
Beyond a White Australia?

Race, Multiculturalism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Australian Identities

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Table of contents

Abstract	1
Declaration	3
Acknowledgements	4
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Thesis approach: the question of race, Australian identities and Indigenous sovereignty	9
1.1.1 Scope and limitations of the study	14
1.2 Australia's colonial history	16
1.2.1 Aboriginal policy	19
1.2.2 Immigration policy	23
1.2.3 Ideology	26
1.3 Thesis structure	38
2. Debating the nation: dealing with difference and incommensurability	42
2.1 Introduction	42
2.2 Constructing and re-producing the nation	44
2.3 The nation as a racialised entity	54
2.4 'We are one, but we are many': The narrative of the multicultural nation	58
2.5 Indigenous nations and western political theory	68
2.6 Conclusion	81

3. The (white) elephant in the room: cultural identities and Indigenous sovereignty	84
3.1 Introduction	84
3.2 Identity and racialised subjectivity	93
3.3 Which way Australian identities?	100
3.3.1 Connecting subjectivities to relations of ruling	101
3.4 Conclusion	110
4. Methodology	113
4.1 Introduction	113
4.2 Paradigm and methods of inquiry	114
4.3 Researching racialised identities	118
4.4 In the field: Interview method	122
4.5 Conclusion	127
5. “We’re multicultural mate!” Australian identities, multiculturalism and refugees	129
5.1 Introduction	130
5.2 The meaning of multiculturalism	132
5.3 Contemporary Orientalism in Australia	161
5.4 Conclusion	176
6. Australian identities and Indigenous sovereignty	180
6.1 Introduction	180
6.2 Being Australian	184
6.3 Awareness of Australian history	203
6.4 Land rights	216

6.5 Conclusion	237
7. Indigenous sovereignty, multiculturalism and Australian identity: The great divide	241
7.1 Introduction	241
7.2 Is Australia a white country?	245
7.3 In relationship with Indigenous sovereignty	269
7.4 Conclusion	291
8. Conclusion: The social construction of whiteness in Australian identities and its relationship with Indigenous sovereignty	295
Appendices	305
1. Respondents' profile	305
2. Introduction letter to respondents	313
3. Consent form for participants	315
4. Interview schedule	317
Bibliography	324

Abstract

The social construction of race has been central in the debates about Australian identities since colonial violence founded the nation. The relationship between sovereignty, nationhood and whiteness is of central concern to this thesis. There are two underlying premises to this thesis. The first is that Indigenous people conducted their sovereignty prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 1770's. The second is that Indigenous people did not cede sovereignty, which continues to this day. This thesis is an empirical critical and discursive analysis of the narratives of Australia, as a settler society, and its colonial legacy as a 'white Australia'. This thesis argues that Australia has protected its white sovereignty through four key points. First, that the Australian nation has been produced as a racialised entity with whiteness as the hegemonic norm which shapes white power and privilege in Australia; second that multiculturalism in Australia has been used as a framework to deal with difference within which race is obscured; third that white Australian discourses of nation and identity are limited in their ability to be located in Indigenous sovereignty; and finally, that discourses of multiculturalism and Indigenous sovereignty are rarely addressed in a coherent and simultaneous manner resulting in what I call the 'great divide'. This thesis seeks to understand how whiteness, as the hegemonic norm, prevents non-colonial Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations in the everyday lives of white Australians. The literature in the area of critical race and whiteness studies predominantly focuses on discourse analysis and only a small group of researchers apply the theories to empirical research. Further, the literature on multiculturalism and the literature on the area of Indigenous sovereignty have historically been separate areas of research that are based in metropolitan areas. The researcher conducted in-depth guided

interviews with 29 adults who self-identified as 'white Australian' in order to analyse the key discourses of race and to understand the complexities of how whiteness and race is socially produced and lived in rural Australia. This research makes a contribution toward meeting these gaps in the critical literature on race and the construction of everyday whiteness in Australia.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Catherine M Koerner
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Peter Allen's song... "I still call Australia home"... is a song that has wide appeal among many non-Indigenous white Australians because it captures the experience of 'awayness' and 'belonging'. It points to the current of movement and migrancy, which runs through conceptions of belonging among non-Indigenous white Australians and is at the heart of Australian colonial history. This sense of belonging is often expressed as a profound feeling of attachment. It is derived from ownership and achievement and is inextricably tied to a racialized social status that confers certain privileges: a social status that is enhanced by a version of Australian history that privileges the exploits of white Australians by representing them as the people who made this country what it is today... The non-Indigenous sense of belonging is inextricably tied to this original theft: through the fiction of Terra Nullius the migrant has been able to claim the right to live in our land. This right is one of the fundamental benefits white British migrants derived from dispossession (Moreton-Robinson 2003, pp. 24-25).