

EDITORIAL

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The past decade has seen the emergence of an interdisciplinary field of research and commentary that can be broadly gathered under the umbrella of 'critical race and whiteness studies'. Common to the diverse perspectives and positions that constitute this field is the view that, far from having been 'resolved' through the anti-colonial movements and civil rights struggles of the latter part of the twentieth century, race and whiteness continue to shape local and global subjectivities and opportunities. In settler-colonial nations like Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada, we can observe the currency of whiteness as a concept and value in the very vehemence with which politicians and journalists proclaim and deploy their 'benevolent intentions' against the rights and sovereignty claims of Indigenous and other Australians racialised as non-white.

To appreciate the role of whiteness in shaping Australia's economic, military and political priorities today we need to register an important shift in the meanings attached to 'whiteness', 'race' and 'racism' under John Howard's prime ministership. Rather than being understood as a collective and active cultural inheritance, racism has been thoroughly reconstructed as an individual moral aberration. As a consequence, the claim that individuals or groups within the nation might be racist has become tantamount to slander. This discursive reconstruction of racism has forged a broad social consensus which is most frequently expressed in claims that our tolerant, multicultural nation has moved beyond whatever 'racial issues' it might have once had.

Part of Howard's appeal lies in his ability to embody this consensus which, after the spectacular (and internationally embarrassing) displays of white racism through the Hanson years, sees questions of whiteness and race as increasingly irrelevant for a nation whose urgent mission is to fix so-called 'failed states' and to spread democracy throughout 'our' region. With the growing force of the US-Australian alliance, the language of whiteness and race (and, post 9/11, increasingly also that of religion) has been euphemistically transposed into the

language of sovereignty. The corollary of this shift is that an implicit distinction now operates dividing the world into those peoples and states seen as inherently 'worthy' of sovereignty – on one hand – and those regarded as 'undeserving', 'unprepared' or otherwise 'incapable' of assuming it – on the other.

Powerful nations dominated by white Christian men have authorised themselves to violate the sovereignty of others, not in the name of whiteness and Christianity, but, rather, in the name of 'freedom', 'civilisation' and 'democracy': values that would seem impossible to contest or refuse. To put questions of whiteness and race back into focus, then, it is necessary to ask: which categories of people and which nations are excluded from the key debates and decisions about sovereignty that are reconfiguring economic, military, political and cultural relations all over the globe? As this is a rhetorical question on my part, I will present a recent example by way of an answer.

After Defence Minister Danna Vale requested road works to be carried out preparatory to the annual Anzac Day pilgrimage to the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, the Opposition environment spokesman, Anthony Albanese, criticised the government's failure to secure national heritage listing for the site in spite of promises made by John Howard in 2003. To this criticism, former Veteran Affairs minister Bruce Scott pointed out: "The call ... for heritage listing is ... nonsense. It is sovereign soil of the Turkish people, while it is a very important part of Australian history ... we must accept that we have no sovereignty." (*Australian*, March 11: 2) I see this statement, "...we must accept that we have no sovereignty", made with reference to the overseas battleground which is regarded as the birthplace of the Australian national spirit, as an encapsulation of the challenge which, after a decade of so-called "reconciliation" and innumerable calls for a treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, remains to be faced by the inheritors and defenders of a white nation.

Like many publications, the origins of the articles to follow are in spoken presentations delivered across a range of contexts over

the past few years. While two of the contributors, Irene Watson and Suvendrini Perera make specific mention of their choice to retain something of the 'spoken' quality of the original presentations, all of the articles speak in some way to their context of production and delivery, notwithstanding their transformation over the past twelve months to engage with the comments of peer reviewers and to update the content where necessary.

The first two articles, by Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Alistair Bonnett, address historical and current intersections of whiteness and race in national and transnational contexts. Both focus primarily on Australia and Britain as sites of colonial expansion and invasion and diasporic settlement where whiteness not only occupies a central position of cultural value but also informs legal judgement and political decision-making.

Bonnett's article, 'From the Crises of Whiteness to Western Suprematism' had its origins in a keynote address to the *Placing Race/Locating Whiteness* conference held at Flinders University in Adelaide in 2003. It teases out the connections between the colonial subjectivities and interests respectively sheltered under the concepts and terms of 'whiteness' and 'the west' from the mid nineteenth century through to the present. Drawing on the work of Charles Pearson, an English historian who migrated to South Australia in the mid nineteenth century and Benjamin Kidd, a social Darwinist writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Bonnett examines the range of pressures that precipitated crises in 'whiteness' as a concept and a value and which led to its displacement with 'western', particularly in Europe after World War Two.

These pressures, including intensifying class conflict within 'white' nations and the discrediting of explicitly racial configurations of national identity in the wake of the atrocities of Nazi Germany, created the need for the de-corporealised rationale provided by 'the West' for the continuing domination of other peoples by Western Europeans both at home and in their settler-colonial diasporas. The genealogy Bonnett provides of the related but non-identical projects of white domination and western supremacism is particularly resonant at a moment which has seen military actions against sovereign nation-states justified in the name of a

'Western civilisation' of which the US presents itself as the supreme guarantor (See Huntington 1997 for example).

In connection with Bonnett's qualified historical account of the shift from white to western, it is interesting to read Aileen Moreton-Robinson's article, 'The House that Jack Built: Britishness and White Possession', which originated as a paper presented at the *British World Conference* hosted by the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne in 2004. Whereas Bonnett's focus is on the intellectual production of concepts of 'white' and 'western' that were subsequently applied within specific national contexts, Moreton-Robinson looks more closely at the racialised *interests* that these concepts assert and protect. And she finds evidence in contemporary Australia of a possessive investment in whiteness that is not so much euphemised as 'western' as it is couched in debates over the meaning of the nation's British heritage.

Shifting the gaze from the 'dysfunctional Aboriginality' on which politicians and the media are currently obsessively focused, Moreton-Robinson turns to examine the re-assertion of the centrality of Britishness within the Australian academy and popular culture. Her ideological analysis of the entangled relationships between British identity, whiteness and the prerogative of national possession encompasses a variety of examples, from the revival of an exclusive form of digger-nationalism to the recent explosion of publications on the relationship between Britishness and Australian identity. And she observes that expressions of mourning about the loss of British dominance and increasingly ethnicised celebrations of Anglo and Celtic identities are occurring in a national policy context where Indigenous rights are under sustained attack, evidenced by the High Court's Yorta Yorta decision which reinforced the legal privileges of white possession against native title claimants.

To understand this apparently paradoxical situation, Moreton-Robinson turns to recent narratives of the British in Australia, identifying the struggle against the landscape as a key theme and reframes a question originally posed by Toni Morrison to ask why this literature assumes that the form of Britishness and national identity that emerged in Australia is "free of, uniformed, and unshaped by" Indigenous sovereignty?' (20) In addressing this question, she shows

how the landscape is metonymically deployed to deny wars of invasion against Indigenous people, allowing the virtue of the British, and hence the nation, to be recuperated in the face of Indigenous counter narratives and sovereignty claims.

A recent illustration of the intimate connections Moreton-Robinson establishes between Britishness, the celebration of the digger in overseas military campaigns and the disavowed wars of colonial invasion can be seen in the choice of the Prince of Wales to officiate at Anzac Day ceremonies at Gallipoli this year where a classical soundtrack incorporating the didgeridoo will be broadcast.

Suvendrini Perera's article 'Who will I become? The Multiple Formations of Australian Whiteness' begins by returning to the context within which the ideas for her piece were originally generated: a forum in 2001 titled 'A Treaty for All of Us' hosted by the University of Technology in Sydney. This was prior to 9/11, prior to the Tampa election and prior to Keith Windschuttle's ascendancy in the national broadsheet media's theatrical production: 'the history wars'. Perera posed the question 'Who will I become?' during the Centenary of Federation as a means of tackling the 'sacred ignorance' (Baldwin, 1971) to which white Australian clings so tenaciously. And she explains that it was only after her own migration from Sri Lanka that her own sacred ignorance about the history of this place was challenged and she began to understand '...that as someone who migrated here what I was doing was consenting to, and literally *signing on* to [was] a system of colonisation. Not even my own experience of colonisation, on multiple levels, had alerted me to this.' (33)

This article arrives at a moment when, not content with attacking proponents of Indigenous sovereignty, Windschuttle's latest book suggests that perhaps the White Australia policy was not really so racist after all. (Windschuttle 2004) Perera not only confronts this perverse revisionism but also demonstrates that the '...definition and measure of Australian whiteness was, from the outset, derived and asserted in relation to its *multiple racial others*, rather than to a single reference point'. (31) This means that any attempt to re-write the nation's history must *necessarily* be undertaken on a variety of fronts that are irreducible to a moral schism between

black/white, Indigenous/non-Indigenous or anti-racist/racist. Hence, the important '...role that nonwhite migrant stories and itineraries can play in reopening a seemingly known and familiar national history, denaturalizing its assumptions and disclosing its underlying formations.' (32)

The salience of Perera's attention to the 'ongoing hierarchical relations of whiteness' which differently position non-Anglo and Indigenous Australians can be appreciated with reference to a recent example from Queensland. The riots following the death in custody last year of Mulrunji Doomagee that culminated in the conflagration of the Palm Island¹ police station have elicited very public expressions of 'hard love' from Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie. ²These include placing pressure on the Palm Island Council to accept an Alcohol Management Plan and to attend the opening of a multi-million dollar youth centre to be run by police in February this year. This pressure was exerted in spite of the Council's opposition to the public celebration of a new police-run facility while the community was still grieving a suspicious death in police hands that was subject to a formal Inquiry.

After at least one member of the Palm Island suggested that the Premier's offer to personally waive a \$800,000 debt in return for their cooperation was blackmail, Beattie launched a pre-emptive attack in Parliament in which he described the Palm Island Council as 'dysfunctional', and attacked their lawyer, Burmese born solicitor, Andrew Boe, who is married to the State's first Aboriginal magistrate, Jacqui Payne, and receiving no payment for his work. To Beattie's abuse of him as a "leech" and "a typical illustration of white lawyers taking advantage of an Indigenous community" (*Courier Mail* 26-27/2/05:5) Boe responded: 'The biggest defamation of all so far is [Premier Beattie's] suggesting I'm white. There's a cause of action there.' (Ibid) The Premier's characterisation of an Asian-Australian as a "white leech" provides a stark illustration of Perera's point about the extent to which a black/white binary continues to organise public debate in Australia.

While Perera's title poses the question, 'Who will I become?' as a non-Indigenous, non-Anglo Australian, Irene Watson's article 'Settled and unsettled spaces' poses the following question from an Aboriginal standpoint: 'Are we free to roam?' Based on a keynote presentation at the Placing Race/Locating Whiteness conference at

Flinders University in 2003, this piece reflects on the situation of Indigenous rights after the Mabo decision's overturning of *terra nullius* and the establishment of a national native title regime as well as the recent abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Addressing a situation in which the views of a handful of Indigenous people are solicited by governments as a substitute for a genuine negotiation of co-existence with the diversity of languages, country and ways of being that constitute Aboriginal Australia, Watson poses a number of questions to which she provides no answers, instead inviting readers to 'move into the uncomfortable conversations ... into a meditation on discomfort ...[to] places where the settler society is made to answer these questions...' (49)

In appraising the current position of Australia, she turns to Franz Fanon's analogy of colonialism's passing as the smoking ashes of a burned house that might yet burst back into flame as well as drawing on Ziauddin Sader's argument that the postmodern feeds on the appropriated history and identity of non-western cultures by '...colonising their future and occupying their being' (1998:13) Posing the question, 'How is it that we are being eaten?', Watson embarks on a critical discussion of Germaine Greer's recent essay 'Whitefella Jump Up', which advocates the Aboriginalisation of the nation. What are the implications, asks Watson, of this process of Aboriginalisation for Aboriginal Australians? 'To dissolve into whiteness?' (42)

She then moves on to examine the recent shift to 'practical reconciliation' and associated policies of 'mutual obligation' as a re-ignition of assimilation in the face of silenced Aboriginal sovereignty claims. Illustrating her argument with the story of the greedy frog, Watson explains that - in contrast to the exclusivity of white sovereignty's patriarchal model of state that has the assimilation of all others as its final solution - Aboriginal sovereignty embraces diversity and values inclusivity. Yet it is Aboriginal sovereignty and the very value of self-determination are currently under vigorous attack with academics and journalists drawing a spurious causal connection between rights to land, language and culture - on one hand - and dysfunction within Aboriginal communities - on the other. The dismantling of ATSIC was premised on a variant of this argument

notwithstanding that, rather than reflecting values of Aboriginal sovereignty, it was 'based on hierarchy, patriarchy and entrenched colonialism'. (43)

Watson then asks 'How do we look?' This is a double-edged question asks not only about the possibilities of Aboriginal Australia being the subject rather than the object of a white gaze but which also investigates the way that Indigenous men and women are seen to be seeing one another and white men and women. In this context she analyses the outcry from sex discrimination commissioner, Pru Goward, and others following artist, Richard Bell's, decision to wear a self-designed T-Shirt with the slogan 'White Women Can't Hump' when accepting his Telstra art award. Watson notes that, in stark contrast to protests about a T-shirt casting aspersions on white women's humping ability, the process of appropriating of public and crown land to which Indigenous people have ancestral connections for development continues both unabated and un-remarked.

To illustrate the currency of Watson's argument that colonisation continues to smoulder in the ashes of Australian society, we need look no further than *Australian* columnist, Christopher Pearson's, uncritical promotion of a paper published by the Centre for Independent Studies by two non-Indigenous authors, economist Helen Hughes and health and education worker, Jenness Warin. (Pearson 2005:18) In their paper, blame for violence and poverty within remote Aboriginal communities is laid squarely and unequivocally at the feet of HC ("Nugget") Coombs whose socialist vision of Aboriginal sovereignty is condemned as romantic and naïve. Totally excised from this argument is the entire history of race relations prior to Coombs appearance on the stage of Aboriginal Affairs as well as past and present Indigenous activism for recognition and in some cases restitution for a history of stolen land, stolen children and stolen wages.

Instead, readers are presented with 'mutual obligation' and 'private ownership' as neat solutions to an array of issues facing remote communities. However, for such solutions to work requires amnesia on the part of colonialism's victims as well as its beneficiaries. Only then could one could proceed from the neo-liberal principle of 'all things being equal' when reference to Indigenous mortality rates, imprisonment and socio-economic status repeatedly

demonstrate that all things are about as far from being equal as one could imagine. It seems that critics of self-determination have a very simple answer to Watson's question 'Are we free to roam?' 'No. But your children may one day be free to own a stake in the national prosperity that was bought at the expense of you and your ancestors.'

The next two articles address a series of important questions. How do we register and even re-enact or re-live historical violence and traumas that we may not have personally experienced? How do these traumas erupt in our most intimate relationships, shaping our political activism as well as our every day practices of cultural consumption? How does the suffering of others register affectively as shame and pride in belonging to the nation? What motivations might there be for white people to forge bonds of solidarity with those victimised by whiteness other than feeling better about ourselves?

I first heard Jon Stratton present a version of what was to become this article at the Cultural Studies Association of Australia conference at the University of Melbourne in 2002. 'Before Holocaust Memory: Making Sense of Trauma Between Postmemory and Cultural Memory' begins by recounting the impact of the European Judeocide on the author's relationship with his assimilated Jewish mother who, in the grip of Alzheimer's, mistook the author for a Jewish child she sheltered as part of the *kindertransport* to England in 1939. He describes how growing up in England in the 1950s and 1960s with a Jewish mother and Gentile father meant registering the trauma of Judeocide in the absence of the totalising discourse of 'the Holocaust', which enabled the wider western world to incorporate it as part of popular cultural memory.

The later part of the article focuses on Stratton's journey through the 'post-traumatic' society of the 1970s through popular films and series that presented the Nazi concentration camp as a site of eroticised violence: 'The corollary is that descriptions of what took place in concentration and death camps and, indeed, the actual images photographed at the time, became pornographic opportunities for sexual arousal – even, perhaps especially, for Jews.'(66) He concludes that by the late 1970s and early 1980s

...my own knowledge of what had transpired coupled with my traumascapes, my repeated actings out of my inherited fears and confusions related to the Judeocide, meshed with the new cultural memory of the Holocaust in what now could be identified as posttraumatic society. This was the time that I could begin my own journey to understand the impact on me of my mother's traumatic relation to the Judeocide and its haunting of my psyche. (67)

Whereas Stratton's article compares the individual and collective effects of a trauma of racialisation that shifted in his lifetime from being unspeakable and unrecognised to one that has become an object of mass cultural production and consumption, Sara Ahmed's article investigates the cultural politics of a trauma experienced by Indigenous Australians and which is recognised by one part of the dominant non-Indigenous group and unacknowledged by the other.

It was at a seminar hosted by the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland that I was first exposed to some of the ideas expressed in Ahmed's article, 'The Politics of Bad Feeling'. In it she examines responses to the *Bringing Them Home* report into the removal of Aboriginal children and to Prime Minister, John Howard's, subsequent refusal to apologise to those harmed by practices and policies of assimilation. Her intimate investigation of the role of shame as an affect shaping individual and national subjects moved by dynamics of responsibility, guilt and absolution raises several key questions: [What] kind of recognition and reconciliation is offered by such expressions of national shame?...[In] allowing us to feel bad, does shame also allow the nation *to feel better*? What is the relation between the desire to feel better and the declaration of bad feeling?' (72)

Approaching shame as an affective expression of inadequacy before an idealised other, Ahmed demonstrates how letters in electronic Sorry Books, addressed to a non-apologetic (and by implication shameless) Prime Minister, seek to recover national pride to gain the approval of a wider international community lest Australia be seen as a pariah state like the former South Africa: 'By witnessing what is shameful about the past [that] the nation can "live up to" the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present. In other words, our shame *means that we mean well.*' (77) It is

this return to virtue, she argues, that enables extravagant displays of national shame to function as a re-covering of the past.

Having demonstrated the problems inherent in attempts to make individual and national subjects feel better about the past, Ahmed critically tackles a proposition that can be found circulating in whiteness studies: making white people feel bad about being white exacerbates racism. She suggests, on the contrary, that attempts to found a progressive white identity in anti-racist pride 'sustains the narcissism of whiteness and allows whiteness studies to make white subjects feel good about "their" anti-racism' which in, turn, leaves racialised others with the burden of pain caused by ongoing racism. And this leads to her final question 'Is there room for feeling better?' Only, she argues, if we don't mistake the desire to feel better for the accomplishment of justice. So, rather than the re-covering of pride that she has shown to be central to the politics of shame, the recognition of injury implicit in the act of *exposure* might leave room for feeling better 'even if it is not *about* feeling better.' (83)

In contrast to the expressions of shame in electronic Sorry Books that are the object of Ahmed's analysis, Clare Bradford examines a very different response to the exposure of the theft and/or abuse of Indigenous children in the service of white projects of assimilation. Her article, 'They Went Home': Racialised spaces in contemporary picture books', originated in a keynote presentation at the 2003 *Placing Race/Locating Whiteness* conference and it investigates the role of children's literature in socialising subjects in different white settler-colonies. She argues that the normative socialising function of illustrated children's books in these nations means that racial, ethnic and cultural differences are usually represented either as 'a boon to white children' or as obstacles that must be overcome by children racialised as non-white in order to gain acceptance into the dominant group. But what happens to illustrated children's literature when its authors and target audiences are members of those groups who have been subjected to colonial practices and policies of assimilation?

Drawing on Michel de Certeau's elaboration of the role of 'tactics' in resisting the 'strategies' of those who deploy power, Bradford examines scenarios from

illustrated narratives which present innumerable ways of 'playing and foiling the coloniser's game'. She identifies several common features of these texts which distinguish them from their dominant counterparts: 1) a focus on inter-generational communication of specific historical events which incorporate the experiences of the individual authors of the texts; 2) a focus on successful everyday strategies for subverting institutionalised structures of domination embodied in residential schools and church and government settlements, for example; 3) the assertion of subjectivities and pleasures based on belonging to and possession of aspects of place that are inaccessible to colonial surveillance and control; and 4) their double address (to Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers) and the alternative visions of the future conveyed in these counter narratives of a white nation that constitute the implicit departure point for mainstream illustrated children's books. This last point made me wonder how these texts might be effectively deployed as tactics by school teachers and parents to challenge prevailing representations of exotic or assimilable others?

Bradford's article prompts some broader reflections engaging themes and issues addressed in many of the articles in this collection. For me, these crystallise in the question of how the European institution of monarchy is perpetuating relations based on white race privilege both in Australia and elsewhere? Whether it is in the generic register of the soap opera (Charles and Camilla) or the fairytale ('our' Princess Mary of Denmark) or of everyday celebrity (the latest romps of the Monaco royals), a new generation is presented with a paradox. On one hand, the self-regulatory disciplines of neo-liberalism promise equal opportunities for individuals willing to put in the hard yards, regardless of gender, colour or creed. On the other hand, there is a class of taxpayer funded individuals, all of whom are white, who seem to have won the lottery without even paying for a ticket. I want to conclude by invoking the image of (Australia's?) Prince Harry at a fancy dress party wearing the uniform of Hitler's Africa Corps (*Times Online* 14/1/05) as a disturbing but eloquent resolution of the paradoxical persistence of white supremacism in a world in which we are constantly being told that race doesn't matter.

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Notes

¹ Originally owned by the Manbarra people, Palm Island was made into a penal colony for dissident Indigenous people from all over the State in 1918 and has subsequently been afflicted by a homicidal white administrator, assimilation experiments and, in more recent years, benign neglect by State governments. See

www.faira.org.au/lrq/archives/199901/stories/shameful-white-history.html.

² Queensland, the state where I now live in Australia. Queensland is generally regarded as having come a long way since the heyday of state sanctioned racism and organised police corruption associated with the reign of former Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen. However, as television news bulletins provide regular updates on the state of Joh's failing health, preparing viewers for a State funeral in the not-too-distant future, I am not the only person to have observed the usually sunny face of the 'new Queensland', Premier Peter Beattie, take on a decidedly sinister cast as he negotiates the challenging issue of race relations on Palm Island.