



# **Critical Whiteness Studies: An Overview on Theories Methods and Approaches**

**Dr Shona Hunter**

**University of Mannheim, Germany 25-26 June  
2012**



# White Spaces Research Network

- Rethink raced power & vulnerability as ambivalent and shifting
- Rethink race, racism and ethnicity as more differentiated than only between Black and White
- More sensitive to people's lived realities in families, at work and other institutions.
- Hunter, Swan and Grimes (2010) 'Reproducing and resisting whiteness in organisations, policies and places', *Social Politics*, 17(4).
- Lund Pederson, Samaluk (2012) Critical Whiteness Studies Methodologies, *Graduate Journal of Social Sciences* .
- Abbas, Burgin, Decker & Hunter, (forthcoming 2013) New Territories in Critical Whiteness Studies , *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*



# Today's session

## Part 1

### **Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS):**

- Introduction to the interdisciplinary range and breadth of CWS
- Appreciation of whiteness as socially, materially and affectively constructed (historically and spatially located)
- Contested & complicated relationship to white supremacy, histories of imperialism and Empire

## Exercise



# Today's session

## Part 2 example:

- Irishness as ambiguously dis/empowered
- 'Bad' whiteness. Kept out of 'pure whiteness' at the same time as benefitting from the same colonial power.

## Part 3 example Key text

(Hunter, 2010: What a White Shame) :

- English CWS: Discursive material/symbolic/affective
- Empire, shame and anxiety (postcolonial melancholia)  
Shift from pride to shame, feminised degradations of whiteness
- Revisionist narratives enacting 'good' and 'bad' whiteness. Worried (worrying) white men and white women saviours (Bill Janet & Mazie)



# White (not British or European) Nation Fantasy

Th[e] White belief in one's mastery over the nation, whether in the form of a White multiculturalism or in the form of a White racism ... It is a fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy.

**Because [whiteness] is a fantasy position:**

no, one can be fully white, they can only yearn to be so ... it is by *feeling qualified to yearn* for such a position that people become identified as White.

(Hage, 1998 pp18/58)



# *Whitened* subjects

‘Some people are ‘whiter’ than others, some are not white enough and many are inescapably cast beneath the shadow of whiteness’ .

(Nayak, 2007: 738)



# Critical Whiteness Studies

## Whiteness as:

- a social/cultural, political and affective
- Shifting; changeable across time and space
- Historical repetition/work/contestation fixes associations with particular physical features/particular bodies. *imagined as white*

## ***Codified for those that are in it:***

- Normative, commonsense, natural, shared
- Hidden, coded, scripted, **‘whitely scripts’**  
(Breda Gray, 2002)



# Codification of whiteness

**Means:**

1. 'we' know almost instinctively what whiteness 'is' without ever necessarily uttering the word.

2. we need to think carefully **methodologically** about how we:

1. read this; make analytical links between the symbolic and material
2. how we explain this to others 'outside' of debates on whiteness.

***Why is what we read whiteness and not something else?***

# Who is 'in' normative whiteness?

## White masculinity:

The ideal white man [is] one who knew how to use his head, who knew how to manage and control things and get things done.

## Embodies the spirit of Empire:

He is enterprising, heroic, dynamic, virile, healthy, enduring, noble, reasonable, calm, able to control both himself and the environment around him.

Dyer, 1997

## White femininity:

The ideal white woman 'the good white girl' is one who supports and nurtures the ideal white man, maintaining the social order.

## Is the bearer of the white race:

She is pure, passive, silent, gentle, respectable, civil, decorous (silent). Polices the boundaries of white morality and the excesses of white masculinity.

Frankenberg, 1993

**White masculinity at the pinnacle  
of its power 19c Western  
European colonialism**

# Who is out of normative whiteness here and now?

- Eastern European
- Irish
- Irish traveller
- Jewish communities,
- Roma
- White working classes – ‘White Trash’/‘rednecks’/‘Chavs’



# How are they 'in' normative whiteness?





# 1<sup>st</sup> Wave: Whiteness as structuring ideology - 'public and psychological wage' DuBois (1935)

1. Whiteness as material and psychological privilege - White labourers adopting racialised identity of dominant group
2. Whiteness as invisible through various ideological positions – colour blindness/cultural deficit/nationalism stand in for whiteness
3. Whiteness travels and structures globally the 'color line'



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave: Mechanisms of whiteness

1. Cognitive dissonance between EO & Jim Crow in the mind of whites (Myrdal, 1944)
2. Literary “whiteness” - codification that renders whiteness invisible, whiteness as a cultural referent (Morrison, 1992)
3. Material - Legal/institutional definitions of who is white (Delgado and Stefancic, 1996; Harris, 1993; Lopez, 1996)
4. Symbolic/cultural - whitening of successive migrants (Jews/Poles/Irish) as a reward for aligning with dominance (Allen, 1994; Roediger, 1991; Jacobson, 1998)



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave:

## Material processes & practices UK:

legal, civil and political rights, immigration law, social security, property ownership:

1914 & 19 Aliens Restriction Act – Jewish identity cards

1962 Immigration Act - Irish as a ‘special case’

1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act – Irish migrants as ‘suspect communities’

2004 Workers registration scheme - ‘no recourse to public funds’ – A8 migrants (Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Slovakia)

2007 reversal of ‘public funds’ & immediate labour market access – A2 migrants (Romania, Bulgaria)

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave:

## Cultural & symbolic practices UK:

religion, dress, language, consumption patterns, housing (suburbanization), schooling and education, 'moralities'.

**'I never knew the working class had such white skins'**

(Lord Milner, Battle of the Somme WW1, in Cohen, 1997 p256)

**'If you talk about anti-Irish racism people look at you as if you have two heads, like what is the problem? You are "white", you speak English, they don't understand this huge cultural difference'**

Breda Grey (2002, p266)



**10 -15 minutes**

- 1. Think about your day to day experiences what whitely scripts frame your behaviours?**
- 2. Why do you identify them as whitely particularly?**



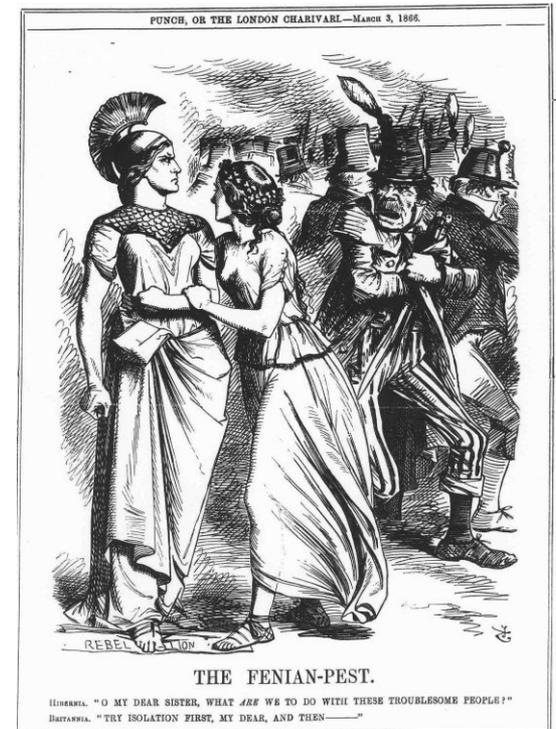
# PART 2

# Discursively ambivalent Irishness

## In need of civilisation

1. Religious minority
2. 'Index of nigrescence'
3. Simionization: skull size, hair colour, prognathous jaw
4. Political underclass
5. 'Suspect community' terror
6. **Yet** colonial oppressor connections

## Irish Iberian (Harper's Weekly)



# Subtly blackened subjects

I think discrimination against Irish people is so subtle, bar the statement that ‘all Paddies are stupid’, the rest of it is so subtle that to describe it or to say what it’s about is just very difficult , and people think you’re just making a mountain out of a molehill.

(Cath, London Irish migrant 1990s in Gray, 2002 p.267)



**Multicultural  
Ireland?**

# 'Divided legacies' of colonialism

Race

Nation building

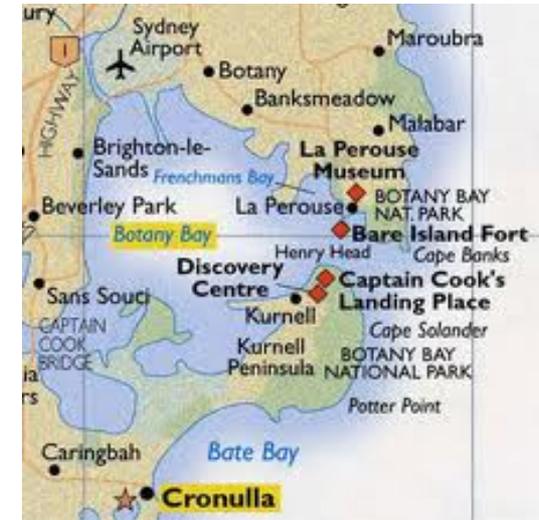
Whiteness

**Specifically Australian (marginalised)  
Anglo-Celtic Whiteness: convicts,  
pioneers, explorers**

'[white national] belonging  
[achieved] through a narrative  
of a **colonized/rejected** people  
– the Irish rebels but also poor  
English convicts – adopting a  
new land of Australia.'

**WUN** (Elder, 2010: 22)  
Worldwide Universities Network

## Irish migrations

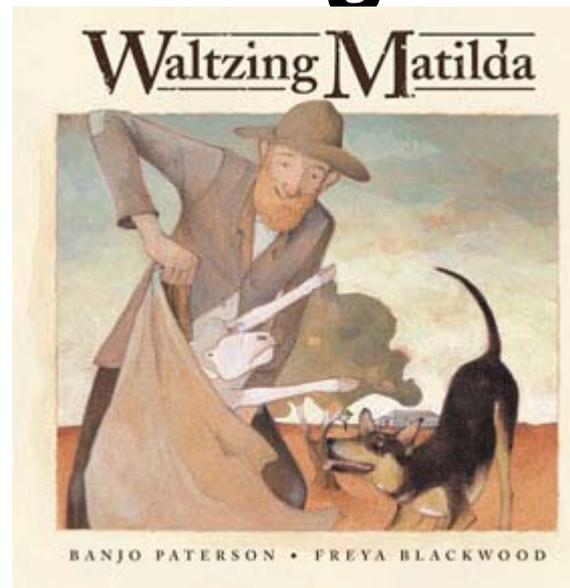


## 1804 Castle Hill Uprising



# Complicity in British (&US) colonial expansion 'hauntings'

This is not the usual exhortation expected of ... an anthem. It doesn't tell anyone to gird our loins, fight foes, wave banners, or save anybody. If its about a battle it's about a lost one ... It's about a battle that did not take place. And after this nonevent the (forgotten) place in question is left to the sheep (their number one less), left to be haunted by a lonely ghost. ... The words of this song do now seem ironically prophetic in that it is **ghosts that Australia now seeks to acknowledge** in order to understand its own identity: ghosts of those lost under the wheels of an empire, **stolen generations, generations of thieves,** ghostly intentions such as no one will now avow. (Kelen, 2005)

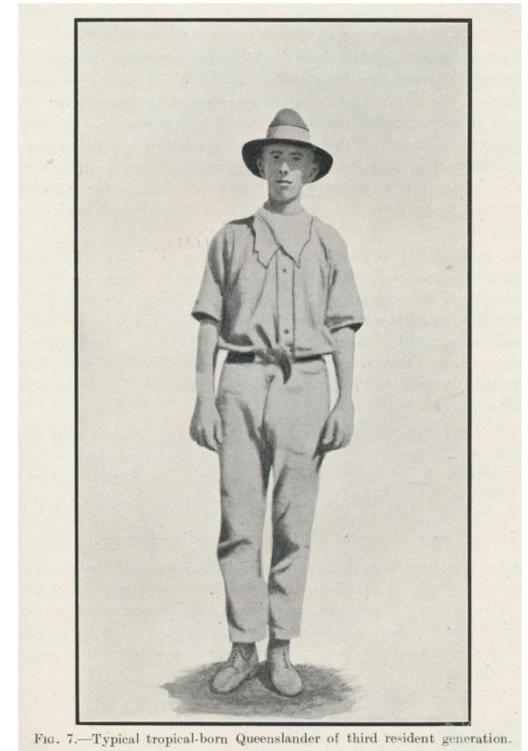


**Indigeneity  
disavowed at the  
same time as  
(Irish – Anglo Celtic)  
whiteness  
'enriched'  
(Negra, 2006)**

# Material practices and processes: Categorising bodies into whiteness

He is tall and rangy, with somewhat sharp features, and long arms and legs. Inclined to be sparely built, he is not however lacking in muscular strength, while his endurance is equal in his own circumstances to that of the temperate dweller in his. This North Queenslander moves slowly, and conserves his muscular heat-producing energy in every possible way. One can pick him out in the streets by the fact that, as a general rule, he walks more deliberately. (Cilento, 1925 p.74)

## Cilento's North Queenslander





# PART 3



# 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave whiteness as process/practice/accomplishment

1. Innovative and renovative research methodologies  
(internet/biography/music/photo-elicitation)
2. Focus on the work done - cultural practices and discursive strategies by whites in order to recuperate, reconstitute and restore white identities in the 'post' contexts.
3. Focus on the recruitment of ethnic minorities to whiteness and the strategic deployment of whiteness by those at the margins. Focus on the achievement of whiteness.



# 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave: Relationality, affective and psychic contradictions

The common denominator in such studies is the consideration of how power and oppression are articulated, redefined, and reasserted, through symbolic, material, discursive psychic practices even where the prerogatives of white supremacy are ostensibly challenged through multiculturalism. [it] sets out to rethink the anxieties, absences, loss, fear, and guilt bound up in whiteness. But it brings these together into a specific critique of the illusion of white benevolence and the liberal transcendence of racism. (Hunter *et al*, 2010 p.412-413)

# UK [3<sup>rd</sup> Wave] Critical Whiteness Studies: Intersectionality

Empire	National geography	Institutions
<p>Colonial power/pride            womens' supportive and disruptive role  <i>Class/gender</i>            (Hall,1997; Ware, 1992; 2005)</p>	<p>White highlands/            white inner cities            Industrial decline            (Nayak, 1999; 2005, Garner 2007; Clarke &amp; Garner, 2010; Pitcher, 2009; Rhodes 2011a; 2011b)</p>	<p>Education and the protection of middle class choice/ 'colour'            (Raey 2008; Raey et al 2008; Byrne 2006; 2008; 2009; Hunter, 2005; 2010; Swan, 2010)</p>
<p>Whiteness as <b>fragile contradictory achievement</b> easily denigrated through gendered and classed disruptions</p>		
<p>Sustained through emotions:            Pride/shame, fear/anger, love/hate</p>		

# The battle between 'good' and 'bad' whiteness

*The Jewel in the Crown* Paul Scott, 1984, BBC 1

Revisionist critique of overtly racist practices as the downfall of Empire, but not of the colonising impulse itself.



Hari Kuma, Daphne Manners, Ronald Merrick

Ahmed Kassim, Guy Perron, Sarah Layton



**'There's nothing I can do! Nothing!'**

Whiteness defined through conscience  
Dyer (1997)



# The psychic costs of whiteness

## White Shame

Dominant white identity ... operates **melancholically** as an identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial. This diligent system of melancholic retention appears in different guises. **Both racist and white liberal discourses participate in this dynamic**, albeit out of different motivations. The racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions within official ... ideals, while white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them. ... Both violent vilification and the indifference to vilification express, rather than invalidate, the melancholic dynamic. Indeed melancholia offers a **powerful critical tool** precisely because it theoretically **accounts for the guilt and the denial of guilt, the blending of shame and omnipotence in the racist imaginary.** (Cheng, 2000, p.11-12)



# White Governmental belonging

## An institutional example

### Health and social care practitioners the epitome of liberal multiculturalism

- Positioning always assumes a certain form of ‘governmental belonging’ feeling you have the right to control, direct and make choices over the environment and the people and materials within this.

### Benevolence, care and good intention

- Operate as a form of control and oppression which further established the power of whiteness over welfare clients and service users.

### Reconciling contemporary benevolence & inequality

- Reconstituted imperialisms continue to play out in contemporary.
- Necessary construction of GOOD and BAD whitenesses.



# Worries about being unequal Bypassed Shame

What does occur in awareness is ideation about the shame event, specifically thoughts, (mainly doubts) about the self-image seen from the “other’s” viewpoint. These sometimes escalate into an internal auditory colloquay about the shame-connected event. The person cannot seem to stop thinking (obsessing) about the shame-connected event. (Lewis, 1990 p.243)



# Worried white men: Bill

[Bill] I mean official statistics, definitions often say WHITE, they then don't break it down to British areas, you go white, Pakistani, which well, white isn't an ethnic group, I mean I have, I worry about that, um, but there was just this arrogant [**male managerial**] assumption that there was white people and then there were other people, and you could break the other people down, into Swahili's and Pakistanis and whatever, which is incredibly arrogant. ...**So there's still that sort of element of culture {pause} being British? It's embarrassing isn't it? ...** I'd say to be perfectly honest. ... because of this {pause} what do people from other places think of the British? Well they think you know, **shaven heads, bare chests, lots of beer**, and I've been round, you know, I've been round, I've been to a lot of countries and you know I'd rather go on holiday where people there aren't British people, quite embarrassing at times ...



# Differentiating Shame

## Shame is:

...at once a measure of civilization and a condition of civilization. Shame enlarges the spectrum of objects outside of [the self] which can engage [people] and concern [them].

## This means that:

To the extent to which the individual invests his (sic) affect in other human beings, in institutions, and in the world around him, he (sic) is vulnerable to the vicarious experiences of shame.

(Tomkins, 2005, pp 59/62)



# White women saviours: Janet fighting for the 'underdog'

[Anti-racist work] is part and parcel, you know you can't pick which BITS of OPPRESSION you'll challenge... Well I don't feel that you can, I can't say oh I'll be anti-ageist, but I won't give a monkeys about racism {long pause} **I've had to challenge** ... the Professional Exec Committee, the one person that I nearly got hold of and throttled because of their RACIST remarks, **but, ur, I didn't.** And I think 'oh, God', so I did question myself over the issue as I said '**you should have said, you should have tackled that, and that's not on.**'



# White women saviours: Mazie Vicarious shame

[Mazie] I think that overall we can learn an AWFUL lot about our neighbours, colleagues and this, this asylum seeking, **it saddens me**, and I've come across **so much racism**, and people are **openly racist**, and **I do get angry**. I actually said to some **man** at a party the other day, and it wasn't a big party, it was a small one, and I actually said '**will you stop please, or else I will have to leave,**' and **my husband just looked at me** and I said, 'because you've got your views but I just think you're very racist and **I won't tolerate, and I can't tolerate listening to you any more,**' and the shock in the room, and I mean, he'd previously gone against, gays, and somebody said 'but its an old image,' and I said 'no it's not' ....



# White women saviours: Mazie (& Shona) Shame as the power to wield moral rectitude

[Mazie cont.] I said, and everybody's sniggering, and some of them afterwards said 'well we didn't agree with him but what do you do?' and I **said 'well you don't laugh, you know you were laughing and I can't tolerate that,'** so {pause} you know. That's what I say, 'I don't want to be rude, **but I really CAN'T listen to this, because I think this is SO unfair to an enormous number of people** that you've never met'. And I said 'you have your right for a view, but if it continues, I will have to go home, **because staying here, I feel as if I'm agreeing with you.'**

[S.H.] Yes, and that's it isn't it, because then you get those **feelings of guilt.**



**10 -15 minutes**

- 1. Think about your day to day experiences what whitely scripts frame your behaviours?**
- 2. Why do you identify them as whitely particularly?**

# Conclusions

## Whiteness as:

Relationally constituted

*Crosses time an space: Traces of colonial 'elsewheres' in contemporary formulations*

Always ambiguously dominant **ie Irish 'divided legacies'**

Contemporary culture: Lived through postcolonial narrative of benevolence

As much about the control of inappropriate whitenesses as of a racialised Other

**ie White women's control of inappropriate white masculine excess**

# Contact Details

Shona Hunter

School of Sociology and Social Policy

University of Leeds

LS2 9JT

tel: 0113 343 4422

mob: 07796 682 036

<http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/about/staff/hunter.php>

Academic Lead for WUN White Spaces Network

<http://www.wun.ac.uk/research/white-spaces-network>