Encountering Racism Down Under:
Antipodean perspectives on the construction of tolerance and white sovereignty

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

The University of Leeds   **The University of Southampton**

The University of Cape Town   **The University of Sydney**

Convenors and Discussants:

Say Burgin	*University of Leeds* (Network Convenor)
Madeline-Sophie Abbas	*University of Leeds* (Network Convenor)
Daria Tkacz	*University of Southampton* (Convenor)
Lwando Scott	*University of Cape Town* (Convenor)
Tristan Enright	*University of Sydney* (Convenor)
Rebecca O'Brien	*University of Sydney* (Lead Discussant)
Rebecca Williamson	*University of Sydney* (Lead Discussant)

Relevant Information:
1. Principal Reading
2. Blog Name and Address
3. Synopses
4. Food for Thought
5. Functional and Technical Instructions
6. Network and Institutional Contacts

1. Principal Reading:[1]
Ghassan Hage (1998) 'Good White Nationalists: The Tolerant Society as a White Fantasy', in *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Sydney: Pluto Press, pp. 78-116.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll (2006) 'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches: Protesting cultures of white possession', *Journal of Australian Studies* 89: 149-186.

2. Blog Name & Address:
En/countering Whiteness: Critically discussing the working of racial practices and racial inequalities
Available at: http://encounteringwhiteness.wordpress.com/

---

[1] N.B. Reading material available electronically from institutional convenors.

3. Synopses

Hage: 'Good White Nationalists'
~ Rebecca Williamson

Hage's chapter critically discusses the discourse of tolerance in Australian society as it relates to the history of immigration, multiculturalism and the integration of the 'Other' into the national imaginary. Hage's main aim is to deconstruct the power relations implicit in the discourse of tolerance. He argues that this discourse works to identify the 'good white nationalist' – a normative notion of the accepting, non-racist citizen – in opposition to the 'evil white nationalist' who is intolerant and racist; a separation that he argues is ideological and strategic. He understands tolerance as a capacity, and describes it as an active practice that is equally constituted by a capacity to *not* tolerate, thus, tolerance and intolerance coexist. Only a certain segment of society (i.e. white nationalists) can claim this capacity which is based on a sense of ownership over an imagined national space – a kind of spatialised power that involves the active positioning of the 'other' within the national imaginary; an act he equates to a form of symbolic violence. Rather than being opposites, 'evil' and 'good' white nationalists represent different thresholds along a continuum of tolerance. Hage argues that the discourse of tolerance works to mask the fact that practices of exclusion and inclusion are both based on an equal claim to the right to manage national space. Thus, the discourse of tolerance acts as a form of 'tolerant racism', which disempowers and objectifies 'others' (migrants, asylum seekers, etc.), while also mystifying the very practices and discourses through which they are victimized.

Moreton-Robinson & Nicoll: 'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches'
~ Rebecca O'Brien

Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll's (2006) article presents the concept of 'patriarchal white sovereignty' as the underlying regime of power that ensures that white, particularly male members of the Australian nation retain more rights to enter, exist and act within public spaces than their non-white counterparts. Patriarchal white sovereignty is presented as an ideological tool utilized primarily to reproduce, confirm and cement whiteness and masculinity as the central keys to ownership of Australia as a nation. It is not logic enacted through explicit legal or social inequality, but is instead based upon the denial of the systemic privileges afforded to white people through historically established legal discrimination. According to Moreton-Robinson & Nicoll (2006:150) this ensures that even though all citizens may have equal rights under the law, 'not all citizens have the resources, capacities and opportunities to exercise them equally'. In accordance with Hage (1998), Moreton-Robinson & Nicoll (2006) suggest that patriarchal white sovereignty extends beyond the right to occupy a physical space, but also to exercise tolerance of the 'other' as well as define the limits at which this tolerance may be revoked. Two case studies are presented as examples of points at which patriarchal white sovereignty has explicitly exposed itself in response to perceived transgressions of 'white behavioural norms and morality'; the 2006 'violent attacks' at Cronulla Beach and a heritage protection claim by Indigenous peoples in Victoria over land 'owned' by a white male. Through these cases, Moreton-Robinson & Nicoll highlight the assumption of the right to ownership imbued within patriarchal white sovereignty, the ways through which the uncooperative 'Other' is presented and excluded from the umbrella of 'Australian' and the ever-present threat of violence that is most often underlying, however at times (such as at Cronulla in 2006) may become manifest in order to remind the racialized 'Other' of the repercussions of pushing the limits of tolerance outlined by the white, Australian 'local'.

4. Food for Thought

Rebecca and Rebecca have raised some (thought-provoking) questions to help get the conversation going. Please feel free to engage with any of these or to offer your own interpretation of the two readings and their relevance (or not) to your own research and/or experience.

- Spatial metaphors have particular prominence in the Australian context, where the national borders are (relatively) clearly defined and as reflected in the symbolic importance of the beach. How are nationalist spatial imaginaries/borders deployed in other contexts (beyond the US) to reinforce racial dominance?

- In Australia, racist commentaries have been justified as a protest against 'political correctness' (i.e. the discourse of tolerance) that purportedly blocks 'freedom of speech' such that the either/or logic seems to have short-circuited any alternative spaces for constructive or critical dialogue. Has this been invoked in other contexts and are there any alternatives that move beyond the tolerator/tolerated binary?

- Hage has been criticized for essentialising the categories of 'white' and 'non-white' Australians, and undermining genuine attempts to support migrant integration and ethnic diversity by the white middle-class. Does this criticism have validity?

- Moreton-Robinson & Nicoll's work has been developed out of, and applied largely to, the Australian context. Is there a place for analyses utilising patriarchal white sovereignty in other contexts?

- Is the concept of patriarchal white sovereignty applicable in postcolonial societies within which the Indigenous population is numerically larger than the colonial or settler population?

- Moreton-Robinson's body of work demonstrates the existence and repercussions of patriarchal white sovereignty, but does little to develop responses through which it may be challenged. How might we begin to develop a response to these issues?

- To what extent can the power of the media be challenged in the face of its repetition of representations of otherness based on exclusionary discourses of white possession?

- The way in which discourses of tolerance work to mask power relations are a feature of both articles. How are these articulated in other contexts/countries? (e.g. does the discourse of race relations in the UK operate in the same way?)

5. Functional and Technical Instructions

1. So that we can generate maximum effect with minimum effort in relation to the new online discussion forum format, we would ask that you set aside 30 or so minutes every few days to both read and respond to the comments made by other participants. This means that you'd spend not much more than an hour online during the timeframe in which this discussion is 'live'.

2. In order to be able to contribute to the blog, you will need to register as a Wordpress user. You can do this by clicking on the register tab on the blog homepage (see link above and below) - you only need a username so click on the 'usernameonly' option. Once you have filled in the necessary information, you will then be registered as a Wordpress user.

3. The next step is to contact Maddy Abbas (see contacts) with the email address you used when creating your account. Please include the following in the subject line: 'WhiteSpaces Blog Edition Sign-Up'. Maddy will then add you to the blog as a 'contributor' so that you will be able to log-in and submit comments. If you would like to, you can also make changes to your profile and add a profile image. If you are already a Wordpress user, you can skip the initial step and just contact Maddy with the email address you want to use.

4. It would be really helpful if people could register and contact Maddy ASAP so that we can check that log-ins work and to test that the blog discussion forum is up and running to ensure that everyone who wants to contribute is able to.

5. To remind you, the blog can be found at:

    http://encounteringwhiteness.wordpress.com

    The username for the blog is: encounteringwhiteness
    The password for the blog is: criticalwhiteness

6. Network and Institutional Contacts

Say Burgin	*Leeds*	hy08snb@leeds.ac.uk
Maddy Abbas	*Leeds*	ss08msna@leeds.ac.uk
Daria Tkacz	*Southampton*	dmt106@soton.ac.uk
Lwando Scott	*Cape Town*	l.scott@uct.ac.za
Tristan Enright	*Sydney*	tenr3065@uni.sydney.edu.au