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In terms most familiar: technologies of whiteness in Australia and Canada: a comparative analysis

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IN TERMS MOST FAMILIAR

TECHNOLOGIES OF WHITENESS IN AUSTRALIA AND CANADA
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Colin Salter
January 2009
AUTHORS’ CERTIFICATION

I, Colin Salter, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Science, Technology and Society Program, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Colin Salter
Tuesday, January 27, 2009
abstract

This thesis explores the implications of colonial whiteness in the actions of communities supporting the struggles of First Peoples in Australia and Canada. Exploring how whiteness manifests itself, how it permeates as epistemic blank spots into the actions of those promoting respect and recognition, is used as a basis to reflect on social justice in contemporary society.

The emerging field of critical whiteness studies provides a solid foundation to engage with whiteness. Scholarship on the hegemony of technological discourse is drawn from to extend on this foundation. The notion of human history as a history of progress and the associated scientific hierarchisation of knowledges is rooted in relations of power|knowledge that perpetuate culturally inappropriate colonial relationships.¹ Gene Sharp’s work on consent theories of power and Jacques Ellul’s engagement with *Technological Society* are engaged with to explore how such hierarchisation of knowledges is maintained. The pervasiveness of this relation is explored in three case studies to reflect on the implications.

Engagement with white interpretations of the 1966 walk-out of Aboriginal

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¹ Nikolas Rose, following Foucault and focusing on (self) governance and freedom, refers to the study of such changes as a genealogy (1999: 65-6).
stockworkers and their families at Wave Hill provides an historical grounding of contemporary whiteness. Interpretations of the walk-out as a strike that later shifted in focus, counter to oral historical accounts, are used as a basis to consider how manifestations of whiteness in Australia have shifted in the last 40 years. The 2001 formation of the Community Picket at Sandon Point, as a means to oppose a residential proposal, provides a focus for reflecting on whiteness in contemporary Australia. The Picket was established to offer support to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) and promote a progressive variant of ‘practical reconciliation’. Friends of the Red Hill Valley’s support for Haudenosaunee Treaty rights, in opposing an expressway proposal for the valley, is comparatively engaged with to reflect on contextual variations in how whiteness manifests itself in Australia and Canada. Exposing the actions of white supporters as counter-hegemonic and a challenge to aspects of whiteness whilst unintentionally maintaining unjust colonial relationships at the same time locates some of the challenges for both scholarship and action in the area of social justice.
acknowledgments

This thesis owes much to many. My first exposures, over a decade ago, to the injustices of colonial Australia and its ongoing contemporary manifestations are where the roots of this research can be located. The spaces created by activism and the praxis of listening fostered an uncomfortableness with what I had been educated about Australia, my scared ignorance (see Perera 2005) of its present and its past. Cognitive dissonance drove me to reflect on how my own complicity in perpetuating colonial assumptions was undermining my attempts to afford respect and recognition. My appreciation goes out to those who (continue to) expose my well-meaning intentions, as well as those who have helped me on my (ongoing) journey of transcending whiteness for my own sake. My broader awareness of the structural and epistemic violence embedded in contemporary western capitalism is similarly attributed to many. I hope these people and many others continue to assist in exposing my unmarked whiteness.

I am indebted to those continuing the struggle to protect the Sandon Point area. Their tireless efforts in the face of ongoing adversity continue to prove an inspiration. I must thank Jillian Smith for first introducing me to the dispute over the Red Hill Valley during the development of my research proposal. My experiences of listening to accounts of those struggling to protect the valley, affording respect and recognition to the Haudenosaunee, have exposed me to different contexts and approaches. Meeting participants in the land reclamation at Caledonia afforded an awareness of a culture I previously had very little exposure
to—and significant differences in the responses of white people to assertions of sovereignty. I would like to thank participants in the disputes who have provided many of the images reproduced in this thesis, alongside the National Gallery of Australia and Louis Seselja/the National Library of Australia for granting permission to use images from the respective collections.

Brian Martin and Susan Dodds have been instrumental as my supervisors at the University of Wollongong, alongside the unending support of many others within the Faculty of Arts. They have helped me through many issues, continued to help me re-focus, and provided invaluable direction. They have improved this thesis immensely. Rhonda Roberts and David Mercer assisted in early formation of my research proposal, without which, this journey may not have began. The support of Walter Peace and the School of Geography of Earth Sciences at McMaster University cannot be overstated. Walt’s willingness to assist during my time in Canada, openly sharing his extensive knowledge of the Red Hill Valley, made my comparative research possible. I am also indebted to Nathan Clark, Maia Iotzova, the residents of ‘bunnytown’, the many participants in the Red Hill Valley dispute I met, and the staff at the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster.

I have received substantial financial support, without which this research would not have been possible—especially my 17-month research trip to Canada. The University of Wollongong, through an Australian Postgraduate Award, provided the majority of funding for this research. The Faculty of Arts Postgraduate Research Committee, the Centre for Canadian Australian Studies and the Study Abroad office provided further financial assistance. In Canada, aside from the invaluable support I received from the School of Geography of Earth Sciences at McMaster University, the University of British Columbia, the Sociology Departments at the University of Montreal and Brock University, the Environment Studies Association of Canada and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council have provided valued assistance.

The support of family and friends provided essential support that assisted me in seeing this thesis through to completion. Many colleagues listened when that was what I needed, provided valuable comments when asked and prodded my ideas
when warranted. The many great friends I made during this journey made the challenging task of living in a different country much easier. I am indebted.
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abbreviations

AASC  Australian Archaeological Survey Consultants
ALP   Australian Labor Party
ATE   Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Canberra)
CHOP  Clear Hamilton of Pollution
COI   Commissions of Inquiry (Sandon Point)
DIPNR Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources
DEC   Department of Environment and Conservation
Friends  Friends of Red Hill Valley
HETF  Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force
HRCA  Hamilton Region Conservation Authority
IF1  Isolated Find 1 (artefact at Sandon Point)
ILALC Illawarra local Aboriginal Land Council
Navin Officer  Navin Officer Heritage Consultants
NDP  New Democratic Party (Ontario)
The Picket  The Community Picket (Sandon Point)
SCLC  South Coast Labor Council
SPATE  Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy
IN TERMS MOST FAMILIAR

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