Inside The Contract Zone: White teachers in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

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This paper represents an autoethnographic exploration of white teachers in South Australia's Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, through the lens of critical whiteness studies and racial contract theory. The broad aim of the paper is to return the gaze on the white subject within the context of White Australia. Moreover, this article seeks to position the teacher as a site of representation; a site for the reproduction and potential disruption of the relations of dominance 'in situ'. I employ a narrative technique to locate my Self as a writer and as a racialised subject; to critique my structural and cultural location as a teacher in the Pitjantjatjara Lands; and to argue that autoethnography may be harnessed as one of the many tools for negotiating forms of critical pedagogy within the transcultual setting.

Autoethnography, whiteness, racial contract theory, Pitjantjatjara Lands, critical pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In this article I develop an autoethnographic narrative with the broad aim of turning the gaze onto the white subject within the context of White Australia. To do so I map my personal experiences as a white teacher in an all-Indigenous setting onto the social and historic processes that produce that setting. Under analysis is the field of education in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in far northwest South Australia (commonly known as the APY Lands or The Lands). A feature of education in The Lands is the phenomenon of 'tourist teaching'. This term has been adopted by some writers to capture a culture of high turnover of white staff in remote communities (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003, 2004); it is also used to refer to the ways that white teachers reproduce uneven transcultural relations (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003, 2004; Hoffman, 1996; Reyes & Bishop, 2005). My interest in this paper is to explore the latter; the subtle ways that tourist teachers reproduce relations of dominance *in situ* (Connelly, 2002). This paper also represents an entry onto the field of critical race theory and its articulations with pedagogy, and an attempt to develop a working relationship with whiteness studies and racial contract theory.

Following a method demonstrated by Wojecki (2004), I begin by telling, and then re-telling a personal narrative. Narrative is used as a "method of inquiry" (Richardson, 2002), and as a means of moving beyond the predominantly white canon, to write "more engaged sociology … [and to reach] diverse audiences" (Richardson, 2002, p.414). I seek to invite audiences to reflect on the complexities of their own experiences, and to demonstrate how autoethnography may be harnessed as one of the many tools for negotiating critical pedagogy at the local level. This is done with a view to disrupting whiteness (Cowlishaw, 1999, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Langton, 1993; Mills, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2004a), and in the spirit of critical theory and pedagogy (Bhabha, 1994; Foucault, 1970; Hall, 1997; Hattam, 2004; Spivak, 1990). These bodies of theory help to shape my narrative. And although autoethnography is a contested term, I generally employ it as a form of writing and research that displays "multiple layers" and "connects the personal to the cultural" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Empirical data is compiled through development of two short narratives: The Arrival and The Library. These narratives represent my arrival onto The Lands as a pre-service teacher. I story events because storying, "gives us the perspective to see the story as a text outside of ourselves … [enabling us to] make the personal experience useful politically" (Chapman, 2004, p.98). Storying provides a vehicle for moving beyond the autonomous Cartesian self, and toward an understanding of the "personal as political" (Frankenberg, 1993), by amalgamating the Self (*auto*), culture (*ethnos*) and writing (*graphos*) (Veissière, 2005). This process is subjective in that I will recall and interpret events differently today than I would have done in the past or will do in the future. And as a racialised subject, my construction of events is, "always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange" (Hall, 1997, p.4)[1]. Nevertheless, by consciously situating myself in the narrative I invoke an approach to research whose roots originate in the doubt that any scholarship can occupy an objective position. I consciously seek to work within the white perspective and the relations of racism that I am, after all, unable to shake off.

Some Background

The APY Lands are located in South Australia's remote northwest desert region; Anangu is the name the Indigenous people of the region use in reference to themselves. Although Anangu remained isolated from Europeans for much longer than most Australian Indigenous groups – with the region remaining largely untouched during the period of invasion of Australia up until the early 1870s (Riphagen, 2005; Summers, 2004) – many aspects of life in the contemporary Lands betray a legacy to colonisation. These conditions are now well documented, and are often focused upon in mainstream media. They include high welfare dependency, inadequate housing, violence, substance abuse, poor health, low school attendance, and comparatively low levels of Western literacy and numeracy (Costello & O'Donoghue, 2005). Despite there being a persuasive body of critical research which illuminates the ongoing relationship in Australia between 'white' privilege and 'black' disadvantage[2], the primacy of liberal individualism as the bedrock ideology of Western epistemology, "ironically ensures that *individual* investments in the *collective* sovereignty of white people remain invisible" (Nicoll, 2004, p. 21). According to Chambers, "the category of the individual is the key to white hegemony" (in Nicoll, 2004, p.21); in other words, there remains widespread 'mainstream' resistance from acknowledging, "the impact that *colonisation continues to have* upon the lives of all people in Australia, whether it be through disadvantaging Indigenous people or accruing unearned privilege to non-Indigenous people" (Riggs, 2004b, n.p.).

> Whiteness itself is thus atomized into invisibility through the individualisation of white subjects. Whereas nonwhites are perceived first and foremost as a function of their group belongingness … (and then as individuals), whites are perceived first as individual people (and only secondarily, if at all, as whites) (Chambers in Nicoll, 2004, p.21).

Wadham, Pudsey and Boyd elaborate the thinking that underpins the social construction of individualism in liberal societies. They explain that individualism is a belief system or philosophy, "which emphasises the sacrosanct nature of the individual and their rights to liberty … [which] is often associated with liberalism and the Enlightenment;" moreover, individualism as a hegemonic discourse, "inhibits the potential for acknowledging social contexts," (Wadham et al, 2007, p. 80), and thus promotes a 'blame culture'. From the standpoint of 'white'

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[1] As a white researcher interrogating my own culture, autoethnography represents a means of "turning the gaze" and producing a form of "symbolic allegory" that is particularly useful for conducting forms of "counter discourse" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p.9), which in this case constitute the "unlearning" of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993).

[2] It should be noted that 'white' privilege in the contemporary Australian context, while it predominantly applies to Anglo Australians of British origin, must be considered within the broader relations of class, gender and ability. Similarly, 'disadvantage' must be considered not only in terms of race, but also of class, ethnicity and gender.

individualism, A<u>n</u>angu and other non-white or migrant Australians' perceived inabilities to 'do well' and to 'succeed' within social institutions such as education, therefore become attributed to 'individual laziness, unwillingness or lack of ability'.

It would be erroneous to assume that A<u>n</u>angu, like other Indigenous Australians, have been the passive recipients of white domination or have had no access to social power. It would also be wrong to presume that 'white' teachers in the region are the passive agents of colonialism or that colonisation was not, both, destructive and creative of peoples (Attwood, 1989). However, when considering contemporary aspects of A<u>n</u>angu Education it is important to acknowledge that in Australia, as in other settler nations, "issues of race and whiteness have never been resolved since colonial days" (Schech & Wadham, 2004, p.i). European race thinking established a hierarchy of human variation along biological and cultural lines well before the first Presbyterian mission school was established in the APY (during Australia's protection and segregation era (Edwards, 1982)). Despite its 'paternal care', the policies imposed by the mission – grounded in racial superiority and white race privilege – were based on colonial ideas of superiority and domination, traces of which can be seen in today's A<u>n</u>angu Education system.

Thus A<u>n</u>angu Education has always been shaped by political and cultural tensions at the broader level, and race thinking, underpinned by liberal individualism, has been difficult to dislodge from the dominant Australian psyche. In some respects, race in the time of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism, "is just as vague and just as resilient as it was at the beginning of the history of European imperialism" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998: 206); moreover, some writers contend that race has recently re-entered the mainstream of Australian political life with renewed force (Markus, 2001). This is supported by Aileen Moreton-Robinson who contends that "the political and social climate in Australia regarding race and immigration has taken a reactive and conservative turn since the early 1990s," thus at this time in world history and global politics, questions about race, power and governance require critical investigation and engagement (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p.vii).

Despite the fact that A<u>n</u>angu people now maintain rights over their land and have policy and operational control over education in their region, struggles between A<u>n</u>angu and Western epistemological and ontological frameworks have created ongoing problems, both for the smooth operation of land rights within the broader context of White Australia, as well as for the governance of A<u>n</u>angu Education. Variations between Western and A<u>n</u>angu cultural frameworks have not only fettered A<u>n</u>angu people's successful exercise of educational control, they have also muddied Western 'readings' of A<u>n</u>angu proficiency and 'capacity' (Iversen, 1999). From a critical standpoint, these 'misreadings' are also patent in recent conservative media and political reports.

A Backdrop: self-governance in The Lands has failed …

Following four youth suicides in The Lands in 2004, the State Government moved to end the region's self-governance rights[3]. Conservative critics[4] have been quick to announce that, "self-governance in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands has failed," that "what is wrong with these remote communities are the communities," that "Aboriginal people acknowledge that the rot lies within their own communities" (Howson, 2004, n.p.), and more recently that, "some Aboriginal people use the 'cultural curtain' as an excuse to avoid participation in schooling and in the economy" (Johns, 2006, n.p.). These conservative discourses are presented as a backdrop, and as an example of the way that racism in the contemporary period frequently works to 'explain away' the history of given circumstances, and to absolve 'white' people of their collective implications in structural

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[3] Citing that they would not tolerate, "an executive unable to administer civil order, community service, social justice and quality of life" (Treasurer and Police Minister Kevin Foley cited in Howson, 2004: n.p.)

[4] Such as the Bennelong Society, the Menzies Research Centre and Quadrant.

racism, thus perpetuating "the marginalisation of the targets of racism" (Wadham, Pudsey & Boyd, 2007, p.201).

My broad aim in this paper is to disrupt this pattern. I seek to inform the work of white teachers, particularly in light of the competing discourses through which the teaching role is constructed, complicated, and never finally fixed – for example, the 'white' teaching role is subject to contesting forms of educational governance, both Anangu governance at the local level, and 'mainstream' governance at state and federal levels. To highlight these complexities, several features of education in The Lands might be explored. However, to delimit the exploration I adhere to the notion of the 'contract zone', using contract theory and critical whiteness studies to explore ways that racial inequalities form the fundamental basis upon which society is established. I consequently argue that 'white' Australians, far from blaming Indigenous communities for their perceived 'deficiencies', need to interrogate how Indigenous spaces have been transformed and constructed within a discourse of white race privilege and how 'we'[5] as white people collectively continue to be privileged through the structural and discursive relations of race.

On Whiteness

To do so, I start from a premise of white race privilege, which uses 'whiteness' as a means of highlighting race. Whiteness traditionally operated through a discourse of non-racialness, conferring 'race' onto 'other' social and cultural groups, thereby sustaining social hierarchies built around race. More recently, however, whiteness has come to operate through a rhetoric of 'sameness' or 'colour blindness' whereby "colour blindness [works to] establish the discourses and practices of hegemonic and complicit racial relations" (Wadham, 2004, p.195). When referring to whiteness, I draw upon Haggis and Schech (2004, p.180), who denote, "a terrain of structural advantage, as well as a standpoint of race privilege which segues into [a] sense of owning the nation." I understand whiteness as referring not merely to the physicality of race, but to the systems, beliefs, practices, and laws that shape the very foundations of society, that construct social identities, and that work to legitimise and sustain the centrality of the white subject. The significance of naming whiteness is that in doing so, we "displace it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance" (Frankenberg, 1993, p.6); or, as Cowlishaw points out:

> … whiteness studies does more than invite reflexivity and shift the ethnographic gaze to a different object. It also expands the way we think about race. Instead of race being a problem suffered by 'people of colour', which we anti-racist whitefellas have to fix on their behalf, race is now recognised as referring to a *relationship* between people with different kinds of heritage, both physical and cultural. That is, race is not simply something people have, a quality, but is a comparison, a relationship, a social identity, which contrasts with that of others" (Cowlishaw, 2005, n.p.).

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[5] It is important that I acknowledge my problematic use of possessive phrases. For example, "…*we* as white people." It is not only problematic to assume that all readers of this paper will identify as being white, but as many writers point out (see for example Pease, 2004; Riggs, 2004), whiteness itself is not homogenous. In taking up an autoethnographic approach I consciously reveal myself through use of first person writing, contrary to traditional academic writing where authorship is silent. This is done in the spirit of qualitative inquiry; the core of that position is the doubt that any textual staging has a privileged, objective, or disinterested position. Thus, by locating myself in the writing, I also endeavour to locate myself in the broader relations of racism, and to open my writing to self-reflexive questioning. Nonetheless, in doing so my writing also potentially gives way to what Moreton-Robinson describes as the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty (see Moreton-Robinson, A. (2004). The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty: The High Court and the Yorta Yorta decision. *Borderlands e-journal, 3*(2)). For the time being, I leave this problematic position unresolved, yet acknowledged. I draw on Riggs (2004a) who, facing the same dilemmas of authorship, resolves to present his position as an attempt at working within a white perspective. I make the same attempt.

THE NARRATIVE TELLING

The Arrival

We sat on the curb waiting for the bus. I assumed we had each been selected owing to our grades and our interest in social justice, and all of us, I noted, were white. The latter was suddenly as surprising to me as it was unsurprising. Virtually our entire cohort of 1500 students was white; when I thought about that against the remote, all-Indigenous APY Lands, we seemed somehow **whiter**. I glanced at the university and at the neighbouring hospital; at the lawns, the surrounding houses, the architecture enveloping us … all of it white. I'd never thought of myself as being 'very white', not in the mainstream way; I didn't even eat white bread! I was more of a part-time 'Vegemite kid'[6].

My location of Self within that mainstream was contested. Growing up 'working class' had galvanised in me a latent belief that I'd earned my privileges. In contrast I also had some concept of a worldview beyond the individual, and I knew that my raced, classed, gendered position in society accounted for a lot. For example, I was aware, relatively speaking, of how effortlessly I moved through mainstream society, how normal that was. And despite being a first generation Australian, with British and German heritage, I'd never once doubted my identity as a true Australian; I'd never doubted that I belonged.

Prior to The Lands trip there'd been only one occasion, though it had faded rapidly, that had propelled whiteness into my consciousness. I'd just been driven in a rickety bus from the airport to a YMCA in the heart of Nairobi. Overwhelmed by a sea of black faces I suddenly felt very white, whiter than white; I felt paralysed. But as the six voluntary months rolled out, the paralysis wore off and it became increasingly clear that, regardless of my minority status as one of the few white women, I was by no means disadvantaged; my skin colour was a constant source of unearned privilege. And though I didn't fully realise it, this was probably the first time I'd truly experienced the divergence between **difference and race**.

I tried hard to do 'the right thing' and to be a 'good' teacher in Kenya. And because I'd learned a bit about culture and power in my first degree, I hadn't yielded to the belief that 'goodness' equated to being 'a white saviour'. Even so, this hadn't made the role any clearer, and I left harbouring the uneasy feeling that I'd possibly made things worse.

I didn't want to do the same thing in my own disadvantaged backyard – which, after hearing the term 'third world' commonly applied to it, was how I latently conceptualised The Lands. I didn't know much about the place, in fact, I'd never had much to do with either Indigenous people or the desert. My primary school education had embraced Captain Cook, and maps of Australia sliced in six geometric ways. Indigeneity had been relegated to tribal imagery: boomerangs and pictures of the red centre. I once visited the red centre; I was about nine. I distinctly remember making a so-called 'explorer journal' and filling it with details like Burke and Wills' journey throughout the mysterious, dangerous outback.

According to the television, mystery and danger still personify the outback. Only days before the trip I'd caught two documentaries: one on *Getaway* about the magic of Ayers Rock; the other a

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[6] Vegemite entered mainstream discourse in the early 1920s but is now reputedly found in 90 percent of Australian homes (White, 1994). Vegemite is repeatedly proffered in mainstream media and overseas as a symbol of 'Australianness'. However, throughout 80 years of advertising, no indigenous persons are represented. In the year 2000, Vegemite's eightieth anniversary slogan read: 'it's been around since the beginning of time'. Media of this sort – invisible and benign, but common to the mainstream – has easily accorded with and endorsed, "the British political myth of *terra nullius*: [which suggested that] before 1788 Australia had been not only a land of no people but a place where nothing of significance had happened" (Haynes, 1998, p.5).

documentary about substance abuse and violence in The Centre. The latter, in particular, stuck in mind so by the time we arrived I couldn't help but expect danger.

On first impressions I was right: an ocean of red dirt, a grid of transportable houses, a clinic, a store, and the largest building, a shabby looking school fronted by a 'Proud School' sign. All of the communal buildings, and what looked like the teachers' residences, were secured with padlocks and bars. The dangerousness of the place, vested in bars and locks, stood out immediately. But interestingly enough, so did an odd sense of familiarity: the architecture, the layout of the community, the square fences and geometric plots.

An Indigenous person walked toward me.

I felt threatened.

The school bell shrieked.

The man walked idly past.

The Library

Six weeks later: I'd settled in and felt pretty good about my efforts, having made only one obvious mistake.

On my first official day the Principal, a whitefella, showed me the ropes. These included the tea and coffee area, his desk, the other white teachers' desks, the grounds, and the basic timetable – mostly familiar stuff. I then headed to the library. Glen the young Caucasian teacher was busy with some boys so I moved to a group of girls. I said hello and tried to make conversation but they seemed shy; either shy or disinterested, so I just sat for a while, rather uncomfortably, beneath a *Values for Australian Schools* poster and scanned the room. Glen eventually called for everyone to pack up. But no one moved. I looked at the girls; they were flicking pages. I leant over and said, 'c'mon girls; time to pack up'. They dropped their heads and continued to do nothing until the oldest one said something 'in language' and suddenly all of the students began to move; she was obviously a leader.

Back in the classroom Glen introduced me to Elsie, our AEW (Anangu Education Worker). I immediately recognised her as the leading girl, only then realising that she was in fact older than me. I felt awful – what a stupid mistake. Nonetheless, in the weeks that passed I went out of my way, at least outside of the classroom, to strike up a friendship. Inside the classroom things were a little more difficult. I'd been in team-teaching positions before and so I tried arranging lesson plans together, but Elsie rarely turned up and when we did meet I seemed to make all of the decisions. I seemed to take responsibility for everything. In the end I just didn't have time for us to plan together and as a consequence I had to take the reins. I knew the plan, the lessons had to be taught, and so I would plough ahead. Regardless, Glen was happy with my work and throughout the term he pretty much allowed me to do whatever I wanted. For the most part Elsie was around only sporadically. I did feel concerned about this; was there a relationship between 'my presence' and 'Elsie's absence'? I never found out.

In the end, I left with a glowing report from both Glen and the Principal, and a pile of cards from the kids saying 'Come Back'. I was pleased, but unsure about returning. On the one hand I actually missed the mainstream, and on the other I was still extremely confused about the impact and worth of Western education in a region seemingly devastated by the West. I left feeling confused and wondering if I'd made things worse.

THE RE-TELLING

The Contract Zone

To rewrite the narrative from a more critically informed position I start with the idea of the contract. The metaphor of the contract is as resonant with complex implications as it is straightforward. "The notion of society as a social contract between free, equal, and "fraternal" selves," (Battersby, 2000, p.6) has a long history in philosophical thought. Originating with Hobbes, and stretching through the political philosophies of Kant, Rousseau, Gauthier, and Rawls. At its most general, the contract might be thought of as an agreement, an indenture, a convention or treaty. There is the notion of the social contract, the sexual, moral, and racial contract. In light of whiteness my interest is focused on the latter. The philosophy of a racial contract which underpins society and systemically works to "reflect and reproduce the perspectives of the privileged" (Mills, 2007, p.3). Mills' *Racial Contract* (1997) was inspired by Pateman's *Sexual Contract* (1988), and is designed to show how the 'social contract' is not gender or race neutral but actually privileges white property owning men (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a).

The social contract is built around the Enlightenment belief in the equality of mankind. According to orthodox contract theory, if men are essentially free and equal the same rights and protection ought to be afforded to all. However, this orthodox contract overlooks the starting point from which modern society is born; a foundation upon which all people do not start out equally. According to Mills, modern Western society is founded on racial and hierarchical beliefs. Thus those who are said to be able to 'contract in' to society and its benefits are those in relation to which the original contract was written – collectively, whites[7]. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Enlightenment beliefs in the primacy of the individual continue to underpin a philosophy of 'white' individualism, which works to not only sustain the centrality of the white subject in social and cultural relations, it upholds asymmetrical power relations between the 'white' and non-'white' Self.

Mills suggests that a racial view of the social contract has both strategic and theoretical value. If we start with a view of reality which places at centre stage those injustices that are predicated on white race privilege, then a marginal view of injustice becomes impossible. If 'we' white people learn to acknowledge our implication in the construction of society, then we can no longer avoid or "'explain away' the materiality or the history of a given situation" (Frankenberg, 1993, p.2). A racial contract view of The Lands might assert that white people can no longer or easily avow that what is wrong with these remote communities are the communities, for the racial contract underpins of all of society.

My aim from here is to start to illuminate the racial asymmetry that underwrites education in The Lands. To do so I pose two questions: what are the material and discursive dimensions of the contract zone – indeed what is the orthodox or dominant contract? And, what do I as a 'white' subject bring to moments of contact? Moreover, how am I located within and shaped by orthodox contractarian thinking? *How* do individualising beliefs and practices position me in relation to non-white Australians? According to the racial contract, if I as a white, able bodied person – even despite for the time being my gender – have benefited from a range of privileges that result in the overwhelming demographic whiteness of Australia's middle and upper class realms, then the fine-grain details of my story may be unique, but many of its overarching details will speak to the experience of 'growing up white' more generally. I posit that within these broad brushstrokes exists the racial contract upon which society is constructed. Also, these characteristics may be exposed through a contact perspective, which refers to "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other .... often within

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[7] Feminist theorists would extend this argument to mark out more specifically, 'white men'.

radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 1992, pp.6-7)[8]. Thus when conceptualising 'contract zones', history may be harnessed to critically inform the present.

I use the term 'contract' in place of contact to draw attention, as mentioned, to the racial contract upon which The Lands are built – both its material and discursive dimensions. Materially, the 'contract zone' represents: (a) transient white teachers (typified by two or three year contracts), (b) within the geographic locale of the The Lands, (c) carrying out mainstream curricula, (d) under a Settler education regime, (e) that is partially locally governed[9]. Discursively, however, the contract zone represents the historicity of each of these material dimensions and how they play out (or conflict) in actual practice. In this paper I start to unpack just two of these features, beginning with white teachers and following with the geography of The Lands.

The White Teacher

The majority of Australian teachers – like those in the United Kingdom and United States – are drawn from the 'white' Anglo-Celtic dominated mainstream (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Hagan & McGlynn, 2004; Johnson, 2002; Pearce, 2003; Santoro, 2004; Santoro, 2005; Santoro & Allard, 2005; Santoro, Kamler, & Reid, 2001; Tree, 2003). Thus it is no surprise that the high majority of teachers who travel to The Lands reflect a predominantly white demographic – white as in the physicality of race. This is aptly portrayed in the first narrative by the fact that each of the student teachers is unsurprisingly white. But when we expose this unsurprising whiteness we start to illuminate the raced construction of the social contract and how its invisibility often operates as an effect of its dominance.

From this perspective the whiteness of the teaching profession is neither an anomaly nor an indicator of 'white intelligence'. Rather, this view of whiteness "goes beyond the physicality of 'race' … to include the acquisition of "cultural capital" and a "state of psychological entitlement" (Brodkin cited in Kameniar, 2006: n.p.). In re-interpreting the first narrative I suggest that the cultural capital made available to myself as a white subject, and the largely 'white' teaching profession, has made it not only possible but inevitable that a white demographic view has come to represent society's professional subject positions. In this way whiteness saturates and constructs the social fabric, simultaneously reproducing racial superiority and white race privilege.

Discursively, then, the white teacher represents, and is produced through, an asymmetrical relation of power, unwittingly bringing to contact moments a state of 'psychological entitlement'. It could be argued that this state of entitlement unconsciously plays out in narrative number two when I instinctively 'take the reigns' – controlling lesson plans, ploughing ahead, and essentially overlooking my relationship with Elsie. However, left unquestioned albeit unintentionally are the workings of the hidden curriculum: the familiar timetable, white male management, the central organisation of white staff with individual desks, my easy relationship with Glen and the Principal, and the fact that my performance is judged according to my ability to perform in a mainstream manner and at a mainstream pace. I do not recognise these things, for at the time the privileges conferred through my whiteness cause a delay in my awareness (Wojecki, 2004).

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[8] Notwithstanding Spivak, two of the most well-known contact theorists, and those upon whom I draw most notably, are Pratt (1992) and Carter (1992). A contact perspective illuminates the historical and discursive context in which cultural interactions take place. In this way, Pratt refers to the contact zone as a space of radical racial asymmetry. Similarly, Carter utilises a contact perspective in his study of nineteenth Century explorer journals to analyse first contact interactions between explorers and indigenous Australians (Somerville & Perkins, 2003).

[9] Operational control of education in the region falls under the governance of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC). "The PYEC is composed of Aboriginal community members (Anangu) who largely retain their traditional values and customs. [Operational control] means that generally semi-literate Anangu with minimal Western school experience have decision making control over all education policies and operational practices in the communities of this geographic area" (Iversen & Thomas, 1996, p.3).

Aspects which fall outside mainstream tradition, such as the team-teaching relationship between white and Aṉangu teachers, garner some concern, but only tokenistic attention. To disrupt whiteness during moments of contact, Cowlishaw (2004, pp.66-7 emphasis in the original) suggests that so-called 'whitefellas' learn to, "establish relationships of trust and reciprocity," and become, "*engaged with* rather than *concerned about*, others." Were I to rewrite these experiences through lived experience I would therefore recognise that my relationship with Elsie took place within a discourse loaded with 200 years of racial history and indeed violence. By overlooking my working relationship with Elsie, because it was too hard, because it was unfamiliar, because it took 'time' thereby challenging the dominant Western schedule[10], I was reproducing racial asymmetry, but more importantly I was enacting a form of violence. In rewriting my relationship with Elsie I would place at centre stage, rather than on the margins, the significance of the transcultural relationship. However, to understand more fully these moments of contact it is worthwhile tracking their historical dimensions.

In the early part of narrative one my structural and cultural context emerges. I am produced through a very white environment, which goes relatively unnoticed until the introduction of The Lands. From here The Lands are organised against an explicitly white mainstream; a common way for colonial discourse to produce its subjects. The Lands are conceptualised as remote against a white mainstream centre. Likewise, the white subject is conceptualised through a sense of belonging to the mainstream. My identity as a 'true Aussie', for example, is measured according to my stance within the dominant culture, within the colony. In this instance my whiteness is conceptualised through the vernacular of the pop media: whiter than white. While seemingly trivial, the capacity available to the white subject to affirm her belonging through mainstream media bespeaks power. Film, advertising, radio and television are influential. Defining oneself as a 'Vegemite kid' discursively refers to a social contract which is both inclusionary and exclusionary – what Mills calls the "Dominant Contract". In terms of the discursive production of power through processes of media representation, it is valuable to track the history of one of Australia's now 'household' names.

It therefore comes as no surprise that throughout eight decades of constructing, reconstructing and publicising a dominant national identity, indigeneity is expunged from the Vegemite advertisements. Langton describes representation in racial terms, stating that:

> The easiest and most 'natural' form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible. Indeed, racism can provide a complete and satisfying comprehension of black identity (which is why it persists) and one that is linked to the viewer's ideological framework (Langton, 1993, p.24).

In this way my own ideological framework can be traced to comprise the re-production of a black imaginary that is linked to the media. And certainly if we concede that,

> The most dense relationship (between white and indigenous Australians) does not constitute physical contact but takes place between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists (Langton, 1993, p.33).

This imaginary of black identity, fuelled by mainstream media, begins to connect more explicitly with whiteness throughout both narratives: when my student Self unproblematically conceptualises The Lands as a 'disadvantaged backyard'; when I stereotypically conflate and homogenise 'Indigeneity' with 'the desert'; when I recall and practice my explorer education; when Indigenous Australians and central Australia are mythologised on television, thus directly informing an Aboriginal imaginary; and not least, when this imaginary is tested upon my arrival to The Lands. Instantly, those imagined models of Aboriginality that had for years been informed through a largely undisturbed and altogether white lens on the world, start to be tested. One

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[10] Depicted in the narrative through the shrieking school bell and the familiar mainstream timetable.

example is the way that the dangerousness of The Lands, vested in 'bars, locks, the gaze of the indigenous bypasser, and a sea of red dirt', is immediately confirmed (Hayes, 1998)[11].

Langton (1993, p.33) describes Aboriginality, "as a field of intersubjectivity in that it is made and remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation". She posits three broad categories of cultural and textual construction of 'Aboriginality', which are participated in by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects. The first category involves dialogue, or contact, between Aboriginal people. The second category involves the familiar stereotyping, iconising and mythologising of Aboriginal people by white people who have not had substantial first-hand contact with Aboriginal people. Such as school curricula built around tribal imagery, or mainstream travel programs that mythologise stereotypical icons such as 'Ayers Rock'.

> A third category are those constructions which are generated when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engage in actual dialogue … In these exchanges, as in any social interaction, the individuals involved will test imagined models of the other, repeatedly readjusting the models as the responses are processed, to find some satisfactory way of comprehending the other (Langton, 1993, p.35).

However, I do not wish to dilute the complexity of these issues through highlighting the paucity of Indigenous representation in mainstream media. If non-representation were the problem, it might just as easily be rectified by adding more Indigenous people to the mix, or by adding Indigenous teachers to the school staff. Rather, I suggest that non-representation is symptomatic of a much deeper racial contract. Mills states that:

> The whiteness and Eurocentrism of the contract … [does not] inhere most fundamentally in verbal and semantic exclusions … [but] in the fact that this apparatus was originally designed for a population with a [white] history (Mills, 2007, p.9).

The whiteness of the racial contract through which contemporary society is largely built, which I argue issues from colonial times, has generally meant that black disadvantage and white advantage are mutually constructed. In this light, it is also little wonder that my status as a first generation Australian, presented no obstacle to my developing a deep sense of 'belonging'. Several writers have traced the relationship between European, and in particular British, migrancy to Australia and the development of a myth of national identity dependent on British origin (Anderson & Taylor, 2005; Paisley, 2003; Schech & Haggis, 2004). The Australian government's enthusiastic and exclusionary drive to create a white, British populace, vested most strikingly and alarmingly in the White Australia Policy, has resulted in what Schech and Haggis (2004, p.176) describe as the ability for white, British migrants to fit in, while other migrants and Indigenous Australians are condemned to a position of 'perpetual foreigner'. Thus, "the ideology of racial hierarchy is indeed integral to Australian culture [to its dominant contract]; white privilege and differential entitlement and the subordination of racialised minorities *are* mutually constituted" (Brewster, 2005).

I raise these examples, not with intent to vilify the white subject, but to: highlight that which is obscured by conservative views of The Lands; to bring a sense of historical specificity; and to illustrate the ways that racism is unwittingly participated in by the white subject, constantly acting to reinforce the centrality and superiority of the white identity.

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[11] Haynes (1998) illustrates that white peoples' relationship with Indigenous Australians and with Central Australia has played out in much the same way since explorations to the red centre were first undertaken. Examining the records made by early explorers to the desert; Haynes points out that their observations, "based on preconceptions, were formed quickly rather after a long period of reflection" (p. 50).

The Lands

More could be said about the discursive formations which produce the white teacher, and the ways that these formations not only inform education in places such as The Lands, but how they characterise a more fundamental racial contract upon which contract zones are built. Nonetheless, identitary thinking is not limited to the human subject but stretches to include the land, reciprocally working to produce racialised subjects. Geographically, the Lands occupy the cross-border region of far north-west South Australia, the south-west of the Northern Territory, and adjacent regions in Western Australia (Summers, 2004). Discursively, the terms 'APY' and 'cross-border' refer to the processes through which personhood and land rights have been defined through white law in Australia (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a); these terms also reflect the historic legacy of the cultural appropriation of landscape – the making, mapping and possession of Australia.

The APY region once represented two distinct areas occupied by the Pitjantjatjara people to the west and the Yankunytjatjara to the east – regions that did not feature in my geometrically divided primary school maps. In 1981, these regions were recognised as belonging to their traditional owners and bounded together in a legal entity created by the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act*, thus becoming the 'APY' Lands. However, Moreton-Robinson suggests that such laws were, and are, highly racialised. She contends that the law in Australia, designed and established by white patriarchs in their own image and to their own advantage, "is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control and domination" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a, n.p.).

As such, apart from representing Indigenous ownership of the region since 1981, it may be argued that the APY covertly marks out white ownership of the rest of the more economically viable nation. And in this way, the desert is maintained as a remote, largely redundant or blank space. Discursively, the desert regions of Central Australia are portrayed as barren, remote, and blank; easily defined as *terra nullius*, easily justified as good grounds for nucluear testing, or more recently, for nuclear dumping[12] (Lowe in Bird Rose & Davis, 2005; Green, 2005). At the same time the desert is discursively depicted as being dangerous and feminine. For, "the explorers' characterisation of an implicitly gendered land, and of the desert in particular, was an important component of their public self-construction as intrepid heroes" (Haynes, 1998, pp.50-51); a construction which resonates in narrative number one during my trip to the 'red centre'.

The challenge for critical autoethnography is to establish links between colonial productions of Self and space – such as the explorers' characterisation of land – in their contemporary manifestations. Thus as a researcher of my own experiences I am unavoidably led to consider: how did history impact my incarnation as a white teacher in The Lands? What did I bring to moments of contact? More importantly, how might these brief re-writings of my lived experience help to inform my future pedagogy?

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[12] In the 1950s and 1960s the British Government, with support from the Australian Government, conducted a series of nuclear weapon tests in remote South and Western Australia. Anti-nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Green pointed out that permission was not sought for these tests from the affected Aboriginal communities, which included the Pitjantjatjara. Sickness and death from radiation exposure is what resulted for many of these Aboriginal peoples. Four decades later, the Australian government undertook a clean-up of the Maralinga test site, "but it was done on the cheap, and even now kilograms of plutonium remain buried in shallow, unlined pits in totally unsuitable geology" (Green, 2005, n.p.). In the late 1990s the Howard Government announced it would build a radioactive waste dump in central South Australia, though this was overturned by the Aboriginal people of the region and their supporters. "On July 7, 2003, the federal government used the Land Acquisition Act 1989 to seize land for the dump. Native Title rights and interests were annulled. This took place without forewarning and with no consultation of Aboriginal people, or the SA Government" (Green, 2005, n.p.). Although the Howard Government eventually relinquished plans to dump nuclear waste in remote South Australia, they are now planning the same construction in the Northern Territory.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have endeavoured to recall some of my personal experiences within the contract zone. More importantly, I have endeavoured to rewrite and therefore learn from those experiences through use of critical whiteness studies and racial contract theory. According to Mills' Racial Contract, "we should start with the reality of exclusion and inegalitarianism as the norm," (Mills, 2007, p.3). In other words, we name whiteness, draw attention to moments of contact, learn to see the racial asymmetry inherent in those moments, and engage in processes of contractual renegotiation which disrupt patterns of racial inequality inherent in the 'colonial' social contract. In asking what the dimensions of the contract are, and what I, as a white subject, bring to moments of contact, I attempt to ask how my Self and those around me, how our dialogue and interactions are positioned within racial and colonial discourses, and how those patterns may be disrupted. While I employ an autoethnographic approach to demonstrate how our personal experiences – particularly as educators – may be revised through a critical white lens, I do not attend to the many questions surrounding the ways that "such writing can serve the chilling function of simply saying, 'but enough about you, let me tell you about me' [thus] privileging the white, middle class, woman's or man's need for self display" (Chapman, 2004, p.99). Also left wanting is a more complex management of theory, which embraces a less reified articulation of 'whiteness' and 'blackness', but recognises the lines of differentiation inherent in both. However, as originally stated this paper represents an entry onto the field of critical race theory, and therefore recognises that all scholarly work at some point represents an opening for further analysis.

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