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EDITORIAL: THE BORDERPOLITICS OF WHITENESS

LARA PALOMBO AND MARIA GIANNACOPOULOS

We begin this edition by acknowledging the sovereignty of the Cadigal people, upon whose land we live in Sydney, and upon whose land this ACRAWSA e-journal has been produced. However, it is against the background of the *ongoing denial* of Indigenous sovereignties as well as the unrelenting 'War on Terror', both on and off shore, that we introduce an edition of the ACRAWSA e-journal on the *Borderpolitics of Whiteness*. This edition contains a selection of papers, first presented at the *Borderpolitics of Whiteness* Conference in Sydney 2006, that contribute to discussions of the multiple ways in which borders and their attendant politics are continually transforming but still operational as white colonial power. The essays and literary work that comprise this edition bring to attention the historical formations and transformations of the borders of whiteness and the targeted violence that these processes produce through their concatenation with a politics of 'race'. The *Borderpolitics of Whiteness* has become a renewed politics of vengeance by processes that re-constitute their alignments via the regulation of the body, across local and national spaces, and across diasporic and transnational formations.

The *Borderpolitics of Whiteness* Conference, as the first official ACRAWSA Conference, brought together academics, performers and community activists to engage in a dialogue around issues pertaining to a field that we believe cannot but be controversial. The very terrain that the conference played out upon was and is,

to use Irene Watson's term, "unsettled".¹ We adopt this term and call the space of the Conference "unsettled" because this was a space constituted by diverse intents to challenge the 'borderpolitics of whiteness' as a form of power, but it was also a space invested *in* whiteness or constructed through these same borders. In other words, complex racialised relations of power persist even in spaces that have been set up to critique and dismantle them. Discussions at the Conference and at the Community Forum "The Borderpolitics of Communities: Marking Cronulla" indicated that much work still needs to be done in order to develop strategies across community and academic spaces to continue to contest colonial relations of power. We read the controversial discussions that took place at the Community Forum as testimony to the different modes of questioning 'whiteness', but also as marking the differential effects that colonialism continues to exact upon the bodies of people from various communities. The intricate web of racialised relations that were laid bare at the Forum should be placed and understood within the broader context of the complex operations of colonialism which embeds divisions and then thrives in these very climates. In saying this we are not advocating a politics of sameness or easy unities as the way forward; instead we think that insisting on mapping the various manifestations of colonial power upon different communities *and* their interconnectedness is one way to move towards racial justice in the Australian colonial landscape. We believe this to be a difficult and painful dialogue that

needs to continue as a way of negotiating, understanding, intervening in and contesting colonial power in the multiple forms that it takes. Discussions around the ways in which non-indigenous communities can engage with the politics of racism in the context of denied Indigenous sovereignties are particularly urgent and need to be continued.

We are very privileged in this issue to reproduce extracts of some highly poignant daily entries documenting life in immigration detention by Mina from *Mina's Diary* and a collection of poems powerfully crafted by esteemed writers Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf *The Veil My Body*, Tony Birch *Not Our Job and Another 113*, Anita Heiss *White and Black Poetry Readings: Distinct Differences* and Ouyang Yu *The Last Barrier*. These great works were selected by Dr Helen Koukoutsis who negotiated with each writer or their publishers, highlighting the purpose of this journal and of ACRAWSA. These works participate in current polemics of war, race, sovereignty, refugee rights and detention centres, border control, religion, white Australia and its policies. Their use of literary and poetic discourses extends, encourages, inspires and builds up links that work to interrupt dominant narratives on these issues. Meanwhile, they undo colonial 'imaginings' that affect in multiple ways all readers of this edition. It is with their gritty critical incisiveness that *whiteness studies* must connect.

In distinct ways, the essays in this edition maintain a focus on the operations of borders and whiteness through analyses of law, geopolitics, history, racial violence and citizenship. The edition opens with the articulate and critical essay by Suvendrini Perera, '*Aussie Luck*': *The Border Politics of Citizenship Post Cronulla Beach*, a paper first presented at the *Borderpolitics of Communities*

Forum in December. Perera's essay meticulously maps the ways in which citizenship is deployed as a form of internal border control and policing "across" a series of "discontinuous sites and contexts". She pinpoints "a hidden but nonetheless inexorable logic of territorialisation" that binds the racialised space of Redfern to the space of Cronulla and asks that the events of Cronulla be understood in terms of this relation. Without this there is an obfuscation of the "socio-spatial linkages that sustain Sydney as a city constituted by racialised and ethnicised borders within a neoliberal regime that both recodes and reinscribes colonial demarcations, scales and categories". Within this framework Perera engages with the heterogeneous effects of the "watershed" of Cronulla to expose the "racist hierarchies and demarcations that are...constitutive of Australia as a nation-state". Her detailed analysis of the Tamworth council's decision to refuse resettlement to Sudanese families, the decision to ban the Australian flag at the Big Day Out, the circulation of the Cronulla 2230 Board game, and the name changes of Governmental classificatory institutions, expose the "new emphasis on citizenship" as "a technology that aims to search out the enemy within". This is a project that, in making and remaking the borders between Indigenous and other racial/ethnic bodies, "extends at an official level the project of national purification undertaken at Cronulla Beach".

In an essay where the intellectual labour and analytical rigour of painstakingly dissecting elaborate documents of the U.S. state are palpable, Joseph Pugliese's *Geocorpographies of Torture* shifts the focus of the edition to the global business of empire and war. This paper, which was originally presented as a keynote address at the *Borderpolitics*

of *Whiteness* Conference, unravels and lays bare the logic that informs, enables and effectively legalises, the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Pugliese invalidates the official claim that practices of torture “have a unique nature” by establishing crucial points of connection between the practices of torture at Abu Ghraib and the U.S.’s racially supremacist history, a violent history that continues to shape and inform the contemporary U.S. nation. Pugliese argues, through his incisive analysis of the deployment of legal rationales for defending torture, that “torture is officially sanctioned along a continuum of carefully managed intensities, punctuated by levels of pain that, the reflexively disciplined torturer ‘knows’ must not go beyond that defined level of intensity that will place his or her victim within the domain of possible death”. Therefore, officially, “torture really only comes into being, paradoxically, in the death of the victim”. And it is precisely because of this violent logic, through which “Arab prisoners become metonymic adjuncts of the external terrain of Iraq”, that Pugliese insists that bodies become “the ground upon which the military operations are performed and through which control of the colonised country is secured”.

In the Australian context, the borders of the Plantation Camps of the 1860’s and the Internment Camps of World War One were violent colonial techniques that re-affirmed an anglophilic form of white diasporic and transnational power. Lara Palombo’s essay *Whose Turn is it? White Diasporic and Transnational Practices and the Necropolitics of the Plantation and Internment Camps* critically historicises the ways that the Australian Camps, by instituting forms of control “outside the law”, strengthened white (anglophilic) sovereignty and its participation in a

global colonial project. This paper specifically engages with the way in which the bordering of these camps controlled the local shifts from the position of non-white and white ‘object of labour’ to ‘political subjects’ or citizens of the nation. The essay foregrounds how these Camps within their specificities continued the colonial techniques used against Indigenous Australians to create “white sovereignty” but also, as Palombo argues, “these biopolitical and necropolitical processes have been enacted to suit the ‘global’ aims of a certain transnational form of sovereignty”.

In *Nomos Basileus: The Reign of Law in a ‘World of Violence’*, Maria Giannacopoulos tracks the points of connection between three distinct but legally enabled enactments of white sovereign power. Specifically, she draws on excerpts from the High Court Mabo judgement, Howard’s celebration of Greeks being “fully integrated” and her own experience of racial violence on a Sydney train, in order to contextualise these events in relation to the process that enables them, that is, ongoing Indigenous dispossession. She questions the claim made by scholars of whiteness studies that Southern Europeans become “fully complicit” with Indigenous dispossession by contending that “In the context of an ongoing demand to ‘integrate’ the claim of ‘full complicity’ seems to be an impossible logic” since to be “complicit” is the “unspoken script of integration”. Her analysis insists that the focus stay firmly on those sites of power that produce the violent coordinates for complicity. Howard and Brennan in Mabo are not only “fully complicit with Indigenous dispossession but they also produce the very conditions under which other communities then become implicated in ‘post-colonising’ work”.

Jennifer Nielsen's essay '*There's Always an Easy Out': How 'Innocence' and 'Probability' Whitewash Race Discrimination*' is a harsh but necessary indictment of law's ability to deal justly with questions of race discrimination. Nielsen asserts that anti-discrimination jurisprudence reproduces whiteness "because it promotes white interests and uses white standards, attitudes and behaviours to measure what is and is not legitimate". In relation to this, Nielsen argues that the non-recognition of race discrimination by the Tribunals can be understood, in part, as an effect of the application of the "the Briginshaw test", "which is a rule about the quality of evidence that can be used to make legal findings by inference". Although normative discourses of law would say a test like this affords "equality" since everyone receives the "same treatment" at law, Nielsen lays bare the racialised operations of this logic and of the test itself by positing that this test "instils the assumption that – being so 'serious' – race discrimination is unlikely to occur". This assumption is tied to "white confidence" that prevailing practices in workplaces are "race neutral". But again Nielsen dispels this logic by foregrounding the way in which Aboriginal peoples are portrayed (within the context of her interviews) as "invaders" in the "white space of the workplace". Importantly, she asserts that "this representation of Aboriginal peoples as the usurpers of territory can only be achieved through endorsing the capitalist premise of the rightful servitude of land-less labouring classes, which in this nation, is built upon the falsehood of white sovereignty".

Bi-lateral relations re-constitute the colonial national borders of Australia. Elaine Laforteza, in her essay *White Geopolitics of Neo-Colonial Benevolence: The Australia-Philippine 'Partnership'*, exposes the Australian

state as one that casts itself, "performatively" in the role of the "good neighbour", and in so doing obfuscates the way in which whiteness enables the establishment as well as the occupation of this position. In particular, Laforteza deploys Orientalism as a critical frame for foregrounding the operations of whiteness to assert that the "uneven exchange" that characterises the bilateral economic relations between Australia and the Philippines are an effect of the "distinctions expounded between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident', as well as with 'white' and 'non-white'". Through her close textual analysis of official documents that are seen to be simply between two states that are "already known", Laforteza demonstrates the way in which those documents are constitutive of the Australian state since it is the "elision of Indigeneity" that "packages Australia as a white, western centric nation". Importantly, Laforteza concludes that these omissions, along with the effacement of uneven geopolitical power relations, allow Australia to act as *though* it can legitimately contract with another state. Thus, the performance of benevolence within the region, a benevolence that continues to produce Australia as "white" is indissociable from practices of "continuing Indigenous dispossession".

The next paper is an invitation to reflect on the racial harassment and murders associated, again, with the borders of whiteness. David Singh's essay *White Subjectivity and Racial Terror: Towards an Understanding of Racial Violence* seeks to comprehend the way racial violence is the predictable outcome of a whiteness that violently negates the difference of the *other* whilst preserving the integrity of racialised space. Drawing from the work of Theo Goldberg on the "identity-in-otherness" and from Aileen Moreton-Robinson's

concept of the “possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty” Singh argues that “... It would appear that where proprietorial claims to territory are bound up with racial subjectivity, the will to self determination appears to be especially ferocious. The whiteness that is consequently given expression in the name of space, place and self is one that must force the ‘other’ away or efface entirely: racial harassment or racial murder”. Drawing from the fictive portrayal of racial violence in Hanif Kureishi’s novel, *The Black Album* (1996), from his personal experiences as a multicultural policy advisor, and from the events of December 2005 at the Cronulla Beach, Singh’s paper strongly asserts that racial violence is not exceptional or irrational, but more the logical and predictable outcome of white racial subjectivity.

The final essay of the edition posits that the abandonment of set colonial borders might not produce decolonising effects but it can operate to create a shift in the debates of the “settler nation” to envision a “decolonial” space. In her essay *Vanishing at the Border*, Robinder Kaur Sehdev argues that despite the ‘formal’ abandonment of the colonial myth of the *Maid of the Mist* of the Niagara Falls, the myth has nevertheless endured and functions to re-produce similar myths. The *Maid of the Mist* narrative and other similar cultural representations sustain the racialised notion of the “vanishing Indian” and become the “structuring principle of settler imagined relations with First People” that re-produce colonial borders. These borders have not simply divided Canada from the U.S., rather they have marked the settlers’ power to position First Nations as both at home on their lands and as profoundly alienated from them within the settler state. In this colonial setting Sehdev argues the “The responsibility to decolonise confronts

every we. The we of the settler state and whiteness, if left undifferentiated and unexamined, is not bound to a recognition of agency and responsibility”.

We hope that you enjoy this of edition of the ACRAWSA e-journal. The process of putting together this edition has been challenging but also incredibly rewarding. It must be said that this edition would not have been possible without the support of many people. We would like to thank Dr Goldie Osuri who, through her hard work and strategic thinking, made the *Borderpolitics of Whiteness* Conference a reality and has continually supported the production of this edition. We also wish to acknowledge and thank Dr Helen Koukoutsis for researching, selecting and negotiating the reprinting of the testimonial and poems reproduced here. Her support for this project has been demonstrated in a multitude of ways from the outset and for this we are grateful. This edition is the result of many important conversations that we had with the presenters at the Conference and is indebted to all the people that responded to our initial call for papers. Although not all the submissions that we received are reproduced here, they all helped to make this final edition possible. We warmly thank all the contributors to this edition: it is your intellectually incisive and politically committed work that has allowed us to transform an idea for an edition into an important contribution to this field of research. We also wish to thank the Department of Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University for providing intellectual support and access to resources without which we could not have completed this project. We would also like to thank all the referees who supported this project by giving authors important feedback. Thanks to the ACRAWSA editorial

collective who proof read all the essays and made important suggestions. A special thanks to Damien Riggs for editorial advice and for uploading this edition to the web.

Notes

¹ See Irene Watson 'Settled and Unsettled Spaces: Are We Free to Roam?' *ACRAWSA e-journal* Vol.1, 2005