

# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies



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**Volume 7, 2011**

AUSTRALIAN CRITICAL RACE AND WHITENESS STUDIES ASSOCIATION  
(ACRAWSA) ESSAY COMPETITION WINNER 2010

## **Critical Race and Disability Framework: A new paradigm for understanding discrimination against people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous people with disability**

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*This article develops a new paradigm for critically examining the problems with the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) for redressing discrimination experienced by people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and Indigenous peoples with disability. It highlights the limitations of a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability through the development of a new paradigm I term critical race and disability. A critical race and disability approach foregrounds the intersectional multidimensional categories of people's identities and argues that the ideal disembodied social actor and the hegemonic discourses perpetuated through this ideal need to be challenged simultaneously in order to disrupt the production of a hegemonic racialised, able-bodied order. The approach also calls for the recognition of intersectional epistemologies because the way a person comes to know the social world can cut across categories of identity. Further, a critical race and disability approach recognises that experiences of discrimination result from multiple hegemonic perspectives, such as whiteness and ableism, and argues that whiteness and ableism cannot be challenged, interrogated or disrupted separately because they are not experienced or carried out separately. This new critical paradigm provides a way forward for people whose identities and experiences are not singular but complex, intersectional and multidimensional.*

## Introduction

People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)<sup>1</sup> and Indigenous peoples with disability experience discrimination in Australian society. They experience individual, systemic and systematic levels of discrimination based on their race and their disability (National Ethnic Disability Alliance [NEDA] 2003; Wadiwel & Griffis 2009). There are currently inadequate channels of resolution in place for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. While it can be suggested that Australia's discrimination law is grounded in protecting people from discrimination, the *Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) 1975* (Cth) and the *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992* (Cth) do not resolve the discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability (Wadiwel & Griffis 2009). A critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective will assist in developing a framework of analysis that critically examines the problems with the RDA and the DDA for redressing the discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. I have called this framework of analysis a critical race and disability approach. I will begin by discussing a critical race and whiteness studies approach, a disability studies perspective and their limitations for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. Subsequently I will outline a critical race and disability framework developed in conjunction with a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective. I will then provide a description of the RDA and the DDA. Following, I will use a critical race and disability framework to critically examine the problems with the RDA and the DDA for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. Finally I will draw conclusions from the discussion to determine a way forward for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability.

## Critical Race and Whiteness Studies and Disability Studies

A critical race and whiteness studies approach seeks to disturb, interrogate and challenge the underlying privilege of whiteness embedded in Australian society which exercises its hegemony and dominance in civil, political and social institutions and "comes at the expense of the oppression and disadvantage of those positioned as other" (Riggs 2007: 1). In the production of academic knowledge in western culture, there is a common focus on 'the other' as different, as something to be studied. Seldom is there a scholarly focus on whiteness as a subject position that exerts power. Critical race and whiteness studies attempts to draw attention to this relationship between whiteness and power. "Whiteness is seen as a thoroughly racialised project that aims to legitimate the authority of certain groups over others by drawing on the legacy of 'biological' explanations of race" (Riggs 2007: 2). A critical race and

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<sup>1</sup> The controversial nature of NESB and its ability to exclude people must be acknowledged. However, there is no single or widely agreed upon term for people from non Anglo-Celtic backgrounds and there is currently tension surrounding the terminology used for ethnic minorities in Australia (NEDA 2010). NESB is used to highlight the experience of people who are disadvantaged in the context of white privilege in Australia.

whiteness studies approach to law derives from civil legal studies and “traditional civil rights scholarship” (Harris 1994: 741) and problematises, alongside other institutions, the law as an institution that perpetuates whiteness (Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Harris 1994).

Firstly, a critical race and whiteness studies approach problematises the equality ascribed to the law and the associated values of neutrality, objectivity and justice. This is because the neutral or colour-blind legal view of an individual tends to ignore or disregard their position in society in terms of the influence of privilege, advantage, disadvantage and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Harris 1994). Critical race and whiteness scholars argue that colour-blind or neutral approaches have the capacity to overlook the ways in which society is structured through systems of privilege and disadvantage as well as histories of colonisation. Critical race and whiteness studies looks at the power structures behind institutions like the law and challenges the ideologies of whiteness that inform and enable them to continue. Harris (1994) for instance, critiques the supposed neutrality with which the law treats people equally because they are considered the ‘same’ or differently because they are understood as ‘special’.

Secondly, critical race and whiteness studies seeks to acknowledge the voices and epistemologies of Aboriginal people and people from NESBs, which are often silenced through the law and disembodied discourses of rationality and neutrality. Critical race and whiteness scholars suggest that Aboriginal people and people from NESBs often experience the impartiality and prejudice of white forms of power and ways of knowing (Harris 1994; Delgado & Stefancic 2001). Thus, critical race and whiteness studies focuses attention on the ways whiteness is developed, produced and preserved as a category that often avoids critical examination and seeks to disrupt the claims that whiteness makes to normality and universality (Moreton-Robinson 2004).

A disability studies perspective and an ableist discourse seek to expose and deconstruct the dominance and hegemony of the ideal able-body by focusing on the way that disability is produced by society (Goodley 2009). Such an approach examines the ways in which the able-body is normalised and holds power within society through a direct contrast with the disabled body (Campbell 2009; Wendell 1997) and is legitimised through discourses and political actions (Oliver 1996). Oliver (1996) argues that disability as a social category is produced from a particular standpoint or epistemology. Disability studies is centred on the acknowledgement and recognition of the particular epistemologies and knowledges of people with disability. A disability studies perspective and an ableist discourse are informed by the social model which was developed by people with disability (Barnes, Oliver & Barton 2002). The social model makes an important distinction between disability as socially constructed and impairment as “the bodily dimension” (Goggin & Newell 2005: 28). The social model questions the way that disability and handicap are constructed through society (Oliver 1996) and suggests that disability is created through social institutions, structures, interactions and relations. The social model contests the idea that the ‘problem’ of disability lies with the individual and shifts the gaze from the

'problematic individual' to society (Colker 1998) by "locating the required interventions within the realm of social policy and institutional practice" (Humpage 2007: 215).

There are some limitations of a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. A critical race and whiteness studies approach specifically foregrounds the social category of race, with less of a focus on the intersection of disability and race.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the disability social model does not pay sufficient attention to culture and race (Shakespeare & Watson 2002) and primarily focuses on disability, leaving little room to recognise other aspects of people's identities, for example their gender<sup>3</sup> or race. Goggin and Newell describe this as "category politics ... where we are not allowed to be, at one and the same time, a woman and disabled, Aboriginal and part of the disability movement" (2005: 29). Shakespeare (2009) contends that a framework for understanding disability should consider more than just a medical diagnosis of disability and the social landscape that surrounds it. It should also consider the effects of social structures, the physical environment and cultural meanings as well as the influence of further social categories like class, gender and NESB.

### **Critical Race and Disability Approach**

Both a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective are instrumental in challenging the dominant privileged position of the able-bodied white. However, for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability it is important to take both frameworks further to address the intersectionality of the multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability cannot separate out the categorisations of their identity/ies because they are not necessarily experienced separately. They often experience multiple and complex discrimination, poor access to justice and lack of protection by any current legal framework in Australia (Wadiwel & Griffis 2009).

A critical race and disability approach adopts but also adapts the similarities of a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective in order to develop a framework of analysis that recognises the intersectional multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability and addresses the complex discrimination they experience. I will use this framework to critically examine the RDA and the DDA in order to problematise the construction of

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to highlight that critical race and whiteness theorists do acknowledge other intersections like gender and race (e.g. Frankenberg 1993, 1997; Moreton-Robinson 2000), sexuality, gender and race (see the *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* special issue on "Queer Race" [2006 2.2]: <http://www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournal/?id=25>; and Riggs 2006) as well as class and race (Preston 2007; Roediger 1999).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to draw attention to the special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* (2006 8.2 & 3) which specifically focuses on gender and disability.

discrimination legislation for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. A critical race and disability framework will consider five core ideas.

Firstly, a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective both emphasise embodiment, that is, NESB and Indigenous people or people with disability come to know the social world through their own embodied experiences. Both approaches also foster an awareness of the significance of the embodied identity of the judge, the discriminator and the discriminated in discrimination cases (Campbell 2005; Gaze 2002; O'Connell 2008). Placing an importance on the embodied dimension of social life is in direct contrast to the dominant western epistemology—Cartesian dualism—which is predicated on a disembodied social actor (Luker 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2004).

A critical race and disability studies approach stresses the need to go further than critically examining the judge, discriminator and discriminated. An embodied approach should also recognise the intersectional multidimensional categories of people's identities, for example, their race and their disability. This would recognise that NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability are discriminated against because of their multidimensional embodied identities which are often difficult to separate into social categories.

Secondly, a critical race and whiteness approach and a disability studies perspective suggest that a disembodied social actor contributes to the idea that there are certain ways of knowing the social world that are objective and rational. This is often enabled through dichotomies—for example, the separation between the human and animal world—here objective, scientific ways of knowing and thinking about the social world are posited as inherently universal (Moreton-Robinson 2004). Despite its claims to universality however, this rational objective framework is socially constructed and juxtaposed against other ways of thinking about the social world, such as embodied epistemologies which are viewed as less 'civilised'. A critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective seek to problematise the exclusionary nature of knowledge deemed objective and rational. Both approaches suggest that the privileged, that is, white able-bodied people, legitimate their position of dominance through comparing their superiority to those that are assumed to be 'sub-human' (Goggin & Newell 2005; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Yeatman 2000). For people with disability there is an unequal power distribution between the able-bodied and people with disability because of "historical assumptions about his or her immaturity, incapacity, or even sub-human status" (Yeatman 2000: 194) because their "bodies, minds and selves are assumed to be incomplete" (Barton 1993: 237).

A critical race and disability framework also seeks to problematise this ideal disembodied social actor. It argues that for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability, the ideal of a disembodied social actor has the capacity to exacerbate their experiences of discrimination because they are constructed as 'sub-human' by the intersecting discourses of whiteness and ableism. By promoting an intersectional approach that recognises the multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability,

a critical race and disability framework seeks to interrogate the privilege accorded to the ideal disembodied social actor—who is also assumed to be white and able-bodied. Disturbing only one hegemonic discourse, either whiteness or ableism, leaves one or the other intact. What is needed is an approach that recognises the intersection of race and ableism as producing a hegemonic racialised, able-bodied order.

Thirdly, a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective suggest that social actors can only know the social world through a specific perspective, that is, if they are person of NESB or an Indigenous person they know the social world as a person from a NESB or an Indigenous perspective or if they are a persons with disability they know the social world as persons with disability. A critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective also suggest that knowledge is acquired through specific embodied experiences (Moreton-Robinson 2004; Wendell 1997). This challenges the hegemonic values and perspectives in society which are often embedded in social institutions, laws and practices and viewed as universal and neutral. The universality and neutrality assigned to hegemonic values is what enables and maintains their power and allows the knowledge that comes from an embodied experience to be devalued. Moreton-Robinson suggests that “whiteness is an epistemological a priori [that] provides ... a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority, which becomes normalised and forms part of one’s taken-for-granted knowledge” (2004: 75-6). Similarly, Wendell argues that able-bodied people are unable to identify with people with disability because imagining what it would be like to be a person with an impairment does not provide them with the knowledge or perspective of people with disability. This is because, firstly, an able-bodied person cannot imagine the social barriers that people with disability face on a daily basis, and secondly, “suffering caused by the body, and the inability to control the body, are despised, pitied, and above all, feared [by society]. This fear, experienced individually, is also embedded deeply in our culture” (1997: 267).

A critical race and whiteness studies approach suggests that the perspective NESB and Indigenous peoples have of the social world is that of a person of race. While a disability studies perspective suggests that for people with disability their perspective of the social world is that of persons with disability. A critical race and disability approach acknowledges the intersectional epistemologies that NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability have as NESB or Indigenous peoples and as people with disability. It recognises that the ways in which a person comes to know the social world can cut across categories of identity by foregrounding the multidimensionality of the identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability.

The fourth core idea a critical race and disability framework considers is that if a critical race and whiteness studies approach seeks to disturb, interrogate and problematise whiteness as embedded in social institutions and society (Moreton-Robinson 2004; Nielsen 2008; O’Connell 2008; Riggs 2007), it also suggests that whiteness is privileged over other epistemologies in society. Moreton-Robinson, for example, argues that

whiteness "is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life" (2004: 75). Relationally, a disability studies perspective suggests that the able-body is associated with the 'normal', 'universal', human experience and that this discourse informs society excluding people with disability as 'other'. Disability studies attempts to destabilise normative assumptions about people with disability and disrupt the precedence given to able-bodied people. Ableism is a hegemonic epistemology (Campbell 2009; Goggin & Newell 2005) and "discrimination ... [exists as a result] in the institutionalised practices of society" (Oliver 1996: 76) with "legislation, policy and practice contribut[ing] to the legitimation of disabilist assumptions and discourses" (Barton 1993: 236). For people with disability these privileged knowledges and epistemologies contribute to their exclusion from society. For example, the dominant discourse of the able-body as ideal and the medical model that sees disability as an individual pathology or problem that should be treated, managed, contained and healed by the medical profession (Goggin & Newell 2005; Humpage 2007; Oliver 1996) cements ableism as an ideal bodily ontology. The medical model "imposes a presumption of biological or physiological inferiority upon disabled persons" (Barton 1993: 237) reaffirming disability as undesirable.

A critical race and disability framework also recognises that some knowledges and epistemologies are privileged over others. However, a critical race and disability framework foregrounds experiences of discrimination that result from multiple hegemonic perspectives, such as the hegemonic intersection of whiteness and ableism. The framework draws attention to the ways in which people with multidimensional, intersectional identities are disadvantaged and discriminated against because of multiple hegemonic epistemologies. This means that hegemonic epistemologies, like whiteness and ableism cannot be examined, interrogated, disrupted or problematised separately because they are not necessarily carried out or experienced separately.

Finally, NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability are often seen as objects of knowledge rather than subjects of knowledge. They are not seen as knowledge produces in their own right nor are they seen as capable experts who have the capacity to produce and interpret knowledge from their own particular culture or standpoint. Moreton-Robinson argues that "Aborigines have often been represented as objects—as the 'known'. Rarely ... [are they] represented as subjects, as 'knowers'" (2004: 75). This asymmetry in knowledge production cements them as 'other', the studied, the different (Moreton-Robinson 2004). For people with disability, the medical model is a paradigm that constructs people with disability as objects of knowledge and positions them in a relationship of subordination to this knowledge, where their disability is regulated and controlled by the medical profession (Goggin & Newell 2005; Humpage 2007). Even when people with disability are 'subjects' of knowledge they are restricted to speaking positions such as the 'tragically disabled' which reinforces the idea that disability is a "tragedy and catastrophe" (Newell 2006: 279).

A critical race and disability framework understands that NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability are often seen as objects of knowledge rather than knowledge producers in their own right. The framework emphasises the importance of destabilising the position of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability as objects of knowledge and the stereotypical speaking positions that NESB and Indigenous peoples and people with disability are often placed into. It recognises the power imbalance in knowledge production as a problem which needs to be placed alongside the recognition of the intersectional and multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. In highlighting the limitations of a critical race and whiteness studies approach to disability and the limitations of a disability studies perspective on race, it is possible to develop a critical race and disability framework that builds on the strengths of both approaches to recognise the embodied identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability as persons whose epistemologies result from their intersectional, complex and multidimensional identities. I will demonstrate the usefulness of combining these approaches through a critical analysis of the RDA and the DDA. Such a combined approach problematises the capacity of these laws to redress the discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability.

### **The RDA and the DDA**

Discrimination law in Australia is grounded in principles of equality (O'Connell 2008) and exists to ensure human rights are delivered and protected by facilitating freedom from fear of harassment and discrimination (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] 2006). Discrimination law is divided into categories based on race, gender (*Sex Discrimination Act 1984* [Cth]) and disability. Both the RDA and the DDA address direct and indirect discrimination (Jones & Bassar Marks 1998). In the RDA, direct discrimination refers to situations in which someone is "treated less favourably ... than the way someone of a different race, colour, descent or origin would be treated in a similar situation" (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission [HREOC] 2006: 5). In the DDA, direct discrimination refers to situations in which people with disability are treated "less favourably" (DDA-Section 5) than an able-bodied person "in circumstances that are not materially different" (DDA-Section 5). Indirect discrimination is less observable than direct discrimination and is permitted on the grounds of reasonableness and if it serves an important purpose. In the RDA, discrimination is indirect "if it puts at a disadvantage more people of a particular race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin than people of another race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin" (HREOC 2006: 6). In the DDA, indirect discrimination describes the exclusion of people with disability from participation in society because of a requirement or stipulation that puts them in a position of disadvantage (DDA-Section 6; Jones & Bassar Marks 1998). Additionally included in the RDA are racial hatred laws (*The Racial Hatred Act 1995* [Cth]) which provide protection for those who are publicly offended, vilified, insulted, humiliated or intimidated because of their race, colour or NESB (HREOC 2006). Comparably, the DDA also provides



protection against harassment (DDA–Section 35) and discriminatory questions, for instance asking people information that would allow them to be discriminated against on the basis of disability (Victoria Legal Aid 2010).

The RDA and the DDA are informed by a formal equality and substantive equality policy framework. Formal equality is “rights to equality before the law” (RDA–Section 10) and involves direct discrimination. For the RDA, formal equality is a colour blind or neutral approach where everyone is equal before the law (Nielsen 2008). In the DDA, a formal equality paradigm is evident in the assumption that society is equally constructed and that the experience of people with disability is comparable to able-bodied people, provided circumstances are not materially different (Campbell 2005; DDA–Section 5). Both Acts also permit a limited degree of substantive equality in that differences can be accommodated as required through special measures, affirmative action principles or special considerations (Nielsen 2008). Special measures “are designed to help groups or individuals who have been unfairly treated and now need support to help them ... enjoy their human rights” (HREOC 2006). Affirmative action principles are policies or programs implemented to redress historical discrimination and disadvantage, ensuring equal opportunities (Anti-Discrimination Board 2006).

### **Problems with the RDA and the DDA**

The structure of discrimination law does not redress the discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability because it requires them to separate out their identities into social categories of classification based on their race, age, disability and gender. An intersectional approach is important to discrimination law because it would recognise the multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. An intersectional approach “acknowledges that where disadvantages interplay and coincide or conflict between and within groups new policy approaches need to be considered” (Bagilhole 2007: 153). A critical race and disability framework emphasises an intersectional approach to discrimination law and seeks to understand the current barriers that impede access to justice for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. Such barriers include: the definitions contained in the Acts, the equality discourse that frames the Acts, the sameness/difference dichotomy which holds that those who are the same should be treated equally and those who are different should be treated differently (Bacchi 2009), the way people with disability are viewed by the RDA and the DDA and the judicial interpretation of the law and discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Defining race and disability*

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<sup>4</sup> It must be acknowledged that there are differences in the way that the RDA and the DDA are structured and the types of discrimination they address. Nielsen suggests that any analysis of discrimination law must recognise that differences exist between them which may affect the analysis (2008).

For NESB and Indigenous people and people with disability there are problems with the way that both the RDA and the DDA define race and disability respectively. The definition of race used in the RDA functions to reinforce white race privilege by focusing on race discrimination and not race privilege, the Act only recognises public instances of discrimination and treats discrimination as individual, isolated and episodic in nature (Nielsen 2008). In the first instance, Nielsen argues that "the RDA supports whiteness by placing the privileges it produces outside the scope of the definitions of what is race discrimination" (2008: 5). This centres the Act around the ideal of the white able-bodied, heterosexual male and its appeal to universality becomes the benchmark of neutrality and normality upon which 'others' can be measured (Nielsen 2008). Secondly, the RDA states that direct and indirect discrimination are not necessarily illegal unless the discrimination is enacted in a public place, limiting the span for changing and challenging discrimination that is not carried out in a public place (Nielsen 2008). Thirdly, the approach of the RDA focuses on individual legal redress which means that "remedies cannot reach beyond a particular case" (Gaze 2005) and cannot address systemic or structural disadvantage which may occur as a result of a continuum of rights infringements (Gaze 2005; Nielsen 2008). As a result, the problem of racial discrimination is constructed as individual rather than systemic or institutional (Nielsen 2008). For example, due to the RDA's requirement for individual complaints, discrimination against Aboriginal people is defined as an "Aboriginal problem" (Nielsen 2008: 7) without implicating white (or non-Indigenous) people in the production of racism.

Nielsen also suggests that the definition of race in the RDA is limited as, although it is ascribed a universality, "this 'universal' scope cannot acknowledge that disparities exist in the social, political and economic experience of different racial groups" (2008: 6). It also leaves little room to examine other social categories like disability, gender or religion that effect one's racial identity or the way one experiences the social world (see Imtoul 2006). An intersectional approach to discrimination law would broaden the definition of racial discrimination and the coverage for NESB and Indigenous people. By recognising different understandings, interpretations and epistemologies of discrimination and race it would also acknowledge the multidimensional and intersectional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples who may also be persons with disability.

The definition of disability in the DDA has the potential to create problems for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability because it fails to acknowledge the intersection of disability with cultural, linguistic and faith-based identity markers. The definition of disability in the DDA, while broad and inclusive (Jones & Bassar Marks 1998) fails to recognise dominant epistemologies in the construction of the definition of disability and the different cultural contexts which influence perceptions of ability, such as the white Australian construct of disability. The definition of disability in the DDA does not acknowledge NESB and Indigenous knowledges, understandings or experiences of disability. Cultural, linguistic and faith differences lead to divergent understandings of disability and these different definitions or understandings affect an individual's understanding of discrimination. This is important in Australia because "one in every four

people with a disability is a person of either first or second generation NESB, representing approximately 1 million people across Australia" (NEDA 2009). As well as acknowledging alternative understandings of disability as a result of cultural, linguistic and faith differences, disability should be located within a historical, social and cultural context. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced colonisation, dispossession, genocide and segregation, with continuing entrenched disadvantage through poverty, racism, discriminatory policing and imprisonment. In this context the self-perceived barriers faced by Indigenous people with disability as a result of impairment may be indistinguishable from disadvantage experienced as an effect of colonisation (Goggin & Newell 2005).

The definition of disability in the DDA also requires people with disability to identify as disabled in order to use the Act, requiring people to conform to able-bodied norms of what is understood as 'disabled' (Goggin & Newell 2005). Writing specifically about the Deaf community, Goggin and Newell suggest that prior to the DDA the Deaf community identified themselves as a "linguistic minority rather than a disability category" (2005: 39). However, people with hearing impairments have to "conform to hearing-world norms in identifying as having a disability" (39-40) in order to be able to access the DDA.

For NESB and Indigenous people and people with disability, the experience of discrimination is compounded by their multidimensional identities that are marginalised and subordinated in society and in the RDA and the DDA. By recognising the intersection of these identities which cut across categories of race discrimination and disability discrimination, legal and social justice bodies and institutions could recognise that oppression occurs on various levels for people with multidimensional identities and that the people who occupy these categories of race and disability are discriminated and disadvantaged by systemic barriers in society (Bagilhole 2007).

### *The Equality Discourse and the Sameness/ Difference Dichotomy*

Both the RDA and the DDA are informed by an equality discourse asserts the "fundamental right [of all citizens] to equality before the law" (Nielsen 2008: 1). The presumption of equality enacted through the legal system ignores the embedded privilege and disadvantage in society (Harris 1994; Nielsen 2008). This is because the values of an equality discourse—neutrality, objectivity and justice—are abstract and disembodied principles (O'Connell 2008) which obfuscate the unequal structure of society that informs discrimination (Harris 1994; Delgado & Stefancic 2001). Both the RDA and the DDA do not define 'equality' as such but presume a state of equal affairs as "each act requires non-discrimination to be achieved through treatment that is 'comparable to', thereby instilling 'a struggle for equality' into anti-discrimination law mechanisms" (Nielsen 2008: 3). This understanding of equality begs the question: comparable to what? (Nielsen 2008). The equality discourse that informs the RDA and the DDA is divided into formal equality and substantive equality. Both forms of equality have the capacity to entrench the dominant epistemologies of whiteness and ableism that inform the RDA and the DDA and also have the capacity to

conceal the disembodied social actor that is privileged through such discourses of equality. These values also construct the white able-bodied social actor as 'normal', displacing NESB and Indigenous people with disability into the realm of 'the other' (Campbell 2005; O'Connell 2008).

Formal equality 'same treatment' measures in the RDA assume that society is equally and neutrally constructed, a level playing field, where opportunities are evenly distributed, and effort is awarded on a non-discriminatory and consistently proportional basis (Nielsen 2008). As a result, the RDA does not challenge or problematise disadvantage, discrimination and privileged positions, cementing the hegemonic location of whiteness and creating a 'veil of ignorance' in relation to inequality, pre-existing and continuing racial discrimination and racial differences in society. In this way formal equality "equalises all" but rarely challenges structural disadvantage and privilege, thereby benefiting the white majority (Nielsen 2008).

Similarly the formal equality framework of the DDA does not, in practice, translate to equality for people with disability (Campbell 2005). This is because those who interpret and apply the law often have "problematic understandings of disability" (Campbell 2005: 201), reproducing the disadvantage, discrimination and social exclusion that people with disability experience (Campbell 2005).<sup>5</sup> Further, formal equality in the DDA is hindered by the lack of recognition that discrimination against people with disability is often embedded structurally (Campbell 2005), which leaves legislative protection such as the DDA with little scope to deliver significant change for people with disability. Additionally, even though attention through formal equality measures may be given to the embodied identity of people with disability, by focusing on the individual with disability who has experienced discrimination and comparing them to the ideal white able-bodied social actor, the Act essentially assumes that the person with disability and the discriminator are equally positioned in society. This positioning then locates the problem within the individual and reproduces the idea that inequality results from a failure to take advantage of opportunities to 'correct' one's circumstances. For instance, Campbell argues that there is a presumption in DDA cases that discrimination is inherently a problem for individual people with disability rather than collective, systematic or structural (2005).

The substantive equality measures—special measures, affirmative action principles and special considerations—in the RDA and the DDA enable

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<sup>5</sup> Campbell analyses the "High Court majority judgment in *Purvis v NSW*" (2005: 202) and argues that the judiciary focused their attention on a direct interpretation of the Act which lead to an individualising of the 'problem' of discrimination for the plaintiff. This interpretation then disregarded the wider social barriers that the plaintiff faced, in this case, in relation to the education system. Campbell argues that the decision to individualise the 'problem' for the plaintiff justified an appeal to the segregation of people with disability from 'normal' schools into special education and therefore removed the responsibility for addressing equal access from the school. As such, the case maintained the status quo rather than challenged systemic barriers to mainstream education for people with disability (Campbell 2005).

loaded dichotomies of sameness/difference or equality/difference between plaintiffs and the accused (Bacchi 2009). These dichotomies allow people to be discriminated against or treated differently because they are not seen as the same and therefore deserving of equal treatment but rather 'different' and in need of different treatment. Inequality thus becomes justified because of difference (Bacchi 2009). This marked position of difference or 'special-ness' is problematic for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability because it identifies them as 'other' by "lock[ing them] ... into the identity defined by ... [their] subordination" (Brown 2000: 232). By upholding or emphasising this position of difference it becomes inevitable that the position of the 'normal' can only be held by those who already exert privilege, that is, the white able-bodied social actor (Bacchi 2009). Substantive equality measures also reinforce what Goggin and Newell refer to as "category politics" (2005: 29) where NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability are not recognised by the law as occupying both subject positions.

Special measures, affirmative action principles and special consideration are formulated through the problematic idea that disadvantage and discrimination result from a lack of opportunity that can be overcome by increasing access and promoting advantage (Coram 2008). The incapacity of special measures, affirmative action principles and special consideration to solve past problems or provide future changes and advantages that will remedy the injustice, colonisation and devastation experienced by Indigenous peoples also contributes to their inability to challenge and expose the dominant epistemology of whiteness (Bacchi 2009). As Coram points out,

The notion that inequality arising out of colonisation can be closed by increased access and opportunity and the building of community capacity, puts the onus on indigenous people to overturn the historical effects of structural arrangements (2008: 1).

Disadvantage and discrimination are not the result of a lack of opportunity, they are the deliberate effects of a history of exclusion (Coram 2008).

The discourse of equal treatment based on sameness is problematic for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability (Nielsen 2008). This is because NESB and Indigenous people with disability are not seen as the same as white able-bodied people and are therefore not treated the same because they differ from the white able-bodied norm. It is not sufficient to view NESB or Indigenous people and people with disability on the same terms with white able-bodied people as this does not recognise the significant differences between these groups. At the same time, such differences should not be constituted as difference based solely on comparisons to a white able-bodied yardstick which then determines the treatment of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability (Campbell 2005; Nielsen 2008). An intersectional discourse would acknowledge multidimensional and complex differences because "it is important to determine how inequality and differential life experiences affect an individual's life chances, social attitudes and activity" (Bagilhole 2007: 159).

### *The Structure of the RDA and the DDA and Judicial Interpretations*

Another barrier that impedes access to justice for NESB and Indigenous people with disability is the way that the RDA and the DDA are structured and the way the judicial system interprets and applies them. For example substantive equality measures such as indirect discrimination, special measures, affirmative action principles and special consideration, rely on terms such as 'reasonableness'. 'Reasonableness' is subject to the discretion of those in power and those interpreting the law (Bacchi 2009). To determine whether something is reasonable, the judicial system 'rationally' judge, weigh and decide whether the extent of the discrimination and disadvantage experienced by NESB or Indigenous people or people with disability requires compensation in the form of special measures, affirmative action principles and special considerations (Nielsen 2008). The RDA states that a condition applied to a person on the basis of race is discriminatory if that condition is unreasonable (RDA-Section 9). The DDA also states that the specific subsections dealing with indirect discrimination (subsection [1] and [2]) do "not apply if the requirement or condition is reasonable, having regard to the circumstances of the case". The DDA qualifies this by stating

for the purposes of subsection (3), the burden of proving that the requirement or condition is reasonable, having regard to the circumstances of the case, lies on the person who requires, or proposes to require, the person with the disability to comply with the requirement or condition (DDA-Section 6).

There are significant consequences for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability in relation to substantive equality measures based on 'reasonableness'. 'Reasonableness' or 'reasonable' is not defined by either the RDA or the DDA and is ambiguous. As a result it has to be interpreted and determined by the judiciary who are often white and able-bodied (Gaze 2002) and know little about intersectional discrimination, "judges can interpret the element of ... 'reasonable' in indirect discrimination to maintain the status quo and limit the law's ability to require social change" (Gaze 2002: 329). Further, "'reasonableness' is assumed to be 'objective'" and "involves a questionable claim to universal objectivity" (Pace in Nielsen 2008: 8-9), which implies that it exists free from bias, privilege and whiteness. 'Reasonableness' in the RDA and DDA is also problematic because it has the capacity to further compound the discrimination experienced by people with intersectional, multidimensional identities. This is because if the RDA and the DDA do not recognise that NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability can be discriminated against because of the intersection of their race and disability, then it also fails to consider when determining 'reasonableness' the effect and impact of discrimination on a person's intersectional identity.

While judges have the capacity to interpret what is reasonable and unreasonable, discrimination cases are further impeded by the apparent disembodiment of decision-makers in RDA and DDA cases (O'Connell 2008). The embodied decision-making of judges is often obscured by a

mask of neutrality despite the fact that everyone who interprets the law "has experiences, knowledge and prejudices ... they are not neutral [and] ... have their own location in this system of advantage and disadvantage" (Gaze 2002: 339). Gaze argues, "it appears difficult for members of (generally) racially privileged groups, such as the judiciary, to recognise the impact of racism on the less privileged" (2005). What must be called into question then, is the way that the judicial system interprets the RDA and the DDA from positions of privilege. Elsewhere Gaze contends that judges in Australia "rarely have any experience of systemic discrimination" (2002: 335) and interpret the law by giving effect to the words contained in the legislation rather than through the prism of discrimination as experienced by the plaintiffs. Interpreting discrimination through the scope of the legislation does not fulfil the purpose of the laws because the social context of discrimination is not envisaged or accounted for (Gaze 2002). Similarly, Campbell (2005) also argues that the lack of satisfactory results for people with disability who apply to the DDA for protection is a consequence of the application, interpretation and understandings of disability by the judicial system which individualise discrimination and ignore the broader social context of discrimination.

### **Ways Forward**

Significant changes need to occur in order to provide a way forward for NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability who experience discrimination. Firstly, discrimination law needs to recognise intersectionality and the multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability in order to provide them with a useful tool to appropriately redress their experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Secondly, the current equality discourses which underpin the RDA and the DDA are inadequate and recognise mutually exclusive categories such as race and disability. Discrimination law needs to be transformed to include an intersectional approach which would address multidimensional identities and recognise difference as a value in its own right. Thirdly, discrimination law needs to recognise the unequal structural and systemic barriers that exacerbate the discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. In the fourth instance, the definitions of discrimination in terms of race and disability have limited scope for the possibilities of intersectional interpretations of identity. The Acts need to be able to redress collective claims that recognise multidimensional identities but also provide structural and systematic changes to the way that NESB and Indigenous people and people with disability are treated in society. Finally, those who interpret the RDA and the DDA should be aware of its purpose and should be informed by complex, multidimensional experiences and knowledges. This means that discrimination law must acknowledge the embodied identities of the judiciary because "one's embodiment ... includes in a crucial and inescapable sense one's beliefs, habits and entire context" (Gatens 1996: 140). Simultaneously the judiciary should reflect and represent the experience and knowledge of people from NESBs, Indigenous people and people with disability, enabling their participation in the legal institution. However, as whiteness and ableism are entrenched in the knowledges produced by the legal system,

the broader epistemological and bodily sensibilities of white Australian culture need to be transformed if these changes to the law suggested above are to have any impact.

## **Conclusion**

This article has developed a framework of analysis that I have called a critical race and disability approach. This framework combines a critical race and whiteness studies approach and a disability studies perspective and emphasises intersectionality as a solution for redressing the complex discrimination experienced by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability. The application of a critical race and disability approach is productive in terms of understanding the barriers to access for justice by NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability, specifically through the RDA and the DDA. Viewed through a critical race and disability approach, the structure of the legislation does not enable a sufficient response to the disadvantage experienced by NESB or Indigenous people with disability and works to entrap them into mutually exclusive and subordinate identity markers. Recognising the intersectionality of the multidimensional identities of NESB and Indigenous peoples with disability provides a way forward for addressing discrimination that exceeds the terms of the Acts.

## **Author Note**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the staff at the Disability Studies and Research Centre (DSRC), in particular Rosemary Kayess who took me in as an intern and gave me the opportunity to work on this project. I would also like to sincerely express my gratitude to Dinesh Wadiwel, Damian Griffis, ACRAWA, to the judges and peer reviewer for their recommendations and to my mentor Dr Cate Thill.

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

[www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournal](http://www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournal)

**Volume 7, 2011**

SPECIAL ISSUE: POST-RACIAL STATES

## **The Myth of Post-Racialism: Hegemonic and Counterhegemonic Stories About Race and Racism in the United States**

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*In the United States, hegemonic narratives reproduce post-racial ideals by developing popular myths that either minimise the prevalence of racial inequalities or blame their persistence on African Americans, who are represented as dysfunctional and resistant to mainstream American culture. Hegemonic narratives are not only racist and prejudiced but also deceptive because they move race away from the unequal policies that produce structural-level inequities for lower and working class African Americans, putting the latter at a greater disadvantage in relationships to middle and upper class white Americans and African Americans. Hegemonic stories are misleading since they claim that racial equality is possible even when the majority of white Americans have a claim to socio-economic and political privilege and have a vested interest in maintaining that advantage at the expense of others. Using both past and recent critical race theories, this article critically analyses the major differences between hegemonic stories which accept the myth of post-racialism in the United States and counterhegemonic stories which contest this myth. By analysing these stories, the essay reveals the racially disadvantageous conditions the majority of blacks in the United States continue to face despite the 2008 election of a black president. The essay identifies persistent structural racism that the myth of post-racialism seeks to efface. It also suggests that American social and economic institutions work to entrap African Americans and other non-white minorities into a racist prison industrial complex, limited education and health facilities and rampant poverty which drastically reduce their opportunities in the United States.*

### **Introduction**

Race must be foregrounded in the study of American public discourse which tends to substitute a concrete and radical civil rights agenda with notions of meritocracy and a post-racial equal playing field. The foregrounding of race shows the myth of post-racialism to be a fallacy based on hegemonic stories that minimise the effects of racism on African Americans. By contrast, counterhegemonic stories, or *counterstories*, seek to emphasise and make visible the consequences of racism. While hegemonic stories ignore racial inequalities in the United States by shifting the responsibility for poverty onto African Americans themselves, counterstories reveal the structural disadvantages faced by blacks and work to challenge post-racial myths. My analysis of various hegemonic and counterhegemonic stories suggests the complexities of narratives that either elide or make visible the institutional and structural factors which explain the persistence of racism in the United States.

This essay is indebted to Richard Delgado's methodology of critical race theory, which weaves together legal discussion, statistics and narratives in order to deconstruct conventional stories about race and reveal the importance of storytelling in American law. In the mid-1990s, Delgado and other American legal scholars such as Derrick Bell and Gary Peller challenged the meaning of race in American public discourse by centring it within individual and communal stories that reflected the impact of race on the American judicial system. As Bronwyn T. Williams suggests, in "The Truth in the Tale: Race and 'Counterstorytelling' in the Classroom", these scholars "used techniques such as narrative[s] to challenge dominant cultural constructions of race" and "the ideal of an 'objective' legal tradition, arguing instead that, by denying the influence of race on the legal system or debating whether race in the form of whiteness exists at all, the dominant culture uses the system to protect its own interests" (2004: 166).

Delgado's use of narratives that challenge conventional perceptions of race and racism is apparent in his concept of "counterstorytelling" which provides a framework for representing the continuing effects of racism on African Americans and for challenging the biases of academic disciplines dominated by Eurocentric thinking (2000: 60-70). In his essay, "Legal Storytelling: Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative", Delgado defines counterstorytelling as the curative process by which a subjugated group tells stories that resist the narratives that a dominant group tells themselves and others in order to establish a "shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural" (2000: 60). Counterstorytelling is a curative process since it "can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" and, thus, "show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion" (2000: 61). Delgado's counterstorytelling help us to challenge the facile dismissal of race and racism in hegemonic discourse as a 'finished business'. Applying Delgado's counterstorytelling a decade later, Williams denounces how American universities and colleges "reproduce the dominant cultural ideology" by restricting Black History Month to a mere celebration of the achievements of individuals such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and Jackie Robinson (2004: 165). Williams argues, "When we have our conversations about race in the context of

such narratives of individualism and race as 'other', we reinforce a worldview that does not address the systemic and cultural constructions of race" (2004: 165). Developing similar counterstories, my essay critiques the easy dismissal of race in legal, political and academic hegemonic stories from the 1940s to the present which ignore the ongoing impact of racism on African Americans.

### **Counterstorytelling as Resistance against Hegemonic Storytelling**

Hegemonic narratives permeate books, news, tabloids, music and other media by creating a virtual reality that Delgado describes as a set of "archetypes" or "well-told stories" that "ring true in light of the hearer's stock of preexisting stories" (2000: 70). Hegemonic stories are powerful tools of indoctrination because they dictate popular views about race. Williams states: "In order to permeate and shape our perceptions and responses to race, these narratives must conform to and reproduce the dominant cultural ideology" (2004: 165). Counterstorytelling opposes hegemonic storytelling by subverting conservative assumptions that romanticise the 'American dream' as able to provide upward mobility, should an individual work hard enough, whilst ignoring the precarious socio-economic status of blacks in the United States. Counterstorytelling is apparent in Delgado's critique of the inherent prejudices of American legal scholarship against African Americans (1995: 46). Delgado gives the example of civil rights laws in which the majority of white scholars "hold that any inequality between blacks and whites is due either to cultural lag or inadequate enforcement" of existing civil rights laws, overlooking "the prevailing *mindset* by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom" (2000: 60).

As Delgado suggests, this kind of hegemonic storytelling was apparent when a white professor from a major law school opposed the hiring of a black lawyer named John Henry on the charge that "he was vague and diffuse about his research interests" and "wanted to write [mainly] about equality and civil rights" (2000: 62). When a student told the professor that Henry could teach law "from a black perspective", the professor replied: "Those things are true, and we gave them considerable weight. But when it came right to it, we felt we couldn't take that great a risk" (2000: 63). The professor's response to the student's plea demonstrates the lack of empathy towards other epistemologies that Delgado describes when he argues, "Ideology—the received wisdom—makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural. Those in power sleep well at night—their conduct does not seem to them like oppression" (2000: 61). Moreover, the professor's attitude suggests that hegemonic stories endure unless they are challenged by counterstories that infuse ethics and justice into human relationships. As Williams points out, "If we listen to the narratives outside the dominant culture, not only for what they tell us about individuals but also for how they help us understand different conceptions of our culture and its institutions, they can help us develop an understanding of race that reaches beyond individual morality" (2004: 167).

## **Hegemonic Stories of Dysfunction and Self-Alienation**

An early and influential hegemonic story on black-white race relations appeared in the 1944 book, *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, in which Gunnar Myrdal wrote: "The correlation between poor housing, on the one hand, and tuberculosis, venereal diseases, prostitution, juvenile delinquency, and crime, on the other hand, has been demonstrated so often by American experts that we do not have to add anything to the evidence. This point should be kept in mind in any evaluation of Negro family life, of Negro crime and of Negro sickness" (1944: 376). Myrdal's book was controversial because of its attempts to establish an analogy between an urban African American 'lifestyle' and poverty, crime and delinquency. The book was however, influential in creating a hegemonic narrative about racial inequality that was taken up in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965).

In his report, Moynihan argues that "collectively, in the spectrum of American ethnic and religious and regional groups, where some get plenty and some get none, where some send eighty percent of their children to college and others pull them out of school at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Negroes are among the weakest" (1965: i). Through the use of apocalyptic metaphors, Moynihan warned against the "approaching complete breakdown" of the "family" of "lower class Negroes" of the mid-1960s due to a pervasive "Tangle of Pathology" that was apparent in "broken homes" mostly led by unwed mothers caught within welfare dependency (1965: 5-6). Moynihan and Myrdal both create hegemonic stories which evolve out of what Daryl Michael Scott calls "the image of the damaged black psyche" (1997: xii). According to Scott, "the image of the black personality as damaged" is evident in a long tradition of American social science literature that was developed "from the aftermath of Reconstruction in 1880 to the present" and holds "that blacks are and historically have been damaged" (1997: xi-ii). The 'damage' trope is pernicious because it views the socio-economic disadvantages of African Americans as deriving from familial and social dysfunctions that are particular to blacks. This trope inferiorises African Americans and disregards the structural conditions that prevent equality with other Americans.

By the 1980s, hegemonic stories about African Americans were so fixated on their racial dysfunction that a few white conservative intellectuals championed what they viewed as the cultural self-alienation of blacks from mainstream American culture. Thus in his 1987 book, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Allan Bloom explains that American universities and colleges of the late 1980s created a problem wherein "at the moment when everyone else has become a 'person,' blacks have become blacks ... 'They stick together' ... This is peculiar inasmuch as race is less spiritually substantial than religion, and also inasmuch as integration was both the goal and the practice of blacks in universities prior to the late sixties" (1987: 92-3). As a remedy to this situation, Bloom

recommends that blacks at American universities be taught "the good old Great Books" which can provide them with "a new alternative and a respect for study itself" (1987: 344). What Bloom perceives as self-alienation are the psychological and economic factors which lead black students to form circles. These networks allow black students to develop a sense of solidarity that provides them with the emotional and cultural connections which help them overcome racial prejudices they encounter during their university or college education. In her book, *'Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?': And Other Conversations About Race*, Beverly D. Tatum says that "connecting with one's Black peers in the process of identity development is important and should be encouraged" because it provides them with a "reference point" and a means for overcoming "the daily challenges of living in a racist society" (2003: 69-70). It is also worth pointing out that white students group together for similar reasons (excepting victimisation based on race), but because white students are not viewed as a 'racial' group as such, this unity is not seen as racial self-segregation in the same way that 'black' social groupings are nor is it viewed as disadvantageous.

### **White Conservative Hegemonic Stories of Colour-Blind Racism and Post-Racialism**

Another dominant hegemonic story is the representation of racism as a problem that has either been resolved or is difficult to prove. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva acknowledges the prevalence of this hegemonic narrative in the United States when he argues that colour-blind racism has a "slipperiness" because it blames the victim (non-white minorities) "in a very indirect way" through the "now you see it, now you don't" rhetorical style "that matches the character of the new racism" (2010: 25). Colour-blind racism is insidious since, as Bonilla-Silva suggests, it ignores "the effects of past and contemporary discrimination on the social, economic, and educational status of minorities" by "supporting equal opportunity for everyone without a concern for the savage inequalities between blacks and whites" (2010: 31). William J. Bennett, a former US secretary of education, reproduces this narrative when he argues, in *The Devaluing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children* (1992), that America has already gotten "angry about racism and decided [that] it was wrong, [and] the country didn't wait to eliminate the 'root causes' before going after it aggressively, in law and through social stigma" (146). Bennett's argument assumes that racism is over and that it must be stricken from the American English vocabulary since it leads blacks to develop separatist notions of race that undermine American individuality. Bennett writes: "Along with abortion, race has become the most divisive issue in contemporary American politics. The great body of the American people believe in individual rights, not group rights, not rights conferred by sex, race, and religion" (1992: 179). Bennett's rationale for individual rights comes from the hegemonic narrative of colour-blind racism which allows whites to remove race from the factors that impede the social and economic mobility of blacks. In doing so, whites disculpate the government, states and courts of the United States from any responsibility for the socio-economic conditions of African Americans by "blaming them



[African Americans] for their own misfortune" (Cohen 2010: A1). This strategy of blame is deceptive because it frames racism in such a way that blacks appear as the people who perpetuate the problem, thus making the conversation revolve only around blacks as opposed to whites who contribute to inequalities without having to acknowledge and resolve them.

A parallel of colour-blind racism is the hegemonic story of post-racialism which represents the United States as a post-racial society in which blacks and whites are treated as equals. This hegemonic narrative stems from an ideology, espoused by both Democratic and Republican leaders, which argues that race equality has been achieved in the United States. Post-racialism has become popular in the American media since the moments preceding the inauguration of President Barack Obama. A few hours before Obama was pronounced the winner of the 2008 presidential election, Anderson Cooper, a reporter for CNN (Cable News Network), asked a panel of commentators including Bill Bennett, a well-known Republican, the meaning of the election "in terms of change of race relations in the United States." Bennett replied, "Well, I'll tell you one thing it means ... You don't take any excuses anymore from anybody who says, 'The deck is stacked, I can't do anything, there's so much in-built this and that'" (CNN 2009). Bennett's comment suggests that African Americans can no longer complain about racial inequalities in the United States when there is a black president. His statement is emblematic of the hegemonic narrative of the first decade in this century that portrays America as a post-racial nation in which all the promises of black civil rights struggles have been fulfilled.

Post-racialism also emphasises the importance of individuality as opposed to group identity. Lawrence Auster (2008) writes: "Presumably a post-racial, beyond-race America will be one in which no one thinks about race any more, an America in which we all just see each other as individuals." According to Auster, post-racial America also reinforces "The notion that the election of Barack Obama to the presidency will inaugurate a 'post-racial' America, an America that has gone 'beyond race.'" Post-racialism is an admirable goal because it imagines a world in which blacks and whites in the United States live without racial division. As Patricia Zengerle (2010) suggests, post-racialism envisions the United States as a country in which "division and tension between black and white Americans" has disappeared. Despite such noble intentions, post-racialism constitutes more of a rushed idealism than what Zengerle calls "a thorough thinking through" which would reveal the persistence of race in the United States. As Zengerle suggests, post-racialism avoids the fact that "Racial conflict is America's deepest wound" (2010).

### **'Class Trumps Race' Hegemonic Stories**

Another variety of hegemonic race narrative that permeates American public discourse is the view that class, not race, shapes the lives of African Americans. An influential example of this narrative is 1987's *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* in which William Julius Wilson argues that the lack of amenities in African American

urban communities stemmed from the fact that “today’s black middle-class professionals no longer tend to live in ghetto neighborhoods and have moved increasingly into mainstream occupations outside the black community” (1987: 7). Wilson’s hegemonic story is also apparent in his claim that the flight of “nonpoor blacks from previously mixed-income neighborhoods” have “deprived these communities of the key structural resources including role models for their children” (Patillo 2007: 106-7). According to Wilson, “the declining presence of working and middle-class blacks” in “ghetto neighborhoods” has created a serious lack of “informal social control” and “permanent relationships” and a huge increase of poverty, “broken unions, out-of wedlock pregnancies and births” and, “to a lesser extent, separation and divorce” (2000: 87-88). Wilson’s portrayal of “ghetto neighborhoods” as characterised by deprivation and lack of “control” is consistent with hegemonic race stories which trace the challenges of African Americans to a culture of poverty and deficiency. In a *New York Times* article (2010), Cohen explains that “Culture is back on the poverty research agenda” because “the cultural roots of poverty ‘play important roles in shaping how lawmakers choose to address poverty issues’” (2010: A1). In response to Cohen’s article, Steinberg (2011) argues that the re-popularisation of the cultural argument has taken place within a 40-year period of “racial backlash” which has seen the systematic erosion of structural-level progress made during the Civil Rights Movement. At the forefront of this backlash is the removal of race from public discourse on structural inequality.

Wilson’s narrative resembles a hegemonic story because it represents African Americans as being responsible for their own predicament and de-emphasises the significance of race in their lives. While the flight of nonpoor blacks from innercity neighbourhoods has played a major role in the condition of these communities, African Americans still experience racism regardless of class. In “Socioeconomic Inequality: Race and/or Class”, Wilson himself writes in 2001, “To repeat, the growing joblessness among the innercity poor represents the most extreme form of economic marginality stemming in large measure from changes in the organization of the economy, including the global economy ... This is because the black population, burdened by cumulative experiences of racial restrictions, was overwhelmingly unskilled a few decades ago” (2001: 446). Wilson’s comment shows that the consequences of racism still need to be addressed in hegemonic stories about class and culture, which tend to emphasise classism over racism rather than the relationship between the two.

Another example of a class-based hegemonic story is Walter Benn Michaels’ *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, which argues that class trumps race (2006: 2-3, 6-7). Discussing Michaels’ theory, John Ernest (2009) writes in *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*: “By race, Michaels means an assumed aspect of identity, something that enables individuals sharing that aspect to identify themselves as groups. For him, class is largely a function of economic differences and therefore much more solid. It might be problematic to identify yourself as black or white, but you certainly know whether you are relatively rich or poor” (2009: 46). By

arguing that class trumps race, Michaels dismisses the equal impact that both factors have on the lives of blacks in the United States. As J. Kameron Carter argues in *Race: A Theological Account* (2008), "one is led to refuse the either/or between race and class that Walter Benn Michaels seems to box himself into" because "racial construction and the realities of class formation are not mutually exclusive. Rather, race and class articulate each other" (2008: 382).

Furthermore, Michaels represents race as a consequence of genetic and cultural history that people use to separate themselves from others. He writes: "We love race—we love identity—because we love class. We love thinking that the differences that divide us are not the differences between those of us who have money and those who don't but are instead the differences between those of us who are black and those who are white or Asian or Latino or whatever" (2006: 6). Michaels assumes that race is merely a physical and cultural identity marker that one arbitrarily adorns, overlooking the ways in which race is also a product of historical relationships that group or separate people; often without their choice. As Ernest (2009) argues, race is not as "simple" as Michaels assumes because "it is more than something we carry around. It can be understood more fully as something that awaits us as we move from place to place, something we bump into, something that often influences deeply, historically, how and (even today) where we live" (2009: 46). Michaels does not view race in such historical and structural contexts since he perceives it as an identity that blacks can choose to wear or not to wear. Race is not a chosen identity since it is a consequence of rigid relationships based on longstanding historical, social and economic inequities. Racism is the consequence of the survival of these relationships through unjust laws and stereotypes.

### **'Laissez-Faire' Hegemonic Stories**

Additionally, there is a kind of hegemonic story that represents cultural deficiency as the reason blacks are unable to achieve equality in the United States. In their book, *Preventing Prejudice: A Guide to Counselors, Educators, and Parents* (2006), Joseph G. Ponterott, Shawn O. Utsey and Paul Pedersen describe "laissez-faire racism" as a "subtle racism" that does three things: "[First] laissez-faire racism attributes the economic and political failures of Blacks to their own cultural inferiority. A second component of laissez-faire racism is the denial by Whites that structural and institutional barriers to minority progress exist. Third, Whites who express laissez-faire racism are resistant to efforts that seek to remedy institutional and social inequality" (2006: 38).

Moreover, as Bonilla-Silva argues, "laissez-faire racism" ignores "the significant impact of past and contemporary discrimination in the labor market" against blacks (2010: 34) and overlooks the fact that whites "live mostly in white neighborhoods, marry and befriend mostly whites, interact mostly with whites in their jobs, and send their children to white schools" (48); which are choices that blacks can make only to be denied the schools, facilities, protection and other privileges that whites enjoy

amongst themselves. Whites racially segregate themselves, but this is not seen as a deficiency or problem because it is not viewed through the lens of racial pathology in the same way that black communities are. When whites segregate themselves, this self-alienation is not seen as a racial activity with racial consequences.

Earlier, in 1995, Dinesh D'Souza utilised a hegemonic narrative which blamed black poverty on black deficiency and pathology. Denouncing affirmative action for blacks, D'Souza contended that it was not reasonable for "black students in education with a C average at a community college ... [to] command incomes comparable with white students majoring in business with a B average at the University of Wisconsin or Cornell" (1995: 301). D'Souza's hegemonic story is consistent with "laissez-faire racism", a parallel of colour-blind racism, which, as Lawrence Bobo, James R. Kluegel and Ryan A. Smith argue, "involves persistent negative stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame blacks themselves for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate U.S. racist social conditions and institutions" (1997: 16). D'Souza's hegemonic story reproduces "laissez-faire racism" because it inferiorises black students with learning challenges by blaming their race for such limitations, overlooking the structural disparities preventing these students from getting equal education in America. D'Souza also perpetuates a fallacy by presuming that in order to benefit from affirmative action, minorities are necessarily less qualified in the first place. D'Souza's hegemonic story ignores the fact that affirmative action is premised on rewarding people with the same qualifications who would otherwise miss out on benefits simply due to their race.

D'Souza's hegemonic story is part of the narrative of "laissez-faire racism", since it views blackness as a sign of inferiority, and not as an identity that exposes blacks to economic and social injustices from which white Americans are generally shielded. Ignoring such inequities, D'Souza demonises African Americans when he writes: "Perhaps the most serious of African American pathologies—no less serious than violence—is the routinization of illegitimacy as a way of life. The bastardization of black America is confirmed by the fact that nearly seventy percent of young black children born in the United States are illegitimate, compared with twenty-two percent of white children" (1995: 514-5). D'Souza's hegemonic story fits into the myth of the 'culture of poverty' which ignores the existence of stable African American families and communities in which members have good relationships with another despite the challenges of structural inequities facing them.

### **Black Conservative Hegemonic Stories of Post-Racialism**

Hegemonic race narratives are not solely promulgated by white scholars and authors but by black intellectuals as well. Black conservative intellectuals such as Shelby Steele and John McWhorter also utilise discourses which blame African Americans for cultivating victimology, separatism and obsession with white guilt. Steele criticises African Americans for being impaired by a rhetoric of victimhood and separatism in

a period that he describes as the age of “the promised land of freedom” (2006: 26). Paradoxically, Steele imagines this freedom as a stage that blacks can reach only through use of false deference towards whites. Steele’s hero is Booker T. Washington, whom he describes as a black leader who possessed an “accurate reading of whites” (2008: 66). In *A Bound Man*, Steele writes: “He [Washington] saw that whites simply would not tolerate racial equality or even much protest toward that end. So he advocated development rather than equality, and he favored a mask that showed blacks as humble, hard working, and accommodating of segregation” (2008: 66). Steele considers Washington’s deferential mask as a step which, when added to W. E. B. Du Bois’ “mask of protest”, worked so well “that it led to a new era of white guilt in which whites—particularly institutions—had to redeem their moral authority through blacks. And so today, continuing to read white America as we always have, we wear a mask focused on our racial difference rather than our common humanity” (2008: 66-7). The notion of racial difference is part of a hegemonic narrative that Steele develops in *White Guilt* when he describes the attitudes African Americans have towards race:

The black identity today involves a degree of nostalgia for some of the certainties that were the unintended consequences of racial oppression—the security of an enforced group identity and group unity, the fellow feeling of a shared fate, the comfort of an imposed brotherhood and sisterhood, the idea of an atavistic, God-given group destiny ... Today it is fashionable among blacks to say that integration was a failure, which is to imply that our true strength is in separatism (2006: 26).

Steele’s representation of African Americans as nostalgic for separatism rather than working towards an equality he sees as synonymous with integration is a hegemonic story that mistakes the social and economic deprivations that make race a tool of liberation from subjugation for a superficial marker of identity.

Steele draws attention to Obama whom he sees as an African American who has transcended race. Obama’s candidacy in the 2008 US presidential election is proof for Steele that white America “has undergone a moral evolution away from racism so transformative that there is now something like a desire in the body politic to see a truly qualified black person in the White House” (2008: 11). Steele credits Obama’s popularity among whites on the basis that he “separated himself from the deadly stigmas of black inferiority and white paternalism” (2008: 15). Steele’s hegemonic story considers black peoples’ emphasis on race as a pathology that stifles their political progress. Moreover, as Houston Baker suggests, “Steele’s account of the dynamic of bondage and freedom renders black liberation a deeply problematic social and moral occurrence. By his logic, black freedom is coexistent and coterminous with the field of white power because such freedom is purely derivative. It always travels in the shadow of the valley of white supremacy” (2008: 148). Steele’s hegemonic story is thus grounded on the problematic notion that freedom is given, not won.

Steele’s hegemonic story is consistent with both colour-blind racism and “laissez-faire racism”, because it represents a politically conservative view

of race relations in the United States that is non-threatening for white readers. Steele's acceptance in mainstream American society partly derives from his acquiescence with "laissez-faire racism", an ideology Bonilla-Silva characterises as compatible with colour-blind racism, because it "has rearticulated elements of traditional liberalism (work ethic, rewards by merit, equal opportunity, individualism, etc.) for racially illiberal goals" (2010: 7). The US media are comfortable with colour-blind racism because it allows the preclusion of a more complex and potentially uncomfortable discussion of the structural inequalities faced by African Americans.

McWhorter is in agreement with Steele, because he too disparages African Americans for clinging to race. McWhorter's hegemonic story denies the severity of socio-economic gaps between blacks and whites in America. He claims that 1995 statistics which suggest that "the median income for black families was \$25,970, while the figure for whites was \$42,646", are misleading because, he argues, "the black median income is dragged down" by "the extenuating factor of the low income of unwed mothers living on welfare" (2000: 10). He writes:

The median income of black *two-parent families* is about \$41,307, as opposed to about \$47,000 for whites. Even here, the gap is extremely difficult to pin on racism. In 1995, 56 percent of black Americans lived in the South, and wages are lower there. Finally, as often as not today, black *two-parent families* earn *more* than whites—they did in about 130 cities and counties in 1994, and in the mid-90s, their median income was rising faster than whites' was (2000: 10).

McWhorter's figures are part of the efforts of a few black conservative scholars to diminish racism by overemphasising misleading images of black prosperity. Such tactics work to discredit the idea that racism is a significant factor in American society by instead emphasising how blacks can supposedly achieve their dreams if they stop perceiving themselves as victims of white oppression. Expressing views that are similar to Steele's, McWhorter urges blacks to find causes of their anxieties in their "ideological sea of troubles" which, he claims, come from three tendencies: the treatment of "victimhood not as a problem to be solved but as an identity to be nurtured", the conception "of black people as an unofficial sovereign entity, within which the rules other Americans are expected to follow are suspended out of belief that our victimhood renders us morally exempt from them", and "a strong tendency toward Anti-intellectualism at all levels of the black community" (2000: xi-ii). McWhorter's arguments become a hegemonic narrative since they attempt to explain the limited conditions of African Americans as resulting not from economic and structural inequalities but the opposition and frustration that some blacks develop because of their alienation in American society. McWhorter's hegemonic story is flawed because it is based on the myth of "the culture of poverty" which misinterprets African American 'opposition' to mainstream American culture as "victimology", "separatism" and "anti-intellectualism" (2000: xi-ii), overlooking the ways in which African American representations of whites as "the former oppressor[s]" (2000: xi-ii) derive from centuries of disenfranchisement that have been replaced by new institutional and structural inequities.

McWhorter's portrayal of urban blacks is also a hegemonic story since it co-opts a mainstream and conservative American political and intellectual narrative that is often used to explain away inequality and racism outside of the social, economic and material conditions of African Americans. McWhorter's representation of African Americans in underprivileged neighbourhoods minimises the capacity of these blacks to develop entrepreneurship in legal activities such as hairdressing, painting, plumbing, and roofing as well as illegal activities and underground economies of drug dealing, hustling and pimping. Such illicit activities are viewed as detrimental since they perpetuate the myth of "the culture of poverty" but hegemonic narratives overlook, what could be seen in another light, as the entrepreneurship and resourcefulness that people who are involved in them possess. Elijah Anderson for example, describes, in *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, the "rise" of an "underground economy" of blacks in urban America "which offers the most desperate [black] people an alternative to the regular economy that often does not support their basic human needs" (2000: 234).

### **Counterhegemonic Stories of Racial Realism**

Unlike hegemonic stories which represent the conditions of African Americans through the prism of dysfunction, separation, post-racialism and classism, counterhegemonic stories explore these conditions through the lens of racism *and* class. Contesting hegemonic stories that dismiss the relevance of race and racism in the United States, counterhegemonic stories foreground the persistence of both in the lives of African Americans. Counterhegemonic stories challenge and offset the dominance of hegemonic stories and focus on the legal impediments and scholarly biases that perpetuate racism and the increasing socio-economic gaps that widen racial inequalities. Counterstories also challenge hegemonic notions of the 'American dream' by making visible the longstanding racial inequities in the United States.

Addressing the paradoxes of American law, Derrick Bell argued in 1990 in an essay called "Racial Realism" that the notion of racial equality for African Americans is an unobtainable and unrealistic goal since blacks will never achieve full equality in the US and will always be subjected to some kind of discrimination (1995: 302). For Bell, the seemingly objective and self-evident nature of American jurisprudence masks over all sorts of prejudices, moral beliefs and personal opinions that allow judges to continue to harm blacks and perpetuate their subjugated status (1995: 303-4). Referring to the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision, Bell argued that the court ignored historical and social circumstances when it declared that "an affirmative action policy may not unseat white candidates on the basis of their race" (1995: 304). To Bell, this definition of racial equality ignores the long history of discrimination that blacks have faced in the standardised tests, professional schools and urban policies that favour white students (1995: 304). As an alternative to such discrimination, Bell proposed "racial realism" or the process through

which blacks would persistently attack the legal principles of American jurisprudence and "have their voice and outrage heard" (1995: 302). This process involves day-to-day legal struggles against discrimination.

Writing at the same time as Bell, Gary Peller criticises American legal conventions and scholarship for conceptualising race as an idea that relates more to prejudices than to economic exploitation against blacks. Peller argues in "Race Consciousness" that from the 1970s, white liberals made "racial consciousness" difficult to achieve for blacks because they took "race" out of its historical meaning and inscribed it into a misleading abstraction of skin colour, stereotype, prejudice and racial "unconsciousness" (1995: 127). To Peller, this liberal rhetoric on diversity kept blacks away from "race-consciousness" or "the idea that race matters to one's perception and experience of the world" (1995: 136). Peller used the example of the integration policies of the late 1960s which alienated black nationalism in the United States by representing it as a radical movement that was similar to the white supremacist nationalism of the same period. This equation of black nationalism with white supremacist nationalism was a systemic effort to weaken race and black radicalism in the United States. Peller states, "The sense of integrationism as the inevitable means to achieve racial enlightenment reflects both the institutionalization of a particular understanding of what racism means and the marginalization not only of white supremacists but also of the opposing analysis, which was represented in the sixties by Malcolm X and other black nationalists" (1995: 128). Consequently, integrationism weakened the African American community by alienating its black nationalist sociologists who viewed mainstream American scholarly norms as a form of colonialism. Peller summarises key aspects of this critique: "[Black] Nationalist sociologists argued that American scholarly norms constituted a form of 'academic colonialism' in which the discourse of universality and neutrality is embodied in assumptions about the superiority of white cultural practices and the corresponding inferiority of African-American culture" (1995: 142). Like Delgado, Peller also focuses on the racism within American legal scholarship and professions:

In law schools throughout the country, admissions, hiring, and tenure debates proceed on the basis of standards of academic and scholarly merit which were constructed in a period when African-Americans were excluded from mainstream law schools and when the very law to be studied itself sanctioned white supremacism ... black nationalists insisted that the existing social practices should not be taken as the standard, since those practices were created by a culture that considered it normal to exclude blacks—that is, a culture in need of transformation (1995: 143).

Thus black nationalism was alienated within American scholarship because it pointed to the paradoxes inherent in the liberal American narrative of integration without consciousness and freedom from hegemonic assumptions about race and class. These contradictions are challenged in other counterstories about the confinement of African Americans in poor and disadvantaged neighbourhoods where they are unable to access the socio-economic privileges of middle and upper class white Americans and African Americans.



## Counterhegemonic Stories of Racism and Discrimination

Counterhegemonic stories of racism and discrimination refute the assumption that class trumps race. This type of counterstory is apparent in Patricia Hill Collins' argument that class and race work in tandem with other matrixes such as gender, sexuality and nation "as forms of oppression that work together in distinctive ways to produce a distinctive U.S. matrix of domination" (2000: 276). Such a counterstory attests to the ways race and class mutually reinforce one another as pervasive hegemonic tools that reproduce structural inequalities limiting the life chances of African Americans.

A similar kind of counterstory is utilised in Thomas J. Sugrue's book *The Origin of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequalities in Postwar Detroit*. Sugrue shows that discrimination in workplaces, real estate and job agencies and de-industrialisation are the major forces that have led to the unemployment and impoverishment of thousands of blacks in Detroit since the early post World War II era (1996: 7-13). That is, the socio-economic problems of the black poor in Detroit can be found not only in the decline of manufacturers and the prominence of global outsourcing but also in the persistent racialised politics which have kept most black Detroiters in low-paying jobs and poor houses since the mid-twentieth century. The plight of the black underclass in Detroit is representative of larger historical trends, such as resistance against the full-employment and unionisation of blacks in America, which already took shape during the 1920s and 30s, before the suburbanisation process of the 1950s occurred. During the 1920s, blacks were reluctant to become involved in unions because they had learned in the past that political rhetoric of equality did not protect them from racial violence. In *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Migration* (1991), James Grossman writes: "When confronted with picket lines, union organizers, and employer propaganda and pressure, most black workers eschewed strong commitments to unionization. They did so for a variety of reasons: union racism, antiunion leadership within the black community, unfamiliarity with trade unionism, and intimidation by employers" (1991: 210). In addition, from the 1920s to the 1950s, blacks in the United States were hindered by the pervasive housing segregation in American metropolitan cities such as Chicago, St-Louis and Detroit. All these factors contributed to the formation, during the second half of the twentieth century, of a huge black underclass facing structural inequalities that would be revisited upon later generations of blacks.

In a similar vein, Angela Glover Blackwell's essay in *The Covenant With Black America* opposes the hegemonic story where class trumps race by describing schools, jobs, stores and parks as some of the amenities that are deprived to most African Americans "because of policies and practices that are exclusionary" (2006: 101). Blackwell explains:

... despite laws against housing discrimination, it is still quite prevalent and most likely to be practiced against black people. Too many neighborhoods with good schools and desirable amenities are too expensive and do not allow renters. Some communities present so much hostility toward blacks

who do move there that black people are discouraged from attempting to even move into those neighborhoods (2006: 101).

Such predicaments derive from persistent structural problems such as pervasive joblessness, gentrification and the flight of middle-to-upper-class blacks which have worsened the plight of innercity blacks. Even if blacks wish to 'de-segregate', they face exclusion in white 'segregated' towns. The problem with hegemonic stories is that, once again, the racial effects of white segregation are ignored because they aren't considered 'racially' problematic in the same sense that black communities are.

### **Counterhegemonic Stories about Post-Racialism**

Counterhegemonic narratives about post-racialism oppose hegemonic stories of the United States as a post-racial society in which blacks and whites are treated as equals in the absence of race. In an interview with Amy Goodman (2008), Glen Ford argued that during the 2008 Presidential campaign some Democrats tended to represent African Americans as people who had "already come 90% of the way on the road to equality" and simply needed to go 10% of the rest of the way by voting for Obama. Ford rejects this narrative by arguing,

No indexes show blacks 90% of the way towards equality in any area of life. We've never made 65% more in income than white people. Black median household wealth is one-tenth white median household wealth ... In fact, we can't find 90% figures relevant, outside of NBA teams and prison. But no white man, no white Democrat who said that would avoid being excoriated by the entire spectrum of black political opinion (2008).

In his counterhegemonic story, Tim Wise opposes the narrative of post-racialism because it contradicts the grim realities of the majority of people of colour in America. Wise explains: "For while the individual success of persons of color, as with Obama, is meaningful (and at this level was unthinkable merely a generation ago), the larger systemic and institutional realities of life in America suggest the ongoing salience of a deep-seated cultural malady—racism—which has been neither eradicated nor even substantially diminished by Obama's victory" (2009: 8). Abby L. Ferber (2009) develops a similar counterhegemonic criticism when she writes:

Even in the face of legal and political gains, there is no evidence to suggest that the racial economic divide is decreasing. And the reality is that during economic downturns, minority communities suffer first and worst. Economic gains made by people of color are generally only very recent gains, and thus most tenuous and vulnerable. They are much less likely to have inherited wealth from previous generations to soften the blow during a crisis.

The drastic conditions of African Americans are apparent in *The Future of the Race* (co-authored with Cornel West) in which Henry Louis Gates, Jr., describes his experiences with racism. In his counterstory, Gates describes his humble socio-economic background in a small town in Piedmont, West Virginia, where he was born on September 16, 1950, and how his father

"worked two jobs—loading trucks at a paper mill, plus a night shift as a janitor for the phone company—to keep" his family "well fed and well clothed" (1996: 3). Gates describes the drastic poverty of black families in the 1950s and 60s when "only 3 percent of blacks had a college degree. And more than half of blacks fell below the poverty line" (1996: 9). Gates notes, "In the year I graduated from high school. Almost half of black households took in less than fifteen thousand dollars" (1996: 9). Gates observes a similar predicament among many African American families in 1993, when the median net worth of blacks was "zero" while those of whites was "ten thousand dollars" (1996: 25). To these bleak statistics, Gates adds, "In 1993, 2.3 million black men were sent to jail or prison while 23,000 received college diploma—a ratio of a hundred to one" (1996: 25). Ironically, Gates experienced racism on July 16, 2009, when Cambridge police officer James Crowley arrested him on the front porch of his own home and sent him to jail after he allegedly refused to step outside when he was asked to do so. Gates' arrest is not an isolated incident because it is part of the structural racism that routinely subjects blacks to racial profiling in the United States.

In his book, *Driving While Black: What to Do if You Are a Victim of Racial Profiling*, Kenneth Meeks (2000) describes "a classic example of racial profiling," which is "the tactic of stopping someone only because of the color of his or her skin and a fleeting suspicion that the person is engaging in criminal behavior. It's generally targeted more toward young black American men and women than any other racial group" (2000: 4-5). Gates' arrest is an example of racial profiling because police were reportedly told by a white female caller that two black men had broken into a home. In the wake of instant fury and accusations of racial profiling from prominent African American civil rights activists such as Al Sharpton and Tom Joyner, the Cambridge police dismissed their charge of disorderly conduct. Although he received an apology from the Mayor of Cambridge (E. Denise Simmons), Gates demanded a request for forgiveness from James Crowley (Jan 2009). In an interview about the incident, Gates said: "There are one million black men in jail in this country and last Thursday I was one of them. This is outrageous and this is how poor black men across the country are treated every day in the criminal justice system. It's one thing to write about it, but altogether another to experience it" (in Pilkington: 2009).

Gates' counterstory reveals how even a renowned African American scholar whose work emphasises racial tolerance and multiculturalism is vulnerable to racial bigotry. Gates' counterstory shows that America is not a post-racial society, a fact that President Obama acknowledged near the end of a press conference of July 22, 2009, in which he said that the "Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody [Gates] when there was already proof that they were in their own home". As Nicholas Graham points out, Obama noted that racial profiling has "a long history in this country" though "he stepped lightly regarding any role race may have played in the situation" (Graham 2009). Obama did acknowledge that blacks and Hispanics are frequent victims of racial profiling, though, as Andrew Mytelka argues, he also emphasised the "incredible progress that has been made" in race relations in the United States and cited himself as

"testimony to the progress" (Mytelka 2009). Obama later invited both Gates and Crowley to a 'beer summit' at the White House where the two people shook hands and had a cordial conversation.

The Gates incident reveals there are limitations in the ways structural racism can be discussed in media and political discourse at the highest level. This confrontation of race is unlikely to occur because President Obama has been avoiding the issue of race in the United States since the beginning of his term, probably for fear of alienating whites who supported him during his campaign. As Bonilla-Silva suggests, Obama does not want to be seen as "divisive", a term he used during his "race speech" of March 18, 2008, in order to distance himself from a 2003 sermon in which Reverend Jeremiah Wright said: "The government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law, and then wants us to sing 'God Bless America.' No, no, no. Not 'God Bless America'; God Damn America! That's in the Bible, for killing innocent people. God Damn America for treating her citizen as less than human" (Wright: 2008). In his 'race speech', Obama said that Reverend Wright "expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country—a view that sees white racism as endemic" (Obama: 2008). In a response to Obama's representation of Reverend's Wright's speech as "divisive," Bonilla-Silva writes: "This should be surprising to race scholars across the nation who regard racism as indeed 'endemic' and know that race has been a 'divisive' matter since the 17<sup>th</sup> century" (2010: 220). Moreover, Bonilla-Silva states:

His [Obama's] speech had three serious problems. First, Obama assumed racism is a moral problem (he called it a "sin") that can be overcome through goodwill. In contrast, I have argued that racism forms a structure and, accordingly, the struggle against racism must be fundamentally geared toward the removal of the practices, mechanisms, and institutions that maintain systemic white privilege. Second, Obama conceived "racism" (in his view, prejudice) as a two-way street. In the speech he stated that *both* blacks and whites have legitimate claims against one another, that is, that blacks have a real beef against whites because of the continuing existence of discrimination and whites against blacks because of the "excesses" of programs such as affirmative action. Obama was wrong on this point because, as I explained in chapter 7, blacks do not have the institutional power to implement a pro-black agenda whereas whites have had this kind of power from the very moment this country was born (2010: 221).

Post-racialism is a myth akin to wishful thinking that does not address the structural inequalities upon which blacks and whites in the United States have historically been taught to live with one another. Such systemic barriers need to be dismantled before the idealism of post-racialism, which is apparent in Obama's desire to get beyond race, can be achieved.

### **Counterhegemonic Stories of Prison Injustice**

The continuing significance of race in the United States is apparent in counterhegemonic stories that reflect the effects of historically racist policies on the lives of African Americans. This racism is apparent in the

disproportionate imprisonment of blacks at an unprecedented rate; which is also comparable to the incarceration of Hispanics in the US and non-white minorities in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada. According to the Joint Center Databank, at the end of 2002, "Black inmates represented an estimated 45% of all inmates with sentences of more than 1 year, while white inmates accounted for 34% and Hispanic inmates 18%" and "As of December 31, 2002, black males from 20 to 39 years old accounted for about a third of all sentenced prison inmates under state or federal jurisdiction. On that date 10.4 percent of the country's black male population between the ages of twenty-five to twenty-nine was in prison, compared to 2.4 percent of Hispanic males and 1.2 percent of white males in the same age group".<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics states, "At midyear 2008, there were 4,777 black male inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents being held in state or federal prison and local jails, compared to 1,760 Hispanic male inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents and 727 white male inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents".<sup>2</sup> These alarming statistics show that a racialised form of imprisonment has been destroying the core of the black community in the United States since the end of the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960s, when subtle forms of segregations replaced those of preceding decades in many urban black communities. They suggest that incarceration has taken over from official segregation policies.

The impact of racism on the African American community is also visible in John Edgar Wideman's counterstory in his 1971 novel *Brothers and Keepers*, in which he describes the character Robby's difficult attempt to maintain his humanity and sanity in prison. Robby behaves diligently and receives an associate degree in engineering while in jail. Yet he becomes very affected by prison life and writes a heart-wrenching letter to his brother John about his penitentiary experiences. The letter reads: "Big time, no rehabilitation, lock em up like animals—then let them out on society crazed and angry. Shit don't make no sense but the people cry for punishment and the politicians abide them—can they really be so blind?" (1984: 243). This passage suggests the impact of racism on African Americans who are incarcerated in the prison industrial complex in inhuman ways in order to appease hegemonic political leaders and constituencies. This imprisonment is a form of structural injustice that limits the freedom of blacks since, as Wideman asserts: "If you're born black in America you must quickly teach yourself to recognize the invisible barriers disciplining the space in which you may move. This seventh sense you must activate is imperative for survival and sanity. Nothing is what it seems" (1984: 221-22). Wideman's story points to the harsh existential realities for the majority of black men who are caught in the US prison system. Drawing from similar kinds of stories, scholars can make an inventory of inhumane experiences that black men face in the US criminal justice system.

Wideman's story is part of a counternarrative that has existed at least since 1975 and which reveals the plight of thousands of young black men

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<sup>1</sup> See 'African Americans and the Correctional System' (2009).

<sup>2</sup> See 'US Department of Justice Prison Statistics' (n.d.).

and women who are still victims of racial and economic oppression in the United States. Wideman's story describes a type of incarceration that can be interpreted as a metaphor for a larger type of imprisonment, one that is physical, spiritual, economic and societal, but which is mainly reserved for blacks and other racial minorities in the United States. Though not everyone considers blacks criminals, the experience of being an incarcerated person of colour has become a cliché, since many blacks are considered criminals or sent to jail at some point in their life. In America, black men are becoming endangered species living in insecure spaces where chances of success are not only limited by the meanings assigned to their race but also by the codes of behaviour and activities that racism has imposed on them.

The impact of race on African Americans is further evident in the large-scale incarceration of blacks and the confinement of one-third of black children below poverty line in the United States. Recent statistics show that African Americans represent "15% of US drug users (72% of all users are white), 36.8% of those arrested for a drug-related crime, 48.2% of American adults in state, and federal prisons and local jails and 42.5% of prisoners under sentence of death".<sup>3</sup> In his essay, "Why The Death Penalty Should Be Abolished" (1998), Jeffrey Reiman quotes Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun's statement that "Even under the most sophisticated death penalty statutes, race continues to play a major role in determining who shall live and who shall die" (122). In the same essay, Reiman argues, "a society that reserves the death penalty for the killers of whites but not of blacks treats blacks as of less worth than whites" (123).

Furthermore, as Floyd D. Weatherspoon points out, "The number of African-Americans under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system is almost too startling to state" (1998: 173). Weatherspoon goes on to say: "The U.S. Justice department reported in 1989 that more than a million African-Americans were then either on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole. Other reports which focus specifically on urban cities find that black males fare even worse. For example, in Baltimore, Maryland, 56% of the black males between 18 and 35 are under the supervision of the criminal justice system" (173). Other statistics show that "The United States imprisons African American men at a rate four times greater than the rate of incarceration for Black men in South Africa".<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Paul Street writes in "Color Bind: Prisons and the New American Racism" (2003): "At the millennium's turn, blacks are 12.3 percent of the U.S. population, but they comprise fully half of the roughly 2 million Americans currently behind bars ... And according to a chilling statistical model used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a young black man aged 16 in 1996 faces a 29 percent chance of spending time in prison during his life" (31). Weatherspoon also gives the following data with 1989 demographic characteristics of US jail inmates: "46% White Males, 43% Black Males, 5.0% White Females, 4.0% Black Females, 2.0% Other" (1998: 173). These statistics reveal that the incarceration of black men is much higher

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<sup>3</sup> See 'People of Color and the Prison Industrial Complex: Facts and Figures at a Glance' (n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> See 'People of Color and the Prison Industrial Complex' (n.d.).

than that of white men; black men make up a small proportion of the population as a whole while their prison population is roughly the same as that of white men. Moreover, as is apparent in statistics from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, blacks were the most sentenced group of prisoners in the United States between 2000 and 2009 under state or federal jurisdiction and across race and sex.<sup>5</sup>

### **Other Counterstories of Inequalities**

In a similar vein, statistics about other aspects of the lives of African Americans are staggering. For instance, "according to the 2000 census, blacks make up approximately 13% of the US population. However, in 2005, blacks accounted for 18,121 (49%) of the estimated 37,331 new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in the United States in the 33 states with long-term, confidential name-based HIV reporting".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, "according to 2005 data (the most recent available) from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for black teens and young adults in the age groups 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 34, homicide is the leading cause of death".<sup>7</sup> Finally, according to a 2009 study by Sarah Fass and Nancy K. Cauthen, "34% of black children live in poor families. In the 10 most populated states, rates of child poverty among black children range from 28% in California to 48% in Ohio" (Fass & Cauthen 2008).

Equally grim conditions of blacks in the United States are found in Tavis Smiley's *The Covenant With Black America*, a report on a 2006 African American convention on the primary concerns of blacks in the United States. In the book, David M. Satcher argues that "African Americans receive a lower quality of care in many areas in cardiovascular care, diabetes, surgery care, and the early diagnosis of cancer, to mention a few" (2006: 4). The study traces these structural problems to the small number of African American physicians in the United States (only ten percent), the propensity of African Americans and Hispanics to be more exposed to hazardous toxic substances, low income of blacks, and the existence of a "culture of medicine [that] is predominantly white European," and which does not accommodate the specific needs of black patients (3-5). Hence, black Americans face significant disadvantages beyond the control of individual choice that affects inequality and which the post-racial myth obscures with its focus on individual responsibility, culture of poverty, dysfunction and other hegemonic metaphors. In CNN's 2008 *Black in America I* report, Soledad O'Brien states, "Poor neighborhoods, poor choices, simply finding, let alone affording healthy food is a constant challenge in many black communities" (2008).

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>5</sup> See 'Prisoners in 2009' (2010).

<sup>6</sup> See 'HIV/AIDS and African Americans' (n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> See 'Black Homicide Victimization in the United States: An Analysis of 2005 Homicide Data' (n.d.).

Hegemonic discourses delay equality and justice for African Americans who are depicted as living in culturally deficient communities. These discourses underpin dominant race narratives in America which neglect the structural causes and manifestations of economic inequalities between blacks and whites in the United States and develop ideologies of a post-racial American society that is more myth than reality. Hegemonic stories are subtle and condescending narratives since they attempt to do away with race and the inequalities between blacks and whites in the United States while claiming that African Americans nurture a culture of poverty, separatism and victimology. Such narratives ignore the persistence of racial oppression in the political, economic and social lives of African Americans. Instead of shifting responsibility for racial inequality onto African Americans themselves, hegemonic narratives should look to the institutional and structural perpetuation of racism. Hegemonic stories fail to recognise the lived realities of racism and its effects on Americans where race is an identity shaped by economic and human relations rather than human genetics only. It is imperative, as counterhegemonic stories do, to critically interrogate race as a discursive form of power rather than something tied to bodies only.

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### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Dr. Laura Davis, Dr. Carole Barbato and Dr. Kenneth Bindas for the useful feedback they gave me during my writing of early drafts of this article. I also thank Dr. Holly Randell-Moon and the anonymous reviewers who read my article for their constructive suggestions.

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

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**Volume 7, 2011**

SPECIAL ISSUE: POST-RACIAL STATES

## **Getting 'post racial' in the 'Australian' State: What remains overlooked in the premise 'getting beyond racism'?**

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*The election of President Barack Obama in the United States stimulated debate on 'postracialism', yet, as many argue, and critical race theory attests (Delgado 1995; Moreton-Robinson 2004), racism is far from being defeated. The premise that racial difference has less purchase in an increasingly multicultural paradigm risks a disengagement with the racist mechanisms fundamental to white hegemonies. These mechanisms remain un-interrogated in public and political discourse, while systemic and institutionalised racism continues. In the 'Australian'<sup>1</sup> situation, unresolved questions of sovereignty and redress for Aboriginal populations maintains a continuing settler colonialism. Measures such as the National Curriculum and Aboriginal histories that appear to be multiculturally inclusive are overtly contradictory when considering the racial oppressions that Aboriginal peoples remain subject to. A dominant Anglo-culture in 'Australia' has historically controlled mainstream institutions and culture. This paper draws attention to how the privileging and dominance of settler culture remains embedded in institutions and social practices. The paper first explores the hegemony of whiteness in 'Australia' and continued colonialism regarding Aboriginal peoples, before moving on to interrogate two strategic areas, education and recorded history, where racial oppressions are not only continued, but where the maintenance of white domination can become further obfuscated through notions of 'tolerance' and 'inclusiveness'.*

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation marks here denote the constructed nature of this term.

## Introduction

At first glance, the proposal in 2010 for the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives into the new National Curriculum in education would appear to be a long-awaited for acknowledgment of their different knowledges, as would the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples' perspectives into contemporary historical writings, such as Richard Broome's *Aboriginal Victorians* (2005). Despite these attempts at inclusiveness, what remains is the continuation of western cultural and epistemological dominance, supported through the pretence of post racial inclusion. In order to unpack how this dominance remains, the paper first explores the hegemony of whiteness in 'Australia' and the continued colonialism with respect to Aboriginal peoples. The paper then moves on to interrogate two strategic areas, education—in the form of the National Curriculum and recorded history—in Broome's text, where the maintenance of white domination not only continues but remains obfuscated through notions of 'tolerance' and 'inclusiveness'.

## The maintenance of white hegemony

In the construction of a white-dominated 'Australia', its violently imposed cultural/colonial foundations have largely remained historically, politically and legally unchallenged. The legitimacy of its national sovereignty and the pre-existing sovereignty of the Aboriginal First peoples have been both strategically and transparently repressed (Watson 2002; McAllan 2007a). Transparency—the inability of white people to think about norms, behaviours, experiences or perspectives that are white specific (Flagg 1993: 957)—remains central to the maintenance of white privilege and dominance. Transparency ensures that white cultural and political dominance remains unexamined. Moreton-Robinson argues that in white regimes of power particular representations are imbued with value, "deemed truthful", while others are classified fictitious. Such 'truths':

form part of our commonsense taken-for-granted knowledge of the world ... [normalised hence] invisible, unnamed and unmarked. It is the apparent transparency of these normative representations that strategically enables differentiation and othering (2004:76-7).

Access to the centre, where privilege is conferred, is always on the centre's a-reflexive terms (Sheehan 2001: 29-33; Moreton-Robinson 2004: 79-87). Yet white privilege involves a complex, situated identity (McDermott & Samson 2005: 245) that is ever-morphing within new applications of racism. White privilege remains incredibly flexible in its power to reconstitute (Doane 2003: 10).

Randell-Moon argues also, that the cultural dominance of white settler society continues through a secular association with a normalised Christian culture that assists in legitimising the white sovereignty of the nation state (2007; 2008). Continuing colonial sovereignty, with no acknowledgement of Aboriginal sovereignty, thus works to disavow the state's racialised foundations in colonial violence. Aboriginal peoples were and have been paradoxically included while excluded—included as marginalised in the

construction of a nation that has remained racially discriminatory and exclusionary at its constitutional core.

In contrast to the nation state's racialised foundations, in the emergent global economy, individuals are increasingly being positioned to participate as international citizens, supposedly autonomous and unracial, where socio-capital flows are unhindered between nation states. The social gains from this internationalised sociality are claimed to include greater access to economic equity, with increased freedom from oppressions of class, gender and race. Yet racial inequality and white hegemony has expanded within this frame as whiteness has continued to be reconfigured through alignments and preferentiality for white immigrant populations. White privilege throughout the twentieth century became increasingly synonymous with European (Bonnett 1999: 203). The notion of competing as unracial, equal and autonomous participants in a globalised world is increasingly contradictory in 'Australia', as all international relationships remain filtered through the socio-political lenses of this country's colonialist historicising. The nation is presented ideologically in the international frame as multicultural, with its immigrant populations all sharing equally in the nation state's abundant resources; yet this presumption overlooks and hides the disavowed sovereign relations of Aboriginal peoples, their continued marginalisation under a perpetuating colonialism, and the preferential immigration that has consolidated white hegemony.

The discourse of postracialism and colour-blind ideologies play an integral role in the continued conference of white dominance in this global frame, as white dominance is faced with increasingly ethnically diverse populations. The premise of colour-blindness is based on an organised set of claims that rest on an assumption of equality, which overlooks continued racial stratification and the ongoing roles of social institutions in the reproduction of inequality (Doane 2003: 13). Strategic avoidance of race becomes an effective political strategy where inequality is not seen as the persistence of racism but as the failure of individuals or communities to integrate or participate competently in a white dominated society (13). With such ideological manoeuvring, racial stratification thus becomes recast as meritocracy (16).

Post racial politics have not ushered in racial equity, and while political theories determine oppression is caused by economic forces, the way to address inequities is to become more conscious of the mechanisms that maintain racial oppression (Wise 2010). In seeking to locate the mechanisms that perpetuate racialised hierarchies, Deborah Rose argues deep colonising is a process whereby conquest is embedded within institutions and practices even as these same institutions and practices are aimed towards reversing the effects of colonisation. Unless colonising practices are analytically separated from the processes of decolonising, such practices will continue under a benign mask of radical decolonisation, making colonisation far more difficult to challenge at all levels (Rose 1996: 6-16). The coloniser must come to recognise itself in its colonising role before decolonising can take effect (Watson 2002, 2007: 26). Such a task is extremely challenging considering that whiteness is a quasi-conscious state (transparency) confused within entrenched white socialisation (that

remains fear and guilt inherent), making self-recognition difficult (McAllan 2009: 25-62). Both progressive and conservative policies have utilised the ideology of colour-blindness in a joint process of white transparency. Colour-blindness is thus a stealth project within the semi-conscious drive to maintain white dominance (Doane 2003: 16).

### **The new National Curriculum and the maintenance of white hegemony**

'Australia's' education system is one of the most powerful institutional mechanisms in constructing and maintaining white-dominated social hegemony. The continued omission of Aboriginal peoples' sovereign and cultural histories has enabled a colonialist historiography to permeate the educational system in 'Australia' at its most rudimentary levels. Moves by the current Labor government to restructure this system into a national program will serve to further centralise, and thus fortify, this dominance. Despite increasing numbers of children from widely varying ethnic groups, resilient ideological dominance at the level of the pre-school and kindergarten teaching positions even the youngest minds to view Aboriginal children as a minority group requiring assimilation. While all cultures are subject to the assimilative frame of the dominant cultural paradigm, this assimilation is overtly inappropriate when it comes to the country's First Nation peoples. The discursive reproduction of Aboriginal difference as 'other' emerges from 'Australia's' history of 'nation building' through racial preference for migrants with white and European cultural backgrounds. Now with a new policy turn that has seen the drafting of a National Curriculum to be more inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, the focus in education has shifted from marginalism and assimilation to 'inclusion' via colour-blind discourse and ideology.

While the Labor government's draft for a National Educational Curriculum in March 2010 was proposed to be 'inclusive' of both Aboriginal peoples' and new migrant peoples' perspectives, the continued imposition of the ideologically-dominant Eurocentric education system remains unexamined. An Aboriginal knowledge system, meaningfully engaged, would involve a radical restructuring across mainstream society, utilising oral based cultural practices of reciprocity, which support human interrelationships and ecological sustainability. In contrast, the Anglo-European agricultural and industry-based economy in 'Australia', today with mining as its chief export,<sup>2</sup> has operated at great cost to a sustainable future for all peoples. Likewise, the Eurocentric system underpinning the National Educational Curriculum overlooks how white cultural dominance has been imposed at the expense of pre-existing Aboriginal cultures and the crucial significance of their knowledges.

Although it is problematic to homogenise the world views of settler and indigenous cultures into two distinct epistemologies, as a generalised phenomenon, settler dominance has involved a pronounced separation between consciousness and landscape (Langton 1996) in range of social,

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Department of Foreign Affairs and Trading (n.d.).



economic and political practices and has expanded through assimilating the cultural specificity of multicultural peoples. By contrast, indigenous cultures throughout the world have continued to engage in cultural practices inscribed in land. Colonialism, as a text-based movement, has been a recording of unequal power relationships (Miley 2006: 9). Text-based western culture was intermeshed within the social engineering of individualism, and individualism was a characteristic of the nuclear family of the industrial age.<sup>3</sup> As Moreton-Robinson elaborates, whiteness within western culture has functioned as an “ontological and epistemological a priori”, constitutive of what can be known and who can know, “producing the assumption of a racially neutral mind and an invisible detached white body” (2004: 81). Colonising epistemological structures continue a negation and trivialising of indigenous philosophy and methodologies (Milroy in Neilsen 2005: 18).

Under such epistemological and historical conditions the National Curriculum agenda, with its premise of cultural inclusion, would require a fundamental restructuring to comprehensively address this Eurocentric institutional dominance, as well as a fundamental re-evaluation of the necessary ways to adequately acknowledge and address Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives. Yet the draft reveals the continuation of a colonial and Eurocentric education system, with the three R’s<sup>4</sup> framework central to it, even though now including, from within a Eurocentric gaze, a selective view of ‘Australian’ Aboriginal peoples and the Asia-Pacific. The new National Curriculum has been geared to present ‘Australia’s’ education system internationally as one that more accurately reflects the views of a multicultural nation located in the Asia-Pacific Rim, while the framework of its Eurocentric core remains intact. The inclusion of alternate histories, interpreted through an ‘Australian’ (read settler ‘Australian’) lens functions to reconstruct differing perspectives as entirely subsidiary. As the draft recommendations show (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority Report [ACARA] 2010), alternative histories will be provided within the Curriculum as minor electives only—as special studies, serving to season and flavour the unquestioned cultural dominance of settler-colonial ideologies and epistemologies.

The Curriculum also reproduces the linear ‘western progress narrative’—the idea that humans have developed from ‘primitive’ hunter gatherers to ‘civilised’ modern subjects. “The Shape of Australian Curriculum: History”

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Parsons (1970); Ariès (1962).

<sup>4</sup> Reading, writing and arithmetic. As the Draft reflects a Eurocentric world view, the English curriculum is explained to be organised around reading/writing acquisition, learning to use the English language effectively to enhance learning and appreciate literature and literacy techniques, which includes skills in reading and understanding the structure of texts and grammatical accuracy. The mathematics curriculum includes: Number, Algebra, Statistics, Probability, Measurement and Geometry to teach logical thought, analysing, empirical and evaluation skills. The science curriculum is structured to teach students to function effectively in a scientifically and technologically advanced society, which thus meets Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) standards. See the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority Report (ACARA) (2010).

document states: "The origins of many modern Australian institutions can be traced back to the legacy of ancient civilisations, particularly Rome", and argues "we fail students if we deny them a familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding traditions" (ACARA 2010). The curriculum includes texts from Edward Gibbon to Geoffrey Blainey, explained as "writers of history of literacy distinction" (ACARA 2010). Mathematics in the Curriculum is quantitative in approach, and teaches chronology, demographics and economic activity, and science teaches scientific and technological development over time—that is, development in terms of the 'western progress narrative'.

Clearly, the more pressing function of a centralised national education in 'Australia' is not primarily the desire to be more inclusive of its multicultural populations, but to present 'Australia' as a global player to its trading partners internationally. As such, 'Australia' will meet the economic requirements of an internationally homogenous market that relies on the 'three R's' of the dominant west. Former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, addressing the 2008 Future Summit, stated:

we must begin to make the appropriate investments in skills and education for the long-term human capital needs of the economy. That is why we have unveiled substantial initiatives including ... A new national curriculum in Maths, the Sciences, English and History ... Australia must make these investments to lift our competitiveness (Rudd 2008: 11-2).

The document "Working Together for a Shared Future" from the Queensland Research Council (QRC) (influential to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's Report) states the Curriculum:

will seek to equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and capabilities that will enable them to effectively engage with and prosper in society, compete in a globalised world and thrive in the information-rich workplaces of the future ... schools are aided to adopt a curriculum that reflects real-life learning and accurate up to date content within a resources sector context. In addition, innovative and cooperative projects are developed with industry, which enable students to access a broad range of minerals and energy related learning (QRC 2009: 4-5).

The accompanying ten-point plan for innovation, competitiveness and productivity explains: "A strong, robust national science curriculum is needed to meet the demand for a skilled internationally competitive workforce in the resources sector" (Rudd & Carr 2007).

The government's discourse on the National Curriculum focuses on corporatised research and is clearly geared to increase 'Australia's' participation in the global economy. McIntyre makes the point concerning corporatised research, "Empirical-analytic science is attractive to the corporate state because it ties down the object of study and restricts the meanings in play when controlling the communication of evidence becomes the priority" (McIntyre in Doyle 2004: 9). Such discourses carry the post racial assumption that race is no obstacle to economic participation while, at the same time, continuing hidden practices of racial stratification.

Discourses of science, empiricism and objectivism characteristically lend weight to an authoritative voice speaking from a white centre.

It is clear that in the 'Australian' situation regarding education, as the state continues to be constructed as a neutral agent in a pluralist society with its actions representative of the larger society, new social claims are being made through educational reforms, such as the National Educational Curriculum, of the increased acceptance of ethnic difference and the unacceptability of overt acts of racism (Doane 2003: 12-3). At the same time, any activist assertions regarding cultural difference by Aboriginal peoples in the context of educational reforms, and in wider public discourse more generally, can be depoliticised by being represented as 'unnecessary and unequal'. The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and history in the National Curriculum is claimed,<sup>5</sup> while at the same time, Aboriginal cultural differences continue to be politically marked as a problem to global competitiveness in political and public discourse.<sup>6</sup> The differences Aboriginal knowledges present to the Eurocentric view become marked as 'uneducated' (Batisste 2002: 34). The tokenistic inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives as adjunctive to international educational standards—standards that are implicitly Eurocentric—along with this contradictory approach in representation, serve to both perpetuate an ideology of an unracialised meritocracy while also reinforcing racialised hierarchies.

### **Marginalising Aboriginal pedagogies/languages in educational reform**

The government's claimed aspirations to remodel the National Curriculum to be more inclusive of Aboriginal peoples' perspectives needs to be further assessed in light of other concurrent policy. Continued 'mainstreaming' of Eurocentric education is normalised in the proposed curricula while any concrete structural attempt to implement decolonising strategies to redress the imbalances of privileging and exclusion is overlooked. If social inclusion of Aboriginal peoples is the government's primary goal, in full recognition of their oral-based cultures, such inclusion would require substantial administrative support to adequately accommodate Aboriginal pedagogies and to protect, reinvigorate and teach Aboriginal languages to both Aboriginal students and students at large.<sup>7</sup> This should be a re-structuring

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<sup>5</sup> The National Curriculum incorporates, in its Cross Curriculum Priorities, the admonition to appreciate the ongoing contribution to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (ACARA 2010, Curriculum).

<sup>6</sup> Instead of the government acknowledging the repercussions from policies that prevented Aboriginal cultural practices and impacted their autonomy, Aboriginal peoples continue to be represented in government discourse as in need of paternalist control. For example, Greens Senator Rachel Siewert recently questioned current Prime Minister Julia Gillard's latest *Closing the Gap Report* that urges Aboriginal peoples to take more responsibility, while the government is simultaneously re-imposing paternalist policies that diminishes Aboriginal peoples' control of their own finances (Drape 2011).

<sup>7</sup> For Aboriginal-specific pedagogies see Martin (2007); Nicol (2008).

principle embraced in order to decentre the Eurocentrism and whiteness of the National Curriculum. Yet, as it stands, bilingual programs in schools where Aboriginal languages remain primary have been besieged in recent years by assimilatory policy championed by the Howard, Rudd and now Gillard governments.

In 2009 mandatory English programming was introduced so that lessons in remote regional schools where the first language is Aboriginal were to be compulsorily taught in English. 'English as a second language' (ESL) support is offered only in the late afternoon (Department of Education and Training [DEET] n.d.) when energies and concentration are waning. Bilingual education is thus being curtailed in remote communities where Aboriginal languages are still primary, with Aboriginal languages left to families with first speakers and only spoken within immediate kin environs—environs that have been greatly fractured by conditions of colonialism and modernity. In light of the comprehensive erasure of Aboriginal spoken languages through the social-engineering of past governments and the imminent threat to surviving languages that are only in use in older generations, these administrative decisions and their impact on the remaining vibrant language groups will only hasten Aboriginal language extinction overall.

The Race Discrimination Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission recently presented the following information to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) at the United Nations:

Languages are critically endangered in Australia, dying rapidly ... There are only 18 Indigenous languages currently spoken by all people in all age groups. Without intervention, Indigenous language usage will cease in 10 to 30 years. ... Bilingual education is one of the best strategies for language stabilisation. Currently nine schools out of 9632 in Australia have Indigenous bilingual education. Most are in the Northern Territory, and are rolling back that bilingual education (Innes 2010).

The lack of support for Aboriginal languages was the primary complaint in submissions to the former Rudd Government in response to the "Indigenous Education Action Plan 2010-2014" (IEAP), implemented by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development Education and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA 2010). The IEAP Draft had made recommendation for the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples' perspectives in the National Curriculum. With its Eurocentric literacy and numeracy focus, the IEAP Draft was said to be aimed at 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.<sup>8</sup> The Draft does mention strategies aimed to

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<sup>8</sup> In constructing a current demographic profile of Aboriginal peoples in academic occupations, as well as Aboriginal university student numbers, a dramatic underrepresentation is revealed. As the Aboriginal population in Australia is currently listed with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as 2.4% (see ABS 1995), if all opportunities were considered 'equal' in the current employment stakes we would expect to see a 2.4% representation of Aboriginal academics. In the 2006 census, of those who identified their occupation as university lecturers and tutors, 257 out of 32,588 individuals identified as Aboriginal. This percentage has changed little in the current data. The amount of Aboriginal peoples employed

increase Aboriginal teacher numbers, as well as cultural awareness training for the predominant non-Aboriginal education force, yet inclusion of Aboriginal staff in a Eurocentric-structured system remains firmly on Eurocentric pedagogic terms. This continues the assimilative structure of western epistemology generally. Considering these factors, particularly the contradictory situation concerning Aboriginal languages, the IEAP Draft and the New Curriculum Draft are continuing the white centrality of education in all but a symbolic manner.<sup>9</sup>

Given that there is no restructuring to adequately accommodate Aboriginal pedagogies/languages in the educational system, the government's promulgation of Eurocentric educational expectations highlights the contradiction in lack of support for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in curricula. Following the government's agenda of promoting its educational initiatives as inclusive, the IEAP Draft invited submissions to allow for community consultation. These submissions were uniform in their criticism of the Draft. The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) submission (MCEECDYA 2009)<sup>10</sup> focused on the centrality of language to cultural identity and argued that there are two major areas of concern about the IEAP. Firstly, there is a lack of emphasis on ESL in the Draft. This is significant because Aboriginal students come from diverse Aboriginal language backgrounds, and school readiness (in the white-dominated system) should only therefore be assessed in an ESL frame rather than an 'English only' frame, as it currently is. Secondly, the plan's lack of emphasis on the necessity of Aboriginal languages in improving educational outcomes is of deep concern. The AIATSIS submission recommended the introduction of an Indigenous Language Curriculum component in state schools throughout the country and the funding of a state language centre for Indigenous languages in every state.

This concern with language was foremost in other submissions also. The Human Rights Commission's submission echoed the need for a bilingual language approach in assessment, with a request that Aboriginal language teachers as well as ESL teachers be made available for all Aboriginal students. Their submission highlighted how bilingual education is internationally recognised as fundamental to self-determining educational

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in academia was at 0.8% in 2006 and is now at 0.9% of overall staff, so there would need to be a threefold increase to bring the amount Aboriginal academics up to the national average proportionate to their population numbers (Biddle 2010).

<sup>9</sup> The author of this article notes that the draft's rhetoric is characteristic of many other drafts the author has read regarding Indigenous policy reform. Mention of Aboriginal peoples' consultation and involvement, and aims to respect cultural integrity, increase numbers of Aboriginal teachers and cultural awareness training in non-Aboriginal staff, all remain (in the observations of the author) largely at the level of suggestion, while implementation of policy that will actually restructure institutions with increased Aboriginal and TSI teachers, programs, etc (and effect actual systemic change to the centrality of whiteness) remains deferred. The author notes in particular the wording "engage in *genuine* partnerships" (MCEECDYA 2010: 19), which begs the question, Why would this adjective be necessary?

<sup>10</sup> For all submissions see MCEECDYA (2009).

outcomes. The Human Rights Commission argued that the IEAP was further discriminatory to Aboriginal peoples in that ESL teachers were currently made available for migrant students yet not for Aboriginal students.

On the whole the submissions reflected the dissatisfaction with the government's universalist approach to education which was seen as particularly discriminatory towards indigenous-specific educational needs. The AIATSIS submission pointed out that the IEAP Draft had made the universalist statement: "Evidence shows that mastering the basics of English literacy and numeracy is a foundation for lifelong learning, economic participation and effective citizenship" (MCCEECDYA 2009). The submission argued the Draft should state: "mastering the basics of English literacy and numeracy is essential to participation in the wider Australian economic and public domain". AIATSIS further argued,

The action plan does not acknowledge that mastering English literacy and numeracy should not be at the expense of the child's home culture and that Standard Australian English (SAE) needs to be taught explicitly in an ESL pedagogical framework alongside the home language (MCCEECDYA 2009).

The Indigenous Education Foundation also criticised the universalist approach to Aboriginal students, revealing that the 150,000 Aboriginal students in 'Australia' represent 4% of the overall student population, and 86% of these Aboriginal students attend regional or urban schools where most of their peers are non-Aboriginal. In their submission, the Foundation argued, "We need more tools and policies that allow and empower Aboriginal families to make their own choices and decisions" (MCCEECDYA 2009). The Stronger Smarter Institute went further, saying that the IEAP entirely omits Aboriginal peoples' agency, governance, employment and language. Their submission states:

The Indigenous Education Action Plan, as it is, appears to be a subset of an assimilation policy in which things are being done TO Aboriginal communities to make them more like mainstream society, not WITH, and this is disturbing ... A curriculum and pedagogy that embeds indigenous cultural perspectives will improve the chances of students staying at school once they start attending (MCCEECDYA 2009).

Gunstone's research on 'Australian' universities and Aboriginal demographics has argued for the necessity to concretely engage indigenous pedagogy, as well as the need to include cultural awareness within the 'Australian' university system. He also highlights the link between cultural awareness training and the amount of unchecked individual and institutional racism towards Aboriginal peoples in 'Australia's' educational institutions (2009).

The principles of mainstreaming and assimilation underpinning the government's education agendas must be located within the government's broader economic and cultural agenda in relation to Aboriginal peoples. The Australian Human Rights Commission's submission included a quote from the World Bank where the Bank claims:

... the biggest challenge to achieve universal education is to develop appropriate learning practices so that young people who do not speak dominant languages are able to participate in school education (World Bank: 2005).

What remains unsaid in universalist discourses is that the push for a western education carries the assumption that the western education system will advantage all individuals equally even as this education remains within the constructed economic and social circumstances that sustain the colonising privileges of westernised global dominance. Any attempt to include Aboriginal-specific knowledges and methodologies at an institutional level in educational policy is clearly fraught with danger in such circumstances. Without fundamentally considering the issues of colonial occupation, pre-existing Aboriginal sovereignty, Aboriginal peoples' dispossession and the institutional hegemonies—which all continue the colonising relation with Aboriginal populations—any social inclusion concerning Aboriginal peoples will remain entirely contradictory. Such complexities require a major reconstructing of the entire political and social framework of 'Australia'. Considering that the overall incentive for curricula reform is clearly connected with the international economic agenda of 'Australia' as a sovereign nation, albeit for the claimed social benefit of its assumed homogenous community, without the dismantling of white hegemony and the restructuring mentioned above, the colour-blind claim of social inclusion can only be further deleterious to Aboriginal populations. Their knowledges and pedagogy continue to be ignored and devalued.

To include Aboriginal peoples' perspectives in the mainstream education system in a tokenistic way, with no attempt to genuinely bring Aboriginal knowledges into the centre, will further an ideological position that places the responsibility for a Eurocentric education on Aboriginal peoples themselves since they now, supposedly, have no excuse for failing in the push for economic competitiveness. This only serves to further reinscribe the centrality of western privilege. While Aboriginal knowledges and practices offer concrete solutions to mounting problems within European sociality and modes of living, they continue to be denied in this global competitive push. To borrow from Rose's concept of deep colonising concerning entrenched institutionally-consolidated hegemony (1996), the nation appears to wear the mask of benign decolonisation in its new educational agenda. As conquest remains embedded institutionally, any attempt to adequately acknowledge Aboriginal knowledges requires a fundamental separation from colonising processes. As Wise argues (2010), race-based inequity requires solutions that interrogate racial hierarchies and their invisibilised systems of white privilege.

### **Perpetuating the nation's colonial historical narrative**

Another major area where the dominance of white hegemony continues to be conferred is through the historical narratives created about the nation in particular kinds of historiography. The historical record in 'Australia' has increasingly been confronted with differing perspectives as a result of the nation's ethnically-diverse population. Yet in this record, considering the

nature of 'Australia's' imposed colonial foundations, it is clear why 'Australia's' narratives have continued to exclude or obfuscate Aboriginal perspectives. The New National Curriculum Draft claims it will finally include 'Australia's' Aboriginal history in its history curricula yet the management of this history reveals an obscured yet persistent maintenance of this marginalisation.

While strong and significant Aboriginal voices have been included in the dominant historiography about 'Australia', an ongoing predominance of white historians writing on Aboriginal peoples continues. In the past thirty years or so, some non-Aboriginal historians began to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives and histories into their writings. The introduction of such voices (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) has generated significant debate in 'Australia' (referred to as the 'history wars'). The 'black armband' view of history came into currency during the conservative Howard government years, when historians such as Keith Windschuttle decried the support for Aboriginal perspectives from non-Aboriginal historians as a self-interested, counter-productive and disruptive agenda that only shamed and blamed non-Aboriginal 'Australians' for atrocities that were 'in the past' (see Gunstone 2004: 2-8). Challenges to hegemonic colonial narratives through alternative histories of 'Australia' appeared to raise a "defensive assertion of whiteness" (Doane 2003: 15). As white privilege was contested and challenged by new historical accounts, the urgent countering of those supportive to Aboriginal perspectives appeared to be a reaction to a perceived victimisation. Claims were made by conservative historians and commentators that non-Aboriginal peoples were being made to feel guilty for injustices that they saw as the responsibility of previous generations.

Such a scenario quickly became evident concerning the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples' perspectives in the National History Curriculum in 2010. Echoing the criticisms of the Howard government, the now opposition Coalition Liberal-National parties' representative characterised this approach as a 'black armband attack' on 'Australia's' British heritage. The Coalition's education spokesman, referring to the 118 references to Aboriginal peoples to be included in the curriculum stated:

We have a seeming over-emphasis on Indigenous culture and history and almost an entire blotting out of our British traditions and British heritage ... I am deeply concerned that Australian students will be taught a particular black armband view of history without any counter-balancing ... that won't give young Australians confidence about their future because it doesn't teach them the ... balanced truth about their past (Pyne in National Indigenous Times 2010: 3).

This response is typical of the history wars (discussed above) where attempts to contest the dominant historical narrative causes a "defensive assertion of whiteness" (Doane 2003: 15) from conservatives in the political arena. A further example of such defensiveness is the representation of Aboriginal peoples in mainstream public discourse as not



competent.<sup>11</sup> In this political environment ethnicity-based claims or challenges to white centrality are seen as 'reverse discrimination'.<sup>12</sup> Some commentators have also played the 'white ethnic card' to assert their European ancestors also experienced oppression (Doane 2003: 16-7). Along with the defence of 'Australia's' European heritage and history, more insidious strategies are taking place regarding the inclusion of Aboriginal histories into the 'nation's story'. A-reflexive or semi-conscious whiteness is continuing the normalised centre of society through discourses of colour-blindness and meritorious individualism (Doane 2003: 16).

Given the problematic nature of discourses which stress inclusiveness while reinforcing the centrality of white hegemony, the accommodation of Aboriginal perspectives by historians attempting to 're-balance' the historical record must be assessed carefully. Non-Aboriginal socialisation remains inherently acritical of ways that settlers talk 'about' Aboriginal peoples, which continues to prevent their understanding of Aboriginal peoples as well as their own implication in colonial settler epistemologies. Recent contributions to the historical narrative from within settler hegemonies evidence a colour-blind racism and lack of serious engagement with whiteness. As a result, 'Australia's' settler cultural dominance remains largely unquestioned and unchallenged in these historical narratives.

In order to assess how these omissions take place in what purport to be texts that are sympathetic to Aboriginal perspectives, I will critically analyse a text from a non-Aboriginal historian who would widely be considered empathetic by many historians in this research area. Richard Broome's *Aboriginal Victorians* (2005) presents an ostensibly nuanced account of the historical impact of colonial settlement in the southeast corner of the country. His research documents policies and, to some extent, their effects, political events and prevailing societal attitudes, and appears to make an attempt to redress the dominant historical record by including Aboriginal perspectives in his account. Despite this inclusion, epistemological and cultural differences from the historian's socialisation within white culture persist in his retelling of events and recounting of facts.

Historical discourse is often pregnant with ideological apparatuses, for example, from religious institutions or economic networks that generate certain meaning effects or stereotypes (Muecke 1992: 21-2). The individualism of colonial expansion developed an abstracted form of language prone to objectification (Muecke 2005: 14-22). The use of

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<sup>11</sup> As was seen with the Northern Territory Intervention where Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to draconian policies that resemble early twentieth century assimilation policies, when the control of individuals and communities was heavily regulated and their movements and autonomy constrained (see McAllan 2007b).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, when Native Title (*Native Title Act 1993* [Cth]) was legislated and the Liberal government responded to the subsequent Wik case (*The Wik Peoples vs the State of QLD Ors* 1996), then Prime Minister Howard and Senator Nick Minchin steered public debate concerning the supposed threat to pastoralist lands and the rhetoric of 'stealing our back yards' came to characterise Indigenous land claims (see Birmingham 2010).

objectifying language will jar the reader/ listener if they consider that the writer/ speaker is attempting to represent another's perspective. The use of particular words can reveal an author's un-interrogated whiteness. An example of this occurs in Broome's book when the historical circumstances of people connected with the Cummeragunga Aboriginal reserve in the north of Victoria are recounted. In the account given, it is related that Thomas Shadrack James, a Mauritian, had married into the Aboriginal community, and this is accompanied by documentation of some of this community's activism. While James, like many in this community (including his brother-in-law William Cooper), was a strident activist, the statement is made: "Mostly people were law-abiding, reflecting their strong religious and moral *upbringing under* Thomas James" (Broome 2005: 271; my emphasis). Earlier it is stated that James is "the spiritual leader of the reserve" (262) in reference to James having joined the Methodist church for a time.

The word 'under' is particularly telling regarding the practice of objectification central to whiteness, as is the word 'upbringing'. The white assumption that this account carries is that a non-Aboriginal, who joined the community, was in a position to assume leadership over other Aboriginal community members, despite the clear documenting of community members' mutual strivings for autonomy. The association of the word 'moral' with 'upbringing' also stands out. Bonnett has argued that whiteness has developed, over the past two hundred years, into a taken-for-granted experience structured upon a varying set of supremacist assumptions, sometimes cultural, sometimes biological, sometimes moral, sometimes all three (1999: 213). The whiteness in Broome's statements above is likely to have come from moral assumptions from his own socialisation, which prevent him from allowing for Aboriginal cultural understandings. James is referred to again in a morally-approved tone: "For almost forty years he gave the children of 'Cummera' the skills to defend themselves and articulate their view of the world" (2005: 299). Here, normalised notions of a meritorious superiority regarding non-Aboriginal education remain un-interrogated, and there are unambiguous assumptions regarding Christian religion, morality and Aboriginal peoples' abilities. Opportunity to comprehend Aboriginal peoples' autonomy, their systems of familial kinship and the lack of division perceived by those within Aboriginal communities is here closed off.

Another overt assumption about whose knowledge is situated with more authority is evident in Broome's comment that "the impact of smallpox around 1790 and 1830—brought by the Mindye according to Aboriginal people, but, most likely to have been introduced by the Macassans in reality—was horrific" (90). The words "in reality" here stand out and beg the question: whose reality? The colonialist assumption here is that white European written accounts assert reality, which then represents Aboriginal oral histories as myth or at least inaccurate.<sup>13</sup> Though scientific/biological

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<sup>13</sup> The impact of this persistent whiteness and colonial thinking is evident in relatively recent Native Title cases such as the Yorta Yorta in this region, in which the ruling against traditional owners was made because Judge Olney legislatively dismissed their oral histories as emotional and manufactured. See *Yorta Yorta v*

racism is no longer acceptable in an era of colour-blind ideology, Broome's account nevertheless evidences lingering racialised assumptions from this discourse.

When speaking of the fraught conditions of the 1850s to 1880s in Victoria, as dispossession and devastation were reaping their relentless toll on Aboriginal populations, the inclusion of Broome's statement "some *self-reliant* Aboriginal people owned or built houses" (160; my emphasis) is also deeply problematic. The use of the term "self-reliant" in this sentence transmits to the reader a colonialist assumption that Aboriginal people were generally not autonomous. The notion of self-reliance also excises the context of the brutal circumstances of frontier conflict and European invasion. This is the risk also when the reader is positioned to consider that missionary paternalism was a beneficent arrangement for those who had survived settler violence, poisoning and generalised starvation from losing their lands only to be then subjected to the harsh regulation and hyper-management of mission life. For instance, Broome writes:

Aborigine and missionary were enmeshed in a reciprocal relationship of a two-way power and mutual dependence that ebbed and flowed from reserve to reserve. The reserves were not concentration camps as some have termed them, but places of refashioned community and identity: places that became home, complete with oppressions and opportunities like any home (129).

Broome makes an unquestioned assumption that comfort existed in the reserves from a white paternalistic understanding of homely protection and refuge, which normalises this extreme situation and entirely refashions the circumstances of Aboriginal survival from dispossession and ongoing injustice. In contextualising events in a narrative that neutralises the extent of inequality and subordination, and by continuing to assume a meritocracy of equal individuals in very unequal circumstances, Broome's narrative serves to legitimise the institutionalised systems of oppression and quell debate on redress and redistribution (Doane 2003: 14). It may be countered that Broome's narrative is an attempt to engage Aboriginal peoples as active negotiators in the Aboriginal-settler historical narrative, in contrast to previous historical accounts that render them as passive recipients of colonial oppression. However, Broome's un-interrogated assumptions and omissions actually serve to further the colonialist project through transparent whiteness.

Non-Aboriginal socialisation and inherent privilege within the dominant cultural group puts the task of adequately speaking with Aboriginal peoples firmly in the 'hard basket' for non-Aboriginal historians. To the extent with which a-reflexivity persists, whiteness continues in institutions and resists any attempt to redefine the centre (Doane 2003: 8). Accumulated privilege within colonising relations reproduces the assumption that the self is a moral agent in which individual will is paramount. This creates and reifies the myth of meritocracy, while the balance of power in colonising relations has little allowed for the free agency of the colonised (McIntosh 1990: 70-

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*State of Victoria & Ors* [1998] 1606 FCA at 106 and 262. See also Kerruish & Perrin (1999: 5).

81). Non-Aboriginal historical analyses therefore often carry 'deep-colonising' assumptions (of conquest) regarding the presumed benefits for Aboriginal peoples that are extrapolated from within this myth of meritocracy. As the historicising frame contains assumptions about positive aspects of white socialisation, which become reified in public discourse, a normalised meritocracy is revealed in accounts of how Aboriginal peoples negotiated with imposed white socialisation.

Broome's representation of this negotiation by those Aboriginal people held in the missionary system is one of relatively unproblematic adaption to elements of colonial institutionalism, such as paternalism, Christianity and European notions of education and marriage. In his chapter entitled "New Communities", Broome argues that European ideas were often embraced by Aboriginal peoples in order to garner social advantages. That is, European schooling and literacy enabled Aboriginal activism for rights, and Aboriginal peoples were assisted in this activism by the Christian belief that they were equal in the eyes of God (2005: 127). This representation of the relationship between Aboriginal activism and European ideas carries the assumption that Eurocentric values were an unproblematic choice for Aboriginal people and not undertaken as an entirely necessary political strategy in the face of oppression and coercion that arose out of policies which attempted cultural erasure.

Broome also unproblematically conflates what he calls an acquiescence to a paternal relationship in the hard post-frontier colonial world, where protection and help was needed, with a reciprocal hierarchical relationship that "came naturally to people who traditionally had elders to mentor, guide and protect them through the rigours of gaining knowledge, becoming initiated, and living in a society surrounded by *mainmet*—dangerous strangers" (128-9). In attempting to normalise colonialist paternalism as benevolent and protective by equating it with Aboriginal traditional culture, Broome makes an incongruous and wholesale cultural appropriation that lacks any preparedness to recognise the very significant differences between the two cultures, and again depoliticises the actual circumstances of a comprehensively racist cultural assimilation.

This cultural appropriation is also evident when Broome assumes an equivalence between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality and its practice. He writes:

Their acceptance of Christianity was perhaps aided by the traditional emphasis on religion in Aboriginal life, an emphasis weakened by still-recent disruptions of the people's association with land, sacred sites and the accompanying rituals. Christianity and its rituals thus fulfilled a cultural vacuum and provided new ways of creating social interaction and a feeling of community (139).

Broome appears to assume that complex spiritual relationships with land and people are merely religious practices that are culturally malleable, with the further suggestion of a superficial symbolism. His discussion of Christian conversions and the embracing of white marriage (139-41) again excises the socio-political circumstances for Aboriginal peoples during this

period, in which failure to emulate conformity with Christian ceremony and white marriage meant extremely harsh living circumstances and loss of children. Without addressing the complexities of Christian conversion, Broome ruminates:

their liking of European dress ... the younger reserve residents loved fashionable attire ... the young women ... trimmed their hats with ribbons and lace from the hawkers ... [and] wanted to experiment with European forms: the wedding being a key symbolic moment in a life ... dress, ceremony and photographs also enabled them to assert their equality with other Victorians (140).

That the actual conditions for equality were so remote belies the colour-blind meritorious discourse at work in this representation. The persistence in white historians to see the opportunity structure in white-dominant society as open, and institutions as impartial, is due to the inability to discern how western hegemony is reified through notions of equal opportunity and impartiality (Doane 2003: 14).

Broome's historicising remains insufficiently interrogated, with the discursive and institutional mechanisms that entrench privilege and hegemonic power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples remaining invisible. To assess the damage to Aboriginal populations throughout 'Australia' from the impact of politically instigated cultural genocide is almost an insurmountable task. Non-Aboriginals have remained within privileged social systems where their cultural traditions and identity have faced little challenge in comparison. Un-interrogated privilege within non-Aboriginal populations can generate the construction of a more palatable view of settler society in place of a focus on white culpability in settler colonialism, as has been the case in conservative accusations of 'black armbandism' (Birch 1997). Yet even those non-Aboriginal-socialised historians who are very motivated to confront the past more critically (including the author of this article) can fall victim to wanting to construct a more palatable view, particularly when their research surrounds them in the explicitness of this past.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has not been to single out individual historians for becoming draftees in the whiteness of colonial hegemony, or to detract from whatever success they have had in confronting and redressing omissions in the historical narrative. Neither is it the paper's purpose to arrest any measures taken by governments to provide opportunities to allow for, and learn from, Aboriginal peoples' perspectives and histories, support cultural continuity and stimulate non-Aboriginal awareness of the same. What this paper is drawing attention to is how the privilege and dominance of the imposed settler culture remains embedded in 'Australia's' institutions and social practices. The paper has addressed how readily those at the centre assume knowledge for others and resist the crucial necessity of separating colonising practices from decolonising processes as well as self-examination of their reinscriptions of white hegemony. Hence

reinvestments in the centre's particular truths, due to quasi-conscious whiteness and its effects of deep colonising, perpetuate an ideologically-loaded cultural domain where alternative voices have to struggle to be heard.

As external pressures of internationalism and increasing diversity come to bear on the national policy priorities of 'Australian' governments, the argument from the white centre in 'Australia' is that an inclusive national narrative will now extend neutrally beyond race. As inclusion to its centre is always on the centre's terms, the cost to cultural specificity is that, with a mask of benign decolonising, racial or cultural difference can be assimilated to flavour but never seriously challenge the essential tenets of this dominant culture—which provides no challenge to the dominant culture's 'deep colonising' resilience. In such conditions, racist discriminations can become represented as individual and unfortunate behaviours or acts, instead of invisible systems of deep colonising that continue to confer settler dominance. Without self-examination concerning this white centrality and dominance, which is preventing adequate restructuring of the educational systems and historiographies of this country, the sovereignty, cultural specificity and integrity of Aboriginal peoples will remain sacrificed.

### **Author Note**

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### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the writers I engage with here, as well as my reviewers, and the Editor, Holly Randell-Moon. All errors mine.

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

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**Volume 7, 2011**

SPECIAL ISSUE: POST-RACIAL STATES

## **A colonising paradox: White presencing and contamination politics in the Australian white-vanishing trope**

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*This article uses critical discourse analysis to deconstruct popular white Australian mythology about becoming lost in the bush. The analysis shows that the well-known tales of lost white children, women, explorers, drovers, and other variants of what is here termed "white-vanishing mythology", are neither neutral nor natural, but socially constructed and politically instrumental. In particular, these tales create and regulate forms of whiteness that are hegemonic, exclusive and conformist. This article details the ways in which whiteness is structured, marked and policed, and points to the strategic uses of such a delimiting for the maintenance of a racialised hyper-separation that underpins Australian colonialism. Loaded with binarised discourses of race, civility and belonging, white-vanishing mythology is exposed as a potent discursive weapon of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The trope's continuing popularity for contemporary migrant-coloniser writers indicates that racialised, colonialist thinking remains deeply and insistently embedded in white Australian culture.*

[I]f we are to be adequate critics of whiteness, we must become as educated about the history of colonialism, worldwide, as we are trying to become about the history of racism (Frankenberg 2001: 418).

The colonial state did not merely aspire to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this 'visibility' was that everyone, everything, had (as it were) a serial number (Anderson 1991: 184-5).

This article examines the strategies of whiteness and white belonging performed by the Australian lost-in-the-bush myth, here termed the

'white-vanishing' myth. The myth—comprising the numerous stories of vulnerable white people disappearing into the (constructed as) harsh Australian landscape—is examined critically, to illuminate its predominant location within non-Indigenous culture, and its enduring function, within that culture, as a racialised colonialist discourse.

The lost-in-the-landscape motif has long been acknowledged as a particularly Australian obsession (although less frequently recognised as a peculiarly *white* Australian obsession) (see Hamer 1955; Heseltine 2000; Pierce 1999; Torney 2005). Yet despite more than half a century of interest in the trope, cultural critics have not yet answered the most obvious question: *why* does it reoccur obsessively? This article argues that the white-vanishing myth is in fact a deceptive and strategic colonial textual paradox—more than anything else, it is actually a narrative of white presence, rather than absence—and that this presencing function helps explain its lasting attraction to white Australian writers and audiences.<sup>1</sup>

Three concepts from critical postcolonial studies provide a guiding theoretical framework for the analysis throughout this article. The first is the concept of "hyper-separation", as coined by Plumwood (2003: 54), to describe the process of "defining the dominant identity emphatically against, or in opposition to, the subordinated identity, by exclusion of their real or supposed qualities". The second concept is Pratt's "anti-conquest", that is, "a strategy of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (1992: 7). The third concept, closely related to the second, is White's (1985) notion of the "counter-instance": an aberrant discursive event that actually services (providing a foil and prompt) an opposing and more dominant discourse. When the familiar literary, cinematic and other white-vanishing tales that litter non-Indigenous Australian culture<sup>2</sup> are examined through the critical lens provided by

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, 'white Australia' refers to the dominant set of nationalised cultural images and identities perpetrated and naturalised in the name of all Australians. As Gibson points out, while "the colony is a diverse collection of ethnic and interest groups ... it is also unified by its shared 'rebirth' in the 'new' environment" (1992: 69). Accordingly, use of 'white' in this article follows the lead of critical whiteness scholars who see the white subject as interchangeable with the migrant-coloniser. That is, whiteness is understood as what Anderson (1991) would term an 'imagined community', encompassing "any non-Indigenous subject in the Australian context, and any sense of belonging to this country that this white subject can enjoy" (Ravenscroft 2004: 3).

<sup>2</sup> The lost white person occurs in multiple genres of white Australian culture. Just a few examples include: the song "Little Boy Lost" (J. Ashcroft 1960); the film of that name released in 1978 (Bourke); the film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Weir 1975); Henry Lawson's poems of lost (always white) tramps (1964); the many romanticised tales of Leichhardt or Burke and Wills wandering in mad circles (e.g. Charnley 1954; Fitchett 1938); Patrick White's lost explorer novel *Voss* (1957); dramatic treatments such as Janis Balodis' *The Ghosts Trilogy* (1997); and even an operatic treatment, in David Malouf's reworking of *Voss* as a libretto (1986). There have been two prominent books on the lost-child phenomenon alone (Pierce 1999; Torney 2005), although lost children are but one small strand of the overall

these concepts, their figures of the 'lost child', 'lost stockman', or 'lost schoolgirl' become recognisable not only as narrative emblems that capture the white Australian imagination by performing potent fantasies of white innocence, victimhood and heroism in Australian space, but also as part of a discourse that polices and regulates the parameters of whiteness in ways that are hegemonic, conformist and anti-individualistic. Entwined with the process of performing a colonialist strategy of white belonging, white-vanishing mythology also enacts, through its deployment of hyper-separation, boundaries for whiteness itself.

### **A familiar narrative**

The sequence by which discursive definition and surveillance of white subjectivity are achieved in white-vanishing texts is quite standard across the trope, to the extent that such narratives are now familiar, even predictable, in their appeal to and reinforcement of particular discursive patterns. The lost-in-the-bush tale has become a stock cliché of white Australian culture. Typically, the discursive sequence is as follows: first, there is an explicit assertion of racialised whiteness for key characters, using white-associated physical, cultural or symbolic features. Usually this assertion of whiteness is made for the about-to-vanish protagonist, but sometimes other members of their community are also marked explicitly with whiteness. Next, there is a threatened erosion of that whiteness through metaphors of physical or psychological taint. Then, a white character vanishes. Finally, one of two possible outcomes occurs. The vanished character may be recovered alive and triumphantly restored to the white community, implying a correction to the taint—they and/or other tainted whites have learned, through the vanishing trauma, to understand and appreciate the limits of their white subjectivity, and have retreated from those limits, to be redeemed as wholly white. Often class and gender-bound mores such as mateship and monogamy are also reinforced in this process. Alternatively, the vanished character may be lost forever, through death or complete disappearance. In this case, those who remain behind take implicit or explicit warning against transgression from the traumatic loss of one of their own.

In all the white-vanishing texts, the transgression that is punished is not only one of spatialisation, of wandering from the path, but one of identification. Whether vanished characters return or not, the texts establish clear discursive barriers against the infringement of white-settler social norms, especially by 'going native'. These texts bear out Ashcroft's definition of colonial 'going native' anxieties as focused more on the fear of discovering sameness with the Indigene than fear of discovering difference (B. Ashcroft 1998). They enact what McGregor calls a "boundary management" (2003: para. 1), in which an explicitly racialised clarification occurs and the limits of acceptable whiteness are defined and redrawn.

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white-vanishing theme. For many more examples from a diverse range of genres and historical periods, see Tilley 2007.

Such regulation inevitably asserts hegemonic controls over white individuals in a variety of ways, resulting in acquiescence to dominant white values of class, gender, race or some combination of these. Yet, although a strident boundary management discourse without doubt has some oppressive effects for some white subjects (for example women—see Tilley 2007), ultimately, it is fundamentally a colonialist mechanism of anti-conquest. The process of expressing anxiety about the stability of white subjectivities actually shores up those subjectivities and reinforces the borders of their whiteness. Hybridity, flexibility or adaptation in any form (cultural, racial, psychological) are utterly rejected in the service of a colonialist master-narrative of hyper-separation that cements and legitimises white occupation. When these texts are examined critically, white-vanishing events are inexorably revealed as the counter-instances of a dominant discourse of white presencing in which communities band together in a common understanding of what it means to be white. The next sections of this article examine and illustrate in turn the steps, as outlined above, in this clichéd sequence: whiteness, threat and correction.

## **Whiteness**

As noted above, the typical discursive structure of a white-vanishing tale begins with an overt assertion of racialised whiteness, usually for the vanishing protagonist, and sometimes also for members of their community. These are white-vanishing tales first and foremost because those who vanish are explicitly marked as white. The white-vanishing trope illustrates Ingram's assertion that, in settler texts, "whiteness is not portrayed as unraced, transparent, or neutral, but rather is racialized or marked" (2001: 157). The markers include skin, hair, eyes, lips, clothing, body shape, language and even posture, gestures and gait. Such marking is usually constructed as positive: with only a few recent exceptions, whiteness symbolises a categorical 'good' in these texts.

Markers of whiteness are most obvious in popular fiction examples of lost-in-the-bush tales. For example, in "A Little Rebel" (a 1916 story for children in *Town and Country Journal*), the lost child Trixy is "divinely fair, with ... a cream-white skin" (Yeo 1916: 4). Similarly, Parkes (writing as Sekrap) describes the child in her story as "fair haired, with blue eyes" (1879: 220), while the lost child in Ogilvie's "Old Jack", is simply "the golden-haired boy" (1906: 15). Teenaged Miranda, the main vanishing protagonist in Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is a "pale girl with straight yellow hair" (1967: 28). The semiosis of whiteness continues in 1998, with Miller's vanished child also a "golden-haired boy" (1998: 123).

Not all vanishing protagonists are fair-haired, but where eye colour is mentioned, and it frequently is, it is usually blue. In *Paving the Way*, Joan Grantley (who later becomes lost in the bush and dies) and her sister have "pretty blue eyes, rounded chins and rosy complexions" (Newland [1893] 2002: 91). Likewise, Furphy's (possibly parodic) Mary O'Halloran has "something almost amusing in the strong racial index of her pure Irish face" ([1903] 1997: 86). Mary's eyes are "of indescribable blue" (86) and

repeated references are made to her “deep-blue eyes and a skin of extreme whiteness” (87).

Not all constructions of whiteness are literally embodied. Furphy underscores the imagery of Mary’s white skin with additional symbolism expressed in clothing. She dresses in “a vast, white sunbonnet” when we first meet her (85) and later a “long white garment” (88). Many of the other lost females in the catalogue of Australian white vanishing are likewise conspicuously clothed in white. The white nightgown of Emily, the lost child in the movie *One Night the Moon* (Perkins 2001), glows with an intense, luminous whiteness created through bleach-bypass processing of the film (Millard 2001).<sup>3</sup> Lindsay’s picnicking schoolgirls all wear white muslin dresses, in both book and film. The white clothing transfers racial connotations to the wearer: Michael, seeing Miranda’s white dress in the distance, perceives her as a white (i.e. imported European) swan (1967: 28).

In some stories, the very whiteness of European garments helps searchers find lost characters. In “The Tale of the Mountain Moss”, Ellie and Johnnie are only saved because “Ellie’s apron gleamed white” (Moth 1879: 23), and the “fluttering apron” is a “better guide than his feeble cry” (23). In “Little Daisy”, searchers are too late to save the lost child, but her white clothing enables her father to find his daughter’s body when “something white fluttering in the breeze attracted their attention” (Ex Capite 1888: 917). In Adam-Smith’s rendition of the popular Duff children lost-in-the-bush narrative, the desperate father had almost abandoned the search when he “saw something white a little distance away—it was Jane in her petticoat” (1981: 149). These romanticised spotless white garments, like their wearers’ white skins, are loaded with symbolism relating to cleanliness, innocence and ‘proper’ civilised attire and behaviour, as well as to gender and class. Kociumbas, describing mid-nineteenth-century children’s fashions among the colonial elite, observes that women and girls often wore flimsy white dresses, which “taught them the importance of the image of feminine fragility, dependence and purity and also signalled that

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<sup>3</sup> To label *One Night* a “white-vanishing” text is not to deny the Indigenous identity and perspective of director Rachel Perkins who, although joining the project after its initial conception, worked collaboratively with a range of contributors to bring the project to fruition and shape its final form, but rather to suggest that a text can enact discourses that are entirely separate from its authors’ identities. Like any white-vanishing text, *One Night* inherits traces of the prior versions of the myth, and these are part of its meaning-making context. For example, *One Night* is strongly reminiscent of Mary Gilmore’s poem “A Little Ghost”. In Gilmore’s text, the ghost of a lost child is led by moonlight over the creaking floor of her room and “across a narrow plain” (1907: 228). The “moonlight leads her” (228) and as she follows it, “curlews wake, and wailing cry ... Till all the Bush, with nameless dread, Is pulsing through and through” (229). The ghost-girl herself “moves her lips, but not a sound Ripples the silent air” (228). All of these semiotic elements are present in *One Night*, in which a silent girl likewise follows the moonlight, gliding ghostlike across a narrow plain to the sound of curlew cry. Anti-conquest ideological elements, of an innocent white victim lured by a luminous force into dreadful nature, are also inescapably paralleled, meaning that the dominant ideological structure of the movie is, like other retellings of the white-vanishing myth, discursively shaped by broader cultural currents.

their families had servants to care for such garments" (1997: 67). Jane's white petticoat, visible because, in the mythology of the Duff children as it entered popular folklore, she has selflessly removed her darker over-skirt to cover her sleeping brothers, signals her idealised civil social behaviour in caring, like a little mother, for her brothers. Her heroism (and that of the community in searching tirelessly) saves all the children's lives. As will be discussed in more detail below, finding the whiteness (whether clothing, bodily, or social) helps resolve or remove these narratives' tensions about threatened loss of white racial and cultural purity in colonial contexts.

Less overtly 'popular' white-vanishing narratives, while usually more subtle, also tend to position their lost or vanished characters as explicitly white. For example, Malouf's lost character Gemmy, who is washed overboard and lives with "blacks" for 16 years in *Remembering Babylon*, is initially recognised as white by settlers because of his hair, "sun-bleached and pale-straw coloured as their own" (1993: 3). He is then confirmed in his whiteness by non-physical properties such as his vestiges of English language and, importantly, the tattered remnants of European clothing around his waist.

In the majority of white-vanishing narratives, whiteness symbolises wholesomeness, acceptability, or the means through which rescue occurs. Gemmy's blonde hair, for example, is initially his passport to reacceptance into the white community. In a handful of other recent white-vanishing texts, whiteness is more ambivalent. The two middle-aged men who vanish in Astley's *Vanishing Points* are unambiguously white, yet an irony about that whiteness has entered the narrative: both are explicitly "too white". One has "too white skin that never tanned" (1992: 5), and the other a "face too white for the climate they were moving in" (23). Their whiteness makes them unsuited to Australia's environment, yet ultimately that unsuitability is actually celebrated—their sunburn marks them as "*gloriously alien*" (5; emphasis added).

### **Tainted whiteness**

If the whiteness of vanishing characters is always highly visible, even over-determined, it is also always threatened or compromised in some way. The second discursive aspect of white subjects in Australian white-vanishing texts is their exploration of the possible erosion of whiteness through metaphors of taint (again, usually-but-not-always applying to the vanishing character). Working dialectically against these texts' declarative iterations of whiteness as a visually marked racial presence, are iterations of whiteness itself being endangered, displaced, or weakened, through metaphors of stain, contamination, ebb, or decline.

The vanishing protagonists, although undeniably white, are also always in some way not-white. They are changed by contact with their Australian surroundings in a way that constructs them as now having entered into a process of defilement—that is, of becoming imperfectly white. If we understand "defilement" in Kristeva's sense, as "an element connected with the boundary, the margin, etc., of an order" (1982: 66), this imagery

of taint both signals and enacts a politics of separation and boundary management. Changes to the white form, character, or physical body in the Australian environment are not represented in the white-vanishing narratives as positive signals of flexibility and adaptation, but most often as deterioration or degradation that must be resisted, overcome, or destroyed. The protagonists who vanish are typically what Dixon calls "bastard types" (1995: 64). That is members of a "dangerous and unstable hierarchy" of flawed, damaged, and contaminated grotesques or hybrids of whiteness that spring up in colonial contact zones as anxieties about the loss of an (imaginary) original English form of whiteness are explored.

Colonial anxieties about degeneration were encapsulated in Turner's 'frontier thesis' (written in 1893 and first published in 1920), which argued, in the North American context, that a new environment changes settlers' dominant characteristics as a group (F. J. Turner 1935). The same idea appears in the Australian context in Ward's conception of the laconic, 'rough and ready' battler as a response to the particular characteristics of the Australian 'bush' (in R. Lawson 1980). It is also inherent in concerns, as expressed by visiting author Anthony Trollope in 1853, about whether "the [imagined white Australian] race will deteriorate or become stronger by the change" (in Dalziell 2004: 5). The white-vanishing texts' explorations of taint reflect these kinds of anxieties, as well as more direct fears of racial deterioration through miscegenation. Schaffer has commented on the power of captivity narratives "as a genre to articulate in mythic terms the fear of miscegenation" (1993: 4). In the Australian context, in which Schaffer argues that "the captivity narrative makes no sense [because] ... (n)ew inhabitants were not taken captive" (11), settler fears about miscegenation, contamination and the instability of categories of racial difference appear to have instead found expression in the related trope of white vanishing. White-vanishing texts use the symbolism of taint to reconstitute and regulate an order of racialised whiteness.

Perhaps the most visible sense in which vanished characters are marked as losing their whiteness is through changes to their skin. Many have skin that, although still explicitly white, signals with patches or tints of 'not-white' that they are less 'pure' in their whiteness. Clarke describes lost child Pretty Dick's skin as "white as milk", but it is also now sun-tanned "golden brown" below the cuff-line ([1869] 1976: 557). In near-identical imagery, Warner, writing in *The Australian Town and Country Journal's* children's corner section (compiled by Ethel Turner), notes that lost child Willie "clasped his little brown hands and lifted his white face" (1911: 32). Likewise Gaunt's lost-adult character Jenny is "fair" ([1894] 2003: 109), but the line where her "sun-tan ended showed as a dark ring round her white neck" (4). Similarly, the found child in M.C.'s (Catherine Martin's) "Silent Jim" has a "sun-browned face" (1874: 26), but lest readers should mistake her for a found black child, repeated references to her blondeness—"sunny hair" (27), "sunny head" (28) and "fair brow" (28)—emphasise her white identity. In *Remembering Babylon*, beneath his blonde hair, Gemmy's face has been "scorched black" (Malouf 1993: 3).

The same combination of darkened skin with residual whiteness occurs in Thrower's novel *Younah* (1894), about a white child who becomes lost and



lives with Indigenes<sup>4</sup> in Tasmania. Martin notes that the lost white child's "bush skills and closeness to indigeneity are mapped on her body ('the natural fairness of her skin had deepened into an almost brunette like tint, by reason of continued exposure to the open air')" (2001: 155). The changes are superficial: when the white child is found and "restored" to white society, her "femininity and class are clearly legible" in her facial features, posture and gait, even "after years in the supposed wilderness" (2001: 155).

### **Managing contamination**

In the texts discussed above, skin taint has been obtained vicariously from the environment; in other white-vanishing texts, it is explicitly obtained from actual contact with the Indigene. When the lost child Babs, in *Norah of Billabong* (Bruce 1913), is located in the bush, a "dark stain covered the child's face and its legs and arms" (230), as though the skin colour of "Black Lucy", the Indigene accused of kidnapping her, has somehow rubbed off onto the white child. Nonetheless, like Younah's still-legible physical markers of class and gender civility, Babs's original whiteness is visible in her physical form: she has "pretty ... slender" feet and a "high ... instep" (224). To the white searchers, these characteristics are conspicuously inconsistent with her dark skin because, as one declares, "I've never seen a darky with a foot like that ... They're all just as flat-footed as a—a platypus" (224-5). Now the searchers look more closely and, contradicting the stain, Babs's facial "features were those of the baby who had laughed to them from the blue wall of the little room at Mrs. Archdale's" (230).

Babs's behaviour also confirms that she 'belongs' with whiteness: "there was no fear in the wide, dark eyes that met theirs—but rather an unspoken greeting, as though instinct told her that she was once more among her own kind" (230). As also occurs in *Younah*, a ritualised washing takes place, to remove the visible tinge of Babs's contact with Lucy. After the washing, Babs has undergone a transformation that—as McClintock (1995) has documented in a range of colonial texts that use the washing metaphor to skirt unrepresentable issues of miscegenation and deracination—constructs the change as much more than just surface cleanliness:

[T]he soap was at a low ebb and the ammonia bottle empty before they made little Babs Archdale clean. All the child's skin was stained with some dark juice and grimed with the dirt of long months; but it yielded to the scrubbing, and Babs emerged from the final rinsing water a very different

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'Indigene' in this article refers not to any actual Indigenous person or peoples but to the homogenised fantasy image of the generic Indigenous Other that is constructed within white textuality. Goldie (1989) argues that the white image of the Indigene is detached from and has no relationship to the plurality and diversity within and between groups of Indigenous peoples. In white texts, he argues, 'Indigene' is not a signifier that represents Indigenous peoples, but a mythic sign fabricated within white culture, projected outwards, and superimposed over Indigenous worlds.

being from the grubby piccaninny who had gone in—the white skin of her shining little body a startling contrast to the deep sun-brown of her face and arms and legs (Bruce 1913: 235-6).

Plumwood points out (2003: 54) that, as part of hyper-separation discourse, “Colonizers exaggerate differences—for example, through emphasizing exaggerated cleanliness, ‘civilized’ or ‘refined’ manners, body covering, or alleged physiological differences between what are defined as separate races”. The washed Babs has become “a very different being” (Bruce 1913: 236) from the unwashed Babs: in this way, the text’s governing discourse performs a fundamental denial of the sameness of white and Indigene (they are of a different ‘kind’). This is an example of white-vanishing mythology constructing and maintaining the “forms of difference” that Bhabha sees as crucial to “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse and the exercise of colonial power through discourse” (1994: 67). Babs’s transition from one world to another is marked by an absolute change: in one world, she is a ‘piccaninny’; in the other, she is a human. Through these kinds of absolute oppositions, white-vanishing texts disrupt any possibility of connection or merging between the hyper-separated worlds of the text (the worlds of own kind and Other). When a character strays from their own kind to become lost in the world of the Other (nature, bush, Indigene), it is staged as a rupture—a *vanishing* from one world to the other—and figured as a trauma that threatens the white world’s order of things and needs to be cleaned up.

Another lost-child novel, *Manganinnie* (Roberts 1979), uses similar imagery of trauma and restoration. In the film of Roberts’ novel (Honey 1980), which was watched by generations of Tasmanian schoolchildren as part of their English curriculum, sentimental scenes in which the lost white child Joanna is reunited with her brother, sanitised with steaming water and vigorous towelling, and reinstated to European dress and appearance, imply a correction to the disequilibrium of the earlier narrative in which Joanna lived with an Aboriginal woman, Manganinnie, while her white family grieved for her (represented particularly in anti-conquest visual images of the bereft, anguished white mother as tragic victim).

This sense of restored order (despite or indeed because of the sadness with which Joanna ascribes her now-lost ‘shared’ time with Manganinnie to the unrecoverable past) writes out any possibility of a continuing disequilibrium in which Joanna and her family acknowledge their status as members of the occupation force that has dispossessed Manganinnie. Innocent, harmless, devoted, and compassionate Joanna is not a figure through whom settler complicity in white society’s unlawful presence and (non-successful) genocidal activities in Tasmania can easily be explored. Rather, as Goldie describes: “through the indigene the white character gains soul and the potential of becoming rooted in the land” (1988: 69). The text has Joanna approach Indigeneity but reject it, taking away from the encounter only a deepened sense of her own belonging in the country Manganinnie has shown her.

In *Remembering Babylon*, Gemmy undergoes a washing that matches Joanna’s and Babs’s—although it is less successful from the story’s white

settlers' point-of-view. Gemmy's racial degeneration is marked with an odour of decay that clings to him despite baths and clean clothes provided by a white woman:

For all the scrubbing with raw soap, and the soft woollen shirts and moleskins Ellen McIvor had found for him, and washed with her own hands, he had kept the smell he came with, which was the smell of the myall, half-meat, half-mud, a reminder, a depressing one, of what there might be in him that could not be reclaimed (Malouf 1993: 41).

Again, the rituals of cleansing and cleaning allude to issues of racial delineation. The settlers believe that Gemmy had "started out white. No question" (Malouf 1993: 40). Yet now, "when you looked at him sometimes he was not white. His skin might be but not his features. The whole cast of his face gave him the look of one of Them" (40). When Gemmy cannot be 'cleaned', the text ultimately manages his threat of contamination in another way—he is returned to the bush and vanishes again, permanently.

*Remembering Babylon* also metaphorises racial defilement in another way that is common to the white-vanishing trope more broadly: through images of physical taint or "damage" (Malouf 1993: 7). The white community reads the physical changes written onto Gemmy's body by his encounter with the Other as a spoiling or degeneration of their imagined ideal white type: he is now "misshapen" (7), with "the mangy, half-starved look of a black" (3). Clearly, these metaphors of racial characteristics leaching in or out through proximity with the Indigene allude to fears of miscegenation as racial degradation.

Busia has commented that, in non-Indigenous postcolonial literature, "Sex between the races is never [portrayed as] a good thing" (1986: 367). She argues that, in white texts, "without exception, when it takes place, it is an unhealthy relationship with dire consequences" (367). In particular the "fruits" of such unions are marked, literally and symbolically, as flawed. They are "frequently the most morally degenerate of beings: villainous, treacherous, manipulative degenerates who ... manage to inherit both the most repulsive physical and spiritual traits of their parents" (367). Gemmy is perceived as just such a degenerate by the white settlers. His adaptations are seen as evidence not of flexibility but of duplicity and malevolence. He "was a white man" (Malouf 1993: 3, emphasis added) but is now a black *pretending* to be white. He is the mimic man, "a parody of a white man ... imitation gone wrong" (Malouf 1993: 39).

Other white-vanishing texts even more clearly associate miscegenation with 'damaged' white characters. In Astley's *Vanishing Points*, for example, the character Estelle Pellatier [sic] traces her lineage both to the lost white French boy Narcisse Pelletier, shipwrecked in northern Australia in 1858, and to the Aboriginal tribespeople who rescued and adopted him (1992: 71-2). Estelle's damage is written onto her face, in the form of an indelible stain: "She was disfigured by a birthmark blotching the corner of one eye and clouding the upper curve of cheek" (Astley 1992: 27).

### **Resolving taint: a didactic role**

Some white-vanishing texts are less explicit in signalling physical damage as racial degeneration, yet still perform a semiosis of taint via physical or psychological infirmity or lapse. The un-whitening of Jenny's skin in Gaunt's text, for example, is matched by the extent to which she is also approaching a state of not-white behaviour. Mirroring the infantilising representations of Indigenes in these texts (Tilley 2007), Jenny is portrayed as child-like, with a "half-developed mind" (Gaunt [1894] 2003: 85). She is "a little simple, perhaps" (99). She is also "wild about Black Anderson" (99), a criminal and outcast who represents the fearful yet desirable Other. The descriptions of Anderson do not confirm that he is racially black (it seems rather a reference to his bushy black beard) but Jenny's attraction to him nonetheless symbolises her asymptotic<sup>5</sup> approach to the Other, which is to be understood as a deterioration on her part from the ideals of her society.

The white-vanishing texts offer only two options for resolution of their characters' dangerous approaches towards alterity: the tainted white must either be rescued and redeemed, or if they are too contaminated from their contact with the Other to be symbolically or literally washed clean, they must stay vanished or perish. Simple Jenny does not know better than to become deeply involved with Black Anderson. Too fascinated with his otherness to permit the possibility of rescue and redemption, she pays the ultimate price (death and permanent vanishing) for her dalliance.

Similar suggestions of character flaw or psychological inadequacy are prominent throughout the white-vanishing narratives, both for those who become lost and for the members of their families or communities. Mortimer argues that white American captivity-narrative protagonists invariably "resisted sin and physical and spiritual corruption until rescued" (2000: 12). The behaviour of white Australian captives and vanished protagonists immersed in the space of the Other is often far more ambivalent, suggesting a cultural difference between the two societies. Overall, however, the didactic purpose of the tales is the same: to teach, whether by model or warning, conformity to norms of difference and separation by race, class and gender.

Sometimes in Australian white-vanishing tales, the semiosis of taint or imperfection extends beyond individuals to attach to white society as a whole. Vanishing characters are frequently 'bastards' in a literal as well as figurative sense, with disputed parentage and fractured family situations preceding or precipitating a white vanishing. Many of the white-vanishing narratives allude to crumbling white social structures: implied social 'decay' often provides the disequilibrium that results in (and then is redressed by) a white vanishing. Hamer first observed in 1955 that lost children in Australian literature usually had absent or disrupted parentage

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<sup>5</sup> See Alan Lawson (2000; 2004) for a discussion of asymptosis (drawing near but never connecting) as a colonialist discursive trope.

detailed in the narrative.<sup>6</sup> Often a fundamental disruption to the patriarchal norms of marriage and nuclear family foreshadows vanishing: absence of an ideal mother is a particularly frequent precipitating factor. For example, "Little Daisy" in Ex Capite's 1888 story is prompted to run away after her mother's death, Edwards' lost child Una goes missing while her mother is sick (1909: 16), and Yeo's Trixy has lived with her godfather since age four, when her mother died. Her father has been on business in England for five years, during which time the godfather has "spoiled her to her heart's content" (1916: 4).

In Moth's "The Tale of the Mountain Moss" (1879), the fundamental disruption outlined in the opening paragraph is the father's drunkenness. Although he is now sober, the family has been marked from the story's outset as flawed and therefore vulnerable. Bill Trickett, the father of "Little Liz" who is lost in Farjeon's *Shadows on the Snow*, although now exemplary in his devotion to Liz, is also flawed. He "had come to the colony under a cloud" (1877: 83), and soon after arriving, his wife dies, leaving him to care for baby Liz in the 'unsuitable' masculine environment of the goldfields.

All of these narratives suggest defects in the desired fabric of white society, defects that directly or indirectly cause a white character to vanish. Quickly, though, these defects are sutured by each narrative's presentation and resolution of a vanishing event. The white-vanishing texts 'solve' grotesques either by ejecting and erasing them through permanent vanishing, or by redeeming them and their communities through their valiant and united responses to vanishing in rescue missions. The vanishing episode is invariably used to reclaim 'bastard types'—among both vanishing and non-vanishing characters—from the brink of their final transgression to otherness, and restore them to their 'proper' roles in an explicitly gender- and class-ordered white society. The white-vanishing trope is, in effect, a textual strategy for mopping up—disposing, containing, or retraining—any uncontrolled excess at the edges of white settler society. These texts perform, and manage, the fear that "in the colonies control of the reproduction of bourgeois values was seen to be directly threatened by race" (Coté 2009: para. 3).

The white-vanishing narratives' textual interplays between whiteness and non-whiteness, and explorations of physical and psychological defilement, reflect wider anxieties about change in settler society. In other late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century literary texts, 'currency' or so-called 'native born' first-generation white Australians have typically been portrayed as having largely white racial characteristics, but with environmental influences shaping psychological and physical changes. Meredith, for example, wrote in 1844 that currency children tended to "precocity of growth and premature decay" (50). Kociumbas (1997) notes pervasive social anxiety and uncertainty about the extent to which bodily

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<sup>6</sup> The literature Hamer discussed was exclusively *white* Australian literature, although as was common at the time he did not specify this. His point about parentage and his conflation of white Australian literature with all Australian literature were both repeated by Pierce (1999).

adaptations ascribed to currency children were positive or negative, and a reverse but related concern that physical or mental inflexibility in new settlers might prove to be a fatal deficiency.

Both the fetishisation of racial purity and the anxious fear of degeneration in white-vanishing texts suggest a repressed awareness, as Dalziell has identified in a different white-settler textual trope—the English-but-not-English “Australian Girl”—that “white European settlers are neither European nor white at all” (2004: 5). This doubt is articulated clearly in *Remembering Babylon*. Malouf’s settlers fear not only the otherness they perceive in Gemmy but, by extension, the sameness with otherness that might be latent in themselves. Gemmy’s non-white smell confronts them with “the smell in your own sweat, of a half-forgotten swamp-world going back deep in both of you” (Malouf 1993: 43).

This underlying anxiety about the validity and robustness of race itself as a category for ordering and dividing the world (and legitimising colonialism) undermines settlers’ certainty about how to interpret the markers by which their identity is asserted in colonial contexts. In the white-vanishing texts, this anxiety finds expression in pervasive doubleness. Settlers are white-and-not-white at the same time: skin, body and ‘being’ alter, yet do not alter. Any blurring or contradiction, however, does not survive the unfolding of the white-vanishing event. The device of white vanishing always functions to remove uncertainty, contradiction and instability from the narrative. The white-vanishing trope performs—and simultaneously buttresses, avoids and denies—the fear articulated by Trollope that the whole category of racial difference might be unsustainable, and the social order and legitimacy of white society therefore at risk. Irredeemable boundary types disappear in these narratives, because if they remained they would, like other ‘bastard’ textual types, “undermine the stable identity of a (white) national self” (Dixon 1995: 66).

### **A colonising motive**

Dixon argues that the “anxiety that English identity will be lost in Australia” is sometimes so intense that it finds expression in metaphors of complete absorption or consumption of settlers “by the hostile land and its savage inhabitants” (1995: 66). The white-vanishing trope, in this sense, is a sibling narrative to the trope of cannibalism. In both tropes, the white settler is constructed as literally consumed by the Other, a kind of manoeuvre that Curthoys calls settler victimology (2000). In victimological texts, macro circumstances of white privilege and inter-racial injustice are obscured with a micro-focus on whites as vulnerable and as sufferers. We see this in the emphasis, in white-vanishing texts, on the trauma of vanishing for lost people and their communities, and in the sense of vanishing’s inevitability. Victims are helpless, depicted as powerless within a hostile and unknowable country. No attention is paid to culpability, to the knowledges that whites could learn about the country if they adopted a visitor stance and listened to its Indigenous owners for guidance.

In the white-vanishing trope, Indigenous presence is in fact multiply displaced, because an anthropomorphised 'hostile land' frequently stands in for the Indigene as the object held responsible for white characters' consumption by their surrounding environment. White-vanishing texts *always* simultaneously enact a white presencing that overrides the performed anxiety about absence. The trope can certainly be read as exploring and performing the "fundamental anxiety" that "when Englishness is lost there is nothing to replace it: that in Australia, nation, like the interior of the continent, is a nameless blank" (Dixon 1995: 72), but it is also a strategy for *blocking* deeper exploration of the root causes of that anxiety.

By way of example, it is useful to revisit a text that Dixon used to support his argument about anxiety, Favenc's *The Secret of the Australian Desert* (1895). Favenc loosely based his book on a search for vanished explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, and it contains a number of smaller white-vanishing incidents. In one of these, a white explorer vanishes down a hole in a cave. Dixon reads this textual moment as a "literal enactment" of "fear of absorption" by the Other (Dixon 1995: 79). The sense of dread felt by the exploration party at the loss of one of their own is, Dixon argues, a sense of the "imminent danger ... of being devoured by barbarism" (79).

In one sense, Dixon is correct: Favenc's text explicitly articulates fear of being devoured, with the white explorers speculating that the Indigenes' mouths are "watering to see us roasting on the coals" (Favenc 1895: 69). On the other hand, it is worth noting that while this particular moment in the narrative expresses fear and anxiety about disappearance, overall the text resolves and placates this fear. It uses the larger white-vanishing premise (of Leichhardt's disappearance), as well as the several specific smaller white-vanishing episodes, not as enduring motifs of absence and loss but as counter-instances (White 1985) that service the text's more dominant discourse of white privilege and power. The vanishings ultimately serve to *negate* or *deflect* anxiety about the legitimacy, sustainability and permanence of white presence and create a sense of certainty about white imperviousness and collective progress that offers reassurance to an interpellated white readership.

In the case of the white explorer's disappearance down the cave, his loss immediately motivates a response of gallant mateship and white unity. These actions establish the white search-party's collective valour, pre-emptively endorsing them as deserving recipients of the riches and secrets they afterwards 'discover' in the land. Ultimately this is not a fearful text at all, but a text that is absolutely confident in naturalising "an attachment to a sense of white entitlement" (Frankenberg 2001: 421). Like other white-vanishing texts, having first established a sense of what it means to be white, then featuring a threat posed to that status, Favenc's text focuses on the whites' response to that threat and their restoration of the status quo. The narrative describes the whites' intellectual strategising as they assess their resources, formulate a plan and, by working together as "comrade[s]" (1895: 71) they are able to not only get their 'mate' out of the cave but also to overcome the much greater numbers of "cannibals" (75) who appear in his wake. One of the whites comments, "we must fight

for all we're worth" (74). That the whites' "worth" is to be understood as considerable (and that the Indigenes by contrast have no "worth") is evidenced when the land itself assists the whites in their fight. Just as the Indigenes begin to swarm out of the cave, there is a strangely isolated earthquake from which the whites are protected, but which collapses the cave, entombing all the Indigenes inside.

Thus although the land at first appeared intent on consuming the white, the situation is quickly reversed, with the land consuming the Indigene specifically so that whites can occupy the land. The tremor opens up new access to a path that leads the whites soon afterwards to the first "goal of their hopes" (Favenc 1895: 123), an inland lake that feeds lush pastures, and eventually on to the second goal, a "fabulously rich" reef of gold (185). This white-vanishing narrative's dominant textual effects are not to perpetuate anxiety and uncertainty, but to reinforce confidence and surety in the white race's "worth" and (therefore) destined status as naturalised inheritors of the landscape's riches (as they are understood within a capitalist economy that valorises pastoralism and mineral exploitation but has no concept of value as inherent in other kinds of relationships with land). The story offers on every level a discourse of white presencing, as do the many other white-vanishing tales in which lost victims are rescued by white communities who band together to overcome the conflated construct of land/Indigene.<sup>7</sup>

### **Permanent vanishing**

Of course, triumphant rescue is not always the outcome in white-vanishing narratives. Trollope's anxiety about racial robustness *might* have its ultimate expression in narratives in which white subjects not only "deteriorate", but vanish altogether into the new environment. If "colonialism involves the erosion of an originary Englishness that will not necessarily be replaced by a mature colonial identity, leaving a vacancy" (Dixon 1995: 64), white-vanishing texts certainly provide opportunities to explore and express the fear of such a vacancy through the metaphor of white men, women and children first finding their whiteness compromised, then vanishing altogether. Yet, even when rescue does not occur, the

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<sup>7</sup> In discourses of hyper-separation, Indigenous peoples are often constructed as inseparable from the natural world—they are "'beasts of the forest', in contrast to the qualities of civilization and reason that are attributed to the colonizer" (Plumwood 2003: 54). In white-vanishing texts, the dichotomy does not always valorise coloniser over colonised: often coloniser is alienated, and Indigene is spiritual and grounded; sometimes coloniser is blind, and Indigene sees; but whichever way the value judgements are arranged, the dichotomy (the hyper-separation) remains. Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos argue that "modern Western racism is about excluding worlds. Racism, understood as a matter of the exclusion of the Other as-a-world, is at the heart of claims that there are incommensurable experiences and irreducible differences" (2004: 34) between white Australian and Indigenous peoples. In the white-vanishing texts, racially separated characters are clearly constructed as belonging to incommensurable worlds, and this politics of absolute difference persists from colonial to contemporary texts.



anxiety does not survive the texts' resolution: instead, the erasure (through vanishing) of characters who have in various ways 'gone native', provides the magical resolution to anxieties about the dissolution of boundaries. Those who remain behind are united in grief and loss, and tend to come together as a more delineated community (with enhanced bonds of inclusion also underscoring what is *excluded*) as they face the trauma of vanishing together.<sup>8</sup> The 'problem' of taint is removed by destruction of the most-tainted individual.

The semiotic parameters of the white-vanishing trope support Turner's argument that Australian fiction is characterised by anti-individualistic subject constructions and motivated by "fear of difference" (G. Turner 1984: 451). Excessive difference is punished with the vanishing of oneself or one's loved ones. Transgressive whites are produced as "docile bodies" (Foucault 1977: 135) through the white-vanishing texts' surveillance and regulation of subjects within specific social orders. These texts construct and reinforce the discursive message that members of the white occupying force in Australian space are not normally permitted to vanish; vanishing is not part of the grand social narrative of white occupancy and proliferation as manifest destiny—Anderson's "human landscape of perfect visibility" (1991: 185)—that underpins settler colonialism. White vanishing is a metaphor for seditious, unconformist, or uncivil white behaviour in general, and the threat of 'going native' in particular. A native state is not to be seen as desirable or even possible—to suggest that 'going native' is potentially a viable existence risks undoing the extensive set of Rousseauian binary oppositions that are essential to sustaining colonialism. It is this risk that the white-vanishing myth attempts to manage and avert.

The moral economy of these texts is also the moral economy of *terra nullius*: an assumption that whiteness and adherence to white social codes *create* property rights where none existed before (Buchan & Heath 2006; Frost 1981). White-vanishing texts perform and naturalise collective social mechanisms for regulating, confining and 'solving' any threatened uncivil behaviour. They are always, ultimately, texts about *white presencing* rather than white vanishing. What looks like "so many individual agents getting on with the business of expressing, exploring, negotiating, and even settling their legitimate differences—differences that define them not as white people ... but as people" is in fact a "brand of special-interest politics" for white people (Chambers 1997: 197). These are texts in which whiteness is regulated and reinforced. Through this boundary management, Indigenous worlds are excluded and whites are constructed in a relationship of legitimacy with the land.

The event of white vanishing in these texts provides the illuminative counter-instance that normalises and is necessary to the discourse of white presencing. Those damaged, tainted, rebellious, or helpless whites who go missing function as the 'heretics' (White 1985) whose very individuality produces those who do not vanish as 'orthodox'. Those who approach

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<sup>8</sup> Even documentary-style versions of the lost-in-the-bush myth tend to refigure loss as triumph (e.g. Wainwright 2004).

hybridity precipitate a trauma that valorises the conformity of those who do not. Those who *stray* enable the rest of the white community to both demonstrate and valorise a strenuous intention to *stay*. In short, the obsessive narrativising of white vanishing in white Australian culture is part of a colonial strategy of discursively shoring up the ranks of the occupying force. In Australia, this force was primarily 'settlers' themselves rather than an overtly military invading force and discourse was (and is) fundamental to its colonising operation. The white-vanishing trope is, like the imaginary story of her son's vanishing that the bereft white mother writes and obsessively rewrites in Miller's *Child*, a kind of "spell", an "incantation" designed to "keep things the same" (1998: 137) rather than face the reality that many things need to change.

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### Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the two anonymous ACRAWA referees for their considerate and constructive encouragement, to Dr Holly Randell-Moon for editorial brilliance, and to Professors Joanne Tompkins and Alan Lawson of the University of Queensland, whose research guidance has been incalculably valuable. All errors in the work are of course my own.

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies



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**Volume 7, 2011**

BOOK REVIEW

Anne Monsour. 2010. *Not quite white: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy 1880 to 1947*, Teneriffe, Qld: Post Pressed.

**Clemence Due**

The University of Adelaide

*Not Quite White* provides a fascinating case study of the immigration to, and subsequent experiences within, Australia by people from Lebanon during the years of the White Australia Policy. In this book, Monsour utilises archival records, anecdotes, and interviews to provide an interesting perspective of this time in Australia's history, from the point of view of one group of people who suffered as a result of the restrictions placed on immigration to the country. In doing so, Monsour also provides a broader study of the effects of this policy on colonial Australia and the way in which immigration shaped Australia despite efforts to keep Australia 'white' and therefore essentially British.

In the first two chapters of the text, Monsour details the context of Lebanese migration to Australia, including the effects of immigration policy on Lebanese migrants in Australia at the time and their ability or inability to gain citizenship or become naturalised. As such, in addition to documenting the struggles of this particular migrant group in Australia, these chapters also provide a useful reference point for the various policies in existence in relation to immigration and citizenship during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the effects of these policies on non-white immigrants during this period of Australia's history.

Chapters 3 and 4 both extend this background to immigration policies, with a focus particularly on the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901), or the White Australia Policy. Of particular interest in these chapters, especially to scholars of race and whiteness studies, are the conflicts documented by Monsour surrounding the classification of Lebanese migrants as being from Asia—a classification which Monsour points out many Lebanese migrants objected to adamantly, claiming instead that they were white and therefore unfairly classified under the Act. These chapters further document the ongoing struggles faced by Lebanese migrants to gain citizenship or naturalisation in Australia given their classification as Asians

under this Act. As such, Monsour outlines the restrictions Lebanese migrants faced in Australia as a result of their classification as not European or 'white'.

The history summarised in these two chapters highlights the flexibility of the category of 'white' and the power this category has to exclude those seen as outside it. For example, these chapters document restrictions for those classed as 'not-white' on employment, citizenship and the right to vote, amongst other issues. In Chapter 4 in particular, Monsour focuses on the importance of being seen to be 'white' during this time in Australia's history, providing examples of people from Syria being classified as either 'white' or 'coloured'—a classification in many cases based apparently on phenotypical appearance and therefore skin colour. Furthermore, Monsour points out that such classification seemed to be, in many cases, arbitrary, and Monsour utilises police descriptions of various Lebanese immigrants to demonstrate the confusion that the application of such racial categories often caused. Again providing examples, Monsour further demonstrates the importance of a classification as 'white', or fair skinned in relation to subsequent status in Australia. In this chapter, Monsour also discusses the improving position of Lebanese immigrants in Australia during this time, concluding however that such improvements were predicted only on complete assimilation into mainstream, 'white' Australia.

Indeed, this is one critique I would make regarding this book in that whilst it is clearly a book about an historical period (and the history within it is of considerable interest), I do feel that Monsour could have extended these discussions about the difficulties Lebanese immigrants experienced in Australia due to not being classed as 'white' and from here considered the ongoing tensions between Lebanese and 'white' Australians today. Monsour does very briefly nod to these ongoing tensions—such as the 'Cronulla riots' in December 2005 and media coverage of 'Lebanese crime' in Sydney around the same time (13)—however there is no attempt to explicitly link ongoing difficulties in being seen as 'white' and therefore as 'belonging' in Australia outlined in this book with these continuing difficulties facing the Lebanese-Australian population today.

In the next section of the book, Monsour shifts her focus from the immigration and citizenship policies that affected Lebanese immigrants during this time to examine the perception of Lebanese people as traders, and the occupations that Lebanese people actually engaged in once they arrived in Australia. Monsour argues that whilst the perception at the time (and the argument put forward in subsequent literature), was that Lebanese people were 'natural traders', in fact hawking and storekeeping were some of the few occupations that Lebanese immigrants could take up in Australia in light of entrenched discrimination in legislation relating to restrictions on the type of employment 'aliens' could partake in. Interestingly in light of more contemporary immigration and population debates in Australia, Monsour uses records from the time to illustrate the common perception that Lebanese migrants were taking jobs from white Australians, or undercutting their labour and employment by providing cheap goods. Thus Monsour highlights commonly held and negative stereotypes regarding the work of Lebanese immigrants and the ways in

which the policies stemming from these stereotypes worked to disadvantage Lebanese workers and their families.

Next, in chapter 7 Monsour utilises fascinating case studies from historical records in order to outline the decisions made by Lebanese immigrants in deciding where to settle in Australia and start work. This chapter highlights the importance of family to Lebanese immigrants in patterns of settlement around Australia, and discusses the unique difficulties of settling in Australia with its vast land-mass. Additionally, this chapter outlines the importance of supporting family back in Lebanon to these early immigrants. This is another section of the book that is of interest in light of current research into patterns of migration that suggests that remittances sent 'back home' to a migrant's country of origin in the present day "represent a large proportion of world financial flows and amount to substantially more than global official development assistance or aid" (Koser & Van Hear 2003). Thus again this book provides historical evidence of relevance today in relation to immigration debates and policies.

In chapter 8, Monsour shifts her focus from an examination of archival historical records to interviews and questionnaires provided to second and third generation Lebanese-Australians. In this chapter, Monsour examines the impact of settlement in Australia on new immigrants and subsequent generations. This chapter provides a very interesting examination of the factors that affected the settlement experience for these new families, and their children and grandchildren. Monsour discusses the impact of the need to assimilate into Australia, particularly in light of the hostilities and difficulties outlined in the earlier chapters of the book. In outlining this need, Monsour examines the requirement to quickly learn English in order to be able to survive economically, and the associated loss of the Arabic language—a loss Monsour states is often regretted amongst later generations. Monsour also examines the impact of religion and the importance of being perceived as Christian and not 'foreign', and interestingly, discusses the apparent reluctance to discuss the 'past' amongst these new immigrants—as seen in the lack of knowledge in later generations about their parents' or grandparents' life in Australia or in Lebanon.

In summary, Monsour's book represents an interesting overview of Lebanese immigration to Australia that provides important information about the ways in which this specific group of migrants shaped Australia's history. More broadly, *Not Quite White* is a fascinating portrayal of migration to Australia in the face of racist and restrictive immigration policies, and serves to remind us of the many challenges facing current immigrants and refugees in a country that, arguably, is still striving to be seen as 'white'.

### **Author Note**



Dr. Clemence Due is a researcher in the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. She has published widely in the area of critical race and whiteness studies, particularly in relation to popular representations of marginalised groups in Australia. Clemence can be contacted at: [clemence.due@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:clemence.due@adelaide.edu.au)

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

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## Volume 7, 2011

### BOOK REVIEW

Kay Anderson. 2007. *Race and the Crisis of Humanism*, London and New York: Routledge.

#### **Elaine Kelly**

University of Technology, Sydney

In *Race and the crisis of Humanism* (2007), Kay Anderson provides an insightful and clearly written analysis of, as the title suggests, the crisis of the concept of the 'human' inherent in the movement of humanism. The contextualisation of this 'crisis' is available by reviewing the first one hundred years of colonialism in Australia. Anderson locates herself within the contemporary postcolonial and critical race literature well, agreeing with the general contention that racialised forms of colonial power were justified by reiterating a human/animal, nature/culture binary which operated by subordinating Indigenous populations to the status of 'closer to nature'. In this sense, she confirms the claim that humanist discourse contained a racism that promoted and justified the deeds of colonialism. However, Anderson is critical of the generalised manner in which this claim has been made, arguing that it has caused a blockage in critical race scholarship, "The inclination to reduce racist thought and practice to its *function* in imperial and other power-laden projects", she writes, "needs to be more strongly resisted" (198). In an effort to provide a "deeper problematisation of race" (198), Anderson unpacks theories and materials circulating in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a range of philosophical, anthropological and scientific perspectives in order to provide a complex understanding of the relationship between conceptions of the human, nature and race. In so doing, she provides ample evidence to support her observations, as well as generating important new insights.

Broadly framing her discussion using a deconstructive post-humanist logic—something which challenges the taken-for-granted concept of the 'human'—one of Anderson's most significant contributions is to explicitly and meticulously detail the manner in which European contact with Indigenous Australians in the late 1700s and early 1800s provoked a 'crisis' in the understanding of humanity at this time which subsequently contributed to the development of biological determinism (which she refers to as innatism). This, Anderson explains, complicates the oft-repeated

claim that racist thought was applied to colonial encounters with indigenous peoples in order to justify imperialism and instead emphasises the development of racist thought *out of* this particular encounter (193). Consequently, Anderson contends that contemporary understandings of race and racism can be readily traced back to the circulation of these ideas in the last 150 years, even as the term race has been in circulation for longer (190).

Why does Anderson make this claim? For many years humanity had been theorised as a 'Chain of being' or unified thing. The Christian worldview of the Creator assigning specific roles and elevating humans above nature was taken as truth and a trace of its logic even remained influential within the development of Enlightenment thinking (36). During the Enlightenment and with the stretch of Empire, the notion of 'human exceptionalism' was tied to the belief in a universality of humanity as well as the notion of 'improvability'. Anderson notes that the discovery of geologic time was central to a rethinking of the 'human'. A progressivism took hold. That is, all humans were capable of asserting dominance over nature and it was in this manoeuvre that humans attained civilised being. In colonial encounters, colonists narrated cultural difference according to the logic of progression, seeing Native Americans, for example, as earlier forms of human life which the colonisers had since surpassed. In this sense, the transnational nature of the thinking Anderson places under the spotlight is clearly evident, even as her focus remains on the Australian setting. Moreover, Anderson's discussion of the role of land use and ownership here is of particular import for contemporary debates. After outlining John Locke's influential ideas concerning the cultivation of land as a marker of progress, Anderson claims that the problematic reliance of this theory upon the human/nature binary promoted the discourses of "settlement, sovereignty and dispossession" (95). It would be interesting to expand this discussion into today's land rights and self-determination debates, where the idea of appropriate use of land continues, wrapped up, however, in a neoliberal logic. In debates concerning individual and collective ownership, the former continues to be privileged, with the latter denigrated by some as economically backward, thus warranting the introduction of individual land leasing on communal lands.

The improvement or progressivist model of humanist thinking, what David Theo Goldberg has referred to as "liberalism's polite racism" (2002: 58) was, according to Anderson's exposition of sources, considered an inadequate explanatory model in the Australian context. Upon encountering the Australian landscape and its flora and fauna as well as the local aboriginal population, Anderson argues that European classificatory systems and broader belief systems were put into question, leading to anxious efforts to retrieve the unity of humanity. These efforts were eventually resolved by developing the theory of innate biological difference to explain human variety. Hence there was the movement away from developmental difference as the explanatory model and toward a scientific racism (2007: 143).

By highlighting the historicised and constructivist foundation of the human/nature divide in the context of the development of Enlightenment

thinking and scientific racism, Anderson's work can be used to illuminate a range of ethical and political issues in contemporary society. Instead of returning to a reliance on the liberal ideal of inclusion—the notion that extending the definition of humanity to those once excluded solves problems of inequality—Anderson's work asks us to note the instability of the category of 'the human' (123). In so doing, markers of humanity, nature and animality may be rethought. The forms of change this may take in theory and practice are not answered in this book save for a final line calling for ethical encounters that involve a "non-appropriating openness" to difference (203). In future work, the content of this ethical imperative—what it might look like—would be a primary place for elaboration.

*Race and the Crisis of Humanism* is a book that makes a compelling, provocative and important contribution to critical race theory, postcolonial theory, geography and Australian historical studies.

### **Author Note**

Elaine Kelly received her PhD in Critical and Cultural Studies from Macquarie University in 2010. She is currently Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her research examines the cultural politics of climate change, with a particular emphasis on the climate-migration nexus.

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies



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**Volume 7, 2011**

BOOK REVIEW

## **'Confronting' veiled misrepresentation and assimilated discourse**

Tanja Dreher & Christina Ho (eds.) 2009. *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Gender, Race and Religion*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

**Janine Little**  
Deakin University

In July 2010, the French parliament voted to ban the burka, worn by some women in Europe's largest Muslim minority community as part of their spiritual and community lives. Only one of more than 300 French MPs voted against the prohibitive law, while similar moves in Spain and Italy have passed through at least their first tabling for debate in the respective legislative assemblies. Not far away, the Dutch politician Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party won 24 seats in the national parliament by running an anti-Islamic campaign that called for a halt not only to all "Islamic migration" to the Netherlands, but to a ban on the Koran and the burka in any public forum.<sup>1</sup>

Further away, but no less a part of the reactionary zeitgeist of a post-9/11 world, a West Australian Supreme Court Judge ruled that a Muslim woman giving evidence before a trial by jury would have to remove her burka so that jurors could see all of her face, instead of just her eyes. The full-length, full-faced veil even made it into last year's Australian Federal election campaign, when both Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott remarked that they considered the burka to be "confronting" when encountered in a public space. In terms of political and mass media traction, the burka, in the parlance of journalists and advertising copywriters, had grown *legs*. More than that, according to the contributors of Tanja Dreher's and Christina Ho's edited collection of articles on the contemporary intersections of Islamic identity with gender,

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<sup>1</sup> *Dateline*, SBS Television, 29 August, 2010.

race and culture in Australia, the veil's capacity to reproduce patriarchal constructions of women as "troublemakers" (Perera: 226) within this critical trio has also mobilised its significance at considerable distance from its purposeful and specific role in Islamic faith.

News media representations of Islam and "the West's" right to claim a civil libertarian high ground have coalesced around 9/11, Jihadist terrorist attacks in Bali, England, India and Indonesia, and the horrific consequences of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Bulbeck: 208). Mainstream media discourses tend to replicate a vague popular perception of Muslims as potentially threatening to Anglo-European/ American/ Australian social democracies. "Western" cultures and specifically white Australian mainstream culture is generally not well educated about cultural diversity in nuanced or specified ways. As a result, calls for greater understanding of Muslim cultures as "the new others" (Green & Jacka in Dreher & Ho: 4) tend to be framed by images of deviance, notions of competition for socioeconomic capital or women's oppression within Australia as something reified by Islamic law and culture, rather than as entrenched practises deployed via patriarchal structures in postcolonial nation-states. Following the sustained pattern of this broader structure of power relations relies upon an awareness that its interests are not identical with its own constructions of masculinity, but do count on a form of relations that casts women and certain forms of cultural difference as needing simultaneous protection and policing. *Beyond the Hijab Debates* makes an important contribution to charting and analysing the terrain of the contemporary manifestations of this phenomenon.

As Barbara Baird observes in "The Moral Politics of White Hegemonic Masculinity in Australia", "the nation state and hegemonic masculinity are not entirely coincident. Both are internally inconsistent and subject to change" (92). The instances of this inconsistent and often contradictory intersection of gender and cultural relations in Australia—so often veiled misrepresentation, rather than constructive dialogue—concerns each of the 15 chapters collected by Tanja Dreher and Christina Ho from research first presented at a University of Technology, Sydney, conference at the end of 2006. Now, in the post-Howard, post-neoliberal context of Australia's cross-disciplinary intellectual negotiations of social justice issues (flattened under the market-driven ruthlessness of the past decade), the book makes a collective contribution to sharpened critical analysis of the intersections of religion, gender and race that affect not just one group, but equity and diversity in general.

One of the most significant intersections highlighted in this three-part collection, is that of a paternalistic discourse of protectionism underscoring much media representation of Muslim women in Australia, just as it continues to do in multiple guises for Aboriginal people and communities. In their introduction, Dreher and Ho refer to "a new politics of gender" in which particular interpretations of women's rights are favoured through a feminised mode of this protectionist discourse that is deployed within conservatism to justify everything from war to unpaid domestic labour (5). As Dreher and Ho observe, sex, rather than democracy, can be seen in contemporary discursive frameworks to be motivating and shaping the

mediation of conflict between Muslim and western worldviews (5). If women are “forced” to wear the veil, it follows within this paradigm that nations aspiring toward social democracy are (theoretically) compelled to act protectively to intervene, or assist them (4). While the burka has come to symbolise this dimension of appropriated women’s rights, the appropriation is itself an echo of the colonialist, assimilationist and reconciliation discourses that have produced similar dynamics for Indigenous Australians since colonisation.

Peta Stephenson’s, “Recreating Community: Indigenous Women and Islam” (67-80) and “The New Protection: Indigenous Women and the Contemporary Australian State” by Nicole Watson (105-17) engage with both the material and deeply familiar dimensions of this history, from quantitative cultural studies and qualitative legal perspectives. Stephenson’s interviews with “nearly 50 Indigenous people from around Australia who grew up in Muslim households or embraced Islam as adults” (68) are interpreted alongside Graeme Turner’s observation that Muslims in Australia are compelled to articulate their identities in terms of a repudiation of, and resistance to, available national discourses of identity and belonging (in Stephenson: 69). The Indigenous women interviewed, according to Stephenson, found commonalities between Islamic practice and Aboriginal community values through the importance of family (71). Further, in wearing hijab, the women “concealed their Indigeneity” while at the same time reporting that it “bestow(ed) a sense of shared identity” (75). This “dialectic of veiling”, concludes Stephenson, leads to the symbolic role of hijab in the way that “Islamic identification enables many women of Indigenous descent to rebuild and recreate community” (75). Nicole Watson’s engaging account of contemporary instances of shattering of Aboriginal family and community in “The New Protection”, accords stark testimony to the significance of such an enabling.

Watson recalls her personal response to news that Queensland Police Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley had been acquitted of manslaughter, three years after the Palm Island death in custody of Mulrunji (105). For Watson, 21 June, 2007, was a long one in the mediated lives of Indigenous Australians. She tells of turning from anger at the Queensland justice system, to coming to terms with the Howard Government’s same-day announcement of the Northern Territory Intervention into Aboriginal communities, in a bid to address child abuse: “I wondered when our right to be Aboriginal people would finally receive universal respect. The parallels between the Intervention and the protectionist legislation of the early twentieth century struck me” (106). Similar intersections are threaded through, and between, contributions to the collection—and resonate for anyone who has worked in the race/ gender/ culture research area.

Kevin Dunn’s, “Public Attitudes towards Hijab Wearing in Australia: Uncovering the Base Use of Tolerance”, focuses on non-Muslims’ public perceptions of hijab in Australia. The table on page 37 recalled, for me, an experience of a collaborative research and development project to embed Indigenous cultural studies in the mainstream education curriculum, with Jean Phillips and Jo Lampert at the Queensland University of Technology, a

few years ago.<sup>2</sup> Non-Indigenous students' emotional reactions to the historically factual accounts of Aboriginal dispossession, oppression and still, violence, were understandable; it was confronting news to most of them, who had mostly never met an Aboriginal person before going to university. Many of the stock phrases reappear in the table of comments made by non-Muslim Australians about the presence of Muslims in the general community. "We are all citizens. We're all Australians." Or, "Everyone should be treated equally", tend to arise whenever discriminatory or destructive national histories are outlined to those who apparently benefit from them. In relation to Indigenous cultural awareness, however, there was not much of what Dunn's respondents saw as "economic meritocracy" where level playing field assumed, the survey group perceived everyone in Australia as "consumers" with an "ability to rise up" and become, presumably, even better consumers and hence equal with other Australians. In fact, one misrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dispossession and survival in Australia is that this "ability to rise up" against colonial invasion and dispossession was *not* demonstrated collectively and in multiple ways, as concerted and determined resistance. The gathering of such survey material in this, and other contributions to the book, is vital for redressing such misrepresentations, and shifting hegemonic discourses of culture and nation, generally. Interrogating the ways of knowing that shape those discourses is another.

Dunn observes, for instance, how people tend to draw on ancient philosophies of tolerance rather contemporary notions of "cosmopolitanism or cultural relativism" (49) when they are compelled to share socioeconomic capital with others. When conceding democratic and even human rights to others, the "tolerance" and "inclusivity" discourses are, as sociologist Bob Pease recognises (2010), problematic and sometimes patronising. Similarly and specific to this collection's subject matter, assimilationist discourses according to Dunn, tend to reject hijab while the discourses of freedom of religion and expression tend to talk back to and diffuse in the Australian social context, those references to hijab as a symbol of patriarchal oppression (50). Jamila Hussain notes, additionally, in "Finding the Women's Space: Muslim Women and the Mosque" (52-66), that second generation Muslim women in Australia were no longer prepared to accept their own exclusion from sites of social capital (such as education) or religious worship and fellowship (the mosque) in Australia. Both Muslim and non-Muslims negotiate cultural identity and capital then, in complex and dialectical frameworks. Why then, do mainstream media representations revert to reductive and often inaccurate portrayals?

In "Media Hegemony, Activism and Identity: Muslim Women Representing Muslim Women", Anne Aly makes the central point that reinterpreting media messages depends upon audiences' capacity to draw upon alternative frameworks of knowledge (29). This has long been a contention

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Lampert & Janine Little (2004), Project Report, "The Road Forward: Experiences of the First-Time Running of an Indigenous Culture Core Unit in the Education Curriculum", School of Cultural and Language Studies, Faculty of Education, QUT. See also Phillips & Lampert (2006).



not only for Muslim Australians but also Indigenous Australians who have been spoken and written over by a mainstream media that generally excludes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander sources from any sustained public dialogue or diversified commentary on current affairs and key issues. As with Indigenous Australians, Muslim women reported that they were not always disposed towards educating mainstream Australia, or serving as cultural attachés to the white cosmopolitan centre, even though this is how mainstream news and current affairs often situates Indigenous voices. Something of a working alternative is sketched by Chilla Bulbeck's chapter in Part Three of the book, "'Recognising' Each Other in Conversations between Anglo Feminists and Muslim Women" (208-21).

Bulbeck shares the book's underlying aim, that "a more radically imagined 'we' would challenge both capitalism and racism to encompass men and women whose outlook is 'revolutionary', as Shariati described Islam: committed to social equality and committed against power structures of all kinds" (Connell in Bulbeck: 221). The starting off point for dialogue on such an oppositional praxis, understood sometimes by "the secular left" as social inequality, is inscribed within Islam as the "obligation to work for charity" (221). This interpretive dissonance might be a point of reference too for "the informative debates concerning gender relations" that are organised, as Bulbeck says, around the hijab (221) but, as the book's deep research of individual and community experiences of structural power relations in Australia shows, the living dynamics are more complex than merely uncovering and confronting misrepresentation.

Alia Imtoul's call for something of a methodological future for cross-cultural collaborative research between Muslims and non-Muslims, is to foster "standpoint epistemology as an act of political agency" (177). Recuperating excluded, obscured or "historically subordinated knowledges and identities" (177) by collaborating on level and transparent terms in analytical projects that address cultural specificity and community well-being need not be "confronting", nor about reproducing discursive frameworks of disempowerment. It may be a matter, as Suvendrini Perera suggests in the concluding chapter, of enabling more opportunities for a kind of "border thinking" demonstrated in *Beyond the Hijab Debates*, where it is potentially liberating to hold tight to a "claim to citizenship that speaks of living both inside and outside the confines of the enlightened western state" (234).

### **Author Note**

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# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

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## Volume 7, 2011

### BOOK REVIEW

Arlene Dávila. 2008. *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race*, New York: New York University Press.

**Lauren Vasquez and Matthew W. Hughey**  
Mississippi State University

In her latest book entitled *Latino Spin*, Arlene Dávila, author of *Barrio Dreams* (2004) and *Latinos Inc* (2001), delves into the social and political discourse surrounding the emergence of Latinos as the largest nonwhite population in the United States. This aptly titled text dissects how the image of Latinos is spun to simultaneously valorise their ability to assimilate and improve American culture or condemn them for perceived 'natural' and incommensurate differences. In so doing, Dávila covers a wide range of the 'Latino spin' discourse as it centres around particular kinds of identities: from an emerging middle class to a family-oriented Patriot, and from 'new republicans' to lucrative consumers. Moreover, Dávila explores how Latinos are looked upon with respect to urban planning, art museum creation and ethnic and cultural studies courses at colleges and universities. Of note, Dávila bases her argument on a central point to which she returns throughout her book: Latino ethnicity is complex, heterogeneous and defies the tendency of social and political discourse to essentialise all members of a race or ethnic group. Within the group 'Latino' there exist vast differences in language usage, generations of citizenship, class standing, aesthetics (referencing skin colour), citizenship status, and in some cases, whether they are foreign born citizens (for example, Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans born in the United States).

The text is organised neatly and Dávila—with direct and uncompromising prose—makes her claims clear. She begins each chapter with lucid and declarative sentences that serve as the blueprint for that chapter. Even as she strays down tangential personal stories, she always returns to the central points of her overall argument. Opening with the discussion of how recent data shows Latinos are the newest burgeoning members of the middle class, Dávila then proceeds to problematise the interpretation of that data in social and political discourse. As mentioned previously, the diversity of the Latino population is vast, and at times, unwieldy for

researchers. Data used to assert grandiose and sweeping claims, as pointed out by Dávila, fails to accurately capture the diversity of Latino lives and potentially overshadows important issues within the category 'Latino.' For instance, if all nationalities that are sheltered under the umbrella of Latino are framed as increasingly socio-economically mobile, this framing will paper over the fact that while English speaking Argentineans are flourishing, Puerto Ricans living in New York are falling further into poverty and relying on public assistance more than ever before. Failure to disaggregate the data to examine intra-ethnic variation can paint a gilded picture of life for Latinos. Another laudable point that Dávila makes is that most evidence is obtained from self-reported data, and the definitions of 'middle class' range quite markedly for Latinos. Furthermore, household income—which is used to determine class standing—is easily skewed if more than one family contributes to said income. In this vein, Dávila's attention to methodology and data collection is an important contribution to the discussion of Latino's precarious discursive economic and cultural position in the US.

Dávila also turns to the contentious question of whether or not Latinos are the 'new Republicans.' Advocates point to the generalised attitudes held by Latinos including anti-abortion positions, a hard-work ethic and religious conservatism. Dávila outlines how pundits from both the Bush and Kerry camps strategically framed their campaigns in the 2004 presidential election with the view that Latinos had the potential to become the largest swing vote in US electoral history. Dávila offers an extensive discussion of not only how politicians aligned themselves with the political concerns of Latinos, but also how they did so without alienating their Anglo supporters. Unique to this bifurcated dynamic, politicians could advertise policy in completely different venues specific to each group. Candidates placed Spanish-speaking advertisements on Spanish-only television, radio channels and periodicals. Such a move guaranteed that the majority of white Americans would neither come into contact with nor understand these advertisements, thus there was minimal risk in losing supporters who garnered ill feelings towards Latinos.

Dávila also spends time critically analysing the proposition that Latinos possess the ability to (paraphrasing Univision news anchor Jorge Ramos) "give America back to America, as Latino values are once again represented as archetypically American, but only in extremely narrow and conservative terms" (67). Dávila argues that such a framing is particularly double-edged as it gives legitimacy to an assimilatory agenda and then fosters praise for Latinos for the few values that are already in alignment with the dominant Anglo group. This discourse effectively discounts all other cultural aspects of, and values held by, Latinos and limits the benefits the country stands to gain by incorporating non-Anglo values. Moreover, this process draws up a blueprint for animosity within Latinos; those who cannot assimilate due to myriad reasons (for example, darker skin colour, non-English language skills) are held responsible for their own social stagnation. In relating this point back to the larger discussion of how the Latino image is spun, Dávila reiterates how distinct Latino values are rarely discussed as 'wholesome.' She claims that this absence could be attributable to the notion that many white Americans still believe that

Latinos are biologically, culturally and naturally 'different.' Decades after the civil rights era in the US, Dávila's point is cogent and sobering—the resiliency of racist and reactionary thinking still drives mainstream US discourse on Latinos.

Shifting gears, Dávila turns to the intersection between Latinos as consumers and the media structures around Latino consumption. Dávila points out that even the most popular Latino media outlets are owned and operated at the highest echelons by non-Latinos. It is here that her central point comes through with aplomb. Dávila describes how the "culture that makes Latinos profitable is the same culture that brings them down" (85). Advertisers market to stereotypical conceptions of Latinos and in so doing contribute to the fixity of the image, thus simultaneously constraining and enabling the assimilation process. Advertisers employ actors who are lighter skinned and speak a neutral form of Spanish as this allows them to market to a broader audience. At the same time, advertisers cling to Spanish-language marketing as it is still perceived as a more emotive language. Another point of import is that most other advertising niches include age, gender and class and yet, for Latinos, the niche is culture. US Latino advertisements create an identifiable culture in an attempt to foster Latino pride and yet this is the same culture that, for Anglo Americans, sets Latinos apart as the feared 'other'. This advertising strategy creates a Latino population that clings to traditions and culture lest they are accused of being superficially Latino.

The second part of the book continues to explore how the Latino image is spun, albeit in less intuitive ways. This part of the book loses a bit of the novice reader friendliness that is apparent in the first half. Due to the specificity of topics, one needs a background in the process of how city planning or how college and university politics work in order to grasp the full impact of Dávila's claims. For example, her discussion of urban planning refers explicitly to New York and its Puerto Rican population. There are references to Mayor Giuliani's term in office and the formations of community groups that sought to exercise their agency in city planning. Readers who live outside of concentrated urban centres may not readily comprehend these processes and could become lost in the jargon. For instance, the division of New York into ethnic enclaves and the stratification within may be foreign to some. Moreover, the discussion on what constitutes 'art' and what should and should not be granted inclusion into local museums needs a better synthesis into the how this process adds to divisiveness between Latino and Anglo populations in New York.

Leaving any pretence of positivist disinterest behind, Dávila purposefully employs pronouns that clearly include her own views on the issue of 'Latino spin' as it concerns her as a Latina. Her passion seeps through the pages and makes the read enjoyable. A caveat to the latter half of the book is that she references her own studies quite frequently and this self-referential pattern often substitutes for an in-depth explanation. If the reader is unfamiliar with the topic under discussion they will not gain familiarity with it here. Also, while Dávila often brings up other nonwhite groups and their relational status to Latinos, there is never a point where this topic is analysed in detail. Especially lacking is the relationship

between African Americans and Latinos. While this is touched on in the conclusion, no explicit analysis exists. Diplomatically, this was never implied as a goal of this text, so it may be a suitable direction for Dávila's future endeavours. Perhaps an analysis of this kind of detail towards another minority group's plight for assimilation would be beneficial in identifying a pattern in the use of assimilationist discourse in US public culture. *Latino Spin* is recommended for a light introduction to the varying ways in which Latinos are framed in the present day. Although *Latino Spin* is marketed as a book belonging to the social sciences, is not overly challenging and can be navigated by most laypeople.

As sociologists concerned with public narratives, we were struck by an incredibly important, yet perhaps understated, contribution of the book. Throughout the text, Dávila remarks that a large portion of discourse about Latinos centres on whether or not Latinos are in the US 'legally' or 'illegally.' She casually questions whether this *de jure* distinction serves as the true lynchpin for equal treatment, opportunity and acceptance. Dávila's implicit questioning of this arrangement serves as the clarion call for those who would debunk the myth of a 'post-racial era' in the contemporary US. That is, legal citizenship provides no guarantee of equality. For example, racial segregation in US education—over half a century after the infamous *Brown v. Board* case<sup>1</sup> that struck down "separate but equal" treatment of minorities—is rapidly approaching the rate it was in the 1960s (Orfield & Lee 2004). Additionally, only seven percent of US houses of worship—often billed as centres of unity, love and inculcators of a Protestant ethic of hard work and moral responsibility—are racially integrated (Emerson & Smith 2001). Racial inequality, discrimination and racism are neither respecters of laws nor people. And Dávila's interrogation of 'Latino Spin' demonstrates how the 'legal/illegal' debate often implicitly drives discussion of Latino intersections with marketing, politics and urban planning. This point is the hidden gem of the text. Reiterating this position with students, friends and colleagues remains critical for the future health of US democracy and is an invitation for social unrest in the country. For as Dávila writes: "By fetishizing citizenship as a guarantor of privileges, the immigration debate veils the civil liberties that are increasingly denied to all" (10).

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<sup>1</sup> *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka* was a court case that took place in 1954 in the US. The case considered whether the operation of two separate schools for whites and blacks was unconstitutional. This ruling overturned a previous Supreme Court ruling that mandated separate but equal facilities were allowable. *Brown v. Board* found that schools that were separate were inherently unequal and decreed the all students would have the right to attend the same schools.

Matthew W. Hughey, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and affiliate faculty member of Gender Studies and African American Studies at Mississippi State University. He studies racial identity formation, racialised associations, and the production and reception of racial media representations. He can be reached at: [MHughey@soc.msstate.edu](mailto:MHughey@soc.msstate.edu).

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## Volume 7, 2011

### JOURNAL REVIEW

Carole L. Lund & Scipio A. J. Colin, III. (eds.) 2010. Special Issue: 'White Privilege and Racism: Perceptions and Actions', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 125, Spring.

### **Nado Aveling**

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This special issue of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* is a welcome edition to the body of literature that tackles the connections between racism and white privilege. Indeed, it takes up the baton of "investigat[ing], analyz[ing], punctur[ing] and prob[ing] whiteness" (Fishkin 1995: 430), while at the same time moving beyond description on the one hand and confession on the other to show what white privilege looks and feels like within a specific context. Thus its strength lies not in its theoretical grounding or analysis of white privilege—although these are solid—but in its insistence that insights are but the first step; action must follow. As the editors, Carole L. Lund and Scipio A. J. Colin, III note:

The purpose of this volume is not to inform or enlighten peoples of color regarding what they already know about the intersection of white racist ideologies, white privilege, and sociocultural and intellectual racism, but to make white practitioners aware in order to afford them the opportunity (if they choose) to reflect on their paradigm and practice and institute appropriate changes (2).

This is a powerful collection that provides specific examples from the broad field of adult education (such as postgraduate education, vocational education, community health education) and offers fine-grained analyses of white privilege. To illustrate I will focus on three contributions for closer comment: firstly, Chapter 3, "Racism and White Privilege in Adult Education Graduate Programs: Admission, Retention, and Curricula" by Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey; secondly, Chapter 4, "Whiteness at Work in Vocational Training in Australia" by Sue Shore (coincidentally, the only contribution from Australia) and finally Chapter 7, "A Living Spiral of Understanding: Community Based Adult Education" by Melany Cueva. While in no way meaning to impute lesser degrees of rigorous scholarship or depth of analysis to the rest of the collection, these articles stand out for me as professionally and personally relevant and satisfying.



I was particularly taken with Baumgartner's and Johnson-Bailey's chapter because it directly engages with the ways in which institutions of higher education support white privilege. While this chapter is set within the United States, I experienced a shock of recognition despite the obvious cultural differences between the US and Australia, and my understanding that white privilege and racism are invariably historically and contextually enacted. I would suggest that we have much to learn from the authors' case study, both at the institutional level as well as the more personal level of supervising the work of our postgraduate students. Certainly, the authors' final recommendations are as applicable in Australia as they are in the US. Thus, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey discuss the "admission process, retention issues, and the evolution of the curriculum" (28) at the University of Georgia in general terms and conclude with their own stories to illustrate precisely how these practices were experienced when they were graduate students at that very university. Lisa, a white American outlines the relative ease with which she was able to negotiate the terrain and the acceptance she felt throughout; she was offered a scholarship, was invited to write academic papers with her advisor, was encouraged to teach to supplement her income—in other words, she felt valued and appreciated but assumed that her 'race' had nothing to do with the opportunities that came her way. Juanita, on the other hand, had to fight for admission and was not afforded any of these opportunities. Upon eventually gaining entry to the graduate program she became what she refers to as a "commuter student". She commented: "Perhaps if I had not been mired in trying to get admitted and then attempting to survive, I would have read the fine print" (33). These stories are not unfamiliar to me. As a white woman graduate student I was offered many of the opportunities that came Lisa's way and many years later I still see the struggles and obstacles that confront Indigenous students. While admission procedures may be different in Australia, the curriculum that Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey describe rings similarly true: units such as "Introduction to Adult Education" and "Adult Learning Theory and Research" are as 'white-centred' in Australia as they are in the US.

Shore begins with the premise that the vocational literature is "often silent on the extent to which whiteness ... functions as *a priori* description to constitute hierarchies of consciousness about human capital" (41) and goes on to ask "But what do these manifestations of whiteness look like as mundane acts in the everyday?" (43). What follows is a deconstruction of these "mundane acts" within the context of her work with adult educators in a course that was specifically designed to "assist educators to explore the implications of 'coteaching' with whiteness" (50). As her interview data shows, these educators were not unaware of the connection between white privilege and racism and were concerned to teach in ways that would enhance their students' life chances. Nevertheless, her data demonstrates the subtle, yet pervasive discursive practices that positioned their students as not being 'white enough'. Shore rightly concludes that her insights with this group of students are important in assisting other adult educators to "negotiate the precarious nature of opportunity that is always and already racially structured" (50).

"A living Spiral of Understanding: Community Based Adult Education" by Melany Cueva is the third article in my self-chosen trilogy: like Cueva, I am a woman of European descent for whom it is essential "to examine my own cultural filters critically, to increase my awareness of racism and to take action to eradicate injustices" (80) and who found Cueva's insights about insider/ outsider status with particular reference to her work with Yup'ik peoples in Alaska more than pertinent to my own work. Cueva's discussions cut right to the core of what it might mean for those of us who are white to deconstruct our whiteness in ways that are on-going. An excerpt will serve to illustrate:

I sat across the table from an Indigenous Elder and listened as he described the meeting protocol for his tribe. He shared how they line the table with cedar boughs. In my white woman way, I imagined the beauty of the cedar and the fragrant aroma. Blessed with the presence of mind to still my thoughts and listen, I learned that the cedar boughs are to protect against white peoples' words. I hope for the day when people no longer need to be protected from peoples' communication that erupts from a place of unconscious thought and insensitivity (87-8).

It is this quotation that more than adequately sums up the purpose of this volume "not to inform or enlighten peoples of color regarding what they already know" but to "reflect on [our] paradigm and practice and institute appropriate changes" (2). We have known for some time that whiteness bestows privileges on those of us who are white, what we do not yet know how to do is to "partner with peoples of color to create a new reality in adult and continuing education" (3). This volume points the way to 'putting our money where our mouth is'.

### **Author Note**

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