visibly different cultural backgrounds (e.g., Muslims) and ethnic identities (e.g., Oromo, Akan or Somali) particularly become the primary objects of suspicion and antipathy. They are often wrongly seen as threatening to the cultures they come into contact with. This paper focuses on African heritage youth's opportunities for relational wellbeing—that is, their ability to be what they reflectively value and do valuable things with others in destination societies.

Australia is one of the top ten destinations of international (economic and humanitarian) migration (OECD 2020): it has one of the highest shares of the foreign-born population as a portion of the total population, that is, 30% (ABS 2020), and over 60% of the population growth in Australia is attributed to immigration, including the arrival of around 12,000 refugees annually since the end of the Second World War (Simon-Davies 2018). Following the end of the so-called White Australia policy (that restricted non-European immigration) in the early 1970s, Australia's migration program reached a global scale—the resettlement of African refugees in Australia began in the mid-1980s. In the late 1970s, Australia adopted multiculturalism as a national policy to manage ethnocultural diversity. The policy recognises cultural differences and encourages newcomers to adapt to shared

norms and expectations. Its intention is to support the effective integration of ethnoculturally diverse humanitarian and economic immigrants. However, in Australia, integration outcomes of refugees are often conceived in terms of labour market participation. Refugee resettlement and integration programs and services focus on the newcomers' ability to speak English and secure jobs (Molla 2021a; Australian Government 2019; Shergold et al. 2019). This narrow framing does not recognise social interactions and political discourses that promote or undermine refugees'wellbeing.

In this paper, I argue that, by perpetuating negative stereotypes about visibly different minorities, racially stigmatising public discourses in the destination society undermine refugees' wellbeing—in particular, their sense of safety and belonging. For example, as shown in the analysis below, conservative politicians and media outlets have routinely racialised youth violence in recent years, labelling Black African youth as inherently dangerous and prone to crime. By racialising violence and stigmatising the 'different' as dangerous, conservative politicians and media commentators transfer differences into Otherness and trigger xenophobic fears in the broader public. The negative racial discourse not only makes the African heritage youth unsafe but also sows fear and distrust in the community, further undermining societal wellbeing and cohesion. This paper aims to understand how the politics of racial Othering have affected African youth's substantive opportunities for wellbeing. The following research question guides the paper:

> How has the racialisation of violence affected the opportunity for African refugee youth to achieve relational wellbeing?

The remainder of the paper is organised into two main sections. The first section briefly discusses the analytical framework, method and data. It outlines the ideas of Othering and wellbeing. The second and main section of the paper briefly describes the racialisation of violence in Australia and shows how it undermines African heritage youth's opportunities for relational wellbeing. The paper closes with concluding remarks.

2. Analytical Framework, Method and Data

2.1. Othering and Wellbeing

The idea of wellbeing is analysed from different disciplinary perspectives. In psychological research, the emphasis is on subjective states of mind (Cahill 2015). Sociologists tend to focus on how social processes and structures mediate the individual's sense of wellbeing. In welfare economics, the informational basis of wellbeing assessment foregrounds the availability of resources (Dworkin 2002) or utility and preference satisfaction (Goodwin 1995). Some scholars in international development (e.g., Gough et al. 2007; White 2015, 2017) and youth studies (e.g., Harris et al. 2021; Wyn 2009) emphasise the relational dimension of human wellbeing. They argue that beyond physical health and adequate material resource safety, wellbeing rests on meaningful social relations and connections.

Amartya Sen has developed the capability approach as an alternative framework in response to the limitations of resources and utility-based accounts of human wellbeing in the welfare economics literature. Sen (1987, 2009, 2017) maintains that (a) resources are valuable to the extent they can be converted into achievable options and outcomes, and (b) the utilitarian metrics of subjective perception as a measure of individual wellbeing are problematic mainly because they overlook the link between disadvantaged social position and conditioned preferences. As an alternative evaluative framework, the capability approach underscores the importance of assessing wellbeing from two distinctive perspectives: the availability of opportunities for people to be and do well (capabilities) and their actual achievement of wellbeing (functionings). For Sen (2003), "If life is seen as a set of 'doings and beings' that are valuable, the exercise of assessing the quality of life takes the form of evaluating these functionings and the capability to function" (p. 4). The capability approach asks whether people have genuine options to do and be what they reflectively value rather than the resources they have access to or the level of satisfaction that they can attain. In assessing a person's wellbeing opportunities, the emphasis is on the availability of social arrangements that enable them to live well and be well.

For Sen (2000, 2009), differences in wellbeing outcomes can be a function of social climate variations that perpetuate hierarchical relationships. The fear of being unfavourably noticed by others can result in diminished 'general social functionings'. Even in the presence of preferential social arrangements (e.g., equity-oriented public policies and programs), the inability to 'appear in public without shame' (Sen 2009) can be a negative conversion factor that diminishes one's capability to be and live well. For example, racial stigma and abuse victims live with a sense of indignity and shame. For racialised youth, not being able to appear in public without fear or shame is a critical impediment to their quality of life. As a basic capability, the ability to 'appear in public without shame' underscores the importance of freedom from stigma and negative public representation. For those on the margin of society, being routinely shunned and excessively profiled can result in fear and shame. In essence, as De Herdt (2008, p. 468) stresses, the ability to appear in public "without having good reasons for feeling humiliated" is a precondition of human agency. This is mainly because those who face (e.g., because of their racialised identity) public humiliation on a daily basis can develop distorted views about what they can do and be (Clark 1989; Deaux 2006; Steele 2010). Put differently, durable exposure to racial violence, discrimination and disrespect can assault self-worth; experiences of being ignored and underestimated can undermine self-efficacy. Hence, in assessing wellbeing, we should consider people's opportunities for dignified representation as an important informational basis of judgement. We cannot expect young people who are unable to go about without fear and shame to be well, engaged and productive citizens.

However, the capability approach provides only a partial view of the interplay between social arrangements and wellbeing. In an effort to expand the capability-based evaluative framework, I turn to the relational wellbeing literature (e.g., White 2015, 2017; White and Jha 2023; White and Ramirez 2015). Viewed from a relational perspective, wellbeing is more than just being well or having a sustainable income—it is more than the absence of harm and hardship. Wellbeing has material, relational and subjective dimensions, and it is emergent, happening through "the dynamic interplay of personal, societal and environmental structures and processes, interacting at a range of scales, in ways that are both reinforcing and in tension" (White 2017, p. 133). The argument is that our physical and emotional wellness depends partly on our relations with, and the actions and inactions of, others. For instance, in societies where anti-immigration politics and xenophobic labelling are rife, visibly distinct refugee groups are likely to have limited positive interactions with local communities.

Wellbeing is often approached as an individual construct—how individuals think and feel about their lives. The relational dimension of wellbeing emphasises instead the importance of social context, and how this promotes or undermines people's scope to experience wellbeing. Seen from this perspective, wellbeing is grounded in the quality of social relations. Wellbeing is relational in that specific social and cultural contexts mediate the material and symbolic resources that affect people's quality of life. In this respect, investigating relational wellbeing entails documenting "how people are doing materially and the terms on which they are able to interact with others" (White and Jha 2023, p. 6). The idea of a relational approach to wellbeing puts the emphasis on social contexts, connections (and the terms of connection) and the importance of everyday interaction.

In the context of refugee resettling countries, stigmatised social position diminishes the newcomers' sense of belonging. This makes assessing wellbeing in relational spaces timely and critical. As White (2017) argues,

> *At a time of resurgent nationalism, where suspicion of those perceived as 'other' is becoming a dominant ethic and intensified border controls and gated communities embody the defence of privilege against 'outsider' threat, it is vital that narratives of wellbeing generate an expanded and socially inclusive vision and practice.* (p. 129)

Othering entails ascribing negativity and stigma towards minoritised out-groups. It is a double act: portraying the Other as 'essentially different' and translating difference into stigma (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi 2012). Othering is a discursive instrument of power;

it creates, essentialises and targets collective identities. As Staszak (2020) notes, whereas difference "belongs to the realm of fact", Othering belongs to the realms of discourse and practice (p. 2). Othering makes some differences matter and degrades others into irrelevance. The categorisation of individuals or groups based on perceived distinctions is not a neutral process. As sociologists Norbert Elias (2000) and Georg Simmel (1971) noted a long time ago, social differentiation (e.g., racial categorisation) is intertwined with and indicative of prevailing power dynamics. Racial Othering emphasises the act of negatively representing and depriving equal respect and worth. Misguided by disdain and fear of the Other, 'paranoid nationalism' marks the boundary between those who belong to the nation and those who do not along the colour lines (Hage 2004). Politicians perform Othering by linking racial minority groups to concerns of national security, cultural homogeneity and economic burden. The narratives frame members of minority groups as a threat to society. Kagedan (2020) argues,

> The politics of othering involves a clever weaving of fact (often paltry but exaggerated) and fiction intended to demean a group—or even to demonise it—in advance of politicians using fear and dislike of the group to create policies and laws against them. (p. 125)

Relatedly, racialisation refers to the process of assigning racial meanings to specific social problems, the practice of centring race as a key factor in defining and explaining violence and other social ills (Murji and Solomos 2005). Racialisation is underpinned by systemic racism and racial prejudice—when people's actions and behaviour are guided by racial prejudice, all they see is not the person in front of them but the cast of their prejudice. People racialise violence when they frame causes and perpetrators of criminal activities along racial lines, thereby Othering members of a specific racial group and prompting xenophobic fears in the broader public. Othering draws a line of differentiation between 'us' and 'them'. Commenting on the experiences of migrants in France, Fassin (2001) argues that Othering emphasises the racialised body and "introduces internal frontiers founded on difference" (p. 7). Othering also expresses asymmetries of power and regard associated with one group's dominance over the other (Spivak 1985). Through Othering, politicians and the media do not just define and label ethnoculturally minoritised groups as 'unfit' to be a member of society. They also at the same time devalue them as less worthy of equal respect and dignity. Othering rests on the act of negating shared attributes. Specific instruments of racial Othering include labels and stereotypes. It necessarily entails stigmatising a difference to put people in a hierarchical order. In Australia, by framing youth violence as an ethnocultural problem, those who propagate Afrophobia represent Africans as inherently violent and dangerous (Molla 2021a, 2021c, 2023). They create an 'interior frontier' that divides what they see as desirables and undesirables. Put differently, racial Othering represents an invisible wall of exclusion, undermines self-worth and diminishes social standing.

In this paper, I conceive the racialisation of youth violence as a form of racism that enforces differential access to dignity, resources and safety. Focusing on the racialisation of violence makes it easier to show concretely multifaceted aspects of racism and its impact on African heritage youth. I ask whether African-heritage Australian youth from refugee backgrounds have substantive opportunities for positive representation, and nurturing relationships and connections that foster their wellness. I specifically assess the wellbeing of the group in two spaces: (a) the ability to appear in public without fear and shame (**dignity**) and (b) the freedom to participate in one's community (**belonging**). The argument is that people achieve these dimensions of wellbeing when they have genuine options to build social connections, participate in their society and have equal rights to dignifying representation and self-worth. The first space of assessment focuses on African heritage youth's rights to dignified representation and respect in the public sphere. The second space of assessment concerns the group's substantive freedom for affiliation and participation in the life of their community.

2.2. Method and Data

The study from which this paper is derived examined the educational experiences and attainment of African heritage youth from refugee backgrounds in Australia. The project generated qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with 44 African-heritage participants (aged between 18 and 30) who arrived in Australia on a permanent humanitarian visa from the eight main countries of origin of African refugees (namely, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Ghana, Liberia, Somalia and Sierra Leone). Before they signed the consent forms, the participants were given plain-language statements and were fully informed about the purpose of the study. The interview protocol covered a range of questions about the participants' educational opportunities and experiences as well as their sense of safety and belonging.

For this paper, I chose accounts of five participants to explicate the impact of racial Othering on the relational wellbeing of the refugee youth. The key selection criterion was the relevance of the accounts to the theme in question. My positionality—as defined with my intercultural competence (acquired through lifelong learning and daily interactions with people of different ethnocultural backgrounds), racially marked body and active engagement in the community—was a critical factor in the research. It enabled me to capture the nuance and details of the participants' accounts of their lived experiences. Even so, I recognised that my outsider status, defined with my non-refugee background and academic position, could create unequal power relations that might have affected the interview processes and outcomes.

In this paper, I use the notion of the racialisation of youth violence as a marker of racial Othering. Following street violence and unrest at the 2016 Moomba festival in Melbourne (commonly referred to in the media as the Moomba 'riot'), the racialisation of youth violence reached its peak. Conservative media outlets and top government officials framed youth violence in Victoria as a racial problem. I located these statements and media headlines using the university newspaper database and Google searches. The key search terms were 'African gangs', 'African crime gangs', and 'African youth violence'. Under the *Racialising Violence as a Marker of Othering* section, I present excerpts of quotes from Coalition Government members and media headlines representing African-heritage youth as violent and dangerous. The quotes are preceded with a brief conceptual exposition, connecting the racialisation of youth violence with racial Othering.

In making sense of the qualitative data (accounts of African heritage youth), I applied an inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021). After data familiarisation and in light of the analytical framework, I read the transcribed data and coded the text line by line. Then I identified segments of key statements and mapped out emerging patterns to form the following two themes: *the ability to appear in public without fear* and *opportunities for participation and belonging*. The two themes form subheadings of the analysis section (*Racialisation of Violence Undermines Wellbeing Outcomes*). The analysis section combines empirical accounts (i.e., politicians' verbatim, media headlines and stories of young people) and theoretical redescription (i.e., invoking concepts from sociology, development studies, youth studies, social psychology, social welfare and cultural studies to explicate the themes). Here, theoretical redescription entails placing the empirical data in new contexts of ideas and concepts. Applying theory to empirical data enables a social researcher to detect "meanings and connections that are not given in our habitual way of perceiving the world" (Danermark et al. 2002, p. 94). The racialisation of youth violence is used as a marker of racial Othering.

3. Racialisation of Violence and Implications for Wellbeing

3.1. Racialising Violence

In this paper, racialising violence is seen as a marker of Othering. Starting from the mid-2000s, with the arrival of a significant number of African refugees, there has been increased antipathy against the group. Especially in the wake of the 2016 violent unrest at the Moomba festival in Melbourne (commonly referred to in the media as the Moomba

'riot') and other subsequent offences of robbery and theft blamed on 'gangs involving African youth' in the State of Victoria, conservative media personalities raised spectres of 'African gangs'. Conservative tabloid personalities such as Herald Sun's Andrew Bolt and 'shock jocks' radio hosts such as Alan Jones echo the racist gang politics. Below are media headlines that typify the framing of African youth since the mid-2010s:

Herald Sun:
- Who let them [African refugees] in? To **terrify** checkout staff? (7 October 2016)
- Blind eye to report on growing **African gang** crime (2 January 2018)
- African chaos in Taylors Hill. Residents too **scared to go out** to restaurants (8 August 2018)
- **Virus** thrives in multiculturalism (13 July 2020)

Sky News:
- **African gangs** scaring Melburnians: Dutton (3 January 2018)
- Deradicalisation programs to combat **African street gang** violence in Victoria (15 January 2018)
- We cannot turn a blind eye to **African youth crime** (13 November 2018)

Channel 7:
- **African gang** terrifies train passengers (4 October 2018)
- Dandenong residents say they're fed up, claiming **gang warfare** is out of control, with shopkeepers and students too scared to walk the streets at night (15 July 2019)

Daily Mail (Australia):
- Melbourne's **African gang crime** hot spots are revealed—so is your suburb safe? (20 November 2018)
- Gang of 20 **African youths terrorise** customers in a Melbourne Coles (23 January 2019)
- **African youth gangs** running riot in Sydney carry out six 'blitz-style' robberies of phone shops (10 June 2019)

Note the framing of the issue: African youth are represented as violent gangs who 'terrify' and 'terrorise' peaceful residents. Underpinning those representations is the politics of racial Othering that combines traditional overt racism based on pseudo-biological notions of racial superiority and covert cultural racism based on the notion of cultural incompatibility of the Other (Siebers 2017). As Finn (2020) notes, racism persists when a dominant group in society establishes a system of advantage and oppression based on perceived racial categories and has the "power to carry out *systematic discrimination* through the institutional policies and practices of the society and [shape] the *cultural beliefs and values* that support those racist policies and practices" (p. 32, emphasis added). In this respect, negative media discourses reinforce racial stereotypes in society.

It is imperative to note that the racialisation of violence and the act of racist dog-whistling are not limited to media coverage. Below are snapshots of the representation of African youth by Australia's top officials of the Coalition Government:

Tony Abbott (former Prime Minister of Australia, speaking on 2GB Radio):

*So, there is a problem; it's an **African gang problem**, and the Victorian socialist government should get real and own up to the fact that there is an **African gang problem** in Melbourne.* (25 July 2018)[1]

Malcolm Turnbull (then Prime Minister of Australia, speaking on 3AW Radio):

*There is certainly concern about street crime in Melbourne. There is real concern about **Sudanese gang**.* (17 July 2018)

Peter Dutton (Federal Home Affairs Minister, speaking on 2GB Radio):

> *The reality is people [in Melbourne] are scared to go out at restaurants of a night time because they're followed home by these gangs, home invasions and cars are stolen, [. . .] call it for what it is—of course, it's **African gang violence**.* (3 January 2018)

Jason Wood (then Assistant Federal Minister for Multicultural Affairs, quoted in The Sydney Morning Herald):

> ***African youth gangs*** *are out of control. [. . .] I've secured legislation to deport foreign-born thugs, [. . .] I've arranged with Minister for Home Affairs Mr Dutton to have the AFP as part of a National Anti-Gangs Squad to target violent youth gangs in the South East and Western suburbs.* (29 May 2019)

The political and media sensationalism distorts public perceptions of people of African origin. It engenders stigma and *Afrophobia* in society. The European Network Against Racism (Michael 2015; Nwabuzo 2015) uses the term Afrophobia to describe 'the hostility, antipathy, contempt and aversion' directed at Black Africans in dominantly White societies. It includes racial bigotry, prejudice, violence and marginalisation directed at people from Sub-Saharan Africa. Frames such as 'African gangs' and 'crime thugs' are not just words. Those are rather ideological scripts of Othering that distort people's perceptions toward individuals of African origin. By representing Black African youth as violent and dangerous, the politics of Othering nurtures negative views about the group. The negative frames made the phrase 'of African appearance' synonymous with criminality. As Kagedan (2020) argues, 'The politics of othering emboldens, curates, and marshals people who are uneasy about myriad issues to demand that something must be done about "those people"' (p. 149). Even worse, blowing a political dog whistle and stoking racism through insidious stereotyping and dangerous framing often goes unchallenged.

In the context of Australia, the representation of Black African youth as violent is *political* for two reasons. First, negative racial frames and labels are mobilised primarily by politicians and media personalities. Second, the negative representation of African youth usually emerges during election seasons at state and federal levels. The fact that top government officials and conservative media personalities resorted to the same 'African crime gangs' narrative suggests the shared interest to use racial Othering as an instrument of governance.

3.2. Implications for Wellbeing

Racial Othering is a social act. Resulting from both structural arrangements and individual prejudices, racial Othering manifests itself in relational dynamics, influencing the ebb and flow of inclusion and exclusion. As such, racism erodes the social base of dignity and respectful relationships. The theoretical and empirical literature in sociology, cultural studies, criminology and social psychology (e.g., Brubaker 2015; Fassin 2001; Lilly et al. 2019; Loury 2021; Murji and Solomos 2005; Steele 2010) shows that sustained exposure to racial discrimination and stigma undermines people's ability to engage in economic, social, cultural and political domains of lives of society. Whether it stems from 'the myth of racial inequality' or the misbelief of cultural antagonism (Balibar 2020), racism puts ethnocultural minorities in a state of collective vulnerability that diminishes their dignity and belonging. In what follows, I discuss how the racialisation of violence undermines African-heritage Australian youth's opportunities for wellbeing.

With the politics of racial Othering outlined above as a backdrop, this section focuses on how racial Othering undermines African heritage youth's opportunities for wellbeing, with special attention to their freedom to appear in public without fear and participate in society with purpose and mutual respect. These two points are discussed in turn.

3.2.1. Inability to Appear in Public without Fear or Shame

One of the key measures of people's wellbeing opportunity is the ability to appear in public without fear and shame (Sen 2009). The politics of racial Othering undermine this fundamental human capability. Racial Othering injures dignity. As Du Bois ([1903] 2015)

noted over a century ago, "being a problem is a strange experience" (p. 6). Those who are framed as dangerous and viewed with suspicion are destined to live with self-doubt and insecurity.

African-heritage youth in my study report that, at every step of their move in the public sphere, they know that their actions and behaviours would be interpreted in relation to demeaning stereotypes people hold about them as a group. For those young Africans, the burden of presumptive guilt is emotionally taxing. They recounted how they felt when they encountered incidents of racial microaggressions:

Being a Black young person is challenging. Right now they identify us with criminal activities. Your skin colour makes you a target. [...] Even when you go to shopping, someone is always following you. They think you would steal, you don't have money. That happened to me and my friend at Coles. When you know that someone is following you while you're shopping, you feel embarrassed. But what can you do? (Abola, Congolese background, male, university student)

It is not that Australians are disrespectful but I just feel some people don't respect others, they don't appreciate that we are all human beings regardless of where we came from or what skin colour we have. [...] yeah, sometimes I feel disappointed. (Shimbra, South Sudanese background, female, university student)

One day, on my way to school, I was sitting on the train. Nobody sat next to me. Everybody walked away. That really made me feel embarrassed. (Serdo, South Sudanese background, male, high school graduate)

Being a young African person, I have always been judged by the character of someone else, not mine. I can catch the train or walk into any shopping centre, people will be staring at me, looking at me as being part of what they call African gangs. People don't think I'm a responsible person. I don't like it when I'm not treated according to my character. (Jigurte, South Sudanese background, male, recent university graduate)

As a Black person, people see you with suspicion; this is mainly because the media labelled African communities as criminals. That blocks our opportunities in terms of finding jobs so and so on. (Ferensay, Sudanese background, female, high school graduate)

As the quotes above suggest, those subjected to racial Othering live a life of alienation and stigma consciousness. It is exhausting to be an unwelcome guest. Experiences of derogatory labelling and racial stereotypes constitute capability deprivation and are indicators of injustice. In this regard, racial stigma devalues people, inflicts a grievous wound on self-esteem and undermines self-efficacy and aspiration for a better future, contributing to low integration outcomes. Nonrecognition, disrespect and racial vilification are particularly injurious because those impair the positive understanding of self (Honneth 2003). The above accounts suggest that consistent exposure to causes of humiliation and shame may result in the internalisation of low self-efficacy that limits action even when the original threat is removed. When you receive perpetual messages that attack your sense of ease with who you are, and you know your body is negatively raced, your sense of self-worth is undermined, and your aspirations are tamed. The resultant effect is emotional ill-being. In his classic work on social power, renowned psychologist and civil rights activist Kenneth Clark observed that people "whose daily experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others will, as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth" (Clark 1989, p. 64). The negative meanings associated with people of African descent operate to obscure their actual identity and deprive them of cultural citizenship, or full societal belonging. The next section expands on this point.

In expressing the emotional cost of negative racial stereotypes, the interview participants used terms such as 'feel embarrassed' (Abola and Serdo) and 'feel disappointed' (Shimbra). Exposure to disrespect generates feelings of anger, low self-worth and self-exclusion from opportunities. African youth who participated in this research used terms

such as misunderstood, humiliated, disrespected, ashamed, stereotyped, etc., to describe their feelings. For those young Africans, the burden of presumptive guilt is emotionally taxing. Reflecting on accounts of South-Sudanese-background refugees, Losoncz (2019) argues that the experience of disrespect is "psychologically injurious as it impairs the person's positive understanding of self—an understanding acquired through mutual recognition and approval" (p. 64). Racial stigma is depreciative. When racialised youth feel estranged from the host society, they develop *affective dissonance* that destabilises their sense of self-worth and security (Ogbu 1995). Racist verbal assaults and public stigmatisation can subject victims to severe psychological trauma. Words can serve as weapons to terrorise, humiliate and wound the racialised Other (Delgado 1993). It is worth noting that those who are found guilty of participating in violent activities should receive a proportional penalty. But it is unacceptable to use their involvement to criminalise entire communities of African heritage. Further, penalising those involved in illegal activities should not overshadow the importance of addressing socioeconomic and cultural issues underlying youth disengagement and increased contact with the justice system among refugee youth.

3.2.2. Barriers to Belonging and Participation

Racial Othering also diminishes genuine options for belonging and participation. As social beings, people live linked lives. Our sense of self and security necessarily rests on our relationships with others. As a key element of human capabilities, belonging presupposes one's ability to engage in meaningful social interactions. A sense of belonging provides energy for aspirations, agency and self-expression (White 2015). Regardless of our ethnic identities or cultural roots, we all yearn for belonging; we value our freedom to live the way we see fit and want to be valued and accepted by others. Affiliation—the ability to have the social base of dignity and self-respect and engage in meaningful social interactions—constitutes core human capabilities (Nussbaum 2019). Relationships are central to our identity and sense of belonging. For people forcibly displaced from their familial homes and social roots, affiliating with destination societies is very important. However, for African-heritage youth in Australia, this fundamental human aspiration has been overshadowed by pervasive racial Othering that creates a 'hierarchy of belonging' whereby their identities are (re)constructed as having lesser rights to belong and to dignified representations. Social participation plays a critical role in creating or expanding social capital that can, in turn, contribute to wellbeing outcomes of refugee youth. In this respect, racial Othering diminishes social participation, undermining refugee youth's wellbeing. Accounts of the refugee youth suggest that the politics of racial Othering contribute to the permanence of Otherness of Black youth in predominantly White societies (Molla 2021b). Participants in my study complained that

> *Growing up as an African here, everybody sees you as a refugee. You can be here for 25 or 35 years as an Australian citizen, you are seen as a refugee, this sometimes holds you back.* (Kotebe, South Sudanese background, female, recent university graduate)

> *Although we grew up here, went to university here, got a job and integrated with society, we are still labelled as refugees who arrived yesterday.* (Tekeste, Sudanese background, male, university student)

> *It's hard to be a Black person here. People call you names. You don't feel you belong to society. You don't feel like being invited.* (Jarra, South Sudanese background, male, university student)

> *I felt like the teachers just—they thought we [Africans] were all bad kids. Most of the time White people judge us on our skin. As soon as they see a Black person, they automatically think that the person is a criminal, steals things, is bad and all that. [. . .] I know back in high school, there were some naughty Black kids, but there were also some naughty White kids as well. But teachers pretended not to see the White kids that caused trouble; they mostly focused on the Black kids. So, whenever you go to class, when you're a Black person, teachers just pick on you. I just felt like it's just heartbreaking. [. . .] It makes*

you not want to be around them. (Selam, Congolese background, female, university student)

Accounts of Kotebe, Tekeste and Jarra show how the permanence of Otherness diminishes people's sense of belonging and affiliation. No matter how long they have lived here as citizens, they are always viewed as refugees. The story of Selam adds another layer to the impact of racial stigma: it illustrates how the racial microaggression of teachers negatively affects African youth's ability to relate and learn. Take note of the last statement of Selam. Not being around teachers entails and may result in academic disengagement. The message is that exposure to pervasive racial stigma undermines the educational attainment of African refugees.

Further, aspirations are inherently social in that people form their desires for the future in light of shared norms and expectations. How individuals see themselves and what they aspire for partly reflect how they relate with others. Furthermore, people's capacity to translate their aspirations into choices and valued outcomes depends on structural enablers and constraints (Ray 2016; Sen 2009; Appadurai 2013). Experiences of racism affect the way young people perceive themselves and socialise with others. Social psychologist Claude Steele noted that stereotypes could "set up threats in the air that are capable of interfering with actions" (Steele 2010, p. 43). This alertness to negative views of others toward them, in turn, results in *stigma consciousness*, which refers to "the awareness that one's group is negatively valued and that one will, as a result, be likely to experience negative consequences when others recognise that group membership" (Deaux 2006, p. 85). This alertness to negative views of others toward them may lead to self-isolation and disengagement with institutions and society more broadly. The fear of confirming the negative societal view about their racial group can also inhibit Black youth from actively seeking connections and navigating opportunities.

At the core of belonging is 'feeling at home' (Yuval-Davis 2011). Beyond formal membership in society, identifications and emotional attachments matter. Feeling unseen or facing negative representations affects racialised people's ability to form a positive sense of self. Finally, persistent exposure to racial discrimination can also make African youth feel hopeless and resentful. The dissonance between the way one expects to be treated and the actual treatment (e.g., discriminatory treatment) generates negative emotions, including oppositional attitudes towards mainstream culture and society, which might partly explain the disproportionately high imprisonment rates among African youth from refugee backgrounds. Subjects of pervasive marginalisation may not demand inclusion mainly because, as McNay (2014) notes, "Chronic experiences of marginalisation and dispossession can engender in individuals a deep sense of disempowerment, a feeling that their suffering is inevitable or unavoidable and that very little can be done to change it" (p. 37). Hence, in assessing the wellbeing implications of racial Othering, we need to be mindful of the impact of adaptation. Racially vilified minority groups can mentally prepare to tolerate racism. The problem of marginalisation is also cyclical. Negative racial representation pushes young people to the fringe of society. Living in marginal positions of poverty and disadvantage, young people tend to withdraw from education, work and civic engagement.

In Australia, racial discrimination is prohibited by both national laws, such as the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, and state laws, including Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. Despite these legal safeguards, racism persists as a pervasive issue impacting numerous ethnocultural minority groups, including individuals of Black African descent.

4. Conclusions

The paper sought to understand the impact of racial Othering on the wellbeing outcomes of refugees. Theoretically, relational dimensions of wellbeing and the capability approach guided the analysis. The empirical focus was on the racialisation of youth violence in Australia and its impact on refugee-background African-heritage youth. The findings

showed that the racialisation of youth violence undermined important aspects of African youth's wellbeing: dignity (freedom to interact with others without fear) and belonging (opportunities to participate in their communities).

To reiterate the core argument of the paper, young people have diminished wellbeing opportunities when they lack equal worth and respect, and face difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships with others—when they are not free from alienation, deprivation and domination. For members of minoritised groups, recognition means being accepted for who they are as they name themselves and becoming worthy members of society. In this respect, negative interactions with the host society and few opportunities to pursue valuable goals mean refugee youth may remain on the fringe of society, with little or no substantive resources for a quality experience of life. In my own observation, perhaps because of the pervasiveness of the racialisation of violence and deeply rooted historical legacies of racism, the presence of Black bodies in the public sphere continues to trigger abundant *feelings of inconvenience* and thereby diminish Black people's *sense of emplacement* (Marques et al. 2020). Without sensible political projects that tackle anti-Black discriminatory views and narratives, African heritage youth might continue longing to belong. Racial Othering is more likely to keep African communities down in the social hierarchy, where many societal ills are incubated.

Drawing on the insights of this paper, I would like to emphasise a couple of points. To begin with, racial boundaries are our own making; we can form, reform or transform them. Political actors might want to use racial Othering as an instrument of 'bordering' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). Many in the position of power may also know the disrespect, discrimination and domination that Black youth face due to the prevalence of the racialisation of violence. But they may look away and take no action to stop the dangerous rhetoric. Hannah Jones describes this act of 'turning away from painful knowledge' as 'violent ignorance' (Jones 2021). As fair and informed citizens, we cannot afford to ignore racially infused causal misattributions. Ignoring troubling knowledge only perpetuates injustice and imperils social cohesion. We should commit to challenging 'violent ignorance' and making small changes. As African American novelist James Baldwin (in Romano 1979) put it: "The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you can alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change the world" (para. 38).

Relatedly, in a society where racial stigma is propagated at a higher level of public office, respectability, opportunity and outcomes are more likely to be distributed along the colour line. Even more worrisomely, in a society where racial Othering goes unchallenged, children would grow to see racism as a natural response to difference. No one benefits from racial hate, fear and stigmatisation, not even those perpetuating it. Racism sows unfounded fear and suspicion; it propagates animosity and disdain. In so doing, racism does not just dehumanise members of the target groups; it also undermines cooperation and respectful relationships, thereby affecting the wellbeing, cohesion and prosperity of society as a whole.

Finally, relationships are fundamental to who we are as human beings. We are hardwired for connections. We long for belonging. The quality of our life experience partially reflects the structure and strength of our social relationships. Hence, refugee resettlement and integration policies and programs should be evaluated in terms of the substantive opportunities the newcomers have to relate with others and be recognised for who they are as they name themselves.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: No data is available for sharing due to ethical consideration.

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Note

1. Victoria is one of the six (and most progressive) states in Australia; Victoria is also one of the strongholds of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

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