

EDITORIAL

CATHERINE KOERNER, KATHLEEN CONNELLAN & ALIA IMTOUAL

This special edition arises from the dynamic annual ACRAWSA conference held 10-13 December 2007 in Adelaide. The overarching theme for the conference was 'Transforming bodies, nations, knowledges' which encouraged a focus on issues of racial power and privilege in both local and global contexts. Indigenous sovereignty was a particularly important strand of the conference with a number of presentations (including keynotes) using issues such as the 'NT Interventions' as a way of grappling with the complexities of sovereignty and race power.

The authors whose work appears in this special edition include the keynote presentation from Sara Ahmed from (Goldsmiths College in London), Clemence Due, Stella Coram, Odette Kelada, Goldie Osuri, Damien Riggs and a book review from Lara Palombo.

All the papers address issues of critical race and whiteness as it is inscribed into and onto the body with its associations of sovereignty and knowledge. Ahmed unsettles the comfortable image of 'happiness' by providing readings of happiness through film as well as feminist and critical race appraisals. She shows what the condition of ostensible happiness is projected and expected to mean in culturally charged contexts. Ahmed digs deeply into the connection between happiness and the external material world of objects and families. She presents the condition as precarious yet at the same a strange requirement of normative white heterosexual society and shows how the 'melancholic migrant' or the 'feminist killjoy' is outside of this necessary 'good feeling'. Ahmed

is particularly interested in the 'points of conversion' in happiness and 'the reduction of pain' as these moments are contrived and orchestrated to return to 'scenes of happy diversity' where racism is considered 'backward' and covered over with a gloss of happy normal life.

Stella Coram's paper on mainstreaming highlights the problems of policy and positioning between advantage and disadvantage. Coram points out that inequality has become institutionalised to such an extent that 'race' has been silenced and made to disappear from policy. This has happened in the process of 'inclusion' and the 'integration of minorities into mainstream culture'. A 'discourse of disadvantage' has resulted. Coram asserts that the 'deployment of disadvantage' is a 'middle class phenomenon' and that 'mainstreaming as a model for increasing equality is paradoxical because equality exists or it does not'.

Due's deals with the theme of 'socially cohesive communities' as espoused by the former Federal minister of Kevin Andrews in relation to the irony of the white Australian 'absorption' of Sudanese migrants. Due points out that the mainstream media created stereotypes of the Sudanese as strangers who did not fit into the Australian 'way of life'. The continued denial of white Australia (who consider themselves as generous hosts to refugees such as the Sudanese) of the fact that they as white settlers have ignored the sovereignty of indigenous Australians is emphasised by Due.

Kelada's article focuses upon the role of paternalism in the play of fantasy and

reality within white Australia and the Northern Territory intervention in 2007. She shows that white blindness which is caught up in structures of power and authority is exacerbated by tactics such as haste and emergency. Beginning her paper with the popular children's storybook of 'Where the Wild Things Are', as an example of the convergence of colonial conquest and fantasy, Kelada shows how the white imaginary catches itself up in a fictive reality where the idea of rescuing children of 'tender' age from drunken abusive parents becomes a cause that must at all costs be enacted. Kelada shows how white manipulative techniques result in rushing the legislation through senate without consulting with the communities and without considering the facts of the 'Little Children are Sacred Report'. Her discussion of the notion of 'false memory' explicates the push and pull between fantasy and reality in the enactment of racialised power.

Osuri draws upon Achille Mbembe's 'necro-politics', a concept which she extends into a discussion of bio/necropolitics and geo/necropolitics. She does this by concentrating upon the 'performance of whiteness' and the tensions between war and peace. For example Osuri points out the irony of the Rudd apology to the Stolen Generation against the backdrop of the Northern Territory intervention which was simultaneously in process. Osuri brings the work of Perrera, Moreton- Robinson and others into a discussion of the 'multiple' formations and movements of whiteness and how such slippages allow for ambiguities, ironies and non-accountability. She asks what peace might look like for white Australia if it includes a continued exercise of sovereignty over Indigenous communities. Her paper argues that the benevolent Rudd is perhaps employing a 'bio/necropolitical regime of

management' which does not enhance the life of indigenous peoples whose existence is determined by white possession.

Riggs provides an eloquent but unremitting voice for the voiceless in his paper. Whilst his subject matter is the white fostering of Indigenous children, his concern in this paper is the way in which white mothers of Indigenous children are still more heard than their Indigenous mothers. In a careful critique of Cuthbert's methodology, Riggs shows how powerful the politics of voice can be – even in the work of a white feminist and race conscious writer such as Cuthbert. Riggs is most concerned with 'how the speech of those of us who identify as white thus functions as a form of violence' and this is especially evident when there is an understanding that some 'good' is being done. Riggs reveals complex hierarchies of voice as Cuthbert manages to evade issues of whiteness by negating the indigeneity of the Indigenous mother because she was 'tertiary educated' and dismissing the whiteness of the foster mothers by 'individualising their narratives.' This astonishing revelation shows how simple it is to do violence through the performance of voice and Riggs calls for an 'ethics of speech' that can deal with the 'unspeakable' and the 'unrepresented'.

A common thread in all the papers (beyond their commitment to critical race and whiteness issues) is the existence of ironies and pretence and the play of fiction against fact in representations of race in Australia.

Acknowledgments

Kaurna meyunna, Kaurna yerta, ngadiu tampendi.

The editorial committee recognises the Kurna people and their land.

Accrio tampendi, ngadlu Karuna yertangga banbabanbalyarendi (inbarendi). Kurna meyunna yaitya matnya Womma Tarndanyako. Parnako yailtya, parnuko tappa purruna, parnuko yerta ngadlu tampendi. Yellaka Kurna meyunna ito yailtya, tappa purruna, yerta kuma burro martendi, burro warriappendi, burro tangka martulyaiendi.

English translation:

We recognise and respect Kurna cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land. We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to the Kurna people living today.

The 2007 conference of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association, *Transforming Bodies, nations and knowledge's*, was held by Karrowirra, The Torrens River, near the traditional country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains.