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# Examining Discourses of Whiteness and the Potential for Reconciliation

Meredith J Green

Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

Christopher C Sonn

Victoria University, Victoria

## **All correspondence should be sent to:**

Meredith Green  
Centre for Social Research  
Edith Cowan University  
Joondalup Drive  
Joondalup WA 6027  
[meredith.green@ecu.edu.au](mailto:meredith.green@ecu.edu.au)  
Phone: (618) 6304 5942  
Fax: (618) 6304 5866

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore how examining discourses of whiteness can contribute to an anti-racism that does not simply reduce racism to problems located with the 'other' or focus on the benefits of anti-racism for the dominant group. We discuss how by examining discursive negotiations at the micro level we are able to critique dominance and privilege at the macro level. To illustrate this we use the findings from a discourse analysis (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998) of discussions with white Australians about their involvement in Reconciliation. In particular, we identify spaces for the examination and critique of whiteness within white Australians' discursive negotiations of Reconciliation. We also discuss how engagement with Indigenous knowledges is a necessary part of the critique of whiteness.

## Examining Discourses of Whiteness and the Potential for Reconciliation

In Australia and countries like the United States and New Zealand, being identified as white entitles one to unearned material and psychological privileges (Brodkin, 1999; McIntosh, 1990; Tannoch-Bland, 1998), which are often not visible to the dominant white group (Espin, 1995; Moreton-Robinson, 1998). This is particularly the case for those everyday practices and assumptions that privilege white people, such as being able to swear or wear second hand clothes without it being blamed on the bad morals or poverty of one's race; not having to educate one's children about racism so as to protect them; and assuming that one's race has contributed to national heritage or 'civilisation' (McIntosh, 1990).

These privileges, in part, constitute whiteness, which in broad terms is "...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg, 1993, p.236). The reverse side of white privilege is clearly illustrated in the economic and social statistics of Indigenous Australians, who experience higher rates of incarceration, mortality, disease and disability, and unemployment, as well as higher levels of poor housing, poverty, and lower rates of education when compared with non-Indigenous Australians (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004). This is a result of the systematic practices of colonisation, which repeatedly attempted to decimate the social structure of the Indigenous people through advanced weaponry, rape and violence, and introduced diseases (Doolan, Dudgeon, & Fielder, 2000) and the continuing oppressive practices and policies, such as assimilation and protectionism (see Broome, 2001; Hollinsworth, 1998). For Indigenous people whiteness means living in "...a society where crimes against their humanity and

cultural integrity go unnoticed, unheard and unpunished on a daily basis” (Moreton-Robinson, 1998 p.43).

Attempts to address inequities such as these through anti-racism are often oversimplified and naïve (Rattansi, 1992). Many approaches to anti-racism are reduced to the level of the individual, society, or ideology and therefore maintain conservative and simplistic views about racism (Cohen, 1992; Henriques, 1998 ). One common form of this simplification is the tendency within anti-racism to focus on the black person, which fails to locate and interrogate white people’s complicity in the dynamics of racism (Henriques, 1998; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

In this paper we shift in focus towards whiteness and the positions of dominance, normativity, and privilege. In particular we examine the discourses of whiteness that white Australians drew on to understand and negotiate their involvement in Reconciliation. Our interest is in exploring how examining these discourses can contribute to more meaningful and useful approaches to anti-racism that do not simply reduce anti-racism to problems located with the ‘other’. Many have pointed to the need for white people to engage with and interrogate whiteness if race relations are to change in a meaningful way, that is if justice and equity are to be attained (e.g., Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Thompson, 2003). This, however, is not to suggest that we find ways for white people to become ‘good’ non-racist individuals (see Thompson, 2003) or that we don’t attend to the structural inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (see Ahmed, 2004). Rather, the interrogation of whiteness serves to make whiteness seen by the dominant white group as the problematic centre of racism.

In this paper we identify spaces within white Australians’ discursive

negotiations of Reconciliation where the dominance and privilege of whiteness can be examined and critiqued. Our aim is to show that by examining the negotiations of discourses at the micro level we are able to critique power inequities at the macro level. Through this process those belonging in the dominant white group would have an opportunity to see how our/their<sup>1</sup> understanding of and involvement in Reconciliation may be reproducing inequities. To strengthen a shift away from a reductionist view of anti-racism being located with the 'other' we also discuss how engagement with Indigenous knowledges is a necessary part of the critique of whiteness.

In the first part of this paper we provide a more detailed explanation of whiteness, our framework for discourse analysis, and the background to Reconciliation. To illustrate our arguments outlined above we then present some of the discourses we analysed from discussions with white Australians about their involvement in Reconciliation.

### **A focus on whiteness**

Although there is a shared understanding that whiteness is connected with issues of power and power relations and differences between white and non-white people, it remains a highly contested concept and continues to be debated and developed within different literature (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Being white is as relational as other racial identifiers, however, it is not as clearly marked as other racial identifiers, except in it not being the 'other' (Bander Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001; Frankenberg, 1997, 2001). As such whiteness has come to be understood as an empty category, constituted only by the absence and appropriation of what it is not (Bander Rasmussen et al., 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> The first author of this paper is a white Australian and the second author is a black South African.

White enculturation involves both denying the power of whiteness and assuming its universality (Moon, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999). Therefore, the specific and constructed structural and cultural location whiteness holds is concealed (Frankenberg, 1997) and whiteness is positioned as the natural and unproblematic centre of our racialised world (Bander Rasmussen et al., 2001; Moreton-Robinson, 1998; Weis, Proweller, & Centrie, 1997). Meanwhile, other racial identities are marked and racialised by their difference. As such, the unfair privileges and dominance of whiteness is not considered as an explanation for inequities across different racial groups.

The relations of power within whiteness are not monolithic, complete, or uniform (Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). They are multifaceted, specific, and dependent on the context and historical period in which it is constructed as well as the intersections between whiteness and other identity markers such as gender, class, and sexuality (Frankenberg, 1997; Hartigan, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Shome, 1999). Therefore to understand whiteness we need to attend to the interconnecting axes of power, spatial location, history, and local transformations (Hartigan, 1997; Shome, 1999). Although whiteness is fluid and continually changing according to the changing features of social contexts, it also exhibits "...deeply embedded, structural, hard, enduring, solid-state features of race and racism..." (Duster, 2001, p.113).

As already suggested, we understand whiteness to be a series of discourses through which white people are privileged and positioned as dominant in a particular context. It is through discourses that social, cultural, and historical processes determine and limit our experiences, our understandings of ourselves, and our relationships with others (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001; Burman, Kottler, Levett, &

Parker, 1997; Henriques, 1998; Parker, 1992; Parker, Levett, Kottler, & Burman, 1997). Relations of power, dominance, and oppression are also reproduced and legitimated through discourses (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Henriques, 1998; LeCouteur & Augoustinos, 2001; Mama, 1995). This conceptualisation of whiteness allows us to recognise the mechanisms of privilege and dominance within the discursive negotiations of white reconcilers.

### **Analytical framework**

There is a strong body of writing in discursive psychology and a range of approaches to discourse analysis (see Burman & Parker, 1993; Burr, 2003; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Parker, 1992; 1997 for reviews). One approach concentrates on identifying the discursive resources and interpretative repertoires people draw on to accomplish something within discursive systems. This approach has been adopted most notably by Wetherall and Potter (1992) to investigate racism in New Zealand (see also Kirkwood, Liu, & Weatherell, this issue) and by Augoustinos and colleagues (for example, Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999; LeCouteur, Rapley, & Augoustinos, 2001) to investigate racism in Australia, and (see also Saxton, 2004 in relation to discursive repertoires in Reconciliation ).

However, the discourse analytic approach we have adopted was theorised and developed by Henriques, et al., (1998) and others. This approach focuses on how people are constituted and positioned by discourses. It is based on a Foucauldian view of subjectivity, which sees the self as being positioned within a fragmented discursive space, torn between different competing discourses (Burman et al., 1997). Subjects are positioned in relation to discourses and there is a process of movement through various, and at times conflicting, discursive positions (Henriques et al., 1998; Mama, 1995). Discourse analysis attempts to pull apart the common sense meanings and



assumptions we understand ourselves by, thereby enabling us to see the discourses and discursive positions we adopt in a particular historical and social context (Henriques et al., 1998).

Different proponents of this approach have outlined a number of different techniques to analysing interviews or other textual material. The analysis conducted for this research relied mainly on Parker's (1992) 10 criteria for discourse analysis, but was complemented by approaches described by other theorists (i.e., Henriques et al., 1998; Mama, 1995). Parker's (1992) criteria particularise the conceptual work of Foucault on construction, function, and variation of analysis of discourses (see for example, Foucault, 1969, 1980). The criteria are aimed at examining the objects and subjects in the texts; a discourse's relationship with itself and other discourses; what system of meaning or view of the world is formed by these discourses; and the reproduction of power within and the ideological effects of the discourses.

### **Talking with white reconcilers**

The analysis was based on discussions with 31 white Australians about their involvement in Reconciliation. The aim of Reconciliation was "A united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all." (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993, p.3) and was initiated by an Australian Labour Government in 1991. In 1991 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) had recommended that a process of Reconciliation be undertaken to address the systematic discrimination of Indigenous Australians (Johnson, 1991). The Prime Minister at the time, Paul Keating, was also committed to developing a new sense of identity for Australia that was separate from its British roots and based on developing a new orientation towards the Asia-Pacific region and developing different

relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Hollinsworth, 1998; Markus, 2001). As part of this new identity Keating called on non-Indigenous Australians to be honest about the past and make an ‘act of recognition’ with Indigenous people.

One of the key facilitating activities of Reconciliation was Local Reconciliation Groups (LRGs) and accompanying Reconciliation Learning Circles (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1999). These Groups and Learning Circles were aimed at informing non-Indigenous Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and identity, and the social and economic disadvantage and discrimination experienced by Indigenous Australians. Participants were contacted through LRGs in Western Australia as well as through informal networks extending from these groups. Twenty-one of the participants were female and 10 were male, five were aged between 20 and 35, seven were aged between 35 and 55, and the remaining participants were aged between 55 and 75. A demographic description of each of the participants, identified by their pseudonyms, can be found in Green (2004).

Participants were either involved in two interviews or a focus group and follow-up interview. In the first interview or focus group white reconcilers were asked about their understanding of and participation in Reconciliation, their reasons for becoming involved, and their challenges and successes within Reconciliation, and those of the nation. The second interview was conducted to clarify and expand on any issues or points of interest from the first interviews. Participants were also shown a summary of their first interview, constructed by the first author of this paper, and were asked whether they felt their experience of Reconciliation had been captured.

### **Context of Reconciliation**

The Reconciliation movement engaged people across Australia in its vision of

justice, equity, and respect (see Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000 for an overview of the process and outcomes of Reconciliation). It provided Australians with the opportunity, information, and support to reject explanations of disadvantage that relied on negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians and to understand it as a product of colonialism as well as institutional and cultural racism. It also provided new opportunities for Indigenous Australians to be incorporated into the Constitution and to participate in national decision-making, belonging, and rights.

However, the formal process of Reconciliation ended its 10 year life in 2001 without reaching many of the expected marks of achievement. The referendum to change the preamble of the Australian Constitution to recognise the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands and the rights of Indigenous Australians as the first Australians was not passed. Nor has John Howard, the current Prime Minister, made a formal apology to Indigenous people for the removal of Indigenous children between 1910 and 1970, as recommended by HREOC's National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). Finally, while the Draft Declaration and Draft National Strategies developed to advance Reconciliation have been supported by the Commonwealth Parliament they have not been legislated (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000).

The absence of these changes needs to be viewed in relation to a number of major events occurring during the time of Reconciliation. Two of these events were the Mabo and the Wik land rights cases in 1992 and 1996 respectively. In brief, the Mabo case effectively overturned the notion of terra nullius and made pursuing native title claims or compensation possible and a legal right. The Wik case ruled that pastoral leases did not necessarily extinguish native title and therefore exclusive

possession could not be granted to the pastoralists. Despite the difficulty Indigenous people face in making a successful claim, these land right cases created many uncertainties and have threatened settler ideology and Australian nationalism and challenged non-Indigenous Australians morally and psychically (Broome, 2001; Dodson, 1998; Hollinsworth, 1998; Markus, 2001). In their analysis of everyday talk about land claims Riggs and Augoustinos (2004) illustrated how non-Indigenous Australians drew from a range of contradictory discursive practices to position Indigenous people as a threat but to also reassert white superiority.

Reconciliation was also affected by the election of John Howard in 1996 as Prime Minister (Liberal Coalition party) and Pauline Hanson (an independent Queensland politician) as a Member of Parliament. Keating's direction had been accused of being a 'politics of guilt', separatist and divisive, threatening to national identity, and at risk of resulting in greater poverty and alienation (Hollinsworth, 1998; Markus, 2001). Howard and Hanson supported the views of those who opposed the apologists within Reconciliation and held pride in Australia's achievements and honourable history. Rapley (1998) showed how the construction of an inclusive superordinate in-group within Pauline Hansen's maiden speech enabled mass mobilisation.

Within this context, nationalism, in particular, has been shown to be a commonly used discursive resource of non-Indigenous people to discuss Indigenous people (Augoustinos et al., 1999). The focus on a collective Australian national identity emphasises the commonality of people living in the same country and undermines the legitimacy of differences in culture, sociopolitical history, and ethnicity that risk disrupting the nationalist superordinate goal. An example of this was Howard's use of the term 'farmers', instead of the legal correct term

'pastoralists', in discussing the Wik case so as to invoke a sense of nationalism against Indigenous Australians (LeCouteur et al., 2001).

In relation to this period in Australia social commentator Hugh Mackay reported that the attitudes towards Indigenous Australians became more complex as existing racism was tempered by concern, embarrassment, and shame about failing to understand and solve the disadvantage facing Indigenous Australians (Newspoll, Saulwick, Muller, & Mackay, 2000). However, many Australians were tentative, perplexed, and confused about how issues such as these might be solved and were caught between calling for inspired leadership and compassion and the comforts of racism and cynicism.

Curthoys (2000) has highlighted the unmarked distinction between colonisation and decolonisation in Australia and its affect on the discourses of race that are drawn on. Becoming a republic and separating from Britain is still being debated in Australia, while internal decolonisation through self-determination is hindered by continuing colonising processes such as the resumption of land. This unmarked distinction between colonisation and decolonisation has meant that discourses of race in Australia include those from the colonial period, such as protectionism, segregation, and assimilation as well as those from the post-colonial period organised around racial and ethnic equality, cultural diversity, human rights, self-determination, and sovereignty.

While Australia has formally embraced liberal and egalitarian principles since the 1970s it is still structured around the social, political and economic oppression of Indigenous people (Augoustinos et al., 1999). Ideological tensions and contradictions exist between an avowed cultural egalitarianism on the one hand and an implicit assumption of cultural superiority of a white Anglo-Celtic culture on the other.

Discursive resources commonly used in political debate on race relations in Australia draw on a highly salient and partial account of colonial history and blend prototypical Australian discourses of egalitarianism and tolerance with discriminatory and prejudiced ones.

### **Discourses of white reconcilers**

In the discussions we had with white Australians involved in Reconciliation seven discourses were identified. These were categorised into two sets: ‘reasoning discourses’ and ‘actioning discourses’. Four of the discourses were categorised as ‘actioning discourses’ and were organised around white reconcilers’ understanding of racism and their involvement in Reconciliation (see Green, 2004, for an explanation of this set of discourses). However, in this paper we consider the three ‘reasoning discourses’: ‘cultural connection’, ‘expert analysis’, and ‘righting wrongs’. It is through these discourses that white reconcilers negotiated the different reasons for becoming involved in Reconciliation. We contrast the ‘cultural connection’ and ‘expert analysis’ discourses against the ‘righting wrongs’ discourse to illustrate some of the ways whiteness is reproduced within discussions about Reconciliation. Brief descriptions and illustrative extracts of these discourses are presented followed by a more detailed analysis of how they reproduced whiteness.

#### *Righting wrongs*

The discourse of ‘righting wrongs’ focused on addressing the problem of and solution to racism and the injustices it has caused Indigenous people. White reconcilers reflected on how white Australian society has consistently disadvantaged and attempted to destroy Indigenous Australians and their culture and how justice and equity could be achieved. Within this discourse white reconcilers were positioned as the Australians wanting justice and Indigenous people were positioned as a group who

has been disadvantaged and discriminated against.

**Ashley**

But it's always been a strong sense for me that, that democratic urge I guess, that all people should have access to what's required to be fully human. It seemed to me that Aboriginal people in Australia, the vast majority didn't have those sorts of basic rights. Even if they were conferred legally they were conferred quite late, even those really basic ones. But I suppose it's more that sense of, for me it's an emotional playing, level playing field that I want, I guess. Yeah that opportunity to be free from the societal oppressions and be able to fully express one's self. It sounds a bit airy-fairy and wishy washy that I talk about it now. So that applies as much to Aboriginal people as it would to recent immigrants or just about anyone I guess, that's not, that doesn't have that privileged access either, it's funny that it should be privileged...

**Brad**

...you see an Aboriginal kicked out of a hotel for no particular reason and you know... I guess, some people just say well, that's just the way it is, I'm sure that a lot of people think that this is not exactly right. So all those things add up and I suppose that's what makes things like the Reconciliation movement, gives it its power. People have absorbed all this stuff over the years and when an opportunity comes along to express it, then it all, a lot of people take that opportunity. So, yeah, I 'm sure I'm not the only person that has seen instances of injustice towards Aboriginal people in life. And you usually think "There is not very much I can do about it", but when a Reconciliation movement comes along it gives people an opportunity to actually do something in concert with other people.

*Cultural connection*

The 'cultural connection' discourse related to white reconcilers wanting to feel connected to Indigenous cultures, values, and ways of life. Adopting Indigenous lifestyles and cultural practices was thought to be beneficial to white, western approaches to living. Benefits included finding solutions environmental problems, spiritual development, and feeling part of a much 'richer' Indigenous Australian culture. The central object of this discourse was culture, which Indigenous people were positioned as the custodians of and white Australians were seen to be lacking.

**Deadrie**

And I think there's...that's something that could be done, most Aboriginal myths and legends..., Dreamtime stories have been told so far in children's books. They've been seen as children's stories and they are

seen on that level, they are fairytales, and I think white society has got to accept that they are more than that. It's partly the fault of Aboriginal people that all the stories, cause I've been told that these myths and these stories can be told at various different levels and they start teaching them to four year olds at four year old level and they move up 'til you are still getting the same stories when they're entering adulthood. But they are taught at a different level, different morals and meaning attached and the only level that's been given to white society is the level at which Aboriginal people see that white society would understand it, which is the four year level and I think we've got to get beyond that. I think Aboriginal people have got to somehow tell the stories in a bit more depth so they cease to be children's fairy tales and become part of our cultural heritage. I think the environmental movement is having a powerful effect too, the fact that people are relating more to the environment and seeing it as something precious. So from there they are able to make the next step and take it on board in an Aboriginal way and in a spiritual way.

### **Lorraine**

... I want part of the Aboriginal culture to be incorporated in the Australian culture, because I really think that the respect for the land or the regard for the land, that's in me too. I love, I'm also agreeing with it. I hated seeing the way the country was being treated by the people around me by my culture. My culture's attitude worries me, in the way we consume stuff, and I really think the rest, if nothing else, Aboriginal people were to some extent living in harmony. The amount of time that they were here and they were still living here, they hadn't eaten themselves out of house and home, in spite of the fact that people were saying: Alright they think that the ...[inaudible]... fauna got killed off by Aboriginal people. They may not have got the balance absolutely right but they were pretty much, doing pretty well. It doesn't mean that we necessarily have to live like them, but I mean there is a whole lot of things, there is a whole lot of potential there, that could be of value to us and is of value to us.

### *Expert analysis*

The 'expert analysis' discourse was about white reconcilers having knowledge and expertise about the structures and practices of Indigenous communities and cultures. With this knowledge and expertise in hand, white reconcilers were positioned to analyse issues they identify as common to Indigenous people and communities, such as alcoholism, domestic violence, and unemployment. White reconcilers were positioned as experts of Indigenous people, who were positioned as a subject to be known about.



**Greg**

Aborigines have to work out some new way of rearing their children. The traditional way, the children were very much indulged by the family and had little discipline up until their puberty when they were initiated and then they had the full weight of the whole culture came down on top of them to conform to the standard. Now that, there is nothing...for an Aboriginal boy to become a man you had to go through all the initiation ceremonies and all this progression. Now this doesn't happen at all and so hence the authority system in Aboriginal society has gone or is going and Aborigines have to work out some alternative for that. 'Cause Aboriginal children, I think, have real problems in our schools when they come in lacking the sort of authority system that we, I think, still have in European families.

**Gwen**

Well I think what needs to go on is leadership and I think that for Aboriginal people, the elder of the tribe is very important and if they dip out, there's something missing. So you mustn't forget that even though they're not very hierarchical, the elder still was the one that had the law and so forth. So elders to them matter.

**Analysis of discourses**

These discourses presented a range of discourses and positions through which white Australians understood and negotiated their involvement in Reconciliation. In the analysis below we discuss two ways whiteness is reproduced through the 'cultural connection' and 'expert analysis' discourses. We refer to these as a 'return to the white self' and a 'focus on the Indigenous 'other''. While we are not uncritical of the way in which whiteness may be reproduced through the 'righting wrongs' discourse, we have used it in this paper as a point of contrast for the analysis of the other two discourses.

*Return to the white self*

By 'return to the white self' we are talking about white people's interest on what they may gain from Reconciliation. This focus relies on romantic constructions of Indigenous communities and cultures. For example, Indigenous people as spiritual  
*'So from there they are able to make the next step and take it on board in an*

*Aboriginal way and in a spiritual way*'. While there are debates about the importance of essentialised notions of indigenous cultures<sup>2</sup> for Indigenous people, we want to concentrate on how these essentialised understandings position the white reconciler. Dodson (2003) has highlighted how romantic constructions of Indigenous family structures, sense of community, and conservation practices act as a counterpoint against which the dominant society can critique itself and have the opportunity to develop these attributes for themselves. These constructions reflect the aspirations of white Australians and what white Australia wants or needs to see in itself (Dodson, 2003; Langton, 1993). For example, from Lorraine's extract '*... I want part of the Aboriginal culture, to be incorporated in the Australian culture, because I really think that the respect for the land or the regard for the land, that's in me too. I love, I'm also agreeing with it. I hated seeing the way the country was being treated by the people around me by my culture*'. However, here we are not concerned what the aspirations of white reconcilers' reflected. Rather we are interested in how the 'cultural connection' discourse centres on the white self and shifts away from goals such as achieving justice and equity, as shown in the 'righting wrongs' discourse. For example, Ashley's aim '*But it's always been a strong sense for me that, that democratic urge I guess, that all people should have access to what's required to be fully human*'.

Within the 'cultural connection' discourse white reconcilers expect Indigenous people to share their cultural knowledge with non-Indigenous people and assist the non-Indigenous community develop Indigenous values and beliefs. For example in the extract from Deidre, '*I think Aboriginal people have got to somehow tell the stories in a bit more depth so they cease to be children's fairy tales and become part*

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<sup>2</sup> Debates around the importance of essentialism for indigenous people are discussed by Dodson (2003), Rattansi (1992), Smith (1999) and others.

*of our cultural heritage*'. Smith (1999) and Srivastava (1996) have discussed how white people view non-white people's experiences, culture, and knowledge as public resources to be shared to help white people learn and understand racism and don't view this as possibly problematic. Hage (1998) identified a similar aspect of whiteness in multiculturalism, whereby white Australians expect to be enriched by immigrant cultures. He referred to this as the '*multiculturalism of having*', through which the role of immigrant cultures is to enrich white Australian culture. These expectations represent one way unequal power relations and contribute to racism being played out within anti-racism contexts (Srivastava, 1996).

#### *Focus on the Indigenous 'other'*

In Australia, representations of Indigenous people and colonisation have been dominated by white non-Indigenous people (Larbalestier, 2004) and Indigenous subjectivity has been determined solely by non-Indigenous culture (Dodson, 2003). By constructing knowledge about the 'other' we are able to simplify complex and diverse accounts of reality and give ourselves a sense of affirmation and control over our lives (Larbalestier, 2004) and over the lives of others (Dodson, 2003; Langton, 1993). For example, the construction of Indigenous culture as lacking social order, law, or system of ownership provided colonisers with an argument for terra nullius, which led to the violent dispossession of land from Indigenous people (Dodson, 2003). Based on non-Indigenous debates around the HREOC Inquiry, Larbalestier (2004) showed how whiteness has been the normative framework for understanding events from the past. Within these debates non-Indigenous people continue to interpret Indigenous people and tell them how to understand their experiences. Non-white may then be required to defend, reassert, and reinforce the legitimacy of their story and their identity (Srivastava, 1996).

In the 'expert analysis' discourse the construction of knowledge about Indigenous people and culture served as the basis for dealing with what is defined as an Indigenous problem. For instance in the extract from Greg we see that there is knowledge constructed about a particular authority system, the demise of this authority system, and resulting issues for the Indigenous community. Another example from Gwen is *'Well I think what needs to go on is leadership and I think that for Aboriginal people, the elder of the tribe is very important and if they dip out, there's something missing'*. Saxton (2004) highlighted the tendency for people committed to Reconciliation to focus on practical interventions to address Indigenous disadvantage rather than a transformation of power relations. This is in contrast to the 'righting wrongs' discourse, in which injustice, rather than something about Indigenous people or culture, is viewed as the issue and white reconcilers' responsibility is not about analysing issues and suggesting solutions for Indigenous people. For instance in Brad's extract *'So, yeah, I 'm sure I'm not the only person that has seen instances of injustice towards Aboriginal people in life. And you usually think "There is not very much I can do about it"'*.

## **Discussion**

In the analysis of the 'cultural connection' and 'expert analysis' discourses we examined how whiteness is reproduced through returning attention to the white self and focusing on the Indigenous 'other'. We now extend this analysis to look at the affects on anti-racism. Focusing on the Indigenous 'other' only simplistic solutions to anti-racism, based on reductionist constructions of Indigenous people and culture, can be reached (see Cohen, 1992; Henriques, 1998; Rattansi, 1992). While, returning attention to the white self risks anti-racism concentrating on how the dominant white group may be benefited. Similar risks have been raised by Moreton-Robinson (2000)

in relation to the dominant group's focus on the personal development goals of anti-racism, rather than political engagement. Marcus (1999) has also expressed concerns about anti-racism simply becoming a series of benign and worthy individual sentiments from the dominant group. As Moreton-Robinson (2000) explains, white peoples' actions may be driven by compassion and good intentions, but the discourses and power of whiteness underlying this compassion and these intentions may not be seen.

As illustrated by our analysis the privilege and dominance of whiteness at the macro level is negotiated in different ways through discourses of white reconcilers. This and other analyses highlight the need to interrogate whiteness as part of effective anti-racism efforts (e.g., Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Thompson, 2003). However, Ahmed (2004) highlights that declaring one's whiteness is not in itself an anti-racist action. She argues that currently in the UK and Australia the conditions required for these declarations to do what they say they do, do not currently exist. For declarations of whiteness to do what they say resources would need to be redistributed in an equitable way.

While not ignoring the structural changes required for this redistribution we propose that by interrogating discourses of whiteness there is a necessary and inherent critique of the dominance and privilege that support resource inequities. This critique may, in turn, contribute to the required structural changes talked about by Ahmed (2004). Discourse analysis makes explicit the social structures and processes that maintain oppression and that would otherwise be viewed as opaque because of unacknowledged conditions, unintended consequences, and unconscious motivation (Burman & Parker, 1993; Parker, 1992).

We propose that this critique may be facilitated by the articulation of Indigenous

knowledges and epistemologies, which would provide a counterpoint to the dominant listening and speaking positions evident in the discourses of white reconcilers. The development of indigenous knowledges is part of the project of decolonisation, of retelling stories from the vantage point of disenfranchised communities, and offering new ways of seeing and being in the world (e.g., Martin, 2001). Although this writing is typically concerned with Indigenous agendas, it has powerful implications for transformative practice. This is not to say that non-Indigenous people must uncritically accept Indigenous knowledges (Cowlshaw, 2004), but to recognise that it has powerful roles to play in critiquing whiteness. Sonn (2004) has argued that using indigenous writing in university curricula in psychology can serve to disrupt the dominance and taken for granted centrality of Western ways of knowing. Although there is resistance reflected in discomfort, many respond by interrogating dominance and privilege as part of the process of engaging across racialised boundaries.

Nicoll (2004) has also suggested that examining whiteness in Australia and developing different relationships between Indigenous and white Australians needs to occur in relation to Indigenous rights such as sovereignty and self-determination. Riggs and Augoustinos (this issue) have also highlighted the importance of juxtapositioning the deconstruction of whiteness against Indigenous peoples' accounts of resistance. This would highlight that although whiteness continues to oppress Indigenous people and privilege white people, white sovereignty can not be legitimated.

However, Ahmed (2004) also warns that white people have to be careful not to block hearing Indigenous voices by moving too quickly from listening to asking about what can be done in the future. These questions rush too quickly past the exposure of racism and risk moving away from what is being critiqued or positioning the white

person outside the critique. She suggests that white people need to stay implicated in the critique of whiteness and take on their responsibility in these histories of racism that have led to the present, but to also turn away from themselves and towards those who have been oppressed (Ahmed, 2004, 2005). Similarly, Apfelbaum (2001) asserts that people in dominant positions need to move out of and stop protecting the familiar space of one's worldview and acknowledge the unbridgeable gap between the different experiences of the oppressed and the dominant.

These calls may be met by finding spaces to challenge dominance and privilege within the discourses of whiteness. Kirkwood, Liu, and Weatherell (this issue) have also identified spaces for social change within amongst the conflicting discourses adopted in written submissions responding to Maori land claims in New Zealand. We suggest that spaces for critiquing and taking responsibility for injustice may exist in the 'cultural connection' and 'expert analysis' discourses. Although discourses limit the sayable, they don't imply closure and they provide spaces for new statements to be incorporated within a discourse (Henriques et al., 1998). For instance, white reconcilers may be able to negotiate a different way of being connected to Indigenous people and communities that does not rely on romantic constructions, as in the 'cultural connection' discourse. Likewise, within the 'expert analysis' discourse the enthusiasm for making sense of issues Indigenous people face may be shifted away from the Indigenous subject and towards an analysis of dominance, power, and privilege.

This work shows that a shift to critiquing dominance and privilege through discourses of whiteness is a productive move away from concentrating only on those who are oppressed or on the dominant group's gains from anti-racism. By conceptualising whiteness as a set of discourses we recognise the connections

between discursive negations of whiteness and the power of whiteness within social structures. Importantly, this orientation has allowed us to make visible the fact that engaging in Reconciliation will require an interrogation of whiteness because not doing so will leave invisible and unchallenged dominant discourses that are deeply rooted in anti-racism. Our task now is to further explore the processes of centring Indigenous knowledges and critiquing whiteness in the discourses drawn on by the dominant white group in everyday settings.



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