# Repressing a privileged location: Exploring the uncanniness of white belonging

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**Abstract:** In this paper I employ Freud's concept of the uncanny in order to examine the ways in which white belonging in Australia is founded upon the repression of ongoing histories of colonisation. I suggest that the unsettling that these histories produce are managed through recourse to the spatialisation of white identities, the result being that the white nation can lay claim to a sense of belonging through ownership. In order to challenge this understanding, I outline an approach to understanding location itself as an inherently exclusionary practice, founded as it is upon the epistemic violence of white ways of knowing. I propose that what is needed is the ongoing problematisation of white belonging, and a focus on the privilege of location that masks the uncanniness of our assumptions of place.

> Settler belonging is an expression of the epistemic violence (to borrow Spivak's phrase) of settler post colonialism (Probyn, 2002, p. 75).

> The uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed (Freud, 1961, p. 247).

> The enigma and threat of democracy is not the army of shadows in the underground. The enigma and threat of democracy is merely its own indeterminacy. This means that people have no place, that they are not identical to themselves: that indeterminacy is in fact a permanent challenge to the rationality of policy and rationality of social knowledge. Spatialization is a way of conjuring with the challenge of safely grounding reasonable democracy and rational social knowledge (Rancière, 1994, p. 34).

The three preceding quotes neatly demonstrate the key argument that I wish to put forward in this paper – that notions of white belonging in Australia are always already premised upon the genocide and dispossession of the Indigenous peoples of this land – a fact that is routinely repressed in order to manage the uncanny effects that it produces. More specifically, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which ongoing histories of colonisation are enacted through that which Jacques Rancière (1994) terms the spatialisation of identification. In this way, I suggest that our identifications as white subjects in Australia may be understood as being foundationally uncanny, in that we are

reliant upon the collective repression of our non-indigenous status (cf., Schech & Haggis, 2001). With an aim to exploring these ideas, I focus on the epistemic violence (Probyn, 2002) that is enacted through the primacy that is accorded to white ways of knowing.

In order to demonstrate these points, I first outline an approach to understanding colonialism that draws upon psychoanalysis as a post-colonising research practice. I suggest that as a site located within a particular time frame, and thus within a network of social and ideological practices, psychoanalysis may be understood as an exposition of the ways in which colonisation is enacted on a number of levels (cf., Seshadri-Crooks, 1994). In other words, its location *within* histories of oppression would seem to be conducive of the reflexivity required to interrogate whiteness as white people. In this way, the location (of researcher, epistemology and practice) becomes fore-grounded and critiqued, rather than left as a taken-for-granted neutral zone. More specifically, I apply Freud's (1961) notion of the uncanny to examine how white belonging is forever unsettled through the recognition of ongoing histories of white violence. In this way I suggest that our location as white people in relation to Indigenous sovereignty presents a challenge to the supposedly *a priori* rights of belonging that have been claimed by us as white people through recourse to the fiction of Terra Nullius.

In order to further examine the uncanny effects of white belonging, I suggest that we need to render uncanny the very concept of belonging itself, particularly as it relates to concepts of ownership and possession. Through an examination of the privilege of location that shapes white hegemony in this country, I focus on the myriad of institutional practices that prop up whiteness, specifically, in relation to the privileged location that white systems of representation hold in this country, and the privileging of white ways of understanding location – that is, the authority that is generated through the association of location with ownership (cf., Moreton-Robinson, 2003). I suggest that these forms of privileged white location are always already structured through their relation to Indigenous disadvantage, and it is thus my intention to demonstrate how this relationship is managed, and challenged, through discourses of place and belonging.

**Psychoanalysis as post-colonising reading practice**

In this paper I employ psychoanalysis as a form of reading practice in order to better understand the social practices of colonisation in Australia. Billig (1999) suggests that psychoanalysis may be a useful research tool as it holds a hegemonic position in Western cultures through a number of interconnected factors: 1) that Freud's development of psychoanalytic theory was in many ways

determined by its location within the context of Austria in the early 20th century, and the rise of anti-Semitism, 2) that it thus provides a means of understanding the rhetorical strategies that manage the issues of self and other that arose from the practices of imperial expansion and colonialism, and 3) that psychoanalysis itself provides the means not only for rendering visible practices of repression, but also for masking its own agendas – not only does it reveal acts of repression, but it similarly shows us how to do repression. As a result, psychoanalysis, as a way of understanding subjectivity, holds considerable cultural value within Western societies. I would thus suggest that psychoanalysis provides a means of understanding the construction of subjects within colonial nations such as Australia - not as a tool for diagnosing the pre-existing problems of a cultural group, but instead as a cultural resource that prioritises particular moral and ethical understandings of the world.

These connections between the practices of colonisation and psychoanalysis are elaborated further in the work of Khanna (2003), who employs the concept of "worlding" in order to explore how particular knowledge making practices are universalised through the subjugation of alternate knowledge. She suggests that the practices of worlding are "profoundly ideological" (p. 4) – that they are reliant upon the concealment of colonial violence in ways that both justify white belonging, whilst denying the acts of appropriation that shape the practices of imperialism (see also Probyn, 2002). To map this concept onto the Australian context, I would suggest that the form of worlding that arose from colonisation was reliant upon the fiction of Terra Nullius[1] – the presumption that only white ways of knowing about land and country were valid. Such presumptions continue to inform the ways in which the white Australian nation responds to the sovereignty of Indigenous people, and thus hold us in psychoanalytic-like relations (Parker, 1997), where the conflation of the subject positions "white" with "self" and "Indigenous" with "other" works to legitimise the unequal relations that exist between the two groups (see also Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Riggs & Selby, 2003).

Both Elliot (1996) and Nolan (2003) have examined some of the complex ways in which psychoanalysis is implicated in the knowledge practices that shape

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[1] The notion of Terra Nullius has been used in Australia since colonisation to claim that the land was empty upon the arrival of white people – that because the many Indigenous Nations that existed before colonisation did not conform to white modes of ownership and land management (i.e., pastoralism), they could make no claim to ownership of land that preceded those of white colonisers. Whilst some Indigenous Nations have had success in claiming land rights over the past few decades in Australia, there continues to be much contestation over land rights in general, and certainly the current Howard government has shown little sign of recognising Indigenous sovereignty. For more see Moreton-Robinson (2003; 2004) and Probyn (2002).

colonial nations. Their suggestion is not that we should engage in a naïve revisionist history of Freud that focuses on the racism of psychoanalysis per se, nor do they attempt to excuse psychoanalysis or Freud from histories of racism. Rather, their intent (and one that I share) is to examine how these histories position psychoanalysis as a potential site for examining colonisation. The question then, is how may psychoanalysis work to render visible the social practices of imperialism through the framework of psychoanalysis itself (cf., Doanne, 1991)?

In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud (1930) suggests that white civilisation (or more precisely, culture – see Parker, 1997, pp. 111-112 for a discussion of this) requires the repression of its foundational violence in order to institute a particular moral order, and moreover, to equate that moral order with a notion of white good. Thus Nolan (2003), in her analysis of Freud's Totem and Taboo, suggests that the claim to a civilising mission should not be un-problematically accepted in relation to the practices of colonisation, but rather, that colonisation should be viewed as an act of aggression – as the psychical and physical displacement of Indigenous systems of representation. To paraphrase Khanna (2003), we may suggest then that the worlding of white morality works to normalise (or universalise) such understandings of morality so as to justify white violence against those who transgress it. In this way, the incommensurability of white and Indigenous knowledges (to employ a crude binarism) is used as a justification for the oppression of Indigenous people by positioning white ways of knowing as essentially good (Probyn, 2002).

I would suggest, then, that the foundational tenets of psychoanalysis are directly applicable to the analysis of colonial nations, and thus, colonial subjectivities. The account of subjectivity as outlined throughout the work of Freud, may be (very) roughly referred to as the practice of understanding how past events have shaped the present. Thus the revealing of the primal scene is taken as a key tool for understanding the complexes of adult experiences. This account may be translated into the colonial context, whereby it is only possible to understand how white subjectivities are constructed in the now through recourse to the primal scene of colonial violence. Again, I would suggest that we may locate this as being the context of Terra Nullius itself – that white belonging in Australia is configured through the foundational assumptions of Terra Nullius.

Yet, having said that, whilst a view of history that denies white violence holds sway in Australia within the current political climate, it is by no means the only understanding of colonisation available. Indeed, the term "post-colonising" ,as suggested by Moreton-Robinson, (2003), points towards the fact that whilst the white nation may continue to engage in practices that oppress Indigenous people (and repress white violence), the challenge of Indigenous sovereignty is

one that can not be simply dismissed (see also Nicoll, 2003). Moreover, I would suggest that from this perspective, acts of repression are rendered more obviously attempts at reasserting white hegemony, and can thus be seen as destabilising claims to the *a priori* sovereignty of white people. In this way, the reading of a post-colonising move through psychoanalysis may contribute to the visibilisation of practices of repression, the result being the decentring of the normative status of white ways of knowing.

**Spatialised Identifications – Claiming Self/Claiming Place**

As I have already suggested, a psychoanalytic approach to reading colonialism may work to locate the primal scene of Terra Nullius as an ongoing tool for justifying white belonging. Thus, regardless of the recent and relative success of Indigenous Nations achieving land rights, the fiction of Terra Nullius continues to inform decisions about the control of land, and indeed works to maintain white ways of knowing as central to definitions of belonging in Australia (see also Moreton-Robinson, 2003; 2004). This reliance on the fiction of Terra Nullius thus continues to implicate us as white people in colonial violence. In these ways, and as Moreton-Robinson (2003) elaborates, the denial of Indigenous sovereignty may be understood as an attempt at claiming some form of white ontological belonging in Australia.

In a paper on white belonging, Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos (2003) suggest that white subjectivities demonstrate an ontological disturbance – that any possibility for our belonging as colonial subjects is unsettled through the relationship we have, or deny, to Indigenous sovereignty. Thus attempts by the white nation to subsume Indigenous people within the position of the other may be understood as effectively working to undermine claims to white belonging. Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos suggest that in order for us as white people to belong, we require the recognition of our right to belong at an ontological level. Yet if the sovereignty of Indigenous people is ignored, there can be no possibility of such recognition for white people. As a result, and as I believe a psychoanalytic reading of imperialism demonstrates, white violence is an ongoing practice that is directed at managing this ontological disturbance, so as to erase or subsume Indigenous people to the extent that the white nation becomes its own point of recognition. Yet, if we are to understand white subjectivities as founded upon this lack of belonging, or more specifically, through a lack of any recognition of a right to belong, then the ontological disturbance that our subjectivities represent prevents us being in any way other than through anxiety. Having said that, there is obviously an uncanny relationship between the foundational lack of white subjectivities, and the hegemony of whiteness in this country. The question, then, is how is it that

white people continue to benefit from unearned race privilege, despite our rather anxious location in relation to histories of place?

Jacques Rancière (1994) suggests that the anxieties surrounding our lack of belonging are repressed through recourse to spatialisation as an identificatory practice. In other words, through the production of a range of discourses that simulate the settledness of white national identity (e.g., an emphasis on white achievements in relation to: war [the digger], agriculture [the pastoralist] and over-coming the harsh environment [the battler]), it has been possible for white subjectivities to be shaped through a notion of place and belonging (Moran, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). In this way "settler belonging" is premised on what Fiona Probyn (2002, p. 75), following Spivak, terms epistemic violence. Such violence works to mask colonial violence against Indigenous people, and thus allows for the rewriting of white history as the peaceful settlement of an uninhabited land (see also Riggs, 2003a).

This point demonstrates the ongoing connections between the ideologies of Terra Nullius and the identificatory practices of white subjectivities. Whilst Terra Nullius may have been challenged as a justification for refusing land rights claims to Indigenous peoples, this has not translated into the contestation of Terra Nullius as a social practice that informs white spatialised identifications (cf., Moran, 2002). Indeed, such identifications may be understood in many ways as being reinforced by the High Court's verdicts – whilst the outcomes may be viewed as a step towards recognising the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, the verdicts nonetheless serve to enshrine white ways of knowing as *a priori* being the objective arbiter of what classifies as place and belonging.[2] Thus as Moreton-Robinson (2004) suggests, refusals to recognise Indigenous land rights, both pre- and post- Mabo, demonstrate the tight grip that the white nation maintains in regards to defining who can, and who cannot, possess land. Thus, as an ongoing practice of colonisation, Terra Nullius remains as an *a priori* justification for the settledness of white subjectivities. In denying the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, the white nation can therefore continue to employ discourses of place to bolster its hold upon land (cf., Nicoll, 1998).

Yet at the same time, such attempts at managing place only serve to visibilise

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[2] For the purposes of this paper I have focused on the ways in which white people since colonisation have directed or attempted to manage Indigenous sovereignty. This is a necessary analytic move to make in order to demonstrate the violent foundations of white belonging, but at the same time it runs the risk of contributing to the denial of Indigenous sovereignty and agency. I thus seek to acknowledge here that there exist many counter stories to the dominant accounts of colonisation, and there also exist many examples of collaboration and negotiation between Indigenous and white people. My point, then, is not that such events didn't occur, or that relationships don't continue to exist, but rather that the dominant narrative of the Australian nation comes at the expense of denying the reality of Indigenous sovereignty.

the contingent nature of white identificatory practices. Rather than simply reasserting white dominance, they render obvious the anxieties that shape our sense of belonging. Thus, as Butler (1993) suggests in regards to identificatory practices, the reliance upon the binaries of self and other (as underpinning Western subjectivities) leaves identities that are founded through such practices open to the unsettling that arises from the presence of those people positioned as the excluded other. As I will go on to discuss, this lack of a lack is what Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000) suggests to be the site where whiteness is rendered most visibly uncanny. Whilst the constant reiteration of white subjectivities serves to create a semblance of reality (i.e., the fixity of identities), this is only the case if those people positioned as the other to the white self can be adequately kept within the frame of white histories (Riggs, 2003b). When there is a failure of positioning, in that Indigenous people, for example, challenge the dominance of white systems of representation, then the practices of repression that attempt to mask white violence are revealed (cf., Roach, 1996). And it is here that the uncanny effects of white belonging are exposed – that as white people our current location is made possible only through the denial of our previous location(s), and the dis-location of Indigenous people.

## The Uncanny, Colonisation and National Belonging

In referring to white subjectivities as being foundationally uncanny, I take as useful the description of the uncanny employed by Freud (1961) in his work on the subject. Freud suggested that the uncanny is generated through the return of the repressed – in the revealing of things that were thought to be repressed. Thus as Bergland (2000, p.11) suggests, colonial subjects "must avoid being reminded of what has been buried, and just as important, what has been conquered. But of course, they cannot". In this way, our acts of belonging as colonising subjects are configured through the repression of histories of white violence. These national acts of repression are constantly under threat in regards to the claims that Indigenous people continue to make in relation to land rights and sovereignty. As a result, our location is rendered uncanny  - the repression of white violence is revealed, and our belonging is shown to be "based on illegal dispossession" ( Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 24). In her work on colonial narratives of belonging, Allen (2003) suggests that the fiction of Terra Nullius was used to construct Australia as an empty space, just waiting to be filled by white people. Through such a denial of Indigenous sovereignty, white colonisers were able to deny the uncanny effects of their location upon this land through recourse to imperialism as a foundational trope for justifying political and economic hegemony. Thus, as Bergland (2000, p. 15) again suggests, in this social context Indigenous people "might be experienced as the uncanny confirmation

of the terrifying possibilities of powerlessness… that [colonising subjects] attempt to repress".

In this regard, Freud (1961) suggested that uncanny experiences occur when something that we assume to be familiar is rendered unfamiliar. In their book titled "Uncanny Australia", Gelder and Jacobs (1998) suggest that this is also the case when something unfamiliar becomes familiar. Both of these renderings of the uncanny are indicative of our location as white people in Australia. In the first instance, something that is familiar – our belonging in this country – is rendered unfamiliar when it is compared with Indigenous belonging. Moreton-Robinson (2003) suggests that Indigenous people are connected to land through an ontological belonging – one that precedes, and indeed exceeds white claims to belonging. In this way, the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous people has not effected the erasure of Indigenous people, nor has it resulted in the unproblematic location of white people in this country. Rather, it has created a foundational lack of white belonging that is revealed as uncanny when our sense of belonging is shown to be unfounded (e.g., through the challenges that Indigenous people have made since colonisation in relation to land rights) – the familiar is rendered unfamiliar.

Similarly, white belonging is rendered uncanny when the unfamiliar becomes familiar. Throughout the history of white colonisation, the category migrant has predominantly been reserved for those people positioned as being "non-white". Whilst this category has changed greatly over time, to include groups that were previously excluded, it continues to be deployed to manage the whiteness of the Australian nation. As a result, the unfamiliar for most white Australians has been those people positioned as outside the category of "white". We have seen examples of this over the past few years in the media reportage of illegal immigrants, and more recently, those events termed terrorist attacks. These events have worked to clearly construct who does, and who does not count as a familiar (white) person to the Australian nation. Yet, these examples of constructions of familiarity are rendered uncanny if we are to understand our own location as white people in regards to migrancy (or more accurately, invasion). Indigenous land claims continue to render visible the contingent status of white belonging in Australia, thus unsettling our location, and positioning us as migrants - much like those groups of people positioned as non-white or outsiders by the white Australian nation. Thus instead of being able to claim some form of *a priori* belonging, we are forced to recognise our location as being estranged – as being foreigners to this land (cf., Kristeva, 1994; Moran, 2002). In this way, that which is unfamiliar  - the foreign – becomes the site where we are located, rendering our feelings of belonging as uncanny.

In addition to this understanding of the uncanny, Freud (1961, p. 224) suggested that the uncanny "is the name for everything that ought to have

remained secret and hidden but has come to light".  We may draw obvious parallels here with the ongoing histories of white violence (e.g., the forced removal of Indigenous children, land theft and the destruction of sacred sites) – histories which have up until recently remained repressed in the white national psyche. Regardless of the justifications that have been claimed for these actions, and their relegation to the past, the ongoing visibilisation of these practices renders uncanny white claims to benevolence and the civilising mission. Instead the foundations of white belonging are re-presented as located upon acts of violence and negation.

One of the ways in which these uncanny experiences are managed (in order to bolster the hegemony of whiteness) is through the discourse of Indigenous threat. Elsewhere, I (along with Augoustinos, 2004) have argued for one particular understanding of subjective investments in whiteness as being managed through the projection of threat onto Indigenous people. Within these social practices, white violence is repressed, and recast as a response to the supposedly *a priori* threat presented by Indigenous people (cf., Clarke, 2002). Contemporary discourses of threat thus draw upon this positioning to justify white advantage through recourse to the threat of Indigenous land claims (Nicoll, 1998). In this way the uncanny effects of such land claims are blamed upon Indigenous people, thus making it possible for the white nation to ignore the fact that the uncanny is produced through our lack of any true claim to land, rather than as a result of our justifiable *a priori* sovereignty being challenged. Moreover, it is precisely at the point where the white nation is reliant upon the notion of Indigenous threat that our location is rendered uncanny. In other words, by recognising the existence of Indigenous people who were threatening, the white nation undermines the fiction of Terra Nullius, thus revealing the white violence that has been repressed, and therefore locating our belonging as foundationally uncanny.

Simon Clarke and Anthony Moran (2002) suggest that the uncanny effects of repression are also managed through the construction of Indigenous people (rather than white people) as the site of the uncanny. In this way, our feelings of foundational uncanniness (i.e., our non-recognition as located subjects) are repressed. This construction of Indigenous people as uncanny is evident in discourses that suggest Indigenous people have lost their culture, or which rely on a notion of the transiency of Indigenous life in order to challenge Indigenous belonging (cf., Riggs, 2004). Such white discourses create the uncanny situation, whereby Indigenous people (who are taken as having a long-standing relationship with the land) are positioned as being unsettled – as having no belonging.[3] In this way our own lack of belonging as white people is projected

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[3] In saying this, I should clarify that in talking here about belonging, I am referring to white understandings of belonging. Whilst it may well be the case that as a result of the

onto Indigenous cultures, the result being that our uncanny location in this country is repressed. What such practices demonstrate are the ways in which our constructions of Indigenous peoples presence as uncanny in fact reflect our own feelings of unsettledness. Yet these acts of projection are always already waiting at the borders of white identifications, threatening to reveal the instability of positioning that shapes our subjectivities (Stephenson, 2002).

Probyn (2002) points towards the ways in which the projection of the uncanny onto Indigenous people is rendered problematic if we are to give consideration to white attempts at claiming indigenous status, in order to manage Indigenous land claims. If we are to understand that white systems of representation are reliant upon the subject/object spilt that equates white with self, and Indigenous with other, then any attempts by white people to become indigenous effectively render our belonging uncanny. Thus any claim to white belonging as an *a priori* category is challenged when we are forced to recognise the location of Indigenous peoples themselves. This demonstrates the previously mentioned "lack of a lack" (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000, p. 84), where the site of the other (which is either taken to be totally different from whiteness, or the site that white people aspire to be – to have Indigenous belonging) is populated by a group of people who challenge the authority of whiteness, and demand recognition of their sovereignty in this land. In this way, Indigenous land claims render visible our problematic status of belonging, and generate an uncanny effect that unsettles any claims to the indigenous status of white people (for an example of this, see the rhetoric of Pauline Hanson and her claims to belonging).

In these intersecting ways, white belonging is rendered uncanny – either through the revealing of whiteness as located upon Indigenous disadvantage, or through the challenge that Indigenous land claims present to the indigenising moves of white people. In order to further explore the privilege of location that shapes whiteness in this country, I now turn to look at the ways in which we may understand white belonging as constituted through a very particular understanding of place. More specifically, I would suggest that it is the conflation of place with racialised categories that makes possible the assertion of white hegemony in this country. In this way, I suggest that we need to go further than simply suggesting that our belonging as white people is uncanny – instead we need to render uncanny the very category of belonging itself.

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Native Title Act, 1993 (for example) Indigenous people are forced to prove their belonging status within white systems of representation, this does not negate Indigenous peoples ontological belonging to country, a belonging that pre-exists white belonging-through-ownership/dispossession (for more on this see Moreton-Robinson, 2003).

**Challenging Placialised Binaries**

As I have outlined earlier, white subjectivities may be understood as structured through spatialised practices of identification. In this way, the binaries of here and there, self and other, are made possible through the privileging of location; both the site of subjectivity as being within individual bodies, and as such bodies being located within particular places. In her work on "The ethics of travel", Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2002) outlines some of the ways in which these practices of identification are reliant upon the privileging of a very specific form of white knowing about place: the association made between ownership, belonging and self. Seshadri-Crooks suggests that rather than repeating this form of knowing by accepting a simplistic understanding of the uncanny effects of white belonging as produced through the conflation of the here and there (i.e., the familiar and the unfamiliar), we need to better understand *how* belonging may be understood in ways that challenge assumptions of ownership.

Following on from this, I would suggest that in order to thoroughly unsettle notions of white belonging, we need to render uncanny the very concept of location itself, rather than solely conceiving particular locations as being uncanny (where the location itself is a taken for granted object). What this requires, then, is the challenging of what I will term "placialised binaries". Here I refer to the intricate ways in which the categories of racialised practices are connected with discourses of place to produce an understanding of white belonging as predicated upon an *a priori* understanding of white hegemony (cf., Bergland, 2000). In other words, as the normative subject position within racialised hierarchies, whiteness is accorded a relatively invisible location for white people. This invisibility of race for white people thus translates into an explicit visibilisation of race for those people positioned as the racialised other. In these very complex ways, white belonging is made to appear as if it is always already located upon a universal sense of place – that it is the natural right of white people to assume ownership of land (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). Of course, the corollary of this is that Indigenous people, for example, are positioned as lacking this sort of belonging – as being ineligible for the status of land-holder. This demonstrates the ways in which racialised binaries construct specific understandings of place in colonial nations. In order to unsettle the dominance of such white ways of knowing, it is thus necessary to render visible the limits (and thus uneasy foundations) of such identificatory practices. To do this I will provide a brief example from the previously mentioned text "Uncanny Australia" (Gelder & Jacobs, 1998). I do this not to critique the text *per se*, but instead to demonstrate how ingrained white notions of place are, and how they limit the challenges that we as white writers may make to oppressive practices in Australia.

In the conclusion to their book, Gelder and Jacobs (1998, p. 138) suggest that

"in an uncanny Australia, one's place is always already another's place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled". They go on to state that "one can never be completely in possession of place: one is always (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossession is a fully realisable category". What these quotes suggest, is that the realisation of the categories of possession and place could be a potential end point for managing a desire for settledness. This demonstrates the assumptions that shape white discourses of belonging: whilst Gelder and Jacobs acknowledge the ways in which one's place is always already another's place, this is predicated upon the belief that place should be conflated with possession. What this engenders is an understanding of white belonging as unsettled by our inability to own place due to the prior claims to land of Indigenous people, rather than focusing on how this very understanding of place is structured through acts of dispossession.

This also serves to conflate white lack of possession with Indigenous dispossession, thus ignoring the assumptions of place that have driven imperialism. The point, then, is that whilst throughout their book Gelder and Jacobs outline the uncanny effects of white belonging, they fall short of taking the step to outline what this means for the hegemonic status of white understandings of belonging. The problem, then, is that this may be read as translating into the reassertion of white ways of knowing, and a somewhat naïve understanding of the disjunctures between white and Indigenous belonging (cf., Riggs, 2003b). This approach serves to minimise the incommensurability of belonging that has shaped the histories of white Australia through acts of dispossession and genocide, and instead recuperates Indigenous belonging into notions of white national belonging through the appropriation of indigeneity as an accessible category for white people (as previously discussed).

What this illustrates is the need for the ongoing problematisation of white ways of knowing, and the continued examination of how the spatialisation of white identities is produced. Importantly, we need to focus on the uncanny effects of white belonging in order to highlight the limits (and location) of white understandings of place and belonging. One site where we may challenge the placialised binaries of white belonging is in the paradox that structures white claims to location and thus claims to ownership. Even though white belonging is constructed through universalistic assumptions of white superiority (which are most often voiced at the level of the nation), it is also premised on an understanding of white subjectivities as grounded in particular places. These dual locations may thus be understood as compromising the binaries of Indigenous-local/white-universal that constitute white claims to belonging (Seshadri-Crooks, 2002). Whilst such localising of whiteness may be understood as being premised upon its implicit power to universalise, it is nonetheless the case that whiteness also requires an identification at a local level that in some

ways requires a foregoing of the universal in order to lay claim to place. These uncanny aspects of white belonging thus forever unsettle white subjectivities. What they also make obvious are the anxieties that shape the white nation, and the limits to the placialised binaries that inform white hegemony. If we are instead to accept the uncanny foundations of white identifications in this country, then the binaries of local/universal become more transparently the machinations of imperialism, and thus evidence of the desire to enforce boundaries that are always already impossible.

## Conclusions

What I have hoped to demonstrate in this paper are the very complex histories of location that shape white belonging and identificatory practices in Australia. Through a focus on the uncanny effects of white belonging and an examination of the limits of placialised binaries, I have pointed towards some of the discourses that surround the anxiety of whiteness in this country. A key point of my argument has been the unsettling that is produced by Indigenous land claims, and the recognition of our problematic location(s) as white people in this country. In order to draw out some of the unsettling practices that result from histories of oppression, I have sought to demonstrate some of the many meanings of location that work to manage white hegemony. Specifically, I have sought to a) challenge the dominance of white understandings of location as founded upon *a priori* notions of white ownership, b) contribute to the visibilisation of the location of such understandings within histories of colonisation, and c) locate white privilege as a result of these interplays of location and belonging.

   Similarly, I have demonstrated the ways in which the fiction of Terra Nullius continues to inform colonial subjectivities in Australia. The conflation of the categories of self and other with white and Indigenous serve to repress ongoing histories of white violence through the denial of Indigenous sovereignty. Through the use of psychoanalysis as a post-colonising reading practice, I have contributed to the visibilisation of the uncanny effects of white belonging, and thus to the revealing of the repressed – the need for the white nation to be accountable for white violence.

   In doing so, I have attempted to develop an understand of how, rather than simply why, we as white people do not and cannot belong in the sense of a recognition of a right to do so (cf., Vassilacopoulos & Nicolacopoulos, 2003). In this way I have suggested that rather than solely trying to account for histories of colonisation, we need to reflexively engage in critiquing the practices that create our semblance of belonging in this land. Thus I believe that in being accountable for our privilege we need to examine the structures of epistemic

violence that lend white systems of representation their power, for if we are to only engage with our privilege as a legacy of the past, we are made complicit with the very systems that we seek to challenge. In order to work through this, we need to forego our hopes for an easy ending, and instead be willing to work with our discomfort and feelings of uncanniness. What this means for research in this area is a commitment to a politics of location that challenges its own privilege, rather than simply reinstating it.

## Acknowledgements

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