

Title: Projecting Threat: Managing Subjective Investments in Whiteness

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Abstract:

In this paper we focus on the ways in which subjective investments in whiteness work to construct Indigenous people as threats to the white Australian nation. In order to better understand such subjective investments, we employ an approach to analysing talk that draws upon both psychoanalysis and discursive psychology. We suggest that this combination may allow for a thoroughly social understanding of the practices of exclusion within Australia. Through an analysis of white participants talk surrounding Indigenous land claims, we demonstrate the 'anxieties of whiteness' that structure the hegemonic intelligible subject positions available to white Australians, particularly within the current political climate. Our aim in paying close attention to the ways in which projections of threat are achieved within everyday talk is to make visible the systems of representation that maintain the hegemony of whiteness in Australia.

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*Sandy: I don't think it is even necessarily the Aboriginal thing, I mean it's minority groups – it's like unmarried mothers or unemployed people – it's just that idea of them and us. And people need to have a kicking bag – they need to have something that they feel is responsible for their condition, you know like – 'these people have choices and I don't, why don't they get off their backsides and do it, you know, if I had those choices I'd do this and I'd do that'. It's just, you know, I don't think it's something that's really thought through, I think, it's kind of like a psychology, rather than a reality.*

*Sandy: Once you acknowledge that [terra nullius is flawed] there has to be some kind of payback, and I think it's the payback that worries people – they wonder how big the deal is, you know, what exactly do the Aboriginal people want, or I think they're a bit scared to ask in case it's, it's too huge or... it's that thing that Leslie was saying – they have this idea that they are coming to take your backyard or your property.*

These two extracts of talk from a documentary on reconciliation in Australia entitled 'Whiteys like us' (Landers, 1999) demonstrate some of the key concerns of this paper. Specifically, they make visible the uneasy relationship between Indigenous and white Australians. Thus as Sandy suggests at the end of the first extract, the constructions of 'us and them' upon which the white nation is founded may be viewed as 'kind of like a psychology' – as something that we actively do – rather than as a 'reality' – as something that ontologically is. In this way the binary categories of 'us and them' work to implicitly assert white culture as normative – a claim that requires repetition to maintain its hegemonic position. And this is the approach taken within this paper – that such constructions of 'us and them' shape subjective investments in the hegemony of whiteness in Australia. To 'get at' the ways in which such investments are constituted within particular cultural contexts, we employ psychoanalytic understandings of projection alongside a discursive psychological reading of

psychoanalysis (cf. Billig, 1999). In this way subjective investments are understood, following Kaja Silverman via Patricia Elliot (1996), as being thoroughly social practices. We thus draw upon Lacanian approaches to the processes of subjectification to make visible the ways in which constructions of self and other are achieved in talk (see also Georgaca, in-press), with particular focus on the ways in which explicit statements about certain groups (in this instance Indigenous people) can be seen as implicitly maintaining the status of other groups (i.e. white Australians).

In the second extract Sandy talks about the ways in which Indigenous people are seen as generating fear in regards to land claims. Eva Mackey (1999) suggests that this positioning of Indigenous people as threats to the white nation may be understood as an act of projection, whereby the history of colonisation is retrospectively attributed to Indigenous people as always already being a threat, rather than as a process of white invasion, dispossession and genocide. By continuing to construct Indigenous people as threats (whether it be as threats to white individuals, communities or nation), it is possible for white Australia to: a) project the threatening acts of colonisation onto Indigenous people, and, b) maintain a focus on Indigenous people, rather than on the hegemony of whiteness. Thus in analysing constructions of 'Indigenous threat' in the everyday talk of white people, it may be possible for us to better understand the ways in which projection is enacted so as to contain the unsettling that Indigenous land claims produce. In this way, we understand projection (as it is enacted in the everyday talk of white people) as a cultural tool that works to justify white claims to land, power and nation.

## PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RACISM

Within a broader framework of discursive and constructionist psychologies, there are two key elements that have led us to believe that psychoanalysis may be a useful tool for analysing social practices that maintain the hegemony of whiteness in Australia. Firstly, there is the historical relationship between psychoanalysis and colonialism, in particular, the connection between the ideologies of colonial expansion, and the conceptualisation of the formation of the unconscious (Doanne, 1991; Kovel, 1989). More specifically, in the Australian context, the white construction of Indigenous people as the racialised Other would seem to rest upon the same notions of 'us and them' that can be seen as structuring psychoanalytic understandings of subjectification (cf. Kovel, 1989). That said, in pointing towards this relationship, we are not proposing that it is necessarily a pejorative one, but rather that as two thoroughly social practices, they may be used to better understand one another. Postcolonial readings of psychoanalysis may thus point towards the systems that shaped the formation of psychoanalysis, and conversely, psychoanalytic understandings may be used to examine the practices of colonialism (Khana, 2003; Lane, 1998). The second (and related) reason for employing psychoanalysis, is that it offers a means to understanding the processes of subjectification which allows for an examination of the ways in which investments are shaped within social contexts. As we will now go on to outline, such understandings of psychoanalysis can be seen as making space for a thoroughly situated analysis of exclusionary practices.

Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000) provides a cogent analysis of the ways in which whiteness may be understood as being the primary signifier of race. She draws a

clear distinction between the category 'white', which pertains to people presumed to be of 'Anglo-European descent', and whiteness as a signifying system. We too share this understanding, but seek also to align it with the study of whiteness that has recently occupied the attention of social theorists (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Ware, 1999), something that Seshadri-Crooks is not particularly concerned with. We do this to acknowledge the important links that we believe exist between a range of epistemological traditions, and also because it allows us a broader scope for examining the practices that shape the hegemony of whiteness (as a form of systematised dominance) in Australia. In this way we conceptualise whiteness as both a system of signifying practices that are formative of racialised subjectivities, and also as a set of institutionalised regimes of truth which structure the hegemony of whiteness (cf. Levine-Rasky, 2002). We would suggest that such an understanding makes possible an approach to studying systems of exclusion that is simultaneously situated (in that it focuses on the local ways that whiteness is enacted, and racialised subjectivities are made intelligible), and generalised (whereby it locates particular enactments within broader contexts).

In outlining the ways in which whiteness as a signifying system relates to the enactment of white subject positions, we hope to demonstrate some of the attendant 'anxieties of whiteness'. Here we refer to the ways in which attempts at 'being white' are always mediated by historically contingent understandings of the subject position 'white'. These unstable and contingent understandings of whiteness work to destabilise notions of a white national identity: there is forever an unsettling of white subjectivities (Rutherford, 2000). This lack of a

fixed position thus works to challenge hegemonic constructions of whiteness as normative, and undermines the claims to universality that often accompany enactments of white subjectivity. Such anxieties can thus be understood, in a Lacanian sense, as representing the inherent impossibility of ever claiming the signifying position of whiteness (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). The contingency of whiteness as a social practice means that whilst certain people may have privileged access to performances of the subject position 'white', they can never in actuality occupy the signifying position of whiteness (Pellegrini, 1997). Thus white subjectivities are structured around the construction of Indigenous peoples as embodying all that *cannot be* white, with the desire of positioning white people as embodying all that *is* white. Yet such constructions demonstrate the inherent anxiety of white subjectivities as always already reliant upon racialised systems of understanding.

The 'anxiety of whiteness' is thus twofold. On the one hand, there is the point outlined above; the desire for (and impossibility of) 'being whiteness'. Yet such a desire is predicated upon an illusory notion of wholeness – that we as white people could exceed the racialised categories of whiteness, and thus occupy *all* positions (or more accurately, deny *any* position other than the 'whole self') within a racialised system of representation. Yet the paradox (and thus anxiety) is that such a fantasy of wholeness would effectively obliterate difference – resulting in the destruction of the self/other binaries that racialised systems are reliant upon (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). In this way the 'double nature' of white anxiety is always already present in the structuring of cultures that valorise racialised understandings, and thus is formative of the intelligible subject

positions that are made available within such cultures. In order to manage this anxiety, it is necessary for the categories of racialisation to be simultaneously rendered normative and ahistorical, with the category 'white' actively promoted as being the superior subject position. Thus as Richard Dyer (1997) suggests, whiteness as a system of social practices of exclusion is both normative and invisible. It is founded upon forms of institutionalised oppression, yet it is enacted in very specific ways. As we will go on to demonstrate, whiteness achieves such hegemony through its constant reiteration by nominal members of white culture. And it is because of this that we believe a thoroughly social understanding of subjective investments may be made possible through the analysis of 'everyday' talk: the local site at which ordinary sense-making practices are negotiated and instantiated.

#### SUBJECTIVE INVESTMENTS; SOCIAL PRACTICES

In his book *'Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious'*, Michael Billig (1999) outlines a means to understanding subjective investments as something that we do in everyday talk. Billig suggests that repression (and thus projection) is a formative aspect of language, where talk is structured around silences – by talking about certain things we make other things unspeakable; by voicing one opinion we silence others and by drawing attention to certain topics we mask the visibility of other topics. Thus we may position ourselves as blameless, as above reproach, and thus implicitly construct those who *are* to blame. It follows from this that once a particular social group determines what is acceptable, and what is unacceptable behaviour, then another group must be to blame for that which is unacceptable. These social processes of splitting off, and

projecting, that which is deemed to be 'bad', are typically achieved through the reification of stereotypical depictions of groups of people who are positioned as being outside the dominant group (cf. Clarke, 1999; Elliot, 1996). So, for example, in order to maintain that whiteness is both a normative site of power, and that white privilege is not based upon Indigenous disadvantage, it is necessary for the white nation to construct Indigenous people as undeserving, as abusing the system and as 'naturally inferior' to white people. Such subjective investments work to position 'them' as the rightful heirs to blame, rather than looking at the ways in which the 'us' is always already implicated in constructions of 'us and them' (cf. Layton, 2000).

Once certain groups are constructed as the repository for all that is positioned as bad in white culture, then it is relatively simple to understand the ways in which this constructs such groups as being a threat to the dominant group (Clarke, 2000). For if the splitting off and projection of undesired aspects of the white nation are founded upon relatively arbitrary differences, then there is always the threat that the arbitrary nature of such enactments will be revealed. Thus as Simon Clarke and Anthony Moran (2003) suggest, that which has been split off from whiteness and projected onto Indigenous people always threatens to come back and haunt the white nation. In order to justify this positioning of threat, Indigenous people are actively constructed as threats in ways that, paradoxically, allow for the controlling of Indigenous agency (as we will discuss later). Such constructions make possible an understanding of Indigenous bodies and land claims as always already a threat to the white nation. This is achieved on a daily basis through media constructions of Indigenous people as disorderly,



uncontrollable and unwieldy. It is also accomplished through everyday talk that positions white people as being absolved of blame for colonisation, and instead positions Indigenous people as being unwilling to 'let go of the past' (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Underpinning these multiple constructions of 'Indigenous threat', are the racialised systems of representation which construct specific, hierarchically ordered, subject positions. Hegemonic understandings of 'race' in Australia position white people as belonging to a superior culture, an ideological assumption that has shaped the histories of colonisation in this country. It is because of this that subjective investments in whiteness require the construction of a racialised Other (primarily Indigenous peoples), but without explicitly connecting this to the racialised white self. Thus white people are positioned as being 'not raced' – as existing outside such systems of representation. And indeed this points towards the ways in which the 'anxiety of whiteness' is managed through subjective investments in the racialised categories of whiteness – that in designating Indigenous peoples as occupying the location of 'race', the white nation is left free to claim a 'non-racist' agenda when perpetuating exclusionary practices. Thus as Patricia Elliot (1996) suggests, the discourses surrounding racialised practices work to both preserve white privilege, and simultaneously mask the arbitrary nature of white systems of representation (see also Riggs, 2003a)

The following analysis works through some of the ways in which discussions around Indigenous entitlements to land in Australia work to construct

Indigenous people as threats to the white nation, and thus how subjective investments in whiteness are taken up. Specifically, we look at the ways in which acts of projection work to mask the location of whiteness in everyday talk. We would suggest that if subjective investments are understood as being social practices, then the intelligible subject positions that are made available through such practices should be evident in people's talk (cf. Georgaca, in-press). In suggesting this we draw attention to the social constructionist aspects of our arguments: that subjectivities are not *a priori* artifacts, but rather are enacted within specific cultural locations. Analysing people's talk may thus enable a thoroughly social account of the ways that exclusionary practices operate, with a particular focus on the interpretative repertoires that shape the modes of talk that are employed (cf. Frosh, Pheonix & Pattman, 2000). Thus a constructionist/psychoanalytic approach may indeed exceed binary understandings of individual/society, and instead view "subjectivity as an effect of subjectification, that is to say as socially, interactionally and linguistically produced" (Georgaca, in-press). We would suggest that this sits very closely to a Lacanian understanding of the structuring of the unconscious 'like a language', but that it also builds upon this idea by acknowledging the close relationship between language as a system of signification (and thus as constitutive of subjectivities), and the everyday use of language *by* subjects.

#### UNDERSTANDING CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACISM

A cautionary note should be sounded here – by focusing on the ways in which projection is enacted through talk, and how such projections work to maintain the hegemony of whiteness, we are not intending to suggest that projection is a

motivated act. Rather we are trying to draw out the ways in which everyday talk (and thus everyday enactments of projection) are culturally located performances of intelligible subject positions. Thus white talk about 'Indigenous threat' is not necessarily a planned action, but rather constitutes a culturally available discursive repertoire which works to continually construct and reinforce the categories of 'us and them'. Following on from Kaja Silverman (1992), we may thus understand the ways in which the racialised subject is interpellated by the discourses of race that circulate within Western cultures. In other words, when we refer to someone as inhabiting a specific racialised subject position, we indeed create the 'reality' of that subject position, thus masking the constructed nature of racialised categories. It is because of this that we may look at the ways in which white talk about Indigenous peoples works to actively interpellate Indigenous peoples into racialised systems of representations, whilst often leaving the category 'white' unmarked. We would suggest that by focusing on the particularities of talk, we may better understand the social processes that mark subjective investments in racialised hierarchies.

In this way, the following analysis is not intended to position the white participants as 'evil racists'. Rather their talk may be understood as existing within a cultural network that makes sense of constructs such as 'racism'. Thus we seek to acknowledge the ways in which racism impacts upon the lives of *all* people in Australia, whether that be through forms of disadvantage, or by conferring unearned privilege (see Fine, 1996, for a useful description of the difference between racism *for* and racism *against*). This also demonstrates an important point in relation to constructionist approaches to racism and

whiteness. Whilst categories of race may be seen as arbitrary social divisions, they are still intimately related to structures of power and dominance (Riggs, in-press). So whilst it is useful to challenge the ways in which the racialised categories of whiteness are social constructions, this should not be read as suggesting that experiences of racism are in and of themselves constructions. Indeed we have already suggested that experiences of racialised power structures underpin many of the ways in which we are implicitly taught to understand ourselves as inhabiting certain forms of subjectivity in white western cultures (Mama, 1995; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000).

Thus, as we will now go on to outline, we would suggest that it is important to understand the ways in which specific cultural contexts in Australia make intelligible certain constructions of Indigenous people as being in binary opposition to white people. In this way, talk and context are co-dependent: talk may be understood as located within a framework that makes certain forms of knowledge intelligible - whilst rendering alternate interpretations incomprehensible. This is not to accept a form of naïve or critical realism, but rather to focus on the ways in which certain ways of understanding (such as racism) are taken as reflecting real objects.

#### THE CONTEXT OF TALK

In offering a description of the context within which our participants' talk was produced, we acknowledge that any account of context is always already framed by the politics of the writer. Thus we are not attempting to claim that the context we outline is impartial, but rather we seek to outline the political climate that

provided the impetus for analysing the specific topics in question, and also to acknowledge the contexts that inform the writing of this paper. For, as Vron Ware suggests, 'the various meanings attributed to events such as [Indigenous land claims] are clearly affected by concurrent discourses on race... and national identity' (Ware, 1999, p 284).

At the same time, we seek to locate ourselves within the realms of whiteness. Because academic writing can tend to position the author as above analytic scrutiny, we take as important the work of Maia Ettinger (1994), who suggests that whilst analyses of cultural issues are all well and good, we must be willing to locate ourselves 'within the systems currently under deconstruction' (p. 55). Thus we acknowledge the ways in which work by white academics on whiteness is always already a part of the system of whiteness – a system that enables our voices to be heard, yet does not often challenge us to acknowledge the position from which our voices are spoken (cf. Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

The history of Australia has been subject to much contestation and debate. 'Official' (white) accounts construct Australia's colonial past as the 'white settlement' of a previously uninhabited land. The doctrine of Terra Nullius had (until it was overturned by the High Court's Mabo decision in 1993) embodied in nearly 200 years of white Australian law the view that Australia was literally an empty continent before British colonisation. This history of colonisation is simultaneously referred to by Indigenous people, and whites who are willing to challenge such 'official accounts', as the invasion of an already inhabited land. This version of history emphasises the dispossession and genocide of the

Indigenous population by white settlers. Over two hundred years of colonisation has resulted in the dominant white majority experiencing considerable privilege across the social, economic and legal spectrum, at the expense of the Indigenous minority who continue to experience some of the highest rates of social and economic disadvantage in the world.

The extracts of talk in the following analysis are drawn from two discussion groups, each comprising four white undergraduate psychology students, conducted in 1995 on 'race relations in Australia'. The time at which the extracts reported here were collected (June 1995) is of considerable significance as it was during a period of unprecedented public debate in Australia over Indigenous entitlements to land. Most notable was the Mabo Decision of the High Court, and the subsequent Native Title Act (1993), which, for the first time, recognised that an inherent *right* of Native Title - or Indigenous ownership of land - existed where formerly none had been acknowledged. More locally, in South Australia, considerable media attention was given to Indigenous protests at the building of a bridge at Hindmarsh Island on land of cultural and spiritual significance to the local Ngarrindjeri people.

Group discussions were selected in preference to individual interviews to facilitate a closer approximation to the kind of spontaneous talk, argument, and debate likely to be found in everyday conversation. The group discussions covered a range of issues including the nature of racism in Australia, observed instances of racialised discrimination, affirmative action, equal opportunity, and Indigenous land rights. The following analysis focuses specifically on the

particular sections of talk where the participants talked about Indigenous land claims.

Whilst we acknowledge that the retrospective analysis of participants' talk may be seen as a form of textual empiricism (cf. Parker & Burman, 1994), where participants' talk is used to justify the truth claims of the authors, we believe that the talk that arose from these discussion groups represents pervasive patterns of talk within the wider white Australian polity. Moreover, to seek to generate yet another set of data for analysis may be considered a form of epistemic violence, where a space is created for white people to generate more (negative) talk about Indigenous people (Riggs, 2003b). Thus the utilisation of already existing data is intended to: a) demonstrate the ways in which white talk is structured by a set of relatively stable discourses regarding Indigenous people, and b) challenge forms of white-on-white research which prohibit the interviewer/researcher from intervening in racist talk – why provide yet another opportunity for racist talk to be expressed without being challenged?

#### TALKING THREAT, MASKING WHITENESS

Enactments of projection work to construct Indigenous peoples as the cause of white fear – that white fear is a response to the 'reality' of 'Indigenous threat' – rather than as a construction that works to counter the unsettling presence of Indigenous peoples. In order for colonisation to be positioned as a *response* to a threat, Indigenous peoples must be constructed as actively engaging in acts that are intended to harm the white nation, rather than as responses to colonisation, dispossession and genocide (Moran, 2002). One of the ways in which the

anxieties surrounding Indigenous land rights are managed is via the positioning of white people as victims of unfounded Indigenous land claims. As can be seen in the extracts below, white talk around Indigenous land claims centres on stereotypical constructions of Indigenous peoples as 'abusing the system', and thus implicitly works to avoid the topic of colonisation.

*Anthony: [In regards to Mabo] ... You just have to be careful... a backlash ... in the sense that not too many people get very upset that 'why should they be having all these handouts' in a sense*

*James: ... if they're going to abuse it, particularly if they abuse it then if it comes up again that ... well people will say 'what are you going to do with it, last time... alcohol and what ever ... you've abused your position'*

*James: There is a fine line between them being compensated and them taking advantage of their position as it is felt to be. A lot of Anglo-Australians would umm are sort of are concerned about, they feel they are taking advantage; they're given much more than they need, umm whereas where it may be true that what ever percentage of them.....*



*Martin: Like I've got an uncle that lives in Kempsey in New South Wales north coast and they've got an Aboriginal, couple of Aboriginal groups up there and the government sort of got them housing and they burnt the houses to the ground so the government built them brick houses and um you saw them driving round in brand new Pajero four wheel drives or what not and you sort of get the impression that they sort of got all this and you see what they could do to it and they just don't seem to appreciate what they are given but maybe because they don't want it ahh I don't know but the impression you get is that the government, you sort of see the government trying to help them as I said by throwing money at them, at the problem, but it doesn't seem to be doing any good, maybe because they don't want it - they want to try and get up there on their own - they don't need any help or maybe because they just don't care but yeah you see it first hand and what not and you form opinions and its difficult to change and you see sort of things like that so.*

Constructions of 'us and them' in the above extracts work to highlight the differences between 'Anglo-Australians' and 'Aboriginals' in ways that render Indigeneity the problematic category. Thus 'Anglo-Australians' are seen as being 'upset [that] they [Indigenous people are] having all these handouts', and that Indigenous people are 'taking advantage; they're given much more than they

*need*'. Such constructions work to position Indigenous people as '*taking advantage*', rather than as being compensated for the impact of colonisation. This works to construct white people as a) not to blame for Indigenous disadvantage (indeed Indigenous people are seen as having '*money thrown at them*' – as being privileged) and b) that there are not implicit advantages to being recognised as 'white' in Australia.

We may thus understand the ways in which the advantages that the white participants hold simply by being white are discounted, and instead projected onto Indigenous people as receiving '*all these handouts*'. By expanding our focus to the historical contingencies of white advantage, it is possible to understand such acts of projection as maintaining whiteness (and specifically white privilege) as an unspoken category. And it is the 'threat' of whiteness being exposed as a site of unfair advantage that reinforces notions that Indigenous claims to land and compensation are therefore threats to white nationhood. Moreover, these anxieties may be understood as centering upon subjective investments in whiteness. Thus if whiteness is exposed as a historically located (rather than *a priori*) network of power relations, then the hegemony of white systems of representation is unsettled. The following extract makes explicit the ways in which 'Indigenous threat' generates enactments of white fear.

*Martin: Something the media failed to bring out - the sort of aid - you've been given all this chunk of land and that it was sort of 'save the backyards' kind of mentality and a lot of people got scared... the truth of the matter was that*

*unless they had continual contact with their land they didn't have a claim under that decision so I think that people failed to realise that and that scared a lot of people.*

*Anthony: Umm and I was surprised 'cos I guess you read about but... a friend I do have that's fairly close is doing law and actually he's manning some case against the housing trust or whatever but in amongst all that he you know was telling me about some group that was about to make a claim on Adelaide and it really freaked me out this is bullshit.*

*Barbara: (laugh)*

*James: They've already claimed part of Brisbane, haven't they a claim....*

The enactment of white fear as a response to 'Indigenous threat' (land claims) is exemplified by Anthony, who suggests that a land '*claim on Adelaide... really freaked me out*'. Martin's suggestion that there is a '*save the backyards kind of mentality*' refers to the ways in which the white nation 'lives in fear' of Indigenous people who will come in and take 'our' land. This fantasy of the 'dangerous Other' (Elliot, 1996) works to render invisible the power structures of whiteness, and instead centres on the ways in which white sovereignty is 'at threat' from land claims.

Such constructions of 'Indigenous threat' may be sharply contrasted with the ways in which Indigenous people are often constructed within white culture as having no agency - as being passive victims of colonisation. Augoustinos, Tuffin and Rapley (1999) suggest that these contrasting rhetorical constructions of Indigenous people are used to minimise the visibility of Indigenous sovereignty in Australia. Thus Indigenous sovereignty is positioned as being either a moot point because Indigenous people are unable to perform agentically and thus push for reparation, or else Indigenous land claims are seen as a part of the 'whitening' of Indigeneity, and are thus seen as the actions of a group of 'greedy land grabbers' who have no '*continual contact with their land*', and thus no justification for making land claims (see also Nicoll, 2002, for a further discussion of white constructions of Indigenous sovereignty).

This construction of Indigenous people as having no '*continual contact with their land*' is also deployed to construct whiteness as the normative category in Australia. As we will see in the next extract, by constructing Indigenous people as no longer being '*full blood*' [1], Indigenous people are implicitly constructed as being '*just another Australian*' - and thus they should be treated the same as white Australians. Yet at the same time, Indigenous peoples are positioned as being the sole occupiers of the category 'race'. In other words, by linking racialised categories to notions of biology, references to 'blood' locate Indigenous peoples firmly within racialised systems, thus perpetuating understandings of white people as not being raced. As can be seen in the extract below, the 'conflict'

of Indigenous land claims is positioned as resulting from Indigenous people's 'problematic racial identity'.

*Natalie: So in between killing them off they'd dilute what was left and they would bring them up with all the cultures like our ideas and ideologies and...*

*Barbara: Part of the problem is we don't really have any true Aboriginals any more they're all half caste or quarter caste that's where you get problems because they've got this conflict 'I am Aboriginal but I have a white parent or I come from a slightly white background' and then you get this confusion.*

*Natalie: We don't have any true Australians either we're a multi-cultural nation - so aren't we Australians?"*

*James: So there's been a concerted effort to assimilate?*

*Barbara: Ohh yeah*

*James: Yeah 'cos you don't see that many full bloods at all.*

The positioning of Indigenous people as being part of a '*multicultural nation – so aren't we [all just] Australians'* works to deny ongoing histories of colonisation,

and thus positions land claims as unjustified – as intentional threats to the harmony of the ‘multicultural nation’. The claim that *‘we don’t really have any true Aboriginals any more’* problematises contemporary Indigenous identities by constructing two contrasting categories: *‘true Aboriginals’* and thus implicitly, *‘false Aboriginals’*. In this way the legitimacy of Indigenous identity claims (and by implication land claims) are rendered suspect. This ‘confusion’ over identity is moreover located within Indigenous people themselves (*‘they’ve got this conflict . . . confusion’*). So whilst on the one hand Indigenous peoples are positioned as occupying markedly racialised subject positions, they are also located outside whiteness – as not having access to the signifying systems that mark white subjectivities. It is in this way that the ‘anxiety of whiteness’ is controlled – the inability of white people to occupy the position of the signifier is managed by projecting this lack onto Indigenous peoples – the implicit category *‘false Aboriginals’* denies any possibility of agentic signification for Indigenous peoples, thus reasserting the primacy of white subjectivities within white systems of representation.

Such constructions of Indigenous identity and culture are abstracted from the history of colonisation and are treated as static objects – as existing (in a timeless, ‘pre-colonial’ state) in ways that are not dynamic and ever-changing. This can be contrasted with the construction of white culture as always evolving - thus Natalie’s statement that we *‘would bring them up with all the cultures’*. These interpretations of the ongoing histories of colonisation work to normalise the construction of ‘Indigenous threat’ by focusing on Indigeneity as alternatively ‘a problem’, ‘a lack’ or ‘a site of fear’, instead of examining the ways in which

Indigeneity is retrospectively constructed through the lens of whiteness so as to absolve the legacy of colonisation.

The projection of threat onto Indigenous people is thus accomplished in multiple, and often contradictory ways. In the first series of extracts Indigenous people are positioned as the 'them' to the 'us' of white Australia. Yet in the final extracts, Indigenous people are positioned as no longer being 'full blood', and thus should consider themselves to be 'Australians' like everyone else. Such contradictions work to manage Indigenous land claims by positioning them as unjustified and illegitimate (in that everyone should have the same access), but simultaneously as being made by a group of people who are a threat to the white nation. Thus Indigenous people are both threats, in that they 'unsettle the settler' via land claims (through focusing on the spectre of colonisation), yet Indigenous people are also positioned as passive recipients of government policies (i.e. assimilation, welfare etc.). It is through these multiple positionings that enactments of projection are achieved – the construction of Indigenous people as 'a threat' works to mask whiteness and its relation to colonisation, whilst the construction of Indigenous people as always already subjugated works to manage this 'threat' by reasserting white superiority.

As may be seen from the above extracts, subjective investments in whiteness are managed in many ways. The participants demonstrated the 'anxiety of whiteness' as they attempted to negotiate the topic of Indigenous land rights. Most obviously, there were attempts at projecting unsettling events onto Indigenous peoples. Rather than acknowledging complicity in histories of

oppression (which would thus challenge the hegemony of white systems of representation), the white participants positioned themselves as 'objective observers' of history. Yet at the same time there is an anxiety around 'not being white enough'. This desire to occupy the position of the signifier is evident in the ways in which Indigenous peoples are positioned as being wholly outside of white systems of representation – as being always already the site of difference. We would suggest that this demonstrates the social practices that constitute subjective investments in whiteness in Australia, and have thus hoped to point towards a reading of psychoanalytic processes as being situated enactments of available subject positions.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have hoped to draw out some of the ways in which whiteness is rendered invisible through enactments of projection, specifically, the projection of threat onto Indigenous people. In writing this paper we have relied upon an understanding of whiteness as a normalised site of power, which is reinforced through the day-to-day talk of white people. That said, we feel it important to point out that the category 'white' is not a homogenous entity. Whiteness as a cultural construct is historically and spatially specific – it may fluctuate depending on factors such as economics, politics and legislation. Yet what may be said to be the uniting factor of whiteness is the ways in which it is founded upon the oppression of specific groups of people. Such oppression is based upon implicit assumptions about the nature of subjectivity and the prioritising of difference as a naturally occurring object. Thus the construction of Indigenous people as Other to the white self in the Australian political context is intimately



related to the history of colonisation, rather than being dependent on intercultural differences, which are reified as reflecting real and important differences. The conflation of the Other with cultural groups that are positioned as being outside whiteness relies upon the collapsing of such distinctions. It is because of these reasons that we have positioned whiteness in this paper as a normative site of power – not to ignore the multiple ways in which whiteness is expressed and experienced, but to acknowledge its contingency upon Indigenous disadvantage. For to write about whiteness as an abstract concept which is not tied to oppressive practices is to be complicit with constructions of Indigenous people as the naturally occurring ‘out-group’ to the white majority in Australia.

In using psychoanalysis as a tool for examining the invisibility of whiteness, we have intended to build upon critical psychological understandings of psychoanalytic processes as enacted through talk and in language (cf. Billig, 1999; Georgaca, in-press). The analysis of white talk around Indigenous land claims lends itself well to this objective, for as we suggested earlier, the white construction of Indigenous people as the racialised Other is reliant upon similar categories to those that are employed in psychoanalytic approaches to the processes of subjectification (cf. Kovel, 1989). In elaborating these connections, and exemplifying them through participants’ talk, we have not intended to make motivational claims in regards to speakers’ orientations, nor to suggest that this is the only possible reading of these extracts (for alternate readings see Augoustinos, 2001; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Sale, 1999). Rather we have hoped to elaborate the interconnections between talk and context. We have suggested that in Australia white subjectivities are predominantly predicated upon colonial

understandings of land, Indigeneity and control, and thus the construction of 'Indigenous threat' would seem to be one of the available discourses through which participants may position their talk on land claims. This fantasy of 'Indigenous threat' also works to retrospectively attribute the violence of colonisation to Indigenous peoples – that white violence was a response to 'Indigenous threat', rather than being acts of genocide (cf. Frosh, 2002; Riggs, 2003a).

We have also sought to demonstrate the ways in which psychoanalytic understandings of subjective investments may allow for an examination of the practices of exclusion that shape whiteness as a racialised system of signification. Following on from Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000), we have hoped to make visible the practices through which the 'anxieties of whiteness' are managed. As evidenced throughout the paper, these practices are enacted in multiple and often contradictory ways in everyday talk. In some instances Indigenous peoples were positioned as being the sole occupants of racialised categories, yet at other times denied a position within white systems of representation. We would suggest that these paradoxical constructions might be read as demonstrating the lack that centers upon a desire to '*be* whiteness', in the sense of occupying a signifying position. What is made evident by this desire is the reliance of white subjectivities upon the binaries of 'us and them' that structure whiteness. Thus instead of existing outside the signifying systems of race, we would locate white people's talk firmly within racialised understandings of subjectivity.

As has been evident throughout this paper, the politics of the researcher are never far away. And it is this that we believe to be a central aspect of research on whiteness in Australia. It is important that we as white researchers be transparent about the ways in which our work is located within the hegemony of whiteness. In order to challenge the normative status of whiteness, it is therefore important to engage with a form of critical reflexivity, where we as researchers acknowledge our own position in relation to whiteness. Similarly, we would suggest that research on whiteness needs to be based upon a desire to challenge (rather than simply describe) the systems of whiteness (Riggs & Selby, 2003). Thus white privilege may be usefully conceptualised as always already benefiting white people, but it is how we engage with our privilege that will determine the worth of a 'critical psychology of whiteness'. Examining the ways in which whiteness is masked in everyday projections of threat is but one way in which we as white researchers may challenge the normative status of whiteness. Our task, then, is to continue with an interrogation of the social practices that inform white talk, and the ways in which such talk continues to prop up and privilege the institutions of whiteness.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1 We use this term because it is deployed in participants' talk. The reader should be aware that such terms are highly offensive to Indigenous communities, and the use of such terms is in no way supported by the authors.

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