



Australian Critical Race & Whiteness
Studies Association presents



4 July
2018

Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia

Female Orphan School, Western Sydney University,
Parramatta South Campus

10 am - 6 pm



4 July
2018

Thinking
Relationally about
Race, Blackness
and Indigeneity in
Australia

10

**opening & acknowledgement of
country**

Arrive at 9.30 for registration/coffee

10.15

alexander g. weheliye

Black Life/Schwarz-Sein

irene watson

Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness
and Indigeneity in Australia

Discussion led by Sujatha Fernandes

1

lunch

by Falafel On The Run



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

4 July
2018

Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia

1.30

Relational blackness in colonial Australia

kaiya aboagye

Negotiations of Blackness in colonial Australia
and Re/Thinking the Afro/Indigenous encounter

nikki moodie

Decolonizing race theory: place, survivance &
sovereignty

sandy o'sullivan

Untidy gender and sexuality: celebrating unresolved
identity loops for First Nations' Peoples.

3.30

Centering black feminist and queer critiques in discussions of blackness and blakness.

carolyn d'cruz

Navigating power with poetry on the
hazardous drive toward decolonisation

todd fernando

From the Margins of the Other's Other:
Queering Aboriginal Histories

oscar monaghan

Decolonisation and utopia: are we bla(c)k and
queer in the future?

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Thinking
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5

final discussion

alexander g. weheliye
& irene watson

led by Yassir Morsi

7.30

Ethiopian buffet dinner*

Four Brave Women
26 Lackey Street, Summer Hill, 2130

Vegetarian/ vegan

** Dinner is at participants' own expense at
this refugee-run restaurant.*

\$30 per head payable on the day.

*Please confirm your attendance by June
29.*

4 July
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Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia

A one-day Symposium held at Western Sydney University with Northwestern University African-American studies Professor, Alexander Weheliye and Professor Irene Watson, a Tanganekald, Meintangk – Bunganditj woman and Research Professor of Law and PVC Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy at the University of South Australia. The Symposium centres around the affordances of Weheliye's core ideas of racializing assemblages, guided by Black feminist and queer thought, for relational understandings of race, blackness and indigeneity in Australia.

One of the figures evoked in Alexander Weheliye's book, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* is the Trinidadian intellectual, C.L.R. James, whose impact on the study of race, colonialism and migration continues to be felt thirty years after his death. James' 1969 pronouncement on black studies is the trigger for Weheliye's discussion of the 'object of knowledge' that, according to Hortense Spillers, black studies needs to become. He writes,

'Instead of assuming that black studies reflects an already existing series of real objects, we need to draw attention to the complex ways this field of inquiry contributes to, or articulates, the creation of objects of knowledge such as the black community, black culture, and, indeed, black studies. Continuing to identify blackness as one of black studies's primary objects of knowledge with black people as real subjects (just as the human and Man appear as synonymous in western modernity) rather than an articulated object of knowledge accepts too easily that race is a given natural and/or cultural phenomenon and not an assemblage of forces that must continuously articulate non-white subjects as not-quite-human.'

Weheliye's insistence on this does not mean that Black scholars are incidental to Black studies. Quite the contrary. In quoting C.L.R. James's remark that 'to talk about black studies as if it's something that concerned black people is an utter denial,' Weheliye is not dismissing the centrality of this scholarship as done by Black people. Rather, he notes that James's aim is to 'underline the significance of black thought to western modernity in toto.' The scholarship of Black people, who are the first concerned by this significance is of paramount importance. In Weheliye's work then is the possibility to see how the construction of black studies as a disciplinary object allows it to exit the realm of the ethnographic into 'black studies as a mode of knowledge production' with central significance for our understanding of the world.

Black feminist and queer thought in particular are key to the development of Weheliye's theorization of racializing assemblages and his critique of key Eurocentric work on the idea of the Human. He writes,

'I draw on [Sylvia] Wynter's and [Hortense] Spillers's work in order to highlight and impede the precarious status of black feminism in the academy and beyond, since black feminism has sustained African American cultural theory at the same time as it has grounded the institutional existence of black studies for the last few decades but is nevertheless continually disavowed.'

In Chapter 6 he explicates his use of 'queer' 'as a shorthand for the interruption of the violence that attends to the enforcement of gender and sexual norms, especially as it pertains to blackness.' In his study of 'racial slavery and its afterlives', blackness is bound to 'queering and ungendering.' In Weheliye's work, therefore, blackness, black feminism and queer forms of being both disrupt settled (white) knowledges and provide possibilities of seeing and making the world otherwise.

In Australia, the consideration of blackness cannot proceed without the centering of the relationship with Indigeneity and the conversation between First Nations (Blak) and non-First Nations Black people. Important First Nations scholarly and artistic work has addressed the failure to address the particularity of First Nations experience (cf. Moreton-Robinson 2000).

Important as this work has and continues to be, many are now less concerned with centering whiteness in their critiques and are more committed to doing 'the work' of Black Studies, as E. Patrick Johnson notes in the introduction to *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, without needing to 'compel a response.' A key question for this symposium is what does 'the work' look like within the particular landscape of critical race studies in Australia at a time of heightened questioning of the relationship to whiteness and the potentials for bypassing its 'burning' supremacy, as Bryan Mukandi and Chelsea Bond – channeling Fanon – put it, in the pursuit of sovereignty and against racism.

The swell of Black Studies, seeping out from the borders of Critical Race Theory, and across a range of disciplines and practices, especially as it is worked out in dialogue with black feminist and queer thinking, has a particular 'Australian' dynamic then, borne of this ongoing Black-First Nations (Blak) conversation.

This one-day symposium will allow the opportunity to think with the affordances of black thought and the intersections with Weheliye's idea of racializing assemblages and what they look like in the Australian context. We will engage with Irene Watson's important reminder that,

'Aboriginal peoples' laws, knowledges and philosophies remain relational, and opposed to a Eurocentric approach, which is to separate and compartmentalise knowledge.'

Thus, we might ask how we can study the productive functions of racial coloniality without sidelining knowledges that pre-existed the first moment of colonization and what they bring to our understandings of our current predicament. How can we respect the various lineages of Black and First Nations thought and give voice to those continuing to build more and more complex objects of inquiry that ultimately work towards the deconstruction of the power of racializing assemblages?

The background features abstract geometric shapes: a large yellow triangle on the left, a red triangle at the top right, and a light blue triangle pointing right in the center-right area. The text is overlaid on the white space between these shapes.

How does a consideration of the First Nations relationship to blackness and its situation within a global trans-Indigenous conversation shift the perspective on black studies as it has mainly been developed in the US (settler)-colonial context? What can this broadening of scope bring in terms of Weheliye's central challenge to the provincialization of black studies? What can a dialogue between Black and First Nations scholars add to Weheliye's claim that black studies is essentially an interrogation of 'humanity'? And, thus, how do non-Black and non-First Nations people of colour or otherwise racialized people listen to and work with this thought without, at the same time, engaging in forms of recolonization?

With the seemingly unending dehumanization of Black, First Nations and refugee life in and by the Australian state, and the growing assertiveness of a reactionary and fascist right-wing, these questions appear more than urgent.

Abstracts

Black Life/Schwarz-Sein

Alexander G. Weheliye

The talk focuses on the complex ways gender and sexuality function in the barring of Black flesh from the category of the human-as-Man by investigating inhabitations of the flesh that bring to light the relational being-in-the-world of Black Life. That is, examples from literature and music that render the constitutive ungendered displacement of Black Life from origin and belonging habitable. I will also consider an underdiscussed aspect of Henrietta Lacks's cellular afterlife that shows how Black Life must be erased from the most fundamental parts of human life in order for it to resemble "life."

Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia

Irene Watson

Colonial law and policies of Australia denied an Aboriginal existence and at the same time attempted the demolition of our languages and cultures. In response, many Aboriginal People resisted and continue to resist the extinguishment or assimilation of Aboriginal knowledges. As a result of resistance, Aboriginal Peoples' laws, knowledges and philosophies remain relational, even though colonialism has challenged Aboriginal obligations and relationships to the natural world. That challenge has come in the form of the extinction of species, the destruction of natural world ecosystems, the poverty, incarceration and trauma of many Aboriginal lives, yet many people stand as Aboriginal beings connected to ancient knowledges of the past, and an ongoing timeline to the present and future. What do we make of an Aboriginal standpoint; how might we see through a lens to a view that is beyond a matrix of coloniality and neo-liberal visions? Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia

Negotiations of Blackness in Colonial Australia and Re/Thinking the Afro/Indigenous Encounter

Kaiya Aboagye

White Australia's foundation narrative has erased its African history, in much the same way it has attempted to eradicate and erase Indigenous history. It is no surprise then that, historically, the potential to explore any amalgamation of Afro/ Black/ Indigenous history had been totally obliterated from public analysis and its historical record. This talk will draw upon the work of historians like Cassandra Pybus and Ian Duffield who have challenged dominant interpretations of mainstream white Australian history, by unveiling the stories of the many African settlers who arrived here with the first fleet from 1788. Early colonial literature routinely represents an uncomplicated, patriarchal narrative of mostly white protagonist and the noble/savage Native. However the imagined myth of a colonial "white" Australia was debunked with Pybus's research which found that, 'between 1788 and the middle of the nineteenth century, almost every convict ship carried people of the African diaspora to New South and Van Diemen's Land' (Pybus, C.).

Often the interconnected histories of African slavery and the colonial genocide of Black-First Nations people remain disconnected and separate narratives. Rarely are there connections and links drawn between settler Australia's investment in African slavery, better known as Black-birding and the continued illegal trade of black bodies post emancipation.

Critically analysing settler accounts from the period of colonial invasion helps us to establish a timeline in which to examine how black people of African descent and Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islanders have been historically positioned against each other. It also provides a small glimpse into the discursive realm of recorded Afro/Indigenous encounter and highlights the need to recover these stories with critical interpretation. In attempting to explore Australia's black Black bi-cultural landscapes, it is also important to develop culturally relevant ways to unfold the multiple layers that nuance the Black Australian experience. This talk will introduce my research project and offers some preliminary considerations around how we might begin the task of finding and analysing, as well as reclaiming/recovery of the Afro/Indigenous experience in Australia. It also explores how we might use critical Indigenous methods of analysis in order to produce meaningful interpretations about the nature of Indigenous Australia's shared connectedness to the global African diaspora and the global experience of Blackness in Australia.

Decolonizing race theory: place, survivance & sovereignty

Nikki Moodie

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a robust interpretation of the failure of liberalism to either achieve equality for Indigenous people or recognise the ongoing effects of dispossession. However, despite the opportunities created by CRT, there are features of race theorising which tend to overwrite the concerns of Indigenous peoples. To date, Brayboy's (2005) work has provided the most substantial interpretation of CRT and settler colonial education systems from an Indigenous perspective. In the decade since this work however, a substantial literature on Indigenous education, decolonization and settler futurity has emerged, which creates the opportunity to strengthen critical race theorising and more accurately reflect Indigenous people's activism and intellectual projects. This paper therefore advances two core arguments: (1) that CRT is limited in its analysis of sovereignty and Indigenous futurity, and; (2) that an update of Brayboy's work, framed Decolonizing Race Theory, offers an integration of cognate approaches. This provides an opportunity to centre Indigenous rights to land, and acknowledges the right and reality of reinvention and change within the struggle against the logic of elimination.

In proposing DRT as a framework with which to think through the multiplex implications of Indigenous futurity, 'decolonization' here centres place and relationality in place as core concepts for Indigenous education research. To move beyond critique to change, reparative activism requires centring prerogatives other than Whiteness, including multiplanar relationships between people and Country. Deploying Indigenous methodologies, centring sovereign relations, reimagining data ownership, community based research, or language revival, are examples of possibilities which can be theorised using DRT in a way that moves beyond critique to consider the implications of the spiritual, political, economic and academic projects of Indigenous peoples.

Untidy gender and sexuality: celebrating unresolved identity loops for First Nations' Peoples.

Sandy O'Sullivan

As a part of a broader project titled the Colonial Glaze: icing on the bitter cake of empire, this presentation explores the ways in which Indigenous peoples challenge the confines of colonial morphology.

Navigating power with poetry on the hazardous drive toward decolonisation

Carolyn D'Cruz

Drawing inspiration from Oodgeroo Noonucal and Ellen Van Neerven's poetry, this paper uses three motifs to navigate the hazardous drive toward decolonisation: speaking, listening, and acting. Regarding the matter of speaking, Van Neerven prompts us to ask what it means 'to have a language' and to find words for knowledge where 'the lines' have become muddled. This also raises the question of 'who' speaks and how they do so. For non-black and non-First Nations people of colour, the lure of assimilating to the culture of settler colonial Australia can block and obscure Indigenous voices and knowledges; it can become too easy for a brown voice to colonise a black one. To avoid this, and to learn how to live more justly on land in which its traditional custodians never ceded sovereignty, practices of listening become imperative. By attending to those voices that question official narratives in history and canonised knowledges, other forms of marginalisation appear as crucial accomplices to holding up the centre of settler colonialism. White nations cannot be built without also policing sex and sexuality. Feminist and queer critique are therefore fundamental to discussions of bla(c)kness. Yet, as with the case of migrant issues, the promise for 'democratic inclusion' can also thwart feminist and queer political projects from aligning and building solidarity with decolonising objectives. Hence, the final motif turns to a form of acting, which emerges through Noonucal's poem 'An Appeal': the provocation to use positions and practices of power to 'beat the foe'. Perhaps contesting assimilationist narratives is a thread from which many marginalised people can build solidarity. For an academic teaching and researching in the field of gender sexuality and diversity studies, it has become my obligation and responsibility to unsettle and displace the colonised and oppressively normative centres of knowledge production and dissemination. At the same time it must be acknowledged that there is an unavoidable complicity with power that comes with working within the academy. This does not mean, however, that such power cannot be bent to 'break the thrall', as Noonucal asks to do.

From the Margins of the Other's Other: Queering Aboriginal Histories

Todd Fernando

The emerging field of queer Indigenous studies is, at times, situated in opposition to default narratives within Indigenous communities. The narratives of Indigenous queerness have prompted an ideological challenge to the heteronormative lens that exists within Indigenous research and knowledge. Amid the display of personal and public Indigenous socio-cultural practices, queer Indigenous research operates as a modality to assert and understand forms of sexual expressions and realities within gendered identities in response to non-Indigenous conceptions of sexuality. Through an engagement with assemblage theory, this paper locates representations of queer Indigeneity within texts, digital images (including film) and art. As such, the paper will highlight the importance of recognising heteronormative biases and social schemas within Indigenous frameworks as a way to shift and strengthen Indigenous social and community knowledge (both historically and contemporarily). The navigation of spatial and temporal boundaries will also provide scope for this paper to consider the importance of revitalisation and normalisation of queer Indigenous customs, values, and histories.

Decolonisation and utopia: are we bla(c)k and queer in the future?

Oscar Monaghan

Decolonisation looks simultaneously to the past and to the future. The political manoeuvres we make are contingent on an awareness of what, precisely, has been done to us. In this way decolonisation has always required the comingling of utopic desires with a consciousness of the destructive realities of colonial domination. That we and our intimacies are constituted through our relationship to domination hints that there can be no answer to the question what vision of the person would emerge if these entanglements could be unravelled? If these entanglements could be disentangled, the self would be neither bla(c)k, nor white; not gendered; not queer, nor straight. What imperatives does this understanding produce for a bla(c)k, queer political praxis?

Biographies

Alexander Ghedi Weheliye is professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University where he teaches black literature and culture, critical theory, social technologies, and popular culture. He is the author of *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (2005) and *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014). Currently, he is working on two projects. The first, *Feenin: R&B's Technologies of Humanity*, offers a critical history of the intimate relationship between R&B music and technology since the late 1970's. The second, *Black Life/SchwarzSein*, situates Blackness as an ungendered ontology of unbelonging.

Professor Irene Watson belongs to the Tanganekald, Meintangk – Bunganditj First Nations Peoples and their territories include the Coorong and the south-east of South Australia. Professor Watson has been a member of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement in South Australia from its inception in 1973. She has served as a solicitor advising the legal service on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and has advised numerous communities across Australia on law and justice issues. Professor Watson has made several interventions on behalf of First Nations Peoples to United Nations from the 1990s, and she continues to attend UN meetings as an invited expert on the rights of First Nations. Professor Watson attained a Bachelor of Law at the University of Adelaide, and received the Bonython Law School prize for her doctoral thesis in 2000. She was awarded a three year postdoctoral fellowship by the University of Sydney and took up an appointment with the University of South Australia in 2008. Professor Watson has published extensively in law and Indigenous Knowledges and in 2015 she published *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law*, (Routledge 2015) and more recently *Indigenous Peoples as Subjects in International Law*, (Routledge 2018). Irene is currently Research Professor of Law, PVC Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy at UniSA.

Carolyn D'Cruz is a Senior Lecturer in Gender Sexuality and Diversity Studies at La Trobe University. She is author of *Identity Politics in Deconstruction: Calculation with the Incalculable* and co-editor of *After Homosexual: The Legacies of Gay Liberation*.

Oscar Monaghan is a scholar from the Guugu Yimithirr people of Far North Queensland. Oscar has lived, worked and studied on Gadigal land since 2009, when they came to Sydney University as an undergraduate studying Arts and Law. They were appointed to the University of Sydney Law School as a Wingara Mura Postgraduate Fellow in 2017; their current research focuses on the relationship between property law and the production of heteronormativity in the Australian settler colonial context.

Associate Professor Sandy O'Sullivan is a Wiradjuri woman, and is currently leading the School of Communication and Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Sandy has been an installation artist, performer, designer, and academic for nearly three decades. Her research over the last decade has focused on First Nations' cultures, bodies, spaces, design and cultural engagement and representation, with a specific concentration on Indigeneity, gender and sexuality and the ways in which these multifarious identities are performed. She recently completed a seven-year study exploring the capacity of national museums to engage and represent First Nations' Peoples. Funded by the Australian Research Council, the study reviewed more than 470 museums across three countries. Engaged with multiple First Nations' Peoples and Communities, the research explored meaningful spaces and curatorship across national museums. Sandy is a current member of the Canadian Government sponsored Thinking through the Museum Collective and the breakout group, Museum Queeries.

Todd Fernando belongs to the Kalarie peoples of the Wiradjuri Nation and identifies as queer with pronouns he/him. Todd is a PhD Candidate with the Centre for Health Equity and the Melbourne Poche Centre through the School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne. Todd's doctoral research focuses on the intersections of health science and Indigenous sexualities. Todd is employed by the University of Melbourne as a sessional lecturer and tutor with an academic teaching and research interest in queer theory, health policy, racial literacy, whiteness studies, and global Indigenous politics.

Dr Nikki Moodie (Gomeroi/Kamilaroi) is a Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Studies in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne. Nikki has a background in political science and sociology, with a primary research focus on Australian social policy and the surveillance of indigeneity. Current research projects attend to the effect of social capital on Indigenous tertiary education, and the politics data production in Indigenous education policy. Nikki is an Editor for Critical Race & Whiteness Studies, and Associate Editor for Higher Education Research & Development.

Kaiya Aboagye is a critical Indigenous studies and black studies scholar in the School of Social Policy and Political Science, Department of Sociology, at The University of Sydney. Kaiya is also a Research fellow with the Sydney Poche Centre for Indigenous Health. Trained in socio-legal studies, majoring in sociology and Indigenous Studies, her research interests are in Indigenous Knowledge's, trans-Indigenous Theory, hip hop scholarship and Decolonial black feminist thought. Kaiya's research is a study that will look at the social, historical and cultural connections between people of the global African diaspora and First Nations people of Australia.

Sujatha Fernandes is a Professor of Political Economy and Sociology at the University of Sydney, which she joined in 2016. Previously she was a Professor of Sociology at Queens College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Before this, she was a Wilson-Cotsen Fellow at Princeton University's Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts (2003 – 2006). She has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Fernandes is the author of *Cuba Represent! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2006), *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Duke University Press, 2010), and *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation* (Verso, 2011). Her latest book entitled, *Curated Stories: The Uses and Misuses of Storytelling*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2017. She has published articles in many edited volumes and journals, including *Signs, Contexts, Latin American Politics & Society, Ethnography, and Anthropological Quarterly*. Her work has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, and Chinese. She is a contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, and *Dissent*, among other publications. She has been featured in *New York's Daily News*, and has appeared on ABC Australia, NPR, MSNBC, American Public Radio, BBC, and many other news outlets globally. She is an editorial board member of *Transition: The Magazine of Africa and the Diaspora*.

Yassir Morsi is a lecturer in politics at La Trobe University and the author of *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks: De-radicalising the Muslim and Racism in Post-racial Societies* (2017). He is the Vice-President of the Australian Critical Race & Whiteness Studies Association.

Thinking Relationally about Race, Blackness and Indigeneity in Australia is organised by the Australian Critical Race & Whiteness Studies Association with support from the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, and the Institute for Culture & Society Western Sydney University.

The Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association (ACRAWSA) is an independent, incorporated, professional association for scholars researching in the interdisciplinary field of critical race and whiteness studies. The goal of the Association is to provide a network for established scholars, early career researchers, and students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and to provide opportunities to develop the field. The Association promotes scholarship and other activities which: Respect the existence of and continuing rights deriving from Indigenous sovereignties in Australia and elsewhere; and critically investigate and challenge racial privilege and the construction and maintenance of race and whiteness, both past and present

ACRAWSA runs the online open access journal *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* and the ACRAWSA Blog at www.acrawsa.org.au.

Please support ACRAWSA by becoming a member at www.acrawsa.org.au.



Venue & logistics

Female Orphan School (Whitlam Institute), Western Sydney University, Parramatta South Campus.

A free shuttle bus runs between Parramatta Train Station and Parramatta South Campus. Pay parking is available on campus.

For further travel information please visit https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/campuses_structure/cas/campuses/getting_to_uni.

A free vegetarian lunch, coffee & tea will be provided for all participants.

To reduce waste, please bring a water bottle which can be refilled at the venue.

For further enquiries, please email president@acrawsa.org.au