

Critical Issues

Imaginative Research in a Changing World

On Whiteness



Edited by

Nicky Falkof and Oliver Cashman-Brown

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The Ethos Hub

'Images of Whiteness: Exploring Critical Issues'



2012

On Whiteness

Edited by

Nicky Falkof and Oliver Cashman-Brown

Inter-Disciplinary Press

Oxford, United Kingdom

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Inter-Disciplinary Press, Priory House, 149B Wroslyn Road, Freeland, Oxfordshire. OX29 8HR, United Kingdom.
+44 (0)1993 882087

ISBN: 978-1-84888-105-1

First published in the United Kingdom in eBook format in 2012. First Edition.

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Introduction

Nicky Falkof

This book emerges from Interdisciplinary.Net's first global conference on Whiteness: Exploring Critical Issues. The event took place during an uncharacteristically sweltering three days in Oxford in July 2011. It was attended by 48 delegates who came from 14 countries: the US, UK, Canada, South Africa, Romania, Finland, Germany, Israel, India, Australia, Sweden, France, Norway and New Zealand. The work presented spanned the widest possible range of disciplinary interests, from nationalism and economics to political theory, cinema, psychology, space, literature, history and performance, among others. In doing so it presented a somewhat surprising - and largely hopeful - snapshot of the potentials of contemporary writing on whiteness.

For many of those speaking, the foundational texts of this area were Richard Dyer's *White*¹ and Ruth Frankenburg's *White Women Race Matters*,² both fairly recent works written by white scholars who positioned their own and their culture's whiteness within a skein of invisibility. Others, though, divined the origins of what can be called critical whiteness studies in the earlier writings of Franz Fanon,³ Toni Morrison,⁴ Audre Lorde⁵ or W.E. B. Du Bois,⁶ a pedigree that creates a space whereby it is not only white people who inaugurate the need to talk about whiteness, but also those for whom whiteness can never be invisible because, in its stranglehold on the structures of power, it is impossible not to see it. This primary disciplinary disagreement illustrates one of the most impressive elements of the conference: there was no consensus as such, no sense that a single narrative had emerged, but rather a chorus of voices that made it uncompromisingly clear that whiteness is not one thing. This fluidity, this solid awareness that the idea of 'white' is constructed by cultures and nationalisms and experiences, offers a way out of the constricting bonds of race, for whatever we identify ourselves as.

Critical whiteness studies has, to date, largely been focused on the US and UK, with a concurrent conversation emerging more recently out of Australia. Yet the conference saw South Africa and Scandinavia, for instance, strongly represented, suggesting that there is something in the experience of living in these regions, whether as a white person or not, that cries out for the analysis and understanding of whiteness. Work presented on Asian women's aesthetic choices, on albinism in east Africa, on Ashkenazi Jews in Israel, for example, radically expanded the often Anglophone emphasis on the global North that has largely characterised this field of study. Whiteness happens almost everywhere, and has effects almost everywhere, but these effects are enormously different in different contexts. Indeed, notwithstanding the overall quality of the presentations, one of the most exciting consequences of the conference was the vibrancy and enthusiasm of the conversations that happened in meals, over breaks, between sessions. Whiteness, living within/without it and what to do about it, became both a common language

and one that was inherently different depending on the position of the speaker and her self-identification. Despite the politicisation and critique inherent in a conference on this topic, there were moments of uplift too, in which speakers and conversations were drawn to ways in which people could find creative, healthy and individual solutions to the persistent problem of ‘race.’

If there was a single agreement to be drawn from those three days in Oxford, it was, as the heated final session showed, that there is much to be done to dislodge the pervasive power of discourses and structures of white privilege, and that we do not yet know how to go about that. In a sense the conference itself was a marker of this: the majority of the delegates were white. In order for the conversation to be advanced it needs to become significantly more inclusive and widespread, and it is to be hoped that this is the first of a series of events that will help to further this goal.

The papers collected in this volume form an incisive cross-section of the sort of material presented at the conference, varied in discipline, content, methodology and ideology. Part 1, ‘Colonialism, Imperialism and Globalisation,’ draws together a selection of papers that consider the global consequences and implications of whiteness from both historical and cultural positions. Perspectives from Australia, France, Turkey, Cuba and South Africa help to diversify a common understanding of the effects of whiteness that can be overly simplistic, often emphasising the dominance of European and American narratives of power over a more internationalised perspective. **Stefanie Affeldt** examines the way in which the sugar industry and popular invasion novels in early 20th century Australia combined the discourses of the ‘yellow peril’ and of ‘white sugar’ to create a racialised commodity fetishism around the consumption of ‘white’ Australian sugar. **Clarissa Behar**’s chapter examines the metamorphosis of racial whiteness and its incarnation as the uncanny ghost in the work of French novelist Marie NDiaye. **Sonja Schillings** analyses two contemporary cartoons about Somali piracy to show how a long legal history of racialisation informs the notion of the pirate, and how changes in skin colour in these cartoons illustrate the essential performativity of race. **Nina Liewald** places the novels of Richard Flanagan within a counter-hegemonic discourse that highlights the pressing necessity to develop a new relationship to whiteness in Australia. Writing on Hugh Tracey, founder of the International Library of African Music, **Paulette Coetzee** outlines the structures and visibility of colonial whiteness, and the way in which it claimed ownership of African cultures even as it created space for them. **Sedef Arat-Koç** explores the emergence of transnational whiteness in non-European, and often non-white, contexts of neoliberal capitalism, showing the process of ‘whitening’ that characterises the identity patterns of a globalised middle class. **Siv Elin Ånestad** uses fieldwork in Havana to examine the racialisation of prostitution in contemporary Cuba, exploring how socio-psychological attitudes play an essential role in black and white constructs.

Part 2, 'Gendered Whitenesses,' focuses on the way that a white or non-white identity or subject position influences subjective and cultural experiences of being female or male. The chapters consider how gendered people relate to their own understandings of their whiteness and non-whiteness and how the complicated intersectionality of gender and race influences identity, behaviour and self-image. **Rebecca Brückmann** examines two segregationist women's groups in the American South during school desegregation in the 1960s, revealing paradoxes in how their activism was gendered and the historical trace it left. In her study of white Swedish mothers of newborn babies, **Maja Lilja** explores the complicated ways in which women use their identity as mothers to justify their own racialised statements, illustrating how motherhood, far from being outside race, helps to construct whiteness. **Nicky Falkof's** chapter uses the film *District 9* and the band Die Antwoord to discuss the ways in which post-apartheid white South African masculinity are being culturally renegotiated. **Alice Yeow** links Enlightenment ideas of (white) beauty with the aestheticising trends in cosmetic surgery that are becoming increasingly common amongst Asian women and the surgeons who alter their bodies. **Toni Wright** explores how Iraqi Kurdish women in the UK situate themselves as white and Westernised and, in doing so, push the boundaries of racial categories conceptualised by white Western feminist writers. **Hannah Hamad's** analyses of the Antarctic-set films *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night* illustrate Dyer's notion of the deathliness of white alongside the distinctive gendering of whiteness into an idealised femininity and a troubling, violent hyper-white masculinity.

Part 3, 'Cultures of White and Non-White,' collates a collection of papers on the variegated cultural appearances of whiteness. Work, cinema, advertising, personal hobbies, political cultures and mental health are all considered in this broad, cross-disciplinary intersection that illustrates both the way whiteness perpetuates and manifests itself and the secretive fears that it disavows. The much-vaunted 'invisibility' of whiteness comes into play here, where mass culture contrives to elide the fact that it is built around privileging a white identity. **Miia Rantala** uses a recent television advert to illustrate the normative power of whiteness allied to nationalism in contemporary constructions of Finnish racial identity. **Sue Abel's** research with Paheka (white) workers at Māori Television in New Zealand interrogates whether exposure to indigeneity affects white identity and can help to foster a de-hegemonising view of white as one among other ethnicities. **Brandy L. Jensen** gives an overview of Arizona state's controversial anti-immigration policies, laws and ballot proposals, using them to illustrate how apparently repudiated narratives of white supremacy actually underlie neo-liberal discourse and policy in America. **Oliver Cashman-Brown** examines the endemic whiteness of birdwatching, considering how it reflects on white privilege as well as his own place within that structure. **Anne Babson** deconstructs Sino-Anglo relations during the debut of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, challenging the

scholar Josephine Lee's charge that the comic opera invokes 'commodity racism'. **Paul Heilker**'s work on autism and Asperger's syndrome reveals how they are socially constructed as 'white diseases', which affects not only the rhetoric of autism but also non-white people's access to and awareness of mental health issues.

Part 4, 'Performing/Passing/Enacting,' examines some of the different ways in which white and non-white people place themselves within the structures of a nominal whiteness. It engages with crucial questions of performativity, that sense in which the acting out of what people understand as 'race' in fact creates racialised structures and identities, and passing, the adoption of the characteristics of the (usually socially and politically dominant) other. These papers take in fine art, literature and popular film and music in their consideration of how whiteness is enacted by white and non-white people. **Leora Farber** addresses the adaptations, renegotiations and reinventions of female South African whitenesses through her own photographic works, musing on the relation between her personal history and that of the colonial woman Bertha Marks. **Lise Sorensen** analyses Jessie Redmon Fauset's novel *Comedy: American Style* for its literary whiteness and explores the idea that racial identity is a question of mistaken identity. **Sonja Smit** investigates the subversive performance style of South African Afrikaans rapper Jack Parow as he subverts stereotypes surrounding Afrikaans masculinities, gangsta rap and white trash. In his analysis of the 1997 Hollywood film *Pleasantville*, **Ewan Kirkland** considers the way whiteness is constructed as lacking in colour, life and vitality, and, concurrently, how the film uses this to rewrite a history of American racial politics that repudiates blackness. **Aretha Phiri**, writing on Kopano Matlwa's 2007 novel *Coconut*, discusses the porousness of race, the impossibility of imaging black separately from white and the destabilisation of blackness that is consequent on the fetishisation of whiteness.

Part 5, 'Strategies of Managing Whiteness,' brings together a selection of papers that have as their common core the complexities, contradictions and challenges attendant upon living within whiteness. These writers reflect on how their subjects understand or respond to their own experience of being white, ranging from guilty disavowal and identification with the other to shame, resentment and claimed colour-blindness. Drawing on her own complex identity as a white English-speaking South African, **Anthea Garman** considers the troubling question of who is, and can be, an African. **James Arvanitakis** and **Tobias Hübinette** examine literary and autobiographical texts to find what they define as 'trans-racial adoption' among whites living outside Europe during the classic colonial era. **Vanessa Eileen Thompson** invokes Fanon and Merleau-Ponty to argue that white mainstream social-philosophical theories of recognition, by ignoring the centrality of race, fail to explain the phenomenon of intersubjectivity. **Deirdre Howard-Wagner** identifies manifestations of white normativity in state and local constructions of multiculturalism and Australian culture during the

Howard administration. **Lydia Carol Dekker**'s participant observation of white car guards in Durban, South Africa, paints a compelling portrait of whiteness cast adrift from the structures of historical privilege. Writing on Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River*, **Jane Durie** considers her personal history as a white Australian alongside the habitual denials and forgettings of a white history replete with violence and domination.

The final part, 'White Hope, White Fear,' considers the way in which white people interact with their own privilege and with the structures of racism within which they live. It is perhaps a mark of the ideological bent of the conference that these writers are, in general, critical of white responses to racism and racialisation. Through data collected in ethnographic research among primary schools in Oslo, **Mari Rysst** challenges the commonly-held assumption that Norwegian children are growing up 'colour-blind', and isolates their developing racial consciousness. **Delores V. Mullings** unravels the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's adjudication process to uncover its reproduction of whiteness and its reduction of racialised people seeking redress within the judicial system. **Lisa B. Spanierman** develops a taxonomy of the emotions of white racism - fear, rage, guilt and shame - and antiracism - moral outrage, joy, hope and compassion - and draws conclusions for scholars and educators working with white youth. **Tobias Hübinette** and **Catrin Lundström** consider the normalised and naturalised hierarchies surrounding Swedishness and the double-binding power of Swedish whiteness through the mourning of the loss of 'old Sweden' and the passing of 'good Sweden.' Utilising Celia Haig-Brown's notion of the 'decolonizing autobiography,' **Emily R. M. Lind** critiques feminist texts on whiteness for their focus on white racism instead of whiteness.

In a much-cited 2004 article, the British scholar Sara Ahmed wrote that it is important to avoid assuming that simply calling oneself white qualifies as an act of anti-racism.⁷ The 2011 Whiteness conference gave many of us a chance to name ourselves as white or as non-white in a way that encompassed our discomfort within or our distaste for those categories, but these acts of naming were not in themselves political. It is rather what we do with them, and what we do with the work that is presented here and its exposé of how whiteness operates, that matters.

Notes

¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

² Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Paladin, 1970 [1967]).

⁴ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1984).

⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Souls of White Folk', in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1920).

⁷ Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism', *Borderlands* 3, No. 2 (2004).

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PART 1

Colonialism, Imperialism and Globalisation

‘White Sugar’ against ‘Yellow Peril’: Consuming for National Identity and Racial Purity

Stefanie Affeldt

Abstract

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Australians were possessed by two obsessions - the fear of the ‘yellow peril’ and the desire for a white society. The fear of the so-called yellow peril found expression in science and politics as well as in innumerable invasion novels depicting the swamping of the self-proclaimed European outpost in the Pacific by imagined Asiatic hordes. The programme of a white society was reasoned scientifically and found political supporters, not least in the labour movement. Moreover, it was conveyed by a medium that was even more popular than pulp fiction: the commodity racism that propagated the consumption of white sugar. White sugar was a very special commodity. Refined white and produced white, it comprised white labourers, dearer sweetness, protection from the world market and the gaining of intra-continental acceptance through subsidies. Both invasion novels and sugar consumption were aimed at the entire society.

Key Words: Australia, commodity racism, empty north, invasion novels, Queensland, sugar, whiteness.

1. ‘The Rising Tide of Colour’

In late October 1930 the major Australian newspapers published an (occasionally full-page) advertisement on behalf of the Queensland Sugar Defence Industry Committee. It warns that ‘The Tide Rises while Australia Sleeps’ and proclaims that its ‘only bulwark is provided by the stalwart Sugar Workers in Queensland.’¹ The advertisement consists of two elements: a drawing and a body of text. The drawing shows an outline of Australia lying in the ripples of a dark ocean. At the horizon, the moon is ascending. A slogan in capitalised letters floats in the water between Australia and Asia, reading ‘The Rising Tide of Colour.’ The text printed beneath contains further hints as to how to decode the graphic. It gives its readers information on the alleged menace the unpopulated areas of north Australia posed in the context of surplus Asian population, and then relates the populating of Queensland to the production and consumption of Australian sugar. The ‘color menace is a very real danger to Australia.’ This leaves hardly any doubt that the rising moon, which bears Asian features and has its eyes set firmly on the north coast of Australia, is representative of the supposedly growing interest of Asian countries in the appropriation of land in Australia. By reminding its readers of the ‘vast half-empty continent’ and adducing figures comparing the number and

density of chosen Asian countries to those of Australia, the advertisement then dramatises the alleged threat of invasion by 'Asiatic hordes.'

This 'scientific' method of accessing the supposed danger in which Australia found itself is furthered by the invocation of contemporary 'scientific racism.' The slogan floating in the water takes its cue from Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*.² His findings underpinned the statement that only a populated north Australia would be able to fend off invaders.³

After raising awareness about this apparent threat to the Australia continent, the advertisement presents the solution to the problem. 'Effective occupation is the only valid title by which any nation can hope to keep its territories intact.' The sugar industry of Queensland was the pivotal player in this gamble for settlement in the northern parts of the Australian continent. Maintaining its production power meant furthering the settlement of white workers and planters in the north. This apparently white industry was the stronghold against the yellow peril, and supporting this industry through the consumption of its produce meant not only providing the means to financially uphold the industry but, furthermore, to help protect 'white Australia.'

Let us take the advertisement at its word and 'Think the matter out!' I do this by initially analysing the Australian perceptions of the yellow peril and the 'empty north,' in particular in the context of the invasion novels. Subsequently, I take a look at the social dimensions of white sugar and the role it played as a means of both maintaining and affirming the 'whiteness' of Australia. I conclude by assessing the way in which consumption of invasion novels and Australian sugar interacted within the dynamics of commodity racism.

2. White Sugar against the Yellow Peril

The advertisement soliciting moral and financial support for the sugar growers of Queensland brought together two lines of discourse which both emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century and continued to be brought to public attention well through the first half of the twentieth century: the yellow peril and white sugar.

A. The Yellow Peril

Invasion novels were a literary genre for a mass audience that envisioned hostile takeovers and urged the populating of the 'empty north.' Read as critiques of the prevailing social and political situation, the novels pressed for the overcoming of internal tensions and the unity of whites against a 'coloured' enemy. Furthermore, they were an expression of the special position the people of Australia found themselves in: in terms of geography, they were surrounded by and in close proximity to Asian countries, while in terms of population politics, half of the Australian landmass was considered unpopulated.

The phrase yellow peril was coined in the late nineteenth century and expressed the supposedly detrimental effects that a mass migration of Asians to western countries had on the wages and living conditions of white labourers, as well as on Australia's racial purity. Again, Australia's seemingly exposed position in the southern hemisphere led to a heightened perception of vulnerability due to the numerical differences in populations.

In particular the empty north, a figure of speech that emphasised this fragility of white Australia by stressing the large stretches of land in the north where settlement was still minimal, became an increasing concern in the public Australian mind at the time of Federation. (White) underpopulation and the subsequent delay in the opening-up of the northern territories became problematic due to the fact that a title to the land could only be lawfully held when it was being cultivated.

This anxiety of losing land to foreign intruders was taken up in a literary genre which, in Australia, emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century and was known as the invasion novel.⁴ In this 'isolated outpost of western civilisation,' the perceived geographical remoteness from Europe and the cultural otherness of the surrounding countries added to the interest in this genre.⁵ The novels were a medium of mass consumption - some of them were published as dime novels, others as serials in newspapers or in the papers of the labour movement, and they thus reached a broad audience. Rather than mere public entertainment, they were a 'dramatic construction of the new world on the base of the old.'⁶ They were written as social critiques of the present situation, envisioning the ensuing consequences as a toxin for the white, mainly British, population.

In general the novels are structured in three narrative parts. In the first part, internal tensions in Australia are depicted. The second part describes the invasion by foreign enemies and Australian reactions to it. The concluding part reports a closing of ranks by the whites who then stand united against the non-white invaders. By doing this the novels tell stories of how, despite internal struggles, Australian society as a whole was able to offer more often than not successful resistance to a foe coming from outside.

Race is the most obvious discursive element in the invasion novels. The invading Asians endanger white workers' economic conditions with their allegedly low living standards, as well as Australian racial purity by attempting to seduce white women with the help of opium. Numerical superiority plays the decisive role in the description of the Asian invader. William Lane, a front figure of the Australian labour movement who also founded the *Boomerang* (a paper of the labour movement) and was the first editor of the *Worker*,⁷ gave an account in his novel *White or Yellow* of how the 'vast horde' of Chinese simply 'over-ran everything' and 'monopolized a score of important industries' in the north.⁸

A problematisation of aspects of gender finds expression in the alleged fragility of white women's integrity. White women are considered prone to seduction by Asian invaders. As the keepers of racial purity they are the most vulnerable part of

the white Australian society. In the 'sacred cause of womanly purity' they have to be kept 'from a fate worse than death.'⁹ Of course, the defence of white women and white Australia is the duty of the white men.

Class features in the contradistinction between politicians who are stuck in never-ending discussions about the invasion scenario and dwellers of the bush who are more practical and take Australia's fate in their own hands. Concurrently, the capitalist class of the north is depicted as the stepping stone for the Asian takeover. Instead of sticking to the ideal of White Australia, these 'high priests of capital,' who were as 'blind ... as bats'¹⁰ and for whom 'business was business and money was money,'¹¹ had only their financial profit in mind and were ready to expand their business relations with the Chinese and Japanese. With their willingness to employ only the cheapest labour, the capitalists in the novels systematically emptied Queensland of white workers until the 'white population' had completely 'vanished,' leaving no one to defend the north.¹²

The only way to fend off external foes and hostile invasions was, in the narration of the invasion stories, to overcome these intra-Australian tensions and foster the uniting of all (white) Australians. Correspondingly, in direct face-to-face confrontation those whites who initially fought in the name of the Chinese soon grasp their disloyalty. They remember to 'act as well as be white' and the struggle with the anti-Chinese turns into a 'race-fight' of 'white against yellow.'¹³ The invasion by foreign foes as the cataclysmic battle becomes the touchstone for internal social cohesion. Eventually, class and gender boundaries are overcome based on shared whiteness and a racialised national identity, and 'Australia was true to her destiny ... she stayed white.'¹⁴

Of course, Queensland was anything but empty - as the reader of invasion novels knew. The crux of the matter was that it was filled not with white but with 'coloured' workers introduced by the sugar industry (and with Aborigines who did not count at all).

B. White Sugar

The term 'white sugar' in the Australian context at the time of the newspaper advertisement stood not only for chemically white, meaning refined, sugar, but also for cane sugar that was wholly produced by white labour. But before this could be accomplished and the sugar industry could proudly call itself the 'white man's industry,'¹⁵ it had to undergo major changes in demography and organisation.

The story of sugar in Australia starts with the beginning of white settlement in 1788. But attempts to cultivate the sugar cane brought to the Sydney settlement with the First Fleet were futile. It took another eighty years and a relocation of cultivation about 750 kilometres northwards before the first commercially cultivated cane sugar entered the Australian market. At the time when sugar cane was successfully cultivated, however, cheap labour in the form of convicts was no longer available since transportation had ended about twenty years before. The

planters resorted to a labour resource that had hardly been tapped before: the Pacific Islands.

Whilst the planters were surely satisfied with the possibility of inexpensive and tractable labour, other groups warily observed the initially private and later institutionalised introduction of these labourers. Besides suspicions of the re-introduction of slavery coming from parts of the Australian public and from critical British minds, the presence of the Pacific Islanders was thought to undermine employment possibilities for white workers in Queensland. The Australian labour movement's involvement in particular fostered subsequent legislation confining Pacific Islanders first to tropical agriculture and then to work in the sugar cane fields.

Despite an attempt in the 1890s to end the labour trade altogether, it was not until the Federation of the Australian colonies was established in 1901 that permanent steps for an extensive demographic change in the sugar industry could be taken. The Federation brought with it the fixation of whiteness as a major part of national identity. The White Australia policy, which was decisively carried by the Australian labour movement,¹⁶ comprised two pillars of legislation which were to the satisfaction of all those who conjured up threats of hostile invasion and the displacement of white workers' interests: the Immigration Restriction Act and the Pacific Island Labourers Act. The former meant the exclusion of immigrants deemed 'undesirable,' who were in the majority Chinese and Japanese. The latter was the ignition spark of the eventual transformation from a 'black' to a 'white' sugar industry and prompted the end of the Pacific Island labour trade as well as the deportation of the remaining Islanders.

With the end of Pacific Islanders' employment, the planters were forced to look for other sources of labour. The transition to white labour was further fostered by the payment of a bonus for white-grown sugar. The funds for this payment came from a special tax levied on all refined sugar. Australian consumers now had to pay dearly for their national consciousness. They not only tolerated this extra payment, however, but willingly did their share in the support of the sugar industry. Australia remained one of the top per capita users of sugar in the world.¹⁷

Despite the sugar industry now being socially 'white,'¹⁸ tensions were far from over. The on-going subsidies attracted the criticism of housewives' associations as well as other sugar-processing industries outside of Queensland. The allegedly spoon-fed sugar industry was accused of receiving unnecessary support from the government.¹⁹ To maintain Australian consumers' support, the sugar industry used the newspaper advertisement in question to call upon national pride and fear to invest in the defence of the country against external enemies.

3. Consuming for National Identity and Racial Purity

In combining discourses on the yellow peril and white sugar, the advertisement tells a story about commodity racism which is decidedly different from traditional

patterns of racist consumption. Commodity racism emerged as a class-spanning access to 'racial difference' in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ It constructed a community of (white) consumers based on the exploitation of (black) labourers. The career of tea, coffee and chocolate as mass products, for instance, benefited excessively from the low production costs based on the system of plantation slavery. Sugar, in early nineteenth-century Britain, was a commodity increasingly consumed by all strata of society. By its use, the factory worker could distinguish himself, as a sugar consumer, from the plantation worker, as a sugar producer.

The campaign for white sugar in Australia functioned differently.²¹ The crux of this sugar consumption was explicitly not the desire for a low cost commodity but rather for an ideologically enriched product, not only of national importance but also of importance to white supremacy. In the course of the legitimisation of high-priced white Australian sugar, the importance of white solidarity against a common external enemy was evoked.

At the same time, the invasion novels provided a fictitious theoretical and empirical embedding for the urgency of fostering settlement in the north. As a medium of mass consumption, the invasion novels were able to disseminate information to all milieus of society. Far from being mere fiction, the novels reflected contemporary 'scientific' findings as well as current political processes. With their emphasis on a white Australian unity despite internal tensions, they supplied the reasoning that Australia could only defy a hostile takeover attempt as a nation with an undisputable identity and racial purity.

The populating of the north played the crucial role in the defence of Australia. This was to be accomplished by enhancing Australian sugar production. The settlement of white farmers and the recruiting of white workers were supposed to further the cultivation and thus the occupation of areas that were deemed unsatisfactorily populated. More than their mere physical presence, the workers of the sugar industry would also embody the ideological bulwark against the threat of Asian invasion.

In this manner, consuming invasion novels and Australian-made sugar meant supporting the defence of the national identity and the continued racial purity of 'white Australia.'²²

Notes

¹ The advertisement was printed in *The Argus* (Melbourne), 15 October 1930, 11; *The Mercury* (Hobart), 18 October 1930, 15; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 18 October 1930, 6; *The Register News-Pictorial* (Adelaide), 20 October 1930, 17; *The West Australian* (Perth), 21 October 1930, 4; *The Argus*, 23 October 1930, 10; *The Western Mail* (Perth), 23 October 1930, 18; *Sunday Times* (Perth), 26 October 1930, 32. Also see the appendix for the advertisement.

² Stoddard claimed that the 'natural outlet' for Japan's surplus population would be found in the United States of America and Australia. T. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920).

³ The basic considerations for this had been developed by an Australian scientist who believed Australia to be 'the last part in the world, in which the higher races can live and increase freely.' Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character. A Forecast* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1894), 89. Also *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ For a reading of invasion novels with regard to racism and whiteness discourses see Stefanie Affeldt, "'White" Nation - "White" Angst', in *Racism and Modernity*, eds. Sabine Ritter and Iris Wigger (Berlin: Lit, forthcoming 2011). For a general survey of Australian invasion novels, see, for example, Robert Dixon, 'Imagined Invasions', in *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender, and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875-1914*, ed. Robert Dixon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 135-154; Neville Meaney, "'The Yellow Peril': Invasion Scare Novels and Australian Political Culture', in *The 1890s. Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, ed. Ken Stewart (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996), 228-263. For invasion novels from Britain and Anglo-America see, amongst others, Ignatius F. Clarke, *Voices Propheying War, 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁵ Andrew Markus, 'Of Continuities and Discontinuities. Reflections on a Century of Australian Immigration Control', in *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*, eds. Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker, Jan Gothard, (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press 2003), 178.

⁶ Nan Bowman Albinski, 'A Survey of Australian Utopian and Dystopian Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies* 13 (1987): 16.

⁷ Wulf D. Hund, 'Negative Societalisation: Racism and the Constitution of Race', in *Wages of Whiteness & Racist Symbolic Capital*, eds. id., Jeremy Krikler, David Roediger (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 58.

⁸ William Lane, 'White or Yellow', *The Boomerang*, 10 March 1888, 9; 18 February 1888, 9.

⁹ J. A. Kenneth Mackay, *The Yellow Wave. A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia*, eds. Andrew Enstice and Janeen Webb (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 2003 [1895]), 257; Lane, 'White or Yellow', 21 April 1888, 9.

¹⁰ Mackay, *Yellow Wave*, 130.

¹¹ George Ranken, *The Invasion* (Sydney: Turner & Henderson, 1877), 86.

¹² Mackay, *Yellow Wave*, 81.

¹³ Lane, 'White or Yellow', 31 March 1888, 9; 14 April 1888, 9; 24 March 1888, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 May 1888, 6.

¹⁵ Thomas D. Chataway, 'The Australian Sugar Industry: Economic Expansion and White Australia', *International Sugar Journal* 1 (1921): 140.

¹⁶ Verity Burgmann, 'Racism, Socialism, and the Labour Movement, 1887-1917', *Labour History* 47 (1984): 41-46.

¹⁷ Peter Griggs, "'A Natural Part of Life': The Australian Sugar Industry's Campaign to Reverse Declining Australian Sugar Consumption, 1980-1995", *Journal of Australian Studies* 30 (2006): 87-125.

¹⁸ Struggles in the sugar industry between the employers and the labour movement continued with the Queensland sugar workers' strike in 1911, when workers successfully fought for their ability to 'cash in' their 'wages of whiteness.' See Kay Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982) and David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007).

¹⁹ Chataway, 'Australian Sugar Industry', 140.

²⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 209.

²¹ For a more complex nexus see Stefanie Affeldt, 'A Paroxysm of Whiteness. "White" Labour, "White" Nation and "White" Sugar in Australia', in *Wages of Whiteness & Racist Symbolic Capital*, eds. Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler and David Roediger (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 99-131.

²² I wish to thank Kayleigh Page for her precise reading of the text.

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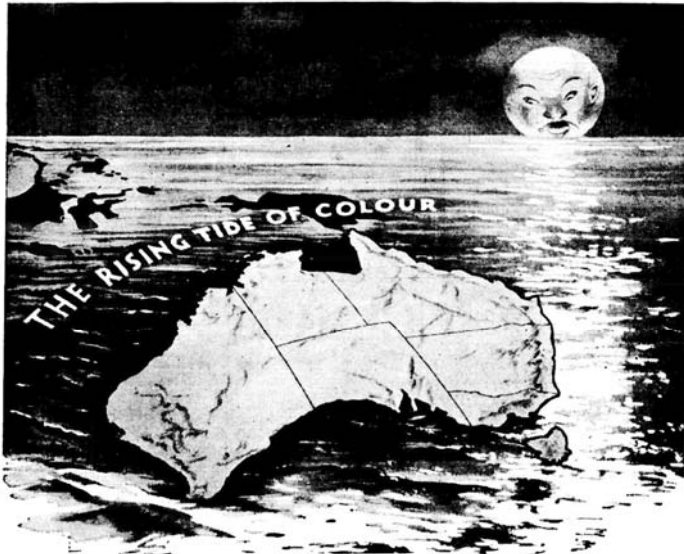
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Appendix



The Tide Rises while Australia Sleeps

THE color menace is a very real danger to Australia. Asia, our nearest Continental neighbor, has a dense and rapidly increasing population. In Australia, we have slightly over 2 persons to the square mile. In Asia, they have, in parts, over 300 persons to the square mile. All history shows that Asia must, from time to time, seek an outlet for its surplus population. In the past, the Asiatic invasion has been to the west. From time to time, Europe has been overrun by Asiatic hordes, and in this way the pressure on Asiatic living space has been relieved.

To-day the position is different. The European nations are ready and prepared to resist any invasion from the East. Where, then, is Asia to turn? To the South, she sees millions of square miles of unoccupied land, some of it within a few days' sail. Is it not inevitable that, when the pressure on Asia reaches breaking point, the overflow must be in our direction?

Read these population figures and try to realize how almost impossible it would be for us to resist a concerted Asiatic invasion:—

COUNTRY	POPULATION	Persons per Square Mile
China	457,787,000	
Indo-China	12,000,000	
Japan and Dependencies	83,438,000	
British India	38,500,000	
Asiatic Russia	347,000,000	Average 184.22
Sierra	1,000,000	
Siam	51,881,000	
East Indies	11,744,000	
Philippines	11,744,000	
Australia	6,430,000	2.15

In view of the above contrasting figures, a demand might be made at any moment—possibly supported by the League of Nations—that some portion of our vast half-empty continent should be yielded up for settlement by Asia's surplus hordes. Effective occupation is the only valid title by which any nation can hope to keep its territories intact.

At present our only bulwark is provided by the stalwart Sugar Workers in Queensland.

If this bulwark were to be demolished—so would inevitably happen should any retrograde movement on our part defeat Queensland's developmental progress—would overcrowded Asia miss an opportunity to denounce our White Australia policy and assert a claim to occupy a field by us abandoned.

THINK THE MATTER OUT!

AUTHORISED BY THE QUEENSLAND SUGAR INDUSTRY DEFENCE COMMITTEE 211 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE.

Uncanny Ghosts: Writing Whiteness in Marie NDiaye

Clarissa Behar

Abstract

In longtime 'colour blind' France the work of Marie NDiaye, French author and 2009 winner of the prestigious *Prix Goncourt*, hailed as one of France's best contemporary authors but at times still marketed as a sub-Saharan Francophone, is remarkable for its shifting constructions of racial whiteness. From central and invisible in NDiaye's early novels racial whiteness becomes, over a twenty-five-year long career, increasingly defamiliarised as conspicuously central and invisible, in the form of persistent metaphors that progressively incarnate as uncannily transparent ghosts, notably in the first stage of a construction of racial whiteness that unfolds in NDiaye's later novels and plays as well as the scenario for Claire Denis' film *White Material*. It is the different stages of this process that I analyse in this paper, examining the metamorphosis of racial whiteness as it is increasingly articulated in NDiaye's work. I define the interrelation between the constructs of racial whiteness available to and used by NDiaye and the changing characteristics of her versatile writing over the years. I argue NDiaye's writing is shaped by the dominant 'colour blind' constructs of race that are predicated on the invisibility of racial whiteness long prevalent in France, and that it functions as a laboratory in which these constructs are questioned and socially progressive alternatives are foregrounded as racial whiteness is de-invisibilised and articulated. This interdisciplinary inquiry into the changing constructions of racial whiteness in NDiaye's work offers a case in point in the examination of some of the strategies deployed by authors to negotiate the persistent centrality of racial whiteness to the construction of Frenchness via a literature that has to establish itself as French and therefore white in order to question dominant literary constructs of Frenchness and examine possibilities of undoing French racial nationalism.

Key Words: Colour blindness, France, Francophony, ghosts, magical, literature, misrecognition, NDiaye, whiteness.

1. The Context of NDiaye's Writing

In her 2001 article entitled *Morphing Race into Ethnicity*, Susan Koshy calls for the following:

A complex theorization of agency that can register the complicity of various Asian American groups in associating themselves with the forms and claims of whiteness, while stressing that these

affiliations were produced by a dominant group with the power to frame life conditions and chances in terms of racial choices.¹

It is this article that helped me understand how what I would call NDiaye's allegedly 'white writing' in fact betrayed - double meaning intended here - the white framework that had shaped it.

What do I mean by 'white writing'? I thought of the expression upon reading a 2009 book entitled *Écritures Blanches*.² Despite its focus on everything that could be understood as making the relevant writings 'white,' and despite its title, which I would translate as *White Writings*, it made no mention of racial whiteness. In an allegedly colour blind context, the examination of the interrelationship between writing and the 'racial formation'³ of whites is indeed taboo in France. Good writing is simply supposed to be good, and not rethought of as the type of writing that majority white France validates (as universal). NDiaye's case helps understand why, as she helps rethink 'good writing' in the light of racial whiteness.

I see NDiaye as the product of majority white France/Europe/U.S. as it manifests itself in majority white French/European/U.S. publishing houses, literary awards, academia, critics, readers and theatre-goers. Marketed as a prodigy from the start of her career, NDiaye has indeed been validated innumerable times by majority white France, and is now considered one of France's best contemporary writers. She was a teenager when her first novel was published in 1985 by one of majority white France's most respectable publishing houses, the *Éditions de Minuit*, which had a reputation for discovering and nurturing young talent. It was insisted that she wrote incredibly well. As she continued being published in majority white France's most renowned publishing houses, NDiaye was awarded prize after prize, again, we were told, because she wrote so well. We heard the same argument most recently when NDiaye was awarded the 2009 *Prix Goncourt*, France's most prestigious literary prize.

In a majority white context such as France's, it is my contention that critics' and academics' survival has long depended on their ability to produce whiteness in the form of 'good' criticism, that is, criticism on what the allegedly colour blind majority white France deems the 'right' topics, and criticism that displays what it considers the 'right' criteria and rhetoric. Such criticism must ensure the continued invisibility of racial whiteness, camouflaged if necessary as the colour blind invisibility of race.

How better to do this than to produce a tokenized high-calibre (read 'white writing') model-minoritised author who will be used to sustain a 'colour blind' myth that can ensure the continued invisibility of racial whiteness, and to teach 'other non-whites'⁴ how to behave in the cultural realm?

The argument that NDiaye should have exercised self-censorship after receiving the *Prix Goncourt* - and not declared she and her family had left

M. Sarkozy's 'monstrous'⁵ France after his election as French president - confirms my interpretation.

NDiaye testifies to majority white France's continued production of whiteness on the one hand, and may correspond to one more instance of what Ann Stoler calls France's 'colonial aphasia,'⁶ as well as to one more way for ever-changing (Omi and Winant)⁷ racial whiteness to camouflage itself as increasingly and supposedly unproblematically visible, as racial whiteness gets progressively de-invisibilised and constructed in NDiaye's work. On the other hand, I argue NDiaye may simultaneously correspond to a collective therapeutic attempt by majority-white France to address its own racism, as it creates the conditions that will allow its 'colour blindness' to be derailed and its racialisation as white to be rendered possible.

Among the results yielded in that perspective: an increased awareness on the part of majority white France that it is possible to be French and non-white, as well as a step towards the realisation that Francophonie is what Omi and Winant call a 'racial project' that is, 'simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganise and redistribute resources along particular lines.'⁸ They note that 'racial projects ... accrete over historical time to shape both the racialized social structure and our psychic structure as racial subjects.'⁹ Although NDiaye is French and was born and raised exclusively in France, I have indeed found constructions of her as a sub-Saharan Francophone African woman writer,¹⁰ as well as a Senegalese writer, as late as 2005 - a time when she was already famous as a French writer, having received major literary prizes. In an authoritative 2005 French bibliography of Francophone literature, the latest and updated edition of a bibliography originally dating back to 1988 and produced under the auspices of France's most prestigious national research institute, the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), NDiaye is indeed found under the entry for Senegal.¹¹

2. NDiaye's Writing

I identify several stages in NDiaye's writing, and read them as stages in the de-invisibilisation of racial whiteness, as a majority white readership, as well as the institutional framework producing such readership and NDiaye's work, become racialised as white.

The first stage I identify in NDiaye's writing is that of 'colour blind' narratives. This corresponds to Ndiaye's early texts, centred on characters whose whiteness is not mentioned and to whom nothing happens. Such texts are haunted by very abstract metaphors of racial whiteness, which, as they begin to name racial whiteness, also begin to render it understandable as the imperceptible abstraction of unnamed dominant norms. Such a world, in which race is invisible, is staged as deadly, dysfunctional and disappearing. By pushing white reading habits to their limits, such texts disrupt them at least as much as they confirm them, as I suggest is

the case in *Comédie Classique* (1987),¹² NDiaye's second book, which consists of one single ninety-six page-long sentence. NDiaye's transitional third book, *La Femme Changée en Bûche* (1989),¹³ establishes an allegorical setting and a separation between first and third-person point of views in the form of an omniscient narrator that is now visibilised in its invisibility - in NDiaye's previous novels it was justified as the characters' retrospective point of view - and is beginning to pave the way for the defamiliarisation of unmarked but white omniscience.

In the second of these stages the ordinary names of race are rendered conspicuously absent by a relentless proliferation of 'neo-racial'¹⁴ techniques of indirection and euphemism in the context of the systematic dehumanisation of the eponymous character Fanny in *En famille* (1990).¹⁵ As sociologist Didier Fassin has shown, this novel was written at a time when French dominant social discourse was characterised by such indirection.¹⁶ NDiaye is not reproducing it; she is actually satirically and parodically proliferating it, and in that sense is no longer producing but already defamiliarising and proto-racialising 'colour blind' whiteness.

It is at this stage that the very abstract haunting metaphors we saw in NDiaye's previous texts are beginning to incarnate as ghosts, characterising what I identify as a third stage in the construction of racial whiteness in her work. I will revisit this theme in subsequent pages.

It is NDiaye's mid-career turn to theatre that allows the interrelation between whiteness, race and theatricality to confrontationally play out in her racialisation of the dramatic space itself. This is the case, for example, with *Papa doit Manger* (2003), staged in the heart of majority white France's most prestigious cultural institution of the *Comédie Française*.

In what I temporarily identify as the last stage in the de-invisibilisation of progressively constructed racial whiteness, the racial formation of whites is finally named. This in my view marks the beginning of a positive phase in the defamiliarisation of hegemonic construction of race as non-white, the negative phase having been the apparent previous colour blindness of NDiaye's texts, specifically satirised in *En Famille*. The naming of racial whites as such allows the shift in points of view we witness in *Trois Femmes Puissantes*, NDiaye's latest novel, centred on three as such non-racialised black characters, who are now the point of view source for racialised-as-white characters seen from the outside. Now that the racial formation of whites has become nameable, the racial formations of blacks and Arabs are also named. Still no racial formation of Asians, however: they remain hegemonically invisible in NDiaye's more famous texts, while the adjective 'yellow' keeps haunting a number of them.¹⁷

3. NDiaye's Ghosts

It is at this stage of what I describe as a proto-racialisation of whiteness rendered possible by the racialisation of 'colour blindness' that we have our first full-fledged ghosts, in the form of Fanny, who turned a 'whitish shape'¹⁸ after what is described as her first death. She is again encountered, towards the end of the book, as 'the figure sans name nor likeness which, at first shivering, was now moving no more than a cadaver,'¹⁹ whom Fanny's aunt Colette can at first not see but whose transparency Colette's gaze progressively accommodates as she begins to realise it is through this form, that has painfully shown up at her door, that she now sees the doorstep grasses.²⁰ This transparent form is dwelled upon as an 'imperceptible figure ... the body ... the weightless form ... that thing which was downstairs, in the cellar ... that phenomenon ... as it were, a likeness of my niece.'²¹ Meanwhile Fanny's grandmother, who was dying at the beginning of the novel, draws conclusions as the 'spirit of the grandmother'²² after Fanny's first death.

What I read as the incarnation of hauntingly abstract racial whiteness, whose long-time repression has ensured its return, continues in NDiaye's next novel, *Un Temps de Saison* (1994). It revolves around the character Herman's quest for his wife and child turned 'avatars,'²³ that is, silent 'emanations rather than persons ... visible and graceful souls, not bodies and intellect ... gliding imperceptible forms'²⁴ who are familiar to the villagers but can only occasionally be glimpsed.

I analyse these ghosts in the framework of my reading of the magical in NDiaye, via Pierre Bourdieu, as a symbolisation of the misrecognition of racial domination - misrecognition is Bourdieu's term in *Masculine Domination*, as translated by Richard Nice.²⁵ Such misrecognition is predicated upon the misrecognition of racial whiteness that lies at the heart of French hegemonic 'colour blindness.' It leads to the misrecognition of domination itself and of the various forms it takes. The magical in NDiaye, then, is the allegorical figuration - or manifestation - of misrecognition as a paradoxical mode of intellection.

I find Bourdieu useful because of the ways in which he constructs the metaphor he uses of the magical to describe how masculine and social domination are both perceived and not fully understood by those who undergo them.

One of the ways in which Bourdieu accounts for his choice of the magical to metaphorise misrecognised symbolic domination is to describe the magical as an 'extraordinarily ordinary social relationship,'²⁶ which could translate for the ghosts as a supernaturalised one.

There is something in the way in which NDiaye's ghosts are so clichéd that reflexively and parodically draws attention to itself and triggers interpretation. Thematically and rhetorically, they strike me as extraordinarily ordinary. In *La Sorcière* (1996),²⁷ the novel NDiaye wrote right after *Un Temps de Saison*, the witch's magic fails lamentably, while we suddenly find ourselves in slapstick comedy with sentences like 'Pourquoi diable aurais-je peur de Pierrot.'²⁸

The 'eternalised' is the other clue Bourdieu gives to account for his metaphorisation of misrecognised symbolic domination as paradoxically both invisibilising and visibilising itself as the magical. It is in *La Distinction* that Bourdieu speaks of the ways in which symbolic domination invisibilises itself via different forms of naturalizing 'eternalisation.'²⁹ Eternity and ubiquity, he explains, are the results of a naturalising process. Speaking about gender, he describes such process as a magical 'dehistoricisation and eternalisation of the structures of sexual division and its attendant perceptual principles.'³⁰

The ghosts - aptly named 'avatars' in *Un Temps de Saison* - thus emblematises a key aspect of NDiaye's writing at that time, with characters endlessly erring in circles in timeless places as they become increasingly passive. Allegorically metaphorised, this eternalisation as ubiquity is also narrativised as the iterative, also a key aspect of NDiaye's writing in these books, as well as taking multiple other forms in the rest of her work, with names repeated from one book to the next or even in the same book for different characters.

The way in which NDiaye writes scenes in her texts is also an important aspect of the narrativised eternalised or vice versa, which is relationally defamiliarised.

Arnaud Rykner analyses the seeming disappearance of point of view in scenes in which he notes that novels seem to be writing themselves on their own, and which I read as signalling universalistic white mystification erasing the traces of itself, including where it is speaking from, in a gesture that marks the logical as eternalised, or the ability to reason as universalised, no longer linked to a time or a place but valid always and everywhere.³¹

The second way in which the shift to scenes could mark eternalisation stems from what Rykner again describes as the way in which scenes stop narration and mark the derailing of what Stéphane Lojkin calls the 'discursive logic of the text.'³² In *Un Temps de Saison*, such scenes feature Herman, a mathematics teacher firmly believing in the power of demonstrative logic, who becomes incapable of making sense of the world around him. In his new surroundings, Herman's reasonings lose all their power, as he progressively finds out with a growing anxiety what I call his numerous 'interro-denegations' betray. Accordingly, a crucial aspect of Herman's becoming passive is his inability to think. In the new environment Herman has allowed himself to be lost in - in a figuration, perhaps, of the way in which NDiaye emblematises majority-white France's growing attempt to come to terms with race even while it resists this - it is necessary to orient oneself differently, no longer through rational vision but through tactile intuition. NDiaye's next novel, *La Sorcière*, stages the derailing of the eternalisation of time as the witches find themselves incapable of reading the past, present or future, and thereby fail to exert what Bourdieu calls 'a social power over time.'³³

The traits Bourdieu sees as characterising the magical, then, help understand NDiaye's indirect allegorical aestheticisation of taboo racial whiteness, in what I see as the stage of the paradoxical 'misrecognition' of racial whiteness.

This helps explain the significance of the magical in NDiaye in a way that has eluded critics, who I see as having constructed a magical that allowed them to distance their racialisation as white, the question of racial whiteness and that of domination.

All this may, however, mark one more paradoxical stage in the invisibilising metamorphoses of whiteness. In place of a conclusion, I propose Omi and Winant's insistence that race is ever-changing, and their warning, as they quote Susan Koshy: 'It is not so much that we have gone beyond race as that race has gone beyond us, morphing at a speed with which academic expertise has not kept pace.'³⁴

Notes

¹ Susan Koshy, 'Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness', *Boundary 2* 28, No. 1 (2001): 156.

² Dominique Rabaté and Dominique Viart, eds., *Ecritures Blanches* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2009).

³ This is Michael Omi and Howard Winant's concept; see in particular *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 67-69. For my use of the term race, *ibid.*, 58-61.

⁴ Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

⁵ See for instance Camille Polloni and Pierre Siankowski, 'Eric Raoult s'attaque à Marie Ndiaye et Invente un «Devoir de Réserve» pour les prix Goncourt', in *Les Inrockuptibles*, 10 Nov. 2009, Accessed 1 August 2011, <http://www.lesinrocks.com/actualite/actu-article/t/41414/date/2009-11-10/article/eric-raoult-sattaque-a-marie-ndiaye-et-invente-un-devoir-de-reserve-pour-les-prix-goncourt/>.

⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France', *Public Culture* 23, No. 1 (2011): 121-156.

⁷ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 58-61.

⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 'Once More, with Feeling: Reflections on Racial Formation', *PMLA* 123, No. 5 (2008): 1567.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See for instance Jean-Marie Volet, 'Où est la Main du Diable ? Une Lecture de La Femme Changée en Bûche de Marie NDiaye', in *La Parole aux Africaines, ou l'idée de Pouvoir chez les Romanciers d'Expression Française de l'Afrique Subsaharienne* (Amsterdam / Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), 97-124.

¹¹ Virginie Coulon, *Bibliographie Francophone de Littérature Africaine (Afrique Subsaharienne)* (Vanves, France: EDICEF, 2005).

¹² Marie NDiaye, *Comédie Classique* (Paris: P.O.L., 1987).

¹³ Marie NDiaye, *La Femme Changée en Bûche, Roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1989).

¹⁴ Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Races, Nations, Classes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988).

¹⁵ Marie NDiaye, *En Famille, Roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990).

¹⁶ Didier Fassin, 'Du Déni à la Dénégation. Psychologie Politique de la Représentation des Discriminations', in *De la Question Sociale à la Question Raciale? Représenter la Société Française*, eds. Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 133-157.

¹⁷ Andrew Asibong notes that Rosie Carpe is 'oddly yellow' in 'Travel Sickness: Marie NDiaye, Hervé Guibert and the Liquidation of the White Fantasy-Subject', *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, No. 1 (2009): 118. 'Yellow' is also present in other texts by NDiaye. When asked by C. Argand in 2001 to choose a colour to describe her work, NDiaye answers 'acid yellow, lemon yellow,' in Catherine Argand, 'Marie NDiaye: Entretien,' *Lire*, April 2001, Accessed 1 August 2011, http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/marie-ndiaye_804357.html. Translation is mine. In 1997, however, NDiaye published two short stories set in China. In *Un Voyage*, I see racialisation thematised as Asian: 'Il regarda l'homme par en dessous et s'étonna de constater qu'il n'avait pas l'air d'un Chinois, sans ressembler tout à fait à un Occidental.' Marie NDiaye, *Un Voyage in Tombeau du Cœur de François II, Adeline, Un Voyage*, Thierry Fourneau, Humbert, Marie-Thérèse, and Marie NDiaye (Vendôme: CRL, 1997), 130. See also Marie NDiaye, *En Chine I et 2*, in *Dix*, Virginie Despentes, Lorette Nobécourt, Houellebecq Michel, Caroline Lamarche, Eric Faye, Marie NDiaye, Lydie Salvayre, Stéphane Zagdanski, Dominique Meens and Marie Darrieusecq (Paris: Bernard Grasset / Les Inroductibles, 1997).

¹⁸ All translations of NDiaye in this paper are mine. 'Forme... blanchâtre,' in Marie NDiaye, *En Famille, Roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990), 451.

¹⁹ 'la silhouette sans nom ni pareille qui, au début frissonnante, maintenant ne remuait pas plus qu'un cadavre'. NDiaye, *En Famille*, 305.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ 'l'imperceptible silhouette ... le corps ... [l]'impondérable forme ... la chose qui était en bas, dans le hangar ... ce phénomène ... comme une apparence de ma nièce', *Ibid.*, 305-310.

²² 'l'esprit de l'aïeule', *Ibid.*, 292.

²³ Marie NDiaye, *Un Temps de Saison, Roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1994), 89.

²⁴ 'd'émanations et non de personnes ... [d]'âmes visibles et gracieuses, non de corps et d'intellect ... formes glissantes et insensibles', *ibid.*, 97-100.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford,

California: Stanford University Press, 2001). Apart from the term ‘misrecognition’ all translations of Bourdieu in this paper are mine.

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 12.

²⁷ Marie NDiaye, *La Sorcière, Roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1996).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35. ‘Why the hell would I be afraid of Pierrot’ Both the words ‘diable’ and ‘Pierrot’ - a stock character of Italian *Commedia dell’Arte* - conjure up the world of slapstick comedy.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique Sociale du Jugement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), 78.

³⁰ Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine*, 8.

³¹ Arnaud Rykner, *Théâtres du Nouveau Roman* (Paris: José Corti, 1988), 19.

³² Stéphane Lojkine, *La Scène de Roman* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2002), 244.

³³ Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, 78.

³⁴ Omi and Winant, ‘Once More, With Feeling’, 1,567.

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Black Invasion and White Nemesis: Racialised Pirate Images and the Meaning of Changed Skin Colour

Sonja Schillings

Abstract

In Western depictions of piracy, notions of whiteness play a crucial role. This chapter argues that pirates depicted as white are associated with different forms of organised maritime violence to those depicted as non-white. Whereas white pirates tend to be understood as individuals who have consciously abandoned the civilisation they now turn against, non-white pirates tend to be constructed as a monolithic threat from the outside without any inner connection to the civilisation under attack. The chapter traces the origins of this differentiation to the legal treatment of privateers in the service of Mediterranean Barbary states. Here, the different legal conceptualisation of privateers who originate from the Barbary states and privateers that originate from European states has led to a racialised understanding of different forms of organised maritime violence. The construction of Barbary privateers in legal history is used in this chapter to contextualise contemporary political cartoons on Somali piracy. In particular, this chapter will address images that deliberately change the skin colour of the actors they depict, and show how these images transport a notion of race that is ultimately performative.¹

Key Words: Whiteness, change of skin colour, Somali piracy, Barbary corsairs, political cartoon, legal history, performative race.

1. Introduction

Pirate images in Western culture have always been multifaceted regarding the aspect of skin colour. The great variety of pirate representations and pirate areas of operation, as well as the connections of piracy and exoticism in the Western imagination, have made both white and non-white depictions of pirates commonplace. Nevertheless, piratical whiteness continues to be loaded with special meaning in Western discourse. In this chapter, I discuss how the legal history of pirate understandings led to a differentiation between white and non-white pirates in Western discourse. Specifically, I address cases in which visual artists actively change the skin colour of the pirates they depict. These artists use skin colour not to *describe* an actor, but to *characterise* her or him; they use race not as a marker of difference, but as an element of performance. They are able to do so because race, in the specific context of piracy, indeed indicates different kinds of performance.

In the following, I compare two political cartoons drawn by Joel Barbee and by Nizar Outhman in order to address the structural implications of skin colour in the construction of pirates. Both cartoons were published in internet cartoon databases during the first spate of internationally acknowledged attacks by Somali pirates in 2008. They were immediately available for an international audience and were both among the first hits for Somali pirate images on several internet search engines for over a year. As the platforms of their publication as well as their choices of visual references indicate, they are geared to be viewed by a predominantly Western audience.

Joel Barbee's cartoon² depicts three men in a wooden boat on the ocean; the word 'Somalia' is painted on the side of the boat. Two men stand, one sits with his arm resting on the boat engine. The two standing men are armed, one with an Uzi, the other with a grenade launcher. All three men wear black hats with a picture of the Jolly Roger and are naked except for loincloths around their waists. The three men look into the distance, and the man standing at the bow yells, 'Hard astern, Subu! They're hoisting the Blackwater flag!'

Nizar Outhman's cartoon³ portrays the geographic outline of Somalia as the body of a boat on the ocean, with a wooden mast, rigging and a crow's nest. One man stands on deck and looks into the distance. He wears an undershirt and a loincloth around his waist. With his left hand, he carries an Uzi; with the right, he holds a black flag with a skull and crossed breads.

These cartoons use almost identical strategies in the visualisation of Somali pirates. In both cases, the pirate ship explicitly stands for Somalia as a whole. Both artists make use of the Jolly Roger in order to identify the ship as a pirate ship; the men aboard are armed with modern weapons, yet there are pop culture references such as pirate hats and stereotypical language in one case, and sloop rigging in the other, to underline their identification as pirates for a Western audience.

What distinguishes the pictures is, most notably, the skin colour of the depicted pirates. In the cartoon by Nizar Outhman, a non-white man is shown with a flag depicting a skull and crossed breads, indicating that the cause of Somali piracy is poverty. In the cartoon by Joel Barbee, the pirates are white; in the colourised version of the cartoon, they appear to have a suntan. These pirates encounter a potential victim that is not depicted, but is said to hoist a 'Blackwater flag,' which indicates the increasing use of mercenaries for the protection of traders and implicitly questions the legitimacy of such practices. Both cartoons allow for a certain legitimacy of the pirates' actions, but they do so, I argue, in very different ways that are directly linked to the depiction of skin colour.

Typically, the representation of whiteness versus non-whiteness corresponds with underlying general notions of sameness versus otherness; piratical skin colour is no exception to this. Yet the implications of skin colour in the case of piracy go deeper, and are more specific. Definitions of piracy are generally based on constellation rather than on performance. The relationship between a piratical actor

and a state is more important to the definition than the acts of violence committed. This is most obviously exemplified by the fact that, according to current international law (most notably UNCLOS Art. 101), the definition of a violent act as piracy is dependent on the location of attack. In other words, the same act can be termed piracy or armed robbery, depending on whether it is committed on the high seas or within territorial waters. This is by far not the only possible qualification to the definition. Pirate definitions rest on a complex and ambiguous set of criteria and oppositions, and are thus all the more inclined to assign specific meaning to implicit carriers of distinction such as skin colour. However, skin colour is exceptional in this regard because its implications are deeply embedded in the legal conceptualisation of piracy itself.

2. Pirates versus Praedones: The Role of Legal History

The role of whiteness in this context derives from a long and complex development in the legal interpretation of piracy as an offense that I will only be able to touch on here. There are, in effect, two different but complementary principles predominantly used to construct actors as pirates in contemporary Western culture, and which, I suggest, are indicated by skin colour. Hugo Grotius most prominently differentiated several forms of illegitimate maritime violence. The *pirate*, according to Grotius, is a private actor who robs others without good reason; the *praedo* is the representative of a people that benefits from raids (for instance, the Vikings).⁴ These two different kinds of actors together, pirates and praedones, inform the greatest part of Western pirate images today. Pirates and praedones complement each other because they have largely been developed to assess different aspects of the same conflict: the century-long war between the Western states and the Barbary states in the Mediterranean, in which skin colour played a prominent role.

When the Antique orator Cicero famously characterised the violent maritime actor as an enemy of all, he referred to an actor that was located outside of 'the city's' influence. A definition of the pirate informed by this understanding reflects a basic rivalry of different political and legal realms; the illegitimacy of the maritime raid extends to the pirate's entire cultural and political background, and helps legitimate the destruction of this entire community. The Antique understanding has directly informed later assessment of the Barbary states. Barbary corsairs have always been associated with specific ports as well as a specific culture and religion. Despite the political power of those states - a power which often exceeded that of European states⁵ - Europeans considered the Barbary states to stand outside of the concept of statehood and outside the potential of exercising legitimate maritime violence. Instead, Barbary privateers were long considered pirates.

Significantly, the understanding of the pirate as a *member and representative of a stable community and culture* becomes racialised in the Barbary context.⁶

Barbary corsairs were described as ‘Turks,’ a term which then conflated dark skin colour, Muslim religion and images of a culture described as exotic and vaguely ‘native.’ The alternative use of the term ‘Moor,’ which was also used for Indians and for Africans in general, is even more pointed in its conflation of an alien culture and non-white skin colour. These terms generally transport a certain insecurity concerning the ways such ‘other races’ were to be conceptualised politically. These racialised terms largely served as flexible shorthand for political entities that were undoubtedly endowed with culture, religion and political organisation, but whose apparent and inherent otherness remained their most striking property for Europeans. This is why very differently organised communities, from small local tribes to the Ottoman Empire, are often sweepingly conflated in those discourses informing conceptualisations of the praedo.

The second definition of piracy, which corresponds with Grotius’ own use of the term and which is also prevalent in law today, understands pirates as homeless rogue brigades, unconnected to any community or culture. Pirates are set in antagonism to ‘every human community’⁷ expressly including, this time, the communities they have come from. This understanding of the pirate is associated with whiteness largely because of the ambiguous role of European privateers in the Barbary conflicts.

Until the mid-18th century, European states did not maintain navies. Instead, states used privateers, privately equipped military vessels that fought and plundered in their owners’ as well as in the state’s name. Privateers carried commissions by states that declared their raids legal. A pirate is basically a privateer who, first, does not act on a commission, and who also, second, commits an act of treason by attacking ships. Subtending this definition is the European observation that some European privateers did not feel obliged to remain in European service but preferred Barbary employment, which meant that they often attacked their own countrymen. Such privateers were the object of much resentment. The common expression was that they had ‘turned Turk.’ Derived from the treatment of these, as it was felt, disloyal privateers is the notion that a pirate is primarily one who *abandons* a civilisation for some alternative.

The example of these European privateers shows why the two cultural notions of piracy developed as complementary versions of each other: the Barbary corsairs were considered the offspring of an inherently predatory culture while the European rogue privateers were the result of individual treason and cultural abandonment. They operated in the same waters, they attacked the same kind of ships, and they were both called pirate, yet their cultural reference point as actors, prominently indicated by their skin colour, made an all-important difference.⁸

The Christian colonial pirates of the 17th and early 18th centuries did their part to substantiate and popularise the notion of the white pirate as an individual transgressor defined by her or his radical refusal of cultural attachments. Indeed, discourses of romantic loners and radical individualists as desirable models helped

transform the deviance of the white pirate into an example of self-determined living. As such an example, it was possible to discursively re-integrate the white pirate as a rebellious, subversive joker who, precisely by virtue of her or his deviance, stood to represent core values of modern Western societies. The understanding of non-white pirates, on the other hand, changed little. Such pirates largely remained the threatening, inherently illegitimate forces from outside.

If we assume this differentiation as relevant even today, a 'change in skin colour' in cultural representation marks a significant moment. In pirate depictions, skin colour is assigned a specific meaning. So if a figure changes skin colour, this also changes her or his position in discourse. When, for instance, a black pirate turns white in a depiction, this implies the perception that her or his non-whiteness is at odds with the kind of violence she or he represents - race and performance do not match, and have to be re-adjusted one way or the other.

3. Pirate Cartoons: Piratical Race as Political Performance

Let us transfer these observations to the aforementioned cartoons on Somali piracy. In the Outhman cartoon, the non-white pirate's crossed breads ultimately address a wrong internal to Somalia. The non-white pirate seems to be a direct result of his situation on land, and expressly operates in this context. His boat does not only stand for the country nominally; by using Somalia's state boundaries as boat outlines, Outhman depicts this pirate as Somali first, pirate second.

In the context of the legal and cultural history sketched above, such a praedobased pirate depiction allows two readings. Pirates, even those imagined in the line of praedones, are by legal definition actors who may be pursued and tried by all states. If a pirate represents an entire state, this can imply that she or he is not a pirate at all but a legitimate representative of this state and its interests. This means that the interests represented by her or him, as well as her or his position as a political representative, should be acknowledged. This pirate is not merely an aggressor but a potential partner in negotiations at eye level. This is a line of argument pursued by some earlier Somali pirate groups that called themselves 'Somali Marines' or similar names that implied the active and legitimate protection of local communities and their interests.⁹

However, the legal history derived from the Barbary corsairs also implies a second, completely different meaning. As in the historical case of the Barbary states, the representation of a state by a pirate implies that the state itself cannot claim recognition. The pirate is a pirate because the inhabitants of this territory do not have the option to declare their violence legitimate - what the pirate represents is, in effect, a lawless, stateless, empty territory. This is the line of argument implicitly pursued by the international community when it permanently refuses to acknowledge, for instance, the claims of Somaliland as a representative state, and that has enabled and repeatedly renewed the treatment of Somali territorial waters

as the high seas, thus explicitly allowing other states to exercise maritime violence in these waters.¹⁰

What does it mean, in this context, when Somali pirates are suddenly depicted as white in political cartoons? Most obviously, in the context of the legal history discussed here, these pirates are no longer considered the representatives of Somalia, but private actors. They evoke all the aspects of pirates as figures that represent modern individualism - not only their skin colour, but also their manner of speech and their hats mark the Somali pirate as 'one of us in spirit.' Barbee's white pirates could do just as well without the reference to Somalia; indeed, the reference here only seems to indicate the location of the specific conflict. The cartoon, and the criticism expressed in it, does not require any substantial embedding of its pirates in Somali culture.

What is interesting about this particular cartoon is that the pirates' whiteness, in its specific meaning of a non-attachment to a state, constitutes the key carrier of the cartoon's critical meaning. Ships in international waters are considered equivalent to the territory of their flag state; their existence as a ship with a flag is a direct expression of sovereign and legitimate statehood. Yet in this cartoon, the international ship confronted with piracy is as detached from this usual national context as the pirate is. It flies a flag that not only plays with the notion of a piratical black flag, but it quite expressly refers to an organisation that mirrors the stateless brigade character that underlies notions of white piracy. The criticism expressed in this cartoon is dependent on the artist's ability to construct pirates and mercenaries as inversions of each other. The pirates in Barbee's cartoon are thus very expressly based on 'our' white pirates of fiction, whose discursive function it is to be a dark mirror as well as a direct consequence of Western culture and society.

Cartoons depend upon the largely unambiguous meaning of the visual 'triggers' they use to characterise a particular constellation. This extends to the notion of whiteness. If Barbee's pirates had been non-white, there is a danger that the confrontation between them and Blackwater might be misunderstood as a heroisation of Blackwater as agents that hold a threatening Other at bay. Only with a white opponent can states' and traders' use of mercenaries such as Blackwater be unambiguously and obviously criticised as a threatening tendency in itself. Reversely, if Outhman's pirate had been white, the motivation of the pirate as a representative of his country would have been much less obvious. The meaning of Outhman's cartoon, then, might have changed from a victim of hunger to a vicious predator of World Food Programme ships.¹¹

4. Conclusion

This chapter has confirmed that clichés about skin colour are deeply ingrained in the structure of Western cultural and legal discourses. Depictions of pirates that change the pirates' skin colour make these hidden structural implications of race

visible for analysis, but they also do more. They treat race as something assigned to actors solely on the basis of their *performance* in a specific context - the context being, in this case, maritime piracy.

In the characterisation of a specific kind of organised violence as inherently white or non-white, skin colour and race are linked in the same way that sex and gender are linked. Despite the problematic aspects of such a conflation of race and performance, this connection hints at a potential for the productive re-attribution of the notion of race. The specific implications found in the legal constructions of piracy cannot simply be transferred to other contexts. However, they give an idea of the wide range of possible meanings of race, and testify to the possibility of a radically performance-based construction of race in contemporary Western culture.

Notes

¹ I thank Gina Marie Caison, Elisabeth Engel and Ida Jahr for their criticisms and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter.

² Joel Barbee, *Somalia Pirates*. Accessed 24 May 2011, http://www.toonpool.com/cartoons/somalia%20pirates_32057.

³ Nizar Outhman, *Somalian Pirates* (Somalia cartoon 9, search ID noun3) Accessed 24 May 2011, <http://www.cartoonstock.com/newscartoons/directory/s/somalia.asp>.

⁴ In *De Iure Praedae*, Grotius differentiates between pirates, praedones, robbers and latrones. Only the former two refer to distinct forms of illegitimate maritime violence (private vs. public seizure of spoils).

⁵ Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations. America's Place in World History* (New York 2006), 25-30.

⁶ A good example is William Ray, 'Horrors of Slavery', in Paul Baepler, ed., *White Slaves, African Masters. An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 187-204.

⁷ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1866), 71.

⁸ Alfred P. Rubin, *The Law of Piracy* (New York, NY: Transnational Publishers, 1997), 39-40 and *Ibid.*, 72-74.

⁹ Martin N. Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money. Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 103.

¹⁰ According to point seven of Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008), other states may treat the territorial waters of Somalia as if they were the high seas as soon as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) allows them to do so.

¹¹ Attacks on WFP ships are indeed not rare. Since approximately 2007, UN and WFP representatives regularly address attacks on their ships by Somali pirates.

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Writing Whiteness in an Australian Context: The Subversion of Race, Civilisation and Savagery in Richard Flanagan's Historical Novels *Gould's Book of Fish* and *Wanting*

Nina Liewald

Abstract

In his seminal study *White*, Richard Dyer discusses the tendency to regard being white as identical with being human which is often made unconsciously, referring to three major embodiments of 'whiteness': Christianity, 'race' and enterprise/imperialism. Analysing two of Flanagan's novels, *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001) and *Wanting* (2008), I suggest that the Tasmanian author picks up exactly the emblems of supposed white power and progress to invert them, thus challenging assumptions about white superiority and blurring racial categories. In order to hint at secret silences and to challenge official historical records, Flanagan uses strategies including metafiction and unreliable narration. *Gould's Book of Fish* and *Wanting* feature historical figures - often icons of white 'high' culture and tradition, such as Charles Dickens - to undermine the ideology of white supremacy, which promoted the repression of desire as the key to civilisation. Additionally, *Gould's Book of Fish* blurs borders between fiction and reality, forgery and truth, 'races,' cultures and different times and spaces. Thus, one message becomes clear: Nothing is classifiable or understood by type alone. Flanagan's questioning of master narratives and the emphasis on silenced voices is characteristic of many postmodern and postcolonial works. Yet both novels are topical in a specific context of political controversies that have been prominent in Australia during the last decades. This chapter seeks to analyse literature in the light of local debates about the validity of official historiography, undiminished privileges of the whites, about land rights, compensation and political power.

Key Words: Richard Dyer, Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*, *Wanting*, Christianity, race, imperialism, Australian historiography, counter-hegemonic discourse.

The notion of whiteness was instrumental to the founding of the Australian nation and has been propagated in literature and art for centuries. Whiteness at the same time denotes 'a normative structure, a discourse of power, and a form of identity,'¹ which is, in the Australian context, inextricably linked to colonialism, the political as well as the economic domination of the Indigenous population, dispossession and genocide.² The White Australia policy officially ended in 1973. However, the controversial public discourse surrounding events from the Mabo High Court Decision (1992) to Kevin Rudd's apology for the Stolen Generations

(2008) show the undiminished explosiveness of questions of ethnicity, and reveal that whiteness still seems to play a major role in the self-perception of many Australians. As Elder notes,

White discourses of race relations encompassed... Romanticism and the idea of the 'Noble Savage', Aboriginal people as vermin, Social Darwinism, doomed race theories, protection, the 'civilizing mission', assimilation, self-determination and reconciliation.³

All of these approaches are different, but share the perception of the white population as the centre or subject that determines the organisation of the coexistence in Australia, and the non-white inhabitants as the 'Other' or object that has to be dealt with.

Since these assumptions also inform historiographical accounts, historical novels are popular among Australian writers as a tool of questioning the official record and presenting their own interpretations of history. Richard Flanagan's novels *Gould's Book of Fish* and *Wanting* are evidence of a 'counter-hegemonic' discourse that highlights the pressing necessity in Australia (and elsewhere) to develop a new relationship to whiteness.⁴ Although the novels do not address the significance of whiteness as such, they pick up many rhetorical tropes that have been linked to this concept in order to question traditional assumptions.

1. The Lasting Power of Whiteness: Ideological Constituents according to Dyer

In his critically acclaimed study *White*, Richard Dyer criticises the ongoing dominance of white people, which suggests that being white is identical to being human. This implies that their power 'reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill ... because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.'⁵ Dyer considers whiteness to be embodied in three main elements: Christianity, 'race' and enterprise/imperialism. Christianity is connected to a split between body and mind and the need for the repression of desire. Whereas men might suffer from an internal struggle between body and spirit, women are expected to be passive and pure. The author does not argue that whiteness is constitutive of Christianity, but highlights the long-standing alliance between Christianity, imperialism and racist doctrines, from the days of the crusades to the present day. Concerning the factor 'race,' Dyer primarily discusses the racism inherent in genealogical and biological classifications, anxieties concerning miscegenation, and the supposed dichotomy of civilisation vs. savagery. Race is presented as being a much stronger unifying force and determinant of identity than class. White people were often attributed more intelligence and restraint regarding their dark impulses, which was seen as an emblem of superiority. Accordingly,

they were held to be most suitable for leadership and enterprise. Energy, will power, and far-sightedness were said to form the perfect basis for economic success, nation-building and social progress.⁶

Despite all talks about Australia as a ‘multicultural nation in Asia,’ the long-standing Australian loyalty to British policies, renewed debates about an Australian ‘core culture’ and the reluctance to fully embrace national independence, as the referendum in 1999 demonstrated, show an enduring orientation towards the British ‘mother country.’⁷ The connection to Britain is still central to the development of Australia’s national identity.⁸ The assumed superiority of Christianity, as asserted by Dyer, was invigorated by anti-Muslim sentiments in the wake of 9/11. Furthermore, right-wing politics gained new respectability with political movements such as Hanson’s *One Nation* and *Pauline’s United Australia Party*.

2. Gould’s *Book of Fish* - ‘A Piece of Kitsch that Has Nothing to Do with History’

While other recent historical novels, such as Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang*, have been criticised for reinvigorating ‘a core myth of Anglo-Australian identity without genuinely questioning its centrality or interrogating the elisions and exclusions upon which it is predicated,’ Flanagan’s novel addresses these possible elisions.⁹ Central to the plot is the historical figure of William Buelow Gould, a forger, condemned to serve 49 years on Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) and later on Sarah Island, which was the end of the line for reoffending criminals in Australia. The main storyline is Gould’s secret journal, his fictional autobiography that illustrates the brutal war against the Tasmanian Aboriginals and his life as a taxonomic painter for the science-obsessed British authorities. Step by step, Flanagan not only subverts characteristics of supposed white superiority but casts doubt on the validity of white historiographical records as such.

Gould’s story is one of brutality, torture and arbitrariness. Religion is dismantled as hypocrisy, characterised by a lack of compassion and self-restraint. A case in point is the protagonist’s recollection of his childhood in a poorhouse, where he used to be sexually abused by an old priest. Furthermore, in the colony, Quaker missionaries rape native women. Even though the novel features some good white minor characters, rape and slaughter are omnipresent.

Moreover, as Ashcroft points out, race has long been connected to language, linking the perception of language evolution to Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest, establishing a distinct hierarchy from primitive (‘black’) to highly developed (‘white’) language.¹⁰ In this context it is telling that the commandant’s staccato sentences border on nonsense and show no eloquence or sophistication, even though his skin stands out due to its ‘utter whiteness.’ The figure of the commandant is a ‘syphilitic megalomaniac whose lunatic plans to recreate the glories of the Enlightenment on Sarah Island bring the community to the brink of

implosion.’¹¹ The supposed white rationality produces only chaos and terror. Taxonomy, as a long-standing means of racist policies, is caricatured in the fate of the surgeon Lemprière. In his endeavour to be admitted to the Royal Academy of Science, he classifies each new species in Australia, and finally falls victim to the very discipline he advocates. He is eaten alive by his pet pig, and his skull is misclassified as Aboriginal and presented as evidence for the ‘Indigenous degeneracy.’ Elements of 19th-century rationalism are rendered absurd. *The Observer* critic MacFarlane points out that

Like Gould himself, the fish which he paints and admires represent all that frustrates the Enlightenment rage for order. Throughout the novel, fish are described slipping between elements, timescales, size and species. They exemplify a happy mobility between categories, a refusal to be bounded by arbitrary partitions.¹²

Especially the myth of economic success, social progress and leadership through far-sightedness and intelligence is rendered ridiculous in *Gould*. The narrator seems to be a clever trader, but he only trades in lies. Furthermore, his ‘enterprise’ grants him no independence. Despite his skin colour, he is a prisoner and is treated like a slave. All attempts to foster the development of Sarah Island, like setting up a railway line or building a Mahjong Hall, betray the insanity and megalomania of the British officials and are economic failures. It is worth pointing out that the narrative structure artfully mirrors the chaos on the plot level. Just as there is no progress on the island, there is also no linear storyline. Nothing in *Gould* suggests control: the story consists of a conglomerate of confusing, surreal episodes that are as difficult to grasp for the reader as the slippery fish are for Gould’s desperate attempts at painting. Additionally, the protagonist is a highly unreliable narrator; he constantly contradicts himself, leaves things out, jumps in the story and casts doubt on everything.

The fact that both narrators are forgers challenges the truthfulness of their whole account. Ironically, Gould finds his antagonist in an even greater forger: Jorgen Jorgensen, the Sarah Island archivist who invents the official records, which ‘would accord with expectation & not reality.’¹³ The chronicled reality drastically contradicts the insanity of the world presented by Gould and therefore undermines the above-mentioned link between whiteness and ordinariness.

3. *Wanting* - Australia as an ‘Absurd, Upside Down, Bastard Imitation of England’

Wanting combines different plots, set in London as well as in the new settler colony of Van Diemen’s Land in the 1840s. The settings invite a comparison of the British characters’ views on civilisation, Enlightenment ideas and ‘British values’

with the disillusioning reality of these notions as they are transplanted to Australia. Flanagan writes the story of Mathinna, an Aboriginal girl who lives in George Augustus Robinson's missionary settlement and is later on adopted and abandoned by the new Governor, Sir Franklin, and his wife Lady Jane. Secondly, it is Lady Jane's story, the story of an infertile woman longing for prestige and love. And thirdly, it is a tale about Charles Dickens' life and work in London, which is presented as a place of private unhappiness, social misery and the repression of desire. This sub-plot already indicates what the white characters hold to be the core of Englishness: The ability to control one's passions is viewed as the ultimate distinction between civilisation and savagery. However, the supposedly savage behaviour of the Indigenous people is never described as such. Differing from many postcolonial novels of first contact, the focus neither lays on the deprivation or sophistication of the Aborigines but on the behaviour of the white characters.

In particular, the good intentions of Christian missionaries in the new colonies are mocked. Robinson's civilising mission that ends in the supposed 'extinction' of the Tasmanian Aborigines, may be partly motivated by pity and compassion, but is still driven by a lack of understanding, certain sadistic impulses, the prospect of promotion and a blind belief in religious phrases that are learned by heart but not realised. Religion is no salvation for anyone, not even for the white characters, who suffer from the repression of their wishes and desires.

The image of white chastity and controlled sexuality is equally subverted in the novel, which is especially visible in Mathinna being raped by the governor, which undermines the artificial dichotomy between civilisation and savagery. Sir John Franklin is initially described as an emblem of English virtue:

His indomitable character, his gentle but inexorable will, his remarkable capacity for leadership, his extraordinary and heroic contribution to Arctic exploration, his embodiment of all that was most virtuous in English civilisation.¹⁴

Statements like this are clearly contradicted by the plot that shows Franklin to be a man of weak character, indecision and ignorance. Every imported demonstration of 'high culture,' such as the soirées on philosophical topics, seems out of place in the face of an ongoing bloody war and the brutality of the convict system. The same applies to Charles Dickens' and Lady Jane's later endeavour to clear the governor, who has gone missing during an expedition, of any suspicion about cannibalism. Even post mortem a picture of 'British moral superiority' has to be defended, since

The distance ... is the extent we advance from desire to reason ... The convict, the Esquimau, the savage: all are enslaved ... by their passions ... A man like Sir John is liberated from such by his civilised and Christian spirit.¹⁵

Ironically, wanting always stands in the way of this spirit and often wins the upper hand, even though control and discipline seem to be the only way of succeeding in this society. While Dyer underlines the predominance of whiteness as the most important defining principle, determining people's opportunities in life, Flanagan highlights the equal importance of class. Not only Robinson, as a simple carpenter turning into a missionary in the hope of social upward mobility, and Lady Jane, marrying for reasons of money and status, seem to be possessed by this factor. Another case in point is the character of Charles Dickens, whose restraint of passion is not a sign of his Christian ideals but an economic necessity. As father of nine children 'only such severe disciplining of his heart allowed him his success, prevented him from falling into the abyss like his debtor father, like his wastrel brothers; from becoming, finally, the savage he feared himself to be.'¹⁶ On the whole, whiteness is not presented as the 'explicit and implicit cultural ideal, of beauty, desirability, virtue, purity' that it was long held to be.¹⁷ The trope of white leadership turns out to be an illusion. Neither Robinson nor Franklin possesses any leadership skills such as far-sightedness and willpower. They both fail in their respective enterprises. Science, embodied in Franklin's journeys of exploration and Robinson's taxonomic studies, is exposed as completely useless, and in Robinson's case also as brutal and inhuman.

4. Official Historiography and its Literary Interpretation

'We - our histories, our souls - are ... in a process of constant decomposition and reinvention.'¹⁸ Flanagan's background-story protagonist, Sid Hammet, is convinced of this. Nothing is written in stone, neither histories, nor specific concepts of categorisation and identity. Historical novels employ many different strategies to refer to an official historiography.¹⁹ According to the criteria Nünning set up for the categorisation of historical novels, works range on a scale from:

The "documentary historical novel" which is connected to reality through a large number of references to the past as it is known, to factual source material, and tries to hide its fictionality ... [to] "historiographical metafiction" which is often highly counterfactual and emphasizes the narrative process through meta-narrative self-referentiality.²⁰

In this respect, Flanagan's works come closest to the latter extreme. The author bluntly exposes the fictional nature of his accounts. Particularly in *Gould* the style of narration and the language used are highly artificial, the story is non-linear and contradictory. By foregrounding the fictionality of his works, Flanagan nullifies any possible truth-claims and blurs the borders between fact and fiction, truth and forgery.

Furthermore, he underlines that every story has a purpose, following the needs of its audience. As the main plot shows, white dominance in Australia was not achieved by white supremacy of any kind, but rather by violence and dispossession, but how to deal with this past when so much guilt is involved? This problem manifests itself in the so-called 'History Wars' that were prominent in the 1990s and still play a significant role in public discourse.²¹ The initial debate between Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey about the extent of frontier conflict and the question of white guilt was publicly exploited, drawn on by various prime ministers and finally aggravated by Windshuttle's book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.²² The ongoing discussion about "'Black Armband'" versus "'White Blindfold'" history,²³ is a controversy about shame, the acknowledgment of national responsibility, national identity and pride, but also about ongoing white political and economic dominance and the question of reparation and land rights. In mixing the use of real historical events and figures with a fictional plot that contradicts official records, Flanagan presents historical accounts as constructed, possibly misleading and determined by perspective.

5. Conclusion

Human desires and the inability to control them are a central theme of Flanagan's works. The irrationality and cruelty of the world at display is striking. Regarding their content and structure both novels indicate the variety of undocumented histories and voices. By means of an extremely artificial style of writing, the author hints at hypocrisies, and adds a surreal quality to a supposedly historical setting, which makes us realise that sometimes forgery and truth cannot be distinguished.²⁴ Flanagan uses the potential of historical fiction, as well as the application of fluid models of time and identity, to question the truth-claim of official historiography.²⁵ We as readers have to be aware that whiteness is still present in postcolonial states, in the form of 'cultural and ideological apparatuses that continue to reflect the values of the colonial regime, a national language or religion, educational system, government infrastructure' and the like.²⁶ The central issue is how we are able to deal with this and to which extent we question our own assumptions and privileges.

Notes

¹ Vron Ware and Les Back, *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 13.

² With the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 the 'White Australia policy' was introduced by means of the Immigration Restriction Act. Only since 1967 Aboriginal people have been able to obtain Australian Federal citizenship.

³ Catriona Elder, *Dreams and Nightmares of a White Australia. Representing Aboriginal Assimilation in the Mid-twentieth Century* (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2009), 20-21.

⁴ Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003). Richard Flanagan, *Wanting* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010).

⁵ Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 9-10.

⁶ The whole previous paragraph summarises Dyer's ideas on this topic in Dyer, *White*, 1-40.

⁷ For valuable comments on the current debate about the elements of a possible Australian 'core culture' as an ethnic and moral entity, please see Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature. Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 76-78.

⁸ For an illuminating outline of the changeable relationship between Britain and Australia see Ruth Feingold, 'From Empire to Nation: The Shifting Sands of Australian National Identity', in *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*, eds. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 61-71.

⁹ Russell West-Pavlov, 'Who's Australia, or, Whose Australia?', in *Who's Australia? - Whose Australia? Contemporary Politics, Society and Culture in Australia*, eds. Russell West-Pavlov et al. (Trier: WVT, 2005), 3-10.

¹⁰ Cf. Bill Ashcroft, 'Language and Race', in *The Language, Ethnicity and Race Reader*, eds. Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 37-53.

¹¹ Alex Clark, 'In the Hands of Madmen. Alex Clark on a Postmodern Bouillabaisse of a Book', review of *Gould's Book of Fish*, by Richard Flanagan, *The Guardian*, last modified 1 June 2002, Accessed 23 May 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/jun/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview23>.

¹² Robert MacFarlane, 'Con Fishing', *The Observer*, last modified 26 May 2002, Accessed 20 May 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/may/26/fiction.features1>.

¹³ Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*, 284-285

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *Wanting*, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁷ Alfred J. López, 'Introduction: Whiteness after Empire', in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. López (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 1-30.

¹⁸ Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*, 2.

¹⁹ Many novelists hint at the circumstance that historiography itself is the result of a subjective process of selection, ideological implication and contextualisation, and thereby question historical truth.

²⁰ Jochen Petzold, *Re-imagining White Identity by Exploring the Past: History in South African Novels of the 1990s* (Trier: WVT, 2002), 29.

²¹ For an elaborate discussion of the debates please see Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

²² Windshuttle asserts in this volume that events like mass killings that occurred during the bloody frontier conflict in Tasmania were rather ‘sporadic than systemic’. Cf. Keith Windshuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History. Volume One: Van Diemen’s Land 1803-1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002), 3.

²³ For an interesting introduction to the economic and political interests of diverse public agents please see Patrick Brantlinger, “‘Black Armband’ versus “‘White Blindfold’” History in Australia’, *Victorian Studies* (Summer 2004): 655-674.

²⁴ As Wiese notes, ‘It is exactly this acknowledgement of the failure of mastery over an ungraspable past - established through literary means - that creates a space in which unvoiced, silent or silenced difference might emerge.’ Doro Wiese, ‘Crimes of Historiography, Powers of the False, and Forces of Fabulation in Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish*’, in *Deleuzian Events. Writing History*, eds. Hanjo Berressem and Leyla Haferkamp (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2009), 356-370.

²⁵ These characteristics are emblematic of many postmodernist novels. Cf. Ryan S. Trimm, ‘The Times of Whiteness: or, Race Between the Postmodern and the Postcolonial’, in *Postcolonial Whiteness. A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. López (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 231-253.

²⁶ López, ‘Introduction: Whiteness after Empire’, 13.

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The White Man's Microphone: Hugh Tracey, Types of Whiteness and African Music

Paulette Coetzee

Abstract

Metropolitan whiteness may tend towards invisibility; colonial whiteness often declares itself as 'spectacle.'¹ The exercise of colonial power requires various agents. I focus on five types of whiteness in Africa: explorers, missionaries, traders, settlers and administrators. Explorers are most directly concerned with knowledge, missionaries with salvation, traders with profit, settlers with place and administrators with power. Dependent for its privilege on the proximity and labour of a black majority, whiteness in Africa also exhibits a preoccupation with its own ideas of blackness. The subject of this chapter may be identified with all five types of whiteness and made his name representing blackness. Hugh Tracey (1903-1977) is best known for recordings of traditional African music, housed at the institution he founded, the International Library of African Music (ILAM). Based in apartheid South Africa, Tracey undertook extensive expeditions in central, East and southern Africa during the pre-independence period, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From these trips he compiled the largest single collection of its kind and disseminated his findings through LP records. As a charismatic public figure with a background in radio broadcasting, Tracey worked tirelessly to promote his subject, and, thus, his own status as expert and interpreter of African tradition. Stressing the social importance of indigenous culture for African communities, he also argued for the promotion of traditional music to improve 'race relations' and facilitate smoother administration within apartheid and colonial contexts. This chapter examines Tracey's performance of various types of whiteness in providing spaces for, while presuming the right to limit and define, blackness.

Key Words: Whiteness, blackness, Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe, colonialism, apartheid, music, tradition, modernity.

Metropolitan whiteness may assume the mantle of universality without reflection. By contrast, colonial whiteness can be prone to overt self-assertion. These generalisations imply a straightforward contrast, of colonial whiteness as marked and overtly *visible* versus the *invisibility* often said to characterise whiteness at home in the West. Yet Satya P. Mohanty argues that 'colonial rule generated a dominant image of the white man as spectacle' while also revealing

another, seemingly contradictory imperative: the white man as simultaneously invisible, or at least capable of invisibility in a

context that renders him eminently spectacular. The public sphere in the colonial context seems to contain within it both of these opposed modes of existence, modes reserved for and articulated as the imaginary of the white male colonial ruler: eminent visibility, the ability to command respect and fear in the subject race, on the one hand, and on the other, the ability to blend in, to be no different from the colonized and their society.²

He goes on to suggest that 'invisibility and spectacularization' may in fact be 'complementary imperatives,' employed 'to comprehend and rule.'³ Mohanty's analysis suggests a level of self-consciousness and strategic deployment by whiteness of visibility and/or invisibility as means towards management of colonial social spaces. It also highlights a performative element, active in either mode. The ability to 'blend in' with the colonised invites imperial approbation only if selective and controlled, a disguise to be adopted or dropped at will. Kipling's character Kim, Mohanty argues, provides a fictional ideal of such invisibility, as a 'white boy ... cunning and beguiling enough to outdo and fool the natives, yet always implicitly and securely on the side of Empire.'⁴

If both modes are performative, to whom are these performances addressed? In either case, I would argue, the audience is two-fold; colonial whiteness performs both for racialised others *and* for itself. Whiteness seeks to 'comprehend and rule,' in Mohanty's words, or to comprehend *in order* to rule, but it must also be *seen* to 'comprehend and rule.'⁵ In visible mode, whiteness performs itself, displaying its own culture as symbols of superiority. Under the cloak of invisibility, it acquires - or creates - knowledge of others to affirm and maintain its rule. Discoveries may be made incognito, but must be disseminated (as written or performed texts) to be applied and receive acknowledgement, to rule and be seen to rule. Representation of the colonised and their cultures may thus also be a spectacle, by and for whiteness.

The concept of visibility/invisibility draws attention to ways of operation but says little about the kinds of whites who maintain colonial spaces. Since colonies are complex enterprises, they require a variety of agents. For my purposes, I have chosen five generalised types of African whiteness: explorers, missionaries, settlers, traders and administrators. Each of these types has a major preoccupation. The explorer is most closely associated with knowledge and the missionary with salvation. The settler, meanwhile, directed towards a colonial future rather than a return to the metropole, is concerned with a particular place and questions of ownership and identity in relation to it. The trader is interested in economic profit, pure and simple, while the administrator (or archivist) is occupied with political power, control of people and the official record.

These types have historical origins in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, but they have contemporary equivalents - explorers become experts or academics,

missionaries become NGO or development/aid workers, settlers turn into white citizens and traders into more sophisticated capitalists. Administrators become known as politicians or business managers. Some types have attracted more attention than others; explorers and missionaries tend to feature prominently in postcolonial analysis, while settlers are important in South African English literary studies, for obvious reasons. Traders and administrators often lurk in the background, while the more glamorous types take centre stage. While all five serve colonial interests, their specific purposes may come into conflict. They are idealised simplifications and should be identified with fields of whiteness rather than with individuals. Indeed, one person may play several or all of these roles, as does my subject, Hugh Tracey.

Tracey was born in 1903 in England and died in 1977 in Johannesburg. He lived most of his life in South Africa following an early period farming and mining in Zimbabwe, where he first developed an interest in traditional African music. After a decade in radio broadcasting, he moved into African music research full-time, initially with financial backing from Gallo Records and then with support from the mining industry, and founded the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in 1954. Tracey undertook recording expeditions over large parts of southern, East and central Africa, compiled the largest single archive of its kind, published recordings in two major collections (*The Sound of Africa* and *The Music of Africa* series) and became known internationally as an expert promoter of his subject, through LP records, books, articles, broadcasts and personal appearances.

Tracey left an unfinished autobiography, in which he identifies himself, firstly, as an explorer. A typescript draft of the autobiography has an alteration to the title, from 'The Sound' to 'The Discovery of African Music.'⁶ The first choice echoes that of Tracey's largest collection of recordings but could suggest an exclusive focus on African music. By contrast, the revised title introduces himself, since discoveries require discoverers. It proclaims the explorer's assumed right to ownership and the centrality of 'discovery' to self-representation, in naming his achievement before his own name. The first section of the typescript has the subheading 'A River Left For Me' and begins with an anecdote from the nineteenth century. Thomas Baines, arriving rather late in the imperial game, had hoped for one more river to discover; Tracey claims African music as *his* river. (It is appropriate that Tracey should begin his autobiography with exploration, since exploration is always overtly textual. Explorers must return triumphant and report their discoveries, or else they remain simply travellers.)

In a 1961 paper, Tracey identifies himself with a colonial lineage and asserts a contemporary application for exploration. He argues that

Exploration today in Africa is no longer geographical, it is geneological [sic]. It is not obvious, it is among the intangibles. It is not so much ethnological as psychological. It is here, in the

realm of psychology, that we must look for the essential African and his personality.⁷

In marking exploration as 'psychological' rather than 'ethnological,' Tracey ambiguously admits 'the African' to the universal category of psychology, hitherto generally reserved for the white Westerner, while reifying the 'African and his personality' as a single unit awaiting Western discovery. The use of the singular erases complexity. Elsewhere, however, he recognises social variety in abundance and insists on specificity.

The *Catalogue* to the *Sound of Africa* series, as a whole, illustrates an awareness of complexity;⁸ Tracey's article 'The Social Role of African Music' provides further examples.⁹ In these and other works, he describes music as always already changing rather than static and describes the musical effects of colonialism as having resulted in (negative and positive) blendings of African tradition and Western modernity. Nonetheless, the 'African' recurs in the singular, time and again, often as the subject of unflattering pronouncements such as 'the African is pathetically incapable of defending his own culture.'¹⁰ The lonely 'African' contrasts with the plural form for the authoritative voice of whiteness: 'we have found that the African is pathetically incapable.'¹¹ In a symbolic reversal of actual population demographics, 'the African' is outnumbered on his own cultural ground and found wanting with regard to its upkeep. (Needless to say, Tracey's 'African' is gendered as male.)

As an explorer, Tracey affirms the value of his 'discovery' for humankind. Since this discovery is not geographical, botanical or zoological, but cultural, recognition of its value is a recognition of Africans' creativity and artistry. Granting Africans valuable cultural products is one thing, granting them knowledge of their own products another. Whiteness portrays itself as central to knowledge production and reception. African musicians are objectified as part of the discovery, requiring Western representation and dissemination - the production and circulation of texts as cultural capital within established discourses, or, in Tracey's words, 'recordings, research and publication'¹² - in order to be brought to the light of knowledge.

What of our other types? The missionary is waiting impatiently in the wings, insisting that he should have had first place. And poor Hugh Tracey is turning in his grave at the thought of being identified with missionaries, whom he attacked as destroyers of African culture (with good reason). I could substitute the term 'development' for 'mission.' But, besides the inconvenience of not having a single word for an agent of development, I wish to emphasise the (neo)colonial continuity between ideologies and actors of Christian mission and secular development. (Tracey provides an extreme example of development-type thinking at work. I am not suggesting that those who call themselves development practitioners today share his attitudes or forms of expression. However, a growing body of scholarship

examines the racial and colonial underpinnings of development discourse.) The salvation sought by Tracey as missionary is not spiritual, but social. It aims to facilitate a healthy and compliant conversion to modernity, drawing on the strengths of indigenous tradition as balm for alienating psychological ills. It is premised on the assumption of inequality - for the present at least - and the need for more enlightened or developed tutelage. As Tracey argued in a 1966 interview,

The raison d'être of our work is to build up the essential true character of African people so they will be recognised as men in a world of men - more particularly recognised as twentieth century men.¹³

Or, as he wrote more bitterly and blatantly inside the back cover of his copy of a book by E.R. Braithwaite in about 1975,

The tragedy is perhaps that some people of negroid origin are finding the competition of the technical world too great a struggle & [sic] blame their pigmentation. Their hopes and natural desires can only be assuaged by the benefits and comforts others can provide for them at present. This attitude must inevitably lead to bitter jealousy which they, & they only, can overcome. Thank heaven that millions of 'blacks' are better equipped to cope with the realities of the paradox that all men are not created equal. They need appropriate skills of mind & philosophy to acquire & maintain those satisfactions which are best suited to their particular needs.¹⁴

Less offensively, Tracey writes in his autobiography that his interest in African music was motivated by the aim of 'helping African musicians and dancers to present their activities to wider audiences' from its earliest days.¹⁵ For Tracey and other missionaries, however, Africans must be helped in ways that ultimately serve whiteness.

The missionary message of salvation is not only aimed at Africans, but addressed to colonial and apartheid administrators and industrialists (or traders). In a fundraising address to 'members of the International African Institute, Royal Empire Society and Royal African Society,' published in *African Affairs* in 1954, Tracey rhetorically asks 'how could the study of music ... have any bearing ... upon the general run of practical administration?' and answers his question with the statement that '*home-made African music is one of the most important of all the integrating factors in their social life.*'¹⁶ He also argues that traditional-style 'songs of Africa' reveal 'solid ... common sense' at 'the heart of the people' and refute 'the popularly held impression that all Africans are seething with political

agitation and unrest.¹⁷ The clear implication is that promotion of traditional music will protect the masses from the influence of 'a small but vocal section of the African public who may ... be able to coerce the simple-minded into supporting their cause.'¹⁸

Tracey's textual self-performance foregrounds a missionary imperative alongside, or just after, the exploratory aim of discovering, preserving and advancing knowledge. Recent biographical accounts and promotions of Tracey's legacy, by ILAM staff and other enthusiasts, also tend to emphasise these two highly visible types, using more contemporary terms such as 'research' and community 'outreach' or 'engagement.' (Examples of commemorative Tracey biography may be seen in an exhibition currently on display at the Albany Museum, Grahamstown.)

Less overtly visible roles, of trader and administrator, come to the fore in the enormous collection of Tracey's official and personal correspondence, which illustrates the breadth of his personal business interests and the pragmatic manner in which he interacted with commercial, government and academic interests in the establishment and management of ILAM and its international reputation in testing circumstances during the independence and apartheid years. These latter roles, I would argue, are less heroic and less susceptible to the teleological form of auto/biographical narrative, which mirrors a successful *Bildungsroman*. They are marked more by contingency and less by destiny. There are suggestions in the autobiography of some conflict at work in this regard, for example where a diary entry written years earlier, indicating uncertainly about pursuing African music as a career, is first included and then erased from the draft.

With regard to Tracey's interactions with both government and industry, it is interesting to note a plan intended to allow ILAM to become financially self-sustainable. This involved selling memberships of the record library to companies and government departments employing large numbers of black workers and supplying records of traditional music to be piped into workplaces and hostels. Mines were the largest customers and the scheme showed promise for a time, with ILAM running courses for 'African Welfare Officers' in selecting records, managing libraries and using equipment. It ultimately failed, due mainly to opposition from workers who preferred popular music and objected to selection of music on ethnic grounds.

Placed uneasily between the idealistic figures of exploration and mission and the utilitarian representatives of administration and trade, is the problematic figure of the settler. Tracey does not foreground this type in the same way in which he identifies himself with exploration and development, yet settler identity is central to his performance of whiteness. His letters evince a growing attachment to place in the particular, especially his beloved Roodepoort farm, Saronde. It is, I believe, Tracey's role as settler which explains his insistence on keeping ILAM within apartheid South Africa, despite all the complications this brought for the pan-

African and international aspects of its work. (South African music forms only a part of its collections; the majority of recordings were made elsewhere.)

The most frequent interpersonal contacts between white African settlers and indigenous Africans occur in hierarchical contexts which are intrinsically violent, yet sometimes also affectionate or even intimate. The Africans with whom Tracey forms the closest, most enduring attachments are all personal servants. Nonetheless, it must be said, photographs and accounts of his recording trips, and above all the recordings themselves, attest to an ability to establish rapport with musicians which seems to transcend colonial hierarchies, even if only in the moment.

This chapter forms a small and condensed part of a much larger project. I have intentionally foregrounded racist and ethically problematic aspects of Tracey's life-work which are under-emphasised in the contemporary resurgence of interest within ethnomusicological and world music circles. I hope I have also conveyed a sense of Tracey's relevance as an example for critical whiteness studies - at once highly typical of his late-colonial era and, in some respects, very unusual. The written format of this chapter provides little space for the last part of its title: 'African music.' I hope to go some way in redressing that imbalance with a few samples from the rich and varied collection Tracey recorded. Elsewhere, I focus more on the authors, or composers, and performers of these sound-texts, the potential of Tracey's archive as source for narratives of resistance and reclamation, and engagements with his work by African scholars.

Notes

¹ Satya P. Mohanty, 'Drawing the Color Line: Kipling and the Culture of Colonial Rule', in *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 313.

² *Ibid.*, 314-315.

³ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 319-320.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁶ Hugh T. Tracey, 'The Discovery of African Music: Autobiography by Hugh Tracey: Part I', unpublished typescript (c.1977).

⁷ Hugh T. Tracey, 'The Importance of African Music in the Present Day', *African Affairs* 60, No. 239 (1961): 156.

⁸ Hugh T. Tracey, *Catalogue: The Sound of Africa Series*, Vol. 1 & 2, (Roodepoort: ILAM, 1973).

⁹ Hugh T. Tracey, 'The Social Role of African Music', *African Affairs* 53, No. 212 (1954): 234-241.

¹⁰ Hugh T. Tracey, 'The State of Folk Music in Bantu Africa', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 6 (1954): 32.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Tracey, 'Discovery of African Music', 2.

¹³ Hugh T. Tracey, unpublished transcript of interview by Tim Rossi, November 1966.

¹⁴ Hugh T. Tracey, handwritten marginalia in "*Honorary White*": *A Visit to South Africa* by E.R. Braithwaite (London: The Bodley Head, 1975).

¹⁵ Tracey, 'Discovery of African Music', 2.

¹⁶ Tracey, 'Social Role', 235, original italics.

¹⁷ Hugh T. Tracey, 'Editorial', *African Music* 2, No. 1 (1958): 1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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A Transnational Whiteness? New Middle Classes, Globalism and Non-European ‘Whiteness’

Sedef Arat-Koç

Abstract

While there is already a large and growing literature on whiteness in the West, especially in the United States, there is very little critical analysis of whiteness in non-Western, non-European contexts. Drawing on insights in critical whiteness studies that approach whiteness not as a racial essence, but rather as a socially constructed category based in historical contingencies of society, politics and culture, this chapter explores the emergence of what I characterise as ‘transnational whiteness’ in non-European, and often non-white, contexts in recent decades, in a context of neoliberal, globalising capitalism. With examples from cases, such as India and Turkey, the chapter analyses the ways in which ‘whiteness’ has become part of the social identity and defines the worldview and politics of the new middle classes. Associated with new consumption patterns, aesthetic choices and lifestyle patterns modelled after middle classes in the West, but also involving a growing social, political and cultural distancing from the less affluent and marginalised majority in their own countries, we can refer to a process of ‘whitening’ among the middle classes. Identifying with first-worldness and an emerging global modernity, the ‘white’ aspirations, lifestyles and identification of the middle classes are significant as they have significant implications for social fragmentation in their countries, as well as for policy at local, national and international levels.

Key Words: Transnational whiteness, non-European whiteness, globalism, new middle class.

If global capitalism is aggressively *de-territorializing*, moving over outwards in a process of ceaseless expansion and furiously tearing down barriers to capital accumulation, then colonial modernity is intrinsically *territorializing*, forever installing partitions between “us” and “them.”¹

1. Introduction: Towards a Transnational Whiteness

I want to propose that in the present context of neoliberal globalised capitalism, we may be witnessing a new form of ‘whiteness,’ one beyond the colour line. This is a form of ‘whiteness’ that is enacted by non-European and non-white actors. In a unipolar world, post-socialism and post-Third World, this ‘whiteness’ is associated with a transnational bourgeois identity, with being on the side of winners in globalised capitalism; or at least an aspiration to, and identification with belonging

in a new, global capitalist modernity. This conception of whiteness serves as a category of distinction *within* as well as between nations and regions.

Focusing on whiteness outside Europe and European settler colonies, the approach of the chapter to whiteness differs from studies which assume that 'white' is equivalent to an essential 'race' or specific ethnicities. Informed by critical whiteness studies, whiteness in this study is seen as socially constructed and a relational category, assumed to reside not in nature but in the contingencies of politics and culture.

Even though racial (or phenotypical) whiteness may continue to be of some significance in the cases of non-European whiteness, there is more emphasis on, what can be called, cultural whiteness. This is when 'culture,' conceptualised as *race-like* difference, becomes the language of political economy and geopolitics. If we see race as a technology of power and as involving 'historic repertoires and cultural, spatial and signifying systems that stigmatise and depreciate one form of humanity for the purposes of another's health, development, safety, profit and pleasure,' it is conceivable to see race-logic and race-like language applying to the exclusion, stigmatisation and subordination of people *beyond*, as much as *along* the colour line.²

Diverging from some of the literature on whiteness in postcolonial contexts, I suggest that whiteness in non-European contexts cannot simply be reduced to the effects of colonialism, to a colonial leftover. While the psychological legacy of colonialism may be of some relevance, I argue that it is also important to look into whiteness as a category of distinction, power and superiority *within* non-European societies; and the ways in which whiteness may become an active strategy by some groups to claim power and superiority over others in the same society. As Bonnett argues in his analysis of white identities in Latin America, '[w]hiteness does not merely haunt contemporary Latin America like some disreputable ghost. It is also part and parcel of today's symbolic economy.'³ Rather than seeing whiteness as 'simply reflecting the imposition of Western values on non-Western societies,' Bonnett suggests that we should think about the ways in which whiteness is 'actively interpreted and translated' as determined by power relations *within* the post-colonial states, on the one hand, and power relations *between* these states and the West, on the other.⁴

In approaching whiteness as historically and geographically contingent, it is useful to see it as a *process* (of 'whitening'), whereby the new middle classes may 'whiten' themselves as they 'darken' other groups. Especially useful about the notion of 'whitening' is the fact that it simultaneously de-essentialises whiteness, recognising its historical flexibility and variability, while at the same time, underlining its continuing association with European or Eurocentric standards.

2. 'Whiteness' beyond the Colour Line? Where/What is the 'White' in Non-European Whiteness?

The form of non-European whiteness I propose emerges in the context of globalised capitalism, as the distinctions between the First and Third Worlds, the North and the South are being reconfigured along new lines. In this context, ‘North’ and ‘South’ designate not merely concrete geographic locations but also metaphorical referents: ‘North’ denoting the pathways of transnational capital; ‘South’ denoting the marginalised populations of the world, regardless of their location.⁵ According to Dirlik, ‘The globe has become jumbled up spatially as the ideology of progress is temporally: with the appearance of Third Worlds in the First World and First Worlds in the Third.’⁶

New class formations under neoliberal globalisation have made it possible for ‘non-whites [to be] whitened by the classed colour of money.’⁷ The possibility that globalism provides for multicultural diversification of the global bourgeoisie does not break down the North-South colour line completely; it just complicates it. The increased class disparities created by neoliberal globalisation means that whereas a very small sector of the bourgeoisie in the (former) Third World may move up to the ranks of a global elite, the majority of Third World peoples find themselves more deeply trapped in a North-South divide. While the status of the non-European elite among the transnational bourgeoisie may be qualified as ‘not-quite-white,’ as they may continue to bear ‘the distinctive birthmarks of unaddressed because unaddressable inferiorised pasts,’ it is possible to argue that there is something about their status and outlook in relation to their country people that is akin to whiteness.⁸

I want to suggest that there are two major dimensions to what makes the transnational bourgeoisie and the global-identified new middle classes in the (former) Third World ‘white.’ One dimension is their increased alienation from the majority of people in their countries and their increased identification, materially and ideationally, with a transnational bourgeoisie. Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk argue that the contemporary period of neoliberal globalism is characterised by an ‘unprecedented spatial and moral secession of the wealthy from the rest of humanity.’⁹ Compared to the earlier periods of developmentalism in post-colonial Third World states and the welfare state in the First World, in recent decades, new middle classes have cut their obligatory social solidarity with other social classes. Their relationship to their local and national surroundings has become increasingly characterised by disembeddedness and extra-territoriality. Physically embodied in gated communities, gentrified neighbourhoods in globalising and ‘global cities,’ and other new urban formations, they now live in gilded ‘dreamworlds’ which represent ‘wilful, narcissistic withdrawals from the tragedies overtaking the planet.’¹⁰

The second dimension of ‘whiteness’ for the new middle classes, intimately related to the material characteristics of the first, has to do with the political and ideological dimensions of how the new middle classes come to perceive and act on class differences. I argue that the political economy of neoliberal globalism leads

to increased racialisation/culturalisation of class, as well as of rural/urban, regional and ethnic differences.

In the context of the (former) Third World, James Ferguson underlines that the shift from the previous (developmentalist) modernisation project to the more recent globalist one has specific effects on the shaping of class relations.¹¹ Acknowledging the wide variety of problems associated with the modernisation discourse both in theory and in practice, Ferguson emphasises that this discourse was, nevertheless, important in the political promises it made. The developmentalism of the 'modernisation' project, Ferguson argues, promised socioeconomic convergence of different countries and regions around the world. It assumed and promised that given time, there would be a movement everywhere from 'tradition' to 'modernity.' This promise of convergence has disappeared from contemporary discourses altogether. With globalised capitalism, the concept of modernity, according to Ferguson, has changed from being a *telos* to being a *status* not to be shared with the majority; from being a collective vision and hope for the future, to a condition of being first-class:

Now with the idea of temporal sequence removed, location in the hierarchy no longer indexes a stage of advancement, but simply a rank in a global political economic order ...

... ranks ... become not stages to be passed through, but nonserialized statuses, separated from each other by exclusionary walls, rather than developmental stairways. Modernity in this sense comes to appear as a standard of living, a *status*, not a *telos*.¹²

Ferguson suggests that 'the status categories of the contemporary global order ... may even come to resemble the fixed status categories of the pre-independence era, when the colour bar segmented the social world into a rich, white, first-class sector and the poor, black, second-class world of the "natives."¹³ As classes of people, as well as nations become stuck in the lower end of the global hierarchy, unable and not expected to move up, their status comes to be seen increasingly as naturally different from and beneath the ones who have achieved the status of modernity.¹⁴ The political implications of this are very significant. As modernisation ceases to be a promise for all; when the perceived possibility as well as the political desirability of a shared modernity with fellow citizens disappear; as ranks in the global order become 'not stages to be passed through, but no serialised statuses, separated from each other by exclusionary walls, rather than developmental stairways,' 'the key questions are no longer temporal ones of societal becoming (development, modernisation), but specialised ones of policing the edges of a status group.'¹⁵

It is in this context, I argue that other classes come to represent (in race-like fashion) different types of humanity, or even the difference between human and sub-human status. What we see crystallised in ‘global cities’ are class tensions and struggles that do not speak their name. There is often a growing hyperconsciousness of and obsession with class differences, though such differences are only articulated in exclusionary discourses of *culturalisation*, *pathologisation* and *criminalisation*.

Combined, the two dimensions of contemporary transnational forms of ‘whiteness’ involve dual logics: a *unificatory logic* at the international level, connecting, as least in terms of fantasies and aspirations, (former) Third World bourgeoisies ever more closely with bourgeoisies elsewhere; and a *secessionist logic* at the national level, involving social, cultural and political distancing from one’s country people.

3. Cases of Non-European Whiteness

The nature of rapid transformation in the economy and society of India has been the focus of attention for many analyses. In this context, so strong is the identification with the global elite for the new middle classes that Sankaran Krishna comments, ‘One of the existential realities of being a middle class Indian is an inescapable desire to escape the rest of India.’¹⁶ Similarly, Arundhati Roy sees the Indian middle class in the neoliberal era to be engaged in the ‘most successful secessionist struggle ever waged in India:’

Ironically, the era of the free market has led to the most successful secessionist struggle ever waged in India - the secession of the middle and upper classes to a country of their own, somewhere up in the stratosphere where they merge with the rest of the world's elite. This Kingdom in the Sky is a complete universe in itself, hermetically sealed from the rest of India. It has its own newspapers, films, television programmes, morality plays, transport systems, malls and intellectuals.¹⁷

In Turkey, there is a literature since the 1990s on what has been labelled ‘white Turkishness.’¹⁸ Analysing the discourses of ‘white Turkishness’ as articulated in the media and popular culture provides an interesting analysis of the racialised/culturalised ways in which poor and marginalised inhabitants of urban areas, especially in Istanbul, have come to be perceived and approached by the new middle classes. One of the examples for these discourses is the one on *varoş*, a term introduced recently to refer to squatter settlements surrounding big cities. Whereas the older term *gecekondu* was often associated with some sympathy for the poverty, marginality and precarious conditions of recent rural to urban migrants, the newly invented and popularised term *varoş* represented fears and

anxieties of the urban middle class elites. The content and tone of the references to the *varoş* range from expressions of arrogance, exclusion, contempt, hostility and suspicion to mocking of the poverty of cultural capital on the part of the poor and marginalised people in urban areas.

Articulated in cartoons, newspaper columns, and general public discourses, there has grown, especially in the 1990s and the early 2000s an aggressive discourse of ‘white Turkishness’ which has put the ‘culture,’ lifestyles and bodies of the urban poor under intense gaze of the urban elite parodying them. In a 2005 article that has become highly controversial, a newspaper columnist Mine Kırıkkanat engaged in a crudely racist mockery of the weekend outing habits of people she considered to be ‘invading’ parts of the urban coast and interfering with the enjoyment of the same space by ‘true’ citizens of these urban spaces. Having previously used terms such as the ‘dark crowds’ for the urban poor, Kırıkkanat referred to the ‘invaders’ as ‘short legged, long armed, dark and hairy’ people with carnivorous barbecuing habits.¹⁹

Studying the depictions of the urban poor and the marginalised in cartoons, Ayşe Öncü (2000; 2002) and Ali Şimşek (2005) have argued that the images have ranged from Orientalist ones parodying the daily habits, patterns, mannerisms, and the *habitus* of those seen as unfit for the ‘global city’ of Istanbul to vulgar racist depictions.²⁰ Öncü finds that the character of *maganda*,²¹ widely and popularly used in cartoons since the 1980s, provides a ‘total and totalising other.’²² Often drawn as a very grotesque figure, *maganda* represents a racialised and classed masculinity. He appears as a rude and vulgar figure, dark, hairy, an over-sexed, animal-like, socially and morally repugnant creature, with his social and moral repugnancy clearly inscribed in his body, especially abusive to women.

4. Conclusion

What do we make of ‘transnational whiteness’? Does it subvert and undermine European whiteness? I want to suggest that the process of othering through culturalisation of class differences (as well as rural/urban, regional and ethnic differences associated with class) acts in a way akin to race-thinking. Culturalisation of class leads to attribution of caste-like quality to subordinated and marginalised classes. Operating akin to racialisation, it makes othering *absolute* and it *naturalises* inequality by attributing social and cultural capital to the new middle classes and justifying the inequalities suffered by those losing or marginalised by neoliberalism as having to do with their ‘culture,’ lifestyle choices and wrong values.

Culturalism leads to invisibilisation, or otherwise parodying, criminalisation and pathologisation of the poor and those struggling under the new economic order. It constitutes the poor and marginalised as outside the modern nation and globalised modernity. Ironically, as capitalist globalisation enables ‘whitening’ of small segments of Third World peoples and as it allows for ‘multiple modernities’

to become parts of global modernity, contemporary non-European forms of 'whiteness' do not subvert whiteness to dismantle it. Rather they help construct and perpetuate new exclusionary walls, spatial and material as well as imaginary, further fragmenting and segregating parts of humanity from one another.

Notes

- ¹ Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 253.
- ² Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 223.
- ³ Alastair Bonnett, 'A White World? Whiteness and the Meaning of Modernity in Latin America and Japan', in *Working Through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, ed. Cynthia Levine-Rasky (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 85.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.
- ⁵ Alastair Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Ann McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (St. Paul, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 518.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 520.
- ⁷ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial States* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 222.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism* (New York: New Press, 2008), xiv.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.
- ¹¹ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, North Carolina : Duke University Press, 2006).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 175.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-179.
- ¹⁶ Sankaran Krishna, 'The Bomb, Biography and the Indian Middle Class', *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 June 2006): 2327.
- ¹⁷ Arundhati Roy, 'Listening to Grasshoppers - Genocide, Denial and Celebration', *Znet*, 27 January 2008, Accessed 18 January 2012, <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/16334>.
- ¹⁸ This is a term that has been given a plurality of meanings and references and used in divergent, sometimes contradictory, ways. The meaning that is of most direct relevance for this chapter locates 'white Turks' in the class formations, the

emerging lifestyles and new identities born in the neoliberal economy since the 1980s.

¹⁹ Mine Kırıkkanat, 'Halkımız Eğleniyor', *Radikal*, 27 July 2005, Accessed 18 January 2012, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=159792>.

²⁰ Ayşe Öncü, 'Global Consumerism, Sexuality as Public Spectacle, and the Cultural Remapping of Istanbul in the 1990s', in *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, eds. Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Ayşe Öncü, 'İstanbullular ve Ötekiler: Küreselcilik Çağında Orta Sınıf Olmanın Küresel', in *İstanbul: Küresel ve Yerel Arasında*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (İstanbul İletişim, 2000); Ali Şimşek, *Yeni Orta Sınıf*, (İstanbul: L&M (Leyla ile Mecnun) Yayınları, 2005).

²¹ Like the term *varoş*, the term *maganda* has no meaning in the Turkish language. Whereas *varoş* is possibly adopted from Hungarian, *maganda* is part of a made-up vocabulary created in popular culture this period (Şimşek 2005).

²² Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 253.

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The Social Construction of Whiteness and Blackness in Contemporary Cuba: A Note on Social Sovereignty and the Order of Otherness

Siv Elin Ånestad

Abstract

A notion of racial whiteness is constructed and becomes meaningful only through its opposition, racial non-whiteness. Building on a seven month long fieldwork in Havana, this chapter explores how entrenched socio-psychological attitudes play an essential role in the social construction of blackness and whiteness in present-day heterogeneous Cuba. Building on Frantz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks*, I argue that a colonially produced and re-produced 'myth of the black' is operating on the island, laying the foundation for white privilege. I discuss how the myth of the black surfaces in Cubans narratives on racial difference and exert an enormous influence on both white and black Cubans lives, such as solidifying the invisible colour barrier that structures domestic race relations by largely discouraging mixed love-relations. This situation can be said to accentuate a colour politic of the body. According to Bhabha, one of the most radical insight posed by Fanon's work is that it shows how the politics of race not only has an economic or historical basis, but is woven into the psyche and body of both black and white humans and, most importantly, that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are realisable only in the order of Otherness. What, asks Fanon, does the black man represent in the white (sub) consciousness? For what is black culture as opposed to white culture or blackness opposed to whiteness? He finds that the white man needs the black man to conjure up the notion of whiteness, humanity, and himself.

Key Words: Race, Cuba, whiteness, blackness, *jineterismo*, prostitution.

1. Introduction

The point of departure of this chapter is that a notion of racial whiteness is constructed and become meaningful only through its opposition, racial non-whiteness. Building on a seven month long fieldwork in Havana, this chapter explores how entrenched socio-psychological attitudes play an essential role in the social construction of blackness and whiteness in present day Cuba. I argue that even though the Cuban revolution removed the institutional barriers separating the population by colour, the pre-revolutionary code of colour was to some degree re-produced in hidden and subtle (but nevertheless powerful) ways in the post-revolutionary formation. With Cuba's re-insertion into the global market through the reopening of a tourist industry in the beginning of the 1990s, in a situation of large-scale poverty, prejudice towards Afro Cubans seems to have re-surfaced. One

of the most salient aspects of this development is that black Cubans are stigmatised as more prone than white Cubans to engage in *jineterismo* activities. Cubans use the term *jineterismo* about local-tourist interactions, usually of a sexual nature, in the exchange of gifts or money. Female hustlers are called *jineteras*, and male hustlers *jineteros*.

Building on Frantz Fanon's work *Black Skin, White Masks*, I argue that a colonially produced and re-produced 'myth of the black' is operating on the island.¹ I found that sexuality especially becomes the arena where the ideology of race receives both a powerful focus, and is highly problematised. I will show how the myth of the black surfaces in Cubans narratives on racial difference. The myth exerts an enormous influence on the lives of both white and black Cubans. For example, while 'the myth of the black' makes Afro Cubans attractive and exotic for the tourists, it solidifies the invisible colour barrier that structures domestic race relations, by largely discouraging mixed love-relations. This situation can be said to accentuate a discursive 'colour politic' of the body.

After the revolution, it seems that discriminatory discourses on race moved out of the official discourse and into the homes, to the intimate sphere of family and friends. The advantage of white skin colour and white 'culture' over black henceforth became part of a 'hidden' ideology of race, making up an unquestioned taken for granted knowledge, or *doxa*. Today, the ideology of race commonly surfaces indirectly, for example through notions of *educación* (education), *marginales* (marginal people) or *nivel cultural* (cultural level). So it should be noted that the narratives I present were confided me in private settings. Especially some of my white Cuban acquaintances would probably not have expressed themselves in the same manner, had I not been a close acquaintant and myself white.

2. The Myth of the Black

Fanon argues that to be born black is to be born into a white definition of yourself. In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Below his skin lies a 'historico-racial schema' conjured up by the white man who has woven him out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories. One could say that Fanon guides us in interpreting the racist undercurrents of 500 years of colonialism as history embodied. Fanon explains: 'The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness.'²

According to Bhabha, the most radical insight posed by Fanon's work is that it shows how the politics of race, not only has an economic or historical basis, but is woven into the psyche and body of both black and white humans, and most importantly - that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are realisable only in the order of Otherness.³ Fanon systematically deconstructs 'the myth of the black.' The aim is to make visible our taken for granted grasp of reality, by showing what elements our pre-assumptions rests upon.⁴ What, asks Fanon, does the black man

represent in the white (sub)consciousness? For what is 'black culture' as opposed to 'white culture,' or blackness opposed to whiteness? He finds that the European man needs the black man to conjure up the white man, the notion of whiteness, humanity, himself:

Now the scapegoat for white society - which is based on myths of progress, civilization, liberalism, education, refinement - will be precisely the force that opposes the expansion and triumph of these myths. This brutal opposing force is supplied by the Negro.⁵

The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black - whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness. It would be astonishing, if the trouble were taken to bring them all together, to see the vast number of expressions that make the black man the equivalent of sin.⁶

Fanon argues that the outcome of the construction of blackness is that one is black to the degree to which one is 'wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual,' and everything that is opposite to these black modes of behaviour is white.⁷ Reading Fanon, the words of Javier, a 30-year-old white Cuban working as a manager in a tourist resort, springs to my mind. In a private conversation, Javier told me:

Remember who you are talking to. I am not an uneducated Cuban. I try to help them - the *jineteras*, the *jineteros*, the black, the drug dealer with the gold-teeth and the gold bracelet, you know the type. You know, it has nothing to do with colour, but there are more blacks who are *jineteros*. You know, they were slaves. They are used to having less than white people, and have always fought to survive. This mentality has not changed since the Revolution, even though they now have the same opportunities. You understand the hustling is part of their culture.

Javier thus establishes a direct relationship between blackness and *jineterismo*, tourist hustling.

3. The Colour of *Jineterismo*

A month or two into my fieldwork in Havana, after discussing tourist hustling with numerous Cubans, I realised that in Cuba, blackness is perceived as the colour of *jineterismo* or tourist hustling, immorality manifested. The core of Cuban

society's stigmatisation of the female *jineteras* and male *jineteros* rest in the sexual relations they strike up with tourists. The *jineteros/as* sexuality is constructed as a dangerous, uncontrollable and destructive force in society, to the point that it, ultimately, threatens the socialistic society which the revolutionary leaders are fighting to uphold. Intriguingly, the public view on *jineteros* and *jineteras* corresponds precisely to the aspect Fanon identifies as the root of the myth of the black; black peoples supposedly 'overpowering,' 'irresponsible' and 'explosive' sexual powers.

Because according to Fanon, first and foremost, the black represents the sexual, the construction of blackness fixates on the genitals. The black male and female symbolise the biological. They supposedly enter puberty early, are 'strong, tough, hot-blooded.' To the white man, the black man is a phallus symbol. He represents the sexual instinct in its most raw state. Fanon wants to show how we carry the colonial narrative of the black as 'closer to nature' in the collective global sub-consciousness.⁸

A Cuban female friend of mine once confided in me that the darker a man's skin, the better lover he is. Both black and white Cubans are of the opinion that tourists come to Cuba primarily because they are attracted to the Afro Cuban part of Cuba; black people and their culture, music and religion. Cubans I talked with also believe that this fascination is fundamentally based on sexual interest. Countless times Cubans (of all shades) asked me if I had come to Cuba to find myself a black lover. And when I asked Cubans about their view on tourist-prostitution, a common reply was that foreign men come to Cuba to try the mulatta girls for which Cuba is 'famous.' A white, self-employed tourist guide (this is the title he gave himself) who approached me in the main tourist area of Old-Havana put it like this:

You have to be smart. I'm making my own money. I do guided tours for tourists. Everyone in Old Havana hustles. Everyone! Like the black guys with Rasta hair. They only have their hair like that to get foreign chicks. White girls come to Cuba because they think they are going to find a nice African man with a big penis. Well, the Rasta's take advantage of that.

In this fashion, Afro Cubans can choose to act in line with the myth that has constructed them as 'closer to nature' and loaded with sexual vitality vis-à-vis the tourists. But it is not merely a matter of acting the part. According to Fanon, the myth that constructs whiteness as desirable and superior to blackness has operated for so many centuries that it has become many black peoples view of themselves, and keeps them unmercifully caught in an inferiority complex.

4. The Myth of the Black Internalised

And it might seem that some Afro Cubans have internalised the white Cubans view of themselves. Sol, a 16-year-old Afro Cuban girl, compares white and black Cubans thusly:

You know that the tourists come here to find black girls. Black girls are more popular than white. That's why more *jineteras* are blacks, and not so many white. But it is also because white Cubans are more intelligent, they think further. Walk into a hotel, look around. A bunch of white Cubans and a few black. I want to be one of these few blacks, I want to educate myself, work as a guide. We blacks are complicated, we get into conflicts. You know, it's the black people who steal and make problems. Every time a tourist yells 'where is my purse, where is my jewellery' - it is usually a black that has stolen it. You know, we are famous, we party, have sex, we don't think so far ahead. In Cuba we have a saying: 'Every time you see a running chicken, there is a black running behind it.'

Sol sees herself and other black people as inferior to white Cubans, defining herself within the white established discourse which is rooted in colonial prejudice, actually claiming that blacks are less intelligent than whites. In her opinion there are more white Cubans employed in the tourist sector, not because white Cubans are found to hire whites, as researches on Cuba have noted,⁹ but because black people lack ability to plan ahead. Black girls more easily become *jineteras*, not because Afro Cubans are less likely to have legal access to money, but because the tourists want to sleep with the 'famous black girls' and because black people are more prone to *jineterismo* and immorality in general. She therefore figures that the best she can do is to become one of the blacks who educate themselves and receive a proper job, a project that is ultimately perceived as a whitening process. Afro Cubans have the expression *un negro blanco* (a white black) meaning a black person who under-communicate his or her blackness and strive to be 'white' through education, language and manner.

5. The Myth of the Black, Individual Agency and Turning a Trick

The Cuban state's attitude can be said to be quite paradoxical; at the same time as the state leadership is dependent on Afro Cuban music, art, religion and culture to attract tourists, black and coloured youth are perceived as more prone to *jineterismo*. Cabezas argues that the Cuban state leaders are not asking how large scale tourist prostitution indicates a deficiency in the system; rather the blame falls on the individual female *jinetera*, who are seen to *jineteer*, not out of necessity, but to obtain luxury goods and recreational opportunities. *Jineteras* are accused of being vain, greedy and lacking morality, social values, emotional maturity and

ultimately, revolutionary consciousness.¹⁰ According to Cabezas and other researchers on Cuba, many *jinetteras* are persecuted and put in jail around the country. In reality, many *jinetteras* are lone-mothers, with the sole responsibility for supporting her children and parents.

Paradoxically enough in such a situation, there are cases where the Cuban state actively utilises historically sexualising and eroticising images of '*la mulata*' to attract Western tourists. For example, Playboy magazine was allowed to feature topless Afro Cuban girls on Cuban beaches if they gave coverage of the islands main beaches and tourist facilities.¹¹ Fusco claims that much of the fuss over *jinetteras* reveals certain biases regarding race, class and gender that Cubans have not shed.¹² Historically speaking, with Cuba entering a new historical conjuncture through the reopening of the tourist-industry at the beginning of the nineties, it is again the dispossessed black populations in Cuba who are taking the heat, and in particular the women.

The 'mulatto trope' and the myth of the black carry a burden of colonial sexual exploitation and racism. To work for another, to become an object controlled by forces outside oneself, suggests a disciplined body, a body without agency, a zombie. And true enough, part of the sex tourism in Cuba has its dark sides in sexual exploitation. However, Sheller reminds us that the myth of the black carries a potential for agency; for individuals working with culture's paradox; and if competently managed, it can be used for individual gain.¹³

I find it useful in this context to draw a line between female sex-workers controlled by a pimp and *jinetteras* working on their own. I argue that some independent *jinetteras* manage to commodify their bodies in a manner that can be to their own advantage. By establishing relationships with tourists, *jinetteras* and *jineteros* can better their life situation in Cuba, or marry a foreigner and leave the poverty stricken island altogether. If it is true that the tourists are more interested in Afro Cubans than white Cubans, one can perhaps say that the 'myth of the black' can enable Afro Cubans to turn a trick, and furnish the myth into an individual strategy of empowerment. Afro Cuban *jineteros/as* can thus choose to make use of the prevalent myth of black people's sexual vitality and naturalness vis-à-vis tourists, a phenomenon which can perhaps be viewed as an implicit way to actually challenge the colour code. Both Cabezas and Fusco have noted that the practices of *jinetismo* lead to a situation where dispossessed Afro Cubans who before the development of a tourist industry represented the marginality within the Cuban system, quickly are becoming the island's nouveau riche.

Following Fanon, I have argued that blackness and whiteness demands each other and only become meaningful as constructed oppositions. I have also tried to show that in Cuba, the colonial legacy is woven into the colour of black and white skin. The colonial legacy still exerts an enormous influence on people's lives and creates situations of exploitation, but also possibilities for individual agency (of course within certain frames).

Notes

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]).

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Homi Bhabha, Foreword 'Remembering Fanon. Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition' to *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon (London: Pluto Press 1986 [1952]).

⁴ Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 15.

⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 194.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Anthony Marcus, ed., *Anthropology for a Small Planet: Culture and Community in a Global Environment* (St. James, N.Y.: Brandywine Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Amalia Lucia Cabezas, 'Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba', in *Global Sex Workers. Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Coco Fusco, 'Hustling for Dollars: Jineterismo in Cuba', in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹³ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (London: Routledge, 2003).

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PART 2

Gendered Whitenesses

Performing Southern Female Whiteness: Women's Groups in Massive Resistance

Rebecca Brückmann

Abstract

When the U.S. Supreme Court, deciding the case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, declared racial segregation as unconstitutional in public education, segregationists across the American South formed a resistance movement known as Massive Resistance. Although a masculinist rhetoric and the concomitant ideology of Southern Womanhood has encouraged a focus on manhood in the studies of Massive Resistance, segregationist women played an important part. Traditionally, white women were defined as 'gate keepers' of white 'purity' and mute icons of the (white) 'southern way of life.' However, female segregationists were very vocal and played a significant role in the defence of segregation and their idea of 'the integrity of the races.' This chapter will compare the rhetoric, conduct and representation of two segregationist women's groups: the Mothers' League of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, formed in 1957, and the 'Cheerleaders' at William Frantz Public School in New Orleans, Louisiana, formed in 1960. Both groups attempted to prevent the desegregation of these public schools, employing different strategies. The Mothers' League, a self-proclaimed 'peaceful and Christian' organisation, invoked the idea of whiteness as entitlement and appealed to courts and politicians about the special rights of whites, which, in their view, were being violated. In contrast, the Cheerleaders staged aggressive, vulgarly racist on-site protests, being described by John Steinbeck as 'a kind of frightening witches' Sabbath.' Both groups were portrayed as performing rehearsed attention-seeking white resistance and were presented in a gendered way. Whereas the Mothers' League's conduct was deemed 'hysterical,' the femininity of the Cheerleaders was called into question, given their vitriolic behaviour. This chapter examines how these groups performed southern female whiteness, and asks the question whether their protest can be seen as a form of white women's activism, further opening up the public sphere for future political activism.

Key Words: Cheerleaders, Little Rock, Massive Resistance, New Orleans, race, segregation, The Mothers' League of Central High School, US South, whiteness, women's history.

1. 'Mothers and Cheerleaders'

'This is a matter for the mothers to settle, and it is time for the mothers to take over.'¹ With this resolute statement, Nadine Aaron, president of the Mothers' League of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, introduced her women's

group to the public. Formed only three weeks before Little Rock's Central High School was due to open on a desegregated basis, the Mothers' League sought to circumvent the desegregation in a self-proclaimed 'peaceful and Christian' way. However, the League's actions contributed to the crisis' escalation on September 23rd, after which President Eisenhower finally decided to send off the 101st Airborne Division to Arkansas' capital to enforce the integration of nine African-American students (the Little Rock Nine) into a white student body of over 2,000.

'We're going to poison you until you choke to death.'² These were the words the six year old Ruby Bridges heard every day before entering her class room, accompanied by four Federal Marshalls. Ruby was the first and only African American child to attend William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans from November 1960 on, sitting alone with her only teacher. The woman who uttered these words was a member of the so-called Cheerleaders, a segregationist women's group that staged aggressive, vulgarly-racist onsite-protests, and became infamously connected to the crisis.

In this chapter, I will argue that both groups employed specific tactics of performing whiteness, invoking the ideas of whiteness as an essentialist group identity, as entitlement and as a means of social mobility for working-class people. First, I will elaborate on the emergence of 'Massive Resistance.' Second, I will address the specific situations in Little Rock in 1957 and New Orleans in 1960, and compare the strategies the women's groups employed in order to prevent public school desegregation and how they constructed Whiteness through their actions. Finally, I will discuss the paradoxes of the women's groups' activism, which was located in an inherently conservative movement, and their somewhat emancipatory behaviour that opened up the public discourse for specific women at the same time. As a warning: when quoting sources, I will use the N-Word, because it is the original phrasing and signifies part of the vileness of Massive Resistance's rhetoric and action.

2. *Brown*, Massive Resistance and (White) Southern Womanhood

When the U.S. Supreme Court, deciding the case *Brown v. Board of Education*, declared racial segregation as unconstitutional in public education, segregationists across the South formed a resistance movement which came to be known by its self-designation as 'Massive Resistance.'³ White politicians as well as grass-roots activists attacked the ruling from a variety of hostile positions, including the defence of states' rights, the Biblical basis for racial subordination, and denouncing integrationists as communist agents. Because of their various strategies of defiance and delay, even a partial desegregation was averted in large Southern areas. Whereas the notion that the South was unified in its resistance to desegregation has to be somewhat qualified, given the progress desegregation made in some upper southern states, numerous strategies of defiance, delay and tokenism as well as violent conflicts proved that at least parts of the 'Southland' were determined to

not give in to the ‘Second Reconstruction,’ and made it a continuously hard struggle for the Civil Rights Movement to succeed.⁴

Since the First Reconstruction, the ideological construct of White Southern Womanhood has been a battleground for proponents and opponents of desegregation. White women were classified as the ‘gate-keepers’ of whiteness, as a collective symbol for the white ‘southern way of life’ itself, and, according to Nell Irvin Painter, the figurative property of white men across all social statuses.⁵ Integration, in the segregationist mind, led inevitably to ‘miscegenation,’ and would subsequently cause the South’s doom. Yet, women were not only mute icons, but vocal racists themselves who took part in the defence of segregation, conservative values and injected their idea of ‘integrity of the races’ into Massive Resistance’s predominantly masculinist discourse.

3. Little Rock: ‘The Bright Spot’ Turns Gloomy

As different as Little Rock and New Orleans were, in neither city did the public expect this magnitude of resistance against school desegregation. Little Rock had even been labelled ‘the bright spot of the South,’⁶ and anti-desegregation measures had been blocked several times in the Arkansas’ legislature. Even more so, Arkansas State Governor Orval Faubus, at first, refused to be directly associated with the state’s White Citizens’ Councils. Louisiana, however, seemed to embody the opposite: the state legislature passed no less than 131 acts and resolutions to prevent public school desegregation within the decade following Brown, and Governor Jimmie Davis was an outspoken segregationist.⁷ Both Little Rock and the more cosmopolitan New Orleans had strong and very vocal grass-roots Citizens’ Councils; and both city governments proved to be unprepared for the backlash desegregation plans ensued, although New Orleans and Little Rock had been subject to litigation by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) for public school desegregation for almost a decade.

The Mothers’ League of Central High School came into existence only three weeks before the Little Rock Nine were supposed to integrate Central High. Its self-proclaimed goals were to ‘find ways and means to prevent integration of the races at Central High School and to provide a rallying-point for all parents who are like-minded.’⁸

As later members, one of them Grace Fitzhugh, reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the formation of the Mothers’ League started out by a telephone chain: an unidentified caller invited her to the house of the Mothers’ League latter Secretary, Mary Thomason, asking how Fitzhugh felt about her ‘daughter going to school with colored persons.’⁹ The group’s initiators seem to have deliberately targeted mothers of daughters, and pointed their attention to a perceived danger of ‘miscegenation’ and the alleged ‘threat’ African American men posed for white women, thus invoking the image of pure Southern

Womanhood in desperate need for a chivalrous saviour.¹⁰ By the end of October 1957, the group of working-class women had 168 official members.¹¹

The Mothers' League performed Southern White Womanhood using several strategies. A constant theme was the stylisation of their and their daughters' victimhood, and the call on Southern White men to live up to their 'manhood.' The group even staged a tearful meeting with Faubus, where sobbing girls hugged him in front of the press cameras.¹² Here, the Mothers' League seems to have employed what has been sarcastically called the 'White Women's Tears'-strategy of deflecting potential charges of racism by public emotionalism and the staging of personal vulnerability.¹³ Second, the League played the role of a double agent by officially denouncing violence, then publicly stirring the fear of violence if desegregation occurred, and simultaneously inciting violence by some of their members at Central High School.

The Mothers' League's fear of violence was apparently limited to people of colour being violent, however. At least parts of the Mothers' League expected white men to not only rhetorically, but to physically protect white women from desegregation, and tried to invoke what they saw as their entitlement to chivalry. On 23 September 1957, the day when a 1,000-person mob escalated the crisis around Central High School, members of the Mothers' League were at the forefront of inciting a riot.¹⁴

The League's Secretary Mary Thomas, gender-specifically labelled as 'hysterical',¹⁵ by the *New York Times* and the FBI, and described as 'constantly attempting to incite the mob to prevent integration,'¹⁶ upon hearing that the African American children had entered the school, yelled at the men in the crowd, 'Where's your manhood? ... Why don't you do something to get these people?'¹⁷ She then collapsed and cried, 'My daughter's in there with those niggers. Oh, my god. Oh God.'¹⁸ Having failed to persuade the men to do 'duty,' she unsuccessfully tried 'to break through the police line.'¹⁹ Thomason's actions seem to be a good example of the League's double strategy: seeking legitimacy for their activism by calling upon men, but ultimately acting themselves whilst simultaneously keeping the ability to be portrayed in a stereotypically feminine (here: 'hysterically' crying) and, thus, unthreatening way.

Finally, the League tried to convey their segregationist message of whiteness as connected to certain entitlements. Even after integration had occurred at Central High, the Mothers' League's new president, Margaret Jackson, wrote several letters to the principal Jess Mathews, alleging that white children were treated worse than the Little Rock Nine. If Mathews had 'enough manhood,' she wrote, he would provide 'the white people' with 'an explanation on this matter,'²⁰ given how the 'common decencies of one white person to another are being outraged - to say nothing of the respect a white child has a right to expect of a white school official.'²¹ The League thus styled itself as the arbitrator of appropriate 'white'

manners and was prepared to call out anyone who seemingly subverted exclusively 'white' entitlements.

4. 'A Frightening Witches' Sabbath' in New Orleans

Even less subtle was the conduct of the so-called Cheerleaders in New Orleans. Seemingly popping out of nowhere, the women's group soon acquired a reputation for its peculiar vulgarity. Ruby Bridges recalled that upon encountering them she first thought that 'it was Mardi Gras, which was always noisy.'²² The middle-aged, working-class women, estimated between 40 and 200 in number²³ and less than lady-like portrayed as '[w]omen in bright, tight treader pants, their hair done up in curlers,'²⁴ were indeed performing their own sort of carnival, striking 'poses in front of the press cameras.'²⁵ In contrast to the Mothers' League, however, the Cheerleaders did not rely on White Women's tears and chivalrous men to insert violence into the proceedings. One of the Cheerleaders threatened Ruby to poison her; others spat at her and 'shouted things like "Go home, nigger."²⁶

Yet, as the defence of white privilege apparently indicated, the Cheerleaders were particularly vile towards the few white parents who did not join in the Citizens' Council's school boycott, feeling particularly threatened by perceived 'race traitors.' As *The Times Picayune* reported, 'tempers burned' as white parents 'slipped six white children into the school,' and 'screaming, cursing women ... manhandled a university student, a New Orleans attorney, a cameraman and a local newspaper reporter'²⁷ who happened to be identified as alleged 'integrationists'. The police even 'had to rescue' the son of a Protestant minister 'from the pummelling by the irate women.'²⁸

Moreover, the police had to remove Cheerleaders who protested on the front lawn Reverend Foreman's house, whose daughter was one of the few white pupils still attending William Frantz. They had threatened to strangle him and threw rocks at his black-and-white, hence 'integrated,'²⁹ dog. Clearly, the Cheerleaders were everything but silent, gentle icons of Southern White Womanhood, and, thus, disproportionately (compared to their fellow male segregationists) demonised by mostly male commentators. John Steinbeck, on his *Travels with Charlie*, was compelled by newspaper reports to see them, and summarised his experience:

In a long and unprotected life I have seen and heard the vomiting of demoniac humans before ... But there was something far worse here than dirt, a kind of frightening witches' Sabbath.³⁰

He asserted that the Cheerleaders words, 'bestial and filthy and degenerate,' were 'no spontaneous cry of anger, of insane rage,'³¹ but a well-rehearsed show that hundreds of people were eager to see, and that earned the Cheerleaders applause like every other performer.³²

Indeed, their ferocious behaviour seems to have been a public spectacle, a show of the vulgar and yet female spearhead of white supremacy, as much for the Cheerleaders' attention seeking as for the sensation mongering of their spectators. Yet, the women's group's behaviour simultaneously caused Steinbeck to deny them their femininity, and to assert that they 'were not mothers, not even women.'³³

5. Women's Roles in Massive Resistance

As Beth Roy has concluded, 'school desegregation was a struggle that especially evoked women's activism' because 'who else could better claim the moral authority to speak up when the site of contestation was the domain of children?'³⁴ Simultaneously, white women who 'spoke up' in Little Rock or New Orleans had to face a 'particular set of dilemmas,' because 'to enter into public discourse was itself an act of defiance,'³⁵ of subverting the status quo of the mute icon of White Southern Womanhood. Phoebe Godfrey contends that for white working-class women in particular, the defence of segregation earned them the right 'to transgress their gender and social class position through their "whiteness."³⁶

Indeed, the segregationist women's activism seems to have been rather paradox, given that these women were part of an inherently conservative movement, at the height of a public ideology of the separation of the spheres. Yet, the Mothers' Leagues, as self-conscious agents, framed their activism in a way that seemed to make it acceptable to their fellow male activists and the public: Presenting themselves as potential victims, expressing concern for violence and 'miscegenation,' calling upon men for help, shedding White Women's Tears, and employing the strategy of what Graeme Cope has called the 'unassailable twin mantles of Christianity and the sacred authority' and, respectability, 'of southern mothers.'³⁷ This seems to have allowed the subversion of white women's presumed passivity, and members of the Mothers' League even ran for Little Rock's City Council in November 1957, being only narrowly defeated.³⁸

Yet, this 'proto'-feminism came to a sudden end when women overstepped their cultural role expectations. The Cheerleaders went too far, being vulgar and violent in their rhetoric and actions, not relying on men's chivalry and not caring about 'curlers in their hair,' thus, denying a nonthreatening female elegance. Their femininity and, subsequently, their legitimacy were subsequently called into question. Performing White Southern Womanhood was a tricky business, then: White women tip toed between segregationism, lady-like, alleged victimhood and yet still helped to transform the public space by their voices, their presence and their active involvement.

Notes

¹ 'Little Rock Students Register: Mothers Form Group to Fight Central Integration', *Arkansas Democrat*, 23 August 1957, 2.

² Anonymous woman to Ruby Bridges, cf. Robert Cole. Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy. The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 249.

³ Cf. Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 17-27; George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 4.

⁴ Cf. Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 117.

⁶ Cited in Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction 1954-64* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 98.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸ 'Gay Council Throng Applauds Griffin For Speech Flaying Race Integration', *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 August 1957, 2A.

⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Interview Report, FD-302, Interview with Grace Fitzhugh, 8 September 1957, *Sarah Alderman Murphy Papers*, MC 1321, Box 9, Folder 5, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Special Collections.

¹⁰ Cf. Phoebe C. Godfrey, "'Sweet Little Girls'?: Miscegenation, Desegregation and the Defense of Whiteness at Little Rock's Central High, 1957-1959' (PhD diss., Binghamton University/State University of New York, 2001), 150.

¹¹ 'Membership List of Mother's League of Central High School', 31 October 1957, *Sarah Alderman Murphy Papers*, Box 11, Folder 5.

¹² Cf. Homer Bigart, 'Faubus is Defiant', *The New York Times*, 29 September 1957, 1, and Bigart, 'Faubus is Defiant', 56.

¹³ Cf. Mamta Motwani Accapadi, 'When White Women Cry: How White Women's Tears Oppress Women of Color', *College Student Affairs Journal* 26 (2007): 208-215.

¹⁴ Cf. 'Growing Violence Forces Withdrawal of 8 Negro Students at Central High', *Arkansas Democrat*, 1. In fact, there were all nine African American students present, cf. Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: David McKay Co., 1962), 88.

¹⁵ 'Mob Compels Negro Students to Leave Little Rock High School After 3 Hours', *The New York Times*, 24 September 1957, 18.

¹⁶ FBI Interview Report, Interview with Thomas Own, Police Officer, Little Rock, 24 September 1957, *Central High Integration Crisis FBI Files*, Box 2, Folder 990 (2).

- ¹⁷ John Wyllie, 'Conversations in the South', March 3 1959, 2; *Orval Eugene Faubus Papers*, MC F27 301, Box 498, Folder 6, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Special Collections and Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, The Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 170.
- ¹⁸ John Wyllie, 'Conversations in the South', 2.
- ¹⁹ FBI Interview Report, *Interview with Thomas Owen*.
- ²⁰ Margaret Jackson, letter to 'Jess Matthews [sic]', 21 December 1957, *Virgil T. Blossom Papers*, MC 1364, Box 7, Folder 8, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Special Collections.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Ruby Bridges, *Through My Eyes* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1999), 16.
- ²³ Cf. Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 247.
- ²⁴ Isabella Taves, 'The Mother Who Stood Alone', *Good Housekeeping*, April 1961, 34.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Bridges, *Through My Eyes*, 22.
- ²⁷ 'Crowd Attacks Four At School', *The Times Picayune*, 2 December 1960, 1, and 'Crowd Attacks Four At School', 17.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 258.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*, 257-259.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 285.
- ³⁴ Beth Roy, *Bitters in the Honey: Tales of Hope and Disappointment Across Divides of Race and Time* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 173.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Godfrey, "'Sweet Little Girls?'" , 48.
- ³⁷ Graeme Cope, "'A Thorn in the Side'? The Mothers' League of Central High School and the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis of 1957', *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52 (1998): 163.
- ³⁸ Cf. Philip Benjamin, "'Moderates" Win Little Rock Race', *The New York Times*, 7 November 1957, 38.

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‘What’s Best For My Child’: Whiteness and Motherhood

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Abstract

Motherhood has often been understood in relation to gender, however recently it has also been argued that motherhood must be understood as a way of producing both class and race. In my study, I explore the connection between motherhood, race and whiteness by studying how a group of white Swedish mothers with newborn babies talk about the upbringing of their children. Even though the women in my study emphasised that they wanted their children to grow up in a culturally mixed environment, when it came to decisions related to the upbringing of their children they said they avoided a neighbourhood, school or pre-school if it had ‘too many’ children with immigrant background. The mothers mentioned a number of reasons for this, such as not wanting their children to be in minority fearing their children’s language would be negatively influenced. Since it was seen as controversial to avoid some schools or pre-schools for those reasons the women used a number of strategies to justify their arguments. One was to argue that they, as mothers, had to do what’s best of their child even though it could have negative consequences for society. This argument used already existing resources about motherhood. A good mother is expected to do anything for their child and by referring to being a mother they tried to present themselves in a positive way in the interviews. The chapter will therefore explore the often complex way the women used their motherhood identity in order to justify racialised statement.

Key Words: Whiteness, mothers, motherhood, performativity of race, discourse psychology.

1. Introduction

Motherhood has usually been understood in relation to gender, recently however it has also been argued mothering may be seen as way to producing both class and race.¹ Being a mother and upbringing children often mean taking decisions that involves race and class.² I will in this chapter presentation explore the connection between motherhood and whiteness by studying how a group of mothers talk about the upbringing of their children. Mainly this chapter will focus on what discourses women use when talking about ethnicity/race in relation to their children.

2. Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework for this chapter presentation is based on three theoretical fields. Scholars within Critical Whiteness Studies have emphasised the

importance of studying whiteness and how white people reproduce race, especially since whiteness often is seen as an unmarked norm.³ Bridget Byrne's study *White Lives. The Interplay of "Race", Class and Gender* about how a group of British women reproduced race but also class and gender has been of particular interest for my study. Furthermore, because my study is about mothers, I also use theories about the construction of motherhood. Theories of motherhood have claimed that motherhood is connected to the image of 'the good mother' who gives up her own life for her children, family and sometimes for the whole nation.⁴

Lastly the study has been inspired by discourse psychology, which emphasises that people in everyday talk use language in order to perform something, as Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell write, 'People use language to do things: to order and request, persuade and accuse.'⁵ This means that there is often an aim of what is being said, for instance it is common people use discourses in order to present themselves in a good way.⁶ Also what discourses people use in everyday talk is usually connected to dominating discourses.

3. Method

The empirical material in my study consists of 19 interviews with mothers in two neighbourhoods, one culturally mixed and one white middle class neighbourhood. Mothers were recruited via open pre-schools located in the two neighbourhoods. Although I wished to interview women of different ages, class and ethnicity; this aim has not been fully achieved. Most of the interviewees were white, born in Sweden, middle class and in their 30s.

4. Empirical Findings

Many of the women in the study initially had difficulties to say how ethnicity had anything to do with their children. This, however, did not mean that ethnicity or race was absent when talking about the upbringing of their children. On the contrary, when it came to decisions concerning their children's upbringing, as to choose preschool or school or to what neighbourhood they would move to, ethnicity together with class was a common topic. This shows that ethnicity/race became important in practices related to the upbringing of their children. Byrne argues that the production of race may be understood through the concept of performativity, which means that race is produced by repeated racialised discourses and practices.⁷ Mothers are, according to Byrne, particularly involved in such practices since being a mother and upbringing children involves repeating discourses and practices related to the upbringing of children.

4.1 Not in Minority

In the interviews the women talked a lot about how to ensure that their children grew up in a good environment. This became obvious especially when the women talked about what school or preschool they would choose for their child. The

women said it was important for them to choose a school or preschool that they thought would be a calm and safe environment for their child to grow up in. The importance of choosing a good school for their child was often about how their child should be shaped as persons; that also meant how they should be raced and classed. The women wanted their child to be confronted with children with other cultural background, but they did not want their children to be too influenced by them. For instance the women in the study said they did not want their children to be in minority, which might be understood as their children should not be too influenced by children with other cultural background. Cecilia, who lived in the multicultural neighbourhood, describes what she and her husband thought about when choosing a preschool for their son,

M: How did you think when it came to preschool?

Cecilia: Yes ... we have, applied for a preschool that in first hand should feel like a safe and good environment. We have looked at quite a lot, most of them. One I totally refused, we didn't apply for it because when I was there and looked I saw barely any Swedish children at all. And I think, I don't want that. But there was another one we looked at and that was maybe fifty/fifty and that was almost our second choice. So it is not that I don't want him to meet non-Swedish children. But absolutely not ...

M: It should not be a majority or how did you think?

Cecilia: No but Fredrik should not be in minority. I really don't want that. And I think it become very much ... I mean the reason is that it becomes a strange ... it becomes a very large focus on social problems and language problems and ... that is not something Fredrik have any need for. He has got other needs.

In this excerpt, Cecilia racialises preschools. A preschool with 'barely any Swedish children at all' is not considered to be a good environment for Cecilia's son. Particularly, to be in minority would be negative for her son. The argument of 'not being in minority' may be seen as an expression of the multicultural discourse. Multiculturalism can be described as 'a way of living with differences,' characterised of cultural diversity being seen as positive and enriching. The multicultural discourse, however, have been criticised by many scholars for both being based on a normative idea of 'us and them' and of having an essentialist understanding of cultures.⁸ The women in my study saw children with another background than their own children as positive and enriching. However, it was a particular form of multiculturalism the women said to be good for her children. Children with other ethnic background should not be 'too many' and should come to their preschool, not the other way around. As one woman said, 'It is very good that you ... that you can integrate a little, I mean children from there to here.'

Furthermore, the talk about not being in minority was based on a distinction between 'Swedish' and 'non-Swedish' children. When Cecilia said she saw 'barely no Swedish children' in the preschool she visited, it might be interpreted as racialisation of children because it can be assumed 'non-Swedish children' here is based on constructions of whiteness.⁹

4.2 What's Best For My Child

When the women spoke about ethnicity/race being one of the things they considered when choosing preschool or school for their children, it was common that they justified such statements with arguments such as 'something you are not aloud to say but everyone thinks' or 'not because I have anything against them.' These arguments might be interpreted in two ways: first, they can be understood as a way to justify the contradiction between the understanding of their upbringing as colour-blind and that they actually mentioned ethnicity/race when it came to decisions of their children's upbringing; second, they might be interpreted as a way to explain the fact the decisions about their child's upbringing had larger societal effects, such as contributing to residential segregation. Another linguistic strategy that was used, especially when the women recognised that their decisions concerning the upbringing of their children could have larger societal effects was to refer to that they had to do 'what's best for their child.'

Maria, who lived in the white middle class neighbourhood, said that she would move to a neighbourhood where her son would attend a good school without problems. Schools with many pupils with immigrant background were not a school she would pick for her child since she said such school often had a lot of social problems. Also, like some of the other women, she mentioned that she did not want her son to 'be in minority.' Maria said she was aware that avoiding moving to neighbourhoods with schools she thought had 'too many' pupils with immigrant background might in the longer run contribute to residential segregation but explained that she had to do 'what's best for her child.' Sanna, who lived in the culturally mixed neighbourhood, said that one of the things she had considered when choosing preschool for her daughter was that she should not be in minority. She was also arguing that she had to do what was best for her own child:

Sanna: But then ... then it is also that I don't want Lisa to be in minority. Because I think that it would be like that at the preschool in Björkbyroad for instance. It is really good that you ... that you can integrate a little bit, I mean children from there to here but I want ... I mean if you are in minority you are vulnerable. And you see closest to yourselves. I mean your own children. I don't want them to feel like that.

M: No no ...

Sanna: If I can choose. Maybe unfortunately but ...

If we look at how the discourse of ‘the best for my child’ is used in the two examples above can be interpreted as solving a dilemma. As Wetherell and Potter have argued, a dilemma is common when people say something which can be seen as problematic or controversial, and particularly statements about doing something for your own interest.¹⁰ Furthermore, dilemmas are often used when there is something at stake; that means that a person has something to either win or lose by using some discourses.¹¹ In the examples above the discourse of ‘the best for my child’ is used to solve both that it was controversial to let ethnicity/race influence the upbringing of their children and also that the decisions concerning their child’s upbringing potentially could contribute to residential segregation. That the women referred to that they had to do what is best for their child should not be seen as individual strategies but rather this discourse was made out of already existing recourses.¹²

The discourse of what is best for my child might be understood in relation to ‘the good mother.’ Characteristic for ‘the good mother’ is that she gives up her own life for her children, family and sometimes for the whole nation.¹³ Referring to ‘what is best for my child’ might be interpreted as a way for the women in my study to position themselves as mothers. Positioning, Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré argue, is the way that people positioning themselves and others in conversation.¹⁴ The subject positions people use when positioning themselves depend on the culturally constructed positions that are available in the discursive context.¹⁵ The collectively constructed positions are also connected to morality since they come with an understanding of what is right and wrong according to these subject positions. As Vivien Burr argues, ‘What it is right and appropriate for us to do and what it is wrong and inappropriate for us to do thus all derive from our occupation of subject positions within discourse.’¹⁶ For the women in my study the available subject position when talking about the upbringing of their child was the ‘good mother’ and was in this context a powerful subject position since almost anything may be justified by referring to the good mother who in any situation should do what is considered as best for her child. Different from the traditional image of ‘the good mother’ who do what is best for others before what is best for herself, here it that she do what she believe is best for her child although it might go against what is best for society.

Even though the discourse of what is best for my child was used to justify racialised statements it was also sometimes contested in the interviews with the women. Later in the interview Sanna came back to how choosing preschool for her child might have consequences for society:

M: So you can’t turn the gaze or you can’t see this from a bigger perspective?

Sanna: No exactly ... It is difficult to say. But right now you don’t have any energy to figure out any solutions either, but you

can think that you could do one's share and that is why it is so difficult when it comes to this preschool ... problem. Because then it becomes so obvious, so how was it with our opinions? How should we ...

M: Right. How you live your own life.

Sanna: Yes exactly.

M: Then it is not about abstract ideas?

Sanna: No, then it is our children and how we should have it good at the end of the day. Yes ... it is a little bit weak.

Different from the previous examples, Sanna here at least to some extent criticises the discourse of 'what's best for my child' by questioning her own position when it comes to choosing preschool. Even though the excerpt above is ambivalent, it shows that the discourse of 'what's best for my child' not only was used to justify controversial statements but also could be contested in the interviews.

5. Conclusions

In the chapter presentation I have explored how a group of mothers talked about the upbringing of their children and particularly how ethnicity or race became an issue in relation to their children. Even though the women initially said ethnicity/race did not have any influence of the upbringing of their child when it came to decisions concerning their child's life, like choosing school or preschool they often took ethnicity/race into account. For instance, one of the reasons that were mentioned was that they did not want their child to be 'in minority.' I have argued that this was closely related to the multicultural discourse. Children with other cultural background were seen as something positive and enriching for the women's children but there was a multiculturalism that was based on a normative assumption of 'us and them' and also revealed a racialisation of small children.

The women in the study were often aware that their decisions not only influenced their children's life but also potentially could contribute to residential segregation. This was something that the women justified in the interviews by arguing that they had to do what was best for their child. In this chapter I have suggested that this argument can be seen as a way to position themselves as good mothers who in any situation should do what is best for her child. Motherhood was therefore used as a way to justify racialised discourses connected to the upbringing of their children. However, this discourse was also contested in some of the interviews.

Notes

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- ¹ Diane Reay, *Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in Children's Schooling* (London: University College Press, 1998). Bridget Byrne, *White Lives. The Interplay of "Race", Class and Gender in Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- ⁴ Ann Phoenix, Anne Woollett and Eva Lloyd, *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies* (London: Sage Publications 1991), 16; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts Advice to Women. 175 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (Anchor Books, 2005), 208.
- ⁵ Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse And Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (London: Sage Publications, 1987), 32.
- ⁶ Ibid., 33.
- ⁷ Byrne, *White Lives*, 16.
- ⁸ See for instance Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 96; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 55.
- ⁹ Katarina Mattsson, *Diskrimineringens Andra Ansikte - Svenskhet Och Det Vita Västerländska* (Stockholm: Fritzes, 2005), 149; Catrine Lundström, *Svenska Latinas. Ras, Klass Och Kön I Svenskhetens Geografi* (Riga: Makadam, 2007), 89.
- ¹⁰ Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 97.
- ¹¹ Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality. Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 10.
- ¹² Potter and Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology*, 76.
- ¹³ Phoenix, Wollett and Lloyd, *Motherhood*, 16; Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 208.
- ¹⁴ Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20, No. 1 (1990): 20.
- ¹⁵ Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd. 2003), 119.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.

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Entering the Ninja: New Cultural Strategies of the White South African Male

Nicky Falkof

Abstract

From the evil government functionaries in *Cry Freedom* to the caricatured villains in *Lethal Weapon 2*, the depiction of white South Africans in globalised culture was long tainted with international disgust at the apartheid state. But fifteen years after the end of apartheid, white South Africans, and specifically white South African men, are reappearing in international cultural consciousness in new and unpredictable forms. This chapter considers the new visibility of the white South African male in the film *District 9* and in the music of the 'zef' band Die Antwoord. It examines how these embodiments of whiteness differ from those that once cemented white Afrikaans identity, illustrating how the contested nature of the power that whiteness accrues has led to a renegotiation of ethnicity and a revision in which the whiteness of these South African men is ambiguous, contradictory, flawed and creative. The juxtaposition of the hybridised characters of *District 9*'s Wikus van der Merwe (Sharlto Coley) and Die Antwoord's Ninja (the musician Wadkin Tudor Jones) in comparison to the apartheid-era masculine persona illustrate the ways in which the experience of South African whiteness has mutated and developed in response to an era of social change in which whites are economically powerful but socially disavowed and politically impotent, and suggests a possible opening up of identity that could signal the potential of a politics going beyond the simplistically racial.

Key Words: South Africa, masculinity, apartheid, Die Antwoord, *District 9*, whiteness.

In the latter half of the 20th century the figure of the white South African male became attached to a very particular set of meanings within popular culture in the global Anglophone north. White South African men, and particularly white Afrikaans South African men, were largely depicted as being the brutal, racist and violent architects and beneficiaries of apartheid. One can see a composite of such characterisations in the vicious security police who were responsible for Steve Biko's death in *Cry Freedom*, the murder of Donald Sutherland's gardener friend in *A Dry White Season* and the attack on activist Shack Twala (Sidney Poitier) in *The Wilby Conspiracy*, as well as in the corrupt diplomats who Riggs and Murtaugh (Mel Gibson and Danny Glover) take on in *Lethal Weapon 2*.¹

In the years since the ANC came to power in the country's first multi-racial elections in 1994, the shape of South Africa in what Bethlehem, de Kock and

Laden call the 'global imaginary' has altered enormously.² From being ineluctably eluded with apartheid's ferocious racism, the country has now taken on a wider plethora of meanings: holiday destination, Aids tragedy, Rainbow Nation, presidential polygamy, violent crime, World Cup success, witchcraft murders, corrective rape, African migrancy and the continent's most forward-thinking constitution. As these new international ideas about South Africa have grown so the automatic correlation between white men and power has shifted. But white people, although largely stripped of their political influence, still maintain a grip on the economy and, demographically if not endemically, have a significantly higher standard of living than most South Africans do. They, or rather we, still retain a powerful presence within the conceptual and ideological spaces of the idea of 'South Africa,' and it is some of these manifestations that I wish to consider.

This chapter examines two different versions of the white South African male in post-millennial popular culture: the film *District 9* (D9) and the rave-rap band Die Antwoord.³ Both have been enormously successful internationally despite failing to conform to somewhat narrow notions of what African cultural products are 'allowed' to be. (The Oscar-winning 2005 movie *Tsotsi*, for example, for all its strengths, personified the poverty-crime-redemption cycle so beloved of the global North's understanding of the global South.⁴) Die Antwoord's rapper Ninja is clearly aware of the relation between them, appearing in various interviews and in the video for 'Evil Boy' wearing the prosthetic alien arm that is the centrepiece of D9's plot, and saying at the start of an interview, 'The history of South Africa is Mandela, *District 9* and Die Antwoord.'⁵ I argue that film and musicians present alternate ideas of what the white South African male can be, although they vary significantly, and one takes greater risks in redefining the possible parameters of an identity that has been repudiated and despised by the international cultural imagination.

Let us begin by considering what whiteness in South Africa meant and means. We are likely all aware of the notion of the 'invisibility' of whiteness posited by theorists like Richard Dyer and Ruth Frankenberg, in which white is understood to be so intrinsic to humanity that it is not noticeable; coloured people are coloured, white people are 'just' people.⁶ While it has been enormously influential, this idea of white as invisible does not scan neatly in the South African context, and not just because, as Sara Ahmed points out, white is only invisible to those who inhabit it already.⁷ White people in South Africa have always been raced, been explicitly spoken aloud like other racial classifications. White is a site of contested meaning and the people who live within its privileged spaces are constantly undergoing certain behavioural injunctions. Much of the economic architecture of apartheid was constructed to deal with the so-called poor white problem outlined by the Carnegie Commission of 1932. Newly urbanised Afrikaners were expected to live 'as white people,' to maintain separation from the non-whites who were carving out a space for themselves within the burgeoning mining metropolis of

Johannesburg, but often did not 'demonstrate an instinctive aversion, socially or sexually, to racial mixing as government racial ideology proclaimed Afrikaans-speaking poor whites in urban areas would.'⁸ Many did not automatically identify themselves as Afrikaners and so the nationalist identity, with its unremitting subtext of whiteness, had to be constantly reinforced.⁹ Far from being invisible, the construction of white can be seen by naked eye.

Historically, then, South African whiteness is neither as monolithic nor as obvious as its external ideological depictions would suggest. Apartheid overdetermined the connectedness of race and gender.¹⁰ The interpellations attendant on whiteness became even stronger when related to the specificity of roles that men and women were expected to play within a social, religious and family structure that mimicked and informed the top-down authoritarian patriarchy of the National Party state. Women were expected to embody the *volksmoeder*, the nurturing, patient, loyal and forthright mother of the nation.¹¹ For men, 'Afrikaner identity was based on values of God-fearing Calvinism, structures of patriarchal authority ... adherence to the traditions invented by the nationalist movement, conservative values ... and, above all, the importance of whiteness.'¹² This version of white South African masculinity invoked violence, toughness, gun ownership, sport, compulsory heterosexuality, racist paternalism, Christianity, a moral mandate and an overwhelming certainty about white - particularly Afrikaans - superiority (the degree to which individual Afrikaans men embodied, refused or questioned this identity is an issue for discussion elsewhere). It is this complex inheritance that *D9* and *Die Antwoord* are responding to.

Let us begin with the film. Briefly, it tells the story of an alien landing in which a crippled interstellar craft comes to rest over Johannesburg. The craft's inhabitants, known as 'prawns' and visually recalling Parktown prawns, a mutant species of cockroach that haunts Johannesburg's wealthy northern suburbs, soon become squatters on the city's outskirts. Wikus van de Merwe (Sharlto Copley), a minor functionary in the rapacious global company Multi-National United (MNU), is given the job of serving them papers before they are moved to an inadequate 'location' far from the city. Wikus comes into contact with an alien fluid, is infected and begins to transform into one of the creatures. He is the subject of an enormous manhunt by unscrupulous corporate assassins desperate to acquire alien weaponry. He joins up with Christopher Johnson, the last remaining member of the aliens' leadership, and attempts to heal himself. After many gunfights and much gore Wikus finally sacrifices his hope of recovery and helps Christopher escape with the aim of returning to rescue his abused people. The film is awash with apartheid and post-apartheid metaphor and invites analysis on a number of points, not least its astonishingly short-sighted treatment of the occult-obsessed Nigerian gangs.¹³ In this instance, though, time permits me only a look at the portrayal of white South African men.

Our first introduction to Wikus is through the faux-documentary that makes up much of the film. He is skinny, awkward and seems incompetent, wears an unattractive woollen jumper and the moustache so typical of the Afrikaans civil servant whose apartheid-era protected employment also made him available for endless class debasement by the Afrikaans- and English-speaking white elite.¹⁴ As Wikus chatters away in his heavy accent and his old-fashioned clothes, a young, dreadlocked black man in a hip outfit moves into the rear of the frame behind him. The contrast between them is striking and sets up a disjuncture between sophisticated, metropolitan blacks and embarrassing, retrogressive, gauche whites. (There is much to be said elsewhere about the way in which middle class black people remain in the background of this highly successful South African narrative, relegated to supporting roles in contrast to the bloodthirsty Nigerians and uneducated, xenophobic township residents.) Wikus shows the camera pictures of his wife Tania and the sentimentality with which he talks about her, while touching, is also emasculating.

His character is constructed in diametric opposition to his father-in-law Piet Smit, a macho Afrikaner who seems disgusted by Wikus' weakness and feminised behaviour and who later betrays Wikus, agreeing to have him eviscerated by waiting scientists. Piet and Wikus are two poles of the white Afrikaner male: the first is the old version, violent, corrupt, ruthless, humourless; the second seems to be a new version, weaker, a figure of fun. The audience is permitted to laugh at Wikus but he is also heartless. He blithely destroys the aliens' eggs and makes abortion jokes as he does so. He mocks them, denies them any sense of personhood, lies to them and fails to see the moral consequences of the treatment that MNU is meting out. The 'new' white South African man is not all that different from the old. He may be less powerful but he expresses the same arrogant, self-regarding racist consciousness that characterised *Lethal Weapon 2*'s cartoon villain diplomats.

However, Wikus changes. By the film's final scene he has become fully a prawn in body and is seen sitting in a mine dump carving a flower out of drink cans for his lost love. This shot is enormously poignant as well as being witty. Having sacrificed the possibility of redemption and reunion with Tania in order to give Christopher Johnson the chance to get away, Wikus has condemned himself to this alien body and this township - for which read black - lifestyle, but has earned his humanity. Despite his disgusting, mutated body, he is no longer the clown we encountered at the film's start but is now a fully developed individual whose capacity for sacrifice has made him noble. The white man, in sympathy with the other's plight, has *become* the other, given up his whiteness and his claim to privilege in order to allow the other to live. Wikus is an apology, an act of recovering from the brutality of the past by entering into the skin of the other and living the other's scorched and poverty-stricken life. If Piet is the apartheid-era white male writ large then Wikus is the next step, the 'kind of identity ... that

accepts the “inbetweenness” of white South Africans and involves a commitment by white South Africans to strive to find an appropriate way to belong in Africa.’¹⁵

This is without doubt a progressive political stance. What it is not, though, is an uncoupling of notions of whiteness from apartheid structures of power, a renegotiation of whiteness that allows it the creolised hybridity that marks the most fluid, creative and productive 21st century African identities. This is not to suggest that white people should be allowed to forget their histories. The point, rather, is that many white South Africans, like, indeed, *most* South Africans, inhabit various and multifaceted selves and that contemporary cultural production, in its emphasis on complicity, apology, tribalism and guilt, often fails to see these complexities, fails to acknowledge the multiplicities of personhood that the country engenders.

Which brings us to Die Antwoord. The band has been vehemently criticised for a lack of authenticity: the musician Watkin Tudor Jones, who ‘plays’ rapper Ninja, comes from a middle class background and has been involved in a number of similar projects previously, as has Yo-Landi Vi\$\$er, the female singer/rapper. Although Jones is white, Ninja’s tattoos recall coloured gang signs from the Cape Flats area, and this act of borrowing has enraged cultural commentators. Notably, though, it does not seem to have had the same effect on the people Ninja is stealing from. Flats responses to Die Antwoord have in the main been positive; many of the band’s early YouTube videos show Ninja hanging out with coloured friends. It seems that, at the start of their career at least, township dwellers got Die Antwoord’s joke where metropolitan liberals did not. (Of course, we are talking here specifically about their use of whiteness. There is a contrasting but evocative argument to be made about the way they have, according to British-Nigerian filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa, ‘appropriated a form of blackness to de-prettyfy white South Africa but glamorise it at the same time.’¹⁶)

The band’s music videos engage a distinctly ‘poor white’ tone, their zef style plugging into an aesthetic that blends Afrikaner history with the trappings of Cape gang culture. ‘Zef Side’ features Ninja, Yo-Landi and their collaborator DJ Hi-Tek being interviewed in front of a picket fence in what is clearly a working class suburb.¹⁷ The video is a pastiche, funnier to those who recognise its provenance. They are dressed in cheap pastels and talk gawkily about living with their parents - Yo-Landi asserts, ‘Ja, my mom cuts my hair’ - then perform the song ‘Beat Boy’ in front of a house typical of the bland suburbia constructed by the National Party for working class white Afrikaners. There is a sequence of bizarre shots of Ninja’s penis swinging in slow motion within his Pink Floyd shorts as Yo-Landi looks on lustfully. Afrikaans male sexuality seems here to be an object of, if not ridicule, then at least humour in a move that is completely alien to the deep seriousness with which the heterosexual imperative was expressed in earlier ideas of this identity. The scene cuts to local faces and social practices - a *braai* (barbecue), someone riding a motorbike, people talking to their neighbours in front of identikit fences - all suggestive of a very particular type of South African whiteness, one that is

seldom depicted outside of South Africa (and not that much within it), one that does not fit in with the dominance, wealth and power associated with apartheid-era whiteness. Not all the people featured here are necessarily what we would think of as white but this pan-racial variety is not an issue for comment, is not noticed within the *mise-en-scene* in the way that race usually becomes focal in South African cultural production.

At the start of the 'Enter the Ninja' video Ninja says, 'I represent SA culture ... blacks, whites, coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, *wat ook al*. All these different things. All these different people. Fucked into one person.'¹⁸ The first performance that took the band to international attention opens with a call to *bloedvermenging* (blood mixing), the greatest miscegenatory horror of the National Party regime.¹⁹ From the outset Die Antwoord's ideas about the sanctity or specificity of whiteness are destabilising, even insurrectionary. Ninja is a poor white rapper who is played by an English-speaking artist. He wears coloured gang tattoos and speaks English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. In the video for 'Evil Boy' he is interchangeable with a Xhosa rapper named Wanga whose contribution is a genre- and taboo-shifting rap about refusing circumcision. Far from engaging traditional or common ideas about white South African manhood, or even responding to them, Die Antwoord express an identity that is not defined by colonial notions of whiteness, although it does not repudiate whiteness either. White, in this universe, becomes a space for performance.

The ANC's apartheid-era call to non-racialism has been passed over in favour of an increasingly racialised political discourse. Die Antwoord's creative topos denies this obsessive re-racialization not with claims to a spurious and impossible colour-blindness but rather by insisting upon a *bricolage* identity, a crossbreed South African self that incorporates much but is not entirely defined by any of it. This is not the same as white people beginning, in the post-apartheid era, to call themselves African, a move that infuriates many black South Africans who see this late adoption of indigeneity and ethnicity as self-serving. Rather it gestures towards an identity that does not require either the assumption of a purloined blackness or a continual identification with a globalised sense of whiteness. In this analysis class is more important than race - see, for example, the video to 'Rich Bitch,' in which Yo-Landi explicates some of the clearest markers of South African class.²⁰

Where *D9*'s renegotiation of the despised tropes of white South African masculinity rests largely on what Liese van de Watt calls the 'generational responsibility' attendant on white post-apartheid identity, Die Antwoord's visual mischief and foul-mouthed cross-linguistic play seem willing to transcend the repetitive vagaries of the country's history.²¹ Again, this is not to suggest that white South Africans should be expected or permitted to forget about how we benefited from apartheid; but the history of South Africa teaches that ideas of black and white are intimately intertwined, that one informs and is informed by the other. Even colonial trauma can be a site for cultural transmission. An attachment to

monolithic and obsessively historicised ideas about white people has extensive effects on the country's torturous relationship to notions of race. If *Die Antwoord* can be understood as conceptual artists as well as musicians/performers/celebrities then perhaps the value of their work can be located in precisely this playful renegotiation of the fluidity of race, particularly in the face of South Africa's notoriously risk-averse popular cultural industry.

Notes

¹ *Cry Freedom*, dir. Richard Attenborough (1987; Universal Pictures); *A Dry White Season*, dir. Euzhan Palcy (1989; Pinewood Studios); *The Wilby Conspiracy*, dir. Ralph Nelson (1972; Optimus Productions Ltd); *Lethal Weapon 2*, dir. Richard Donner (1989, Warner Bros Pictures).

² Leon De Kock, Louise Bethlehem and Sonja Laden, eds., *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2004).

³ *District 9*, dir. Neill Blomkamp (2010; Tristar Pictures).

⁴ *Tsotsi*, dir. Gavin Hood (2005; UK film and TV Production Company).

⁵ 'Evil Boy', *Die Antwoord*, Accessed 12 May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbW9JqM7vho>; 'Interview with Open'er', *Die Antwoord*, Accessed 12 May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Djj9aNHwj4&feature=related>.

⁶ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁷ Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism', *Borderlands* 3, No. 2 (2004).

⁸ Sarah Nuttall, 'City Forms and Writing the "Now" in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, No. 4 (2004): 736.

⁹ John Hyslop, 'White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: "Purified" Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation Against "Mixed" Marriages, 1934-9', *Journal of African History* 36 (1995); Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Ninevah: Studies in the Economic and Social History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Debbie Epstein, 'Marked Men: Whiteness and Masculinity', *Agenda* 37 (1998): 52.

¹¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Conquest* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995): 377.

¹² Mads Vestergaard, 'Who's Got the Map? The Negotiation of Afrikaner Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Daedalus* 130, No. 1 (2001): 20-21.

¹³ Abosede George, 'Who Are the Africans in *District 9*?', *The Zeleza Post e-Symposium* 3 (2010), Accessed 22 January 2012,

<http://www.zeleza.com/symposium/952>; Ato Quayson, 'Unthinkable Nigeriana: The Social Imaginary of District 9', *The Zeleza Post e-Symposium* 3 (2010), Accessed 22 January 2012, <http://www.zeleza.com/symposium/956>.

¹⁴ Deborah Posel, 'Whiteness and Power in the South African Civil Service: Paradoxes of the Apartheid State', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25, No. 1 (1999).

¹⁵ Sally Matthews, 'Becoming African: Debating Post-Apartheid White South African Identities', *African Identities* 9, No. 1 (2011): 12.

¹⁶ Zina Saro-Wiwa, personal email communication, 17 April 2011.

¹⁷ 'Zef Side', Die Antwoord (2009), Accessed 10 May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q77YBmtd2Rw>.

¹⁸ 'Enter the Ninja', Die Antwoord (2010), Accessed 9 May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cegdR0GiJ4>.

¹⁹ Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (London: William Heinemann, 1990), 179.

²⁰ 'Rich Bitch', Die Antwoord (2011), Accessed 2 May 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bdeizHM9OU>.

²¹ Liese Van de Watt, 'Witnessing Trauma in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Question of Generational Responsibility', *African Arts* 38, No. 3 (1995).

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The (In)Visible Whiteness of Beauty

Alice Yeow

Abstract

This paper asks the question, what is the relationship between racial whiteness, Enlightenment aesthetics and Asian women's aesthetic surgery? It answers that question by arguing that Enlightenment aesthetics developed a theory of whiteness that continues to shape the view of white women as the embodiment of unmarked beauty. In order to explore this argument, I will examine the ways in which aesthetic surgeons draw on Enlightenment aesthetic values to maintain white standards of female beauty. The results will show that aesthetic surgery is raced as well as gendered, because theories of beauty themselves are raced and gendered. Thus all aesthetic surgery can be regarded as a form of symbolic whitening, even if the skin itself is not literally whitened.

Key Words: Whiteness, aesthetics, Asian women, surgery, beauty, race.

1. What is Aesthetic Surgery?

The terms 'cosmetic,' 'aesthetic,' 'plastic' and 'reconstructive' are often used interchangeably, despite the words having acquired different meanings in particular historical contexts. For the contemporary feminist Kathy Davis, 'cosmetic' or 'aesthetic' surgery is 'surgery undertaken solely for reasons of appearance,' whereas 'reconstructive' or 'plastic' surgery is surgery that is undertaken to correct disfigurements through birth or accident.¹ I have settled on 'aesthetic surgery' because - according to the US literary and cultural historian Sander Gilman - this term is increasingly used by surgeons to refer to elective surgical procedures that alter the surface and shape of the body.²

Furthermore, the word 'aesthetics' has particular cultural resonances. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature and creation of beauty. Although the history of aesthetics can be traced back to ancient Greece, aesthetics did not become an independent area of study until the eighteenth century, during which very fixed definitions of beauty were developed. For example, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and David Hume convincingly argued that beauty is timeless and universal, and that the achievement of beauty is the ultimate goal of fine art: hence aesthetics is sometimes synonymous with the philosophy of art.

In fact the eighteenth century revival of Greek art enabled philosophers and art theorists, such as Winkelmann, Burke, and Hegel, to use what they believed were Classical examples of human beauty to establish a theory and history of art. In other words, *aesthetics created the very notion of art* (hence beauty); thus it makes

sense that aesthetics has come to incorporate other eighteenth century values regarding race and gender.

For example, some characteristics of feminine beauty that were modeled on Classical Greek examples include fairness (of the skin and hair), for ‘the colors of beautiful bodies must not be dusty, or muddy, but clean and fair;’³ gracefulness, characterised by round stomachs (denoting fertility), and soft angles of the female body;⁴ long hair gathered in a knot ‘without a visible band to confine it,’⁵ round eyes with half closed eyelids, expressing love;⁶ smooth bodies, often nude or semi nude (for pubic hair is masculine, connotes sexual power); a passive stance (implying sexual availability, vulnerability, or shame); and the S-shaped ‘line’ of beauty.⁷

2. The ‘Art’ of Surgery

Aesthetics is important to any analysis of women’s cosmetic surgery because it offers a discourse of beauty that is used by cosmetic surgeons and their advertising campaigns to sell their services to women (not just visually, as in the imitation of classical sculptural poses, but verbally, as in the construction of surgeons as artists/sculptors). For example, in an article titled ‘An Artistic Approach to Figure Sculpting,’ Doctor Anoop Rastogi explains that aesthetic appreciation and artistic talent are integral parts of his work:

By studying the patient’s figure carefully and looking at their proportions, balance and harmony can be achieved ... To do this the surgeon requires two attributes: an artistic flair with the ability to think and conceive in three dimensions, and the surgical skill to then take this three dimensional vision and create a beautiful figure.⁸

In another example, the homepage for the Nautilus Institute of Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery divides into two sub-sites: Chris Edwards as the surgeon and Chris Edwards as the sculptor. Although the two sites promote different kinds of work, Edwards’ dualistic self-representation mirrors the fusion of art and aesthetic surgery. Furthermore, the Nautilus Institute uses the Nautilus spiral as its official logo: according to Edwards, this symbolises the golden ratio, a mathematical equation (well known to the ancient Greeks) that defines the proportions of beautiful objects in nature. It is designated by the Greek symbol Φ , or phi, and also known as the golden mean, the divine proportion and the rule of thirds.

The Italian renaissance master Leonardo Da Vinci and the French architect Le Corbusier both used the golden ratio as a measure when producing their designs; and in 1997, Californian plastic surgeon Stephen Marquardt developed the ‘phi beauty mask,’ which measures the beauty of faces using the golden

ratio. Marquardt claims that beautiful faces of any gender and race - even babies' faces - fit this universal mask.⁹

3. The Whitening of Aesthetics

Of course, the Enlightenment philosophers identified many other characteristics of European beauty (not just whiteness, although this is the present focus). Nevertheless, Bindman argues that from as early as the sixteenth century, ideas about beauty have been inseparable from race, as white Europeans judged the civility and aesthetic capacity of other races by their appearance.¹⁰ Purdy agrees when he argues that the eighteenth century classicist's dismissal of colour as a factor in judging beauty is an argument in favour of whiteness, not just of marble but also of skin; for the absence of skin colour is also an absence of race: 'Consequently, some of the most esoteric discussions about the nature of Greek sculpture could be transformed into a justification for white supremacy.'¹¹

For example, in 1767 the Swedish physician Carl Linnaeus famously described 'four categories of humankind' that were based upon geographical origin and skin colour: the Americanus, who were red-skinned and easily angered; the Asiaticus, who were yellow-skinned and greedy; the Africanus, who were black-skinned and negligent; and the white Europeanus, who, in contrast to the corrupt 'coloured' people, were regarded by Linnaeus as 'gentle and inventive.'¹²

4. The Whiteness of Beauty

By the eighteenth century, Bindman asserts, artistic practice had traditionally been informed by racial theory, such as in the work of Petrus Camper, the eighteenth century Dutch anatomist and artist, who was a proponent of the renowned 'facial angle' theory of racial beauty.¹³ Unsurprisingly, Camper concluded that European faces measured closest to the 'ideal' classical face of antique statues, with African faces (and apes) measuring the farthest.

Not only was it assumed that classical examples of beauty found in ancient Greek sculpture depicted 'whiteness' in both a literal and metaphorical sense, it was also thought that Europeans were better at judging beauty (and creating works of art) than non-Europeans. Kant, for instance, established the idea that men of different races have a different idea of beauty, when he reasoned that 'a negro must have a different normal Idea of the beauty of the [human figure] from a white man, a Chinaman a different normal Idea from a European, etc.'¹⁴

Hume famously argues that the capacity to make pure aesthetic judgments is an acquired skill, something that only an educated, elite, class of civilised *men* were capable of achieving. According to Hume, such 'men of delicate taste' are 'distinguished in society by the soundness of their understanding, and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind.'¹⁵ In other words, for Hume, it is only upper-class white men who are capable of judging beauty and producing works of art. Conversely, the revered English artist/art critic John

Berger argues that it is usually *white women* who are depicted as objects of beauty in these works of art.¹⁶

Nanako Glenn's example of black women's 'double consciousness' (the notion that black women must see themselves and judge themselves as whites see them)¹⁷ can be applied to Asian women as well: white systems of representation have constructed Asians, on one hand, as silent and disciplined, and on the other hand as the 'yellow peril.' Thus Asian women have always been eroticised but regarded as 'less beautiful' than white women: this is frequently illustrated in Orientalist paintings of harem women, which feature the white woman as the object of male sexual fantasies and darker bodies as mere servants or exotic props.

5. Asian Aesthetic Surgery as a Feminist Problem

Purdy's sense that white classical beauty is 'raceless' is worthy of some consideration, particularly if we acknowledge the ways in which aesthetic surgery draws on classical ideas of beauty, and the subsequent popularity of specific kinds of surgeries among particular ethnic groups (such as eyelid surgery, breast enlargement and rhinoplasty to build up the nose bridge among Asian patients). Although such surgeries do not literally whiten the colour of the skin, they can nonetheless be regarded as symbolic forms of whitening, for as Elizabeth Haiken argues, whiteness is sometimes less about skin colour than appearance.

In her book *Venus Envy*, Haiken defines whiteness as an absence of identifiable racial markers as well as any class markers that might constitute a 'significant deviation from the average.'¹⁸ Similarly, Richard Dyer reminds us,

Although it has been customary in the West to call the complexion of Chinese or Japanese people yellow, it is by no means clear that their complexions are so distinct from that of white Westerners; it is generally the shape of the eyes that is critical in deciding whether someone is 'white' or 'yellow.'¹⁹

The extent to which aesthetic surgery is embraced in Asia is alarming, and its outcomes are unpredictable. According to Cullen,

In Korea, surgeons estimate that at least one in ten adults have received some form of surgical upgrade and even tots have their eyelids done. The government of Thailand has taken to hawking plastic surgery tours. In Japan, non-invasive procedures dubbed "petite surgery" have set off such a rage that top clinics are raking in \$US 100 million a year.²⁰

Some critics, such as Davis and Gilman, imply that aesthetic surgery is potentially empowering for Asian women because it brings the surface body in line with an

existing notion of a 'normal' self. Other feminists, such as Kaw and Goering, argue that aesthetic surgery is inherently oppressive - particularly for ethnic women - because, when it comes to aesthetic surgery, the concept of 'normal' is linked with beauty and beauty is informed by gendered and raced ideas.

Goering argues that cultural assumptions linking stereotypically Asian features with negative personality traits, disability and even mental illness are 'internalised' by Caucasian and non-Caucasians alike, as well as medical professionals who make use of them.²¹ For Kaw, such discrimination makes surgical racial passing into a legitimate goal.²²

6. Conclusion

Because most of the feminist literature encompassing women's aesthetic surgery has primarily focused on Western culture, the widespread nature of the phenomenon in Asia raises questions about the ways in which aesthetic surgery is marketed, and how Asian women's bodies are represented, on a global scale. This chapter demonstrates that Enlightenment aesthetics are important to any analysis of Asian aesthetic surgery because aesthetics developed a theory of racial whiteness, which continues to shape the view of white women as the embodiment of beauty.

Aesthetic surgery is therefore an understandable problem for feminist theorists because it mimics the relationship between the female subject/patient and the male artist/surgeon, and because its very conceptual framework is a product of gendered and raced ideas. This has further implications for Asian women, who represent a growing market for the practice, because concepts that underpin Asian beauty are also implicated in white notions of the aesthetic.

Notes

¹ Kathy Davis, *Dubious Equalities* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 24.

² Sander Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.

³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Ideas into the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Oxford University Press, 1767), 220.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵ Johann Joachim Winkelmann, *History of Art Volume Two*, trans. Giles Henry Lodge (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1849), 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: Reeves, 1753), 227.

⁸ Anoop Rastogi, 'An Artistic Approach to Figure Sculpting', *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* (Nov-Jan 2003): 86.

⁹ Stephen Marquardt, 'Contemporary Beauty', last updated 2011, Accessed 2 July 2011, http://www.beautyanalysis.com/index2_mba.htm.

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- ¹⁰ David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 15.
- ¹¹ Daniel Purdy, 'The Whiteness of Beauty: Weimar Neo-Classicism and the Sculptural Transcendence of Color', in *Colors 1800/ 1900/ 2000: Signs of Ethnic Difference*, ed. Birgit Tautz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 83.
- ¹² Quoted in Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 83.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York: Cosimo, 2007 [1790]), 53.
- ¹⁵ David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', in *Aesthetics: The Classic Readings*, ed. David Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 274.
- ¹⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1990), 62.
- ¹⁷ Evelyn Nanako Glenn, *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 84.
- ¹⁸ Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 181.
- ¹⁹ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 42.
- ¹⁹ Sara Goering, 'Conformity through Cosmetic Surgery: The Medical Erasure of Race and Disability', in *Science in Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, eds. Robert Figueroa and Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2003), 176.
- ¹⁹ Eugenia Kaw, 'Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7, No. 1 (1993): 243.
- ²⁰ Lisa Cullen, 'Changing Faces', *Time Magazine*, 2006, Accessed 14 June 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/1101020805/story.html>.
- ²¹ Goering, 'Conformity through Cosmetic Surgery', 176.
- ²² Kaw, 'Medicalization of Racial Features', 243.

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Kurdish Migrant Women and the Re-Conceptions of Race within Forms of Feminism

Toni Wright

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to discuss research into the unique set of migration circumstances of Iraqi Kurdish Muslim women migrants to the UK, and illuminate how categories and concepts of race have been applied and projected onto certain women by some postcolonial and black feminist writers who have assigned whiteness as a homogenised concept that excludes whiteness outside of a Western context. Data from the research sees many of the Kurdish women shifting between racial and social spaces that impact their experiences. These shifts challenge concepts and models of power held within the work of some feminist writers - specifically those who can be interpreted as fixing and positioning women in particular racial subjectivities. What has been significant in terms of race and forms of feminism is the Kurdish women's racial identification as white, and certain gender-related struggles with which that they also identify. Whilst most of the women generally did not wholly identify directly with all struggles and concepts held within the work of some white Western feminist writers, fundamental groundings, such as notions of universal women's rights and equality, found conceptualised within them did hold much appeal to, and a strong sense of identification for, the women. This strong appeal to and identification with these writers sat in contrast to much less appealing concepts of only oppressive relationships that exist between women that ground other forms of feminism, such as some postcolonial and black feminist work. It further suggests that it is possible for women's bodies to move through actual, social, and racial spaces, and to do so as an empowering experience of self-determination and not always as victims of oppressive governing dominant defining powers. The Kurdish women's movements, through actual, social, and racial spaces, illustrate how forms of transnational feminism are unfixed forms of feminism that are ever-changing, and being reorganised, recontextualised, and reconstituted.

Key Words: Migration, women, whiteness, transnational feminism, Iraqi, Kurdish, Muslim, racial spaces.

1. Introduction

This chapter derives from ethnographic research about the re-settlement experiences of Iraqi Kurdish Muslim women in the UK. Drawing on a strand of data collected it explores how the Kurdish women shift between and push the boundaries and limitations of racial categories that have tended to be set within the

work of some feminist writers. The evidence for this is illustrated by the fact that the women situate themselves explicitly as white and Westernised, and in so doing embark on a process of spanning multiple and contradictory racial spaces that see them engage in a 'dialectic of identity.'¹

2. Feminism and Racial Discourses

There have been moves recently, in feminist theories concerning diversities that address a structured world whereby women's positions within it are built around race. In terms of feminist work, Frankenberg has been significant in addressing issues surrounding whiteness.² Frankenberg exposes the privilege of whiteness and the process of de-constructing whiteness in her work. This is useful in illuminating the otherwise concealed social, political, and cultural positions that white people occupy, and demonstrates that whiteness has been - and is often - invisible; yet it is the marker against which all other racial categories are measured.

Writers such as Frankenberg and Ahmed have suggested that turning to whiteness is essential for exposing its privilege, and thereby for highlighting the differences that exist between women.³ But Ahmed, in particular, calls for there to be another turn - a 'double turn' as she puts it - away from whiteness in order to de-centralise it and deconstruct the racial hierarchical model in which it currently exists. For Ahmed, whiteness must be viewed within a 'rainbow of colours' that lies alongside each other, rather than whiteness being a disconnected privileged space.⁴ I suggest this can be extended and that rather than fixing women racially in the colours of that rainbow that migration experiences that may provide for shifts between simultaneous occupations of racial spaces.

So, how have - and how do - the experiences of migrants challenge such racial fixation? In the field of migration this is especially relevant, considering the importance relocations may play in people's construction and reconstruction of identities for themselves and for others around them.⁵ Studies of whiteness have tended to assume the victimisation of Black women and women 'of colour.' In such studies, whiteness is positioned as privileged, and occupants of the opposing space (i.e., black or 'of colour') necessarily position such spaces as automatically underprivileged. I suggest that not all black women or women 'of colour' necessarily see themselves as underprivileged in all situations, at all times, and in all places. I suggest that privilege and underprivilege could, indeed, be part of shifting patterns in women's lives, especially when considering experiences of migration.

The focus on installing a separation between whiteness and non-whiteness has had a tendency to victimise all assigned to non-whiteness and provide privilege exclusively for all assigned to whiteness. Furthermore, it fails to ask which women identify themselves as 'white,' or 'not quite white,' as 'not black,' as 'black,' or as 'of colour,' and at what times and in what places they do that. It assigns colour and race to women in a restrictive and static way that may yet prove to be inappropriate

and unwelcome by some women - particularly by migrant women who move locations and may more easily occupy different (even multiple) racial identities.

Feminist writers who speak of differences and diversity between women and focus on those differences as what women have in common with each other tend to fix women into particular racial categories without necessarily acknowledging that movement and self-determination are possible within and between those categories and spaces. However, exploration into the experiences of more recent migrations have shown that such racial categories and spaces are more negotiable and related to more complex interlocking subjectivities than black and postcolonial feminist writers have suggested so far.⁶

Some more recent migration studies have been useful in exploring the spaces between what has become the installation within feminisms of a non-white/white racial divide. Brodtkin has investigated how law, policy, work, and popular culture pigeonhole migrants as 'other,' as 'of colour,' and as 'outside the "norm."' ⁷ Crucially, however, she shows how some 'others' have become socially acceptable over different times and in different places; how some migrants who had been cast as 'unacceptables' and 'undesirables' by dominant powers and discourses can become, over different times and places, 'acceptable;' and how it has been possible for them to move between 'unacceptable' and 'acceptable' social and racial spaces.

The majority of the Kurdish women interviewed frequently referred to a strong belief in notions of universal women's rights and equality. An example of this comes from a participant who spoke about the right of women to no-violent non-abusive husband-wife relationships, saying, 'Women have the right not to be beaten up.' Within feminism, that referent marker of equality has been exposed by black, postcolonial, and Muslim feminist writers as being the white Western woman experience, but the Kurdish women often saw gendered experiences as universal women experiences.⁸

In contrast, Ang-Lygate has proposed that 'the space is there to examine complexities and contradictions without losing sight of feminist ideas of sisterhood, social justice and freedom from oppression.'⁹ The women's collective proposed by Ang-Lygate grows out of an argument surrounding (what has become in feminisms) a false separation between white and non-white women whom, it has been assumed, occupy very particularly different racial spaces. This is in place of an awareness that women who have been assumed to occupy non-white racial spaces may possibly self-define, and therefore occupy, what has been assumed to be exclusively a white racial space. I suggest that women's shifts between racial and social spaces have been much more of a possibility than has so far been proposed within feminist arguments. I believe it is possible for forms of feminism to be transformed through the recognition of how and why women identify particular racial commonalities with each other, whilst also why and how they simultaneously, and sometimes contradictorily, cite racial un-commonalities with each other.

Some feminist theorists¹⁰ have focused heavily on the differences and diversities that exist between women, suggesting that liberal equality discourse needs to be dismantled.¹¹ It is, however, presumptuous to assume that all women who have been categorised by such feminist theorists as ‘different’ from the referent marker (white Western women) want to see such a deconstruction and dismantling. Imposing ‘difference’ on certain women can also serve to reinforce the referent marker’s exclusive and privileged position, and homogenise that referent marker space as white and Western, and further assumes the right to govern women and shape them as ‘different’.

The Kurdish women’s experiences of racial positioning and identity forces the referent marker space to be opened up, disrupting its oppressive power flow and the way that power has been focused upon. The way in which the majority of the Kurdish women have done this is through a process of assertion and strategies of self-definition. The following section seeks to demonstrate more explicitly how this is achieved.

3. Research Data Results

This strand of research data relates to the ways in which dominant powers and discourses have been operating in shaping and governing the racial identities of the Kurdish women in particular ways. It explores some of the complexities of how the women accept and understand such shaping and governance, replicating the same governance they experience themselves over other women. It also explores how the women seek to subvert, challenge, and resist this in strategies of self-determination, thereby opening up the possibility of breaking out of points of assigned governance, and of occupying multiple conflicting racial spaces at the same time.

An example of how the women felt they were defined as refugees and asylum-seekers, and how they desired to escape such governance as being a part of a particularly undesirable group, came when an interviewee confided that she wanted to move to live in another area of town. She explained it was important for her to move in order to re-determine herself:

Participant: I want to go to a different area. I want to go to [an area of town]. Yeah, it’s quiet and all the people are English. Here there are too many people, and they are refugees, and it’s busy. Busy everything. Yeah, it’s nice [an area of town]. Yeah, nice and quiet.

Researcher: When you say ‘English’, what do you mean?

Participant: White. Yeah, I like this.

Moving into white neighbourhoods was a strategy for escaping the discourses governing certain racially-constituted areas of town as ‘undesirable.’ The women’s

view of themselves as racially ‘acceptable,’ and being closer to whiteness than ‘otherness,’ was put succinctly by another interviewee, who said of meeting white British people,

When I meet people I say I am from Iraq. They say, “What! Why are you not black?” I tell them we are not black, the Kurdish people. No, because Kurdish people from the north, they are not black. But some Arab people, yes.

In a process of ‘othering’ and self-making, the women defined the ‘other’ as black and Arab, and themselves as not black - and often as white. There was a sense of them defining themselves racially as not-black, and not-Arab, and there was surprise when dominant discourses defined the women in ways conflicting with this self-making. One participant illustrates what surprise came when she experienced white British people defining her as Pakistani:

Somebody just said, “You bloody Pakistani,” although I am not from Pakistan. I think he must have been drunk and that he saw me differently.

Evidence shows that the women themselves made use of such discourses in order to produce and define themselves against those they define and produce as ‘other’; yet, at the same time they were confronted and contradicted by the fact that dominant powers and discourses made use of the same strategies in ‘othering’ and racially positioning them.

Data collected outside of the interview situation illustrates also this well. I was often told that, before coming to the UK, the Kurds thought of themselves as white. An interviewee confirmed by saying, ‘We thought we were white until we came here. Then we realised we are black to you.’

The vast majority of the Kurdish women represent a group of women who may well be defined as non-Western and non-white, but who feel comfortable with the concepts of liberal equality and universal rights for women discourse, and with processes of ‘othering’ that have exist in the work of some white Western feminists, which they employ towards other women. Therefore, there are elements of some forms of white Western feminism with which the vast majority of participants felt an affinity, a sense of some kind of sisterhood through shared struggles for equality and rights.¹² Frequently during interviews that Kurdish women would tell of experiences of gender oppression, clarifying at the end an understanding of this as a universal experience for women by saying ‘you understand’ and ‘you know what I mean.’

Much of what the Kurdish women expressed does not ignore the differences between women and the privileges that white British women enjoy. The women

who spoke of shared struggles for equality and universal rights did not dismiss the concepts in some forms of white Western feminism as wholly irrelevant to them, but the study participants only align themselves in a very limited way with concepts of difference as commonality held within some black and postcolonial forms of feminism. The women, more generally, distanced themselves from postcolonial and black experiences, associating closely with a more socially acceptable experience of whiteness.

This reveals the extent to which certain women set their own social contexts, resisting white Western feminist concepts that have automatically sought to exclude them by claiming them as, in part, relevant.¹³ The Kurdish women set new boundaries and introduce limitless movement between racial categories, working to open up different possibilities of being not previously fully considered by feminist writers.

4. Conclusion

The process of migration has been key to many of the Kurdish women's shift between, not only literal space and boundaries, but also racial spaces. Because of this unique shifting experience, they have been able also to migrate through, and position themselves across and within, the context of different forms of feminism according to their own self-determination; thereby, they have resisted being positioned in particular ways (for example, as non-white) and of being impacted by postcolonial legacies by particular feminist writers.

The majority of the Kurdish women's self-identification as white demonstrates a debunking of concepts of what it means to be racially white within certain feminist arguments, and of which feminist writers have assigned, and do assign, certain women as white and non-white. This reconceptualisation of whiteness challenges feminist writers to look at how they have produced some women in particular ways. By saying that Western forms of feminism are exclusively white in nature, their exclusivity and privilege can be reinforced. I subscribe to the position that forms of white Western feminism have clumsily attempted to speak for all women, having advocated a woman experience, and that in so doing they have negated the diversities and differences that have significance between women that postcolonial and black feminist writers have illuminated. But the Kurdish women are able to open up those clumsily written white Western spaces and take parts of the concepts and theories and re-imagine them and make them their own - of claiming, re-conceptualising, and reconstituting them in multiple and different ways.

For most of the Kurdish women, a focus on the universal oppression of women (something that features largely in forms of white Western feminism) is a very attractive concept with which they relate and strongly identify. The following statement from an interviewee illustrates well how the Kurdish women identify more strongly with Western concepts of women's oppression than with concepts

that relate more to racial difference:

I don't know why. I'm very sorry I say these things. Even my sisters, they say the same. I don't say we have been more English. I am not saying that we are being more Western, but I think these ideas are more for us [more for Kurdish women].

Of course, the women identifying themselves as racially white were not always straightforward. A number of the women spoke about how this self-identification was challenged when, whilst very limited, 'close encounters' with the local white British population did take place and resulted in experiences of negativity, of insults, and of racial abuse.¹⁴ Employing processes of mitigation that involved installing and maintaining distance encounters between themselves and particular groups of people proved to be empowering and positive experiences for many of the Kurdish women.

In summary, the majority of the Kurdish women were able, from their migration through literal space and borders, to experience movement through racial spaces, whether that was through Foucauldian processes of self-making or through production by external characters and agencies.¹⁵ Because of this physical migration and social movement, many of the Kurdish women were able to connect to what were, for them, different aspects of different concepts within different forms of feminism. It suggests that it is possible for women's bodies to move through actual, social, and racial spaces, and to do so as an empowering experience of self-determination and not always as victims of oppressive governing dominant defining powers. The Kurdish women's movements, through actual, social, and racial spaces, illustrate how forms of transnational feminism can be unfixed forms of feminism that are ever-changing, and being reorganised, recontextualised, and reconstituted.

Whilst this chapter is indicative of a breaking down of the white privileging written into some feminist work there is something uncomfortable about the way in which the opening up of white Western feminist space has been done by the Kurdish women. There needs to be a re-orientation to consider the work being done to achieve that breaking down and stripping away of power and privilege and acknowledgment of the expense to which it happens.

Notes

¹ Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 209.

- ² Ruth Frankenberg, 'Growing up "White": Feminism, Racism and the Social Geography of Childhood', *Feminist Review* 45 (1993), 51-84.
- ³ Ibid., 238-293. Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism', *borderlands e-journal* 3, No. 2 (2004): 59.
- ⁴ Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness', 42.
- ⁵ Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume I* (London: Penguin, 1997), 177-178. Also Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 300.
- ⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 32.
- ⁷ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2002).
- ⁸ Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes', in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russ and Lourdes Torres (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 55.
- ⁹ Magdalene Ang-Lygate, 'Charting the Spaces of (Un)location: On Theorising Diaspora', in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza (London and New York, 1997), 181.
- ¹⁰ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (London: Crossing, 1984). bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Cambridge MA: South End Press, 1984). Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes'.
- ¹¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family: Private Property and the State* (Richmond VA: Electric Book Company, 1973), 72.
- ¹² Shahrzad Mojab, *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds* (Irvine California: Mazda Publications, 2001), 10.
- ¹³ Catharine MacKinnon, 'From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?', *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4, No. 1 (1991): 15. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 178. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: Women's Press, 1978), 11.
- ¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 161-181.
- ¹⁵ Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*.

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The Gendered Hyper-Visibility of Whiteness in *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night*

Hannah Hamad

Abstract

This chapter critically explores the centrality, visual aesthetic and over-determined articulation of discourses of whiteness in the contemporary Hollywood thrillers *Whiteout* (Dominic Sena, 2009) and *30 Days of Night* (David Slade, 2007), paying particular attention to the manner in which whiteness has been gendered in these films, and to specific gendered tropes of whiteness that correspond to familiar cultural scripts. These are the idealised whiteness of the female investigator (Kate Beckinsale's US Marshal Carrie Stetko in *Whiteout* and Melissa George's Alaska Fire Marshal Stella Oleson in *30 Days of Night*) and, conversely, the malevolent and troubling hyper-whiteness of the male antagonist characters (Alex O'Loughlin and Tom Skerrit's serial killing duo Russell Haden and Dr John Fury in *Whiteout*, and Danny Huston's vampire Marlow in *30 Days of Night*). Both the serial killer and the vampire are, of course, stock figures of troubling white masculinity in over-determined representations of whiteness in popular cinema and culture more broadly, but the over-determination of the extent to which their whiteness is made visible here is noteworthy. This is exacerbated and accentuated by the 'persistence'¹ of the visibility of whiteness in the absence of natural light, in diegetic conceits germane to each, specifically the Alaskan setting of *30 Days of Night* and the Antarctic setting of *Whiteout*. I therefore address discourses of whiteness in these films with regard to gender and visual aesthetics, the alignment of whiteness with death (the first murder victim in *Whiteout* is significantly named Weiss), and its broad discursive over-determination.

Key Words: Whiteness, gender, Hollywood, film, horror, thrillers.

1. Introduction

This chapter critically explores the centrality, visual aesthetic and over-determined articulation of discourses of whiteness in the contemporary Hollywood thrillers *Whiteout* (Dominic Sena, 2009) and *30 Days of Night* (David Slade, 2007). There is a great deal of discursive overlap in the films' respective articulations of whiteness in terms of, for example, visual aesthetics, thematisations of whiteness and the modes and manner in which whiteness is gendered. This is also apparent in many of the ways in which these films evince tropic, thematic, visual and more broadly discursive tendencies in their representations of whiteness that speak directly to some of the major and most influential ways in which whiteness in visual culture has been theorised and conceptualised by scholars. These include the

discursive alignment of whiteness with death, germane to the way in which horror has been theorised as a racially charged genre in terms of its tendency to not only discursively privilege but to also markedly over-determine whiteness. This occurs by the over-determination of what Gwendolyn Audrey Foster terms cinematic ‘white space,’² a visual aesthetic of whiteness that works to reinforce the films’ racial discourse and negotiate white hegemony, through the juxtaposition of what Foster has termed the ‘good white body’ with the ‘bad white body’³ and, lastly, through the playing out of familiar cultural scripts of white embodiment, such as that of the female investigator and the malevolent and troubling white masculinities of stock figures such as the serial killer, the vampire, and the cerebral whiteness of the scientist, all of whom, at different times, are marked by an excess of whiteness and concomitantly deficient humanity. What follows, prior to more detailed interrogation of these tropes, figures and motifs of whiteness, is necessary narrative and contextual information about *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night*, which will better enable subsequent observations about their discourses of whiteness.

2. Overviews

Whiteout tells the story of U.S. Marshal Carrie Stetko (Kate Beckinsale) who is preparing to leave her Antarctic posting for a more temperate climate before the sunless winter strands her there for the ensuing months. However, her imminent departure is unexpectedly delayed when she happens across the first victim of what appears to be Antarctica’s first serial killer. She is duty-bound to remain at her station in order to oversee the case. She is aided in her investigation by various male subsidiary characters, some of whom, it transpires, are both untrustworthy and troublingly hyper-white. She is also plagued by traumatic flashbacks to her previous posting in Miami, where she was forced to kill a traitorous male colleague. *30 Days of Night* tells the story of Eben and Stella Oleson (Josh Hartnett and Melissa George), an estranged white couple who find themselves the only figures of official authority (he is the sheriff, she is a fire marshal) in a small Alaskan town that is cut off from the rest of the world as it succumbs to the film’s eponymous mid-winter *30 Days of Night*, during which time the sun does not rise and the town is besieged by a pack of brutally carnivorous hyper-white vampires.

3. *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night* as Companion Pieces

From these brief introductions and synopses, it is already possible to identify some of the ways in which these films work as companion pieces in terms of the ways in which they articulate whiteness. For example, both feature variations on ideal white femininity in the figure of the female investigator, both of who are juxtaposed against the demonised hyper-whiteness of their respective male antagonists: the vampire Marlow (Danny Huston) in *30 Days of Night*, and Tom Skeritt’s serial killing and diamond smuggling doctor in *Whiteout*.

Both films are adapted from graphic novels of the same name,⁴ and each plays out its narrative of hyper-visible whiteness largely in the absence of natural light, in diegetic conceits that facilitate a juxtaposition between over-determined whiteness and discursive darkness, culminating in narratives and thematics of dark whiteness. This is made possible by a number of things. First and foremost are their respective polar settings: the Alaskan setting of *30 Days of Night* and the Antarctic setting of *Whiteout*. Within these backdrops, each stages conflicts, both narrative and discursive, between Foster's 'good white body' and 'bad white body.'⁵ The 'good white body' is the normatively and/or ideally white figure of authority, whose point of view is privileged, and who occupies the universal subject position: Stetko in *Whiteout* and Eben and Stella Oleson in *30 Days of Night*. The 'bad white body' is a figure of troubling or excessive whiteness aligned with death: the serial killing duo in *Whiteout* and the vampires in *30 Days of Night*.

The narratives of both films see small (largely white) communities in over-determinedly white geographical spaces under siege by malevolent forces of troubling hyper-whiteness, while benevolent figures of ideal whiteness struggle against these forces to maintain control of their own normative white selves, and to protect their communities from the discursive darkness of these forces.

In both films, the majority of the action takes place either on the cusp of or over the course of the extended periods of darkness germane to the winters of their respective polar settings, which in most other respects are starkly all-white, the signification of which is over-determined by landscape cinematography of their respective icescapes. In this way both are imbued with an aesthetic of dark whiteness, commensurate with the discursive darkness, malevolence and death commonly attached to excesses of whiteness.

In the case of *30 Days of Night* the discursive centrality of whiteness is made further apparent via the 'whitewashing' of the central male character Eben Oleson. In the film's source material, the 2002 graphic novel miniseries by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith, the character, played in the film by Josh Hartnett, is Inuit and named Eben Olemaun. In the process of adaptation the Native American aspects of the story have been largely elided.

4. Horror as a White Genre

Scholars on whiteness in visual culture have noted that there is a link between the horror genre and the whiteness germane to and dominant within its discourse. Most notably, this idea was articulated through Richard Dyer's conceptualisation of what he calls 'white death,'⁶ a notion that equates death, and the horror of death, with whiteness. Dyer states that 'the idea of whites as both themselves dead and as harbingers of death is commonly hinted at in horror.'⁷ He identifies these dead whites firstly in the recurring figures of vampires, zombies and ghosts, who are frequently over-determinedly white, and secondly, he identifies the over-determinedly white figures of the serial killer, cyborg and scientist as the

mentioned 'harbingers of death.'⁸ The films under consideration here conform to this tropic recurrence; the harbingers of death in *30 Days of Night* are vampires, while in *Whiteout* they are a pair of serial murdering scientists. These are of course not mutually exclusive discourses of white death, but are rather overlapping and mutually reinforcing, commensurate with Dyer's claim that in representational culture, 'all whites bring death and, by implication, all whites are dead (in terms of human feeling).'⁹ Both Stetko in *Whiteout* and Eben in *30 Days of Night* bear out this claim.

Stetko's embodied whiteness is shown to have intensified following her killing of a colleague in Miami, where she is shown to be vulnerable as a result of her human emotion, so she retreats to a posting in Antarctica, an excess of whiteness and the dispassionate rationality that her job necessitates, factors which combined make for her de facto 'white death.' Eben can only act as a harbinger of death, bringing death to the malevolent vampires by first bringing it upon himself. He allows himself to become one of them, and thus sacrifices his own humanity and the normativity of his whiteness in order to defeat them.

Dyer highlights how associations of whiteness with death via horror make cultural space for potentially troubling scenarios for whiteness (like those described above) and the viability of its discursive dominance. However, he also attempts to account for how the seemingly contradictory or destabilising potential or tendencies of discursive white death instead negotiate white hegemony. He does this firstly by presenting horror as a safe space in which to work out these tensions and anxieties, arguing for it as 'a cultural space that makes bearable for whites the exploration of the association of whiteness with death.'¹⁰ He also highlights how horror allows normative or ideal whiteness to evade association with its more troubling counterpart at the same time as accounting for it and disavowing it, suggesting, 'Horror films have their cake and eat it [i.e., they negotiate white hegemony, in that] they give us the horror of whiteness while at the same time ascribing it to those who are liminally white, [and thus] the terror of whiteness ... is both vividly conveyed and disowned.'¹¹

By demarcating the division between ideal or normative whiteness embodied in the protagonists and the troubling hyper-whiteness of the troubling troped antagonists, the horror of whiteness can be Othered and transcended. Stetko transcends the horrifying whiteness of the serial killer antagonists by defeating them. The humanity of the Olesons is over-determined in relation to the horrifying inhumanity of the hyper-white vampires, so that they too can be defeated.

Foster notes that a high proportion of what she calls 'bad white body' films are horrors, highlighting that 'horror films frequently feature unstable white bodies: white bodies out of control, invisible white bodies, bodies missing hands, brains without skulls, monstrous eyeballs, bodies contaminated by nuclear fallout, bodies at war with their own corporeal existence.'¹² This is seen in *30 Days of Night* in Eben's struggle to maintain control of his white body for as long as possible after

he infects himself with vampire blood in order to be able to fight them, requiring him to stave off the inevitable corporeal transformation (from normative to hyper whiteness) for as long as he can before the good whiteness associated with the light of day (in the coming of the first dawn after the eponymous thirty days of night) returns the town to safety and the control of normative whiteness.

Similarly, Carrie Stetko loses two of her fingers as a result of the exposure of her white skin to the troublingly excessive whiteness signified by the snowstorm that constitutes the film's eponymous *Whiteout*. During an outdoor struggle with the as-yet-unknown killer, the moisture of Carrie's hand is exposed to metal, instantly freezing her skin which rips off as she pulls her hand back. Later, the affected fingers (which have started to turn black) are amputated in order to save her hand. Foster identifies a cluster of amputee films as a notable cycle of 'bad white body' narratives, which, she says, 'allow for a sort of white splitting of identity, a space where shame and guilt can be disrupted or identified.'¹³ Shame and guilt are certainly at play in this case, as Carrie has transferred to Antarctica from Miami as an upshot of the guilt she feels over the death of her duplicitous partner who she was obliged to kill in order to save her own life. The film indeed articulates Carrie's identity as split between the tanned and impassioned Carrie of the Miami sequences that we see in sepia-toned flashback, and the pale Carrie of the colourless Antarctica sequences that see her retreat into a mode of whiteness at once devoid of emotion and defined by rationality, order and control.

The normative white bodies of both Eben and Carrie are therefore destabilised by a loss of control to troubling hyper-whiteness. Central to the embodiment of normative whiteness is the ability to maintain control over the white body, and frequently in horror, the loss of such control results in the troubling abjection of whiteness, and consequently the discursive alignment of whiteness with death via the hyper-whiteness that such alignment engenders, often via archetypal harbingers of hyper-white death, such as the vampire and the serial killer, as is the case here.

5. Cinematic White Space

As Daniel Bernardi highlights, notwithstanding arguments for what is posited as the cultural invisibility of whiteness, it has long been the case in popular cinema that 'whiteness is nonetheless visible as white, replete with its own body of visual and narratological evidence. Ranging from white characters to white lighting techniques to stories of white superiority, this evidence is the stuff of texts and tales.'¹⁴ Foster coined the term 'white space'¹⁵ in relation to cinematic whiteness when she conceptualised it as a spatial corollary to the discursive dominance of whiteness in cinema, and as indicated already, this notion is compounded in the extreme by the snowy backdrops of *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night*. In these films, 'white space' is over-determined and hyper-visible in a manner commensurate with what Ewan Kirkland has elsewhere discussed as 'the mise-en-scene of whiteness.'¹⁶ A key scene in *Whiteout* compounds this notion of the mise-en-scene

of whiteness and cinematic white space further, and can be seen in the viewer's introduction to Carrie, which sees her come inside from the white outdoors, remove her extreme cold weather gear to reveal layers of white clothing, before she peels them off one by one to reveal her white body, showers in a white bathroom, and emerges in a white robe next to a room adorned simply with a white orchid (a delicate flower that can survive in all climates *except* the hyper-white arctics - it, like Stetko, does not truly belong in this context of threatening whiteness). It thus introduces the female protagonist via a ritual cleansing of her white body in the connotatively sterile white bathroom. It also introduces 'Doc,' with his white beard and white hair, aligning white masculinity with the scientific and the cerebral. This scene thus not only over-determines the whiteness of the diegetic space, but, by Stetko's juxtaposition with the overly cerebral white doctor who enters the room to discuss the murder case, it sets up what will become the gendered dichotomy of whiteness in the film, in which white femininity is ultimately virtuous and idealised and is juxtaposed with troubling white masculinities.

Kirkland goes on to illustrate that these sorts of 'symbols of whiteness are not divorced from the construction of whiteness as a race which is aloof, emotionally controlled, culturally empty, and which enjoys a symbolic relationship with death'.¹⁷ All of this is borne out by the serial killer narrative of *Whiteout*. So, in these ways this sequence articulates the gendered hyper-visibility of whiteness germane to the film's wider discourse via a number of motifs, whether visual, thematic or more broadly discursive. Also significant in this regard is the casting of Kate Beckinsale in the role of the hyper-white female investigator protagonist. Beckinsale's extant screen persona brought baggage to this role, due in large part to her centrality to the deathly hyper-white discourse of the *Underworld* film franchise. In these films, the surface inhumanity of her vampire protagonist Selene is shown to be a smokescreen, ultimately, for her latent humanity, allowing her to transcend her troubling, deathly, inhuman hyper-whiteness to embody a more normative ideal. Similarly, here in *Whiteout*, her cold, emotionless hyper-whiteness, compounded by the hyper-whiteness of the Antarctic setting, is a temporary smokescreen for the ideal normativity and virtuous whiteness that will ultimately characterise her.

6. Concluding Remarks

Some of the main points to take from this, then, are that contrary to the state of affairs critiqued by early scholarly conceptualisations of cinematic whiteness, in which whiteness was notable for its invisibility and default status relative to social identity formations that had been discursively culturally othered, whiteness in *Whiteout* and *30 Days of Night* is notable instead for its hyper-visibility, and the ways in which visual aesthetics and racial discourses of whiteness mutually reinforce one another in these films' broad discursive over-determination of whiteness.

Notes

¹ Daniel Bernardi, 'Introduction: Race and the Hollywood Style', in *Classic Hollywood Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xvii.

² Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 47.

³ Foster, *Performing Whiteness*, 3.

⁴ Greg Rucka and Steve Lieber, *Whiteout* (Portland: Oni Press, July-November 1998); Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith, *30 Days of Night* (IDW Publishing, 2002).

⁵ Foster, *Performing Whiteness*, 3.

⁶ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 207.

⁷ Dyer, *White*, 210.

⁸ The related discursive dominance of whiteness in science fiction via generic affinity to some of these figures is clear. This is literalised in the science fiction television drama series *Battlestar Galactica*, in which one over-determinedly white character (Starbuck) is identified and named as a harbinger of death by another (a cyborg, known in the series as a Cylon).

⁹ Dyer, *White*, 211.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Foster, *Performing Whiteness*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴ Bernardi, 'Race and the Hollywood Style', xvi.

¹⁵ Foster, *Performing Whiteness*, 47.

¹⁶ Ewan Kirkland, 'Dexter's Whiteness', in *Dexter and Philosophy*, ed. George A. Reisch (Chicago: Open Court, 2011), 215.

¹⁷ Kirkland, 'Dexter's Whiteness', 216.

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PART 3

Cultures of White and Non-White

Selling Finnishness - National Constructions of Whiteness in Finnish TV Advertisements

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on analysing visual representations of whiteness and the manufacturing of Finnish national culture in one Finnish TV advertisement, inspired by critical whiteness studies and critical visual cultural studies in discussion with feminist and postcolonial theories. The ads in Finnish television have become more white and nationalist during last couple of years. The advertisements echo the changing environment in Finland: xenophobia has increased, popular speech has become racist toward immigrants and especially toward those who visually differ from the assumed phenotype of 'white' Finns, and even towards the old minority groups such as Finn-Swedes. The political environment has become nationalist and populist. The populist xenophobic party True Finns multiplied its votes in the parliamentary election in April 2011.

Key Words: Media/visual representations, TV advertisement, whiteness, race, ethnicity, nationalism, racism.

1. Introduction

Finnish culture is seen as being homogeneously white and, stereotypically, the phenotype of Finns is seen as white and blond with blue eyes, but of course it is not that simple. Most of the cultural images such as advertisements feature white people in Finland. In this paper I analyse visual representations of whiteness in one Finnish TV advertisement, which is part of the larger data of my research. But why study white imagery in Finnish TV advertisements, which are obvious and taken for granted? The question can be answered the same way as queer theorists' answer to the question why study heterosexuality: exactly because this imagery is so taken for granted and thoroughly naturalised. And simply because heterosexual hegemony still forms the dominant order in our society, it is important to look closely at its different formations in order to find new ways of challenging that order.

Whiteness needs to be studied critically because white people are not seen racially same way as non-white people are. White people are seen as the human norm.¹ Whiteness is invisible and it needs to be made visible to be able to question existing racism. In Finland whiteness has been considered as the property of Finns,² and in Finnish TV advertisements whiteness is hyper-naturalised. But white Finnishness has not always been that obvious: the confirmation of whiteness for Finns took place about a hundred years ago. Before that, other Europeans

assigned Finns a lower status in the racialised hierarchy - as descendants of Mongols. In order to prove the opposite over 100,000 Finnish men were measured by Finnish scholars.³ This shows that 'racial bodies' come to be seen as 'having' a 'racial identity,' such as the way in which white and black bodies are discursively, socially and culturally constructed in different time and space.⁴

Media representations do not only reflect the 'reality,' they also construct and produce it.⁵ It is also known that the possibilities for equal encounters are lessened in an environment where dominant cultural images subordinate the representations of some people compared to the others.⁶ It is important to analyse the discourses of cultural images, because media representations produce and repeat cultural differences and stereotypes and have a large effect on how cultural differences are seen and imagined. They shape identities and pictures of the world - how 'we' and 'others' are seen can even lead to ethnic cleansing and racism.⁷ It is also a matter of politics and the exercise of power: who is included in representations and who has the power to define the representational codes and discourses.⁸ Media is part of the system producing ideologies, because it is in a crucial position determining our understanding of race and ethnicity.⁹

Advertisements are different to other cultural products because of their commercial aspects of selling goods. Representations of gender, sexuality and ethnicity are more straightforward in television advertisements than in wider audiovisual productions. Advertising supports the dominant or the hegemonic way of looking, and affects the way we want ourselves to be seen. The repertoires of heteronormative and racialised white representations in the so-called normal or ideal imaginary offer us models to be identified and admired, but also offer a target for counteraction.¹⁰ With these representations the advertisers are selling ideal stories about what is good and bad, normal and abnormal. The device used in advertising business is to present the kind of characters that are easy to recognise as women and men. Conventionally ideal beautiful women are young and thin with long hair, symmetric faces and porcelain white skin, and handsome men are tall with muscles and angular faces.¹¹

Performativity is characteristic of television advertising. Repetitive representations of television advertisements help us to remember and recognise the products, but they also help us to absorb the representations.¹² Based on performance, the forms of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity come true in social power relationships and in the process of endless and compelling repetition. This is called 'simulation work,' when consumers identify themselves with the performances of advertisements - they are forced to identify with the advertisement's heteronormative images.¹³ The same power position can be seen in the performance of race when whiteness is represented in advertisements hegemonically and normatively compared to non-whiteness.

My intention in this chapter is to make the whiteness in Finnishness visible and to question it by focusing on the images of white representations in one Finnish TV

advertisement, which was shown during prime time on the main Finnish commercial television channels in 2010. I will discuss race, ethnicity and whiteness and, before giving conclusions, I will analyse my example by using close reading.

2. Naturalised White Finns

The term race has been problematic in the researches related to multiculturalism, ethnicity, race and nationalism.¹⁴ Some scholars have been avoiding the term or have used it with quotation marks or replaced it with ethnicity, because of its history and connections with racism.¹⁵ In the poststructuralist tradition, ethnicity and race are understood according to constructivism as a relationship and as a continuous process of negotiations - one becomes ethnic or racial in a relationship to another, who is different.¹⁶ Constructivism has managed to deconstruct the naturalisation of ethnicity and race, but according to, for example, neo-materialistic critique, the meaning of race is not the same as culture, ethnicity or 'colour', and race cannot be replaced by them.¹⁷ Race has connection to a body and its visual signs. Sara Ahmed questions the presumed opposition between essentialism and constructionism, but she also argues that even while the racial body is discursively constructed, 'essence' does not disappear.¹⁸ As Ruth Frankenberg argues, the construction of whiteness is densely interwoven with constructions of femininity and masculinity as well as with class and nationhood.¹⁹ 'Did Jews and other Euroethnics become white because they became middle class? That is, did money whiten?'²⁰ The same question can be asked about the first Finns who emigrated to US, who were originally not seen as white.

Racism has a strong connection to visibility and I also argue that the term race should be used in order to be able to discuss about the questions of existing racism. The biological and bodily parts of race cannot be shut out from visual analysis. Those should be recognised as active elements in the production of meaning, without giving them the deterministic role.²¹ Unconditionally abstaining from using race in order not to renew the connotations of biological race and racism may lead to silence in racial experiences.²² Finnish racism researcher Vesa Puuronen notes that the idea of races and racial order also exist in Finland and will not disappear if we do not talk about them.²³ Whiteness seems to be so normative and privileged in Finland that many people do not seem to recognise it and are denying the existing racism.

Skin colour - white and non-white - effects people's lives in Finland now more than some years ago. In April 2011 a parliamentary election brought up discussions about racism. The conservative nationalist party True Finns is against immigration and the EU, and is similar to other right wing parties in Europe and Scandinavia. The party multiplied its votes since the last election held in 2007 when they had only five seats: in the 2011 election they had 39.²⁴ Some of the True Finns

parliamentarians are openly racist and are, for example, writing blogs²⁵ about the supremacy of the white race and using racially inflected language. Four of the parliamentarians are members of Suomen Sisu,²⁶ a nationalist and racist organization.²⁷ After the election some non-white people were attacked, mainly in the capital area, but minority language speakers such as Finn-Swedes are also facing continuous verbal insults.

Nationalism has its everyday and banal side, which helps us to perceive the world and create nations.²⁸ The story of the amazing and successful small nation of Finland has been performed a lot lately, increasing the national feeling among some Finns.²⁹ Michael Billig notes that 'the banal nationalism is recognized in daily practices and we have become blind to those as well.'³⁰ Hyper banal nationalist behaviour was easily seen in Finland when the national ice hockey team won the World Championship for the second time in May 2011. About 100,000 Finns celebrated in the centre of the capital. These occasions were ritualised in the media which repeated the images for a long time and at the same time increased the feeling of national belonging.³¹ This nationalist celebration had some negative side effects: some non-white people experienced racist name-calling and were threatened by some white Finns during the gold medal celebration party organised for the team in Helsinki.³² The ice hockey World Championship celebration again brought up racism by showing that some white Finns thought that the party was only for white 'true' Finns.

3. Constructions of White Finnishness in Advertisements

The imagery starts with close-up picture to the legs filmed from knee level to the ground. The person is wearing black jeans and black high heel shoes and there is wet-looking snow on the ground. The person is not able to walk well and falls to the ground, and spectators can see that she is a white young woman with long blond hair. The background music is rhythmic and powerful chamber orchestra string music. The picture changes: there is a different person. First this person is also filmed from the knees to the ground. The person is wearing loose light blue jeans and flat black shoes. The picture gets bigger and a white, brown-haired man is struggling in the snow and falling. The same string music is playing in the background. The picture changes again and now there is a person with brown high heel boots walking in the snow. The boots look wet. There is the same struggle and falling in the snow: the person is again a conventionally white young woman with long blond hair - maybe the same protagonist as in the first shot. Flute music is playing at the same rhythm when she is trying to walk on the snow. Suddenly the music changes into an acoustic version of the Finnish military march 'Porilaisten Marssi.' This march is traditionally played for the commander in chief of the Finnish defence force, who is practically the president, and for Finnish athletes when they win a gold medal in the Olympic games. Here the march is being played for a couple, evidently the female and male from the previous shots. The couple is

filmed only from their hips to the ground, but the male character is wearing the same loose light blue jeans and jacket but his shoes look different. The female character is wearing a skirt and black boots. The couple is literally marching close to each other and with the same rhythm from a left lower corner to the right upper corner. They do not have any problem at all walking in the snow, no falling down or struggling. The next shot features a list of Finnish national shoe brands. The commentator is saying, 'With domestic shoes, towards home.' The last picture contains the web address www.kotimaisetkengat.fi, which means 'domestic shoes.'

Both the protagonists in the ad are white and ideal-looking: both are young, thin and sexually attractive. This ad is easy to read in the hegemonic way, which is also the heteronormative way. But it is also possible to read critically and to try to open up the nationalistic signs. In the beginning of the ad there is the possibility of imaging the protagonist's gender and sexuality differently to the hegemonic way, but the end of the ad shows a couple walking close together and is easy to read as a heteronormative position. It is especially interesting to notice that, obviously walking with the foreign shoes, both of the people are walking alone and walking is hard or even impossible - as though life is hard or at least challenging alone or with a foreign partner. But with domestic shoes walking is easy and one shares the path with another person, of course of the opposite sex and with the same nationality and white Finnish race, supporting each other. Life is easy and you are walking towards home as a winner. Not only you and your partner are winners; all Finns are winning when they support national shoe companies and Finnish work. The ad supports the national feeling of belonging together. Both protagonists are white – and obviously heterosexual - ideal images of female and male characters. The ad is also giving the message that a relationship with a person from same race and nation is easy and best for everyone.

4. Conclusion

The Finnish audience does not form a monoculture anymore, but the imagery still constructs it as one: white Finns. Non-white Finns are not represented very often, but when they are shown they are marked as strangers³³ or visitors in Finland, or the hosts of the Finnish tourists in foreign countries. Non-whiteness is represented in Finnish TV advertisements stereotypically based on colonial images, but it is also often explained that the stereotypical representations of non-whiteness do not carry the same kind of racist baggage in the Nordic context as in countries whose histories include the institution of black slavery,³⁴ because Finland has not had any colonies and has no history of black slavery. But that does not make the imagery more innocent in Finland. And there also has been a tradition of colonial images in Finland even up to 2008, when Finnish sweets company Fazer finally altered liquorice wrappers featuring a caricature of a black face reiterating the old Golliwog representations.³⁵ A couple of years before that another company Brunberg was pressured to change the name of its product 'negro's kiss' into

'chocolate kiss' and to change the images related to the product. Both of these images and names had protectors among some Finns, who were trying to save the images and the original names of the products. Finland also has its own history of colonialism: first Finland was part of Sweden, then part of Russia, and since has been colonising the indigenous Sami people.³⁶

In Finland TV advertisements have an effective part in constructing the idea of national identities and cultures, because TV is still the most popular mass media in Finland.³⁷ Despite increasing use of the internet, TV still reaches most Finns. Also the repetitive presentations of TV advertisements makes this a very effective technology. As I have shown, the constructions of white Finnishness are explicit in the advertisement analysed in this paper. This advertisement is racialised and its representations of whiteness produce and support the ideas of Finland as racially white nation. Whiteness is represented as a norm and naturalised factor in Finnishness, participating in the production of value and social hierarchies. Most of the ads about white Finns represent the protagonists as civilised and ideal. When white Finnishness is represented as a norm, the images strengthen the representations of non-white people as others, not belonging in the space called Finland. The invisibility of non-whiteness strengthens the impression that non-whites do not exist and do not belong to Finnish society. Especially in this kind of nationalistic ad, white supremacy is very obvious. It shows the need for further unravelling of racialising, gendering and sexualising imagery to make the heterosexual whiteness visible and questioned.

It is alarming that at the moment the general and political environment in Finland has become clearly racist and xenophobic, but at the same time it is finally making it possible to pay attention to racism, which has before been assumed to be invisible - or has not wanted to be seen. Now the existence of racism and the term race cannot be denied anymore and cannot be excluded from discussions.

Notes

¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-3.

² Anna Rastas, 'Am I Still "White"? Dealing With the Colour Trouble'. *Balayi: Culture, Law and Colonialism* 6 (2004): 3.

³ Petri Ruuska, 'Kuviteltu Suomi. Globalisaation, Nationalismin ja Suomalaisuuden Punos Julkisissa Sanoissa 1980-90-Luvuilla' (PhD diss., University of Tampere, 2002), 61-71.

⁴ Sara Ahmed, 'Racialised Bodies', in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, eds. Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (New York: Palgrave 2002), 46-55; Anna Rastas, 'Rasismi', in *Suomalainen Vieraskirja: Kuinka Käsitellä Monikulttuurisuutta*, eds. Laura Huttunen et al. (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2005), 126.

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- ⁵ Anu Koivunen, 'Sorto'. In *Avainsanat: 10 Askelta Feministiseen Tutkimukseen*, eds. Anu Koivunen and Marianne Liljeström (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2004), 52.
- ⁶ Anna Rastas, 'Rasismi Lasten ja Nuorten Arjessa: Transnationaalit Juuret ja Monikulttuuristuva Suomi' (Phd diss., University of Tampere, 2007), 126.
- ⁷ Anthony J. Cortese, *Provocateur: Images of Women and Minorities in Advertising* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), ix-xii; Stuart Hall, *Identiteetti*, trans. Mikko Lehtonen and Juha Herkman (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1999), 139-140; William M. O'Barr, *Culture and the Ad: Exploring otherness in the World of Advertising* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 7; Rossi, *Heterotehdas*, 11.
- ⁸ Cortese, *Provocateur*, ix-xii; Cortese, *Provocateur*, 13; Richard Dyer, 'Valkoinen', in *Älä Katso! Seksuaalisuus ja Rotu Viihteen Kuvastossa*, trans. Martti Lahti et al. (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2002), 13-14.
- ⁹ Stuart Hall, *Kulttuurin ja Poliittikan Murroksia*, trans. Jukka Koivisto et al. (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1999), 273-274.
- ¹⁰ Rossi, *Heterotehdas*, 21-23.
- ¹¹ Rossi, *Heterotehdas*; Leena-Maija Rossi, 'Mainonta Sukupuolituotantona', in *Sukupuolishow: Johdatus Feministiseen Mediatutkimukseen*, eds. Anna Mäkelä et al. (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2006), 62-63.
- ¹² Judith Butler, *Hankala Sukupuoli*, trans. Tuija Pulkkinen and Leena-Maija Rossi, (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2006); Rossi, *Heterotehdas*, 12.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 12; Rossi, 'Mainonta Sukupuolituotantona', 64.
- ¹⁴ Vesa Puuronen, *Rasistinen Suomi* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2011), 48-51; Niina Vuolajärvi, 'Rodun Todellisuus ja Materiaalisuus', *Naistutkimuslehti* 2 (2011): 55.
- ¹⁵ Karina Horsti, 'Vierauden Rajat: Monikulttuurisuus ja Turvapaikanhakijat Journalismissa' (Phd diss., University of Tampere, 2005), 23; Huttunen, 'Etnisyys', 123-133; Rastas, 'Rasismi', 77-78; Rossi, *Heterotehdas*.
- ¹⁶ Huttunen, 'Etnisyys', 128; Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: Sage, 1997), 4-10; Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 50-73; Olli Löytty, 'Toiseus', in *Suomalainen Vieraskirja: Kuinka Käsitellä Monikulttuurisuutta*, eds. Laura Huttunen et al. (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2005), 162.
- ¹⁷ Michael Hames-Garcia, 'How real is race?', in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 308-339; Vuolajärvi, 'Rodun Todellisuus ja Materiaalisuus', 55-59.
- ¹⁸ Ahmed, 'Racialised Bodies', 46-47.
- ¹⁹ Ruth Frankenberg, 'Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness', in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 11.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ²¹ Vuolajärvi, 'Rodun Todellisuus ja Materiaalisuus', 54.

- ²² Ibid.; Puuronen, *Rasistinen Suomi*; Rastas, 'Rasismi'.
- ²³ Ibid., 48.
- ²⁴ There are total of 200 parliamentarians in Finnish parliament.
- ²⁵ 'Parliamentarian Jussi Halla-aho's blog', last modified 19 May 2011, Accessed 20 May 2011, <http://www.halla-aho.com/scripta>.
- ²⁶ 'Suomen Sisu Organization', last modified 8 May 2011, Accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.suomensisu.fi>.
- ²⁷ See also Puuronen, *Rasistinen Suomi*, 195-245.
- ²⁸ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).
- ²⁹ 'Pisa Tourists Swearing in Finnish Schools', Accessed 15 May 2011, http://www.helsinki.fi/en/index/tiedejatutkimus/pisa_finland.html; 'The Finnish Pisa 2006 Pages', Accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.pisa2006.helsinki.fi>; 'The World's Best Countries', Accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.newsweek.com/feature/2010/the-world-s-best-countries.html>; media researcher Mari Pajala writes about Finnish national shame connected to Eurovision contests: Mari Pajala, 'Eurovision Laulukilpailu, Kansallisuus ja Televisiohistoria' (PhD diss., Jyväskylä University, 2006).
- ³⁰ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 5-9.
- ³¹ Johanna Sumiala, *Median Rituaalit: Johdatus Media-Antropologiaan* (Tampere, Vastapaino, 2010), 9-36.
- ³² 'Kapteeni Koivu Pohti MM-voiton Esille Nostamaa Muukalaisvihaa', last modified 17 May 2011, Accessed 17 May 2011, <http://www.hs.fi/urheilu/jaakiekko/maajoukkueet/artikkeli/Kapteeni+Koivu+pohti+MM-voiton+esille+nostamaa+muukalaisvihaa/1135266211092>.
- ³³ See also Leena-Maija Rossi, 'Licorice Boys and Female Coffee Beans: Representations of Colonial Complicity in Finnish Visual Culture', in *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, eds. Suvi Keskinen et al. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); Rossi, *Heterotehdas*.
- ³⁴ Rossi, 'Licorice Boys and Female Coffee Beans', 200.
- ³⁵ 'Lakupoika sai Potkut Lakritsipötkystä', Accessed 1 August 2011, <http://www.iltasanomat.fi/kotimaa/lakupoika-sai-potkut-lakritsipotkysta-art-1288336785440.html>.
- ³⁶ Puuronen, *Rasistinen Suomi*.
- ³⁷ 'Results from the TV Audience Measurement', Accessed 10 April 2011, <http://www.finmpanel.fi/en/tulokset/tv.php>.

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Pakeha Identity and Whiteness: The Case of Pakeha Workers at Māori Television

Sue Abel

Abstract

This chapter addresses the issue of Pakeha identity as a/the New Zealand version of whiteness (the term ‘Pakeha’ is contested, but at the simplest level it means ‘white New Zealander’). It is a given in whiteness studies that whiteness maintains its power through, among other things, its unacknowledged status. Contributing to this is white people’s lack of recognition that they do have a culture and ethnicity, and that their cultural practices and values are not universal. In New Zealand a large number of white citizens identify themselves as ‘New Zealander’ or ‘Kiwi,’ thus substituting a national identity for an ethnic identity and discursively eliding their position as a member of the dominant ethnic group. It has been argued in the New Zealand social sciences that one way in which white New Zealanders may come to acknowledge themselves as Pakeha is through close contact with the Māori world. In this situation their own values and cultural practices can become decentred, leading to a heightened sense of themselves as both white and as coming from a distinct culture. With these two lines of argument in mind, I interviewed a number of Pakeha who work in a variety of roles at New Zealand’s very successful indigenous television channel Māori Television, which has been broadcasting for seven years. The majority of its broadcasting is in the Māori language, and it prioritises Māori objectives and practices not only in its programming but also in its everyday working practices. While it employs a largely Māori workforce, many Pakeha are also employed by the channel. I consider from my interview data the extent to which my participants’ experiences at Māori Television have led to any change in their sense of identity, and what the implications may be for any undermining of white hegemony.

Key Words: Whiteness, New Zealand, Pakeha, Māori.

The research for this chapter started from the hypothesis that those white New Zealanders who have continual close proximity to Māori, Māori culture and language in a positive way are more likely to define themselves as members of an ethnic group, and as Pakeha. The term Pakeha is unique to New Zealand, and means at its most basic level ‘white New Zealanders.’ It is, however, a problematic term, firstly because definitions vary, and secondly because it is rejected by many white New Zealand citizens who instead identify themselves as ‘New Zealander’ or ‘Kiwi,’ thus substituting a national identity for an ethnic identity and discursively eliding their position as a member of the dominant ethnic group.

In the national census taken in 2006, 11.1 percent of the population who gave valid answers to the ethnicity question in the census wrote ‘New Zealander’ under the tick box ‘Other.’ While many of these were those who identified as, for example, ‘Chinese New Zealander,’ analysis of the census data shows that New Zealander ethnic identification was largely a European phenomenon. Kukutai and Didham found in their analysis of the census data that ‘national naming seems to resonate most among people with multigenerational ties to New Zealand but who are not of Māori descent, and who live in areas where Europeans predominate.’¹

This chapter details the results of interviews with several Pakeha who work at Māori Television, New Zealand’s very successful indigenous television station. Given that those who identified as ‘New Zealanders’ in the 2006 census were more likely to live in areas where Europeans predominate, these Pakeha kaimahi (workers) at Māori Television seemed to be ideal subjects on whom to test my hypothesis that white New Zealanders who have continued close proximity to Māori, Māori culture and language in a positive way are more likely to define themselves as Pakeha, as members of an ethnic group, and perhaps, even as members of a dominant group which has benefited from colonisation and white privilege. Taking into account that one of the aspects of white (or in this case Pakeha) power is its unacknowledged status and its often ethnocentric attitudes towards other cultural values and practices, I wanted to explore their experiences as members of a dominant white group who, at least during their working day, are immersed in a strongly indigenous environment, where the underlying values and protocol are Māori and much of the language is Māori. I set out to explore, firstly, any acknowledged changes in the understanding of and attitudes towards tikanga Māori (Māori culture and customs) on the part of Pakeha kaimahi; secondly, any changes that had occurred in their sense of their own identity as Pakeha and, indeed, whether they actually self-identified as Pakeha, and thirdly, the extent to which they understood themselves to be the beneficiaries of white privilege. I also wanted to explore the extent to which my participants had become aware of issues of colonisation and its continuing impact on Māori, and from all of this, the privilege that they hold as members of the dominant culture. Before I detail my findings, I set out some definitions of the term Pakeha (or white New Zealander), and explore the extent to which these overlap with notions of whiteness. Secondly, I briefly set out some relevant facts about Māori Television.

1. Pakehanness and Whiteness

Sociologists Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley talk about ‘the contested nature of post-colonial options, and the fracture lines surrounding the significance of identity in contemporary Aotearoa, especially around the labelling and role of Pakeha.’² Not only do significant numbers of white New Zealanders resist the use of any ethnic identity to refer to themselves, preferring to be called ‘New Zealanders’ or ‘Kiwis,’ but they also reject the identity of Pakeha. For some this is because it is a

Māori word and they question why their identity should be given to them by another (and implicitly inferior) cultural group. Some think it is a term that is in fact an insult, that it means ‘white pig.’ Although this myth has been rejected in both scholarly and popular writing over several decades, it is still believed by many white New Zealanders.

Fleras and Spoonley define the term Pakeha as ‘New Zealanders of a European background, whose cultural values and behaviours have been primarily formed from the experience of being a member of a dominant group.’³ Here the connection with whiteness is more explicit. While this definition lies behind the use of this term to name white New Zealanders as Pakeha, with or without their consent, at the same time it is often a term of identity specifically taken on by white New Zealanders who recognise that they have been (and continue to be) the dominant group, and that this has indeed informed their cultural values and behaviours.

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There is stronger meaning of Pakeha that also recognises the tino rangatiratanga (right to self-determination) of Māori as indigenous people and tangata whenua (literally, people of the land). So for many who identify as Pakeha, the term is a political statement which means claiming a cultural and ethnic identity as a white New Zealander while at the same time acknowledging both the privilege they have had growing up in the dominant culture and the right for Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi (signed in 1840 between the British Crown and many, but not all, Māori chiefs) to exercise tino rangatiratanga (self-determination). This is what I was hoping to find in my participants.

Avril Bell argues for what she calls the ‘progressive potential of Pakeha identity,’ while at the same time acknowledging its ambiguity. She writes,

One of the fundamentally positive aspects of Pakeha identity is that it displaces white New Zealanders from their position of discursive exnomination as *the* (normal, ordinary) New Zealanders. By claiming a specific identity for this group amongst the other groups of Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Chinese New Zealanders etc. Pakeha identity *recognises* and *names* white New Zealanders as one group among many who co-exist in the New Zealand nation-state. Discursively, this goes some way towards undermining white hegemony.⁴

2. Māori Television

Māori battled for three decades, using activism and legal battles against the Crown, to finally get Māori Television to air in 2004. As well as state reluctance, the channel faced a hostile media, a bureaucracy that put as many obstacles as it could in the way of the channel getting to air, and a parliamentary opposition which declared that when it got into power it would axe the channel. Māori Television, therefore, had a lot of people waiting for it to fail.

The channel also faced constraints put upon it by its enabling legislation. This charged Māori Television with promoting and protecting *te reo me nga tikanga Māori* (Māori language and customs); producing high quality, low cost programming and informing, educating and entertaining a wide viewing audience. There are inherent tensions here about audience. Who exactly is the prime audience? What is the best way to reach them and serve their needs? The management of Māori Television say their primary audience is Māori, whether or not they are fluent in *te reo*. Official ratings figures suggest, however, that 70 percent of viewers are Pakeha.

This has led to tensions about the purpose of the channel. Management of the channel say their aim is to normalise *te reo* and *tikanga* both for Māori and in the wider population. There are, however, those who would like Māori Television to take a stronger position and work more actively as an agent of decolonisation. This strategy, of course, runs the risk of alienating the state and losing the funding the channel needs to survive.

For both political and economic reasons, then, Māori Television has worked hard at being an inclusive channel that speaks to all New Zealanders, with its first priority being the revitalisation and normalisation of Māori language and customs in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It can, of course, be argued that normalisation of Māori language and customs is in itself a contribution towards decolonisation and a decentring of whiteness. In affirming cultural values and *matauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) for Māori, and in exposing these to and normalising these for a Pakeha audience, Māori Television has the potential to make a major contribution to the creation of a state where the validity and legitimacy of Māori and *te ao Māori* is taken for granted. Jo Smith, for example, argues that Māori Television already constructs a virtual imagined nation of New Zealand which is firmly rooted in two worlds.⁵ While it does not go as far as destabilising the invisible power of whiteness, it is, I would argue, a first and necessary step.

3. Pakeha Kaimahi

Where does this put Pakeha who work at Māori Television? Māori Television broadcasts predominantly in *te reo*, includes Māori *kaupapa* and *tikanga* (loosely translated, principles and customs) in its programming and also, though to a lesser extent, in its everyday working practices. While it employs a largely Māori workforce, a range of ethnicities are employed by the channel behind the camera.

Many Pakeha were involved in the early days in training Māori staff in areas where there has not been the required pool of talent. However, one Pakeha board member and two Pakeha members of the executive team have been with Māori Television since before the channel went to air seven years, and several other Pakeha hold permanent positions within the organisation.

I recruited my participants by first contacting the human resources manager at Māori Television sent out a memo asking for volunteers for my research. Only one person replied, but I gathered another six participants through a series of referrals. I met my participants one at a time and asked a series of open-ended questions, carefully designed to give them the opportunity to talk about issues of ethnicity, culture, whiteness and power without actually leading them. After about 30 minutes has passed, I asked how they identify their ethnicity when asked to on official forms.

Two findings were immediately obvious.

a) All the participants loved working at Māori Television. There were two main reasons for this. The first was that they felt as if they are part of a whanau (family), and appreciated the ‘Māori ness’ of the organisation. Māori cultural values inform both management style (the hierarchy is much flatter) and relationships within the organisation. Even the building was built to reflect Māori values. The *whare kai*, the place to eat, is situated in the absolute centre of the building, and there is one big table. As participant Bruce observed, ‘The whole feeling is to get everyone together and not to be isolated, and everyone talks to each other.’

Other comments demonstrated the participants’ pleasure at being part of a Māori organisation:

I always enjoy the little *karakias* [prayers] that they have, and if somebody new comes on staff the whole station goes to greet them - those are really cool things. If someone is leaving the whole station comes to see them off. Those are really nice touches that I hadn’t really thought about before. (Sarah)

There’s always lots of laughter. People burst into song. These young ones are all into *kapa haka*. (Ricky)

We all look at each other as a team member, whether it’s a manager or a boss or something like that. We’re just all working together for the same purpose. That’s a nice environment to work in. (Bill)

The second reason that the participants loved working at Māori Television was because they felt as if they are working for something that is in the public good, that what they are doing will make a difference.

You don't want to be corny about it, privileged and proud and all that sort of stuff, but I feel like I'm actually contributing to a slightly greater good. (Ricky)

It's quite hard to work on just making a profit for someone when you might make something that has a bigger flow-on effect in a way that - people are - you know - the national wellbeing. *So you see it as contributing to national wellbeing?* Oh yeah, definitely, definitely. (Carol)

You get a sense you're building something, as opposed to being over at TVNZ. (Bill)

It was obvious, then that all of these participants loved working at Māori Television because of the way that Māori cultural values impacted on their work experience, and because, in working for an organisation that aimed to increase knowledge of Māori language and customs, they felt more a sense of purpose in their work. This makes the second finding even more interesting.

b) Contrary to all my expectations, the issue of their own ethnic identity was not terribly important, or not something they had even really considered.

[Pause] Pakeha? Some people avoid using the term. I don't know, um, I don't know what I'd write. I don't know. [pause] I like talking about Māori dom internationally because I'm overseas a lot. (Roger)

I haven't had to write it down for a while - New Zealander, I suppose - Pakeha, I suppose ... *So it's not something you feel strongly about?* Well I'm clearly not Māori, so New Zealander would probably be ... (Ricky)

If there are boxes there, I'd probably tick European, because there's no Pakeha New Zealander box there. If there wasn't a box? Mmm - I would just say ah probably New Zealander I guess. (Bill)

Pakeha. European. *Do you see them as interchangeable?* Mmmm - generally the same. Yeah. I see them as the same. Yeah. (Laura)

I'm a New Zealander, a New Zealand citizen. (Sally)

Their engagement with Māori did not seem to extend beyond work.

I think once I've left the building and get out into normal - well I say normal - go back into the outdoor society if you like, I don't feel any different than before I worked here. (Bruce)

I love the Māori people. I naturally rotate towards them whether it is at the airport or whatever, because I have got so used to being around brown faces. (Sally)

Nor did there seem to be much in terms of (to use decolonising educationalist Paulo Freire's term) 'conscientisation.'⁶ One participant was amazed when she heard Māori staff criticising the way they were represented in mainstream media; others said they were now more aware of things that were said about Māori in the non-Māori world. There was no other mention of the ways the dominant culture that they were part of, and which they had benefited from being part of, marginalised Māori. Nor was there any mention of the fact that the present government had continued to breach the Treaty of Waitangi, a source of concern and outrage for a large number of the Māori population.

4. Conclusion

Obviously my initial hypothesis that white New Zealanders who have continued close proximity to Māori, Māori culture and language in a positive way are more likely to define themselves as Pakeha, as members of an ethnic group, and as members of a dominant group which has benefited from colonisation and white privilege, has not held. I can only surmise potential reasons for this. One is that Māori Television itself, at both organisational and political levels, is committed to inclusiveness. As the participants have observed, they are made to feel part of a family at work. The programming broadcast focuses on revitalising and normalising Māori language and culture, with very little attention paid to issues of colonisation, the unearned disadvantages of Māori and the unearned advantages of white New Zealanders. Another potential reason is that at a national level, the unacknowledged power of whiteness is so strong that it requires considerable social intervention for white New Zealanders to recognise it. Finally, a particularly insightful explanation was given to me by indigenous Canadian academic Chris Andersen whom I interviewed in May 2011. When I told him that him that 70 percent of Māori Television's viewership was Pakeha, his response was,

That's the thing about colonialism - non-indigenous people can choose when and how to have relations with indigenous people without having to deal with the larger structures and the political economy of what's going on.⁷

It seems to me that this is precisely what is happening with the Pakeha workers I interviewed. For these participants, Māori language and customs were now an accepted and indeed pleasurable part of their working life, as was the fact that they were working for an organisation whose goal was to seek such normalisation in wider New Zealand society. But just as they chose to work for Māori Television, so they also chose to go back to their 'normal' life out of work, without any questioning or examination of their own identity as Pakeha or of the power that the dominant white group holds.

Notes

¹ Tahu Kukutai and Robert Didham, 'In Search of Ethnic New Zealanders: National Naming in the 2006 Census', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 36 (2009): 59.

² Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley, *Recalling Aotearoa. Indigenous Politics and Ethnic Relations in New Zealand* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1999), 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴ Avril Bell, "'We're just New Zealanders": The Politics of Pakeha Identity', in *Nga Patai: Ethnic Relations and Racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, eds. Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Cluny Macpherson (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1996), 153.

⁵ Jo Smith, 'Parallel Quotidian Flows: Māori Television On Air', *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* 9, No. 2 (2006): 33.

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

⁷ Chris Anderson, personal interview, 26 April 2011.

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Neoliberalising White Supremacy: Arizona 2010

Brandy L. Jensen

Abstract

While much research that examines both race and neoliberalism regards racial implications as one unfortunate outcome of neoliberalism, I argue that white supremacy shapes society in its entirety and mutually constitutes neoliberalism. I contend that neoliberal discourse and policy modify and reinscribe racial subjectivities, reinforcing the racial hierarchy. Neoliberalism therefore provides various venues through which articulations and enactments of white supremacy become adapted and entrenched, enabling and naturalising its reproduction.

Key Words: Foucault, immigration, nationalism, neoliberalism, race, white supremacy.

1. A Neoliberal Form of Governmentality: COPE

On 21 January, 2010 Arizona Governor Jan Brewer established the Commission on Privatization and Efficiency (COPE). COPE aims to 'identify state services and agencies whose functions can be eliminated, consolidated, streamlined or outsourced to achieve greater operational efficiency in meeting the needs of our citizens.'¹ Brewer appointed the commission's members, comprised of seven government officials and four individuals who work within the private sector. A COPE report dated 21 September 2010 recommends widespread privatisation for Arizona, including rest areas, prisons, state owned land and parks, health care provider credentialing, water, various aspects of the K-12 public school system, and public facility maintenance and management.²

Increased privatisation reflects neoliberal logic and while its advocates claim a reduction in government expenditures, state spending merely shifts rather than declines. State funding for social services and public education decreases under neoliberalism, while military, domestic security, and US border patrol investments tend to rise. Neoliberal proponents also cite the need for greater efficiency, but unfortunately increased privatisation usually concentrates wealth into fewer hands and escalates public costs.³

Government bailouts of corporations illustrate the simultaneous support of free enterprise and increase in public costs germane to neoliberalism. For example, the US subprime mortgage scheme led to state allocation of \$700 billion to fraudulent lenders in 2008. The rapid, largely unregulated sale of home loans typifies the short-term transactions-for-profit promoted by neoliberal goals. This proliferation and deregulation of markets replaces long-term planning intended to construct a more equitable society. Neoliberalism encourages 'free' enterprise from

government restrictions without accountability, no matter what extent of social damage inflicted.⁴

2. Race and Nation-Building: Senate Bill 1070

Exemplified through policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) implemented in 1994, neoliberalism facilitates market deregulation and increasing openness to international trade and investment. Some of the greatest detriment has been experienced in Mexico, where wages declined 40 to 50 percent in NAFTA's first year, while the cost of living rose by 80 percent. Over 20,000 small and medium businesses failed and approximately 1,000 state-owned enterprises became privatised.⁵

Exacerbated by NAFTA, poor and working class people in Mexico face desperate circumstances because they are unable to survive in their homeland. Transnational corporations have displaced millions of Mexican people from their land and means of subsistence.⁶ Mexican workers are pulled by American demand for their labour and endanger their lives crossing into the US as well as in their workplaces. Businesses and products cross borders freely under neoliberal policy, while humans are allowed movement based on their capitalist utility. Borders merely serve an ideological purpose, as legal and illegal immigrants are a structural necessity for capitalism's survival.⁷

America's sketchy history of border policy and consistently inconsistent enforcement of immigration laws corroborates its economic rather than protective function. The US holds an extensive history of opening the US/Mexico border when labour is needed, recruiting Mexican people through the Mexican Farm Labour Program between 1942 and 1964. When the economy changes and labour shortages end, the US returns to more restrictive immigration policies, at times fully excluding and even repatriating groups of people specifically recruited to perform US labour. Between 1929 and 1939, the Mexican Repatriation Act forced one million people of Mexican descent to leave the US; 60 percent were US citizens. Operation Wetback in 1954 mandated 1,075,168 Mexican nationals to return to Mexico.⁸ Currently, America's \$28 billion dollar fruit and vegetable industry depends on immigrants: 78 percent of its workforce is foreign-born, with 75 percent from Mexico.⁹ Refusing to grant citizenship benefits and privileges to documented and undocumented Mexican workers guarantees the material benefits of cheap labour while avoiding many of the costs such as health care and worker protections.

Anti-immigration discourse designates the victims of this system, Mexican people, as perpetrators who take what is not theirs to have. Eliding historical and political dynamics shaping the situation, this discourse helps secure state power through the deception of national transcendence. In reality, most Americans would refuse to work under the conditions faced by many undocumented Mexican workers. The majority of these labourers perform domestic or agricultural work,

comprising an estimated 50 percent of America's five million-person farm labour force.¹⁰ On average, migrant farm workers earn under \$7,500 a year and six of ten have no place to live. Due to hazardous working conditions, one in four migrant babies are stillborn and the average migrant labourer lives to only 49 years of age.¹¹

Marketing immigration control as vital for the safety and employment of US citizens seduces many Arizonians into advocacy for substantial government funding of myriad anti-immigration efforts. While 'security' spending increases, social inequities within Arizona continue to worsen and fewer public resources exist to meet social needs. Again, the reduction in government spending outlined in neoliberal discourse and policy fails to materialise.

The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act, Arizona Senate Bill 1070 (SB 1070), was enacted 29 July 2010. US federal law requires certain undocumented persons (referred to as 'aliens' within the legislation) to register with the government and to carry registration documents at all times. SB 1070 extends this law by making it a misdemeanour for an 'alien' to be in Arizona without carrying the required documents, barring state employees and agencies from limiting enforcement of federal immigration laws, and imposing harsher consequences on those sheltering, hiring, or transporting 'illegal aliens.' The legislation claims to embody an 'attrition through enforcement' doctrine as state officials are able to accost, detain, and investigate anyone they believe may be in Arizona illegally.¹²

Concerns regarding racial profiling accusations led to HB 2162, passed 30 April 2010, which amends SB 1070 by adding that prosecutors will not investigate complaints based upon race, colour, or national origin. Despite the public veneer of colour-blindness attempted through HB 2162, SB 1070 legally sanctions racial profiling by stating that law enforcement officials 'may not consider race, colour or national origin ... except to the extent permitted by the United States or Arizona Constitution.'¹³ This 'exception' summons the Supreme Court edict that 'the likelihood that any given person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor' in evaluating reasonable suspicion under the Fourth Amendment, *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*.¹⁴ Representation of SB 1070 as a policy of exception contradicts endemic historical and contemporary legal racial profiling within America, i.e., its normative basis.

Though many question SB1070, racism finds a thin veil through banal criminalisation of 'illegal aliens' and associations of crime, poverty, and cultural inferiority with Mexico as a nation and Mexican people. Race need not be mentioned; this language conjures racist images indelibly imprinted in the minds of the majority.¹⁵ This colour-blind adaptation of racism eludes detection and can easily be defended, as race remains strategically absent from the discourse. Colour-blind racism proves central to maintaining widespread post-racial assertions in the US.¹⁶ The US government and media regularly appeal to a sense

of threat from racialised foreigners to validate laws such as SB 1070, often proclaiming a state of emergency and the safety of the American people as justification for anti-immigrant policies and any associated financial costs.

The development and implementation of SB 1070 highlights the nexuses of neoliberalism and white supremacy. Researchers for National Public Radio (NPR) analysed hundreds of pages of campaign finance reports, lobbying documents, and corporate records connected with SB 1070 after its April, 2010 conception. Their October 2010 report shows a clandestine effort by the private prison industry to help draft and pass SB 1070. The law could send hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants to prison in an unprecedented way, translating into hundreds of millions of dollars in profits to private prison companies, which gross just under \$5 billion annually nation-wide. Of the thirty-six elected officials who voted for SB 1070, thirty have received financial support from the private prison industry or its lobbyists.¹⁷

3. Knowledge and Power: The Banning of Ethnic Studies and Affirmative Action

On 11 May 2010 a ban on ethnic studies programs was transformed into law through Arizona's legislature. Enacted by 31 December 2010, HB 2281 bars K-12 public schools from teaching classes which

The body of the chapter starts in the previous paragraph. If you decide to divide your text in sections, the body of the text would start after the first subtitle, otherwise directly after the bold five stars that separates the abstract and key words from the body of the text. Make sure that the first paragraph starts with an indentation. All other paragraphs should start this way as well, with the exception of quotes that require a double indentation, like the following:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government,
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people,
3. Are designated primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group, and/or
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.¹⁸

The declaration of the policy states 'that public school pupils should be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people.'¹⁹ Intending to specifically target Mexican American studies, the mandate may be appealed but non-compliant schools can lose up to 10 percent of state funding.²⁰

This measure endorses post-racialism and by equating ethnic studies with promotion of racial resentment, it implies race-neutrality of predominant Eurocentric courses. The power to determine 'valid' academic disciplines emanates

from and perpetuates a white supremacist truth regime and the ban effectively bounds ‘knowledge’ within Eurocentrism. This totalising of curricula is articulated through ‘valuing of individuals;’ denial of alternative narratives is deemed just and necessary. The majority of white Americans considers racism aberrational and relegates violence to physical acts; therefore occlusion of historical and contemporary racial realities is viewed as neither racist nor violent. To the contrary, the entrenched prevalence of these omissions ensures their near ubiquitous invisibility and acceptance with whites.

HB 2281 induces public schools to produce autonomous students evacuated of racial identity and any associated emotional investments. This delegation manifests neoliberal logic as people are regarded as individual entrepreneurial actors in every aspect of life and the state is a firm that produces rational individuals.²¹ Unfortunately, in a society structured through racial logic, status, treatment, and opportunities differ collectively based on racial categorisations. White solidarity remains unacknowledged as this measure claims to oppose ‘ethnic solidarity.’ This problematises the racial or ethnic Other while ignoring and thus privileging white subjectivity.

Elimination of Chicano and Mexican perspectives of history helps dehistoricise, depoliticise, and decontextualise contemporary immigration issues in Arizona and the United States. Mainstream media coverage of drug smuggling from Mexico into Arizona, undocumented Mexican workers, and kidnappings in Phoenix disregards broader historical trends and political realities. Theft of Mexican land and the destruction of Mexican industries and human lives by transnational companies through neoliberal policies are not deemed criminal; teaching about it is.

On 2 November 2010 state voters passed Proposition 107, which bars ‘the consideration of race, ethnicity or gender by units of state government, including public colleges and universities.’²² Arizona, which is 83 percent white, joined five other states which eliminated affirmative action. Combined, these states hold over 25 percent of America’s population.²³

Affirmative action bans posit that university applicants are evaluated on the same test score and grade point average criteria, which compels college-bound people to vie against each other for a finite number of admission spots. This totalises the applicant pool by requiring students to meet identical, Eurocentric standards and granting little or no value to unique contributions applicants may offer. Prop 107’s assertion of race-neutrality denies historically-based, institutionally perpetuated race-based inequities which preclude many racialised people from applying and advantage whiteness within admissions systems and processes.

The ethnic studies and affirmative action bans synergise to exclude racialised people from public universities, often a strategic entry point into myriad social and economic opportunities. Prior to their dismantling, Arizona’s ethnic studies

programs provided highly effective support for Latino participants in pursuit of higher education, with 80 percent continuing to college versus 24 percent of Latino students nationwide. The affirmative action ban then systemically limits university access for racialised people through neoliberal rhetoric of competition, individualism, and reducing government involvement in the public sphere.

4. The Right to Live: The Transplant Controversy

Arizona's Medicaid program, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), stopped financing certain transplant operations effective from 1 October 2010. Governor Brewer and AHCCCS describe this decision as a 'response to significant fiscal challenges facing the State and substantial recent growth in the Medicaid population.'²⁴ AHCCCS cites federal law and a state of emergency as justification:

The benefits eliminated or limited are all considered optional services under federal law and, therefore, AHCCCS is not required to provide them. This act is an emergency measure that is necessary to preserve the public peace, health or safety and is operative immediately as provided by law.²⁵

Reducing public expenditure for health care represents one facet of neoliberalism and amplifies existing social inequities.

At the date of enactment, the transplant measure removed 98 individuals from the waiting list and would save the state approximately \$1.4 million, or \$14,285 per life. This stipulates a death sentence for most, perhaps all, of these low-income patients, who lack the \$200,000 (or political connections) to make a transplant operation possible and likely will die without one.²⁶ A very contentious outcome of Arizona's neoliberal agenda, this restriction quantifies the value of life in dollar terms by designating particular citizens who may be left to die.

The law purportedly rations transplant eligibility based on prognosis, rather than organ availability. However, this depiction precludes realities of health care coverage, socioeconomic status, and political connections, all of which greatly influence a person's eligibility and probability of receiving a transplant operation. Citizens with greater financial resources may evade this circumstance through self-private health insurance and/or self-funding a transplant operation.

Additionally, the prognosis itself relies on subjective 'quality of life' measures projected and assigned value by neither recipients of similar transplants nor those on the waiting list, but rather by outside parties. This policy grants transplant eligibility based upon a person's forecasted potential to be 'able,' reinscribing subjectivity based on (dis)ability and assigning worth to human life based on the body. Foucault avowed normalisation as the root of all racisms; the reservation of the right to life for the 'able to be able' body parallels this contention.

Irreconcilable is *any* use of quality of life calculations to establish entitlement to life-saving treatment.²⁷

5. Conclusion

An emotional public outcry ensued over the transplant measure, with open interrogation of government-corporate enmeshment. Guised in neoliberal language of budget cuts and enacted through law, the transplant measure represents a lucid yet minute example of the ordering of human lives that frames our world and grants some people the right to live, and relegates others to be left to die. SB 1070, the removal of affirmative action, and the ethnic studies ban suggest that most white Arizonians either fail to make this connection, or in fact view racialised people as threatening or disposable, or both. While opposition to the transplant measure may hold promise in some capacities, it also illuminates, at least for me, the insidiousness of white supremacy.

Notes

¹ State of Arizona, 'Executive Order 2010-04', Accessed 15 December 2010, http://www.azgovernor.gov/dms/upload/EO_2010_04.pdf.

² State of Arizona Commission on Privatization and Efficiency, 'Initial Report to Governor Janice K. Brewer: FY2011 Recommendations', Accessed 15 December 2010, <http://www.azcope.gov/COPE%20Initial%20Report.pdf>.

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⁸ Jerry Garcia and Gilberto Garcia, eds. *Memory, Community, and Activism: Mexican Migration and Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (East Lansing, MI: The Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, 2005).

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Carlos Marentes, 'Farm Workers Fight against Environmental Racism and Neoliberalism', 2004, Accessed 13 December 2009, <http://www.greens.org/s-r/33/33-06.html>.

¹² Art Hinshaw, 'Arizona Immigration Legislation (SB 1070) Update', last modified 19 July 2010, Accessed 11 November 2010, <http://www.indisputably.org/?p=1498>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kenneth J. Neubeck and Noel A. Cazenave, *Welfare Racism: Playing the Race Card Against America's Poor* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

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¹⁸ 'House Bill 2281', Accessed 15 December 2010, <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sam Roberts, 'Population Study Finds Change in the Suburbs', *The New York Times*, last modified 9 May 2010, Accessed 12 November 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/us/09decade.html>.

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²² Scott Jaschik, 'Arizona Bans Affirmative Action', *Inside Higher Ed*, November 3, 2010, Accessed January 22, 2012, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/11/03/arizona>.

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²⁶ Marc Lacey, 'Rift in Arizona as Latino Class is Found Illegal', *The New York Times*, 7 January 2011, Accessed 15 March 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/us/08ethnic.html>.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality (Volume 1): An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979); Michel Foucault, 'Society Must be Defended', in *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, edited by Mauro Bertani and Allesandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003).

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Birds of a Feather: The Whiteness of Birding

Oliver Cashman-Brown

Abstract

The objective of this chapter is to understand how white privilege plays a part in the exclusion of non-white people from the activity of birding, in which over 90 percent of participants are white. Through an autoethnography, I chronicle ten Western New York birdwalks, unpack my own whiteness and consider why the demographics of birdwatchers are so racially skewed. I utilise Ogbu's Cultural Ecological Model, calling attention to systemic forms of racism, highlighting the way society and its institutions have treated minorities, and to community forces, which bring to light how non-white communities interpret and respond to such treatment. I also utilise whiteness studies to identify white privilege and to challenge how whites think about race. I postulate that low rates of participation among non-whites may be attributed to limited access to socioeconomic resources, which is a consequence of the history and patterns of racial discrimination in America, especially forms of institutional racism. I end by addressing the invisibility of whiteness, particularly my own, to disrupt its insidious power.

Key Words: Whiteness, privilege, Cultural Ecological Model, birding.

1. Introduction

I am not a morning person, yet I chose teaching as a profession and birding as a hobby. Both my parents were birdwatchers, so birding was part of my growing up. Many of my early birding experiences took place within our suburban living room in western New York, looking through the large windows with binoculars at bird feeders. Our backyard extended over one hundred feet and was covered partially with a denseness of trees and shrubs. My parents also had a summer cottage. Amid a forest of white pines, this country home provided easy access to see birds from our porch. With seemingly little effort, birding became for me a lifelong hobby.

My father was not a birdwatcher as a child, but he was always interested in nature. He went to summer camp every year, where nature walks were a regular activity. In college, he took a course in ornithology, not for career purposes (he was pre-med), but to fulfil his growing love of birds. He got caught up with the birders at university. There were a number of doctors involved. They attended special talks and organised field trips. My mother too was always interested in nature. She spent her summers at the lake house, playing on the shore and in the woods. Her mother would send her out to pick wildflowers, and her grandmother took a keen interest in teaching her about nature.

In the generation that preceded my parents, few people watched birds. Birds were slaughtered for their plumes or for sport. Birding did not become a leisure activity until Roger Tory Peterson published a pocket field guide to birds in the 1930s and binoculars became more available after World War II. By 1970, about 4 percent of Americans considered themselves birdwatchers. By the 1980s, the percentage had grown to about 25 percent.¹ A 2005 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) conducted by the federal government found that the number of people participating in birding activities increased by 155 percent between 1983 and 1995.²

Today, over 69 million American adults birdwatch.³ In every county in the United States today there is at least one designated place for birding. But this seemingly easy access to birds does not mean just anyone watches birds. The demographics of birders do not match the demographics of the United States. Attendees at a Texas Hummer/Bird Celebration were disproportionately female, older, married, college graduates, and came from middle to upper income households.⁴ Their survey neglected to inquire about race. A 2003 NSRE survey found that 94 percent of birdwatchers identified themselves as white.⁵ Most people who have been birding for over twenty years meet fewer than three African American birdwatchers in their lifetime. Furthermore, 34 percent of birdwatchers surveyed have never encountered an African-American birdwatcher, and 67 percent of African-Americans have never met a birdwatcher.⁶

Over the past decade there have been some public conversations around the whiteness of birding. The U.S. Forest Service is interested in the issue because birding can be a gateway into conservation. When surveying white birdwatchers, Robinson found that some were indifferent to the white question, while others attributed the underrepresentation to 'social and economic pressures or the lack of a role model'.⁷ Robinson attributes the absence of African-American birders to what he calls the Don't Loop: 'If you don't meet others who are engaged in a particular activity, the odds are you will not take an interest.'⁸ Friends or family members introduce most birdwatchers to the activity.

The objective of this chapter is to understand how whiteness and white privilege play a part in the exclusion of non-whites from birding. The assumption that birding matters, I must admit, may itself be privileged. One could certainly ask instead why white people participate in such folly. Non-whites have leisure time and fill it with other worthy activities. Birding most certainly is not the most important way to spend one's free time; I must make it clear that because one does not partake in birding does not at all mean that one is culturally deprived or socially disadvantaged. Still, for the purposes of this chapter I am assuming that birding is a worthwhile activity. By going on birdwalks, I immerse myself in a natural environment, witness local ecosystems, observe wildlife in its natural settings and become tuned in with local environmental issues.

To gather data, I attended ten birdwalks organised by two area birding groups in western New York. Locations ranged between ten and seventy miles from my home. On my walks I looked specifically for elements of privilege. I observed with eyes and ears, and initiated some conversations to further my insights into privilege. I took brief notes in my notebook during each birdwalk, pretending to write down bird observations. The use of Ogbu's Cultural Ecological Model (CEM) brings particular insight. At the root of CEM is the positioning of *the system* and *community forces*. The system is made up of policies, curricula, salary systems and other forms of institutional discrimination that oppress minorities, and are part of 'the historical and contemporary treatment of minorities by social institutions.'⁹ These structural barriers that widen racial gaps include segregation, student tracking and restrictive covenants. Also influencing racial gaps are community forces: the 'dominant patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours' within a minority community.¹⁰ From the duality of the system and community forces, groups form cultural frames of reference that shape their behaviour.

This chapter also uses the framework of whiteness studies. Avoiding an alleged neutral (colour-blind) position on the experiences of minority groups, whiteness studies 'reverses the traditional focus of research on race relations by concentrating attention on the socially constructed nature of white identity and the impact of whiteness on intergroup relations.'¹¹ Understanding race as a construct, whiteness studies investigates whiteness as an oppressive ideology that 'promotes and maintains social inequalities' which cause 'great material and psychological harm to both people of colour and whites.'¹² Because of its privileged position, whiteness serves as an invisible norm for other racial forms, a norm against which all other racial forms are judged. By making whiteness visible to whites, whiteness studies attempts to dismantle white privilege and to foster anti-racist forms of white.¹³ Once whiteness is visible, then whites can work toward confronting and eliminating white privilege.

2. Vignette

6 a.m., Saturday. Coffee, bird book, binoculars. To the car. I stop at a McDonald's drive-thru to get breakfast. Egg McMuffin and coffee. A non-white staff member waits on me. This is what they get up early on a Saturday morning to do. Quite different from what I get up to do. Leisure time is part of birding. Robinson found that by far the biggest barrier that keeps African-Americans from participating in birding is lack of time.¹⁴ Most birdwatchers also have disposable income to spend on leisure activities. In these ways, birding is a privilege. Forty-seven percent of respondents at a Texas bird festival reported annual household incomes of \$50,000 or more.¹⁵ For things like transportation, fees, tours, lodging, equipment, magazines and books, active recreational birdwatchers may spend \$3,000 a year on their hobby.¹⁶

I scoff the food down, then drive 12 miles to the day's meeting spot. There are fifteen cars parked there; all but mine are new and dent free (I am a graduate student). Cars are necessary to get to remote birdwalks. Going on birdwalks in locations that are new to me, I sometimes get lost. Seeing a dozen cars in a rural parking lot is often the landmark I need, although sometimes I also need a little good fortune. I once arrived at a rural town hall parking lot for an evening walk to witness the courtship display of the American woodcock. There were a few parked cars scattered around the lot, but no people. It was cold and snowy. Could it have been cancelled? Just as I was about to give up, a car appeared. A white man in his sixties got out and approached me. He told me that his wife went ahead to the site to check it out, and that he came to see who showed up. Only me. He produced an iPod with little speakers to play the display sounds of the male woodcock. I then followed his car a few miles to a quiet roadway off the beaten path. If I were not white, might this have not run so smoothly? If I had been a lone African-American man, would he have approached me that evening in the parking lot? Would he have shown me his iPod? Would he have escorted me to a remote forest and walked with me deep into the woods with his wife? There is a lot of trust that goes on between people on birdwalks. Does blackness get that trust?

This morning there are nineteen people on the birdwalk, all white. This is my first time with this group. The walk organiser knows most of the people in attendance, but is as welcoming and open to me as he is to the regular crowd. I am also the only one who came alone and the only one who does not already know someone there, but I still feel welcomed. I am white. They are white. Would a non-white person feel the same comfort level and confidence? Some African-Americans are apprehensive about entering all-white neighbourhoods. The apprehension is understandable considering the waves of hate crimes nationally and the intimidation and violence initiated by whites to keep African-Americans out of towns and neighbourhoods. The preponderance of disproportionately white communities today is the result of racist attitudes, private behaviours and institutional practices. Dudley Edmondson, an African-American bird photographer, describes the obstacles he faces outdoors as a black man:

Personal safety is a big issue. Racial violence has a long history. This weighs heavily on the minds of African-Americans when they think of outdoor activities. You're not sure who lives where you might go. There's concern about finding yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time. It's amazing that we still factor this into our recreational activities or travel plans, but we do.¹⁷

One in ten African-Americans in Chicago, Illinois, experienced discrimination in Lincoln Park in the form of verbal harassment, physical gestures, assaults and harassment from law enforcement officers.¹⁸ In St. Louis, Missouri, a high

percentage of African Americans avoided camping because it made them feel vulnerable to racial intimidation.¹⁹

As I listen in on the conversations, many of the people on today's walk have travelled to different states and countries to go birding. Some conversations involve big purchase items: new hiking boots and kayaks. Some conversations involve bird trips to Alaska, England and Central America. Birdwatchers spend considerable money on birding and have a substantial economic impact on the communities near birding hot spots. In 1993, for example, about one hundred thousand birders visited Cape May, New Jersey, and spent over \$10 million. American eco-tourists spend \$400 million a year birding in Costa Rica.²⁰

This walk entails a three-mile loop, which winds through some woods and some ponds. The trail is popular for joggers and dog walkers (all of whom are white). I have noticed on other birdwalks that all joggers, cross country skiers and pedestrians were always white. A woman, Nan, strikes up a conversation with me. She is a brand new birder. Her friend got her interested. He has an expensive camera, and has been showing people some of the magnificent photos he's taken of birds over the past week. She tells me of her early birding experiences that are similar to mine in that we both had access to wooded backyards. What is compelling about my childhood backyard is that it was within an all-white neighbourhood. The deeds in our neighbourhood originally had restrictive covenants. My parents bought our house after the covenants were made illegal, but the legacy of whiteness remains there.

Whiteness gains its power through its oppression of non-whiteness. This dichotomy manifests itself through the construction of space: designating where people may live, work and go to school. The institutions of slavery and Jim Crow made the delineations clear. Post civil rights, the delineations are constructed through less obvious means, but nonetheless the lines are drawn. 'Blatant violence has, in most cases,' explains Hargrove 'been replaced by ideological (and symbolic) violence, which reinforces racialised inequities and justifies the interests of the ruling class.'²¹ Systematic programs exist that limit African-American entry into white neighbourhoods, thereby reaffirming white supremacy and continuing the disenfranchisement of non-white communities. Segregation of residential areas strengthens segregation in other spaces and help reinforce stereotypes. Covert barriers come in the form of mortgage discrimination, redlining, racial steering and even sundown towns.

If my own and Nan's backyards helped spawn our birding, then lack of access to a backyard may be a barrier to birding. Robinson's Don't Loop implies that many people become birdwatchers because friends, family members, teachers or scoutmasters introduce them to the activity. Exposure to backyard birdfeeders and easy access to field guides and binoculars also help to foster the developing birdwatcher. The introduction is then furthered along through summer camps, birding clubs, visits to parks and trips to eco-tourist destinations. In each of these

locations, the developing birder usually finds particular expert birdwatchers from which to learn.

3. Discussion

Birding is not the most important activity imaginable, but its sheer whiteness should not go unnoticed. Low rates of participation among non-whites may be attributed to limited access to socioeconomic resources and to differing community forces between whites and different non-white groups. White dominance of birding may also be attributed to systems of segregation. Instrumental segregation, such as access to education and to jobs, and relational discrimination, such as segregated neighbourhoods and racial covenants, may negatively affect non-white income levels, reducing their disposable income that could be used for the occasionally expensive recreational expenditures of birding. The long history of institutional racism in America has prevented non-whites from full participation in the job sector. The low rate of non-white birders may be attributed to differing community forces at play in different racial/ethnic communities. Independent of socioeconomic factors, different racial and ethnic groups may have different norms, value systems and socialisation practices. Birding, too, may be a reproduction of Enlightenment, colonialist hegemony. White culture stems from western European traditions, including the tradition of rationalism, mastery over nature, the Enlightenment and colonialism, constructing whites as being 'the most rational, and, therefore, the most superior of all beings.'²²

To make herself more accountable, McIntosh put herself to the task of identifying examples of how whiteness provides her with unearned privilege, that she receives merely because of the colour of her skin. My knapsack reveals some pertinent information. I was born in a white suburb that had racial covenants in its origin story. My parents were wealthy enough to have leisure time and spend money on leisure time. My father developed a love of nature attending summer camp, where all the campers and counsellors were white and the only non-white people worked in the kitchen. My mother developed her love of nature in part at her family's summer cottage. Each generation of my Massachusetts ancestors going back centuries owned their own land, lived in their own homes and worked their own farms. My father's family could afford to send him to medical school in the 1960s when the field of medicine was nearly all white. My parents were also able to send me to college, where I made friends who helped me get my first job, which launched me into my first career. Because of my education and my job, I have leisure time. My Saturday mornings can be spent spotting birds. I am approachable by birding strangers. The process of unpacking tells of my untold advantages in America. If a citizenry is to function in a democracy, then, as Nader states, 'citizens need to know something about the major institutions, government or otherwise, that affect their lives.'²³ White privilege and all the factors that

support it, from institutional racism to microaggressions, must be unveiled and then dismantled and transformed.

Notes

¹ Paul Kerlinger, 'Birding Economics and Birder Demographics Studies as Conservation Tools', in *Status and Management of Neotropical Migratory Birds*, ed. Deborah Finch and Peter Stangel (Colorado: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1993), 35.

² John Robinson, 'Relative Prevalence of African Americans among Birdwatchers', *USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech Rep. PSW-GTR-191* (2005).

³ David Scott and Jack Thigpen, 'Understanding the Birder as a Tourist: Segmenting Visitors to the Texas Hummer/Bird Celebration', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 8 (2003).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Robinson, *Birding for Everyone: Encouraging People of Color to Become Birdwatchers* (Marysville, OH: Wings-on-Disk, 2006).

⁶ Robinson, 'Relative Prevalence of African Americans Among Birdwatchers'.

⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, 'The Structure of Opportunity and Adolescents' Academic Achievement Attitudes and Behaviors', in *Minority Status, Oppositional Culture, & Schooling*, ed. John Ogbu (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 348.

¹⁰ John Ogbu, ed. *Minority Status, Oppositional Culture, & Schooling* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 13.

¹¹ Woody Doane, 'Rethinking Whiteness Studies', in *The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Woody Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

¹² Annalee Newitz, and Matthew Wray, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3

¹³ Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack', *Independent School* (1990).

¹⁴ Robinson, *Birding for Everyone*.

¹⁵ Scott and Thigpen, 'Understanding the Birder as a Tourist'.

¹⁶ Clark E. Adams, Jason A. Leifester and John S. C. Herron, 'Understanding Wildlife Constituents', *Birders and Waterfowl Hunters. Wildlife Society Bulletin* 24 (1997).

¹⁷ Dudley Edmondson, *The Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places: Africa Americans Making Nature and the Environment a Part of Their Everyday Lives* (Cambridge, MN: Adventure Publication, 2006).

¹⁸ Paul H. Gobster and Antonio Delgado, 'Ethnicity and Recreation Use in

Chicago's Lincoln Park', in *Managing Urban and High-Use Recreation Settings* (St. Paul, MN: U.S. Department of Agriculture-Forest Service, 1993).

¹⁹ Virginia K. Wallace and Daniel Witter, 'Urban Nature Centers: What Do Our Constituents Want and How Can We Give It To Them?' *Legacy* 2 (1992).

²⁰ Scott and Thigpen, 'Understanding the Birder as a Tourist'.

²¹ Melissa Hargrove, 'Mapping the Social Field of Whiteness: White Racism as Habitus in the City Where History Lives', *Transforming Anthropology* 17 (2009): 95.

²² Pamela Perry, 'White Means Never Having to Say You're Ethnic: White Youth and the Construction of "Cultureless" Identities', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30 (2001): 62.

²³ Laura Nader, 'Up the Anthropologist - Perspectives Gained from Studying Up', *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972): 294.

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‘A Japanese Young Man’: British Aesthetes Turning Japanese in Gilbert’s Libretto for *The Mikado*

Anne Babson

Abstract

This chapter revisits Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* in response to a book published in 2010 about it that charges the work with ‘commodity racism.’ Rather than assent to a Saidian post-colonial reading of either the text or the tradition of yellowface in its performance, this chapter deconstructs Sino-Anglo relations of the time of the opera’s debut to debunk the idea of an English hegemony over Japan - there was not one, and Japanese discourse about the West took place in a relatively egalitarian manner as the West engaged in discourse about Japan - and contextualises the work in Gilbert’s larger project of Topseyturveydom and the Aesthetic Movement’s Japonaiserie mania.

Key Words: W. S. Gilbert, Arthur Sullivan, *The Mikado*, Aesthetes, Oscar Wilde, japonisme, japonaiserie, *Patience*, blue china craze, operetta.

Josephine Lee, in *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan’s “The Mikado,”* presents the work by Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert as an inherently racist undertaking. Lee describes *The Mikado* as an exercise that brings ‘into relief the relationship between race and commodity fetishism ... called ‘commodity racism.’¹ She cites as evidence a passage from the opening chorus of *The Mikado*:

We are gentlemen of Japan;
On many a vase and jar -
On many a screen and fan²

Lee points out that, ‘*Mikado* characters ... not only inhabit a world filled with these imported goods: their very being is understood as inseparable from these objects.’³ In other words, these are not gentlemen from Japan, the place on the map; they are, as the song states, gentlemen *of* Japan, a Japan that is found on vases, jars, screens, fans, a place where no Westerner may encounter a real Japanese person, only their stylised representation.

Lee further notes, ‘*The Mikado* ... makes this intimate relation between character and object an indispensable aspect of its yellowface.’⁴ The actors in the original production of *The Mikado* were from England, and they wore yellowface. However, Lee points out that these impersonations were not indeed of Japanese people, however derogatorily such an impersonation might occur, but rather of

gentlemen and ladies of knick-knacks popularised in England during the Japaniserie craze of the nineteenth century.

By her own admission, Lee sees that '*The Mikado* ... defies charges that it is a racist work.'⁵ *The Mikado* has not fallen out of favour with production companies and is performed by members of many different races, including Japanese performers for a Japanese audience. How is this possible? If Lee's fundamental argument is correct, one of two things must be true - either we are really no less racist than the Victorians were, or something else other than racism is at work in this text.

Let me concede two points of Lee's argument: First, the British of the late Victorian period were racist, not just against Japanese people, but against anyone who was not born within their borders of a family that had been there since the Battle of Hastings. Second, *The Mikado* is couched in commodity fetishism. Let no one suppose that Gilbert or Sullivan had complex insight into Japanese life. They knew a song in Japanese, witnessed dances performed by Japanese women, and beheld many, many objects. They, like so many others in Great Britain, loved the objects despite their total ignorance of any reality of Japanese life.

Those two points conceded, where Lee points to a racially-motivated disconnect between the love of the Japanese knick-knack and a disdain for the foreign hand that made it, she misreads Victorian England's attitude toward the working class. In Victorian England, wealthy people adored beautiful things crafted by unacknowledged proletarians from their own country, not just those who were working abroad. If one wanted to argue for a perspective of 'commodity classism' in Victorian England, one would be correct. The British saw barriers between those who made objects and those who enjoyed the objects, but this was not a matter of race for the British but of class.

Hence, Lee's overall argument does not hold water because it pairs two things, the racism with the commodity fetishism, incorrectly. In fact, rather than conflate Japanese people with Japanese *objets d'art*, which would continue to impart a racist agenda to audiences, *The Mikado* conflates British people, not Japanese people, with Japanese *objets d'art*, and this presents a very different analytical problem, one not well illuminated by a strictly post-colonial reading of the text. *The Mikado*, which is British at its core, was understood to be so at the turn of the last century by its initial audience, who were not duped by its yellowface, knowing that they were at a British masque. Because it is a farcical discussion of British life, not a discussion of Japanese life, it has endured without any real censure from the public and fails to arouse the sense of racial offence today that a work might that indeed did demeaningly conflate Japanese people with Japanese objects.

A post-colonial argument fails to have sufficient historical underpinnings to present a clear picture of the operetta. Said famously states that discourse about 'The Orient,' a construct of Europe, exists as a consequence of colonial hegemony. From a geopolitical perspective, a relationship of relative equality existed between

Japan and England at the time of the penning of *The Mikado*. England did not colonise Japan. England had an egalitarian trade agreement with the Japanese. Furthermore, this was not a trade between a dominant superpower and a meek and subjugated backwater principality, but rather a trade pattern emerged by the mid-1870s where Japan participated proactively in spreading the European craze for its art and décor:

The Japanese themselves ... wished to exercise greater control over the supply of modern Japanese manufactures The Kiritsu Kosho Kaisha company, set up to promote traditional craft industries ... opened branches in New York (1876) and Paris (1878).⁶

The knick-knack launched Japan into an international commerce that was highly profitable. It was not an exploitive relationship between nations where one society sets the prices for another's goods and trades for them by proxy. Wealthy Japanese merchants had their boutiques open in Europe before *The Mikado* was written.

According to Jenny Holt, Japanese filial piety was portrayed as an instructive model for British school children in juvenile literature.⁷ Whether or not these portrayals were accurate is less remarkable than the idea that the children of a racist Britain were being told to behave more like other-raced Japanese children. It simply does not fit Said's model of a colonised nation's representation in literature. Hence, in examining *The Mikado*, in light of the aforementioned contemporary notions of Japan, treaties with Japan, trade agreements with Japan, cultural exchanges with Japan, factors simply do not point to a Saidian colonial or post-colonial relationship expressed in operetta form. Something else must be at work here.

The *Dramatis Personae* of Gilbert's libretto suggests no attempt at an authentic list of Japanese names. There is Peep-Bo, an obvious reversal of Mother Goose's 'Bo Peep.' There is Ko-Ko, a homonym for cocoa. There is Yum-Yum, what one says as a child in Victorian England when eating something scrumptious. There is Pitti Sing, a fanciful way of suggesting there will be a tragic song ahead in soprano voice. Nanki-Poo takes his name from a way of referring to handkerchiefs. Lee writes:

Ko-Ko tells the Mikado that Nanki-Poo's name "might have been on his pocket-handkerchief, but Japanese don't use pocket-handkerchiefs! Ha! Ha! Ha!" These jokes directly undercut racial impersonation with a certain insouciance.⁸

Lee sees inherent errors in the racial impersonation. However, how is one to understand the following text, in light of Lee's central argument?

But the happiest hour a sailor sees
Is ... with his *Nancy* on his knees!⁹

Why is a Japanese prince singing about a sailor's beloved *Nancy*? If the other names are all a thin veil, English children's words made into character names, and then we hear about Nancy sitting on someone's knee, we may be in the land of the silly, but we are not in the land of Japan.

If *The Mikado* is a fantasy with no attempt at ethnography, it is nonetheless a fantasy of white people in yellowface. Lee writes, 'at the core of all these productions was a racial performance that appealed precisely because it was not wholly convincing as a representation.'¹⁰ There is a veneer, thin as a layer of make-up, that makes this some kind of racial impersonation, albeit one designed to fool no one. Hua writes about this practise of transparent yellowface:

The ability for racial masquerade enables an experiencing of the other that reassures and reaffirms the stability and normativity of whiteness.¹¹

Even if yellowface stabilises whiteness, what can one make of yellowface that fools no one, that is not designed to convince anyone of its looking like Japanese people? What was the fun of watching performers pretending to be Japanese in a manner that did not convince anyone?

In examining the operetta within her argument, where fetishism of objects and racism in the society equals commodity racism, Lee argues,

The japonaiserie of 1885 promoted a fiction of Japan, the knowledge of which was gained ... by the possession of exotic objects ... These items were not valued for their usefulness but ... for their ability to transform the domestic space with a touch of magic. This magic rubbed onto yellowface performance, whereby racial transformation promised immediate pleasure.¹²

She further notes, '*The Mikado* offers a way of *inhabiting* the beautiful world of Japanese things, a mode of performance that served to alleviate anxieties about the ills of modern life and to offer alternative ways of being.'¹³ Lee, however, does not attempt to answer the question of why Victorian English people would want to subvert their personalities into foreign things. What alternative ways of being that might be found in a shoji screen or an unfurled fan? What kind of magic might Japanese objects produce?

It must have been inspiring to be surrounded by Asian objects, because Oscar Wilde, famously said, to the laughter of many, 'I find it harder every day to live up

to my blue china.’¹⁴ This notion of living up to one’s imported crockery caught the fancy of the cartoonist, DuMaurier (see Image 1).



Image 1 - DuMaurier’s ‘The Six-Mark Tea-Pot.’

THE SIX-MARK TEA-POT

Æsthetic Bridegroom, ‘It is quite consummate, is it not?’
Intense bride, ‘It is, indeed! Oh, Algernon, let us live up to it!’¹⁵

Oscar Wilde’s resemblance to DuMaurier’s ‘Æsthetic bridegroom’ is obvious. Wilde was the perceived leader of the Aesthetes, poets interested in the exterior, rather than the murky psychological interior, of human experience. According to Gere and Hoskins, the Aesthetes devoted ‘much ... energy ... [to] the education of the ordinary householder, and the intended outcome was an enlightened society with artistically decorated homes.’¹⁶ The pursuit of beautiful objects from the East was part of the centre of the movement’s ethos.

Wilde is parodied in *Patience*, the operetta that Gilbert and Sullivan presented the season prior to the opening of *The Mikado*. Gilbert makes it evident that Wilde inspired the creation of Bunthorne, who refers to himself as ‘a blue-and-white young man,’¹⁷ linking himself to the quote by Wilde. If we take Bunthorne at his literal word, here, however, we see him bizarrely identifying himself as a piece of porcelain, a blue and white teapot. Even more intriguing is his lyric immediately preceding this one that identifies him as a caricature of Wilde -

Bunthorne, always portrayed as an Anglo-Saxon, calls himself, 'A Japanese young man.'¹⁸

How can Bunthorne be Japanese? The only way to understand this (one year before *The Mikado* was staged) is that he means to equate himself with a Japanese object, not a Japanese person. He, a white man, sees himself as personified by an object from another culture.

If Bunthorne is a work of Japanese art, then Oscar Wilde's famous comment that one should be a work of art becomes less flippant. If one should be a work of art, as in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where true Dorian is encapsulated in a work of art, while Dorian the man is a falsehood, then the Aesthetes are saying that 'real' people are not the reality of themselves, that ideally, people will and subsume themselves in interesting objects made by human hands.¹⁹ The possibility of this kind of escape into a world of things is alluded to by Josephine Lee. However, she reads as racism the following comments from Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying':

The Japanese people [as represented in art] are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists ... In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention ... You will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere.²⁰

Lee sees this as the denial of the genius of Japanese craftspeople and artisans and the obviation of their personhood, but Wilde, understood in the larger paradoxical context of his work, is not insulting the Japanese. He is seeking a self-conscious fantasy that does not ever once offer the pretence that it is couched in any kind of reality - a landscape of the mind, and his personhood, such as it is in 'a work of art' is not an insult to any real people, even himself. He is interested in erasing the English mundanities of his life but not in proving himself the superior of any person outside his own culture. He is not denying the existence of real Japanese people. He is only denying their participation in his imaginary world. His Japanese effect, the one he says to look for in Piccadilly, is encapsulated in his poem 'Symphony in Yellow':

An omnibus across the bridge
Crawls like a yellow butterfly...
And like a yellow silken scarf,
The thick fog hangs along the quay.

The yellow leaves begin to fade
And flutter from the temple elms,

And at my feet the pale green Thames
Lies like a rod of rippled jade.²¹

His omnibus is a butterfly, his London fog a silk scarf. He sees his common elm trees as ‘temple elms.’ The Thames is made of jade, not murky temperate waters. He does not want to live in the quantifiable England of Lloyds of London. He wants to live in the wonderland of his Japaniserie, an artificial place where his own complex personhood, not that of any particular Japanese person or groups of people, can be forgotten. This, I submit is the location of the town of Titipu, the place where the English aesthetes want to become decorative objects. Lee gives us the following quote from a reviewer of the first production of the operetta:

The whole scene [of *The Mikado*] is drolly familiar. It is the every world of the [Spode] “willow pattern” china, and these are our old friends of the dinner service, the tureens and dishes and plates, who are forever crossing impossible bridges, and sitting under ridiculous tress, and standing in unprecedented postures.²²

The reviewer here recognises *The Mikado* as set among objects as well, and calls the two-dimensional renderings of the dinner service plates’ characters ‘old friends.’ He does not think he has affair with Japanese people, only paintings on porcelain. As the reviewer states - the trees are ridiculous, the bridges impossible, a funhouse mirror of the world. There is no animosity here with these old friends. Everyone knows on opening night that they are not having a colonial encounter, only an evening out with their porcelain to which they aspire to live up. Even Lee makes a connection between Ko-Ko’s ballad, ‘Tit-Willow’ and Blue Willow pattern dinner plates manufactured in England, not Japan.²³ Is there commodity racism implied in a strictly domestic masquerade of a British man acting for a British audience like a figure on a British dinner plate?

The British loved their china and their imported knick-knacks and wanted to live in their fantastical expression of artifice, just like Wilde did. The fantasy of the East is a matter of the mindset in the West, not anything like a true reflection of the people in the East. Indeed, there are no Japanese people in *The Mikado*, only objects come to life.

Notes

¹ Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.

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- ² W. S. Gilbert, 'The Mikado or the Town of Titipu', in *The Complete Gilbert & Sullivan: Librettos from All Fourteen Operettas*, ed. W. S. Gilbert (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1960), 345.
- ³ Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, 5.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.
- ⁶ Charlotte Gere and Lesley Hoskins, *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior* (Londo: Lund Humphries, 2000), 49.
- ⁷ Jenny Holt, 'Japan as an Exemplum of Social Orderin Turn-of-the-Century Britishand American Educational Literature: Filial Paradise', *English Literature in Transition* 52, No. 4 (2009): 424.
- ⁸ Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, 30-31.
- ⁹ Gilbert, 'The Mikado or the Town of Titipu', 347; emphasis added.
- ¹⁰ Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, 30.
- ¹¹ Juliette Hua, "'Gucci Geishas" and Post-Feminism', *Women's Studies in Communication* 32, No. 1 (2009): 75.
- ¹² Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, 71.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 72.
- ¹⁴ Gere and Hoskins, *The House Beautiful*, 13.
- ¹⁵ George DuMaurier, 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot', *Punch* 1880.
- ¹⁶ Gere and Hoskins, *The House Beautiful*, 7.
- ¹⁷ W. S. Gilbert, 'Patience or Bunthorne's Bride', in *The Complete Gilbert and Sullivan: Librettos from All Fourteen Operettas*, ed. W. S. Gilbert (New York: Black Dog Publishers, 1960), 230.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Dover Publications, 1993), 163.
- ²⁰ Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', *The Complete Works of Oscar* (New York, Harper and Row, 1989), 988.
- ²¹ Oscar Wilde, 'Symphony in Yellow', in *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose*, ed. Karl Beckson (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1981), 240.
- ²² Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, 7.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

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Autism, Rhetoric, and Whiteness

Paul Heilker

Abstract

This chapter explicates various forces working to construct autism as an overwhelmingly white phenomenon in public discourse, including popular films, television programming, ‘armchair’ internet diagnoses, ‘geek chic,’ ‘shiny’ autistics, ‘Aspie supremacy,’ the rhetorics of autism advocacy organisations, special education, access to health care and parental education levels. Until a more realistic portrait of autism and autistics emerges in our public discourse, it concludes, we will surely be failing millions of people who could be helped with appropriate educational and social support services.

Key Words: Autism, rhetoric, whiteness, special education.

1. Introduction

Whatever else it may be, autism is a profoundly rhetorical phenomenon. First, let us recall Aristotle’s ancient distinction between the necessary and the contingent: the proper domain of rhetoric, he wrote, is not the realm of the necessarily true, certain, or stable, but rather the realm of the contingent, possible and probable.¹ We do not yet know what causes autism, and outside of any personal experiences we have had with autistics, all there is to work with is fundamentally uncertain yet aggressively suasive public discourse about the condition, where there is heated argument about what, exactly, autism is, how we should think about it, and how we should respond to it. Is it a disease? A disability? A diversity issue? All these things and more? Here, then, is a second way that autism is rhetorical: as Dilip Gaonkar has said, ‘Rhetoric is the discursive medium of deliberating and choosing, especially in the public sphere.’² All we are presented with in the public sphere are competing narratives and arguments about autism, all of which are clamouring for our assent and none of which is remotely disinterested. The arguments wielded in this conflict are often verbal, of course, but they are increasingly visual in nature as well, and they come at us through a wide variety of discourse channels. But what all these rhetorical constructions have in common is that they almost inevitably portray autistics as white.

In writing this chapter, I found myself confronting a dizzying set of chicken-and-egg questions: in each case, that is, as I examined how a discourse works to construct autism as white, I realised that it could just as easily and appropriately be understood as a result of autism’s already being constructed as white. In what follows, then, I discuss each matter as a cause of autism’s whiteness purely for convenience, since I think each could just as easily be an effect: each discourse

both contributes to and results from a larger rhetorical complex working to code autism as a white phenomenon.

2. Popular Discourses

Let us begin, then, with the more obvious factors. While the rates of incidence of autism have been climbing since the American Psychological Association redefined the condition in 1994 (it is currently placed at 1 in 110 persons in the United States), most people still do not have regular, personal contact with autistic individuals. Hence, our conceptions of autism and autistics are driven primarily by what we encounter in popular media. What we learn from the movies, for instance, is that all autistics are white. In *Adam*, for example, the autistic character was portrayed by Hugh Dancy;³ in *P.S. I Love You* it was Harry Connick, Jr.;⁴ in *Snow Cake*, Sigourney Weaver;⁵ in *Mozart and the Whale*, both Josh Hartnett and Radha Mitchell;⁶ in *I Am Sam*, Sean Penn;⁷ in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, Leonardo DiCaprio;⁸ and in *Rain Man*, the iconic film representation of an autistic, Dustin Hoffman.⁹ Likewise, on television, when autistic characters or persons are shown, they are inevitably white. TV dramas give us autistic characters played by Max Burkholder (*Parenthood*),¹⁰ Mary McDonnell (*Grey's Anatomy*),¹¹ and Matthew Gray Gubler (*Criminal Minds*),¹² while reality shows present us with Heather Kuzmich (*America's Next Top Model*),¹³ Zev Glassenberg (*The Amazing Race*)¹⁴ and James Durbin (*American Idol*).¹⁵

While most people might point to Sheldon Cooper, the physicist portrayed by Jim Parsons on the comedy *The Big Bang Theory*, as the most obviously autistic character on television, Sheldon actually exemplifies two other forces working to construct autism as a relentlessly white condition: 'armchair' internet diagnoses and 'geek chic.' Consider armchair diagnoses: while all the other film and television portrayals I have mentioned involve persons being overtly identified as being autistic within the production itself or by its actors or producers, Sheldon has never been identified as such, although there is broad public acceptance that he is. The greater rhetorical power of these armchair diagnoses, though, does not come from their identifying additional fictional characters as autistic (although Napoleon Dynamite and Mr. Bean leap to mind, for instance), but from their invocation of real, historical figures as autistic. There are numerous lists of famous autistic people on the internet, all of which are completely speculative but which nonetheless have considerable suasive power, especially when taken together. Indeed, as Fred Volkmar, a psychiatrist at the Yale Child Study Centre has said, 'there is a sort of cottage industry of finding that everyone has Asperger's.'¹⁶ But in this industry, it seems, everyone is white. On these lists, we regularly find such people as Hans Christian Andersen, Béla Bartók, Lewis Carroll, Henry Cavendish, Marie Curie, Charles Darwin, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Glenn Gould, Thomas Jefferson, James Joyce, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Isaac Newton, George Orwell, Erik

Satie, Jonathan Swift, Nikola Tesla, Alan Turing, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and W. B. Yeats.¹⁷

Even a cursory examination of such lists reveals a high proportion of scientists and technology experts, which leads us to consider the role geek chic plays in the construction of autistic whiteness. As Steve Silberman wrote in *Wired* magazine in 2001, ‘It’s a familiar joke in the industry that many of the hardcore programmers ... are residing somewhere in the Asperger’s domain’, that autism is ‘the engineers’ disorder.’¹⁸ Silberman cites a recurring theme in case histories of autism: a ‘fascination with technology, ordered systems, visual modes of thinking, and subversive creativity.’¹⁹ And in our digital world, such interests and skills are increasingly coded as positive traits, while traditional social skills are becoming less important. Hence, as Neil Shepard notes, ‘in our cultural moment of geek chic ... the proto-typical Aspergian persona represented dominantly in the media is often both intelligent and successful,’ which also means ‘masculine, middle/upper class and white.’²⁰

3. Autism Discourses

Shepard notes that success in terms of geek chic thus ‘upholds traditional normativity in terms of gender, race and class, as well as reifying stigma toward other points on the autistic spectrum,’²¹ a dynamic which many people on the autism spectrum themselves are finding increasingly problematic. We thus come to the idea of the ‘shiny’ autistic and how this concept works, as well, to construct autism as a white condition. According to one source,

Shiny autistic is a term used in the Autistic community to denote an individual who is held up as an example of ‘what autistics should be’ ... Most shiny autistics... are high-functioning individuals who become famous by writing a book or otherwise sharing their experience as the shiny autistic and expects all autistics to be the same or very similar.²²

Temple Grandin,²³ of course, is the quintessential shiny autistic, but we can also point to Daniel Tammet,²⁴ John Elder Robison²⁵ and Dawn Prince-Hughes,²⁶ for instance, all of whom are white, high-profile authors of popular books sharing their experiences as autistics.

Another rhetoric coming from the autistic community itself which is working to construct autistic identity as white is that of Aspie supremacism. In this discourse, autism is seen not as problem to be fixed or a deficit or to be overcome, but rather as a marked improvement over normal neurology. On websites such as Wrong Planet, for example, there are those who describe autism as the next and better phase of human evolution,²⁷ and the Facebook page Aspie Supremacy defines Aspie, that is, someone with Asperger Syndrome, as

A superior being, [though] deficient in chaotic morasses such as small-talk ... [and the] double-standard-laden customs and values trumpeted by Neurotypicals ... more than makes up for it with a sharp, penetrating mind that is highly adept at developing an intense focus on a subject giving them a near-savant level of proficiency ... and an ability to reason independently, reducing their susceptibility to dogma, acceptance of groundless assertions, and the hazards of groupthink.²⁸

And while ‘neurotypicals’ might deflect some of the barbs here by noting the irony and dark humour, the same cannot be said of web postings like this one:

Well, guess what folks? I’m a supremacist! I think neurotypicals are idiots who are fucking this world up, I look down on primate politics, I think if aspies were in charge things would be a whole lot better.²⁹

I admit that I find this rhetoric disturbing, since any discourse that invokes a reference to genetic or evolutionary superiority will, of course, immediately raise the spectre of Nazi racism and Aryan eugenics. Here that association cements the idea of autistics as white.

The rhetorics of autism advocacy groups also work to construct autism as a white phenomenon. The two most powerful advocacy groups, Autism Speaks and Generation Rescue, are both fronted by photogenic white celebrities: Suzanne Wright, the wife of former NBC Universal CEO Robert Wright, and Jenny McCarthy, the popular comedic actress, respectively. Wright takes advantage of her husband’s industry ties to appear regularly on news broadcasts in the United States, while McCarthy appears frequently on talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Good Morning America*. Both rely on their personal ethos as grandmother and mother to autistic children, respectively, as they make their appeals, demonstrating how autism affects several generations at once in white families. Moreover, if one sees a public service announcement on U.S. television, it is invariably produced by Autism Speaks, and these spots overwhelmingly feature white actors or celebrities, such as golfer Ernie Els³⁰ and the musical group the Jonas Brothers.³¹ And finally, each of these organisations’ websites feature images of white children only. McCarthy is featured on the banner of the Generation Rescue website hugging a white boy, for instance,³² and the Autism Speaks site urges us to click on various photos so we can ‘meet’ Bobby, Kyle, Deena, Christian, Louisa, Michael, Adam, Lilly, and Helena, all of whom are white.³³

4. Cultural Forces

Let us now consider some of the less obvious forces working to construct autism as a white condition. For instance, cultural biases for and against special education programs are powerful factors in this regard. A recent study of New York City suburbs found that ‘affluent school districts ... classify more than five times as many of their students with autism as districts at the opposite end of the economic spectrum.’³⁴ The report notes that while ‘many white parents actively seek special-education classifications for their children ... for advantages such as extended testing time,’ for example, ‘Black and Hispanic parents tend to be warier of special-education programs that, historically, placed many minority children in classes beneath their ability levels.’³⁵ In other words, since autism is a special education issue, and since white parents, communities and schools disproportionately embrace special education programs, far more children are diagnosed with autism in those communities.

This same study pointed to a second less obvious, though quite powerful, force constructing autism a white condition: access to health care. Medical experts, the report said,

blame the problem ... on a lack of quality health care in low-income neighbourhoods. Research shows toddlers in poor families who aren’t taken on regular visits to pediatricians are less likely to have their autism diagnosed when it first appears.³⁶

Additional support for this idea comes from a recent study in California which

discovered clusters of autism, largely in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas, where children are twice as likely to have autism as children in surrounding areas. The 10 clusters were found mostly among children with highly educated parents, leading researchers to report that they probably can be explained by better access to medical experts who diagnose the disorder.³⁷

According to Irva Hertz-Picciotto, the senior author of the study, ‘access to services plays the major role.’³⁸ Deresha Gibson, a social work researcher, agrees, contending that since

African-American children are more likely to not have access to healthcare, experience greater discontinuity in healthcare and/or are more likely to see multiple primary care physicians, the opportunity for a provider to make an accurate and timely diagnosis [of autism] is greatly jeopardised.³⁹

Hertz-Picciotto notes an additional barrier to health care faced by Hispanic families in the U.S.: ‘Hispanic parents were underrepresented in all 10 of the clusters,’ she said, which ‘could be because some parents are reluctant to seek help from a state agency if they have a member of the family who is undocumented.’⁴⁰

And even when minority children with autism do get access to health care, there are diagnostic biases in place that delay if not prevent their being diagnosed with autism. Gibson writes that black children with autism-spectrum disorders are often misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. She likewise discusses a 2006 study that found that ‘African-American children were three times more likely than Caucasian children to receive another diagnosis first and 2.6 times less likely to receive an autism diagnosis on their first specialty care visit.’ And once they entered treatment, she writes, African-American children ‘required three times the number of visits over a period three times as long as Caucasian children before receiving an autistic disorder diagnosis.’⁴¹ A similar study found that while it usually takes three or four doctor’s visits for a white family to get an accurate diagnosis for their autistic child, for Latino families it takes more than eight.⁴²

The influences of special education programs and access to health care are both connected to a third less obvious factor working to create autism as a white condition, which is the level of parental education. According to Bernard Weiss, an expert in environmental medicine, the California study ‘confirms an association between parental education and autism risk’ that had been found in earlier studies. Weiss says these ‘findings indicate a higher likelihood of seeking services by educated parents.’⁴³ In other words, the more educated a child’s parents are, the more likely they are to seek educational and medical services if they suspect their child is autistic. The current situation in American education, at least, is thus heavily weighted toward keeping autism a white phenomenon. According to the Civil Society Institute, 75 percent of white students graduate from U.S. high schools, but only 50 percent of black students, 51 percent of Native American students and 53 percent of Hispanic students do.⁴⁴ Moreover, white high school graduates are also more likely to go to college than their black or Hispanic classmates. According to the American Council on Education, 47.3 percent of white high school graduates attend college, versus 41.1 percent of black and 35.2 percent of Hispanic high school graduates.⁴⁵ In short, if and until such race-based disparities in education are ameliorated, autism will continue to be skewed quite heavily toward being a white condition.

In sum, autism is currently being rhetorically constructed in public discourse as an overwhelmingly white condition, as even the simplest Google search confirms: a search for ‘autism,’ for instance, reveals that approximately 94 percent of the images returned are of white subjects (47 of the first 50 images).⁴⁶ The disparity between this rhetoric and the reality of autism, though, may be extreme: in at least one study of 987 Caucasian and African-American children, it was found that the

prevalence of autism did not vary by race, even within race and sex subgroups.⁴⁷ If this is so, we are surely missing and failing millions of people who could be helped with appropriate educational and social support services. Until a more realistic portrait of autism and autistics emerges, these undiagnosed individuals will continue to exert a considerable and unnecessary strain on a wide variety of our educational, economic, social and medical systems, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Notes

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³ *Adam*, dir. Max Mayer, Burbank, CA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2009.

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⁵ *Snowflake*, dir. Marc Evans, London, Revolution Films, 2006.

⁶ *Mozart and the Whale*, dir. Peter Naess, New York, N.Y., Big City Pictures, 2005.

⁷ *I Am Sam*, dir. Jessie Nelson, Los Angeles, C.A., New Line Cinema, 2001.

⁸ *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*, dir. Lasse Hallström, Los Angeles, C.A., Paramount Pictures, 1993.

⁹ *Rain Man*, dir. Barry Levinson, Burbank, C. A., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, 1988.

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¹¹ *Grey's Anatomy*, created by Shonda Rhimes, Los Angeles, C.A., Touchstone Television, 2005.

¹² *Criminal Minds*, created by Jeff Davis, Los Angeles, C.A., Touchstone Television, 2005.

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⁴² Soraya, 'Bias', paras. 12-13.

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PART 4

Performing/Passing/Enacting

Untying the Ties That Bind Her: Re-Negotiating Personal and Collective Ideologies of Gendered Whiteness in *Fin-De-Siècle* and Post-Apartheid South Africa

Leora Farber

Abstract

In this chapter I explore how the ‘immigrant’ experiences of two white female protagonists - the historical figure of Bertha Marks, who immigrated to South Africa from Sheffield in 1886, and myself, as post-colonial persona living in post-apartheid South Africa - are performed in the series of photographic work, *Ties that Bind Her*, exhibited on my art exhibition titled *Dis-Location/Re-Location*. Themes explored in the work and the chapter include the difficulties inherent in, and processes of, adaptation and transformation, through the psychological discarding and preserving culturally ingrained attitudes, behaviours and values. I touch on Bertha Marks’s attempts to preserve her white, Anglo-Saxon colonial Jewish heritage that is based on the colonial tropes of hierarchisation and separateness. I thereafter propose correlations between my ambivalent position as a white, English speaking, second-generation Jewish female living in a postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa and debates within South African whiteness studies around what Melissa Steyn identifies as a sense of ‘psychological dislocation’ that certain white South Africans are currently experiencing.¹ Steyn argues that since South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994, underpinnings of white identity have been challenged through processes of redress; anchors which previously held whiteness secure are shifting or have been removed, resulting in a sense of displacement for those white, English-speaking South Africans who staked much of their identity on their privileged whiteness.² Bertha Marks’s experiences of dislocation and alienation are considered in parallel with my experiences of displacement from a society caught in the throes of reconstruction and redress. The two personae’s experiences are considered as manifestations of the immigrant’s need to re-locate within ‘her’ new environment, entailing re-evaluations of personal and collective ideologies of gendered whiteness.

Key Words: Displacement, hybridity, postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa, white English speaking South African, re-location, immigrant.

In this chapter, I explore how what I propose to be the ‘immigrant’ experiences of two white female protagonists - the colonial woman, Bertha Marks,³ who immigrated to South Africa from Sheffield in 1885, and myself, as postcolonial persona living in post-apartheid South Africa - are performed in the photographic series titled *Ties That Bind Her* (2007-2008). The series was exhibited on my art

exhibition, *Dis-Location/Re-Location* from 2007-2008.⁴ I propose correlations between my ambivalent position as a white, English speaking, second-generation Jewish female living in post-apartheid South Africa and debates around what South African sociologist Melissa Steyn in 2006 identified as a post-1994 sense of psychological 'dislocation' particular to certain white South Africans.⁵ Although marked differences lie in our respective colonial and post-colonial contexts, both subjectivities are considered as manifestations of an immigrant's need to re-locate within their new environment, entailing re-evaluations of personal and collective ideologies of gendered whiteness that are connected by ambivalences of dislocation and re-location.

I focus on my sense of ambivalence, located in a space in-between displacement and belonging, familiarity and unfamiliarity, as a white woman living in postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. Using the work as a springboard, I show how this personal sense of displacement can be extended to what I acknowledge to be a generalised discussion on collective forms of post-1994 dislocation experienced by certain white South Africans in relation to their position in South Africa. I do so with acknowledgement that the category 'white English-speaking South African' (WESSA)⁶ is far from homogenous. Also, I acknowledge that the sources I draw on to substantiate this discussion range from 2001-2006, and are therefore not reflective of the most current situation. Nevertheless, these sources seem to be the most recent writing on white dislocation in South Africa available at present.

In the *Ties That Bind Her* series, the body becomes the script for the telling of migrant dislocation and the cultivation of new identity. It is subject to mutation in the most intimate of places (her bedroom), as it morphs into its estranged other. Underpinning the series is the protagonist's desire to graft a new world onto the body to create a hybrid lifeform, but preceding this is the need to preserve those Anglo-Saxon values, behaviours and attitudes that she feels are necessary to maintain the integrity of her identity. In Bertha Marks's case, these are her colonial values and beliefs, or, her 'whiteness' that she fears losing in her new environment; in my case, they entail those personal and collective naturalised, westernised, Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon values, morals, ideologies and beliefs, embedded in South Africa's colonial past and within my consciousness, that, after evaluation, I deem important to retain in order to preserve a sense of self. This act of preservation is signified by the protagonist's action of inserting a rose cameo into her breast, shown in the first image of the series, *Preservation* and *Preservation (detail)* (Figure 1), the rose being a signifier of 'Englishness.'

The second stage of the transplant is shown in the close-up, *Reparation (detail)* (Figure 2). If compared to its 'mirror' reflection *Preservation (detail)*, it becomes evident that the Eurocentric choker of pearls now appears to be 'under her skin,' taking on forms that resemble West African cicatrisation; white African beads replace the circular strands of pearls below the choker; the strand of pearls on her

breast has been subsumed into her body and read as lying under the skin, and the graft of skin and cameo has 'taken,' leaving a raised scar at the place of insertion. The protagonist is in the process of stitching, penetrating the margin of skin between inside and outside of the body with her needle, repetitively, in ritualistic motion. Her body is in an interstitial state of in-betweeness - she is neither fully her previous Anglo-Saxon self nor yet wholly transformed into a new, hybrid cultural being. In *Regeneration*, the new growth of a butterfly-shaped flower made of white African beads sprouts out of the scar of the cameo. The pearls have been fully subsumed under the skin, and the full effect of cicatrisation is evident. She has entered into a Third Space that encompasses both colonial and indigenous cultures, wherein, quoting Homi K Bhabha, 'identity and difference are neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between.'⁷

Throughout the exhibition, I draw correlations between Bertha Marks's experiences of displacement as an immigrant to South Africa and my feelings of displacement as a white woman living in the broader environment of postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. Whereas Bertha Marks's experience was quintessentially colonial, I use the artwork as a space in which to explore my ambivalences of 'displacement' and 'belonging' within a pan-African environment. These ambivalences are characterised primarily by a sense of psychological dislocation. The latter is rooted in a desire to re-evaluate my past in the present of post-apartheid, postcolonial South Africa, coupled with a need to re-locate myself within this environment. The vital issues of reconstruction and redress are, for me, coupled with recognition that my role in this process as a WESSA woman is necessarily limited and marginal, and yet, paradoxically, I experience a need to feel a sense of 'belonging' within this ever-transforming environment. These processes necessitate a re-evaluation of deeply internalised colonialism, or what Melissa Steyn calls 'tutelage into whiteness.'⁸ The processes of re-evaluation are traumatic, as they necessitate a conscious attempt to shape a new identity by either discarding and/or re-assessing that which is embedded in my Anglo-Saxon upbringing, whilst simultaneously retaining that which maintains personal integrity.

While the (de)constructing of one's (white) identity is a private act, it is also public and political, for, as Sarah Nuttall observes, in a South African context,

one of the mediating moments in the complex set of identity transformations in white autobiographies is necessarily the birth of the individual self. At the same time, what is desired is the birth of a new collective in which one could belong - while still being oneself.⁹

The making of individual identities in a South African context is thus intricately bound to collective modes of understanding and belonging; questions of

singular self-hood emerge only in relation to collective identities. Therefore, my attempts at re-evaluation of my whiteness and the reconstruction of personal identity should be seen against a backdrop of collective South African *whitenesses*, as should my sense of personal dislocation and displacement in the new dispensation.

Writing in 2003, Liese Van der Watt identifies ‘a crisis in the heart of whiteness’¹⁰ that, she argues, is related to an intense experience of displacement from the homeland for a sizeable segment of the white South African population, specifically WESSAs. Van der Watt proposes that post-apartheid South Africa ‘contradicts and throws into question’¹¹ ways in which many whites have come to imagine their place in the new dispensation. She suggests that alienation stems not only from an irrevocably changed present, but also from a past which has revealed itself as a lie:

the uprootedness that post-apartheid South Africa has brought in its wake is intensified when the past no longer offers a comfortable memory to escape to. For the horrors that were revealed in ... the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made it clear that neither the past nor the present offer any comfort or hold any truths.¹²

This, she suggests, results in a kind of displacement from a land that has become, for many, strange, foreign and alien. Similarly, Steyn describes the five narratives of whiteness that comprise her 2001 text, *Whiteness Just isn't What It Used to Be*, as stories ‘about displacement, about the subjective experience of dispossession.’¹³ The narratives that were comprised from a questionnaire sent to a broad sample group of white South Africans are all underpinned by the sense of loss that inevitably accompanies change. Steyn notes that these constructions ‘are being told by people who are sharing a dramatic change in their life-world; they are unmistakably stories of crisis, however diverse their interpretations.’¹⁴ For many, the advent of the new dispensation is accompanied by psychological stress in the form of loss of potency, diminished control and agency, confusion of roles and lines of authority, a perceived collapse of order, of knowledge and even of a coherent self.

In her analysis of two South African films, *Taxi to Soweto* (1991) and *Panic Mechanic* (1996), Steyn argues that these films reflect a

deep-seated ambivalence and inner conflict in white society in relation to the changes to which they were being asked to adjust. The impulse towards escapism denial, withdrawal, and even passive aggression is evident, creating a tension that pulls against the need ... to be reconciled with new realities.¹⁵

In her discussion on these films, Steyn suggests that, *circa* 1994, if white South Africans were to contribute with commitment and reconstruction to the broader society, much emotional work would need to be done to, as Herman Wasserman and Sean Jacobs put it, 'enable white people to be "white" differently.' As they conclude, since the early 1990s, white South Africans have been adapting to a situation where the white self and other constructions are challenged by the evolving society around them. The dominant societal dynamics are incongruous with and inimical to the perpetuation of privileged whiteness and Steyn's analysis shows how the old white certainties are both decentred and destabilised. Consequently, a new sense of self has to be forged on different terms. Similarly, Van der Watt posits that in order to be part of the new postcolonial nation and in order to feel 'at home' in the new South Africa, the previously privileged white minority needs to re-conceptualise or *imagine itself differently*.¹⁶ This reconceptualising, to a degree, seems to be in process. For instance, Wasserman and Jacobs comment that when looking at the social changes that have occurred in South Africa since 1994, and how these changes have been mediated in different spheres, it is interesting to note the emergence of what Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael call 'new forms of imagining.'¹⁷ These new forms of imagining are currently being played out on a variety of fronts, ranging from mass media, visual culture, and new media to mainstream art forms such as theatre or the urban aesthetics of graffiti art, poetry, intellectual property, hip-hop, *kwaito*, television dramas or the reclaiming of the airwaves by refugees.

Assessing whiteness - not necessarily abolishing it but reevaluating it - is obviously then a necessary step in negotiating entry into the South African nation. Yet, as Van der Watt pertinently asks, how does one live with whiteness in the new nation? How does a white person become part of the new South African nation? How does whiteness become a more inclusive and less threatening signifier? Perhaps tentative responses to these questions are to be found in Steyn's third sub-narrative, titled 'Hybridisation, That's The Name of The Game,' which forms part of her of fifth narrative. The latter looks to creating new subjectivities by drawing on other discursive or cultural repertoires to supplement preexisting white identities. These forms of hybridisation find their visual counterpart in the final image of the *Ties That Bind Her* series, *Regeneration* and *Regeneration (detail)* (Figures 4 & 5).

Respondents in this category call themselves *white Africans*. The term differs from 'South Africans' in its implication that those who belong to this group are 'of Africa' or 'are Africans.' This correlates with former President Thabo Mbeki's inclusive conception of Africaness, expressed in his 'I am an African' speech on the occasion of the adoption of the constitution in May 1996: 'It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.'¹⁸ According to Steyn, those currently identifying with the appellation 'white African' do not deny their racialisation but see race as a construct,

facilitated by an understanding of whiteness as a deliberate mechanism of social advantage.¹⁹ ‘Race’ is acknowledged as an influence shaped through historical and structural processes. Through the destabilising of fixed binaries, this narrative poses the possibility that “‘white’ may ... be done in ‘other’ ways.’ Proponents of this narrative propose a dialogic approach to self and other. Recognising the voice of the other is important, as is leaving behind inflated self-images that are part of the colonial master narrative. As Steyn states,

It means stepping off the “pure” side of the binary pedestal artificially fixed by the Manichean allegory, and entering the untidy cultural space in between ... Getting the “self” into perspective inevitably means looking at the “other” through different lenses; hearing the voice of the “other” inevitably reconstitutes the “self.”²⁰

The ‘untidy cultural space in-between’ means incorporating blackness into whiteness and Africanness into Europeaness in a way similar to that which is imaged in *Regeneration* and *Regeneration (detail)*. The respondents in this category deconstruct whiteness, undoing the dynamics that originally constructed its master narrative. According to Steyn, recognising the fears, unmasking the workings of power, acknowledging and dealing with guilt, grieving for lost opportunities, learning to engage with the life-world of the other and being proactive in developing a new subjectivity are all part of deconstructing whiteness. For hybridised whites, loss of dominance does not mean marginalisation and consequent social impotence. Rather, different, intersecting and contradictory codes and structures pertain to power. Long-term historical awareness of this narrative would urge the narrators towards questioning their relationship to the continent of Africa itself. For as Steyn says,

Recognizing their ambivalent relationship to the continent, acknowledging the extent to which they have held it an other ... This recognition leaves no option but to acknowledge that one has lost one’s home, the place of a “safe”, homogenous identity to which one can return. There is no other way ... but to enter into a new relationship - dialogic, appreciative, committed - with the continent that whiteness came to conquer. Opening up space to receive from Africa and from what is African, and to take this Africanness into previously “pure white” identity, enables the narrators to find their commonality with this “other”, that has ... been held at a distance for centuries.²¹

In the *Ties That Bind Her* series, the protagonist's initial action of inserting the rose cameo into her breast thus acts as a trigger towards her re-aggregation as a fully hybrid being. For Bertha Marks, this represents an attempt to maintain and preserve her white supremacy, possibly due to its precariousness in a colonial context. In the artwork, however, the spatial and temporal configurations of dislocation and relocation are shown to be blurred and complex, inscribing plural subjectivities-in-becoming. Therefore the manifestation of hybridity in the final image of the series, *Regeneration*, relates more to my experience than to Bertha Marks's. It signifies a sense of identification with the collective experiences of hybridity that Steyn outlines under the appellation of 'white African.'

By examining South African collective whitenesses through their narratives of displacement, I have explored the position and responsibility of my gendered whiteness within my respective context. This is a form of my grappling with the necessity of coming to terms with my South African whiteness and the multiple racial, historical and cultural privileges that it embodies. This self-examination is a crucial part of the narrative of hybridity, that, as Steyn notes, 'is characterized by both letting go and taking on ... the narrators tend to be aware of the need to let go of old selves, and to take on the responsibility of who they are going to become.'²²

Notes

¹ Melissa Steyn, comment in panel discussion, taken from videotaped documentary footage of the proceedings of the *Revisiting Identities/Positionalities in an Ever-changing South African Socio-and Geopolitical Climate* seminar, 2 September, 2006 (University of Cape Town: African Studies Gallery).

² Melissa Steyn, *Whiteness Just isn't What it Used to Be. White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

³ Bertha Marks was an English Orthodox Jewish woman who was the wife of the successful entrepreneur Sammy Marks. After arriving in South Africa at the age of 22 to enter into what is thought to be an arranged marriage with Marks, Bertha lived a privileged but physically isolated and insular life. Her sense of isolation was probably exacerbated by the upholding of hierarchical Victorian conventions of class, language, race and gender differences. Inherent in this colonial attitude is the privileging of whiteness as a product of race and social class.

⁴ The *Dis-Location/Re-Location* exhibition travelled to seven national South African galleries and museums from June 2007 to September 2008. The exhibition was accompanied by a live performance at the Premises Gallery, Johannesburg, in August 2006, an educational supplement, a programme of public walkabouts and discussions with visual art students from tertiary education institutions in each venue and a mini-catalogue. A 156 page full-colour publication containing ten scholarly essays as well as full documentation of the work has been published.

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, ed, *Dis-Location/Re-Location. Alienation and Identity in South Africa* (Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2008).

⁵ Steyn, *Revisiting Identities/Positionalities* seminar.

⁶ Tess Salusbury and Don Foster, 'Rewriting WESSA Identity', in *Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today*, eds. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn (Sandton: Heinemann, 2004), 93-109. WESSA is a difficult term as it tends to set up a definition of identity that openly offsets a white English-speaking self against an Afrikaans-speaking other. This tends to be a factually incorrect appellation, as most South Africans speak English irrespective of ethnicity, and, furthermore, tends to reinforce apartheid notions of 'natural', static and unchanging ethnic groupings. Furthermore, this group is not and has never been homogenous, making it difficult to define.

⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), cited in Home K. Bhabha, 'Postmodernism/Postcolonialism', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 311.

⁸ Steyn, *Whiteness Just isn't What It Used to Be*, 128.

⁹ Sarah Nuttall, 'Subjectivities of Whiteness', *African Studies Review* 44, No. 2 (2001): 128.

¹⁰ Liese Van der Watt, *The Many Hearts of Whiteness: Dis-investing in Whiteness through South African Visual Culture* (DPhil diss., State University of New York Stony Brook, 2003), 16.

¹¹ Van der Watt, *The Many Hearts of Whiteness*, 61.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Steyn, *Whiteness Just isn't What It Used to Be*, 155.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 235-236.

¹⁶ Van der Watt, *The Many Hearts of Whiteness*, 105.

¹⁷ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Anne Michael, eds., *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁸ Thabo Mbeki, 'I am an African', deputy president's speech on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill, Cape Town, 8 May 1996. Accessed 6 February 2011,

http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1996/960819_23196.htm.

¹⁹ Steyn, *Whiteness Just isn't What It Used to Be*, 129.

²⁰ Ibid., 138-139.

²¹ Ibid., 145.

²² Ibid., 155.

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Appendix

Images from the *Dis-Location/Re-Location* exhibition



Figure 1. Farber, L. (2007-2008)
Ties That Bind Her: Preservation
Image size: 100 x 133.2 cm
Archival pigment printing on
Soft Textured Fine Art paper, 315 g
Editioned 1/9



Figure 2. Farber, L. (2007-2008)
Ties That Bind Her: Debilitation
Image size: 100 x 133.2 cm
Archival pigment printing on
Soft Textured Fine Art paper, 315 g
Editioned 1/9



Figure 3. Farber, L. (2007-2008)
Ties That Bind Her: Regeneration
Image size: 100 x 133.2 cm
Archival pigment printing on
Soft Textured Fine Art paper, 315 g
Editioned 1/9.

Passing before the White Gaze: Performances of Whiteness in Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Comedy: American Style*

Lise Sorensen

Abstract

'What's in a name?,' Ruth Frankenberg asks in her introduction to her study on the social construction of whiteness and women. In answering her own question, Frankenberg suggests that whiteness eludes it because its very power lies in its nameless status. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison argues that whiteness has remained successful in being unnamed; it has remained invisible because criticism, labouring under misguided politeness, has avoided asking, 'What's in a name?' Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is an excellent example of a novel that begs that question. This chapter investigates what I consider a forerunner to *The Bluest Eye*, Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Comedy: American Style* (1933). Fauset's novel names whiteness; indeed spells it out by identifying its main character, who passes as white, as 'Olivia Blanchard' and by drawing on the Grimm brothers' fairy tale, 'Snow White,' as one of its structural motifs. *Comedy* has long been rendered invisible by the literary canon, just as the question of whiteness has. I suggest that Fauset's novel should be seen as an important examination of literary whiteness for which Morrison calls. Employing the conventions of drama in its deconstruction of whiteness as an identity expressive of superior attributes, *Comedy* is divided into 'acts,' and one of its leitmotifs is the notion of doubling. I interpret Fauset's novel within the tradition of Shakespeare's festive comedies, suggesting that racial identity is a question of mistaken identity: indeed, blackness and whiteness are always already mistaken notions of identity. Reading *Comedy* as a work in intertextual dialogue with Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) and Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), I explore whiteness as a performative identity and argue that there is nothing in a name.

Key Words: American literature, whiteness, identity, passing.

'What's in a name?,'¹ Ruth Frankenberg asks in her introduction to her study on the social construction of whiteness and women. In answering her own question, Frankenberg suggests that whiteness eludes it because its very power lies in its nameless status.² Toni Morrison argues, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, that whiteness in American literature has remained successful in being unnamed; it has remained invisible because criticism, labouring under misguided politeness, has avoided asking, 'what's in a name?'³ Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is an excellent example of a novel that begs that

question. As Valerie Babb puts it, '*The Bluest Eye* represents an instance in American literature where a writer probes the meaning of an often uninvestigated racial construct, whiteness; but it is one of few such instances.'⁴ This chapter investigates what I consider a forerunner to *The Bluest Eye*, Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Comedy: American Style* (1933), a novel that names whiteness; indeed spells it out by identifying its main character, who passes as white, as 'Olivia Blanchard' and by drawing on the Grimm brothers' fairy tale, 'Snow White,' as one of its structural motifs. Staged as a spectacle, the novel is divided into acts and prompts its readership, imagined as an audience, not to be 'too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes,'⁵ to use Morrison's closing lines in *Playing in the Dark*.

Fauset's first novel, *There is Confusion* (1924), was written to counteract *The Birth of a Nation*, the 1915 film adaptation of Thomas Dixon's infamous novels, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905).⁶ Dixon's novels sought to remove the basis for race confusion; his 1902 novel, with the telling title of *Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin or the Leopard His Spots, The Leopard's Spots*, bore witness to an anxiety of race passing in a period where the values of the Old South seemed to be gone with the wind, and only the past seemed to offer some consolation. Passing was a reassuring and an unsettling concept to white America at the turn of the century; it confirmed racial categories while it also deconstructed them. Kathleen Pfeiffer notes, 'An individual's ability to "pass for white" challenges the applicability of racial categories, yet those same racial categories are precisely what constitute the passing scene.'⁷ The U.S. Supreme Court's verdict in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, notably, redrew the colour lines and reinforced the 'separate but equal' mandate, but it also staged the ground for passing. 'To a nation that craved certainty,' Pfeiffer argues, '*Plessy* offered the illusion of clear segregation. Yet it simultaneously invited subversion of the most dramatic sort: the number of light-skinned people passing for white best illustrates the potential for racial anarchy.'⁸ Like a thief in the night, Mark Twain robbed race manic America of certainty when he suggested that a 'black' slave could pass undetected for a white aristocratic heir in his novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). While this novel is set in antebellum America and comments on the inconsistencies and paradoxes of slave society, *Plessy* was a reminder that Twain's observations also spoke of their contemporary day.

White supremacists may have drawn some comfort from Twain's notions of 'imitation nigger' and 'imitation white'⁹ in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, as these terms indicate there is some kind of authentic white original: whiteness, as an scientific expression of pure blood, was a kind a currency that was being counterfeited. But as the narrative develops, we learn that Pudd'nhead Wilson's scientific method, the taking of fingerprints, is relational and in itself it cannot account for racial identity. Indeed, Twain's satire makes the controversial statement that to some extent all subjects are passing: Dawson's Landing is a 'scene,'¹⁰ as Twain starts his

chronicle, on which subjects in all shapes and forms pass. Roxy and her child are the most obvious examples, and they are the characters around which the main plot is spun. Roxy is invisibly 'black' and visibly 'white,' and Twain mocks the law that deems her black on the basis of a mathematical calculation of the fragments of her blood. 'To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody,' he writes, 'but the one-sixteenth of her which was black out-voted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro.'¹¹ With subtle irony Twain suggests that if Roxy is indeed black, so are all whites, because she is 'as white as anybody.'¹² Stirring up the colour categories on which the 'fiction of law' is based, Twain deems them weightless; no scientific or legal discourse can represent race transparently.

Twain exposes the social categories of Dawson's Landing as nothing but deceptions; all the citizens, black slaves and white aristocrats alike, are a cast of impostors who act out their socially prescribed roles. As Susan Gillman argues,

In a broader, metaphysical sense as well, Dawson's Landing is populated by nothing but imitation whites whose very names, customs, and values ape those derived from an archaic feudal system with very little material relevance to their own reality ... This is a society radically confused about what people are, who is black and who is white, what is imitation and what is real, a society whose laws create and enforce strict boundaries to mask those confusions.¹³

Including Siamese twins in his story, Twain introduces further confusion to the scene. The twins add to Twain's occupation with personal identity and pose the question how selfhood can be distinguished. The answer ostensibly lies in fingerprints, but as Pudd'nhead Wilson's science cannot fully account for personal and racial identity, Twain leaves his readers with the liberating or discouraging assumption, depending on one's perspective, that all identity is passing. Indeed, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's* gender, race and class disguises, or performances, as it were, point to a postmodern notion of identity like the one theorised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. *Comedy*, which we now consider a modernist text with its experimental form based on the genre of drama and provocative content, likewise anticipates Butlerian ideas of the performative self. Provided with a table of contents, 'The Plot,' 'The Characters,' 'Teresa's Act,' 'Oliver's Act,' 'Phebe's Act,' and 'Curtain,' Fauset's novel presents race-, gender-, and self-identity as 'instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.'¹⁴ 'As a strategy of survival within compulsory systems,' gender is, according to Butler, 'a performance with clearly punitive consequences,'¹⁵ that is, a 'regulatory fiction.'¹⁶ In *Comedy*, whiteness, like Butler's example of gender,

is 'a strategy of survival,' a 'regulatory fiction.' Passing, moreover, can be seen as 'a performance with clearly punitive consequences.'

Fauset's title, I argue, can be read within the tradition of Shakespeare's festive comedies which depend on the actor's ability to transform him- or herself 'through a stylized repetition of acts,' to draw on Butler again. *Comedy*, like *Twelfth Night*, for example, employs the motif of doubling and suggests that race identity is a question of mistaken identity; indeed, blackness and whiteness are always already mistaken notions of identity. Fauset's character of Olivia can be understood within the motif of doubling; like Twain's 'black' and 'white' twins, her racial identity cannot be detected. Olivia's dark twin, Oliver, her youngest son, however, stand in the way of her racial performance; he represents to Olivia her flawed self-image that must be destroyed for her to pass before the white spectator's gaze. Focusing on 'Oliver's Act,' I read Olivia as the embodiment of Charles W. Chesnutt's 'American eye,'¹⁷ which filters the world through the lens of whiteness, in his 1901 novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, and cares for others according to their degree of whiteness.

The birth of Oliver cracks the mirror to her white self that Olivia imagines her children to represent. Oliver, who 'in appearance, in rearing, in beliefs ... should be completely, unrelievedly a member of the dominant race,'¹⁸ according to the expectant mother, is, as Thadious M. Davis suggests in his introduction to *Comedy*, to 'embody the answer to the riddle "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"'¹⁹ 'Her chosen namesake is slated before his birth,' Davis notes, 'to become an obverse reflection of her dreams.'²⁰ Oliver, then, becomes Olivia's darkest nightmare. A figure of self-annihilation to Olivia, the ghost of her hated black father, she 'can't go on living,'²¹ to echo 'Snow White,' if she has to look at Oliver. Like the queen in the fairy tale, moreover, Olivia is eventually destroyed by her own narcissism.

Emphasising specularly in the scene where Olivia is presented with her dark-skinned newborn, Fauset shows how the 'American eye' refuses to identify with non-white others: 'Her eyes stretched wide to behold every fraction of his tiny person,' she writes, 'But the expectant smile faded as completely as though an unseen hand had wiped it off. She turned to her husband sharply: "That's not my baby!"'²² In his excellent analysis of visual encounters in *Marrow*, Bryan Wagner argues that white ideology is punctured when it does not find itself reflected in the physical make-up of the cityscape. Wagner writes that

Through a series of interpersonal encounters, Chesnutt exposes the ideological subtext that structures white responses to the African American middle class. These scenes suggest what happened in Wilmington when local whites encountered racialized objects (bodies, buildings, monuments) that could not be fully assimilated by the structures of white perception. I call

these scenes “disturbances of vision,” a term that designates the intense cognitive dissonance generated in these moments of apparent ideological collapse.²³

Oliver is to Olivia one such ‘disturbance of vision,’ and his presence brings about the collapse of the stage of Olivia’s racial theatre: ‘To her Oliver meant shame. He meant more than that; he meant the expression of her failure to be truly white.’²⁴ Her dark twin, like her namesake Olivia Carteret’s African American sister Janet Miller in *Marrow*, must be kept out of vision to restore her white sense of self, which her two other children represent. Olivia ponders:

Just as years ago she had felt that Christopher was the sign apparent of her white blood, so now she felt that Oliver was the totality of that black blood which she so despised. And there was too much of it. In her own eyes it frightened and degraded her to think that within her veins, her arteries, her blood-vessels, coursed through enough black blood to produce a child with skin as shadowed as Oliver’s.²⁵

Like the criticism that ignores questions of race, Olivia seeks to render her dark-skinned son invisible to her gaze. As Morrison puts it, ‘To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body.’²⁶ Indeed, Oliver’s eventual self-destruction is grounded in the fact that he is ‘shadowless’: he cannot find his reflection in the ‘dominant cultural body’ that Olivia represents. ‘Oliver’s Act’ is dominated by mirror scenes; he ‘live[s] in a double world.’²⁷ ‘There must be some hidden, some inner defect,’ Oliver reflects, ‘which age would reveal to him.’²⁸ A ‘disturbance of vision,’ ‘his presence in the house fret[s] and humiliate[s] her,’²⁹ and Oliver spends most of his childhood at his grandparents’ home, erased from Olivia’s white self-narrative.

‘Oliver’s Act’ is Fauset’s most elaborate exploration of doubleness and the mirror motif in *Comedy*, and she claims that the mirror into which black Americans look for self-recognition is always already framed by the white gaze. The Pandora edition of her novel *Plum Bun* suggests this with its cover image, displaying a light-skinned woman in front of a mirror studying her dark reflection in the looking glass. Racialised subjects, Fauset maintains, are nothing but representation, a fictional invention that the spectator generates as reality, as Twain suggested with the character of Roxy in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. The arbitrariness of race as textual invention is exposed by a young boy in *Comedy*. He comments on his blond, blue-eyed playmate’s social construction as black in a manner reminiscent of the boy in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, who sees through the social illusion of the emperor’s new clothes: ‘But if she ain’t white, why ain’t she white? She’s whiter

than lots of those white girls at our school. What makes her colored and makes those white girls white?’³⁰

Unable to sympathetically identify with her son, Olivia passes him off as the antithesis of her white super ego, labelling and rejecting him as a ‘wild Indian.’³¹ When Oliver returns to his parents’ home as an adolescent, Olivia projects onto him the identity grid of a colonised other. This makes him perform the role of a Latino butler, thus showing off her economic privilege and her racial superiority. As Allen notes, ‘Fauset shows her disapproval by including a scene where Olivia coerces her darker son, Oliver, into serving as a waiter when she entertains a few white friends with an afternoon tea, validating both tea and social separation on the basis of race, which indicates that she has been seduced by capitalism and a national segregationist ideology.’³² Race, in the literary imagination, is a notion of space as well as a notion of bodies: the marrow of tradition in America, as Chesnutt reminds us, is the racialised house. Akin to the violence that white supremacists employ to recompose the racial geography of the city in Chesnutt’s novel, Olivia perpetrates psychic violence on Oliver to restore the racial landscape of her home. Reminiscent of the queen in the fairy tale who eats the liver and lungs she believes to be Snow White’s because she stands in her way of passing before the looking glass, Olivia drives her son to suicide because with his ‘tell-tale color,’³³ he appears to her a truth-telling mirror. Completely wrapped up in whiteness, Olivia is, like Ku Klux Klan members, an agent of death. Richard Dyer comments on this image of white death in *The Birth of a Nation*, the film Fauset’s first novel was published to oppose,

The image of the Ku Klux Klan decked out in white is an image of the bringing of death. When we see the Klan riding to the rescue of the beleaguered whites in *The Birth of a Nation*, it is undoubtedly intended that we should see them as bringing salvation, but it is now hard to see in these great splashes, streaks, and swirls of white on an white screen as anything but the bringing of death to African-Americans. In some set-ups ... composition, placing the Klan where the natural light falls and outlining them with billowing white smoke, shows nothing but white death.³⁴

The last image of Olivia reinforces this sense of destruction; outlined in white smoke, evoking the image of the Klan as bringing white death, her desire to pass for white is still all-consuming; broken and lonely in a Paris pension, Olivia projects her sense of white identity onto the cigarettes she smokes. As Elizabeth Ammons reads the closing scene in Fauset’s novel, ‘Pale and withered, [Olivia] resembles the wicked witch of fairy tale - banished to a cold, lonely, barren world where significantly, she cannot speak the language nor be understood. Engulfed in

silence and solitude, Olivia, obsessed all her life with passing, has finally and permanently passed. She is now totally “white.”³⁵ Ever seduced by white goods, Olivia teaches another expatriate woman that ‘Miss Blanche is the only brand positively that you can smoke at all.’³⁶ Olivia, Fauset maintains, is blind to the fact that she is the one being consumed in the name of whiteness. ‘Having no genuine content other than a culturally manufactured one,’³⁷ as Babb puts it, whiteness is an optical illusion to Fauset, just as it is a ‘fiction of law’ to Twain in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*; there is nothing in its name.

Notes

¹ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴ Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 8.

⁵ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 91.

⁶ Carol Allen, *Black Women Intellectuals: Strategies of Nation, Family, and Neighborhood in the Works of Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, and Marita Bonner* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 54.

⁷ Kathleen Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (New York: Norton, 2005), 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain’s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 78.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁷ Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston: Bedford, 2002), 74.

¹⁸ Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Comedy: American Style* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1995), 40.

¹⁹ Thadious M. Davis, Introduction to *Comedy: American Style* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1995), xxix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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- ²¹ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 188.
- ²² Fauset, *Comedy*, 41.
- ²³ Bryan Wagner, 'Charles Chesnutt and Epistemology of Racial Violence', *American Literature* 73 (2001): 313.
- ²⁴ Fauset, *Comedy*, 205.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 9-10.
- ²⁷ Fauset, *Comedy*, 187.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 201.
- ³² Allen, *Black Women Intellectuals*, 63.
- ³³ Fauset, *Comedy*, 225.
- ³⁴ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 209.
- ³⁵ Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 156.
- ³⁶ Fauset, *Comedy*, 321.
- ³⁷ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, 16.

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De-Reifying Representations of White Male Identity in Post-Apartheid Popular Performance Practices: Jack Parow

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Abstract

This chapter is an investigation into the shifting and unstable processes of signification within a post-Apartheid South Africa. The discussion focuses on the emergence of an alternative construction of whiteness which challenges the homogenous positionality ascribed to white male identity. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise and critically analyse the necessary process of re-negotiating and reinventing white identity within a democracy. This is specific to popular performance practises that reveal a self-reflexivity in relation to the positionality and ideas surrounding whiteness in South Africa. These ideas are analysed in relation to Zander Tyler, also known as Jack Parow, an Afrikaans hip hop artist whose performance style and persona reflect an alternative to predictable forms of representation within Afrikaans music and culture. Tyler's performance is argued as a process of de-reification and subversion that deviates from normalised representations of whiteness. This chapter argues that Tyler's performance reveals both a shift from the reified notion of the white male as coloniser and oppressor as well as deviation from the problematic representations of white guilt that have surfaced in post-Apartheid South Africa. The analysis focuses on how Tyler's performance persona deconstructs the notion of white as invisible and privileged through his references and performance of the working class or poor white identity. These references challenge the status quo by raising the issue of class differentiation in post-Apartheid South Africa. Tyler's humour, self-reflexivity and abjection of self are at the centre of the analysis. The significance of this research lies in the deconstruction of a homogenous and reified perception of whiteness in South Africa. This research is approached through a qualitative process that entails a reading and application of critical texts to the analysis. This reading/application is engaged in a dialog with the interpretative and experiential aspects of performance analysis.

Key Words: Stereotypes, anxiety, reification, questioning, revolt, subversion, Afrikaans, gangsta rap, poverty, Zef.

No one person fits a mould or can be described as normative, but very often identity is mediated and presented in the form of types. This is one way to represent ideas and, to be fair, not all stereotypes are negative. The problem with a stereotype however is that it shows only one side of things; it obscures a more multifaceted perspective of identity. Stereotypes are symptoms of reification, a

process whereby abstract concepts are thought of as concrete, tangible entities that exist independently of those who actually frame them. It is when we take an idea for granted and treat it as a given, as a thing. Matt Wray brings our attention to the ease with which identities become reified through representations,

relying on our shared representations, we treat the category as if it were a fixed, naturally given thing and then assume the person we are fitting into that category shared some or all of the traits and characteristics of the category. In short we reify the categories into identities.¹

Performance, however, creates spaces in which to challenge reified ideas surrounding identity. The performance of stereotypes when they are used subversively can become potent ways of questioning perception. Zander Tyler institutes this kind enquiry through his creation of his performance persona/alter ego, Jack Parow. This questioning can be interpreted as a form of revolt, theorised by Julia Kristeva as an endless process of enquiry.²

In the context of South Africa in its Post-election phase, revolt is an absolute necessity. White South Africans, as Melissa Steyn observes, have not experienced their whiteness as invisible or normalised. As Steyn notes it is rather the 'naturalness of being thus privileged' that remained unquestioned.³ With the advent of democracy and the emphasis on equality in post-Apartheid South Africa the 'naturalness' of this privilege has increasingly being challenged. Sarah Nuttall, for instance, observes a shift in white identity away from the idea of the settler or coloniser to a less defined space within a new democracy, a space in which the white subject must reinvent and negotiate identity.⁴

Jack Parow's comic and subversive music and performance style resonates with this reinvention and re-negotiation of identity. I interpret this reinvention of identity as preoccupied with an ongoing process of questioning and discovery, rather than a coherent end point. These notions are explored through popular music performance, a specific form of cultural production that can be seen as a means to question national and social identities. Revealing how performance practices themselves have the potential to be more than an imitation or reflection of social circumstances and can provide a valuable site for the reconstruction of identity.⁵ This discussion focuses on Jack Parow's subversion of stereotypes that surround white Afrikaans masculinities, gangsta rap, and the notion of *white trash*/poor whites.

Tyler discovered the name Jack Parow from the anti-hero character, Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, referring to himself as the, 'pirate of the caravan park.'⁶ He describes his music as 'romantic and dangerous Afrikaans rap.'⁷ Jack Parow emerges from within a context in which (some) young alternative Afrikaans musicians are processing and reclaiming their Afrikaans-ness

as something that is ‘not always associated with Apartheid.’⁸ Peet Pienaar observes that from the first Oppikoppi,⁹ artists tended to shy away from singing in Afrikaans. The influence of American rock music was strongly felt, and even if bands were first language Afrikaans speakers, they would adopt American accents. For many alternative bands, singing in Afrikaans was reminiscent of frivolous romantic themes (liefdesliedties) and connected to Apartheid as the language of the oppressor.¹⁰ Jack Parow distances his use of Afrikaans from its associations with racism and oppression, stating ‘There are a lot of Afrikaans artists who are still speaking the language of apartheid.’¹¹

Before he became a name in the South African music industry (2009), Tyler rapped in English with different crews including black and coloured rappers in Cape Town. One of these bands was called The Clenched Fist, who as a group decided to create a track, ‘Hard Headed Hobo,’ in which Zander performs a Boer¹² angry at a couple of hobos that have stolen from him. Writing the lyrics for the angry ‘Boer’ in English seemed erroneous so he wrote the rap in Afrikaans, stating, ‘If I was Boer I’d be doing it in Afrikaans.’¹³ This was the start of his experimentation with rap in Afrikaans. This parody of stereotypical images and behaviour related to the ‘Boer’ has continued into his present projects. In music videos like ‘Jy Dink Jy’s Cooler’ as ‘Ekke’ and ‘Byellville’ he is often seen drinking and braai-ing (barbequing), signs typically connected with Afrikaans males.

Tyler’s performance of Jack Parow is heightened through ‘kitsch’ outfits that reference elements of style associated with white Afrikaans masculinity. His 1980s moustache and shorts (rather than slacks) are examples of this. The moustache recalls the politically fraught 1980s, before the fall of Apartheid, when this look was fashionable. The moustache is connected to images of the white Afrikaans male as conservative, Calvinist and nationalist with an ingrained sense of racial superiority. This unfashionable Afrikaans look of the ‘boertjie’ is then combined with a slightly overstated hip-hop aesthetic. This can be seen in the exaggerated baseball cap he performs in and large amounts of gold (bling) in his colour palette. In ‘Byellville’ and ‘Jy Dink Jy’s Cooler as Ekke,’ he is portrayed as a geeky guy who goes through a transformation into a ‘hip’ gangsta rapper.

Jack Parow is influenced by gangsta rap that emerged in the 1980s in Los Angeles as a subgenre of hip-hop music.¹⁴ The lyrics often deal with the violent experiences of marginalised black youth in urban settings. Although Jack Parow as a white South African has little claim to the racial and class-based oppression of black youth, he obviously identifies with the resistant attitudes and grievances of gangsta rappers. Gangsta rap has been strongly criticised for its negative value system with songs referencing pimping, dealing drugs and murder.¹⁵ bell hooks, for instance has been very critical of the materialism and misogynist values espoused by gangsta rap, arguing that these are not a specifically black issues but rather a reflection of the values endorsed by white patriarchal culture.¹⁶ Indeed, for

many gangsta rappers the narratives surrounding their suffering have become the means to material wealth and success. In this way racial suffering is consumed as entertainment and often perpetuates stereotyped ideas of black masculinity.

Gangsta rap and white Afrikaans-ness are identity constructions that are easily subject to reification through processes of mediation. White male Afrikaans-ness and gangsta rap are associated with violent masculinities. This violent element is erased from Jack Parow's representation of a drunken anti-hero who ultimately fails at being cool. Dick Hebdige argues that the punk subculture in 1970s was a way of dealing with, 'that amorphous body of images and typifications made available in the mass media in which class is alternately overlooked and overstated, denied and reduced to caricature.'¹⁷ Jack Parow use caricatured images of white Afrikaans-ness and gangsta rap that resist clear signification. The fusion of fashion elements is made comical by their heightened quality and the incongruity of juxtaposing hip-hop with white Afrikaans masculinity. The signs which emerge from this mismatched 'look' seem out of place and inappropriate in relation to the dangerous attitudes representative of gangsta rap. At the same time they also undermine the masculinity set up by signs such as the moustache and the shorts. This bricolage of styles is part of the *Zef* movement initiated by Die Antwoord and Jack Parow.

Zef is an appropriation of the *common* and mass-produced, an image of 'kitsch' and of poor *white trash* from the suburbs. The term or more accurately racial slur *white trash* stems from an American context, but is helpful in unpacking the idea of *Zef* culture in South Africa. Wray observes that the words *white trash* signify both race and class status.¹⁸ White is associated with purity and cleanliness, while trash refers to the dirty, impure and profane, the abject.¹⁹ The slur thus implies a complex position in relation to normative understandings of white identity. *Zef* originally derives from the Ford Zephyr car and was at first used to identify Jewish emigrants in Cape Town in the 1970s. *Zef* like *white trash* is related to class and race. Parow states, 'Zef is like, well, like the opposite of posh, like plastic ... fur on the dashboard.'²⁰ *Zef* is described by Die Antwoord as an appropriation of aspects of American popular culture, Ninja (Watkin Tudor Jones) states, 'Zef is, like, American style, it's like the debris of American culture that we get in dribbles. We tape it together and try to be American ... The Zef style is a coarse style.'²¹ *Zef* is thus a specific way of incorporating the mainstream and commercial 'debris' into a South African idiom.

Jack Parow's first hit single 'Jy Dink jy's Cooler as Ekke' ('You Think You Are Cooler Than Me') deals quite explicitly with a lower-class white *Zef* identity in contrast to a wealthy middle class identity. In the song notions of superiority or 'coolness' are defined by material wealth, including references to designer labels Issey Miyake, Lacoste and smoking Yves St Laurent cigarettes. The lyrics are composed of binary oppositions between middle class and lower class, local and international: 'Jy't vriende in Swede, ek het vriende in Benoni' ('You have friends

in Sweden, I have friends in Benoni'). The song inverts all the upper class status symbols of material wealth and mobility as negative while lower class symbols are celebrated as 'cool'. One of the many examples of this is the lyric 'Jy's die ou met die new fresh look, Ek's die ou met die Pep Stores broek' ('You're the guy with the new fresh look, I'm the guy wearing the Pep store pants'). Pep stores, a clothing franchise that is marketed towards the working classes and is not considered a 'cool' label to wear. Jack Parow's 'Jy Dink jy's Cooler as Ekke' questions and insults the superiority and expensive 'taste' associated with middle and upper class sensibilities.

'Jy Dink jy's Cooler as Ekke' finds resonance with the behaviour and mindset of the upwardly mobile in contrast to the many South Africans who live on the breadline. Schenk and Seekings note that, overall, in South Africa persistent unemployment is the norm for most young men and women.²² The approach of the new government in post-Apartheid years has focused on economic development rather than the redistribution of resources and social support. This means that a shift has been instituted in South Africa, but this has been a modification from 'a racially-polarised to an increasingly class-divided society.'²³ Or, as Herman Wasserman states, 'While race has become a political liability, economic positioning is seen as the ticket to the future.'²⁴ 'Jy Dink Jy's Cooler as Ekke' brings awareness to South Africa as a country that is both economically and socially divided between rich and poor. Nadine Dolby observes in an ethnographic study on schools in Johannesburg, that regardless of racial differences, students 'were united by their commitment to a consumerist culture.'²⁵ Jack Parow's embrace of a *Zef* lower-class status in 'Jy Dink Jy's Cooler as Ekke' resists this materially obsessed culture.

Wray argues that 'social distinctions are not just ways of orienting ourselves in the world, they are major agents of power.'²⁶ Poor whites or *white trash* are subjects positioned at the margins of society, Wray writes that white trash 'names a people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order.'²⁷ The identification with poverty can thus be seen as a form of abjection. Images and narratives of poverty disturb a sense of order and cleanliness that upholds society.²⁸ This is because, as hooks observes, poverty is often represented by negative stereotypes in the media reflecting the idea that to be poor is a shameful social position.²⁹ To be poor means to be without, disadvantaged, deficient.

The language and images associated with poverty as illustrated above often signify the poor as lazy and dishonest individuals, who will do anything to attain monetary wealth. As if, being poor is synonymous with a lack of integrity. Being poor is also connected to been tasteless, the idea that even if the poor were to find financial stability, they would not use it tastefully. Jack Parow uses poverty and notions of 'bad taste' as symbols of status rather than as conditions of shame. Asked if his image was a comment on *white trash* and 'common' people or a statement, Zander Tyler replied,

Well, the zef image is me, its how I grew up and how I have been classified my entire life, being from behind the boerwors curtain.³⁰ So, yes, I am making a statement to say that we aren't as bad as everyone makes us out to be. But at the same time I'm ripping off my friends and myself because we are pretty dysfunctional and rough as fuck.³¹

Jack Parow's simplistically sketches a sense of anxiety with regards to his identity. When he says 'the zef image is me,' he speaks to how identities can be subject to processes of reification. Jack Parow takes ownership of stereotypes to question them. He acknowledges that at a certain level, as a white man he colludes within systems of reification and colonialism and simultaneously challenges this. Timothy Bewes notes that 'Anxiety signifies a superfluity, an excess of individuality, in which the subjective response is far from predetermined by external circumstance.'³² Here Jack Parow's anxiety with regards to his sense of self can be interpreted as a positive aspect, a self-reflexive anxiety in which perception is questioned.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre makes a distinction between fear and anxiety, noting that

A situation provokes fear if there is any possibility of my being changed from without; my being provokes anxiety to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation.³³

Anxiety can be described as a symptom of revolt as it accompanies the process of insistent questioning. Kristeva interprets revolt as the need to question consistently and continuously so that we do not take for granted how we perceive the world. A successful revolt would be one that continues to question even after 'revolution.'³⁴ As Kristeva argues,

The telling moment in an individual's psychic life, as in the life of societies at large, is when you call into question laws, norms and values. Because it's precisely by putting things into question that 'values' stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life.³⁵

Jack Parow destabilises or 'calls into question' reified representations of white Afrikaans identity, gangsta rap and *white trash* (poverty). He embodies stereotypical and reified constructions of identity but questions and subverts their logic by unsettling signification and thereby enacts a subjective revolt. Through a process of de-signification and subversion Jack Parow brings about an intercultural³⁶ subject in which the difficulties brought up by multiculturalism are

revealed.³⁷ This is significant in terms of Rainbow nation³⁸ discourses so prevalent after Apartheid in 1994.³⁹ These discourses although well intentioned, often institute a superficial sense of togetherness and unity, rather than grapple or engage with a problematic past and its marks on the present.

In conclusion this specific brand of white Afrikaans rap can be viewed as a form of agency within cultural practice. Liane Loots observes that cultural production

can become a moment of self-definition and a political act that challenges how, for example, patriarchy and capitalism define us. Cultural production allows social subjects agency - a chance to speak and create new discourse.⁴⁰

This agency is at the same time revealed as problematic, anxious and vulnerable. The focus on class and race through white trash *Zef* imagery, both in the form and the style of Jack Parow's music and performance reveals a questioning which enacts its own intimate form of revolt. This revolt is specifically a performative one, a rehearsal of identity that challenges perceptions.

Notes

¹ Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

² Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³ Melissa Steyn, 'White Talk: White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness', in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred López (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 122.

⁴ Sarah Nuttall, 'Subjectivities of Whiteness', *African Studies Review* 44, No. 2 (2001): 118.

⁵ Micki Flockemann, 'The Aesthetics of Transformation: Reading Strategies for South African Theatre Entering the New Millennium', *South African Theatre Journal* 15 (2001): 25-39; Ashraf Jamal, 'Faith in a Practical Epistemology: On Collective Creativity in Theatre', *South African Theatre Journal* 17 (2003): 37-64.

⁶ Ruth Cooper, 'Jack Parow pirate of the caravan park', *Bizcommunity*, Accessed 13 May 2011, <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/432/42102.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peet Pienaar cited in DVD Documentary: 'Fokofpolisiekar, Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Did', 2009. Directed by Brian Little.

⁹ Oppikoppi is a Music festival held annually in Limpopo since 1994.

¹⁰ Neville Alexander, 'After Apartheid: The Language Question', Accessed 13 May 2011, <http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/apartheid/alexanderp2.pdf>.

¹¹ The Witness Interview with Jack Parow, Accessed 13 May 2011, http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=5690.

¹² The word Boer refers to white Afrikaans speaking individuals. It has both negative and positive references to white Afrikaans identities.

¹³ Cooper, 'Jack Parow Pirate of the Caravan Park'.

¹⁴ Martinez, Theresa, 'Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance', *Sociological Perspectives* 40, No. 2 (1997): 266.

¹⁵ Adam Haupt, 'Hip-Hop in the Age of Empire: Cape Flats Style', *Dark Roast Occasional Paper Series* 9 (2003): 4 of 15 (unpaginated).

¹⁶ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁷ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1988), 85.

¹⁸ Wray, *Not Quite White*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ Lin Samson, 'Straight Outta Parow', *Sunday Times*, 30 January 2011, 20.

²¹ Chris Lee, 'Die Antwoord Interviewed: On "Zef Style," Harmony Korine and a Movie Featuring a Drug Dealer Named "The Elf"', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 2010, Accessed 9 May 2011, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/music_blog/2010/10/die-antwoord.html.

²² Jan Seeking and Jeremy Schenk, 'Locating Generation X: Taste and Identity in Transitional South Africa', *Centre for Social Science Research Working Paper No. 284* (2010): 15.

²³ Roger Southall, 'Introduction: The ANC State: More Dysfunctional than Developmental?', in *State of the Nation: South Africa*, eds. Sakhela Buhlungu, John Daniel, Roger Southall and Jessica Lutchman (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2007), 21.

²⁴ Herman Wasserman 'Learning a New Language: Culture, Ideology and Economics in Afrikaans Media After Apartheid', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16 (2009): 12.

²⁵ Schenk and Seekings, 'Locating Generation X: Taste and Identity in Transitional South Africa.'

²⁶ Wray, *Not Quite White*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.

²⁹ hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 167.

³⁰ The *boerewors curtain* colloquially refers to white Afrikaans speaking suburbs and is associated with backward, and 'common' (and possibly racist) people.

- ³¹ Adriaan Basson, 'Jack Parow: Meet the Afrikaans "Eminem"', *Mail & Guardian Online*, last modified 26 February 2010, Accessed 12 January 2012, <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-02-26-jack-parow-meet-the-afrikaans-eminem>.
- ³² Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 190.
- ³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Great Britain: Methuen, 1965), 116.
- ³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* (New York: Columbia University Semiotext(e), 2002), 6.
- ³⁵ Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, 12.
- ³⁶ Richard Schechner, a notable scholar in the field of performance studies notes that the 'intercultural subject is the difficulties brought up by multiculturalism, the misunderstandings, broken languages, and failed transactions occurring when and where cultures collide, overlap, or pull away from each other. These are seen mostly not as obstacles to be overcome but as fertile rifts or eruptions full of creative energy.' Richard Schechner, 'A New Paradigm for Theatre in the Academy', *The Drama Review* 36, No. 4 (1992): 7-8.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ The notion of South Africa as a Rainbow nation is a post-Apartheid construct of a diverse but unified South Africa which is at peace with itself and the world. These ideas have been promoted through advertising and television, etc. Brink Scholtz, "'The Most Amazing Show": Performative Interactions with Post-Election South African Society and Culture' (Master's thesis, Rhodes University, 2008), 35.
- ³⁹ Scholtz, 'Performative Interactions', 35-36.
- ⁴⁰ Liane Loots, 'Re-Situating Culture in the Body Politic', *Agenda* 49 (2001): 10.

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Pleasantville and the Meaning of Colour

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Abstract

In his 1997 study *White*, Richard Dyer observes one of many paradoxes of whiteness - as a hue it is both a colour and colourless, all colours and at the same time, none. The colourlessness of whiteness is an undeniable source of its symbolic power, suggesting a racial category that is unmarked, invisible, lacking in particularity. At the same time, as Dyer continues to argue, whiteness carries associations of dullness, blandness, emptiness, death. If colour signifies life, energy, excitement, personality, identity, the sense of whiteness as the absence of colour, as being nothing at all, can become a cause of angst and anxiety for those defined as such. This chapter explores the 1998 film *Pleasantville* as an engagement with the meaning of colour, whiteness and racial identity. A magical realist movie, the film features two teenage siblings who find themselves transported into a black-and-white television programme set in a fictional 1950s American suburb. As the protagonists introduce the insular residents of Pleasantville to contemporary values and culture - sex, rock and roll, modern art - colour begins to seep into their monochrome world. Colour therefore functions in the film as a metaphor for aspects lacking in the repressed, conservative, asexual world of a mythical postwar suburbia notably lacking in non-white faces. On the one hand *Pleasantville* can be understood as a film which whitewashes America's past in a highly objectionable manner. The narrative represents white people as both the perpetrators of racial prejudice and its victims, as 'coloureds' within the film become the target of harassment and violence. As bigotry is associated with characters who remain monochrome, the film constructs racism as historically located in the black-and-white past of newsreel footage, rather than in contemporary realities. At the same time, the film reflects something of the anxieties of whiteness, the sense that whiteness is bland, boring, lacking in vitality, in need of some 'colour' to give it meaning.

Key Words: Colour, film, race, small town, suburbia, symbolism, whiteness.

*Pleasantville*¹ is a magical realist film in the Capraesque tradition of American cinema. Released in 1998, it received little critical attention, largely receiving publicity and awards for its special effects: the combination of colour images in otherwise monochrome scenes through the use of new digital technologies.

The following analysis of *Pleasantville* is part of my current work exploring representations and constructions of racial and ethnic whiteness in contemporary popular culture. This work includes analyses of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,²

Dexter,³ *Silent Hill*⁴ and the *Twilight*⁵ series. Across these studies I have explored the manner in which television programmes, videogames and films reflect historical and contemporary notions of what whiteness is, partly through their depiction of white characters, but also through their themes, organisation of narrative and visual imagery. Of particular interest is the 'mise-en-scène of whiteness' - the manner whereby the white imagery surrounding white characters serves to associate Caucasian people with the symbolic meaning of whiteness. The core aim of this project is to deconstruct the often-default, characterless, invisible identity of whiteness, to make whiteness strange, to explore conflict and contradictions in the conception of whiteness, something that these texts frequently do themselves. For example, indicative of the ambivalences of whiteness as an imagined racial identity, the *Twilight* series both celebrates white beauty and privilege and suggests whiteness to be a condition mired in denial, absence, melancholy and death.

Pleasantville features two contemporary teenagers, a brother and sister - David (Tobey Maguire) and Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon) - who are transported into a black-and-white 1950s television show set in the small town of Pleasantville. While David has a cultish knowledge of the series' fictional universe and a certain nostalgic respect for the values it embodies, his streetwise sister expresses a more cynical and critical disposition towards the town and its quaint and cosy values. Rebelling against her brother's insistence that they both adopt the role of Bud and Mary Sue, sticking to the script with which he has a fanboy familiarity, Jennifer introduces previously unheard-of experiences into the insular small town world, primarily sexuality, but also slang, modern literature and female independence. As Jennifer starts to influence the citizens of Pleasantville, their encounters with more 'contemporary' activities are signified by their transformation from monochrome to full colour. As this colourisation process spreads throughout Pleasantville, 'coloured' individuals become the victims of hostility from the more conservative members of the community. What starts as a light hearted comedy, parodying 1950s American conservatism and television conventions, develops into something more complex: a narrative of escaping repression, fighting oppressive authorities and achieving self-expression and sexual liberation. Not long into the film, the fictionality of Pleasantville and the teenagers' need to return home becomes less important than the characters they encounter and their spiritual, emotional and artistic development. Bud and Mary Sue's mother, Betty (Joan Allen), discovers the joys of masturbation and begins an affair with Bud's boss, Bill (Jeff Daniels), who runs the local soda bar. Bill in turn explores his love of painting, producing multi-coloured murals which lead to his arrest by the reactionary authorities.

This is clearly a film that engages with the symbolic meaning of colour. Characters' escape, awakening or liberation is signified by their colourisation, through which they become marked and othered within the community. Despite the fact that skin and hair colour are a prime way in which racial identity is

conceptualised, *Pleasantville* seems not to be a film that wants, in any substantial sense, to engage with racial politics. There are moments when race, or at least the historical representation of racial struggle in America, is foregrounded, most explicitly in the film's later stages by a sign that appears on a store owned by a more conservative resident, warning 'No Coloureds.' The scene where Bud helps Betty to disguise the pink tones of her skin by covering her face in grey makeup evokes the racial dimensions of facial cosmetics, from blackface to skin bleaching to contemporary beauty industries and their entrenchment in formations of white female beauty. The climactic scene, taking place in a courtroom where Bud and Bill are put on trial for their confrontational application of bright paint to a public wall, sees a clear separation of monochrome and coloured spectators, evoking the depiction of segregation in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its film adaptation.⁶ Despite these moments, and the colour metaphor which runs throughout the film, the liberation of Pleasantville seems more comfortably constructed in terms of gender and (hetero)sexuality than in terms of race.

Nevertheless, there are many reasons to consider the movie as a narrative about the contradictory status of an imagined white identity. In a consideration of the visual qualities of whiteness which informs the tone's application to Caucasian people, various cultural paradoxes of whiteness as a hue are discussed by Richard Dyer: the sense of white as colourless, as no colour, and yet all colours combined. As Dyer writes, 'The slippage between white as a colour and white as colourlessness forms part of a system of thought and affect whereby white people are both particular and nothing in particular, are both something and non-existent.'⁷ This aspect of whiteness has a function in perpetuating white hegemony, suggesting the non-specificity of white identity, contributing to the 'invisibility' of whiteness and white power, constructing white people as unmarked by their ethnicity in a manner which distinguishes them from more 'raced' groups. However, in the later stages of his study, Dyer points to the negative aspects of whiteness which result from the same discourse. He writes, 'White people have a colour, but it is a colour that also signifies the absence of colour, itself a characteristic of life and presence.'⁸ Hence whiteness emerges as a blank, as non-corporeal, as ghostly, as 'emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death.'⁹ If colour signifies energy, excitement, personality, identity, the sense of whiteness as the absence of colour can become a cause of angst for those defined as such. It is these ambivalences which *Pleasantville* seems to be reflecting. The film engages with the sense of whiteness lacking something - colour - and presents in response to this a fantasy whereby white people become able to access colour without significantly undermining their white identity.

If *Pleasantville* the film is a text about white identity, much of that whiteness emerges from Pleasantville the town. This is populated entirely by those of Caucasian appearance. In keeping with the aesthetic which pervades the space, Jennifer comically observes the change in skin tone which accompanies her

transformation into Mary Sue: 'Look at me! I'm pasty!' The small town or suburb - in contrast to the 'darker' urban landscape of the city - within popular representation is a largely white space, both in terms of the demographic of its residents and the themes with which such texts engage. From *Shadow of a Doubt*¹⁰ to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*,¹¹ from *Blue Velvet*¹² to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,¹³ from *Silent Hill*¹⁴ to *Desperate Housewives*,¹⁵ popular films, TV shows and digital games set in small towns can be seen as expressions of white identity, where something of the ethnicity of their characters is embodied in the location itself.

In its initial stages, Pleasantville reflects, albeit ironically, the idea of white identity as a form of perfection. In the film's opening scenes, the contemporary world of economic recession, sexually transmitted diseases, divorce and ecological disaster is knowingly contrasted with an escapist fictional 1950s of politeness, nutrition and safe sex. This ideal life appears even more absurd when inhabited by the real world protagonists. The basketball team of Pleasantville High School has an unbroken winning record; David discovers that no matter how balls are thrown on the court, they never fail to score. Pleasantville also constructs its white characters as living pure self-contained lives, uncontaminated by the outside world and the other people who live there. The town is a closed circuit: Main Street is a Mobius strip where the end returns to the start. There has never been a trial in Pleasantville, never been a fire, everything is 'pleasant.' Pre-colourised citizens are depicted as living a life which is idyllic, but at the same time lacking excitement, vitality, emotion, sexuality. Whiteness represents purity and perfection but also blandness, banality, uniformity, the absence of personality. When characters become colourised they fall from this state - the basketball team loses a game for the first time, fire becomes a reality for Pleasantville's emergency services, Bud and Bill are thrown in jail - but they are also liberated from the confines of an imagined white repression.

While colour is the metaphor by which this liberation is achieved, it is hardly coded in racial terms. Instead, sexuality - largely female sexuality - is the agent of transformation. Jennifer, initially depicted as a promiscuous teenager, is the first instigator of change in the Pleasantville community, introducing sex to the innocent schoolchildren of Pleasantville High, and explaining to Betty the pleasures and mechanics of female masturbation. American literature is also a source of colour. The books in Pleasantville library are blank until David starts to tell the stories they contain, most notably *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Catcher in the Rye*, whereupon the white pages become filled with words. It is through their encounter with these stories that the Pleasantville teenagers become increasingly colourised. Modern art has similar qualities, realised through the character of Bill the soda bar owner who expresses his repressed love of painting, producing huge colourful murals which further anger the conservative black-and-white residents of Pleasantville. With the exception of rock and roll music, none of

the transformative cultures of the film are particularly non-white in ethnicity. Bill's murals are a tribute to Western modern art rather than graffiti street art. While the characters in the film become changed, it is not through an encounter which significantly challenges their whiteness. There is no sense that in becoming a more coloured district, blossoming into full Technicolor by the end of the film, Pleasantville becomes any less white in its demographic. It remains a segregated community.

In this respect *Pleasantville* can be understood as engaging with the racial dimensions of its themes in a quite problematic way. The highly loaded use of the term 'coloureds' - however briefly - in the shop window constructs white people, who remain wholeheartedly white despite their appropriation of colour, as the victims of racial persecution. Intolerance, represented by characters who are defined by their monochrome aesthetic, is associated with a bygone era of black-and-white newsreel footage, rather than with contemporary realities. Bigotry is othered and distanced through its perpetrators' non-natural lack of colour. Difference, associated with skin colour, becomes a matter of cultural choice, artistic expression, personal practice. Being coloured is something people can opt into, although nobody opts out once they have tasted that 'bit of the other' which bell hooks argues white people crave.¹⁶ In this respect, the film evokes Dyer's consideration of the practice of sun tanning, a process by which white people darken their skin in a manner which has little to do with incorporating actual or imagined non-white qualities but instead represents an expression of white power, the variety of white identity and the right of white people to appropriate aspects of others without compromising their own identity and its resulting social status.¹⁷

Pleasantville is a particularly hard film to pin down. A lifelong resident of the United Kingdom, I feel there may be aspects of the movie which pass me by, due to my lack of familiarity with American history and the specificities of North American whiteness. As I have argued, the film does not seem to want to be read in racial terms, and the process of colourisation within the diagesis is rarely depicted as such. Many of the practices which provoke characters' change in skin tone, such as reading the work of Mark Twain or J.D. Salinger, are far from non-white in ethnicity. The idea that outrage at the acts of a coloured person might turn a monochrome resident coloured is hard to interpret in these terms. Similarly, Jennifer's decision to discard her 'slutty' persona and dedicate herself to literary self-improvement, ultimately conforming to the dictates of her fictional character, seems quite out of keeping with the trajectory of the film and its other characters, and difficult to interpret racially. In many ways, *Pleasantville* can be understood as a less confrontational example of the kind of 'incoherent text' discussed by Robin Wood, defined as 'works in which the drive towards the ordering of experience has been visibly defeated.' With such films, incoherence is not considered a flaw, but rather a source of interest for the critic.¹⁸ The incoherence of *Pleasantville* might be a reflection of the paradoxes of white identity with which the text engages. My

own personal interest in the film - a movie which I find at times to be an emotionally moving experience, at others, cringe-inducing - is, I am sure, a consequence of my own white male middle class heterosexuality, and the effectiveness of the fantasy the film presents of escaping the comfortable yet occasionally frustrating constrictions of privilege without stepping outside the security of one's own dominant position. In this respect *Pleasantville* represents a compelling reflection - conscious or otherwise - on the meaning of colour, identity, and racial whiteness.

Notes

¹ *Pleasantville*, New Line Cinema, USA, 1998.

² Ewan Kirkland, 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Constructions of Whiteness', in *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, 5, No. 1 (2005), Accessed August 1, 2011, <http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage17/Kirkland.htm>.

³ Ewan Kirkland, 'Dexter and Whiteness', in *Dexter and Philosophy*, eds. Richard Greene, George A. Reisch and Rachel Robison-Greene (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2011), 209-218.

⁴ Ewan Kirkland, 'Identity, Race, Videogames, and Whiteness in *Silent Hill*', in *Critical Game Studies: Theory, Ideology, Methodology*, eds. Monica Evans, Ewan Kirkland and Adam Ruch (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, forthcoming).

⁵ Ewan Kirkland, 'Racial Whiteness and Twilight', in *Screening Twilight: Contemporary Cinematic Approaches*, eds. Wickham Clayton and Sarah Harman (I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

⁶ *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Universal Pictures, USA, 1962. I am grateful to Anne Babson for this insight.

⁷ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁹ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 141.

¹⁰ *Shadow of a Doubt*, Universal Pictures Company, USA, 1943.

¹¹ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, USA, 1955.

¹² *Blue Velvet*, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, USA, 1986.

¹³ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, television programme, Mutant Enemy, USA, broadcast 1997-2003.

¹⁴ *Silent Hill*, videogame, Konami, Japan, 1999-present day.

¹⁵ *Desperate Housewives*, television programme, Touchstone Television, USA, broadcast 2004-present day.

¹⁶ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Turnaround, 1992).

¹⁷ Dyer, *White*, 49.

¹⁸ Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1986), 47.

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Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and the Dialectics of Race in South Africa: Interrogating Images of Whiteness and Blackness in Black Literature and Culture

Aretha Phiri

Abstract

Despite the necessity of whiteness studies today, the authority, agency and normative value of whiteness work covertly within an intellectual critique embedded in standardised interrogations of images and imaginations (of the black other). Blackness studies are not exempt, and Kopano Matlwa's popular debut novel *Coconut* (2007) appears a self-reflexive commentary on the incestuous, interdependent nature of racial inquiry. While Tlhalo Radithalo points out that the novel registers '[contemporary] South African unease with race,'¹ his assertion that *Coconut* is critical of contemporary blackness misses its evocation of the necessarily porous and performative character of race and culture generally. This chapter argues that *Coconut's* complex invocation of post-apartheid, postmodern black culture exposes the impossibility of imaging and imagining blackness without imaging and imagining whiteness. Here, in the continued fetishisation of whiteness, racial (black) essentialism is destabilised and whiteness positioned as an inevitable mirror on and of blackness. In this regard, this chapter questions the efficacy of 'whiteness' studies that superficially portend the possibility of establishing separate and exclusive studies on race and culture.

Key Words: Whiteness, blackness, race, culture, South Africa, *Coconut*.

1. Introduction

Since the institution of whiteness studies in global academe, it is a sad fact that 'whiteness just isn't what it used to be.'² Through the astute observations of Richard Dyer, whiteness has been named and identified. By way of the tenacious investigation of Valerie Babb, whiteness has been rendered visible.³ With this proliferation of research, white people and their 'culture' have been exposed and the devious, even sinister, workings of whiteness uncovered.

The current popularity and universality of whiteness studies, however, is not unproblematic. While significant, the preoccupation with whiteness risks re-centralising the culture and becoming a fundamentally narcissistic, albeit intellectual, venture. Indeed, in an arguably postmodern and admittedly multi- and inter-cultural society, whiteness studies may just re-institutionalise the hegemonic authority of whiteness. Robyn Wiegman observes that 'we have failed to interpret the tension between particularity and universality that characterises' discourse on race and 'the changing contours of white power and privilege.' Noting that 'seldom

has whiteness been so widely represented as attuned to racial equality and justice while so aggressively solidifying its advantage', we have missed, she argues, 'how seemingly "benign" is the popular cultural rhetoric of whiteness today and how self-empowering are its consequences.'⁴ The paradox, then, is that in generalising its particularity, we elide the subtle nuances of whiteness while simultaneously affording it continued authority and agency. Moreover, although whiteness studies have also been embraced by non-white scholars, it is telling that the examination of whiteness is largely limited to white texts written by white authors. This re-situates racial binaries, positioning whiteness as a 'white' issue self-contained in 'white' literature.

South African author Kopano Matlwa's popular debut novel, *Coconut* (2007), lends itself to an analysis of the issues that trouble academic and cultural attention to whiteness.⁵ Tlhalo Raditlhalo points out that the novel registers '[contemporary] South African unease with race,'⁶ but his assertion that *Coconut* is critical of contemporary black economic and ideological aspirations to whiteness misses its evocation of the necessarily porous and performative character of race. This chapter argues that the novel, rather than being didactic, is a self-reflexive satirical commentary on the incestuous, interdependent nature of racial inquiry. *Coconut* takes a novel approach to whiteness in that, through its complex invocation of post-apartheid, postmodern black society, the novel exposes the impossibility of imaging and imagining blackness without imaging and imagining whiteness. Here, race and culture are essential but simultaneously problematised and whiteness established as an inevitable mirror on and of blackness.

2. The 'New' South Africa and the Trouble with Whiteness

1994 heralded the birth of a 'new' South Africa and the official institution of a black government. With the aid of media-generated phrases, 'Rainbow nation' and 'Simunye - We are one!' for example, the country espoused non-racialism and celebrated its vision of a multicultural society unified in its sense of a diverse but universal humanity.⁷ But Raditlhalo, bemoaning the current policing of blackness and black society's placism, argues that black South Africans have since been guilty of racial and cultural betrayal.⁸ With the institution of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) - a move employed by the government to redress racial and economic inequities - and a concomitant population of (upper) middle-class 'black diamonds' as well as a proliferation of black celebrity figures with a fondness for opulence and a taste for 'croissants with blue cheese,'⁹ Raditlhalo observes that 'South Africans suffer from a debilitating sickness of whiteache, in which they do not wish to "pass for white" but to "be white."¹⁰

The notions of 'passing' and 'being' are crucial to a critically nuanced reading of *Coconut* which articulates the tension between race and culture as essence and performance. 'Passing' is a thematic concern in much South African and African-American fiction where lighter-skinned black people have and continue to 'pass'

for white.¹¹ This performance of whiteness is often highlighted as race betrayal and, as Raditlhalo's comparative reading of Toni Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) highlights, *Coconut* similarly thematises racial self-loathing. Drawing on a quote from the novel, Raditlhalo questions how it is possible 'for a black person not to be black but merely to fantasise about being black? Does it essentially mean that, having been oppressed for too long, the oppressed have, through a process of disinherited imagination, lost the will to remake themselves in their own African images?'¹² His despondency is shared by Grant Farred who, observing that black South Africans 'are located at a crucial historical juncture representing the potentialities and vulnerabilities of the early postcolonial or postrevolutionary moment,' says, '[s]urely the legacy of apartheid is too recent to be forgotten by the newly enfranchised black community.' Both critics look to the past of (an offensive) whiteness in order to argue for the notion of a (defensive) authentic black cultural present.¹³

As its title indicates, *Coconut*, which employs contemporary South African vernacular, puns on the racial duplicity of black people. Noting that the term is 'almost as hurtful as "kaffir,"' Fred Khumalo explains that a 'coconut refers to a self-loathing black person who looks up to white people to validate his or her self-worth.'¹⁴ The coconut fruit, with its brown shell and milky white flesh thus connotes a visually black person who is metaphysically white.¹⁵ In the lives of two seemingly socially disparate protagonists, Ofilwe and Fikile, is suggested a betrayal of blackness. Ofilwe, a product of 'new money,' struggles psychologically to reconcile black cultural traditions with the mores of her middle-class suburban background. Having Sunday lunch with her family at the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, she muses,

We dare not eat with our naked fingertips, walk in generous groups, speak merrily in booming voices and laugh our mqombothi laughs. They will scold us if we dare, not with their lips, Lord, because the laws prevent them from doing so, but with their eyes. They will shout, "Stop acting black!" "Stop acting black!" is what they will shout. And we will pause, perplexed, unsure of what that means, for are we not black, Father? No, not in the malls, Lord. We may not be black in restaurants, in suburbs and in schools. Oh, how it nauseates them if we even *fantasise about being black, truly black*. The old rules remain and the old sentiments are unchanged.¹⁶

Ofilwe's 'prayer' registers her sense of futility at a contemporary blackness which is impotent in the face of a fundamentally unchanging South Africa where racism, specifically whiteness, is still pervasive. Indeed, the white gaze is so powerful that, as her brother Tshepo's mental tirade illuminates, it renders black people invisible:

'Do these people not see me, hear me, when I speak to them? Why do they look through me as if I do not exist?'¹⁷ Whiteness is oppressive and blackness, policed as it is in this society, is registered as a kind of (self-) enslavement reminiscent of the apartheid era, but more destructive in its psychological effects. Black people are, as Ofilwe muses, 'shackled around their minds ... we dare not use our minds.'¹⁸

In contemporary South Africa blacks, subject to a covert ethos of whiteness, must erase or modify their blackness in order to fit in, as the Tlous' inability to perform a thanksgiving ceremony at their home in the gated community of Little Valley Country Estate illustrates. Ofilwe's voice and rhetorical questioning betray nostalgia for an originary blackness, registered in her fantasy of a pure-blooded, proud 'metallic blue-black' ancestry and in her sense of unbelonging: 'Poor us. Poor, poor, poor pathetic us. It is pitiful. What are we doing here? Why did we come? We do not belong.'¹⁹ She and her family, despite their material attainments, are psychologically and spiritually impoverished - pathetic.

3. "Playing in the Light": The Whiteness of Blackness

But Ofilwe's invocation of blackness occurs, significantly, in the nebulous realm of fantasy/myth which, while indicative of ritualised communal norms, highlights black culture as itself particularly performative rather than biologically inherent.²⁰ Similarly, her invocation of whiteness is performative. Like her doppelganger, Fikile, who uses 'words like "facetious" and "filial" in everyday speech and speak[s] English boldly', Ofilwe speaks 'perfect English ... the TV language; the one Daddy spoke at work, the one Mama never could get right, the one that spoke of sweet success.'²¹ Even Tshepo's superficial notion of blackness - wearing one of 'Mama's kaftans' which 'resembles the West African shirts they sell at the flea markets,' and working as a waiter at 'Instant Fried Chicken, a greasy little fast-food joint in Pine Slopes' - is performative and filtered through a particularly white lens. It is not fortuitous, then, that when he attempts to establish himself as a black person he can only envisage doing so in white terms: 'I want them [white people] to hear my voice. I want them to listen to the manner in which I speak. I want to slap their stuffed faces with my private school articulation and hurl their empty skulls into a dizzy spin with the diction I use ... I will demand respect.'²²

Ironically it is the black middle class who, despite having access to and revelling in the material spoils of whiteness, conveniently deploy 'blackness' to redress historical injustice and exploitation. Fikile, who lives in a squalid township and works at Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, mentally berates her co-worker, Ayanda, who, when he is insulted by a customer, retaliates by citing the 'gross contradictions' still evident in the new South Africa: Ayanda 'lived in some loft his parents had bought for him in Morningside ... had gone to a white school, lived in white neighbourhoods all his life. He had the life that everybody dreamed of. The

ass was just talking out of his arse. And we all knew it.²³ In *Coconut*, the notion of a universal blackness is persistently undermined by class discrepancies and ideological disjuncture. Indeed, Fikile, who literally experiences poverty, has no apparent qualms about her active investment in and pursuit of whiteness. Through Project Infinity she will 'be white,' and leave the permanent 'dump' in which she lives. Fundamentally, she wants to escape the general perception of being 'black, dirty and poor.'²⁴ Fikile's yearning, by way of her avid consumption of global mass media images, places whiteness in generally economic terms.²⁵ Arguing that she 'never did have the stomach for poverty,' she self-identifies through negation by stating, inversely from Ofilwe, her sense of unbelonging: 'I am not one of you.' Whites, signifiers of accomplishment, are her 'kind of people.'²⁶

Nadine Dolby argues that although white culture in South Africa has been displaced, 'whiteness must constantly struggle to re-invent itself and to maintain its (still) privileged although increasingly contested, position in a global arena.'²⁷ Fikile's is a similar, albeit warped, attempt to re-invent her blackness within a global arena. In that she effectively 'plays in the light,' Fikile uncannily gestures at while revising Toni Morrison's argument about the pervasive and insidious nature of whiteness in her seminal essay *Playing in the Dark*. The imaging of whiteness in *Coconut* is similarly 'denotative and connotative' and, like Morrison's assessment of the American literary canon's 'fabrication of an Africanist persona,'²⁸ is 'reflexive, an extraordinary meditation on the self.'²⁹ Fikile's yearning for whiteness is, like Ofilwe's disdain for her blackness, a response to 'a [light], abiding, signing' white presence which reflects on blackness and reveals both as necessarily dialectical.³⁰

Henry Giroux argues that we need to 'move beyond the view of "whiteness" as simply a trope of domination,' and *Coconut* highlights the incestuous manner in which race is imaged and imagined in the national consciousness, thus undermining the notion of authentic cultures.³¹ In that whites reflect, for Fikile, 'the life she [was] born to live,' whiteness mediates her sense of self.³² This suggests a complex relationship predicated on both distance and intimacy. The novel does not articulate 'a crisis in identity,' as Raditlhalo states, for this presupposes the notion of identity as stable and absolute.³³ Rather, *Coconut* articulates a crisis *of* identity; that is, the novel troubles at the same time that it thematises identity. Homi K. Bhabha notes that 'the question of identity is always poised uncertainly, tenebrously, between shadow and substance,'³⁴ and *Coconut* explores and engenders this complex process of liminality. Ofilwe muses, 'I do know that this world is strange, though, and I somewhat of an anachronism. Locked in. Uncertain whether I have come to love this cage too.' She is, like Fikile, '[s]tuck between two worlds, shunned by both.'³⁵

Blackness is here read as fragile, not just reiterating the Fanonian notion of psychic tension but engendering a schizophrenic splitting of the self not unlike that described by Julia Kristeva as abjection: 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject

myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*.³⁶ The ‘agony’ Ofilwe experiences of ‘playing a role you would never dream of auditioning for’ occurs because her identity, like Fikile’s, is unstable - liminal.³⁷ Hers is a ‘double-consciousness’ not unlike that delineated by W. E. B. Du Bois as ‘this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.’³⁸ But as Bhabha notes, ‘To exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness.’³⁹ Contrary to Radithlalo’s rather gendered reading of the novel which supports his notion of racial authenticity, then, it is precisely the point of *Coconut* that Ofilwe does not know who she is and that Fikile embarks on ‘something immeasurable and everlasting.’⁴⁰ As Giroux’s reading of Stuart Hall highlights, the ‘new ethnicity defines racial identities as multiple, porous, complex, and shifting and, in doing so’ whiteness and blackness ‘can be addressed through [their] complex relationship with other determining factors that usurp any claim to racial purity or singularity.’⁴¹

4. Conclusion: Who Are We, Really?

Radithlalo concludes his article by arguing that the novel critiques race-betrayal and suggests that ‘[t]o “act black” in contemporary South Africa is a great mistake; it is to make nonsense of the mirage underscoring the national motto, *unity in diversity*.’⁴² He falls into the trap against which Kwame Appiah warns, of using race ‘as a metonym for culture... only at the price of biologising what *is* culture or ideology.’⁴³ *Coconut*’s use of humour and satire, its ambivalent posture, consistently undermine racial absolutism and authenticity. The novel, while gesturing toward essentialism, highlights race as inevitably performative and illustrates how culture is precisely a ‘mirage,’ creating the conditions for what Salman Rushdie terms the ‘bogy of authenticity.’⁴⁴ In a world in which whiteness and blackness in fact mirror and reflect each other in shifting and complex ways, *Coconut* exposes race and culture as dialectical. In this regard, Tshepo’s angst at the futility of his attempt at asserting blackness is significant to the study of race generally: ‘I do not know what I am trying to prove, why I must prove it and to whom.’⁴⁵

This does not render race studies irrelevant but emphasises rather, that race might, in a globalised inter-cultural society, benefit from more complex, realistic, and indeed, less sterile analyses. As Sarah Nuttall observes, the emphasis ‘has been more on racism than on race, and this has tended to foreclose a complex investigation into how race works.’ Both whiteness and blackness, she concludes, ‘are ideas, lived experiences, and practices in the making. New studies now are needed urgently in order to help us understand the complexity of both and to deconstruct the somewhat ossified versions of each.’⁴⁶ What bell hooks argues as necessary for the articulation of contemporary black subjectivity is applicable to whiteness: ‘We have too long had imposed upon us from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness.’ We need to come ‘to terms with

the impact of postmodernism for black experience, particularly as it changes our sense of identity,⁴⁷ and reveals, as Appiah posits, the multiplicity of [our] heritage.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ Tlhalo Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity: Fundamental Questions of Be-ing in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*', *Imbizo* 1 (2010): 19.

² Melissa Steyn's study of white identity works on a similar premise. However she examines the varied ways in which white identity is articulated by white people in a changing, post-apartheid South Africa. Melissa Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

³ Dyer and Babb are just some of the numerous scholars engaged in whiteness studies. I mention them here as they are, with others, considered 'founders' of whiteness studies. Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴ Robyn Wiegman, 'Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity', *Boundary* 2 26, No. 3 (1999): 117-121.

⁵ A winner of the European Union Literary Award, *Coconut* is interesting in that it straddles the divide of popular and academic fiction. Nevertheless, as one reviewer notes, the novel is '[o]ne of the most culturally relevant reads of the year,' and this has been the reason for its success in both mainstream and elite culture. Kopano Matlwa, *Coconut* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007), ii.

⁶ Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 19.

⁷ The national phrase 'unity in diversity' was effectively reproduced and reworked by South African media and tourism.

⁸ Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 33.

⁹ This statement was made by Khanyi Mbau, an 'It Girl' whose celebrity status is predicated on a contemporary obsession with images, consumerism and materialism. Similarly, in an interview in South African popular magazine *True Love* she reiterated that, despite being generally labelled immoral and shameless, people love her 'brand.' *Third Degree: Debora Patta and Khanyi Mbau*, 30 Nov 2010, Accessed 1 June 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TpCOEpI2go>, Melinda Ferguson, 'Can Khanyi Come Clean?', *True Love*, April 2011.

¹⁰ Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 21.

¹¹ I have in mind here America's historical obsession with the 'one drop' of (black) blood rule which determined, absolutely, one's racial categorisation. Ironically, miscegenation made it particularly difficult to determine racial purity, resulting in (nominal) categories of mulattos, octoroons and so on. In South Africa, 'coloureds'

and Indians who appeared white were able to pass for white and so benefit from the privileges of whiteness.

¹² Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 32. Like his inscription of blackness, Raditlhalo's inscription of 'African' here is problematic for it suggests a universal 'Africanism' which is concomitant with being black.

¹³ Grant Farred, 'Bulletproof Settlers: The Politics of Offense in the New South Africa', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 64-70.

¹⁴ Fred Khumalo, 'Shedding Light on Us Darkies: What Might Have Been a Bayonet Has Been Fashioned into a Ploughshare', *The Times*, Feb 2011, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnists/article923808.ece/Shedding-light-on-us-darkies>.

¹⁵ Interestingly, food is increasingly indicative of racial and class disparities within postcolonial Africa. In Zimbabwe, for example, the phrase 'masalad' denotes the black (upper) middle-class who, like white people, can literally afford to eat salad.

¹⁶ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 31-32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-31.

²⁰ This is not unlike Morrison's evocation of the 'funkiness of nature.' Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 64. Ofilwe similarly stereotypes blackness in her generalisations of black people's 'booming' voices and general merriment.

²¹ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 137-154.

²² *Ibid.*, 83-82, and *Ibid.*, 24-29.

²³ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 118-135, and *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁵ Raditlhalo notes *Coconut's* obvious parallels with *The Bluest Eye*. Here, Fikile is reminiscent of Pecola, whose racial self-loathing is manifested in a yearning for blue eyes, and, like Pecola, voraciously consumes mass media-generated images of whiteness.

²⁶ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 169; and *Ibid.*, 140-141.

²⁷ Nadine Dolby, 'White Fright: The Politics of White Youth Identity in South Africa', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22, No. 1 (2001): 5.

²⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Pan, 1999), 6.

²⁹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

- ³¹ Henry Giroux, 'Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness', *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 296.
- ³² Matlwa, *Coconut*, 141.
- ³³ Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 25.
- ³⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 49.
- ³⁵ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 75-93.
- ³⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 2-3.
- ³⁷ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 48.
- ³⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1961), 11.
- ³⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 44.
- ⁴⁰ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 42-171. Raditlhalo posits Tshepo as insightful where his sister is not ('An Indefensible Obscenity', 34), but misses how men in the novel 'got the easy way out' (Matlwa, *Coconut*, 82-83).
- ⁴¹ Giroux, 'Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness', 312.
- ⁴² Raditlhalo, 'An Indefensible Obscenity', 36.
- ⁴³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race', in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 36.
- ⁴⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays on Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 67.
- ⁴⁵ Matlwa, *Coconut*, 30.
- ⁴⁶ Sarah Nuttall, 'Subjectivities of Whiteness', *African Studies Review* 44, No. 2 (2011): 118-119, and Nuttall, 'Subjectivities of Whiteness', 136.
- ⁴⁷ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: South End Press, 1990), 28-29.
- ⁴⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), 105.

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PART 5

Strategies of Managing Whiteness

Troubling White Englishness in South Africa

Anthea Garman

Abstract

To be white in Africa is to be part of a minority - but a very powerful minority. To be white in South Africa is to be implicated and complicit in historical dispossession and disenfranchisement. However, in post-apartheid South Africa, whiteness is no longer the invisible condition of the default human being, a condition to which all other humans must aspire. In fact, to be white is suddenly to be very visibly Other to the black African majority who are increasingly shaping the social landscape in ways that undermine the trajectories of both the colonial project and the apartheid project in this country.

Key Words: Complicity, English ethnicity, identity, privilege, South Africa, subjectivity, whiteness.

1. Introduction

The South African writer Njabulo Ndebele has written about English-speaking South Africans,

Yes, they have a story to tell. Its setting is in the interstice between power and indifferent or supporting agency. In that interstice, the English-speaking South African has conducted the business of his life. Now he was indignant and guilty; now he was thriving. This no-man's land ensured a fundamental lack of character. With a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong - now they do not. When will they tell this story?¹

It is in response to this challenge that I write the following self-interrogation.

2. 'Where's Your Other Oassport?' or, Trouble at the Airport

It has been a long day of travelling to get to Johannesburg and I face another two plane journeys plus a bus ride before I arrive for a research seminar at Brown University in Rhode Island. I am in the gate area waiting for the call to board the British Airways plane. At the desk there is a security guard checking passports. When I get to the front of the queue he takes my passport, looks at it and says roughly, 'Where's your other passport?' He's black and immediately I feel that as a white South African I am being admonished for having 'another passport in my back pocket.' 'I don't have another passport,' I say. He repeats his question. I

insist. He repeats his question, getting ruder. This is the post 9/11 world where annoyance at a flight gate can cost you your liberty, but I am getting really angry with this man. When all those other English-speaking white South Africans investigated ancestral access to British passports I firmly did not go that route. Over the years I have put up with the inconvenience and visa charges that come with travelling as a South African. I turn to the page that has my visa for the US to persuade him to let me through, even though this plane is going to London. He relents. The encounter is mystifying. I have never been challenged like that before and don't know whether it was this person's individual attitude towards me or something mysterious imbedded in the new security regime.

3. Awkward Belonging/Awkward Positioning

Journalist Sean O'Toole wrote as South Africa was celebrating a decade of democracy, 'There is a certain awkwardness that comes with being a white South African these days.'² And *Sunday Times* columnist Eusebius McKaiser commented recently, 'Whiteness has become trapped between victimhood and self-flagellation. This stops white South Africans from fully integrating into democratic South Africa in a way that retains their agency fully ... but at the same time acknowledges their continued privilege.'³ The most pressing reason for studying whiteness and destabilising its discourses in South Africa is the fact that it troubles and delays a future of equality and non-racialism. As Melissa Steyn shows, out of the privilege of the past, the tropes of white supremacism continue to circulate in the way many white South Africans approach the present.⁴ Leaning on Judith Butler's ideas of how power persist through 'reiteration,' Helene Strauss calls the transformation of white South African identity 'crucially important.'⁵

The dismantling of apartheid, and the crisis of identity that it has brought for those white subjects most forcefully interpellated by its ideologies, offers a valuable opportunity to interrupt the iterative power of whiteness.⁶

It is exactly at the level of the reiterative that a study of South African whiteness is critical. Can a new story be told about how to be white? Can a different conversation be held about whiteness? And, more importantly, could such a conversation held here have wider import? Alfred López says,

There remains in the twenty-first century a postcolonial whiteness struggling to come into being, or rather a number of post-empire, post-mastery whitenesses attempting to examine themselves in relation to histories of oppression and hegemony of their others in order to learn the difficult, never-mastered skill that Heidegger used to call *Mitsein*: Being-with.⁷

While many of the tropes that underpin white supremacy are still powerfully in play, there are other iterations, which suggest other subject positions. These involve a recognition and acceptance that to be white in Africa is to have been 'sutured'⁸ into a place and a history. Nuttall and Michael have critiqued representations of South African culture and history, questioning why the focus has been on 'separation and stratification, obscuring other co-existing configurations.'⁹ Nuttall proposes that 'entanglement'¹⁰ can be considered an equally valid description of the South African past and suggests that co-dependence, intermingling and co-habitation are valid realities that can be drawn upon for new identities.

Another provocative idea comes from Mark Sanders who explores 'complicity.' Sanders is concerned with more than just white South Africans' complicity in apartheid. He shows - through an etymological dissection - that an alternate reading of the word as 'a folded-together-ness-in human-being'¹¹ is possible. This is extremely suggestive of ways to rethink whiteness in South Africa. If acknowledgement of complicity is not just about a past but is also a recognition of one's sewn togetherness, entanglement, enfoldedness in being human, then an embrace of the future becomes possible. In her exploration of narratives of whiteness Steyn says there are white South Africans who are looking for 'new subjectivities through other discursive and cultural repertoires.'¹²

There is an awareness of a balance between loss and gain, an acquiescence that restructuring is going to pinch somewhere, and that there is no reason why that somewhere shouldn't be you.¹³

These writers and theorists suggest that there are incipient new ways of talking, negotiating and engaging which are not just the adaptive stories of the past, designed to continue asserting the hegemony of whiteness.

4. Adopting a Position

Much of the literature on whiteness assumes that theoretically decentering whiteness makes a very large contribution to reordering the terrain of actual power and privilege. Robyn Wiegman's critique of such studies is instructive.¹⁴ She points out that whiteness research is not without its own material base in academies under pressure. She questions the field's sudden rise and effectiveness in giving work and prestige to white scholars. She shows that both white subjectivities and whiteness studies are replete with survivalist skills.

But some helpful insight comes from Sonia Kruks, who writes on the 'politics of privilege.' Kruks says it is critical to distinguish between personal guilt ('guilt as emotion') and guilt as an 'existential moral condition.'¹⁵ Kruks believes that a politics of self-transformation is based upon 'a conception of the self which is

more autonomous than is plausible.’¹⁶ The action that flows from personalised politics often treats the suffering of others as an appropriation for the transformation of the self. She questions whether silence and inactivity are not as valid as setting out to speak/act for the disadvantaged. But she also posits whether, with a consciousness of mixed motives and unintended outcomes, instead of renouncing privilege, it could be deployed more consciously in political action. Kruks argues that to estrange oneself from one’s privilege is an impossibility, particularly in the case of whiteness, as it is ‘continually reproduced through us and for us by the surrounding world.’¹⁷ Privilege must be used, conscious of the ‘complexities and ambiguities that ... attend the actions of a situated self.’¹⁸

5. Defining Elusive Englishness

Writing about the English living in the UK, Krishan Kumar asks why English national identity is so enigmatic.¹⁹ And writing from within South Africa, after having done a series of interviews with white English-speaking South Africans, Tess Salusbury and Don Foster say that in contrast to Afrikaners,

there is apparently very little to be said about them. They have historically adhered to the philosophy of individualism and have resisted defining themselves according to group membership.²⁰

What is common to these investigations is the sense of puzzlement about how to define and describe ‘Englishness.’ Stuart Hall believes that ‘identities are constructed through difference and that it is in relation to the Other that identity is formed.’²¹ This takes the form of exclusion, and even abjection. But what if an identity has been formed with a different relation to the Other? Kumar proposes,

Not exclusion and opposition, but inclusion and expansion, not inwardness but outwardness, mark the English way of conceiving of themselves. The English ... found their identity as constructors of Great Britain, creators of the British empire, pioneers of the world’s first industrial civilisation.²²

Kumar says that English identity is an ‘imperial nationalism,’ which is ‘a characteristically different form from that expressed in classic nationalism.’²³ When nationalism became a powerful factor in late 18th century, the empire abroad became the vehicle for the English to ‘gigantically replicate themselves, carrying with them their language, their culture, their institutions and their industry.’²⁴ Kumar believes that empire - like race, class and nationalism - was a ‘fundamental part of English culture and national identity at home, where the fact of empire ... entered the social fabric, the intellectual discourse and the life of the imagination.’ In his assessment of English national identity, Robert Young says,

Englishness was created for the diaspora - an ethnic identity designed for those who were precisely not English, but rather of English descent ... Englishness was constructed as a translatable identity that could be adopted or appropriated anywhere by anyone who cultivated the right language, looks and culture.²⁵

And so Young talks of English ethnicity as a 'global racial and cultural identity.'²⁶ It is this identity that has formed the central subject position that white English-speaking South Africans have occupied, that is, until challenged and decentred by the transition to black majority rule. As Steyn has pointed out, if 'whiteness defined the deepest interior of white identity' and 'the centre was constituted around the marginalised,'²⁷ then the centre is shaken when those previously marginalised proclaim a new locus of definition.

6. Troubled by Thabo

In 1996, when the South African parliament met to ratify the country's new constitution, Thabo Mbeki, then vice president, gave voice to its all-embracing provisions:

I am an African ... I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape ... I am formed of the migrants who left Europe In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves ... I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led ... I come of those who were transported from India and China ... Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that I am an African!²⁸

Fredrik van Zyl Slabbert, a prominent Afrikaans public figure, responded,

President Mbeki wrote a very moving piece called 'I am an African' ... and it was sort-of lyrical and nice And then the unambiguous inclusive statement "the constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origin" - a more inclusive definition of African I cannot think of. So when I say "I too am an African, if not why not?" [it's] because my president told me I'm an African.²⁹

And writer Antjie Krog, working on the translation into Afrikaans of Nelson Mandela's autobiography, wrote,

The biggest decision that has to be made concerns the word "African". Who and what is an African? Mandela uses "African" ... in a rather haphazard way: at the beginning "African" means only the Thembu, then it means the Xhosa, and later on it refers to everybody black. She enquires about Mandela's use of the word, and is sent the following answer by his office: he means black and coloured - the Indians and whites are from other continents, the black and coloureds not. This may be Mandela's logical explanation, but during the Treason Trial he used "African" for everyone who wasn't white, and on Robben Island he told one of the Afrikaner wardens that he was also an African...³⁰

So to this little point of nomenclature. In 1998 Mbeki launched a process called the African Renaissance with an academic conference. The first business was to settle the question of who can be an African. I wrote afterwards,

It was a distinctly uncomfortable experience being white at the conference. Or Arab. Professor Kwesi Kwah Prah from the Centre for Advanced African Studies from the University of the Western Cape was quite convinced that those in the far north of the continent, because of their political allegiance to the Arab states and their non-membership of the OAU, were simply not Africans. That comment had a northern delegation on its feet to vociferously protest that those of Arab origin were as African as those from farther south. It was a tense moment.

Professor Mahmood Mamdani, lecturer in African Studies at UCT, tried to repair the damage. "African" cannot simply be geography and culture but is also political. "There are three creolised cultures in Africa: 1. The African diaspora, 2. the Arabs in North Africa, and 3. the 'coloureds' in South Africa of African/Asian/European descent. Are they wholly African? Do they wholly belong? The answers depend on politics and how people think of themselves. It is best to start with an inclusive answer: they are all Africans."

But in his categories, creolised or otherwise, there was no mention of the white progeny of the colonialists and settlers.³¹

'South African' is fairly easy to claim for me. It has content - at least legally - and I have a birth certificate that says I was born here and a green ID book with the number 6006020070083. I also made a choice in the 1980s under the successive states of emergency to choose a side: anti-apartheid, pro-democracy; anti-racism, pro-integration. I joined other young people like myself who - while we didn't go into exile or go underground, take up arms or join a political party - refused to live a life that was circumscribed by apartheid. We didn't go to events or use facilities that were segregated. We did go everywhere we wanted to in the company of other races, we did not apply for permits to visit our friends in the townships, we did invite them into our houses in white suburbia for food, for wine, for chat. So the South Africa we now have is the South Africa I joined forces for, it feels right, as a consequence therefore, to call myself South African. But African? That I have never felt comfortable claiming.

As Ivor Chipkin points out, while anyone nominally the citizen of a country can claim citizenship as a politico-legal status, in actual effect, citizenship is a quality of relation to the state. Chipkin shows that the ANC since 1994, and more particularly when Mbeki was president, led a state in which the African nationalist project was paramount. The citizen who showed him/herself to be the ideal national subject - i.e., an African of African origins - came to be associated with 'authentic citizenship.'³² This is the core of the issue: the content of subjecthood as a white English-speaking South African in Africa is uncertain. I find I cannot - like Van Zyl Slabbert - assert 'I am an African.' 'African' is given subject content by this state that impacts on 'South African' and therefore on white South African.

At the height of his presidency Mbeki used the electronic newsletter *ANC Today* to mount an assault on white South Africans who thought they were uniquely qualified to continue to provide 'thought leadership'³³ to Africans. Mbeki asserted that as the party that represented the majority, the ANC had the right to set the national agenda and the terms of the debate. The tone felt chilling and depressing. Yes, the carping that criticises everything the government tries to do has its roots in an indefensible white supranationalism and supremacy, but to equate dissent with white supremacy and with disloyalty, and so dismiss it?

7. Conclusion

We have now moved out of the intensity of the Mbeki presidency, but I am thinking deeply about whiteness, South African-ness and African-ness. I have come to some conclusions about my own subject-hood, best encapsulated by the statement 'I am a White African.' As Steyn points out, the whites in South Africa are part of a diaspora. European imperialism and its migrations placed us here, we are far flung from the centres from which we came, but diasporic as we whites of Africa might be, we are not the dispossessed and dislocated of most diasporas. Unusually, we were sent out to be 'in charge of the people among whom [we] settled.'³⁴ With South Africa's transition we also now 'positioned unevenly', but

'[our] whiteness links [us] to the centres of international power: economically, culturally, politically, socially.'³⁵ Therefore to say white and African in the same sentence is to set in tension this uneven positionality and to draw attention both to the inescapable, supranational, privilege of being white and the troubling accident of being born in Africa and therefore, irrefutably, being of this place. This disjunctive is more than just an accurate description. I intend it to signal recognition of my situation and the critical commitment to being in and of Africa and Africans, of being sutured, entangled, enfolded, complicit.

Notes

¹ Njabulo Ndebele, *Fine Lines From the Box: Further Thoughts About Our Country* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007).

² Sean O'Toole, 'Burden of Whiteness', *Mail & Guardian*, 7 April 2004, 11.

³ Eusebius McKaiser, 'Get Over Yourselves and On with It, Whining Whites', *The Sunday Times*, 13 June 2010.

⁴ Melissa Steyn, "'White Talk": White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness', in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred López (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2005), 127-132.

⁵ Helene Strauss, 'From Afrikaner to African: Whiteness and the Politics of Translation in Antjie Krog's *A Change of Tongue*', *African Identities* 4 (2006): 181.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Alfred López, *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2005), 6.

⁸ Leon de Kock, 'South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction', *Poetics Today* 22 (2001): 276.

⁹ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁰ Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*. (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2002), 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Steyn, *White Talk*, 117.

¹⁴ Robyn Wiegman, 'Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity', *Boundary 2* 26 (1999).

¹⁵ Sonia Kruks, 'Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege', *Hypatia* 20, No. 1 (2005), 184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

- ¹⁷ Kruks, 'de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege', 196.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Kumar, Krishan, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ix.
- ²⁰ Tess Salusbury and Don Foster, 'Rewriting WESSA Identity', in *Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today*, eds. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn (Sandton: Heinemann, 2004), 94.
- ²¹ Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', in *Identity: A Reader*, edS. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (London: Sage, 2000), 17.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Kumar, *English National Identity*, x.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 189.
- ²⁵ Robert Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1.
- ²⁶ Young, *English Ethnicity*, xi-xii.
- ²⁷ Melissa Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 43.
- ²⁸ Thabo Mbeki, 'I Am an African', deputy president's speech on the occasion of the adoption by the constitutional assembly of the Republic of South Africa constitution bill (Cape Town, 8 May 1996).
- ²⁹ Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, 'I too Am an African: If Not, Why Not?', public lecture, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (22 November 2006).
- ³⁰ Antjie Krog, *A Change of Tongue* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2003), 277.
- ³¹ Anthea Garman, 'So Who's an African Then?', *Rhodes Journalism Review* (March 1999): 20.
- ³² Ivor Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'The People'* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 16-17.
- ³³ 'The Sociology of the Public Discourse in South Africa', *ANC Today* (21-27 January 2005).
- ³⁴ Steyn, *White Talk*, 123.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 125.

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Trans-Racial Adoption: The Fantasy of the Global Family

James Arvanitakis and Tobias Hübinette

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the concept of trans-racial adoption of children and adults. Despite recent concentration on white families adopting non-white children, we identify how the opposite was a regular occurrence during the classical colonial period. The existence of these inverted trans-racial adoptions is well documented in literary and autobiographical texts, historical and official documents, as well as in art and visual culture. This chapter aims at re-conceptualising trans-racial adoption within the framework of the European's fundamental inability to attach to lands and peoples outside Europe by making use of the concepts of indigenisation and autochtonisation.

Key Words: Whiteness, adoption, trans-racial families, literature, colonialism, indigenisation, autochtonisation.

1. Introduction

We have all seen the images of Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and their children. While three of the children are biologically Brad and Angelina's, the other three have been adopted from Cambodia, Ethiopia and Vietnam. We start this chapter by drawing on pop cultural images of adoption because they not only have the highest profile, but also represent a one-way relationship in adoption that has an established image: wealthy (white) westerners rescuing poor, non-white children from orphanages in destitute (non-white) nations.

While often thought of as a recent phenomenon, such trans-racial adoption of children, as well as of adults, is a centuries-old practice. Despite this, it is a concept commonly de-historicised, with the process dated to the post-WWII era and connected to adoptions from the Third World to the West or the adoption of minority children into majority families within certain Western countries.

If we revisit the 'classical colonial period' between the 1500s and the 1930s, we can see that such adoption practices were common. During this period, it was not only non-white native children and adults who were adopted by white colonisers and settlers, but the opposite also occurred in a process that can be described as 'inverted trans-racial adoption.' This is well-documented in a cross section of sources, from literary and autobiographical texts to historical and official documents, as well as in art and visual culture.

This paper aims to reconceptualise 'inverted trans-racial adoption' within a framework of the European's fundamental inability to attach to the lands outside Europe. To understand this desire to 'feel at home' we turn to two key concepts:

indigenisation and autochtonisation. When discussing ‘indigenisation,’ we refer to adapting to and participating in local ways to the point when one aims to become part of the local. The second term, autochtonisation, refers to an autochthonous relationship to the land. This is a natural science concept that derives from classical Greek and can be translated as that which comes from the earth itself.¹

Combined, we see these representing a desire to not only become part of the local land and culture, but also to feel that one was actually born from it. In this way one becomes like the plants, animals and people: part of the indigenous social and natural world. Drawing on a cross section of literary works, we apply this lens to interpret and understand inverted trans-racial adoption.

2. The European Settlers’ Inability to Feel at Home

During the 500 years of major colonial settlement, millions of Europeans migrated to overseas colonies. Their initial intentions were varied, ranging from conquest and permanent settlement to temporary migration with the aim of making one’s fortune and returning ‘home.’ What emerges for both the settlers and many of their descendants is living with a feeling of not belonging to the new land. This feeling of homelessness created an obstacle for settlers looking to create a new life.

In his novel *Redback*, Howard Jacobson² describes just this type of longing for a homeland amidst the wealthy suburbs in Sydney, Australia. Jacobson describes a conversation between an immigrant father and his son. In responding to the question regarding ‘homesickness’ in the settler state, the son is encouraged to hear the ‘low moaning ... of fourteen million souls in exile’, as the father describes ‘the sobs of grown men and women’ whose ache for their homeland makes the ‘whole country shake nightly.’

This ‘un-belonging’ created a need to reflect on one’s identity on psychic, symbolic, physical and material levels that has continued for generations. It is this sense of not feeling at home that South African author J. M. Coetzee discusses in *White Writing*.³ Coetzee argues that this identity work is one of the main themes in settler literature written by the descendants of European immigrants in the colonies both during and after the classical colonial period. This sense of unease can only be overcome, it would appear, if one can finally attach to the new land. This is captured by postcolonial theorist Pal Ahluwalia, who asks, ‘When does a settler become a native?’⁴

The image of the settler looking for this elusive feeling which cannot be reconciled is exemplified by Australian author Patrick White, in his novel *Voss*.⁵ *Voss* tells the story of a German settler, Johann Ulrich Voss, who sets out to cross the Australian continent. Set in the nineteenth century, it is a tragic story of an ill-advised adventure as Voss sets out with a large party, but remains alienated from the land he aims to get to know as well as conquer.

The Canadian English studies scholar Terry Goldie presents a more confrontational image in relation to this theme. In his book *Fear and Temptation*,

Goldie argues that the image of the native 'savage' in settler literature oscillated between an abject nausea, a will to exterminate 'it' and an erotic desire.⁶ For Goldie, this reflects the white European coloniser's sense of homelessness. This is a permanent attachment problem to the world outside Europe and the dilemma of not being comfortable or feeling safe in the presence of non-Europeans.

This leads to an almost eternal need to want to both become and possess the Other. It is from here we see the obsession of naming new islands and territories such as New England, New South Wales, Nouvelle France, Nya Sverige or Nueva España.

3. The Issue of Indigenisation and Autochtonisation in the Settler Colonies

In the American Spanish colonies, a division eventually developed between those who were born in Europe and those who were born and grew up in the colonies, or the Creoles. The original settlers were called *peninsulares* and, as time passed, most of them were higher servicemen who had been dispatched by the European metropole to administer and govern the overseas territories. Today we might compare the *peninsulares* to so-called *expatriates* or *sojourners* who do not look upon themselves as permanent settlers. The equivalent groups to the Spanish-descendent Creoles in British and French colonies were called settlers and *colons*. The most intense identity work and attachment process took place among the white descendants of the British and French emigrants to construct a feeling of being 'at home' outside Europe.

For the Europeans, the colonies did not just mean a strange and wild landscape, an unknown and challenging climate with exotic animals and plants, but also odd and 'primitive' peoples and cultures. Even if the indigenous population, who most often were dispossessed and displaced, and sometimes even exterminated, were treated and portrayed as being primitive, barbaric and wild in all respects, they had something which the European descendants lacked: the aforementioned autochthonous relationship to the land.

What followed was the practice and strategy to 'go native' by the settlers. This became central in settler societies where the white population eventually became the majority or at least wielded hegemonic power. The aim was to accomplish the extent of indigenisation and autochtonisation that was felt to be absolutely necessary to be able to feel at home as a white person living permanently outside Europe. From around 1900 a strategy and a process developed that can be called 'trans-racialisation' or to 'become trans-racial.' This racial transformation comes from the position of performative and constructivist identity development and takes place when, for example, a white person learns a native language, adopts native food and native dress and practices native customs and religions.

Both the literary and physical worlds are filled with examples of this trans-racialised white person who has gone native to the extent that they are more or less fully identifying with and performing a native and non-European position. One

example of this is the Australian author David Malouf's description of an English boy, Gemmy Fairley, marooned in Australia and raised by a local Aboriginal group, in his novel *Remembering Babylon*.⁷ Arriving European settlers try to save Gemmy, but he is too native to go back. Such a description captures the trans-racialised strategy of the white population and highlights the split of white subjectivities in a foreign land.⁸

Sometimes it was not even necessary to involve the native population in this attachment work. The famous Swedish explorer and Asian studies scholar Sven Hedin explained in his memoirs that he used to lie down and hug the Asian ground which he had 'discovered' before he went to sleep.⁹ In so doing, he argued, 'Asia became my cold bride.'

4. Becoming the Other

While there are many ways that this indigenisation and autochtonisation occurred, in this chapter we will focus on only four, beginning with the concept of 'growing up' amongst the Other, reflecting the strong historical genre based on the fear and the fascination of becoming the Other. Included here is the so-called white slavery/white captivity narrative that centres on a white character enslaved by a non-white people. The narrative could concern either a European or a white settler, and could be autobiographical or fictional.¹⁰

In her study of the white captivity theme within the context of the British Empire, Linda Colley¹¹ writes about the many soldiers, explorers, travellers, missionaries and settlers who were captured by natives in colonies, and who later returned to white 'civilisation' and wrote memoirs and books about their experiences. Included here are James Fenimore Coopers' *The Last of the Mohicans*,¹² Theresa Gowanlock's and Theresa Delaney's *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*¹³ and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*.¹⁴

There are two key variants of this narrative. The first is the way both animals and 'natives' become adopters of white children lost and Othered into a type of 'feral brood.' Examples include Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*¹⁵ and Lee Falk's *The Phantom*.¹⁶ The children grew up among 'exotic' animals as well as among 'primitive' natives. Additionally, there is the captivity that is desired, self-chosen and mostly pleasurable. This is the ethnographic anthropologist method of temporarily living with the Other. This can even involve the researcher having sex with or even being 'adopted' by her or his native informants. This voluntary captivity contains a more or less explicit element of elevating the 'primitive' and leaving behind the 'civilised'. This is the conclusion of Marianna Torgovnick,¹⁷ who analysed such well-known names as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Another example from the same period is the Swedish missionary and adventurer August Larsson who became a 'duke' in Mongolia.

The next type is 'inter-racial intimacy' as the white slavery genre became increasingly eroticised in the first half of the twentieth century. Most obvious here

is Edith M. Hull's novel *The Sheik*¹⁸ that later became a 1921 movie starring Rudolph Valentino. The development of this genre went hand-in-hand with waves of moral panic as authorities warned white women off having relationships with non-white men or even reading novels or watching movies that had such themes of interracial intimacy.¹⁹ So-called 'anti-miscegenation laws' in many Western countries, which prohibited interracial relations including the marriage between white and mixed race people, accompanied this.

This eroticised version of going native has, according to several postcolonial feminists, always existed as a forbidden but on-going phenomenon.²⁰ This was the case despite cultural condemnation and juridical legislation along what the American gender studies scholar Joanne Nagel has called the 'ethno-sexual frontier'²¹ - extending the arguments of Mary Louise Pratt, who described this as the 'colonial contact zone.'²²

The third area is 'trans-racial fantasies.' During the process of decolonisation and the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, the desire to live with and become the Other was transformed into an anti-colonial and antiracist discourse. This later morphed into the loosely defined 'world of New Age.' The American author Jack Kerouac, who sometimes claimed that he had Native American blood, wrote in his classic novel *On the Road*, 'I wished I was a Negro, a Mexican, or even a Jap, anything but a white man disillusioned by the best in his own "white" world.'²³

The fourth area we describe as 'hugging the Other', and this leads to the adoption genre we are most familiar with today. During the first half of the twentieth century when European empires reached their largest geographical spread and the colonial project had been almost fully achieved, non-white natives and especially non-white children were no longer perceived as a potential deadly threat. Rather, they became a philanthropic object of rescue and assimilation fantasies.

This was an imperial sentimental narrative whereby the white European bourgeois subject could imagine the adoption of non-white native children as a sort of a melodrama of redemption and reconciliation.²⁴ Although the true historical origin and development of trans-racial and trans-national adoptions took place during the Cold War and at the time of decolonisation from the 1950s to the 1970s, the white desire to save, protect, care for, nurture, civilise and assimilate the Other's children can be traced back to the inter-war period.²⁵

This same kind of desire to adopt non-white children and wish to transform and convert them into Westerners is also found in children's literature from the same period, in which exotic animals often get to play the role of non-whites. In Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*,²⁶ the monkey King Louie expresses a strong desire to turn into a white Englishman. Likewise, the African elephant Babar²⁷ and the South American bear Paddington²⁸ are both adopted and transformed into colonial

subjects in the French and the British Empires respectively. Indeed, these two representations really foreground today's trans-racial and transnational adoptions.

5. Conclusion: White Cosmopolitanism and the Fantasy of the Global Family

This exposition took its point of departure in the white European's need to connect to the colonies and their inhabitants to feel at home in the world outside Europe and among non-Europeans. The interracial families and trans-racial adoptions of our times can be said to complete the processes of indigenisation and autochthonisation. This captures the desire to live with and become the Other in a way which had not been previously accomplished. Here we see the division between the Western Self and the non-Western Other collapse into an antiracist trans-racial fantasy of postcolonial reconciliation, white cosmopolitanism and a vision of a future global family. Through intimate relations with people of colour such as inter-racial relations and trans-racial adoptions, as well as the construction of a white antiracist cosmopolitanism, white people can finally feel that they are comfortable with non-whites and feel at home in the non-Western world.

Notes

¹ Rene Dubos, Russell W. Schaedler, Richard Costello and Phillippe Hoet, 'Indigenous, Normal, and Autochthonous Flora of the Gastrointestinal Tract', *Journal of Experimental Medicine* 122, No. 1 (1965): 67-76.

² Howard Jacobson, *Redback* (London: Bantam Press, 1986), 149-150.

³ J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁴ Pal Ahluwalia, 'When Does a Settler Become a Native? Citizenship and Identity in a Settler Society', *Pretexts. Literary and Cultural Studies* 10, No. 1 (2001): 63.

⁵ Patrick White, *Voss* (London: Penguin, 1957).

⁶ Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigène in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

⁷ David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

⁸ Penelope Ingram, 'Racializing Babylon: Settler Whiteness and the "New Racism"', *New Literary History* 32, No. 1 (Winter 2001): 157.

⁹ Sven Hedin, *My Life as an Explorer* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998), 87.

¹⁰ There are a number of authors worth considering here, including Paul Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999); the range of essays presented in the edited volume by Kate Darian-Smith, Roslyn Poignant and Kay Schaffer, eds., *Captured Lives: Australian Captivity Narratives* (London: University of

London, 1992); Rebecka Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire. Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); and Paul Neubauer, 'Indian Captivity in American Children's Literature: A Pre-Civil War Set of Stereotypes', *The Lion & The Unicorn* 25 (2001): 70-80.

¹¹ Linda Colley, *Captives: The Story of Britain's Pursuit of Empire and How its Soldiers and Civilians Were Held Captive by the Dream of Global Supremacy, 1600-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).

¹² James F. Coopers, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Oxford: Oxford's World Classics, 1826).

¹³ Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1885).

¹⁴ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 1901).

¹⁵ Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan* (New York: Signet Classics, 1914).

¹⁶ Lee Falk, *The Phantom: Complete Newspaper* (New Castle, USA: Hermes Press, 1936).

¹⁷ Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Native. Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Edith M. Hull, *The Sheik* (New York: Biblio Bazar, 1919).

¹⁹ Alexander Lubin, *Romance and Right: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

²⁰ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

²³ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (London: Penguin, 1957), 180.

²⁴ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence. Domestic Visions in an Age of US Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

²⁵ See both the work of Martha Satz, 'Finding Oneself: Images of Adoption in Children's Literature', *Adoption & Culture* 1, No. 1 (2007): 163-185; and Sharon Smulders, "'The Only Good Indian": History, Race, and Representation in Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 27, No. 4 (2007): 191-202.

²⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 1894).

²⁷ Jean De Brunoff, *The Travels of Babar* (New York: Random House Books for Young Readers, 1937).

²⁸ Michael Bond, *A Bear Called Paddington* (USA: Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2008 [1958]).

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‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’: Frantz Fanon on Whiteness in Hegemonic Social Philosophy

Vanessa Eileen Thompson

Abstract

A growing body of critical whiteness studies, both empirical and theoretical, is challenging the myth of the invisibility of whiteness in the social sciences and the humanities. Whereas in the past two decades postcolonial perspectives have increasingly influenced the social sciences, approaches of critical whiteness have barely been integrated in the discourses of the human sciences. The alleged invisibility of whiteness is especially assumed in various fields of western philosophy. The aim of this chapter is to further discuss the necessity of a broader critical whiteness approach in philosophy. As a starting point I take into account the analysis of the colonial situation and the phenomenology of racism by the black anti-colonial theorist and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. By following three argumentative steps I demonstrate that white mainstream social-philosophical theories of intersubjectivity and recognition still lack essential aspects in their claim to explain the phenomenon of intersubjectivity as they leave out the centrality of race. Starting with a comparison of Fanon’s analysis of the racial gaze to the backdrop of its theoretical guideline, namely Sartre’s concept of the gaze of the other as constitutive for the process of the formation of self-consciousness, I then explore the idiosyncratic relation of the body of the colonised subject to its world. According to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of corporeity I argue with Fanon that the lived experience of the body in the colonial situation is different between black and white bodies. Finally I discuss Fanon’s modifications of the Hegelian dialectic of lordship and bondage. The elucidation of Fanon’s change of coordinates and his introduction of the colonial situation in Hegel’s master/slave dialectic emphasises the originality of Fanon’s Hegel reception. Furthermore the embryonic form of Fanon’s theory of revolution can be outlined, while highlighting the differences between Hegel’s and Fanon’s master/slave dialectic.

Key Words: Critical whiteness studies, philosophy and the Black experience, Fanon studies, critical race theory.

1. Introduction

In this chapter I aim to examine Frantz Fanon’s critical interventions against the invisibility of whiteness in eurocentric social philosophy. It is one of Fanon’s many virtues that his phenomenology of racism, that is based on the epistemological category of the ‘lived experience’ and entails an analysis of the

idiosyncratic forms of alienation in colonial situations, goes to the very heart of the premises of eurocentric social philosophy and discloses that the dominant varieties of these theories are racialised (as they do not pay attention to social identities). Within this context Audre Lorde's political comment 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' opens up a common ground for my following examination. She stated this at the Second Sex Conference in New York in 1979. Lorde wanted to criticise white feminists' racism and at the same time highlight white feminists' complicity with patriarchal power structures considering that feminism liberated white women on the backs of women of color. Therefore Lorde reveals power structures that lie within so called emancipatory forms of feminist critique by naming the fact of whiteness in feminist theory.

The content of this statement can be transferred to Fanon's anti-colonial theory. Another reason why I used this statement according to Fanon's interventions is because I, speaking from a womanist perspective, claim that we should work *with* instead of *against* him. By re-reading the hegemonic theories of intersubjectivity and recognition through the lense of Fanon's phenomenology of racism one can identify them as far too narrow/white and is able to define their white eurocentric spots.

2. The White Gaze and the Trippleness of the Colonised Body

Fanon describes the colonial system as a 'world in two sections'. It forces colonised people to live in two dimensions and situate their self towards two systems of reference. Therefore, he states that any kind of ontology of colonised people is unfeasible because they do not possess 'ontological resistance' in the eyes of the white colonisers.¹

It is necessary to turn towards Sartre's understanding of intersubjectivity to gain further insight into the Fanonian understanding of gaze relations in colonial situations. Sartre's understanding of intersubjectivity is demonstrated in his analysis of the gaze in his groundbreaking work *Being and Nothingness*. He assumes that there is no such thing as a positive intersubjectivity and states that the gaze of the other fixes the self as its other. This fixation includes two implications: 1) On one hand, one only becomes aware of oneself through the gaze of the other, thus the other is constitutive for the awareness and experience of oneself. 2) On the other hand, the other determines the self by fixing it in a certain action, a situation. Thus an irreducible fixation takes place, in the words of Sartre, a 'transcendence of the subject's transcendency.' But this interrelation between two subjects is not characterised by a positive reciprocity because the gaze only operates in a one-directional way. One is seen or one is seeing. Hence the one-directionality can only be challenged through a counter-gaze. A subject-object dualism is thus distinctive for Sartre's conception of interpersonal relationships.

In his phenomenology of racism Fanon adopts the Sartrean category of the gaze and transforms it into the racist gaze inherent to colonial situations. Like Sartre, he

illustrates his analysis of the racist gaze with the help of a key moment. His first-person narrator, a colonised Black man from Martinique is on a train in Paris. A white mother and her child are sitting opposite of him as he, the Black man, is seen:²

“Look, a N...!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. “Look, a N...!” It was true. It amused me. “Look, a N...!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. “Mama, see the N...! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.³

Here the gaze does not fix the black man in a certain action or situation, he is not experiencing the moment of the ‘transcendence of his transcendence’ but is rather fixed and locked up in a racist construct and a racist scheme. The moment of self-realisation in a Sartrean sense cannot occur here because the black self is fixed on a racist imago that is determined *upon* him. Therefore what is taking place here is a one-sided fixation without the possibility of a direct counter-gaze. The racist gaze does not only imply a determination but an *over-determination* from without.⁴ The Sartrean subject-object dualism becomes absolute in this situation. Not only intersubjectivity is impossible but also reciprocity in itself. This asymmetry is reinforced and re-articulated by the structural, institutional, discursive and ideogocial arrangements and dimensions of racism that make a direct counter-gaze in a Sartrean sense impossible. whiteness is a crucial point and organising principle here because it is set and re-inforced as an unmarked norm.

Furthermore, Fanon describes the idiosyncratic relation of colonised people to their bodies, which are violently fragmented within this life reality. On the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body Fanon defines the corporal scheme as a system that embraces our limbs and that is nothing more than another word for our ‘being-in-the-world.’ According to this one can brutally briefly say that we experience the world through our ‘lived body.’ As Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as a ‘third moment,’ Fanon speaks of it as a ‘third-person consciousness.’⁵ However, as a next step Fanon elaborates that in racist settings the being-in-the-world for black bodies is not the same as it is for white bodies. In colonial situations colonised people experience their bodies not only through a coherent reference to the world but additionally via the white racist imago. The evolution of the corporeal scheme is thus hindered because of a ‘historical-racist’ scheme that

lies behind the corporeal one. Fanon literally describes the collapse of the colonised body under the white gaze:

Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer questions of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person ... My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day ... All around me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel, the earth rasps under my feet, and there is a white song, a white song. All this whiteness that burns me ...⁶

That the black body is locked up in the racist construction, its violent linkage to the racist imago and narratives - its 'triple existence' - is what marks the difference to a non-racialised body. The aforementioned differences in the Fanonian reading of Sartre's analysis of the gaze and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body give crucial insight into the abstract and pseudo-universalist tendencies of western phenomenological thought and its exclusion of a central category of oppression, namely race.

3. Fanon's Anti-Colonial Reception of Hegel's Passage of Lordship and Bondage or on the Preconditions of the Struggle for Recognition

In a final step I would like to extend this argument further by including Fanon's re-reading and re-creating of Hegel's passage of lordship and bondage, which is central to Fanon's work. In the centre of his Hegel reception lies the question of recognition of the other as constitutive for self-consciousness. He cites Hegel at the very beginning of his chapter 'Hegel and the N...'

Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.⁷

And then presents his core argument,

There is not an open conflict between white and black. One day the White master, without conflict, recognized the N... slave. But the former slave wants to make himself recognized.⁸

Fanon's focus and emphasis on the Hegelian struggle, born out of the appearance and essence of colonialism and its manichean structures, demonstrate that he reads Hegel through the lense of Alexandre Kojève. What is thus often overlooked is the fact that Fanon does not only draws on Hegel's master/slave

dialectic but rather re-maps or re-creates the Hegelian dialectic by transposing its coordinates into the colonial setting and by introducing the category of race into the Hegelian framework.⁹

In the following, I intend to further elaborate the originality of the Fanonian critique of Hegel. Since Fanon reads the abolition of slavery in the Antilles and the former French colonies as a decision based more or less on white men - ergo as an act of paternalist racism - he argues that the fight to the death did not take place between the enslaved people and their oppressors. The colonial logic therefore stays intact because they were just passive objects of their situation: 'The black man was acted upon ... He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another.'¹⁰

Within this context of an existential reading, Fanon refers implicitly to Hegel, who pointed at the dependency of that self-consciousness that is just formally recognised as a person. According to the genetic reading of Hegel it is this self-consciousness which can not develop its independency because it did not take the 'first anthropogenetic action' to transform the purely subjective certainty into valid and recognised truth. The lack of the fight to the death in this colonial setting is, according to Fanon, due to the racism inherent to the colonial structure which excludes a sort of reciprocity that is the precondition for Hegel's fight on the one hand and to the degree of epidermalisation on the other. When Fanon writes that 'at the foundation of Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasized', he does not yet refer to Hegel's conception of mutual recognition but rather points out that a form of basal equality is already given in the Hegelian scenario.¹¹ Fanon therefore sharply intervenes in Hegel's fight to the death and claims that it is based on unmentioned/white conditions. The absence of these preconditions is what avoids the fight of the two protagonists in the colonial scenario. The primary reference to the other through which the other is *perceived* as the other, i.e., as a potential opponent who resists the self-negation of the first self-consciousness, is missing here. In other words, the Hegelian struggle for recognition is based on a previous struggle in which the opponents primary constitute themselves as opponents because they perceive themselves as dependent on each other. Following the reading of the philosopher Patricia Purtschert one could describe this previous struggle as a struggle for representation. I would rather call it a struggle for perception as it is the lack of reciprocal perception in the sense of a *social seeing* that is missing here in the first place. Furthermore, this primary lack hinders the representation, i.e., the making visible of one's self-consciousness, in the second place. This lack of perception is, as I argue, due to the denial, or better the rejection, of an antecedent recognition based on the colonial-racist system of belief and its underlying practises. This is not to say that the colonisers do not see the colonised subjects (in the sense of a physical non-existence). This form of invisibility is rather a social one that is due to a deformation of the human

perception out of which all forms of recognition result.¹² Hence it is this form of social invisibility that forces Fanon to radically re-write the Hegelian script.

In doing so, he firstly turns towards the white coloniser, 'who differs basically from the master described by Hegel,' who is not dependent on the recognition of the enslaved but only wants the work of the enslaved.¹³ Whereas in Hegel the unilateral recognition of the enslaved turns the lordship into dependency, the colonisers position is assured in the colonial situation.¹⁴ 'For Hegel,' Fanon states, 'there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave: What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.'¹⁵

Finally, Fanon argues that the enslaved black subject also differs from the enslaved in the Hegelian narrative. Because the enslaved black subject did not experience the fear of death, the ability to transcend the dependency on the white master, by means of working on the 'object' as an opportunity to find the source of liberation in his work, is absent. Rather the black desire for recognition is still bonded to the white master.

4. Concluding Reflections

Fanon's comparison of the Hegelian narrative and the colonial situation thus reveal essential differences that are mainly based on the absence of the preconditions for a reciprocal perception of the two self-consciousnesses in the colonial system. Still, Fanon does not turn away from the idea of mutual recognition because he thinks that it provides the only possibility for the formation of an autonomous self-consciousness. He thus sticks to the Hegelian trope and uses it as a model for his anti-colonial theory of liberation formulated in *Les Damnés de la Terre*. In his opening chapter 'On Violence,' in which Fanon explains the necessity and theorises his concept of counter-violence as an indicator of decolonisation, he equates anti-colonial violence with Hegel's notion of work. Anti-colonial violence contains the same quality as the Hegelian figure of thought as for Fanon anti-colonial violence implies an emancipative potential and can assure the basis for mutual recognition.

This demonstrates that he decolonised the Hegelian coordinates essentially. He therefore, to come back to the title of this piece, creates new tools to dismantle the master's house by revealing its whiteness. Furthermore his analysis of the colonial situation can be read as an anti-colonial critique and challenge of eurocentric phenomenologies. His implicit call for the disclosure of whiteness in western social philosophy and the eurocentric cartography are thus essential for the contemporary philosophical debates on recognition as he points out the linkage of recognition, social perception and representation, a linkage that opens up fundamental interfaces between postcolonial theory, critical race theory and theories of recognition and intersubjectivity.

Notes

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- ¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.
- ² As I do not want to reproduce the N-Word(s), I will constantly use its euphemism.
- ³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 110; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- ⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
- ⁷ Hegel quoted from Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 216.
- ⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 217.
- ⁹ Lou Turner, 'On the Difference between the Hegelian and Fanonian Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage', in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Renée T. White (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 144; Nigel Gibson. *Fanon. The Postcolonial Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 30.
- ¹⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 220.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² This argumentation draws particularly upon the actualisation of the concept of *Verdinglichung* (reification) by the philosopher Axel Honneth (2003; 2005). Honneth argues that forms of reification are based upon a categorial oblivion of an elementary recognition. In fact, this can not be reduced to an interactional level as the rejection is pro- and re-produced through ideological discourses.
- ¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 220.
- ¹⁴ In Hegel the master is trapped in an 'existential impasse' because as soon as the other self-consciousness turns into the slave the master is recognised by someone he himself does not recognise as worthy for recognising him (see Allan Bloom, ed., *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Alexandre Kojève* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 19). In addition, the master is dependent on the slave as the master is not transforming the given world by his work nor is he going beyond himself.
- ¹⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 220.

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Multiculturalism and Culture as a Technique of Whiteness

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Abstract

In the foreword to Joe Kinchenloe's book *White Reign*, Michael Apple argues that we need to observe how whiteness as a culture generates norms and ways of thinking about culture itself, an argument Frankenberg also made in her seminal text the *Social Construction of Whiteness*. It is through this lens that this chapter explores the bearing of whiteness on the construction of a normative culture and cultural identities in Australian federal multicultural policy during the Howard era (1996-2007) and how such cultural imaginaries disseminated down to the level of practise in terms of shaping a local cultural ecosystem in Newcastle, Australia. This chapter explores how whiteness is discursively privileged through the containment of cultural life, at the federal and a local level, within the parameters of mainstream Australian values. It begins by examining the discursive shift and construction of multiculturalism and cultural diversity during the Howard years. It then draws on extracts from policy and media statements that evidence the shift in meaning of culture, cultural diversity and multiculturalism around this time, demonstrating how multiculturalism now operated as a discursive site for the governing of populations and in its earlier form by contrast, aimed to endow citizens with specific nationalised attributes. It ends by exploring the performativity of whiteness in shaping celebrations of multiculturalism and cultural diversity at festivals in Newcastle, drawing on ethnographic research to explore how such representations at the federal level affected a local shift in representations of culture and cultural diversity. In doing so, it explores how cultural festivals operate as a means of controlling and ordering cultural spaces as white spaces.

Key Words: Whiteness, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, culture.

1. Introduction

In the forward to Joe Kinchenloe's book *White Reign*, Michael Apple argues that 'whiteness as an explicit cultural product is taking on a life of its own.'¹ The idea Apple offers here is not new, which is that we need to observe how whiteness as a culture generates norms and ways of thinking about culture itself.² This argument Frankenberg also made in her seminal text the *Social Construction of Whiteness*.³ While the Australian federal Howard government was in power between 1996 and 2009, there was a significant shift in discursive representations of multiculturalism, cultural diversity and culture in federal policy documents that permeated down to the local level. Previous federal multicultural policy

discursively positioned multiculturalism as exclusively about ethnicity and ethnic groups or those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Constructions of ethnicity were seen to be located in a supposed homogenous non-English speaking background collective.⁴ Culture and multiculturalism previously embraced difference and gave new meaning to Australian identity that went beyond the limits of a white Anglo Celtic nation. Australia had become a multicultural nation.

The Howard government's new policy discourses and documents reflected both the 'worrying whiteness' Hage describes in *White Nation* and *Against Paranoid Nationalism* and how whiteness as privilege could be deployed at any moment to contain cultural life within the parameters of mainstream white Australian values.⁵ This 'worrying whiteness' characterised the anxiety and fear of a conservative white Australia about the threat that multiculturalism and cultural diversity posed to white Australian culture and the Australian way of life. Whiteness became an explicit tool deployed in the cultural production of new agendas for multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Whiteness as the dominant culture imposed itself on multiculturalism and cultural diversity, reclaiming the cultural space and marginalising ethnicity and ethnic groups both in policy contexts and in public domains.

This chapter examines this discursive shift and the construction of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in policy documents and discourses and cultural festivals during this period. It draws on extracts from policy statements that evidence the shift in meaning of culture, cultural diversity and multiculturalism around this time, demonstrating how multiculturalism operated as a discursive site for the governing of populations and, in contrast to its earlier form, aimed to endow citizens with specific nationalised attributes.⁶ It then moves to an exploration of the performativity of whiteness in shaping celebrations of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Newcastle cultural festivals, drawing on ethnographic research to explore how this federal repositioning affected a local shift in representations of culture and cultural diversity. In doing so, it explores how cultural festivals operated as a means of controlling and ordering cultural spaces as white spaces.

2. The Remapping of Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity in Australia

During the years the federal Howard government was in power, revised definitions of multiculturalism and cultural diversity were set out in various federal policy documents, including the *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Toward Inclusiveness*, which affirmed that to recognise and celebrate cultural diversity was about accepting the rights of all Australians to express and share their *individual* cultural heritage.⁷ This revised multicultural policy inculcated a particular model of cultural citizenship, invoking a new multicultural orthodoxy that harked back to representations of Australian nationhood as racially and

culturally homogenous.⁸ In this policy shift, all Australians, including Indigenous Australians, were added to the *mix* of multiculturalism.⁹

For example, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Toward Inclusiveness*, which was launched in 1999, described multiculturalism as

about and for all Australians ... multiculturalism seeks to embrace and be embraced by all Australians - our original inhabitants, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and everyone else - whether born here or overseas and whether of English- or non-English-speaking origin.¹⁰

Multiculturalism was no longer about the recognition of ethnic *groups* that make Australia multicultural, but about Australians *accepting* the rights of all Australians to express and share their *individual* cultural heritage, while maintaining their overriding commitment to mainstream white Australian culture.

The then Prime Minister John Howard made the following statement about Australian culture in the context of multiculturalism on public radio:

As you know, I'm a strong advocate of the benefits of *our cultural diversity*, but I have always been very strongly committed to what I would call the mainstream culture of this country, and that culture over the years has changed. It has changed under the impact of successive waves of immigration, but it is distinctively and overwhelmingly an Australian culture. ... I have talked over the years about the traditional Australian values of mateship, the core Australian culture ... Now I have always believed that this country has benefited enormously from migration. I think it has been one of the great success stories of Australia. But people come to this country frankly because they want to live in Australia, and by definition they overwhelmingly want to become Australians.¹¹

'Australian culture' assumes a white normative taken-for-grantedness. So, despite superfluities around multiculturalism and cultural diversity, it is white Australian culture that is valued.

Brett reflects on this reconstitution of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. She argues that the Liberal party's *Future Directions* policy document 'Building One Australia' developed in the 1980s foreshadowed this discursive shift.¹² Brett points out, the document defines 'One Australia' as 'a united Australia proud of its distinctive identity and history in which all Australians, irrespective of social background, ethnic heritage, religion or nationality have an equal opportunity to achieve what they might want for themselves and their families;' 'it rejects so-

called multicultural programmes which simply ensnare individuals in ethnic communities denying them the opportunity to fully participate in Australian society;’ and it also rejects ‘treaties with Aboriginal Australians which would permanently recognise them as citizens apart, unable to participate in the mainstream of Australian life, even where they wished to do so.’¹³ It is the resituating of Indigenous culture/identity within a framework of cultural diversity.

Federal multicultural policy now operated as a mode of regulation, limiting representation to participation in the mainstream and operating as an extension of forms of governance to incorporate cultural expression and identity and its limits. In this conceptual form, multiculturalism, cultural diversity and culture operate as a technique for managing populations.¹⁴ Cultural diversity and culture are, thus, inherently governmental.¹⁵ Culture in this sense is understood as a tool of management for the standardisation of values and behaviours. It retains its meaning as ordering norms, values and attitudes, but is operationalised in a strategic sense as a resource to restructure the way people feel, think and act. Multicultural policy could be productively rethought as a normalising apparatus that conceptualises and operationalises a model of cultural citizenship in the contemporary period.¹⁶

3. Contemporary Cultural Citizenship and Representations of Culture in Newcastle

Around this time, I was conducting a sociological ethnography of the struggle for Indigenous rights in Newcastle and I noticed there was also a recognisable shift in the positioning of multiculturalism, cultural diversity and culture in Newcastle City Council’s policy discourses and documents and cultural festivals were dominated by English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh representations of culture and ethnic cultures were being added or appropriated as ingredients to Newcastle’s white multicultural *mix*. To demonstrate, the *Newcastle City Council Cultural Framework* defined cultural diversity as the following:

Cultural diversity embraces ethnicity, gender, faith, ability, lifestyle, sexuality and age. The challenge is to promote an acceptance of *difference* and embrace cultural diversity in a way that acknowledges and honours the role it plays in shaping our character, identity and culture.¹⁷

Cultural diversity was divested of its purely racial and ethnic overtones. In Newcastle, cultural diversity was defined as encompassing identity and the various differences between people such as age, faith, gender and sexuality, which comprise the cultural community of Newcastle. Culture is a domain of morals and ethical codes of conduct; the promotion of the ‘acceptance of *difference*,’ in its many forms, and the ‘embracing of cultural diversity’ and ‘honouring the role it plays in shaping our character, identity and culture.’

'Culture' here has multiple meanings. It relates to the culture industry, the salvation of the post-industrial Newcastle, that is, tourism, and as a set of individual attributes that people of different backgrounds may choose to adopt. For example, the *Newcastle City Council Draft Cultural Framework* for 2005-2010 opening statement sets out to define culture along the following terms:

Culture embraces a wide variety of meanings and values, for individual citizens, for institutions and organisations, and for those charged with responsibility for its support and development in Newcastle. It can be seen in two dimensions:

- Culture is an essential part of everybody's quality of life and wellbeing. A rich cultural life - making, doing, enjoying - enables people to be active, healthy and engaged citizens, with real benefits to themselves, their families and their community.
- Newcastle's cultural sector is also an emerging and growing part of the economy; it contributes to Newcastle's prosperity, provides hundreds of jobs and will play a key role in the diversification of the local burgeoning service economy.¹⁸

Culture is generic; and it 'embraces a wide variety of meanings and values.' Culture is produced here as something that individual citizens can 'consume'. It is a commodity and is packaged as such and this is reflected in its festivals, tourist attractions and public cultural life from the beach culture to symphony concerts. In the 21st century, culture is a community, a resource, and the business of Newcastle's local government. Cultural diversity too is expanded to encompass the diverse range of cultural forms in Newcastle. This shift in representations of culture and cultural diversity are not limited to policy documents.

4. Normative Forms of Culture in Newcastle

Whiteness proliferates in the form of a celebration of Anglo-culture and history in Newcastle. Whiteness reproduces itself as the dominant culture in Newcastle. Newcastle's cultural events celebrate Anglo-Australian culture such as the Mattara cultural festival.

The Mattara Festival first commenced in 1961. It is most aptly described as a festival of origins. The name Mattara is a local Indigenous Awabakal word for hand, and, in this context, denotes the hand of friendship. In 1993 *Coming Together Day*, a day celebrating the signing of a local document of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Novocastrians, formed part of weeklong events for Mattara festival. Today, although the name suggests Indigenous

involvement in what is Newcastle's leading cultural festival, there is little to no Indigenous involvement in the festival. Contemporary Mattara events today are a stark contrast to *Coming Together Day* 1993. It is predominately a celebration of Australian-ness and representations of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture in Newcastle. The centrepiece of the weeklong event is the fair ground set up in Civic Park across from Newcastle City Hall. Children's rides and fairground attractions, such as a merry-go-round and face painting, dominate the space. In addition to the core programme, each year a number of additional events take place. The programme generally consists of a Grand Parade and Cultural Day, the MG hill climb, the sprint classics, a Ball and Miss Springtime award, Family Fun Day; Indoor Art Contest; Sculpture Exhibition; Mattara Poster Competition; Pets on Parade; Green Day; Newcastle Live n' Unplugged and the Hunter Band Challenge; Ruby the Clown Children's Festival; and other events. The programme is essentially a celebration of the many sub-cultures, such as 'band culture,' 'surf culture' and 'car culture' in Newcastle. Such 'culture' reflects individual proclivities and voluntary associations and commodified economic niches. It was in this context that cultural citizenship was ordered and operationalised.

The Mattara Festival concludes each year with the Mattara Grand Parade and Cultural Day. It is 'the' celebration of Newcastle's culture, and is described in the media and brochures as a 'cultural parade.' Traditionally, the Grand Parade is a celebration of art and culture in Newcastle with colourful floats, stilt walkers, street characters, ethnic groups and Indigenous groups making up the *mix*. In divesting cultural diversity of its racial and ethnic overtones, this celebration too has been divested of such representations and has become about celebrating cultural diversity in its broadest sense. Representations of the various ethnic cultures (such as Greek, Macedonian, Turkish, Chinese and Vietnamese) and representations of alterity are managed and added to the *mix*. The floats are representative of industry, community services and cultural groups. The live bands are traditional and symbolic of Anglo-Australian representations, such as the traditional military brass band, the military marching bands with bagpipes and uniformed marching brigades.

In years gone by there had been some form of Indigenous representation. Over a number of years that I attended, there was no Indigenous presence. The only examples of 'multiculturalism' and 'ethnicity' were a local business float, the Universal Taekwondo, whose float included a station wagon with the business logo emblazoned on its windows and students demonstrating and a local shop that sells Middle Eastern merchandise, whose pedestrian float comprised of Turkish dancers (see Image 1).



Image 1 - Turkish belly dancers



Image 2 - Australian Heritage Dancers

The Newcastle Town Crier announces the commencement of the Mattara Parade and leads the procession through the city centre. The Newcastle Australian Heritage Dancers dressed in Anglo-colonial attire are present as one of the pedestrian floats (see Image 2). The Mattara Parade encapsulates typical representations of mainstream Australian culture in Newcastle, represented through, for example, the marching bands and Australian Heritage dancers. There were often several (up to ten) marching bands in the Mattara Parade, including a youth marching band, school marching bands and private marching bands (see Image 3). They epitomise Anglo-Australian culture and history in music and in their dress.



Image 3 - Newcastle Bagpipe band



Image 4 - Sponsored Holden Rally Cars

Australian culture is represented in the form of voluntary organisations, such as the Lions Club, the State Emergency Service, the Rural Fire Brigade, and the Life Guard Services. These are groups which form part of the spontaneous community based voluntary organisations, from Rural Fire Brigades to Lions Club that epitomise Anglo-Australian culture and history. There were also representations of working man's organisations with local trade and small industries and 'car culture' through a procession of old Holden rally cars (see Image 4). Mainstream Australian culture is emblematic of white Australia, and its history and uniquely Australian cultural practices. It is the dominant culture.

5. Conclusion

The Howard years resulted in a significant re-shaping of multiculturalism in the mainstream white imaginary and this was reflected in mainstream cultural

festivals and representations of cultural diversity in Australian society, which now celebrated culture as everything from voluntary associations through to car ‘culture,’ marginalising all that is not white. Whiteness, as an expression of the dominant culture, affected the social positioning of ethnic and Indigenous groups through the formative power of cultural representations and practices. Cultural festivals also operated as a means of controlling and ordering cultural spaces as white spaces.

Notes

¹ Michael Apple, ‘Foreword’, in *White Reign*, eds. Joe Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, Nelson Rodriguez and Ronald Chennault, (New York, St Martin’s Press 2000), xi.

² Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1995), 231.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jan Larbalestier, ‘What’s this thing called White? Reflections on “Whiteness” and Multiculturalism’, in *The Future of Multiculturalism: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin’s The Migrant Presence*, ed. Ghassan Hage and Rowanne Couch (University of Sydney, Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, 1999), 146.

⁵ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Sydney, Pluto Press, 1998). Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Sydney, Pluto Press and London, Merlin Press 2003). Anthony Moran, ‘Trust and Uncertainty in a Settler Society: Relations Between Settlers and Aborigines in Australia’, in *Trust, Risk and Uncertainty*, eds. Anthony Moran and Sean Watson (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2005), chapter 12.

⁶ Clive Barnett, ‘Culture, Government and Spatiality: Reassessing the “Foucault Effect” in Cultural-Policy Studies’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (1999): 375.

⁷ National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999).

⁸ Barnett, ‘Culture, Government and Spatiality’, 375. Kay Anderson, ‘Thinking “Postnationally”: Dialogue Across Multicultural, Indigenous, and Settler Spaces’, *Centre for Cultural Research Pre-Print Journal Articles*. 2000.

⁹ Hage, *White Nation*.

¹⁰ National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century*, 7.

¹¹ John Howard, interviewed by Neil Mitchell, 2004, Radio 3AW, Melbourne.

¹² Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred*

Deakin to John Howard (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003); Judith Brett, 'Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia', *Quarterly Essay* 19 (2005): 1-79. The Howard government was a Coalition government established from a coalition between the Liberal and National parties. Howard was the leader of the Liberal party.

¹³ Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, 185.

¹⁴ Terry Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 71.

¹⁵ Clive Barnett, 'Governing Cultural Diversity in South African Media Policy', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 14 (2000): 51.

¹⁶ Barnett, 'Culture, Government and Spatiality', 371.

¹⁷ Newcastle City Council, *Our Wonderful Life: Newcastle City Council Cultural Framework 2005-2010* (2005): 1.

¹⁸ Newcastle City Council, *Discussion Papers for the Community Plan 2006-2010* (2005).

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Man in Mirror: 'Whiteness' as Perceived by Lower Class White South Africans

Lydia Carol Dekker

Abstract

Despite the many political and social changes that have taken place since 1994, the perception, nationally and internationally, is that all white people in South Africa are still 'privileged' in relation to other races. This view has been ingrained due to the fact that white people, especially Afrikaners, enjoyed a large measure of job security during apartheid that allowed them to earn a wage enabling them to live a life 'suitable' for white people. However, when this job protection and security fell away after the elections in 1994, this caused a ripple effect across the whole socioeconomic spectrum. The privileged economic bubble that many white South Africans within the sphere of protective government structures, especially the civil service, had worked in for so long burst as their job security ceased; some of these whites were hard-pressed to maintain their once comfortable standard of living. Whites from the lower socioeconomic strata were often forced to seek alternative low-paying employment as they lacked the social orientation, education and skills that became essential in the changing landscape of the new South Africa to compete alongside 'other' races. As a result of this shift there has been an increase in whites working in the informal job sector, for example as carguards. Carguarding evolved partly because of the high crime rate in South Africa and partly because of the high unemployment rate. These white carguards are generally considered by the public to be 'white trash,' uneducated, social failures or 'glorified beggars,' which my research shows to be both stereotypical and distorted. I will discuss both the public's images of the carguards and the image carguards have of themselves. This chapter will examine the anxieties that these lower class white people have regarding their own and their children's future in the new dispensation. The research contains data which was gathered qualitatively whilst working as a participant observationist. Loosely structured interviews and a focus group also gave me access to the rich data which I use in this chapter.

Key Words: White, Afrikaner, lower class, identity, post-apartheid, misrecognition, anxieties, carguards.

1. Introduction

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or the

society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.

Charles Taylor¹

Charles Taylor's quote above describes the core of the plight of certain lower class whites in South Africa, as the image they have of themselves is just a reflection of the image others have of them in South Africa. This chapter will reflect specifically on a small group of lower class white Afrikaners who work as carguards in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

The image that the public in South Africa have of the lower class white Afrikaners differs from race group to race group and also within the white Afrikaner class structure. In addition to their anxieties due to their socioeconomic situation, the public's image of the Afrikaner carguards further exacerbates anxieties in this marginalised group.

This chapter reviews how these lower class whites are constructed through different perspectives in academia and the media. The researcher, as a participant observationist, has been privileged to experience the white Afrikaner carguards' perspective from their point of view.

2. Background of the Lower Class White Afrikaner Carguards in Durban

Within all societies ethnic groups are stratified according to their social-economic status. Likewise, white Afrikaners are not a homogenous society and are stratified within by class and status groups. This stratification was not highly visible to other ethnic groups until the democratic elections and the change of government in 1994, as it was perceived that all whites were equally privileged by apartheid. Prior to 1994 white Afrikaners were largely dependent on the state to maintain their standard of living,² and unless they grasped these privileges with both hands and used them to improve their education, they were relegated to the lower economic strata post-apartheid.

Since the end of apartheid, many white people from the lower socioeconomic strata were forced to seek low-paying employment as they lacked the social orientation, education and skills that became essential in the new South Africa to compete alongside other races, some of whom were better educated and others who were now became beneficiaries of affirmative action policies which were enforced to level the employment field. As a result of this shift there has been a notable increase in the number of whites working in the informal job sector, for example as carguards. This does not negate or minimises the impact of apartheid on poverty in other segments of South Africa, especially the non-white population.

Carguarding involves patrolling parked cars in public parking areas such as shopping malls or hospitals to prevent vehicle break-ins and car theft. Although these guards fulfil a security role, it is informal: they do not receive any basic

salaries or social benefits. These white caregivers are generally considered by the public to be white trash, uneducated, 'social failures' or 'glorified beggars.'

When I asked a group of young people between the ages of 19 and 23 their perceptions of white caregivers, some responded, 'I'm always surprised to see white caregivers. It does not seem normal.'³ 'The most I have seen were dirty ... I don't tip them because I do not think that they expect blacks to tip them.'⁴

These quotes are an indication of the younger public's perception of the white caregivers, which fluctuates between pity and disgust. To return to Charles Taylor's quote, one can see how the image of the white Afrikaner caregivers has been shaped through circumstances that originated in the apartheid government's policies, their own lack of foresight for their future and lack of public recognition.⁵ This is what is mirrored back to the white lower class citizen. In comparison to black caregivers, white caregivers are not expected to be seen in this 'type of job' as it is seen as a demeaning position which historically would have been deemed suitable only for non-whites in apartheid South Africa. This lack of recognition also leads to the sentiment, expressed by the participants, that having been thus degraded, the lower class white caregivers have lost their identity in the new dispensation.

3. The Loss of White Identity amongst the Lower Class White Afrikaner Caregiver Since the Eradication of Apartheid

The participants often relayed to me the loss they felt since 1994 when the ANC government implemented changes which had a huge impact on the lives of all ethnic groups. The participants felt that these changes, especially black economic empowerment (BEE), marginalised them and stripped them of their cherished white Afrikaner identity, embedded in their social status and the apartheid symbols such as their flag, anthem and much-vaunted supremacy of their language, just to mention a few. These symbols of the old regime were the first to change. These changes started with the release of Nelson Mandela.

To some the moment that Nelson Mandela was released from prison was a moment of jubilation, and to others it stirred a premonition of foreboding, uncertainty and fear. Either way it was a point of no return for South Africa and social change was inevitable. This dark premonition and fear are reflected by Melissa Steyn, who described her emotions when she saw Nelson Mandela walk his walk to freedom in 1990 as an 'irrational fear.'⁶ This was an emotion she shared with many white people all over South Africa at that particular moment in time. Another author described the sentiment of the general white population after Mandela's release as a feeling of abandonment.⁷ According to Jonathan Jansen, the political negotiations following Mandela's release were not sufficient for white people in South Africa to absorb the inevitable changes which would follow.⁸ Jansen argues that these changes came as a huge shock to a previously advantaged white population group - white people in general and Afrikaners in particular - who

sought to justify their degrading of their social standing by blaming their leaders for 'selling them out.'⁹ Interviews conducted during my fieldwork indicated that that 'shock' could be attributed to the fact that the participants, who came from the lower white class, did not have the education or economic ability to cushion them from the sudden political changes. White people with a lower education now had to compete with previously disadvantaged unemployed people from other races.

Jansen argues that at the same time that those previously oppressed celebrated their victory, the impact of these events on the white people who believed/declared that they had lost so much was ignored.¹⁰ Often white Afrikaners were stereotyped as 'rotten' and 'racist' and whatever they now got was their just desserts, so nobody cared to acknowledge their loss.¹¹ Vicki Robertson observed the same feeling of abandonment that seems to have descended on the white population in general.¹² This sentiment came clearly to the fore in interviews with the participants. Cody, Daniel, Sarel and Uncle all argued that the loss of 'their' country was a direct consequence of the last and former apartheid president, FW de Klerk, 'selling them out' to the ANC.

We have been betrayed ... our white people ... when De Klerk handed our country over to the ANC ... they did not hold a gun to his head and forced him to hand the country over ... De Klerk is actually a traitor, in the old days he would have been shot.

The feeling of abandonment and political betrayal runs right through the interviews, albeit expressed in different ways. James, a male participant, said that they do not have the privilege of owning their own homes because the government has taken that away from them too, highlighting the fact that houses and land are perceived to be freely given to blacks but that they, as poor white people, do not have the same rights as black people in South Africa.

This feeling of abandonment and ignorance of the reality of the plight of these people was accentuated when President Jacob Zuma was reported as saying, 'I didn't know that there were poor whites,'¹³ when he visited a white squatter camp. The invisibility of poor white people comes as a shock to many, especially those who had never heard of and could not conceive of white people living in squatter camps.¹⁴ This is due to the fact that white unemployment has increased between from 55,000 to 158,000 between 1994 and 2007.¹⁵

This sense of loss and abandonment could also be extended to the loss of recognition of their language since 1994. Afrikaans, according to Hermann Giliomee, was a part of the construction of Afrikaners' social identity.¹⁶

In post-apartheid South Africa, there is an on-going debate about the importance of maintaining Afrikaans in its academic capacity in the primary, secondary and tertiary educational systems.¹⁷ The argument is that mother-tongue education in Afrikaans prevents the Afrikaners as a minority disappearing in the

larger multicultural educational system.¹⁸ The loss of language can be equated with the loss of status for the lower class white Afrikaners.

4. The Loss of Status of the Lower Class White People within Their Ethnic Group or Class Structure

According to the participants, the implementation of affirmative action in addition to the lack of education and qualification often rendered this group of Afrikaners jobless and unable to compete for the work which would give them the standard of living they had become accustomed to. Status, according to Max Weber, is linked to honour, which in turn is linked to people's standard of living.¹⁹ In other words, without any work this group of Afrikaner caregivers are not only forced to renegotiate their social and personal identities in the job sector as well as in their social sphere, but unemployment also deprived them of status and honour. Class and status are determined by one's access to material resources, and these resources can only be claimed if one can earn a decent living wage. The participants often failed to recognise that it was not only affirmative action that blocked their means to earn a living wage, and this in turn was perceived as an attack on their personal identities which are linked to their ability to work.

This change in status is not limited to class, but also affects what Taylor terms 'the politics of recognition.'²⁰ He argues for the importance of group belonging, being recognised as members of an ethnic group, which in this case refers to Afrikaners. Without such recognition the group will experience a feeling of inflicted harm and a sense that, compared to others, their status is inferior.²¹ Taylor furthermore argues that this process of recognition is a mirroring process; in other words, identity is not only constructed by our own perceptions but also by how we perceive others' perceptions of us.²²

Flint gave a very good example of how unemployment is related to status:

What I realised is, that if a man asks for work [as a caregiver] it does not matter what his qualification is. Once he lost his job and he has been on the street for a month or two, sometimes staying in a [homeless] shelter, then a man loses his self-respect. Once he lost his self-respect he is useless; useless to his country, useless to his family, useless to his children. Everyone ignored him and nobody wants to help him.

This reveals the loss of status these participants feel working in the informal sector, in what is not considered 'real' work. Their status as workers has changed to something people have constructed as undesirable. This labelling has an impact on how they see themselves through what they do: their job is on the same level as begging and that they are less than other people who work in the formal sector, with socially acceptable job descriptions.

Work is an essential part of our culture and it becomes a defining factor of 'self.'²³ Without a clearly defined job one stands in danger of losing one's identity, as a large part of who we are is about what work we do. When we lose our jobs we do not have a central point from where we can position ourselves and those around us, and our identities become displaced.

Displaced identity was experienced by most of the participants; for example Jack related to me how demeaning it was to be referred to as a 'hobo,' as that is not how he constructed himself but was how other people perceived him. Jo-Ann found that when she started carguarding she felt uncomfortable doing the work as other Afrikaners treated her with contempt. This emphasises the fact that not only class classification but also status play a role in the carguards' lives. Sarel, an ex-railway worker, explained that in becoming a carguard he experienced a huge drop in status, and although he had been living on the streets for long periods he never thought that he would be reduced to a situation where he would have to do menial labour and be in the same socioeconomic position as black people.

Carguarding is often not perceived as a 'job' by the public, but rather as a way to 'beg' for money. To be unemployed can emotionally destroy a person's dignity, as it means 'low or no income, lack of status, loss of purpose, loss of dignity and loss of pride.'²⁴ Not having a job can deprive a person of the 'work culture' which has its own defining powers. When the current government came to power the government and state institutions were reorganised and many white people were retrenched,²⁵ leaving former workers not only unemployed, unemployable and financially destitute²⁶ but also, by my own observation, emotionally broken, with the added feeling that they are victims of the new South Africa.

5. White Carguards' Perceptions That They are Being Victimised

Steyn sums up these sentiments of victimisation as 'this shouldn't be happening to a white,' saying that white people are experiencing a reversal of apartheid and feel victimised, as the new order is 'out to get them,'²⁷ Some Afrikaners feel displaced in what they passionately consider to be their own country.²⁸ These people feel that they, who had total trust in 'their' government pre-1994, are now in a situation where they cannot trust the new government at all:

I cannot find work because of my skin colour ... some places tell you directly that you are from the wrong race group, others just say 'sorry it is affirmative action.'

Daniel, quoted above, constructs himself as a victim of circumstances, and he pointed out that the Afrikaners who live in squatter camps are victims of the post-apartheid circumstances. Daniel is only one individual out of an estimated 430,000 Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites who are said to be 'too poor to live in traditional white areas,' in addition to the estimated 90,000 who are struggling for

survival since 1994.²⁹ According to Robinson these figures increased by 15 percent per year since 1994.³⁰

According to Andries Bezuidenhout, some Afrikaners are tired of being victimised for being white³¹ and being blamed for apartheid, and many of the young people who feel that they are victimised were too young to be part of or responsible for apartheid.³² This feeling of being victimised resonated throughout the interviews with these white carguards. Carguards have an added problem in that they are working in close contact with the general public most of the time and are vulnerable to public victimisation and vituperation.

The participants described to me how they often had to take abuse from the black public because they are white. During my observations there were a few incidents where these white carguards were on the receiving end of racist remarks and aggressive verbal attacks. At first I found it puzzling that they were targeted, until it became obvious that it was because they were accessible to the public. Whereas in normal social interaction it is unacceptable or unthinkable to use racial comments against a colleague, when these are used against a social 'outcast' nobody bats an eye. The white carguards already have a low status, and they are vulnerable to racist attacks, especially from people who seek an avenue to vent their racial frustration. After an informal survey I came to the conclusion that most black carguards are foreign and generally not perceived as a threat to the local black population, as this job sector is seen as so degrading that locals are not generally interested in this type of informal work.

6. Conclusion

In closing I would again like to refer again to Charles Taylor's quote at the beginning of this chapter, where he explains that our identities are not only shaped by people's perception of us but also by lack of recognition. This lack of recognition can harm a group of people, and can mar social and individual identities. Some interviewees indicated that a degree of recognition was restored by this research, however they indicated that they feel that they are still being marginalised by the government through the social and health systems and the public in general. This perception is mirrored to them and has a huge impact on how their current social identities are perceived by others and themselves. However of late the media has occasionally highlighted poor white Afrikaners' plight and through this they have become more visible as a social entity. Social identities amongst the white carguards seem to be re-negotiated as white and black lower class citizens increasingly become more socially integrated into the same socio-economic situation in housing, health services and schools.

Notes

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- ¹ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (New Jersey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 50.
- ² Kanya Adams, *The Colour of Business: Managing Diversity in South Africa* (Basel: Schlettwein, 2000), 27.
- ³ White female, 23 years old.
- ⁴ Black female, 19 years old.
- ⁵ Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 50.
- ⁶ Melissa Steyn, 'Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be'. *White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), xvi.
- ⁷ Vicki Robinson, *South Africa: Poor Whites are Strangers in a New Land*, Norwegian Council for Africa, 8 July 2004, accessed 15 March 2010, <http://www.africa.no/Detailed/5731.html>.
- ⁸ Jonathan Jansen, *Knowledge in The Blood: Confronting Race And The Apartheid Past* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 27.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Jansen, *Knowledge in The Blood*, 30.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Robinson, *Poor Whites are Strangers in a New Land*.
- ¹³ Denise Williams, 'Zuma: I Did Not Know There Were Poor Whites', *Mail and Guardian* 24 July 2008, Accessed February 28, 2010, <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-07-24-zuma-i-did-not-know-there-were-poor-whites>.
- ¹⁴ Jan-Jan Joubert and Loanna Hoffman, 'Begin Van 'n Reddingsdaad'. *Rapport*, 25 October, 2009.
- ¹⁵ SAIRR-Research-Team, 'Newsletter 1: Unemployment and Poverty - An Overview', 11 December 2008, Accessed 8 March 2011, www.eumunicipaloutreach.org.za/newsletters/newsletter1.
- ¹⁶ Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Paarl: Tafelberg Publishers; University of Virginia Press, 2003), 365.
- ¹⁷ L. Prince, 'Wit En Bruin Baklei Oor Afrikaans', *Rapport*, 7 June 2009; Medewerker, 'Treffende Afrikaanse Reklame Belangrik', *Rapport*, 7 June 2009.
- ¹⁸ Jansen, *Knowledge In The Blood*, 37.
- ¹⁹ Steven Kalberg, 'Max Weber', in *The Blackwell Companion to Major Classical Social Theorists*, ed. George Ritzer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 158.
- ²⁰ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- ²¹ Ibid., 25.
- ²² Ibid.

- ²³ Tom Fryers, 'Work, Identity And Health', 31 May 2006, Accessed 21 March 2010, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1501011>.
- ²⁴ Fryers, *Work, Identity And Health*.
- ²⁵ Wessel Visser, 'Coming To Terms With the Past and Present: Afrikaner Experience and Reaction to the "New" South Africa' (Copenhagen: The Centre of African Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 2004), 6.
- ²⁶ Eleanor Momberg, 'Cast-off Afrikaners Adapting Well; Thousands of Former Amptenare Find There's Life After Government Service - And, For Some, Undreamt-of Prosperity', *Sunday Independent*, 22 April 2007, Accessed 10 December 2010, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-167155785.html>.
- ²⁷ Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be*, 153.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 155.
- ²⁹ Robinson, *Poor Whites are Strangers in a New Land*.
- ³⁰ I also referred to Statistics South Africa, Census 2001 and Census 1996 and 2001 compared, Accessed September 10, 2010, report No. 03-02-04 (2001), <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/populationstats.asp>.
- ³¹ Andries Bezuidenhout, 'From Voëlvry to De La Ray: Popular Music, Afrikaner Nationalism and Lost Irony', University of Stellenbosch: Department of History Seminar 5 September 2007, Accessed 8 October 2010, http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departemente1/geskiedenis/docs/a_bezuidenhout.pdf.
- ³² Ibid.

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Reading *The Secret River*: Whiteness, Nation, Belonging

Jane Durie

Abstract

This paper takes the novel *The Secret River*¹ as the basis for analysing whiteness as structure of authority and being white in Australia. Kate Grenville's novel provides a fictionalised account of early invasion and settlement on the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney, and the interactions of white invaders/settlers (mainly pardoned convicts with land grants) and the local Aboriginal people living in the area. In 2011, racialised relations in Australia between white (Anglo) Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are in many ways still/inevitably fraught. Understanding and deconstructing these relationships in their historicised context is integral to intervening in and shifting entrenched positionings that keep denial and racism alive and well. Grenville's novel could be said to explore the fragility of being white, simultaneously as whiteness as a structure of authority is laying down its roots in the Australian soil of the early 1800s. The analysis presented in this paper takes up this story as a contribution to historicising, understanding and deconstructing racialised relations in Australia today. The paper is part autobiography, part reportage, part analysis and part experiment - an experiment in capturing invasion as the foundation for belonging/not belonging, in a white-dominated white-settler state.

Key Words: Whiteness, indigenous/non-indigenous, massacres, denial, belonging, invasion, settlement, Australia.

1. Introduction

Since "whiteness" naturalises the claim to social power and epistemological privilege ... The subversive move is to reveal *within* the very integuments of 'whiteness' the agonistic elements that make it the unsettled, disturbed form of authority ... the incommensurable 'differences' that it must surmount; the histories of ... terror that it must perpetrate and from which it must protect itself; the amnesia ... the violence it inflicts in ... becoming a transparent and transcendent force of authority.²

This paper takes Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River*³ as the basis for analysing indigenous/non-indigenous relations in Australia through the lens of whiteness as a structure of authority. Grenville's novel provides a fictionalised account of early invasion and settlement on the Hawkesbury River, north of

Sydney, and the interactions of white settlers (mainly pardoned convicts with land grants) and the local Aboriginal people living in the area. The centrepiece of her story is a massacre of Aboriginal men, women and children by a group of white male settlers, the lead-up to the massacre and its aftermath.

In 2011, racialised relations between white Australians and indigenous Australians are still/inevitably written through with the act of invasion and the massacres that took place as the invaders slowly made their way across the continent throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century.⁴ Grenville's novel could be said to explore the fragility of being white in a black country, simultaneously as whiteness as a structure of authority is laying down its roots in the Australian soil of the early 1800s. The novel captures invasion and massacre as the foundation for belonging/not belonging for white settlers, speaking directly to the violence whiteness inflicts and 'forgets' in becoming a transcendent force of authority. Thus this paper draws from *The Secret River* to analyse the incommensurable differences that frame the negotiation of a national identity founded on an unacknowledged invasion.

2. Reading *The Secret River*

I read *The Secret River* at Red Rock, a small hamlet on the mid north coast of New South Wales. Red Rock is also known to the local Aboriginal people as Blood Rock, named for the blood that flowed in the water following the massacre of local Aboriginal people (the Gumbaynggirr). According to Tony Perkins, a representative of the Garby Elders,⁵ the massacre took place in the 1880s.⁶ The narrative goes that mounted police entered the local camp and started shooting the Aboriginal people in the camp. As the survivors fled along and in the waterway the police pursued on horseback and continued to shoot. A memorial cairn, 'telling the story in written text, [was placed] at the edge of the taboo place, half way up the Red Rock headland.'⁷

Reading the book lying close to the ground, under day and night skies, I was touched in a personal way. For the first time in a long time I had a physical sensation of walking on land that had been inhabited, walked upon, for thousands of years. I sensed the connection to the land that such a long history would give one. This is not a claim to know what it is like, to claim my place in the wannabe tribe of whites who are so closely attuned to the experiences of indigenous people that they are (almost or wannabe) indigenous. Nor, importantly, is this a nod to the lack that many white Australians express about their culture in the face of minority ethnic/indigenous claims to cultural connections. I have my own cultural connections to land that are enough - when I go to Canberra (where I was born and grew up) and see the beautiful smoky blue hills surrounding the city, and when I see paintings of the bush and the ancient grey/white rock from the Canberra region, I feel a connection and a sense of knowing where I have come from that is

sufficient. Rather, the experience of reading the book in this environment gave it a gravitas it may not otherwise have had.

Two other aspects of reading the book in this environment are worth noting for what they tell us about whiteness in Australia. The first is that the experience made me think about the other places I had camped and stayed along the NSW coast, possibly also sites of massacres, certainly sites of Aboriginal habitation prior to white invasion and settlement. I have holidayed on the south coast of NSW for many years in physical locations similar to that of Red Rock, near headlands and river estuaries, prime sites for Aboriginal camps, festivals, fishing and general living for the nations and clans along the coastline. So the question arises, why has it taken so long to see differently where I was camping/where I was walking?

The second aspect of reading the book that made it such a personal experience was that the secret river Grenville writes about is the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney. It is here in the early 1800s that ancestors on my mother's side settled. So this fictional tale of first contact, of innocence and guilt, of deliberate massacre, is 'my' history. I am neither novelist, historian, nor amateur family genealogist, but I do know that there is nothing in my history to suggest definitively that my relatives would not have been amongst white settlers who participated in a massacre such as the one described in *The Secret River*.

The truth or otherwise of whether *my* ancestors engaged in such massacres is both relevant and irrelevant. Relevant in the sense that as a many-generation Australian I cannot step outside this history of black/white relations, it is part of my history, part of who I am. I did not arrive in Australia as a refugee/immigrant post world war II, or the many other wars in places such as Vietnam, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, that have brought refugees to Australian shores. I have historical roots in Ireland and Scotland but my Irish ancestors arrived in Australia as early convicts/settlers, taking (up) land in the Hawkesbury area and in Lane Cove (Northern Sydney) in the early 1800s. This places me personally within the history of black/white relations in Australia from the time of invasion and settlement so that I cannot say (beyond the literal), 'I was not there; this has nothing to do with me.' I say irrelevant as this particular history makes me no more *personally* responsible for what happened/continues to happen between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians than Australians who have arrived at different times over the last 223 years. Beyond the first peoples of this land, themselves a grouping of many different languages and nations, Australia is a society of numerous different cultures and immigrant experiences and regardless of our different and shared histories, as Australians we must take collective responsibility for indigenous/non-indigenous relations.⁸

3. Two sides ...

In preparing this paper I discussed *The Secret River* with friends. In the main we grappled with two central ideas: the first being that of understanding whiteness

and its operation both at the macro and the micro level, the second the meanings/effects of living in a nation whose beginnings are not openly acknowledged and written into our shared history. Analysing these ideas and their interconnections is central to deconstructing the power of whiteness in the process of challenging its dominance. As Mark McKenna argues,

Australian historians in the early twenty-first century are presented with a political confrontation the resolution of which is imperative - Why can our present not be separated conveniently from our past? - Why should we continually remember the critical narratives of Australian settlement? When responding, perhaps we should do so ... by explaining how the dispossession of Aboriginal people, both historically and in the present day, lies at the heart of Australian consciousness and identity, and is connected to *every* aspect of our past.⁹

The idea that personal histories are our entrée into understanding the broader picture was discussed and personal connections to the events of invasion and settlement were broached. One of those present indicated she felt detached because she does not have an historical connection to invasion and settlement. Another indicated she feels like an outsider looking on but does also feel responsibility. There was sympathy expressed for the class-oppressed convicts and admiration for Grenville's powerful description of the bush as it would have appeared to the white settlers from a very differently cultivated land. There was also discussion of massacres at Red Rock, at Port Lincoln, in the Hawkesbury region, and at other sites. We all agreed that the power of whiteness to dissemble is one answer as to why it could happen, 'it' being the continual denial and forgetting. We came back to the idea a number of times that rationalisations are side tracks that help to keep us blind and enable us to keep our world view, including our wellbeing in the future, intact and, significantly, whiteness is at work in this process.

We critiqued the argument that there are always two sides to a story. The argument in this case is that the whites/convicts were uneducated and poor and were (only) taking an opportunity for themselves which they had never had before. There is definitely a truth in this as Grenville's narrative emphasises in the beginning of the book. Her presentation of life in London for her main characters William and Sal is sympathetic and romanticised, even in all its harsh poverty. From a literary point of view the beginning (and the ending) of Grenville's novel do not match the imaginative way she presents Sal and William struggling to gain a foothold in the dense Australian bush and come to terms with the Aboriginal presence, both of which were terrifying and exotic. Nevertheless, regardless of Grenville's romantic representation of the lost life in London, making it to the colony, even as a convict, provided an unimagined opportunity to make good. The

massacre fictionalised by Grenville reflects many things but it certainly reflects the determination that nothing was going to stand in the way of William and others, having escaped a life of extreme poverty and servitude, taking the opportunity for a free and substantial life, even if it was in strange and untamed land thousands of miles from home. And as Grenville suggests in the novel, the foundations of this life could never be talked about, facilitating an uneasy forgetting from generation to generation.

As we discussed in the group, there is no escaping that the ‘there are always two sides’ argument is a rationalisation that draws us to sympathise with the oppressed convict/white settler out of his depth, desperate to make good. Critiquing this position is not to take issue with the conditions under which invasion and settlement took place for the individuals who first arrived. However, the ‘two sides’ argument only ever engages with one side. It offers a rationalisation and justification in such a way that there is no need to consider the other (side) - all is forgotten. Grenville herself engages the ‘two sides’ argument in discussing her novel, but with a slight twist:

You can set two sides against each other and ask which side will win ... Or you can ... say, well, nobody is going to win ... What there can be, though, is understanding ... experiencing what it was like, the choices that those people had ... the notion of one side being right and the other side being wrong becomes ... irrelevant ... this is a problem we really need, as a nation, to come to grips with ... let me as a novelist come to it in a different way ... of empathising and imaginative understanding of those difficult events ... what would I have done in that situation, and what sort of a person would that make me?¹⁰

While Grenville is understandably sympathetic to her characters, and demonstrates a way of seeing what happened differently, it is this very understanding, this sympathy that, taken as a rationalisation, lets us off the hook of looking at the other side (in keeping with the binary) and stops us short of taking responsibility.

4. History Wars and Denial

Through various interviews and commentaries¹¹ Grenville’s novel became part of the public/intellectual debate that occurred in the early to mid-2000s that came to be known as the History Wars.¹² *The Secret River* has as its central climax a fictional account of a massacre of Aboriginal men, women and children on the Hawkesbury River in the early 1800s and it is this account of a massacre that brings *The Secret River* directly into the territory of the History Wars, aligned (ambivalently and with a strong sympathy to the white settlers) with the reality of massacre and war as a significant and inevitable part of invasion and settlement. In

raising the History Wars I would make the point that the History War debates are a very clear example of the rationalisations and distractions that constantly displace our attention from the business of acknowledgement. The History Wars draw us to the beginnings of Australia as a white nation at the same time as shifting our attention to details and questions such as the number of dead, whether it happened at all, genocide or defence.¹³

This side-stepping of the fact of invasion and white settlement on others' land distracts our attention as a nation from thinking through our beginnings and the ways in which our national identity and sense of belonging of non-indigenous Australians is written through with this unacknowledged invasion and displacement. Thus, *The Secret River*, positioned as it is within these debates, serves as a touchstone for deconstructing the authority of whiteness and, as quoted earlier from Bhabha, 'to reveal *within* the very integuments of whiteness',¹⁴ its secrets and violence and 'the incommensurable differences',¹⁵ that lie within its histories and relationships.

5. Taking Responsibility

There is considerable work to be done, as Bhabha so eloquently states, to expose, acknowledge and accept responsibility for the processes whereby a land of many black nations became a white nation. In bringing this paper to a close I want briefly to be hopeful that we are slowly committing ourselves as a nation to the work required. From a macro perspective one way of very broadly categorising indigenous/non-indigenous relations at the public/policy level since invasion would be to see the 19th century as one of continuing invasion and settlement with consequent massacres, battles and resistance between indigenous and non-indigenous people; in the 20th century this largely gave way to policies of 'protection,' missions, removal and assimilation; and the 21st century has yet to show itself, but potentially the century of reconciliation. Of course such a broad and simplistic categorisation is immediately open to challenge and dismissal. There are overlaps across these categories, and there have always been those who have engaged in reconciliatory practices that went against the grain of the popular views and practices towards Aboriginal people.¹⁶ And of course there is the danger of being seen to present history and the relationships of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples as linear and progressive. However, leaving aside these issues, I am interested to think about the possibilities and hopes for a public and popular shift in relations towards reconciliation.

Beginning in the latter part of the 20th century there has been a series of national events that give rise to hope that reconciliation could become a recurrent theme in the following decades. Briefly, these can be seen to begin with the 1967 Referendum¹⁷ and include events such as the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Mabo and Wik High Court decisions, the Royal Commission into the Stolen Generations resulting in the

Bringing them Home Report,¹⁸ the Bridge Walk in 2000 and The National Apology in 2008. These events do not of themselves necessarily have any material effects on the lives of indigenous people, but the Bridge Walk and the Apology in particular lifted the spirit of many indigenous people. But lest I was to be blinded by the desire to be hopeful, over this same period there have been other events that work in the opposite direction, events that speak to continuing violence and racism underpinning indigenous/non-indigenous relations into the 21st century. The most recent and controversial of these acts has been the Northern Territory Intervention in June 2007. In the face of this act of symbolic violence towards indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory,¹⁹ it is hard to argue that reconciliation may become the dominant discourse and practice. But hope is not about rational argument. Drawing on Foucault's concept of effective history,²⁰ it can be argued that the events construct a period of effective history in building better relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. That does not mean that the future will build on that particular history - there is no guarantee of continuity when contingency has no allegiances - but hope is possible. Hope that there will be more contingent actions/events that build towards a clearer engagement with the incommensurabilities of Australia as a white nation.

Notes

¹ Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (Sydney: The Text Publishing Company, 2005).

² Homi Bhabha, 'The White Stuff', *Art Forum International* 36, No. 9 (1998): 21-24.

³ Grenville, *The Secret River*.

⁴ The latest recorded massacre was at Coniston in the Northern Territory in 1928, Bill Wilson and Justin O'Brian, "'To Infuse an Universal Terror': A Reappraisal of the Coniston Killings", *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003): 59-78.

⁵ Margaret Sommerville and Tony Perkins, '(Re)membering in the Contact Zone: Telling, and Listening to, a Massacre Story', *Altitude 6: Reading Australian Indigenous Texts* 2 (2005): 1-14.

⁶ Other sources indicate the 1840s, coinciding with white invasion and settlement in the area. See for example Johanna Kijas, *There Were Always People Here: A History of Yuraygir National Park* (Sydney: Department of Environment and Climate Change, 2009).

⁷ Sommerville and Perkins, '(Re)membering in the Contact Zone', 10.

⁸ This statement needs greater development and complexity of analysis but this is not the place for that work.

⁹ Mark McKenna, 'A Preference for Forgetting: Some Reflections on Publishing Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place' *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003): 131-138.

¹⁰ Ramona Koval, 'In conversation with Kate Grenville', *Books and Writing* (ABC Radio National, 2005), Accessed 25 April 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/bwriting/stories/s1527708.htm>.

¹¹ See for example Inga Clendinnen, 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past', *Quarterly Essay* 25 (2007): 1-72.

¹² Under the Prime Ministership of John Howard history in relation to invasion and massacres came under revisionist attack.

¹³ In redirecting attention to arguments about the numbers of dead, for example, these debates detract from the founding premise of the Australian nation as one of invasion and settlement of others' land.

¹⁴ Bhabha, *The White Stuff*, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998) provides a thorough documentation of these unacknowledged heroes.

¹⁷ For an explanation of the events listed here see: Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTAR), Accessed 22 April 2011, <http://www.antar.org.au/>.

¹⁸ Ronald Wilson, Mick Dodson and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Australia, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

¹⁹ The Intervention also required the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (RDA) to enable the Intervention policies. See: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 'Racial Discrimination Act is a Vital Human Rights Safeguard', *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission* (2007). Accessed 21 April 2011, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2007/53_07.html.

²⁰ Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 76-100.

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PART 6

White Hope, White Fear

‘Colour-Blind Childhood’?: Living Racialised Ethnicities in a Primary School Setting in Oslo, Norway

Mari Rysst

Abstract

Since the Second World War, nation building in Norway has focused on welfare, equity and equality. From the same period, immigrants from non-western countries arrived in great numbers. As a consequence, egalitarian values regarding gender, race and ethnicity have been, and are highly prioritised in kindergartens, schools and elsewhere. Children learn from an early age that ‘people look different, but are similar inside,’ and that inner qualities count more than appearance. In this chapter I explore the postulation of children being ‘colour-blind’ in a primary school setting in Oslo, Norway. Based on more than six months of ethnographic fieldwork in a primary school consisting of more than 95% pupils with immigrant backgrounds, this chapter discusses how, in what ways and in what contexts the issue of skin colour and race is highlighted, and how the presence of the theme may be understood. The fieldwork was done in the 6th grade in 2010, and includes one white ethnic Norwegian pupil and two with mixed backgrounds having white ethnic Norwegian mothers and black African fathers. One frequent utterance by parents, teachers and children alike at this site is that they have all become ‘colour-blind.’ As the term connotes, the utterance implies that the children and adults at this school do not take notice of different skin colours or distinguish people by skin colour or ethnicity; we are all ‘equal.’ Based on observations of situations in which colour and racism came to the forefront, this chapter discusses the colour-blind version of their reality in the light of the concepts of internalisation, repression and the unconscious, suggesting that the idea of primacy of racial whiteness can be explored through these concepts.

Key Words: Colour-blind, racialised ethnicity, children, childhood, gender, inclusion and exclusion.

1. Introduction

What I am going to present in this chapter must be understood on the backdrop of Norway being a ‘newcomer’ in experiencing everyday issues related to whiteness. Countries like the United Kingdom and the USA have decades of more experience than the Scandinavian countries. Hopefully, we can learn from their experiences in grappling with our own.

Most ethnic Norwegians conceptualise ‘the Norwegian’ to be white, which make people of immigrant background born and raised in Norway wonder when and how they are ever going to be labelled ‘Norwegians.’ Their difficulty is not

unique, but may be particular in the sense that nation-building in Norway, since the Second World War, has focused on welfare, equality and equity.¹ According to some Norwegian researchers, the Norwegian conceptualization of equality is a cultural value, with two connotations: equality as equity and equality as sameness.² Anthropological research documented as far back as 1954 suggests that the Norwegian idea of equality was ambivalent.³ On the one hand, equality exists as value and ideology; while on the other hand, social differences and hierarchies exist.⁴ To this 'climate' of equality thinking, people from non-western countries immigrated to Norway, representing the opposite of equality as sameness, at least regarding appearance and skin colour. However, the Norwegian welfare state has advocated equality as equity and anti-racist policies for more than fifty years, and children have learned in schools and kindergartens that 'we are all equal though we may look different, we are all equal inside.'

On this backdrop of equality, equity, sameness and difference, the present chapter draws on data from a research project in eastern Oslo, Norway - more precisely from one year of ethnographic fieldwork in a multi-ethnic primary school setting. The school has 440 pupils from approximately twenty countries, outnumbering its ethnic Norwegian pupils. This school is one of the few in Norway where coloured children are in a majority position. This fact made me curious of how children manoeuvre this multi-ethnic and multi-coloured situation in their everyday interactions in school. Of particular interest were social classification, hierarchy and social inclusion/exclusion. The curiosity was particularly triggered because adults working there conceptualised the children as 'colour-blind,' and the children themselves said they did not care about skin colours in their school. 'We are all, like, brown, so to speak, so why should we bother?' as one girl said. So when most of them are 'brown,' is it likely that skin colour, with all its connotations, is not an issue? Are they 'colour-blind', and if so, in what ways? Is racism, understood as 'prejudices against racialised ethnic minorities,'⁵ not illustrated in this school context? And finally, how are images of whiteness and racialised ethnicities represented here? 'Racialised ethnicity' means here how different kinds of people are differentiated on the basis of their physical appearance, for instance skin colour and hair, in combination with culturally marked differences.

First I will give an empirical presentation of events from everyday school contexts illustrating issues of 'racism.' I am inspired by 'anthropology of the senses,' how we as researchers can grasp what is going on in a deeper and richer manner by using our all senses in data collection.⁶ In line with this the chapter emphasises sound as a methodological tool. As will be indicated, the chapter also draws on psychological oriented anthropology.

2. Racialised School Events

At the school I have called Dal, white faces are far and few between. They are rather in different shades of brown/black, from fair skinned Moroccans to very dark Africans. Norwegian is the only language heard, it is prohibited to speak other languages, but the sound of Norwegian language is not fluent or without local accent, also among those born and raised in Norway.

After the break in the schoolyard, the teacher opens the door, and the children stumble into room 6A. This is where I did most of my participant observation, particularly because this class has only one student of ethnic Norwegian origin, and one with mixed Norwegian and West-African background. The other class in the sixth grade has no ethnic Norwegians. This day, as every day, the noise is high, and the teacher shouts 'Quiet!' Then he claps his hands three times three; the children do the same, and the situation calms down. But the class room is never totally quiet. Literally speaking, the sound of silence includes whispers, coughs, chairs being pulled back and forth, children going to the toilet, etc.

When the lesson is over and lunchtime starts, 'silence' and discipline evaporate, and the children are free to seat themselves wherever they want. Voices are heightened, chairs are moved, children shout to each other. Today, as often is the case, the boys gather around the table of two popular boys - David, of mixed Norwegian and West-African background, and Omar, having Pakistani origin - where they talk mostly about football. Suddenly I hear the sound of another student, Kofi, who is of West-African origin. He exclaims loud and resigned, 'Okay, I am a negro, I am negro on the outside ... Black on the outside, but inside, we eat the same, drink the same.' Omar says quietly, 'Yes, we all have two eyes, two ears, mouth, nose and hair.' It is obvious that someone has commented on Kofi's appearance; otherwise he would not have uttered just those words. I should also note that this is not the first time he experiences this.

This event stands in sharp contrast to an article in one of Norway's leading newspaper some weeks later; the heading was 'The Children Have Become Colour-Blind.'⁷ In the article two girls from room 6A are interviewed about their school situation: Pernille, of ethnic Norwegian origin, and Sahra, having a North African background. These two girls are best friends; they always stick together. In the article Pernille says 'I am the only girl in our class having blonde hair. I don't feel any different because of that. In our class no one is teased for their country of origin.'⁸ Sahra says that she does not think Pernille is anything special: 'She is like the rest of us.' Pernille's mother is also interviewed about what she thinks about her daughter being the only ethnic Norwegian pupil in her grade, and says that she finds it 'unproblematic. For her it is totally natural. It seems that the children here are quite colour-blind. And I am glad about that, because these people are her future colleagues.'⁹ When I ask a teacher having worked in this school for many years, if ethnic Norwegians have an integration problem, she says,

Teacher: No. Because they have been here [in the area] all the time. The parents want them to attend this school. Our children are colour-blind.

Mari: So that's what you think? They don't care about different skin colours?

Teacher: Nope. They do when they argue and don't find other words. They don't have a wide vocabulary. So, if they fight and argue, if they don't find other words, they take skin colour, but they have no reason for doing that. So I don't think *that* is a problem. And we [teachers] have talked about it, and yes, they *are* colour-blind.

However, the following event challenges the postulation of colour-blindness, just as the story about Kofi does. The setting is the gym hall. The hall is filled with much sound: shouting, running, balls bouncing against walls. The children enter the hall after they have changed, and Nathalie and Suma tell me that Adine, having North-African background, has gone home because Arsim, of East-European origin, has beaten her up. The teacher comes and is told the same. He immediately grabs Arsim and they are in the wardrobe for a long time. I look after the children, which is an easy job until I spot Robert, of East-African origin, lying on the floor, apparently very upset. It turns out that Adine, who has returned from home, has said to him 'you are black' (*svarting*). It is worth noting that she has said this without there being an overt conflict of any kind, contradicting what the teacher above said. The other boys are angry and excited, they whisper to each other and soon a loud, unified, aggressively repetitive 'Racist, racist, racist!' is heard from them all. The boys approach Adine as an aggressive group, Abdullah of Pakistani origin in the lead, as they shout this. Adine tries to find shelter behind me. I react spontaneously and say, 'Stop, stop, don't make a fuss out of this, just leave it!' and they answer, 'But, listen, she is a racist!' I tell them to calm down anyhow, and continue with their games. When the teacher returns I tell what has happened, and he too does not do anything about it there and then. But when he has to leave for an errand some time later, he tells me to look after Adine so that she is not attacked. So how to understand these events of racialised ethnicity? How to understand the postulation of colour-blindness?

3. Discussion

As mentioned, the children say when questioned, that they do not care about skin colours in their school, and adults say children are colour-blind. The empirical examples show the opposite, namely the existence of a discourse of racism. Race seems to be explosively present and simmering just below the surface. I argue that it is likely that the discourse of racism is under their skin, internalised through socialisation particularly in homes, of all ethnic backgrounds, repressed from

consciousness, as part of the unconscious, often returning in situations of emotional stress. Sigmund Freud has written much about the return of the repressed. All the children know that racism is taboo, not accepted, but maybe they also 'know,' deep down somewhere, that being white is best, that white is more beautiful than brown/black. They live in a society in which white people are in a majority situation, and, according to Robert Dyer, *is* the human norm.¹⁰ And as the existence of this conference also is an illustration of, whiteness seems to rule racial classification systems worldwide.

If another teacher at the Norwegian school is correct, Dyer's argument resonates with the situation at the school. The whiter the skin, the better, the teacher says. Light skin is easier converted into high social prestige than dark, according to him, and awareness about distinctions of dark colours exists. For instance, the former mentioned teacher about colour-blindness, says, 'Africans, they are black, they are labelled blacks, they can be called that by Pakistanis, who are labelled brown.' Here she underlines the existence of a distinction in coloured skin colours. It is interesting that being labelled 'black' is an expression of racism, as in the situation with Adine above, while 'brown' is not, but more a matter of fact thing. It may be read an indication of racialised ethnic hegemony, that light brown skinned Asians, for instance the majority group of Pakistanis at this school, have this hegemony together with ethnic Norwegians.

It is a known fact that light skin is preferred and wanted among many Asians, where particularly women frequent beauty salons in order to bleach their skin, or apply skin-bleaching creams at home.¹¹ They also explicitly hide their faces and hands from the sun in order to avoid a tan. One of the most common advertisements on Indian and Pakistani television is whitening products. In Pakistan and India light skinned women are preferred marriage partners of all castes and classes. A relevant question to ask is thus what these appearance practices tell children about equality as equity, about the value of whiteness, coloured skin and colour-blindness? I argue that colour-blindness is a relevant analytic concept in some Norwegian contexts but not in others - more precisely in social contexts where adults and children know each other well, socialise to a great extent and are connected to each other through positive emotions and friendship. Over time, friends do not notice skin colour, friends like the *person*. Pernille and Sahra are best friends and relate to each other as such and are colour-blind regarding each other. Maybe a preliminary postulation could be that strong positive emotions erase or undermine the significance of skin colour, while negative stereotypes obviously strengthen the significance of racialised ethnicity.

It is worth noting that the racial classifications at Dal consist of only three or perhaps four categories based on colour: white, yellow, brown and black. Yellow is seldom used, while white and brown are the most common and matter-of-factly. Black, as mentioned, is a more stigma-laden concept. Compared to the research done by Mica Pollock in a multicultural school in the US, the racial categories

there consist of a basic taxonomy of six groups they call racial, based on ethnic classifications as well as colour: Latinos, Blacks, Filipinos, Samoans, Chinese and Whites.¹² The situation in this school is that the majority of students have mixed ethnic origins, for instance, Pollack labels one girl the 'the five-ethnicity girl.'¹³ In the Norwegian context, mixed ethnicities are not that widespread, probably due to the marriage patterns of Pakistanis and some African groups, who prefer to marry their cousins or other close kin. In other words, endogamy is quite common connected to same caste- and religious affiliations.

4. Conclusion

The Norwegian teachers' postulation of children being colour-blind and the children's under-communication of the relevance of skin colour may be read as an expression of the Norwegian cultural ideal of equality as both sameness and equity; perhaps of political and personal ideals they hope has come true or wish will come true in the near future. Maybe it does underline the Norwegian cultural ideal of equality as both equity and sameness, while the US context primarily includes equality as equity. The American context seems to permit an explicit recognition of multiculturalism, while this is under-communicated or repressed in the Norwegian public discourse. The more complex racial classification and US students' attention to all ethnic groups being equally represented in the curriculum and elsewhere, could be read as an illustration of this. However, it seems that racial classification is a widespread phenomenon. The challenge is to accept this and find ways and words to live with racial classifications that are not discriminating, as Mica Pollock suggests in *Everyday Anti-Racism*.¹⁴

Notes

¹ Marianne Gullestad, *Kultur og Hverdagsliv* [Culture and Everyday Life] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1989).

² Marianne Lien, Hilde Liden and Hallvard Vike, *Likhetens Paradokser* [The Paradoxes of Equality] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999).

³ Barnes, John, *Models and Interpretations. Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1954]).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Duane Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *A History of Modern Psychology* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996).

⁶ David Howes, *Sensual Relations. Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).

⁷ Line Brustad and Line Midsjø, 'Barna har blitt Fargeblinde [The Children Have Become Colour-Blind]', *Verdens Gang*, 20 March 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹¹ Siri R. Svendsen and Vibeke Knoop Rachline, 'Blek is Beautiful', *A-magasinet* (8 March 2010).

¹² Mica Pollock, *Colormute* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.; Mica Pollock, *Everyday Anti-Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2008).

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The Racial Institutionalisation of Whiteness in Contemporary Canadian Public Policy

Delores V. Mullings

Abstract

Canada is recognised as the forerunner of Western multiculturalism, the first Western country to implement a national multiculturalism policy. Alongside the concept of multiculturalism, Canada has strong human right policies when compared with many other countries where citizens are routinely jailed, beaten or murdered for minor infractions or merely opposing the ideas of ruling parties. However, the demographic composition of historical and contemporary Canada is significantly different; there is an increasing racialised population. This demographic change has exacerbated racial tension while exposure of white-dominated processes and the conceptualisation of white hegemonic disposition in Canadian public policies and institutions. Therefore, white supremacy is maintained through public policies and the normalisation of institutional values based on the ethos of whiteness. The white racialisation of employment, the implementation of 'diversity' and the perpetuation of 'otherness' through systemic racial discrimination are functions and tools of exclusionary practices that are aligned with the maintenance of whiteness. These processes ultimately support the over-representation of whiteness in public spaces, distort collective realities and racialised representation, and thus render racialised people invisible. This chapter discusses two aspects of whiteness in contemporary Canada: employment discrimination and human rights redress mechanisms in the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal adjudication process. This chapter provides government statistics to substantiate the claim of institutional racial discrimination and demonstrates how public policies designed and implemented to reduce racial discrimination actually uphold the status quo and protect the foundation of whiteness in Canada.

Key Words: Institutionalised whiteness, racism, public policy, employment discrimination, human rights process, Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

1. Canada in Context

In this chapter I argue that the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal adjudication process reproduces whiteness and ultimately serves to put racialised people at a disadvantage when they seek redress within the quasi-judicial system. I begin with a brief discussion to establish a foundation depicting the processes by which the normative construction of whiteness is enacted in Canadian cultures and highlight some conditions associated with whiteness protectionism masquerading as equality and protection for all citizens under the law-and-order agenda. Many people see

Canada as a safe haven, a place of acceptance and tolerance, for those who are persecuted, harassed, marginalised and ostracised in their countries of birth.¹ It is not uncommon to hear Canadians boast about their society being non-racist, colour-blind and egalitarian, where opportunities abound and the only obstacles to success are personal weakness.² People who experience employment-related racism are blamed for having poor work ethics, lack of 'Canadian experience' or low skill levels. Essentially, then, they are blamed for being victimised; after all, to many white Canadians, racism is a *past* social ill. Racist incidents are therefore shifted from the category of racial discrimination, where they truly belong, to imaginary categories that preserve the image of Canada as a non-racist tolerant society.

Canadian white sensibilities are challenged by the perceived threat of the country becoming too 'black' (read: racialised). The threat promotes a heightened level of consciousness fuel by government statistics asserting the rapid increase in the number of racialised people in Canada. Since 1996, for example, the population of racialised people increased by 25%. In 2001 and 2006 there were 3,983,845 and 5,068,100 racialised people respectively,³ and it is projected that there will be an increase of between 11.4 million and 14.4 million by 2031.⁴ Arabs and West Asians will more than triple in number; Blacks and Filipinos will double their population, South Asians will increase from 25% to 28% and Chinese Canadians will decrease from 24% to 21% while the non-racialised population will increase by 12%. The racialised population increase also means increased numbers in the labour market, a site where racial discrimination traditionally flourishes.

White Canadians lament that racialised people (read: immigrants) are taking jobs away from Canadians (read: whites), and accusations of reverse discrimination abound.⁵ White Canadians tend to stereotype African Canadians as lazy and violent; other groups of racialised people as welfare cheats and still others as drug dealers or terrorists.⁶ These perceptions and stereotypes have motivated government to enact a more stringent law-and-order agenda, which mostly serves to criminalise Aboriginal and racialised people and results in their over-imprisonment.⁷ At the same time, crimes committed against these groups often remain unsolved, as in the case of the murdered Aboriginal women on Vancouver's East Side, the Somali youth in Calgary and countless other crimes against blacks in Toronto.⁸ Racialised bodies are regarded as throwaway bodies, often left to social and physical decay whether alive or dead. There is no urgency to attend to these bodies except to brutalise, destroy and ultimately obliterate. These are examples of the processes of whiteness that are etched and secured in Canadian society and evidenced in social norms, policies and practices.

2. The Role of Whiteness in Federal Employment Discrimination

Many racialised people are more skilled and more educated than non-racialised people in Canada, yet they continue to experience persistent under-employment

and unemployment significantly more than white Canadians.⁹ In 1984 the Canadian government concluded that structural barriers exist in the paid work environment, where racialised people experience discrimination through ‘exclusionary measures, including lack of promotion, word of mouth recruiting and selecting, requesting “Canadian Experience”, and using only white mainstream testing procedures and interviewing techniques.’¹⁰ Canada recognised the need to implement policies to deal with the employment disparities. Judge Rosalie Abella was commissioned to chair the Royal Commission on Systemic Employment Discrimination. The Commission noted that Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, women and ‘visible minorities’ experienced persistent employment discrimination and recommended the implementation of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) to recruit, promote and retain members of the four designated groups.¹¹ In addition to the EEA, the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA), the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) form the foundation of Canada’s federal jurisdiction human rights policies. The CHRA guarantees that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on various social identities, including age, race and sexual orientation. The CHRA governs the actions of the CHRC and the CHRT. The CHRC hears complaint cases based on a violation of section 7 and 14 of the CHRA. The CHRC uses various methods to resolve complaint cases, which may include mediation, arbitration, dismissal, settlement or referral to the CHRT. The CHRT is a quasi-judicial system in which complainants and respondents bring their cases before one to three adjudicators. Adjudicators’ decisions are final. The CHRC has been heavily criticised for its inability to competently and fairly litigate race-based complaint cases, the majority of which are dismissed before entering the resolution process or resolved in favour of the respondent. To a lesser extent, the Tribunal is beginning to receive attention for its equally inept process, which fails to understand the insidiousness of racism and therefore also resolves most complaint cases in favour of the respondents.

Systemic discrimination is subtle, elusive and a challenge to identify and prove. In 2000 the Federal Public Service (FPS) reported that the conditions of the pre-Abella Report continue to plague the court system in the 1990s. This is demonstrated by the 2006 Public Service Commission of Canada (PSC) report showing a persistent gap in the representation of ‘visible minorities’ in the federal government, both generally and in the executive group. This trend was reported again in 2010 and, in fact, has been the trend for all the years since statistics have been collected. This, in spite of federal legislations and programs implemented to deal with employment discrimination. More significantly, when ‘visible minorities’ file race-based complaints against their federally regulated or federal employers,

they are further marginalised by the processes and practices of whiteness carried out by gatekeepers. Employment racial discrimination in Canada continues to be a barrier for racialised people.

3. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

I use a critical race perspective to deconstruct the processes and occurrences of whiteness in the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal adjudication process. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is appropriate for exploring the quasi-judicial process based on the court of law without the pomp and pageantry. Proponents espouse that in any legal procedure race must be centralised in order to make visible the inherent power imbalance and systems of dominance that control and distort realities. With this premise, I reviewed complaint cases resolved between 1995 and 2005 through the CHRT adjudication process. My selection criterion were: employment-related complaint cases filed on the grounds of race, colour or ethnicity by a ‘visible minority,’ defined by the EEA as ‘non-white in colour and not Aboriginal in status.’¹² From a sample of 420, 16 distinct complaint cases were identified. I used a qualitative approach focusing on thematic identification, and cases were categorised and grouped according to similarities.¹³

4. Canadian Human Rights Tribunal White Hegemonic Discourse

The discourse of whiteness remains a foundation in the Tribunal adjudication process. I identified institutional discourses at the Tribunal as *legitimising elements* that contribute to the repeated racial discrimination in the CHRT adjudication processes. For the purpose of this analysis, *affirming organisational norms, values and expectations* will be used to demonstrate reproduction of whiteness in hiring institutional processes and the Tribunal adjudication process. Other discourses identified in the research include *constructing a guilty complainant, normalising racism* and *failing to recognise the possibility of everyday racist practices* however, these will not be discussed in this chapter. The Canadian work environment is constructed around the patterns of social behaviour of able-bodied white middle-class male heterosexual. These patterns are deeply entrenched in organisational cultures. Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, including tone of voice and facial expressions, are important aspects of organisational norms and values. Members of racialised groups can be marginalised because they do not fit into the politically dominant, Amer-Euro patterns of behaviour. In one complaint case, the adjudicator documented employer-selection norms and values of identifying ‘soft skills’ in potential employees. The adjudicator wrote:

According to Ms. Demeda, the interview was designed to assess whether candidates had the “soft skills” necessary to allow them to do the job. She described “soft skills” as: “... skills that you can’t train somebody on. It’s the willingness to work, being able

to co-operate and work as part of a team, being motivated, enthusiastic, having a good work ethic.” Ms. Demeda assessed the candidate’s “soft skills” by the way the candidate answered questions, the way in which the candidate spoke about his or her current position, their attitude and whether they demonstrated that they were able to work as part of a team.

Another interviewer identified leadership skills, and verbal and non-verbal communications as important skills for potential employees. Apparently,

Mr. Chiappetta testified that he was looking for leadership, explaining that “... if people are motivated to move up in the company, leadership skills would help them in achieving that.” He was also looking for candidates with good communication skills, who had the ability to work under time constraints. In assessing the candidate’s suitability for the position, Mr. Chiappetta would consider factors such as the way the person spoke when answering questions, as well as the individual’s body language. [Premakumar case]

Based on the employers’ values and expectations of the interviewing candidates, this individual was not offered the position he applied for. He was said to lack the ‘soft skill’ needed for the job, this in spite of clear documentation of his leadership abilities, motivation and collaborative engagements. The construction of whiteness in hiring process is evident. This racist discourse was struck down with a ruling in favour of the complainant. This was a rare occasion, given that most race-based cases that appear before the Tribunal are resolved in favour of the respondent.

In another hiring process, one involving Mr. Lincoln, an African Canadian candidate, numerous irregularities were apparent. For example, two candidates were asked a technical question (about a watertight door on a sea vessel). Mr. Lincoln responded by referring to ‘relevant provision of the *Canada Shipping Act*’ and offered his interpretation, but added that if he was incorrect or was instructed otherwise, he would discontinue this practice. The respondents and employers, represented respectively by Mr. Cormier and Mr. Stevenson, disagreed with Mr. Lincoln’s response and identified his practice as a ‘serious safety issue’ that ‘could not be justified.’ The adjudicator’s report reflected Mr. Cormier and Mr. Stevenson’s perception that suggested that:

Mr. Lincoln’s answers showed a lack of understanding of the purpose of watertight doors. He also thought that Mr. Lincoln took too strong a position of wanting to defend this practice. This indicated that Mr. Lincoln may not initially be receptive to

change. This could be a problem because of the need facing Bay Ferries to manage a major change in operational practices. [Lincoln case]

Mr. Lewis, a white male candidate, was unable to answer the same technical question that Mr. Lincoln responded to. 'He was not sure what the regulation required and said so,' stated Mr. Cormier and Mr. Stevenson. The adjudicator reported that the two men 'appreciated his honesty' but also highlighted the difference in how the two men were received in regard to their individual response to the question. The adjudicator wrote:

Interestingly, Mr. Lewis was marked up for his honest ignorance, but Mr. Lincoln was marked down even though he knew the regulation, but interpreted it differently. The answer which was less significant was Mr. Lincoln's response that basically he had no weaknesses. Mr. Cormier felt that perhaps this attitude could be an obstacle to change. [Lincoln case]

Evident in this example is the different expectation and the higher standards of scrutiny that racialised Canadians are held to. The white candidate is applauded for his ignorance and the black candidate is criticised for his interpretation and labelled for his confidence and flexibility. As documented in other research where racialised Canadians report similar employment practices in corporate Canada, it is clear that such a display of white values is not unusual.

While the adjudicator acknowledged the different treatment given the two applicants, she did not acknowledge the conflicting statements of the complainant and the respondent. The complainant articulated his willingness to change if he was in error or if the company wanted him to change his practice, but the respondent interpreted his response as 'too strong a position,' 'lack of understanding,' 'not receptive to change' and 'attitude could be an obstacle.' These are norms and values that are based on white expectations of African Canadians and that are used to justify not hiring or not promoting racialised people. None of these concerns have any documented justification, nor do they address the complainant's skill, competency and ability; instead they stereotype him as potentially problematic and having an attitude problem. Canadian politicians and immigration policies used similar rationales to bar Black Caribbean women from entering Canada, stating that they were 'inassimilable.'

5. Conclusion

The major contention with hiring and selection and the CHRT adjudication process is the ethos of whiteness that permeates norms and values. The employers, managers and their agents are predominantly white men and women. The

adjudicators in the cases analysed were exclusively white men and women, except in one instance. All but one was from the legal profession. Their experiences living with unearned white privilege, their education and training as judges and lawyers and their perception that racial discrimination is unnatural and abnormal in Canada are all barriers to their ability to understand racism as it is experienced by racialised Canadians. It is well documented that race-based complaint cases are resolved or successful less frequently than sexual complaint cases, for example.¹⁴ This suggests that adjudicators understand the nature of sexual discrimination so they are able to process the cases more competently, but the same does not hold true for cases of racial discrimination. And if the CHRT continues to appoint white people from the legal profession, then racialised people will continue to be under-represented as adjudicators. The Diversitycity Report notes that only 2,700, or 14.4 per cent, racialised lawyers are in the Greater Toronto area, which comprises 49.5 per cent of racialised people.¹⁵ The legal profession 'is a core institution of democracy. A well-represented system has a major impact on access to justice and its perceived fairness.'¹⁶ Therefore, racialised Canadians will continue to feel the effects of white-dominated norms, values and expectations both in the work environment and in human rights processes until overall changes are made to include them as decision-makers in all aspects of society.

Notes

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Emotions of White Racism

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Abstract

Emotions are critical to how race is experienced and thus are integral to the process of understanding whiteness. Furthermore, emotions are linked to white people's behaviours and are vital to the development of racial justice allies. Drawing from the interdisciplinary critical whiteness studies literature and my own empirical research, in this chapter I develop a preliminary taxonomy of the emotions of white racism and white antiracism. First, I describe the emotions of white racism, which include white fear, white rage and white guilt and shame. Then I explain how white empathy serves as a bridge emotion between white racism and white antiracism. Next, I draw from emerging research to articulate the emotions of white antiracism, which include moral outrage, joy, hope, and compassion. Finally I explain how the emotions of racism taxonomy might be used by scholars who address whiteness in their research, as well as teachers and practitioners who work directly with white individuals to enhance their cultural sensitivity.

Key Words: Emotions of racism, white guilt, white fear, empathy, white antiracism, social justice education.

1. Introduction

I have been thinking about whiteness and the emotions of white racism since 1995, when I first learned that I was white. I enrolled in my first graduate course in counselling psychology with a renowned professor, Robert Carter. His course, which focused on racism and psychotherapy, was extremely challenging both intellectually and emotionally, and I never worked harder than I did in his class. During one lecture, the particular topic of which I cannot recall, a white male student stood up among the 85 or so students in the lecture hall, screamed, 'I can't take this shit,' and stormed out, never to return. At that moment, I thought to myself, 'Wow! That's what I want to study.' Unbeknownst to me at the time, the young man's emotional outburst set the stage for my research agenda on whites' racial attitudes generally, and on emotions of racism.

Emotions are central to how race is experienced in the United States and thus are integral to the process of understanding whiteness.¹ In addition to being a central component of racial attitudes, emotions may have important consequences for white people's behaviours.² Research suggests, for example, that anger about potential cross-racial interactions predicts avoidance of future cross-racial interactions.³ Notably, scholars have argued that emotions are vital to the development of racial justice allies.⁴ Consistent with Paolo Freire's transformative

pedagogy, affect is an essential ingredient of social justice education and developing students' critical consciousness.⁵ Many academicians, however, are not trained to recognise or manage emotions in the classroom and thus may encounter obstacles when teaching white students about racism and white privilege. My own research program on the psychosocial costs of racism to whites, in which I examine consequences for dominant group members in a system of white supremacy,⁶ has suggested a variety of emotions of white racism (and white antiracism) that are consistent with the extant literature. Therefore a logical next step that could aid in recognising the emotions of white racism would be to categorise various emotional responses that have been documented in my research and in the extant literature. For this chapter, I focus on the emotions of white racism in three parts. First, I draw from the existing literature in psychology, sociology and education primarily in the US context to introduce a preliminary taxonomy of the emotions of white racism. This is my primary focus, to which I devote most of my time. Second, I draw from emerging research to discuss briefly the emotions of white antiracism. In closing, I discuss the implications of the emotions of white racism and white antiracism for praxis and research.

2. White Fear

I begin by discussing the emotions of white fear. Fear and anxiety are among the most common feelings that white students experience when learning about racism.⁷ I refer to this fear and anxiety as white fear, which includes fear of learning the truth that white privilege is unearned and fear of losing such privilege.⁸ It also involves visceral fear and mistrust of people of colour, particularly black and latino men in the US.⁹ My quantitative research has been concerned with this aspect of white fear, which I have found to be associated with lower levels of racial awareness, cultural sensitivity and diversity appreciation. We also found that irrational fear and mistrust of people of colour is linked to lack of cross-racial contact or friendships. High levels of racial colour-blindness and prejudice are prevalent among whites high in white fear. Interestingly, my colleagues and I found that white fear mediates the association between multicultural knowledge and multicultural competence - this means that regardless of the level of knowledge that white counsellors attain in various diversity-related courses and practica, counselling psychology educators must address their irrational fear of people of colour if we are to enhance their competence in working effectively with clients from diverse racial backgrounds. Certainly, this has implications for white teachers in classrooms with racially diverse students.

Other aspects of white fear involve anxiety about appearing racist or offending others and fear of facing one's own racism.¹⁰ Capturing the intensity of this aspect of white fear, Beverly Tatum states, 'Fear is a powerful emotion, one that immobilises, traps words in our throats, and stills our tongues ... when we are afraid it seems that we cannot think, we cannot speak, we cannot move.'¹¹ White

fear also includes a fear of a revolution by people of colour, which Perry refers to as fear of black retribution through violence against whites.¹² Although white individuals may be less likely to discuss fear of a revolution in interview settings, future research is warranted because this deep-seated anxiety may be linked to the post-Obama Tea Party movement in the US. Considering the various aspects of white fear, scholars have identified it as a major impediment to racial awareness and racial justice, and urge for research investigation to attain a deeper understanding of this constellation of emotions.¹³

3. White Rage

Goodman explained that sometimes fear manifests differently, such as expressions of hostility and rage, especially among white men.¹⁴ I refer to these key emotions of white racism as white rage. This category of emotions comprises frustration, anger and racial resentment. Expressions of white rage emerge in the classroom, are readily available in commercial and popular media and are especially evident these days in weblogs. For example, after the discontinuation of the University of Illinois' racialised mascot, my colleagues and I examined weblog posts of racial microaggressions that targeted American Indians.¹⁵ Just one of the many examples of white rage was, 'Native Americans should just shut up and fiddle their little hands with glee that a university decided to abuse them. Damn the Natives.' Fitting in this constellation of emotions, Feagin identified intense negative feelings toward people of colour in his white racial frame, which include racial hatred, arrogance, sense of superiority and desire for dominance; furthermore, he explains that these emotions often appear in conjunction with negative stereotyping.¹⁶

Scholars have linked white rage to racial resentment and to whites positioning themselves as victims in a post-civil rights US.¹⁷ White rage ranges from frustration about a perceived climate of political correctness to anger at what is perceived to be racialised people whining about racial injustice.¹⁸ On campus, white rage manifests in many ways. In one study at the University of Connecticut, researchers documented the ways in which white male faculty members intensely opposed a course on 'White Racism.'¹⁹ Finally, bell hooks discusses the rage that erupts among white students in the classroom when they learn that black students have gazed upon their whiteness, thus troubling their notions of a racially colour-blind society.²⁰

4. White Guilt and Shame

Receiving much empirical attention in recent years, white guilt represents a crucial emotion of racism that emerges among whites who attain some awareness of racism and white privilege. In the psychological literature on emotions in general, guilt is considered to motivate some people to action to alleviate negative feelings.²¹ With regard to race-related guilt, or white guilt, conceptual writings and

empirical research have both suggested that white guilt can indeed be linked to cultural competence and social action.²² For example, my colleagues and I found that counsellors who were high in white guilt were more likely to address racial and cultural factors when conceptualising the cause of a client's concerns. Summarizing their program of research on white guilt, Iyer, Leach and Pederson explained that guilt can predict particular action, such as promoting an apology or material compensatory efforts.²³ However they cautioned that white guilt is infrequent, self-focused (i.e., the action involved serves the purpose of making the white person feel better), and does not predict non-compensatory race-related policies such as equal opportunity programs.

Others, too, critique the construct of white guilt. Scholars have observed that white guilt is a middle-class emotion and seen much less often among working-class whites.²⁴ Furthermore, educators argue that white guilt recenters whiteness in the classroom, thus shifting the focus away from racialised students' experiences. This recentering of whiteness may prevent white students from learning about racism and white privilege, and serves to maintain the status quo.²⁵ My research indicates that the nature of white guilt depends on the context.²⁶ One of my current projects involves teasing apart the various dimensions of white guilt to determine whether some aspects are productive (i.e., linked to accountability) and others are maladaptive (i.e., impede racial awareness and social action). Regardless, on the basis of my research program and teaching courses such as 'Whiteness and the University,' I agree with Helms and McKinney that guilt may be an important part of the process for whites to become racially conscious and is an area that deserves further attention.²⁷

Closely related to white guilt, some scholars have discussed white shame. Scholars have critiqued researchers for conflating white guilt and shame, and suggest that some of the maladaptive elements of white guilt might in fact be white shame. In the general psychological literature (not necessarily pertaining to race), shame has been differentiated from guilt in several important ways: (a) shame involves a negative evaluation of one's whole being, whereas guilt is linked to a particular behaviour; (b) shame is linked to feeling worthless, powerless and unlovable; and (c) whereas guilt may motivate reparative action, shame does not appear to do so.²⁸ Thandeka explains that with white shame nothing can be done for retribution, because nobody did anything wrong.²⁹ Having now described white fear, white rage, and white guilt and shame, I transition to white empathy, which is an emotion that ties white racism with white antiracism.

5. White Empathy

White empathy refers to understanding the pain that people of colour experience as a result of racial oppression. It is an emotion that educators suggest we foster among white students. Operationalised as anger and sadness about the existence of racism in my quantitative research, white empathy has been associated

with higher levels of racial awareness, cultural sensitivity, appreciation of diversity, prior multicultural education and more racially diverse friends. Our work suggests that white empathy is necessary but not sufficient. In other words, some students may feel bad that racism exists and even agree that it is harmful to people of colour, but they lack any sense of accountability. A number of my white student research participants declared, 'I didn't own slaves, my parents didn't own slaves and my grandparents didn't own slaves. Racism is bad, but it's not my fault [or my problem]!' Feagin and Vera posit three stages of white empathy, which include sympathy, empathy and autopathy.³⁰ Sympathy refers to the most limited stage in which white individuals develop a passing interest in the lives of racialised people, whereas empathy is a more consistent and developed ability to understand racialised individuals' feelings. Feagin and Vera describe the third stage, autopathy, as one in which white individuals deliberately place themselves in situations to gain a first hand feeling of what it is like to be oppressed. Of all the emotions of white racism that I have discussed thus far, autopathy seems most closely aligned with the emotions of white antiracism, to which I now turn my attention.

6. Emotions of White Antiracism

In addition to the deep sense of empathy (or autopathy) described above, the emotions of white *antiracism* include moral outrage or indignant antiracism, compassion, joy and hope.³¹ Similar to white guilt, moral outrage refers to feelings of anger and frustration about the existence of racial injustice. However, no self-blame is involved in moral outrage, and reparations are sought from a sense of justice rather than from a need to feel better about oneself. Although not directly related to race, research on moral outrage suggests it is a stronger predictor than guilt of support for social justice efforts.³² Jensen and others argue that more moral outrage is needed among whites - whites should be as outraged about racism as people of colour - and thus more research is warranted.³³ One of my students is conducting a master's thesis, for instance, in which she examines the perspectives of white students at the University of Illinois who exhibit some antiracist characteristics.³⁴ These students, high in white empathy and productive forms of guilt, expressed moral outrage about a number of campus diversity issues. In her findings, for example, these white students noted they were extremely dissatisfied with the lack of administrative response to racial-themed parties for which white students dress up as negative stereotypes of racialised groups. They also expressed outrage at dress codes at the local bars that discriminate against young black men. Although the journey from white racism to white antiracism (e.g. learning the truth about historical and contemporary social inequality) is painful, scholars have documented the feelings of joy on the other side.³⁵ In a qualitative study among 18 white antiracists, Smith and Redington found that participants felt 'a sense of integrity,' 'peace of mind,' 'joyful feeling of connection to humanity' and sense of

‘moral fulfilment’ as a result of their antiracism.³⁶ Furthermore, white antiracists in this study reported experiencing a sense of authenticity, pleasure and relief, so much so that they wanted to advertise the good feeling to other whites. Finally, they reported feeling hope for future generations - for a better world with less racism and greater humanity for all.

7. Implications for Practice and Research

Now that I have shared a preliminary taxonomy of the emotions of white racism and antiracism, I briefly turn my attention to its implications. Because the emotions of white racism and antiracism are many and varied and because they are linked to behaviours, educators must learn to recognise and manage them in the classroom.³⁷ My hope is that naming and categorising these varied emotions may assist educators, who in many fields are not trained to deal with white students’ emotional intensity and may feel overwhelmed, incompetent and misunderstood.³⁸ Moreover, they might misread the emotions of white racism as apathy or indifference. Those of us who teach about racism and whiteness will not succeed if we are not prepared to deal with white students’ deep-seated fear and hostility. Some recommendations include:

1. We must prepare white students for experiencing a range of emotions as they learn about racism and white privilege - we can normalise and validate the process.
2. As educators, we must be aware that strong emotional responses among students interfere with their ability to process cognitive information.
3. White faculty must take responsibility for teaching white students about racism. We know that white role models are important in the development of white racial allies. And it is not reasonable to put the onus on racialised faculty.
4. To address white fear and reliance on stereotypes, educators and administrators should create settings that foster meaningful friendships across differences. This might be accomplished in the classroom and in the larger university setting such as in the residence halls.

In a world in which colour-blind racial ideology is pervasive among white individuals who are socialised to deny or minimise racism, we must be prepared to deal with the variety and depth of feeling that we may unearth when the truth wakes them up.

Notes

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White Melancholia and Swedish Whiteness: The Mourning of the Loss of ‘Old Sweden’ and the Passing of ‘Good Sweden’

Tobias Hübinette and Catrin Lundström

Abstract

After the recent election in Sweden in 2010, the racist party the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) has entered the national parliament. The post-election discussions as well as the academic analyses tend to explain this new presence of a racist party in the Swedish parliament as a reflection of a feeling of dissatisfaction among certain voter segments without taking into account any analysis of issues of race and whiteness. At the same time, an explosive eruption of official antiracism has taken place among the elites and within the Swedish establishment. This chapter argues that Sweden is at the moment subjected to the double-binding power of Swedish whiteness in the sense that the passing of ‘old Sweden’, that is Sweden as a homogeneous society, and of ‘good Sweden,’ that is Sweden as a progressive society, are both perceived to be threatened by the presence of non-white migrants and their descendants. In the end according to this critical race and whiteness studies analysis of the state of contemporary Sweden, both the reactionary and racist camp and the progressive and antiracist camp are mourning the crisis of this double-edged Swedish whiteness. This chapter offers an analysis of how white privileges can be maintained in a country like Sweden, in which progressive social policies, gender equality and official antiracism are otherwise hegemonic.

Key Words: Whiteness, Sweden, Swedishness, mourning, melancholia.

1. Swedish Whiteness Under Siege

After the last election in Sweden in September 2010, the racist party the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) has entered the national parliament with 6 percent of the electorate and 20 MPs. The post-election debates as well as the academic analyses explain this new presence of the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish parliament as a reflection of a deepening feeling of dissatisfaction among certain voter segments. Ever since, a reaction that can almost be likened to an explosive and hysterical eruption of antiracism has taken place within the establishment, in the media, within academia, and in the cultural sphere. What seems to be at stake is a desire to explain the rise of this racist party as solely being a result of ‘dissident’ male working-class voters, and anger that Sweden is no longer a country without a racist party in the parliament. However, a critical race and whiteness studies analysis of post-election Sweden has not yet been undertaken. This chapter challenges this absence, and offers an analysis of how

whiteness and white privileges can be maintained in a country ruled by progressive social policies, democratisation projects, gender equality and official antiracism and multiculturalism.

2. The Foundations of Swedish Whiteness

In contemporary Sweden, the idea of being white constitutes the central core and the master signifier of Swedishness and thus of being Swedish, meaning that a Swede is a white person and a non-white person is not a Swede. In other words, the difference between the bodily concept race and the cultural concept ethnicity has collapsed completely within the Swedish national imaginary as whiteness is Swedishness, and Swedishness is whiteness. This conflation between race and ethnicity and equivalence of Swedishness with whiteness is something that not only non-white migrants and their descendants are encountering but also adopted and mixed Swedes of colour with a background from South America, Africa and Asia. In spite of being more or less fully embedded within Swedishness on an ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural level, adopted and mixed Swedes of colour are experiencing racialising practices caused by their 'non-Swedish' bodies.¹

The historical background to this construction of Swedishness can be traced to the privileged position of the Swedes in relation to the historical construction of the white race itself as being the elite of *homo sapiens*, a scientific discourse that was hegemonic for almost 200 years with the idea of Swedes as being the most physically and aesthetically perfected people on earth.² The country's academic world and its scholars also excelled in and contributed substantially to race science ever since Carl Linnaeus created the first modern scientific system for race classification in the mid-1700s, Anders Retzius invented the skull or cephalic index in the 1850s which became the principal method for race science itself, and the Swedish government founded the Swedish Institute for Race Biology in 1922.³ The Swedish nation state also installed one of the most effective sterilisation programs in the world as a eugenicist project which affected more than 60,000 Swedes before the program was dissolved in the mid-1970s, and which was both racialised, heteronormative, gendered and classed.⁴

However from the 1960s and 1970s, Sweden arguably became the leading internationally recognised (Western) voice and (white) supporter of decolonisation and anti-colonial, anti-segregation and anti-apartheid movements, and the world's most radical proponent for social justice and gender equality constructing itself as a colour-blind country, thereby transforming racism into a non-Swedish issue. This highly successful nation branding promoted 'good Sweden' as being the most tolerant and liberal of all (Western) countries and (white) peoples in the world, and which among others has resulted in the fact that Swedes have adopted proportionally the most children of colour from the former colonies than any other Western country and further also that Swedes have entered into interracial marriages and relationships at a much higher degree than other Western nations as

Sweden imagined itself as being a non-racist and post-racial utopia with no colonial past.

Recently, Swedish whiteness has also developed in relation to Sweden as an immigration country. It is of course mainly the eight percent or 700,000 of the total population of Sweden which has an origin from a non-European and postcolonial so-called Third World country in Asia, Africa or South America, which in everyday life as well as in the public sphere and in the political discourse is categorised as 'immigrants,' 'foreigners' and 'non-Swedes' and oftentimes also marked as non-Christian or at least as non-Lutheran. Immigrants from non-Western countries started to arrive in Sweden in smaller numbers from the 1950s but the majority arrived from the second half of the 1970s and particularly in the 1980s and onwards when refugee immigration took over from labour immigration, and that is of course and not coincidentally also the time when integration started to be described as a 'failed' project. Non-white and non-Christian immigrants have dominated immigration to Sweden since the 1990s.

When it comes to discrimination of migrants and their descendants, and particularly of the various non-white and non-European groups, Sweden does not differ substantially from any other Western country of today. Especially regarding residential segregation, Sweden even stands out among other Western countries as having perhaps the most extreme racial segregation pattern. It is in light of this history that Swedish whiteness has evolved together with the image of Sweden which developed during the course of the Cold War and at the time of decolonisation and the social revolution of 1968, namely the idea that Sweden is the paradise on earth and the accomplished utopia for human rights, democracy, gender equality and antiracism, and where race as a concept and as a category has accordingly been made completely irrelevant and obsolete.

3. The Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness

With these foundations of Swedish whiteness as a background, this chapter argues that whiteness is a pivotal analytical concept to understand the recent Swedish election. Within this analysis, Swedish whiteness includes racists as well as antiracists, and in the end all Swedes regardless of political views. This Swedish whiteness is similar to the hegemonic whiteness that Matthew Hughey talks about in his interviews with white antiracists and white racists in the US, and where he finds that beyond the ideological statements there are many similarities between the groups in terms of white perspectives and privileges.⁵ Complicity when it comes to the construction and upholding of Swedish whiteness is furthermore in the end on all sides, including migrants who have believed in and fed the image of Sweden, as the most solidarian and antiracist country in the world. This includes the numerous non-Swedes who have desired and are looking for (white) Swedes as partners and friends just because they are (white) Swedes and thereby the most beautiful and genetically valuable people on earth according to the logics of the

Nordic race myth. Third World solidarity and antiracism has in other words gone hand in hand with white superiority and white homogeneity. It is these two images of Sweden as a homogenous and white society which the Sweden Democrats are mourning the loss of, and which make them produce hate towards migrants of colour, and the passing of Sweden as a solidarian and progressive society which white antiracists are anxious to keep alive and which has provoked such a strong reaction among the Swedish elites after the election.

Central to this analysis is also an understanding of whiteness as a category that constantly recruits new members.⁶ Boundaries of whiteness have always been reconstructed and included new. In the US, Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans are the most common examples of this re-formation of whiteness. This process opens up for a possibility for previous Others to be part of the powerful category of whiteness. In the recent Swedish election, class differences were accordingly blurred by the expanding boundaries of whiteness and white people from diverse class and cultural backgrounds could join together around the notion of Swedish whiteness regardless of being of native or foreign origin, through what David Roediger has called the wages of whiteness.⁷

This means that race and racism are not just an effect of class inequalities and something that necessarily would disappear in a classless society. Moreover, it provides a tool for understanding the class-crossing practices found among the Sweden Democrats' voters. Such cross-class patterns also need to be viewed in a contemporary understanding of economic politics, which is no longer just governed by class positions. 'Even in Sweden,' as Allen Pred formulated it in 2000, economic politics are also racial politics. This finally explains why many Sweden Democrats are migrants or descendants of migrants coming from white, Western and Christian countries.⁸

4. Swedish Gender Equality and Whiteness

A central aspect of the construction of 'good Sweden' is linked to the generous welfare state and the achievements in gender equality. Sweden has, along with other Scandinavian countries, therefore been regarded as exceptionally 'woman-friendly' and has been ranked as one of the most gender-equal societies in the world. This is an ideal that also has been exported to other (Third World) countries through international development aid. However, the institutionalised gender equality discourse carries with it a sense of national identity which is intimately intertwined with whiteness and racial hierarchies and which excludes migrants as Others in relation to the very notion of gender equality.⁹

In order to maintain the perceived unique Swedish construction of gender equality, non-whites are depicted as the 'non-gender equal,' in conjunction with a discourse of the 'Others' oppression.' For Swedish white gender equality to be able to exist, some-*body* is expected not to be Swedish, gender equal and white.¹⁰ Gender equality in its idyllic shape is represented by the white heterosexual family,

which not only depicts the migrants as patriarchal but furthermore seems to justify any relegation of the 'Others,' in the private sphere primarily by the cheap labour of migrant women of colour. Using Patricia Hill Collins' analysis of the ideal family as a primary site of understanding race, gender, class and nation, the white family model is a site where notions of first- and second-class citizenship, territory, 'home,' blood-ties, race, and nation are naturalised.¹¹ This white heterosexual family ideal is upheld by segregation, discrimination, a racialised nationalism and anti-immigration policies. This implies that feminists should remain sceptical towards the Swedish ideal associated with the construction of the gender equal family, as it builds upon and reproduces the social, discursive and geographical place of the 'Others,' often acted out as racialised integration through subordinating practices.

5. White Mourning and Melancholia

This chapter has hitherto discussed some of the contemporary aspects of whiteness related to today's Sweden. The chapter takes into account the normalised and naturalised hierarchies surrounding Swedishness and the double-binding power of Swedish whiteness through the mourning of the loss of 'old Sweden' and the passing of 'good Sweden.' This hypothesis may explain the hysterical post-election anger among the 'progressives' due to the 'reactionaries' electoral success, which during the election campaign rallied under the slogan '*Ge oss Sverige tillbaka*' ('Give us Sweden back'), a slogan that both sides can in the end identify with. This may also explain why the antiracist movement in Sweden is so heavily dominated by white Swedes contrary to the situation in North America and the UK where the antiracist movement is strongly composed of representatives from the minorities themselves, as well as why white Swedish feminists identifying with what other scholars have called hegemonic feminism can sometimes ally themselves with racist ideologies.¹²

The Sweden Democrats' longing back to 'old Sweden' is expressed as a wish to return to the time when there were no ethno-racial conflicts as well as no non-Western 'patriarchal excesses,' and what is under threat for the white antiracists is the image of Sweden as an antiracist as well as a feminist country. In the end, all these self-images are felt to be threatened by the presence of non-Western migrants. It is this double-binding force of both having been on the top of the world as the most progressive and left-liberal country and of having perceived itself to have been the most racially homogenous and pure population of all white nations that makes it almost impossible to deconstruct Swedish whiteness or to transform Swedishness into something else within which also people of colour will be accepted and treated as Swedes. When the object of love is threatened, under siege or even on its way of being lost forever, meaning both antiracist Sweden and homogenous Sweden at the very same time, there is nothing left but an unspeakable melancholia filled with limitless pain. Furthermore, the problem with

the mourning of 'the lost Sweden' is that it excludes groups who did not live in Sweden at that perceived time period, or who do not have biological ties to the 'founders' of the Swedish solidarity ethos. Thus, directly and indirectly the image of the left-liberal, antiracist and solidaristic Sweden is constructed around a sense of a white homogenous past when diversity was not present.

In other words, the recent election took place at a time when Sweden is wracked by white mourning and melancholia for no longer being the whitest of all white countries in the world, and by white regression and nostalgia for not being in full control anymore, and therefore yearning to return to the safe days of white homogeneity when it was easier to both be a racist and an antiracist. The romanticising of a white homogenous past, constructed around the welfare state, and a longing for a homogenous future when hybridity has been erased, constitutes the common character for this white melancholia. This specific Swedish white melancholia, that is so painful to bear but yet unspeakable, is something of a psychic state of the nation and a structure of feeling connected to the self-image of Sweden among Swedes as well as the image of Sweden in the world. It is thus as much about the humiliating loss of Sweden as the most solidaristic, humanitarian and antiracist country in the world as about the mourning of the passing of the Swedish population as being the whitest of all white peoples.

In the future, to begin with a disentanglement between Swedishness and whiteness is absolutely necessary to be able to deconstruct a Swedishness that does not allow non-white Swedes to be Swedish and that trap white Swedes in this melancholic state through the double-edged images of 'old Sweden' and 'good Sweden.' The hope for the future is therefore that a transformative moment will come true which will allow the mourning of the passing of 'old Sweden' and 'good Sweden' to project itself towards a more constructive understanding of the future of Swedishness. However, in order to be able to accomplish and reach this moment of transformation it is absolutely necessary to acknowledge the fact the object of love is irretrievably and irrevocably lost forever how painful that may be to take in and accept.

Notes

¹ Tobias Hübinette and Carina Tigervall, 'To Be Non-White in a Colour-Blind Society: Conversations with Adoptees and Adoptive Parents in Sweden on Everyday Racism', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30 (2009); Catrin Lundström, "'Concrete Bodies": Young Latina Women Transgressing the Boundaries of Race and Class in White Inner-City Stockholm', *Gender, Place and Culture* 17 (2010); Lena Sawyer, 'Routings: Race, African Diasporas, and Swedish Belonging', *Transforming Anthropology* 11 (2002).

- ² Maja Hagerman, *Det Rena Landet. Om Konsten Att Uppfinna Sina Förfäder* [The Pure Country. On the Art of Inventing Ancestors] (Stockholm: Prisma, 2006); Katarina Schough, *Hyberboré. Föreställningen Om Sveriges Plats I Världen* [Hyperbole. The Image of Sweden's Place in the World] (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2008).
- ³ Gunnar Broberg, *Statlig Rasforskning. En Historik över Rasbiologiska Institutet* [State-Run Race Science. A History of the Institute for Race Biology] (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1995).
- ⁴ Mattias Tydén, *Från Politik Till Praktik. De Svenska Steriliseringslagarna 1935-1975* [From Policy to Practice. The Swedish Sterilization Laws 1935-1975] (Stockholm: Fritzes, 2000).
- ⁵ Matthew W. Hughey, 'The (Dis)similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of "Hegemonic Whiteness"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33 (2010).
- ⁶ France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher, 'The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the "Third Wave"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (2009); Jonathan Warren and France Winddance Twine, 'White Americans, the New Minority?: Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness', *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (1997).
- ⁷ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).
- ⁸ Allen Pred, *Even in Sweden: Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and the Popular Geographical Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- ⁹ Suvi Keskinen, Salla Tuori, Sari Irni and Diana Mulinari, eds., *Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari, *Intersektionalitet. Kritiska Reflektioner över (O)jämlighetens Landskap* [Intersectionality. Critical Reflections on the Landscape of (In)equality] (Malmö: Liber, 2005).
- ¹⁰ Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- ¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins, 'It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation', *Hypatia* 13 (1998).
- ¹² Mia Liinasson, 'Institutionalized Knowledge: Notes on the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender Studies in Sweden', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 18 (2010); De los Reyes and Mulinari, *Intersektionalitet*.

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I Once Was Lost But Now I'm Found: Exploring the White Feminist Confessional

Emily R. M. Lind

Abstract

This chapter explores the confessional trope within critical white studies. In particular, I focus on feminist texts that explore whiteness, contending that theoretical discussions often centre white racism instead of whiteness due to the premise on which the study of whiteness is undertaken. Nearly all feminist texts on whiteness written by white authors begin their examination with an autobiographical narrative from the author, wherein she traces her transition from white racist to white anti-racist in order to situate her work within her personal experience of privilege. The personal narrative figures prominently in white feminist analyses of gender, and has been used strategically to voice an otherwise silenced experience of gender subordination. However, when applied to discussions of (white) privilege, the feminist personal narrative becomes misplaced. Theoretical tools designed to analyse subordination are being applied to instances of privilege, and the result is a body of work that approaches its subject with both ambivalence and tension. I argue that the study of whiteness needs to be situated within a methodology that foregrounds relationships of social and economic class given the racial category's place within the history of western industrial capitalism and empire-building. To do this, I build upon Celia Haig-Brown's notion of the 'decolonizing autobiography' by adding material culture to the list of topics through which the autobiography is crafted. I argue that materiality grounds our experiences and auto-narratives within a framework that fosters class consciousness, and from that standpoint, white subjectivity is most responsibly engaged.

Key Words: Feminism, whiteness, feminist anti-racist, white feminism, autobiography, consciousness, positionality, decolonising research.

It seemed like doing nothing would be racist and whatever we did would be racist just because we [white women] did it ... Am I racist if I decide to do nothing? If I decide to refuse to work with other white women on our racism? ... What is this 'being white' that gets me into so much trouble after so many years of seeming to me to be so benign?¹

[The] collective practice of self-reflection and self-affirmation stands at the core of integrative feminist practice. [In the

consciousness-raising tradition,] intellectual understandings emerged from careful analytical attention to expressed emotions and feelings.²

Writing about whiteness has a reputation for being a risky undertaking. As the opening statement by Frye attests, the idea that one could get 'found out' for being racist appears to be threatening enough that scholars are deterred from addressing the issue entirely. Cynthia Levine-Rasky has gone so far as to characterise the study of whiteness as a project 'organised in tension.'³ Rather than try to overcome that tension, Levine-Rasky proposes that scholars 'endeavor to work *through* whiteness ... actively embrac[ing] the complexity, the contradictions, the doubt, the errors, the risks, the fear immanent in such questions'⁴ Levine-Rasky's contention is not unlike Ruth Frankenberg's assertion that when studying whiteness, there is a need to engage with a methodology that is centred around reflexive/recursive' scholarship that is embodied,⁵ and, to quote Donna Haraway, 'responsible.'⁶ Methodologically, the interventions I cite here come out of feminist traditions that insist upon experiential epistemology as a consciousness-raising and revolutionary act. One of the most common manifestations of this tradition is the now-established trope of 'situating' oneself in relation to the topic under examination. In response, many mainstream feminist texts begin with a kind of identity-politic disclaimer, wherein the author identifies which intersections of power and oppression she finds herself embodying and working through, and how that situates her intellectual contributions.

It should come, then, as no surprise that feminist engagements with the social construction of whiteness re-enact the practice of self-positioning. As I read an informal survey of mainstream feminist texts dealing with the social construction of whiteness, I noticed a dominant pattern emerging. Regardless of methodological commitment, nearly all white writers situated their commitment to the study of whiteness - and a politic of anti-racism - within their own life story. Particularly, they all did so with reference to feminist models of experience-as-knowledge.⁷ The use of personal narratives as an entry point for talking about white racialisation takes different forms. Editors and authors may include an autobiographical anecdote to frame their interest in white anti-racism,⁸ others interview white people about race and racialisation⁹ and still others edit collections that focus exclusively on personal narratives.¹⁰

The narrative used by feminist authors in the interests of practicing 'reflexive' research through self-positionality followed a general formula: the author would disclose instances of past racist behaviour, or memories from childhood where they were indoctrinated into ideologies of white supremacy. They then charted the rise of their anti-racist consciousness (often involving feminist activism, if not relationships with people of colour), a transformative 'aha' moment of awareness, and a conclusion that asserts their current political engagement in the anti-racist

struggle. By doing this, the trajectory from racist to anti-racist becomes the subject of one's essay, rather than a disciplined engagement with the concept of 'whiteness' itself. Consider a few examples: Ruth Frankenberg's introduction to her foundational *White Women, Race Matters* begins with a story about how she learned about racism through her relationship with a friend of colour. She writes,

My friend made it her business to educate me. I learned by proximity what it means to navigate through a largely hostile terrain, to deal with institutions that do not operate by one's own logic nor in one's own interest, and to need those institutions to survive.¹¹

Here, Frankenberg is not talking about the discursive history of whiteness, nor the purpose it serves ideologically, but rather, how understanding her whiteness helped her understand racism. Her book, in which she interviewed white women about race, showcases many stories of women disclosing how and where they were taught to be racist. Similarly, Vron Ware situates her interest in international solidarity movements in *Beyond the Pale* through an originary 'exotic' fascination with the 'mumbo jumbo' of Iran.¹² Marilyn Frye's essay quoted above bluntly confesses her frustration with the fact that 'whatever she did' would potentially be called racist. Katerina Deliovsky's recent book - an exceptional contribution to the Canadian conversation about whiteness - begins with disclosures of being shamed by her parents for having friends and lovers of colour.¹³

I want to make clear here that the sources I am citing are not autobiographical in genre. Rather, autobiography is relied upon as an introduction to theorising, and always with reference to a feminist tradition of self-reflection. Indeed, auto-narratives are one of the most established and celebrated tropes within feminist theory: they are linked to the consciousness-raising tradition of second wave organising, they validate the Marxist notion of a proletarian 'standpoint' and challenge traditional ways of knowing at a fundamental level. However, when employed in order to examine identities structured by white privilege and supremacy, the critical usefulness of the tradition begins to fall apart for me. In particular, disclosing (past) racist behaviour in order to engage in anti-racist praxis fails to treat racist stories as violent. Racist acts are instead treated as pedagogical when framed properly, rather than violent in-and-of themselves. Descriptions of past racism circulate unproblematically throughout writings of white anti-racist authors. Further, the bodies of people of colour move conspicuously through the narratives, offered up as opportunities for the white consciousness to develop.

Ironically, because whiteness as a racialised subject position was long ignored by white scholars, it embodies a criterion of marginality. Thus, some scholars mistakenly invest in their own history of racist thinking and action in order to identify what whiteness is. However, what this practice replicates is the voicing of

racism rather than an interrogation of whiteness itself. Further, it reifies the myth that whiteness as a subject position has stand-alone currency, first of all, and that it can be simplistically explained as the experience of benefiting from white supremacy, second. Rather than forward an exciting deconstructive agenda, feminist texts on whiteness seem imbued with a confessional narrative of reformed racism, based on the assumption that race, like gender, can be 'decoded' through autobiography. Indeed, the fact that the autobiographical tradition is being relied on is an indication to which models of theorising gender are being transplanted, rather than invigorated, in order to study race from a feminist perspective. This prevents the field from theorising the gender in race, and the race in gender, instead replicating hegemonic divisions between the two.

I find David Roediger's work on whiteness as the misrecognition of class to be a productive framework with which to address this tension. In particular, he understands whiteness as a 'terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't, and on whom one can hold back.'¹⁴ In this sense, the feminist auto-narratives I have highlighted can be read as participants in Roediger's understanding of the ideology of whiteness. They are over-invested in rejecting claims to racism, and in the process, fail to address how the ideology of whiteness operates. Roediger invites us to consider 'why people think they are white, and whether or not they will stop thinking so.'¹⁵ He uses Du Bois' notion of the psychological wage paid to white workers through racist thinking, as a way of encouraging white working class racism. Roediger asserts that 'the subjective way white workers perceive and define class is through whiteness.'¹⁶ If we take seriously Roediger's invitation, then one of the most significant ways in which we can better understand the operations of whiteness, is not to engage in processes that encourage us to reflect on our so-called experiences of whiteness, but rather, our experiences of class. More importantly, I wonder if one of the central ways through which class becomes whiteness is through the transformative mythologies of settler colonialism. My question then becomes, if whiteness is the subjective experience of class, how can we get at *those* stories? More importantly, how can infect our storytelling with an analysis of imperialism and displacement, in order to fully understand how whiteness operates?

Celia Haig-Brown offers a compelling model for reflexive research, a method she has called a 'decolonizing autobiography.'¹⁷ She notes how in discourses of diaspora, the space from which people have come is most represented in the narrative, rather than the place to which they have arrived. This trend, she cautions, risks reproducing the myth of terra nullius, a central trope used to justify imperial expansion and the hostile takeover of indigenous lands. She positions the decolonising autobiography as a way of accomplishing what James Clifford offers as a goal for the sharing of personal stories: 'to point beyond the individual into ongoing webs of relationships.'¹⁸ Haig-Brown asks, 'What does it mean to take seriously not only the land from which one comes, but the land and original people

of the place where one arrives?’¹⁹ To answer these questions, she proposes that autobiographies address the land on which one finds themselves, and then to engage in an archaeology of all the peoples who have passed through and/or continue to share that space. Haig-Brown’s framework complicates the way in which we see ourselves and our relationship to the land and the First Peoples of the land, complicates the hegemonic story of the nation (in this case the story of Canada) and establishes a respectful and accountable acknowledgment of origins. Most importantly, her work invites research practices to be grounded within this acknowledgment. Whereas conventional feminist models of autobiography privilege the articulation of a coming to political consciousness, Haig-Brown’s model is less goal-oriented and identifies key criteria for telling one’s story, privileging process over product. This compels the researcher or author to establish their life story as tied to colonial processes and begin to articulate their sense of self in relation to it. For instance, themes of land ownership, immigration patterns, racialised segregation (formal or informal), and indigeneity are invited to deliberately anchor the articulation of a lived experience, placing colonial relationships at the centre of the narrative. These themes have structured the lives of all subjects living in a place like Canada, and this model invites everyone to participate in using it. Undoubtedly, Haig-Brown’s model invites autobiographies to be told in radically different ways, particularly for subjects racialised as the majority, who are rarely invited to position themselves or their life narrative in relation to the First Peoples of the land in which they live.

Donna Haraway offers a slightly different model for situating oneself in relation to research. She advocates employing a ‘semiotic material technology’ that can interface with one’s personal narrative in order to ground the self-positionality of dominant subjects. She is critical of the tradition of feminist self-positioning because, she argues, dominant subjects cannot understand their own positions alone. She writes,

One cannot ‘be’ either a cell or a molecule - or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on - if one intends to see and see from these positions critically. ‘Being’ is much more problematic and contingent. Also, one cannot relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement. Vision is always a question of the power to see - and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted? These points also apply to testimony from the position of ‘oneself’. We are not immediately present to ourselves. Self-knowledge requires a semiotic-material technology linking meanings and bodies. Self-identity is a bad visual system.²⁰

I believe there are possibilities that are opened up by Haraway's remarks. Rather than remain trapped in models that fall apart and de-centre the object at hand, white anti-racist feminism could benefit greatly from challenging the notion that we are apparent to ourselves.

Haig-Brown's model of the decolonising autobiography is structured in such a way as to encourage one's testimony to promote equitable social relationships. I wonder what possibilities would open up if Haraway's semiotic-material technology could be infused into the elements of a decolonising autobiography. In addition to situating one's life story in relation to land and indigeneity, I would add material culture to the list of autobiographical anchors. One could imagine, for instance, a decolonised autobiography inflected with anecdotes of how ethnicity and whiteness are expressed through the material 'stuff' we choose to identify with, or that we inherit identity from. The material culture of our lives and homes not only structures subjective experience of social class, but often, traces our own experiences of ethnicity and relation to empire. Highlighting class in relation to imperialism, I believe, can further a decolonising agenda when it comes to self-reflexive research. Further, through these processes we can engage with how race and gender are lived through, and embodied, literally, in the space and place where we stand, and with the objects we hold. Engaging in a decolonising autobiography grounded in an analysis of our material lives would allow the conversation to move beyond the anxieties of whether or not one is being racist, and into narrative territories that remind us how exactly, white supremacist patriarchy relies on false consciousness.

Notes

¹ Marilyn Frye, 'On Being White', quoted in Mike Hill, ed. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997)..

² Angela Miles, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³ Cynthia Levine-Rasky, Introduction to *Working Through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, edited by Levine-Rasky (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁵ Ruth Frankenberg, 'On Unsteady Ground: Crafting and Engaging in the Critical Study of Whiteness', in *Researching Race and Racism*, eds. John Solomos and Martin Bulmer (London: Routledge, 2004), 106.

⁶ Donna Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Press, 1991), 191.

⁷ See, for example Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993);

Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (London: Verso, 1992); Chris Cuomo and Kim Hall, eds., *Whiteness: Feminist Philosophical Reflections* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

⁸ A further illustration of this trend can be found in David Roediger's book, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York and London: Verso, 1991).

⁹ For this, I think Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters* serves as a foundational text.

¹⁰ Indeed, Cuomo and Hall assert that personal narratives are 'far more risky than scholarly essays' and on that basis their book focused on auto-narratives as a methodological intervention into the philosophical study of whiteness. Cuomo and Hall, *Whiteness: Feminist Philosophical Reflections*, 7.

¹¹ Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 4.

¹² Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 22.

¹³ Katerina Deliovsky, *White Femininity: Race, Gender, and Power* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2010).

¹⁴ David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ In the interests of full disclosure, she has written about her use of the 'decolonizing autobiography' as a teaching tool in graduate level seminars at York University, where I was one of her students and indeed, participated in this practice in class.

¹⁸ James Clifford, quoted in Celia Haig-Brown, 'Decolonizing Diaspora: Whose Traditional Land Are We On?' *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry* 1, No. 2 (2009): 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 191.

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ISBN 978-1-84888-105-1

£0.00



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