

BOOK REVIEW

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Alfred J. Lopez (Ed.) Postcolonial whiteness: A critical reader on race and empire. Albany, SUNY Press, 2005, ISBN 0-7914-6361-3, pp. 261.

I first began to read this edited collection whilst working on a special issue of the *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, which I was co-editing with Lorraine Johnson-Riordan on the topic of 'White Terror/(Post)Empire'. We both found considerable utility in the approach to understanding Empire as outlined by Lopez in his introductory chapter, where he spends some time interrogating how white hegemony always involves the construction of an 'enemy other' against which dominant group members believe they must defend themselves. In this sense, Lopez highlights how forms of Empire persist in the face of moves towards decolonisation: when seen as a threat to white hegemony, assertions of First Nation sovereignty are positioned within a logic of colonisation whereby colonised people are seen as to blame for colonisation itself. This logic continues to appear within Australian public, academic and political spheres, where Indigenous people (for example) continue to be depicted as in need of 'rescuing' from benevolent whites, or as undeserving of reparation.

Important also for my own work, Lopez and his contributors highlight how forms of whiteness are often taken up by those historically positioned as 'less-white' – those seen to possess less cultural capital than that held by white, middle-class, able-bodied heterosexual men. John Hawley elaborates in his chapter how norms of whiteness may often play out within queer communities of colour.

Hawley questions how norms of femininity (which are implicitly racialised as white) are often unwittingly taken up in moments of cross-cultural drag.

As well as this explicit focus on the intersections of queer and race, many of the chapters in the book evoke a queer reading of whiteness that draws attention not only to the constitutive fears associated with what we may understand as a peculiarly heterosexual white masculinity, but also to the ways in which race is always already sexualised and gendered in multiple ways.

In a chapter reminiscent of William Spurlin's work on the queer iconography of Princess Diana, Diane Roberts examines how it is that the Princess, both before and after her death, projected a paradoxically normative and abject image of heterosexual white femininity that both reinforced the centrality of the nuclear family, whilst also at times directly undermining its supposedly a *priori* status. Roberts calls for an account of white femininity that acknowledges the multiple ways in which it both props up and challenges the binaries of good/bad, male/female and white/black.

Queer readings of whiteness (where queer refers to an injunction to reverse, subvert or otherwise destabilise particular norms) appear in chapters by both Lopez himself, Kelen and Turcotte. In focusing on the 'wolf man' case that is considered central to Freud's elaboration of psychoanalysis, Lopez examines how both the case itself, and Freud's work more broadly, display a consistent denial of the ways in which varying relationships to the norm of

white European masculinity during and between the two world wars were played out within Freud's consulting room. Whilst Lopez' reading of the wolf man case is not perhaps as convincing as it could have been in its elaboration of the racialised nature of the case, and in particular the 'wolf man's' dreams, it nonetheless serves to demonstrate how it is that the therapeutic setting is shaped through a range of norms that, whether spoken of explicitly or not, shape the client/practitioner relationship.

Kelen takes up this 'queer' approach by focusing on the Australian anthem 'Advance Australia Fair', where he questions the contradictions that are formative of the anthem itself. As he states:

It's the depth of contradiction in the present and official version of 'Advance Australia Fair' (its 'look at me I'm not here' quality) that leaves some of those who sing it [as white people] a little uneasy afterward as to the question of what they've meant. But I think the depth of that contradiction expresses the Australian condition (205).

Here Kelen draws attention to the problems that inhere to giving an account of Australia as a 'fair' nation in the face of ongoing histories of white violence. Kelen thus questions the temporal logic inscribed in the anthem, which remains unclear as to whether it constitutes a declarative statement about the inherent fairness of the white nation (a statement which is patently absurd), or an injunction to *become* a fair nation (or at least one that appears to be more fair). Kelen's argument reads notions of fairness as attempts at masking histories of violence and thus providing an account of white Australian history that creates a coherent, and violent-free, narrative.

In his chapter on the writing of Mudrooroo, Turcotte focuses on the uncanny effects that Mudrooroo's work produces (despite the ongoing questions of authenticity that surround his position as an author). Turcotte highlights how narratives of the present always hold within them narratives of the past, and indeed that the two function simultaneously to produce an account of Australia that strives to overcome the uncanny nature of white belonging. Mudrooroo's work, he suggests, renders visible the workings of the past in the present by creating a narrative of decolonisation that, following Fanon, is less about a reversal of colonial logic, and more about a radical rewriting of colonial spaces.

These, along with other important chapters by Imre, Sterr, Singh and Trimm, provide an account of a certain 'postcolonial whiteness' that is not limited to analyses of those sites typically considered under the remit of 'postcolonial studies', but rather extends postcolonial studies through an engagement with work on Empire and whiteness in order to develop a more intersectional, expansive account of the functions of racialised difference. Whilst my reference to 'queer' may seem arbitrary (and whilst it indeed reflects my own research interests on intersections of 'queer race'), I nevertheless believe it holds out that the chapters in the book significantly queer a range of disciplinary approaches, and thus demonstrate how they may usefully be brought into dialogue with one another. To speak of a 'queer race', much like to speak of a 'postcolonial whiteness', is to refuse a narrow framework for engagement, and is to instead seek a broader set of references for what we consider to constitute 'terror', 'the political' and indeed theoretical interventions themselves.