

# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies



[www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournal](http://www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournal)

**Volume 10, Number 2, 2014**

10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE OF *CRITICAL RACE AND WHITENESS STUDIES*

## **'Aussie luck': The border politics of citizenship post-Cronulla Beach**

**Suvendrini Perera**

Curtin University of Technology

*The essay situates the watershed event, 'Cronulla Beach', in terms of its effects: its ramifying political consequences as well as its circulation at the level of popular culture and the everyday and its reinfections of racist imaginaries and identities. It argues that these heterogenous effects contribute to resignifications of citizenship deployed as forms of internal border control across multiple sociocultural and sociospatial sites. Across a series of discontinuous sites and contexts, the essay explores how Cronulla Beach plays a key role in enabling and legitimising a resurgent border policing of Australian citizenship.*

**Keywords:** Cronulla Beach, Australian Race Relations, Citizenship test, Territorialisation, Redfern

### **Introduction**

In the summer of 2004, a seventeen year-old Aboriginal youth died, horrifically impaled on the railings of a local park, while being chased through the streets of Redfern by police. The awful circumstances of his death, one in a long sequence for which police bear responsibility, sparked furious community protests and rioting that night (Funnell, 2004). After initially struggling for control, police responded with a violent crackdown through Redfern. In the aftermath, Ray Minnecon, Director of Redfern's Aboriginal Crossroads Ministries, wrote of the fraught process of "rebuilding ... Aboriginal identity, integrity and community from the ashes of our burnt-out histories in this place we call Redfern":

For me as an Aboriginal person Redfern is a place where one can interact with a powerful collective will to struggle against the imperial forces that continue to interfere with ... our history ... For almost 200 years we were locked away from the new Australia that was built on our lands ... We are not happy with many of the results of that nation-building process ... We are not happy at our forced

exclusion in the building process ... And we are still picking through the rubble of that terrible history, not made with our own hands, to rediscover ourselves, our identity and our place in the new nation ... Redfern is all of these things and more to me ... I live with this hope that my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will find our place and our space in the most alien and inhospitable place of all to Aboriginal culture and people—the city of Sydney. (Minnecon, 2004)

Minnecon's analysis of the complex meanings encapsulated in Redfern powerfully substantiates Achille Mbembe's formulation that "space was the raw material of colonial sovereignty" (2003, p. 26). The site of a "nation-building" project premised on the exclusion of Indigenous people, Redfern and its environs are the ground, as Mbembe puts it, upon which colonial occupation "writ[es]...new social and spatial relations" (p. 26). This process of writing new spatial relations that Mbembe names "territorialisation" was "ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries" (pp. 25-26).

Here Mbembe itemises the processes of colonial boundary-making, the production of intermeshing spatial, epistemological and ontological borders that undergird and organise colonised societies. Through this constellation of processes space is written as race. It is a writing both enacted and continually reproduced through violence. As Ray Jackson, the opening speaker at the Borderpolitics of Communities forum, meticulously documents through the work of the Indigenous Social Justice Association, violence against Aboriginal bodies is one of the constitutive ways in which the boundaries of race and space are reproduced and policed in contemporary Australia (Jackson, 2001). The punishment, incarceration and killing of Indigenous bodies reinforces colonial 'hierarchies, zones and enclaves' that continue to produce racially marked sites such as Redfern. And they do so even as, in Minnecon's words, its inhabitants determinedly take on the collective task of "rebuilding ... Aboriginal identity, integrity and community from the ashes of our burntout histories in this place we call Redfern" (2004).

I begin this essay, written for a forum to mark the anniversary of the 2005 pogrom on Cronulla Beach, on the streets of Redfern in order to underline that Cronulla Beach cannot be understood in isolation. A hidden but nonetheless inexorable logic of territorialisation binds Redfern to Cronulla Beach. Both must be situated within the city of Sydney, as a space written by ethnoracial hierarchies, zones and enclaves: that is, by the production of borders. Borders operate not only spatially, but also conceptually and analytically. To understand the violence on Cronulla Beach as an aberration or as the outcome of a set of local circumstances alone is itself a form of border policing: it denies the sociospatial linkages that sustain Sydney as a city constituted by racialised and ethnicised borders within a neoliberal regime that both recodes and reinscribes colonial demarcations, scales and categories. The marketing of Sydney's cosmopolitan charms should not obscure that it is a city marked at every level by the racialised differentiation of space, from the location of most of its mosques and Hindu and Buddhist temples in industrial areas, next to waste dumps or in the middle of highways (Sandercock, 2000), to the saturation of the airwaves by broadcasters such as Alan Jones.

In the introductory section of the essay I attempt briefly to map some key operations of borders in the city. The rest of the essay situates the watershed event, 'Cronulla Beach', in terms of its effects: its ramifying political consequences as well as its circulation at the level of popular culture and the everyday and its reinfections of racist imaginaries and identities. In turn these heterogenous effects contribute to resignifications of citizenship that are deployed as forms of internal border control across multiple sociocultural and sociospatial sites in the aftermath of 'Cronulla Beach'.

### **From Redfern to Cronulla Beach: Effaced geographies of violence**

Sydney, described above by Minnecon as "the most alien and inhospitable place of all to Aboriginal culture and people" (2004) is inscribed, perhaps more than other major Australian cities, by a racialised and ethnicised topography. In this marked landscape names such as Redfern, Auburn and Cabramatta signify on a national scale. As the preserve of the native and the alien they are the locus of fear and abjection. Simultaneously, they are structured by a continuing colonial logic that veers between poles of exclusion and assimilation. Even as they function as ghetto precincts that operate to encircle, separate, control and police racially othered populations, these spaces are subject to the demand to reflect the dominant culture back to itself. In this sense they correspond to the imaginative geographies of empire identified by Edward Said, as spaces of otherness irretrievably marked by difference and lack even as colonial activity violently strives to convert them into the same (1978, pp. 54-55).

Spaces of lack and difference in the urban landscape are continually subjected to the colonial demand to assimilate. The assimilationist demand takes varied forms, from the seemingly benevolent desire to promote 'renewal' and 'development' (such as on the Block in Redfern) to the drive to eliminate spaces of difference perceived as threats to 'law and order', 'social cohesion' and, increasingly, 'national security'. To this end the opaque, unknowable and shadowy spaces of the city must be rendered open, orderly and secure. Even before the war on terror, selected suburbs became subject to new forms of criminalisation and surveillance as escalating rates of Aboriginal imprisonment, the introduction of racial profiling and the mandatory incarceration of asylum seekers combined with the neoliberalist drive to privatise the prison/detention system. It was in this context, as private security guards began patrolling the streets of Redfern and Chippendale, that the Redfern elder, Auntie Ali Golding, commented in early 2001, "it's as if we're living in a detention centre" (as cited in Perera, 2001).

Since Australia's entry into the war on terror these moves have gathered force to redraw ever more narrowly the limits of belonging within the nation and police with increasing violence the frontiers of citizenship. The overarching imperative of national security now combines with neoliberal logic on the one hand and assimilationist pressures on the other to train the searchlights on new spaces of racial fear and danger. The suburbs of Lakemba and Auburn are cast as landscapes that mirror the war zones of Lebanon and Iraq (Kremmer & Pryor, 2006), with their residents subjected to levels of unrelenting suspicion and surveillance.

In the late 1990s Pauline Hanson identified Bankstown and Cabramatta as suburbs that threatened the social fabric of the nation by their linguistic and visual heterogeneity. Following the mobilisation of 'culture' and 'values' as surrogate terms for race in the war on terror, the demand for bodies in these spaces to be intelligible, transparent and knowable to the dominant has amplified. Dress and speech are registered as acts of aggression not only against the 'values', but also against the security, of the nation. The demand to be open, available and transparent to the dominant is enforced in differential ways upon gendered and racialised sectors of the population, as in the attacks, led by senior politicians, on Muslim women's veiling practices. Women wearing hijab or burqa are subjected to a spectrum of violence from physical assault to the suspicion of concealing bombs under their burqas and accusations of 'confronting' the sensibilities of Anglo-Australia by their mere presence in public spaces (Perera, 2010).

Territorialised inscriptions of threat and embedded histories of exclusion also structure the relations between Cronulla Beach, Sutherland Shire and Western Sydney. In the days immediately after the racist attacks in Cronulla Beach the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: "the shire is a white, Anglo-Celtic, Christian heartland. But, ominously, this white sanctuary is hemmed in by the great Middle Eastern melting pots of Sydney" (Overington & Warne-Smith, 2005). The shire's status as a "white sanctuary" is reinforced by the information that the area is "fast becoming a celebrity haven" as the home to Australia's former cricket captain, Steve Waugh, and the Olympic champion, Ian Thorpe (Overington & Warne-Smith, 2005). As household names, these local heroes anchor Cronulla Beach in national space. In pointed contrast are the faceless figures who inhabit "the great Middle Eastern melting pots of Sydney" that "ominously hem ... in" (Overington & Warne-Smith, 2005) this haven of whiteness, and who weekly encroach on its hallowed beaches. The shire's status as a 'white sanctuary' also possesses an even deeper purchase on the national imaginary. Its official website proclaims that: Sutherland Shire is known as the 'Birthplace of modern Australia', as Kurnell (now a suburb of the Shire) was the first landing site on the east coast of Australia by James Cook. He went ashore on 29 April, 1770 at a spot now within the Captain Cook's Landing Place, part of the Botany Bay National Park. For eight days he and his scientists, seamen and marines explored and mapped the area (Sutherland Shire Council). Faithfully represented here are the processes of territorialisation enacted at the 'Birthplace of Modern Australia'. The first space to be mapped, explored and rendered intelligible by colonial violence, the shire is also the originary scene of Aboriginal dispossession. The presence of a succession of imperial pioneers—Cook, Philip, La Perouse—is scored into the terrain that now bears the seemingly innocuous name, Botany Bay National Park. This ground, subsumed into the sanitising regime of the "National Park" (Perera & Pugliese, 1998), is the land of the Dharawal people, previously effaced under the sign of 'Botany', whose effacement is reenacted in the website's description of Cook's exploration and mapping of 'the area'.

The Dharawal, invisible in the extract from the shire website, were "among the first Aboriginal people to resist the invasion of their land, the first to be struck down by smallpox and other introduced diseases and the first to become decimated by random killings and massacres" (Welsh, 2005). Rob Welsh, Chairman of the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council, recalled this history in May

2005 as people from Redfern and La Perouse came together to complete the burial ceremonies for six Dharawal people whose remains had been salvaged from museums as far away as Edinburgh in Scotland. As Welsh notes, Aboriginal bodies, as much as land, were objects of theft. They too formed the ground on which colonial sovereignty mapped out its demarcations and carved the frontiers of what would constitute the limits of the human and the citizen (Pugliese, 2007) within the new nation.

The line that connects Redfern and Cronulla Beach runs through Botany Bay. Bringing back into view the violence that inscribes the site of Botany Bay National Park is one way of reframing representations of the shire as a 'white sanctuary' threatened by 'Middle Eastern melting pots'. Rather than being 'a white haven' under siege, the ongoing presence of Dharawal bodies locates the white sanctuary of the shire as itself a site of violence. As Maria Giannacopoulos argues in her essay *Terror Australis*, instead of being a place threatened by "ethnic violence", the shire is exposed as a place predicated on and "having been constituted by a form of white sovereign violence that continues to be retrospectively legalised" (Giannacopoulos, 2006, p. 4). This invisibilised 'white sovereign violence' continues to produce and patrol the limits of the nation in the form of the unquestioned and unquestionable law of the land.

### **Citizenship, Territory and Nation: The View from Cronulla Beach**

In *Race Terror, Sydney, December 2005* I discuss in detail how geopolitical insecurities about the "homeland" and the racialised fears and anxieties that characterise Sydney are layered onto Cronulla Beach as a sacred site of Anglo-Australia (Perera, 2006). These layered spatial relations correspond to what Arjun Appadurai describes as "geographies of anger": "the volatile relationship between the maps of national and global politics ... and the maps of sacred national space" (2006, p. 100). Appadurai suggests that geographies of anger, "the spatial outcome of complex interactions between far away events and proximate fears", manifest "uncertainty about the enemy within and the anxiety about the always incomplete project of national purity" (2006, p. 100). Read as a staging of Appadurai's 'geographies of anger' Cronulla Beach reveals how anxieties about the 'great Middle Eastern melting pots of Sydney' combine with the project of preserving the purity of the 'Birthplace of modern Australia' and securing its borders against the enemies within.

Building on Appadurai's formulation, I want to propose that the category of citizenship, authorised by the law of the land, also constitutes a 'sacred national space' where geographies of anger are enacted. At the intersection of law, territory and nation, symbolic checkpoints and border posts are installed. Criteria for belonging are recast as the emphasis shifts from the fortification of external borders against the 'illegal' and the 'unlawful noncitizen' to new types of differentiation aimed at searching out the enemy within. The category of citizenship is repoliticised or, more precisely, resignified in ways that make citizenship visible anew as a site where the (racialised and gendered) limits of the national are tested and enforced.

These new formations of citizenship are produced across a number of levels from the biopolitical and necropolitical operations of state institutions (Mbembe, 2003)

to locations of popular culture and everyday life. In what follows I explore, across a series of discontinuous sites and contexts, how Cronulla Beach plays a key role in enabling and legitimising a resurgent border policing of Australian citizenship.

The deployment of citizenship and border control as mechanisms for differentiating spatially and racially among the population is not new; indeed, it is constitutive of the Australian state. Brian Galligan and John Chesterman note:

The elaborate legislative and administrative regimes constructed around citizenship rights and entitlements by successive colonial, Commonwealth and state governments ... have been mainly exclusionary. Their overwhelming purpose was to bar any 'aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa, or the Islands of the Pacific' from rights and benefits, with quite extraordinary and ingenious efforts being applied to this negative cause. (1999, pp. 73-74)

The 'negative cause' of excluding nonwhite 'aboriginal [sic] natives' was complemented by a series of other forms of border control. Henry Reynolds argues that in the absence of substantive independence from Britain, the government of the newly federated Australia

was able to assert its independence not by hauling down the Union Jack but by closely controlling what and who could enter the country by means of tariffs, immigration controls, customs and quarantine regulations. These forms of control, rigorously exercised, came to be the surrogate assertion of independence by an impaired nation state. (2007, p. 66)

In the impaired Australian state created post 1901, border control over bodies and goods operated in tandem with the continued definition of nationhood in racial terms and through subjection to Britain. Galligan and Chesterman argue that the Australian constitution was "deliberately couched in [British] 'subject' rather than [Australian] 'citizen' terms" (1999, p. 73), a status that was reemphasised rather than amended by the 1948 Citizenship Act. Introducing the Act in parliament in 1947, Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell assured his audience that it was "not designed to make an Australian any less a British subject" and promised that it would "in no way lessen the advantages and privileges which British subjects who may not be Australian citizens enjoy in Australia" (as cited in Galligan & Chesterman, 1999, pp. 76-77). Galligan and Chesterman succinctly gloss this as follows: "the only way British subjects who were not Australian citizens could maintain the same rights was if Australian citizenship was meaningless. And it was" (1999, p. 74).

Galligan and Chesterman go on to identify the "deliberate eschewing of citizenship in favour of subjecthood" and the exclusion of "non-white 'aboriginal natives'" as "evidence of Australia's non-citizenship tradition", concluding that as a consequence "contemporary Australians have no core notion of positive citizenship upon which to draw":

Reinventing citizenship is not an option since there is no noble past to refurbish. Nor is reviving civic education enough, since the old civics was premised on subjecthood [to Britain] and racial exclusion. Moreover, reconciliation with Aboriginal people, which is a prerequisite for national dignity, does require coming to grips with their past exclusion. (1999, p. 74)

Galligan and Chesterman's contention in 1999 that "Australians have no core notion of positive citizenship upon which to draw" (pp. 76-77) may provide one explanation for the increasing recourse to the term 'unAustralian' as way of defining the nation in the second century of federation. Their argument also contextualises the proposed revision in 2007 of the 1948 Citizenship Act. Although the content of the amended legislation was yet to be finalised, on 11 December 2006, that is, on the first anniversary of Cronulla Beach, the Prime Minister announced that a citizenship test requiring "a basic level of English language skills, as well as knowledge of the Australian way of life and our shared values" (DIMA, 2006) would be required of all future citizens.

The decision to introduce a citizenship test suggests both an extension and a reworking of what Galligan and Chesterman characterise as "Australia's non-citizenship tradition" (1999). Historically the measure recalls the implementation of the White Australia Policy through the technology of the dictation test with the aim of reducing the number of aliens both outside and within Australian borders (Reynolds, 2006, p. 67). As such it foreshadows a covert *re-racialisation* of the category of citizenship through cultural and linguistic, rather than overtly racial, exclusion. In terms of contemporary geopolitical imperatives, the new legislation replicates moves to limit citizenship by the USA and UK, Australia's senior partners in the coalition of the willing, while also paralleling successive Border Protection Acts adopted since 2001.

In contrast to these previous pieces of legislation, the notion of a citizenship test based on "knowledge of the Australian way of life and our shared values" initially seems to gesture towards the definition of a positive, rather than "non" or negative, content for Australian citizenship, discussed by Galligan and Chesterman above. From the beginning, however, the stated aim of the new test in Prime Minister Howard's speech to identify "the Australian way of life and our shared values" (DIMA, 2006), is belied by its contextualisation. As already mentioned, the announcement of the move was clearly timed to connect the restructuring of citizenship with the anniversary of Cronulla Beach. Rather than putting forward a "core notion of positive citizenship" (Galligan & Chesterman, pp. 66-67), the images of a seething mass of bodies, flags and riot police that accompanied the announcement could only have been calculated to create the opposite effect. Juxtaposed with replays of scenes of mob violence, the announcement of the citizenship test reinforces an understanding of Australian citizenship as at once beleaguered, belligerent and exclusionary. Here the promise of a new citizenship that would articulate 'the Australian way of life' is anchored not by reference to shared futures or common ends, but by an unspoken but nonetheless unmistakable threat: the spectre of Cronulla Beach.

The stated aim of the citizenship test is "to ensure that migrants to Australia integrate successfully and contribute to our national progress" (DIMA, 2006). The repeated use of the term 'integrate', harking back to an earlier stage of immigration policy, is in pointed contrast to the absence of any reference to the principle of multiculturalism or even its clumsy official substitute, 'Cultural and Linguistic Diversity' (CALD). Instead, the category of citizenship is resituated in the terms of neoliberalist discourse as "an important extension of the government's broader philosophy of mutual obligation" (DIMA, 2006).

Again, this rearticulation of citizenship within a neoliberalist framework might be seen as one way of potentially providing a new, positive, content for Australian citizenship. Understood as 'mutual obligation', the relations between state and citizen are seemingly privatised, cast as matters to be negotiated at the level of the individual, remote from the bloodied battlegrounds of history and culture. However, as Aihwa Ong points out, "neoliberalism as a technology of governing relies on calculative choices and techniques in the domains of citizenship and of governing" (Ong, 2006, p. 4). Significant (if submerged) links tie the project of neoliberalism to the formation of citizenship as a racialised category. Both are predicated on forms of demarcation and differentiation—'calculative choices'—between subjects that reward some and penalise others on the basis of assumed traits and attributes. Racial and economic regimes coincide as these discriminations are produced through remarkably similar sets of binaries, for example those working to distinguish self-sufficient, flexible, enterprising and disciplined subjects from groups classified as hide-bound, recalcitrant, ill disciplined and lazy.

The contracting of the cultural and linguistic borders of citizenship in the interests of national security and cohesion thus intersects in complex ways with the shrinking of the state demanded by neo-liberal logic (Ong, 2006). Both work to exclude, punish or render expendable their target populations, who often (if not always) coincide in the same racialised and gendered bodies: for example, remote Aboriginal communities deemed 'unviable' for survival or those unwilling or unable to enter into 'mutual obligation' arrangements with the state. Similarly, within the racialised landscape of Sydney in the period leading up to Cronulla Beach, a campaign was mounted against particular migrant communities in the city as unfit to adapt to life in contemporary western society (Perera, 2006).

As neoliberal technologies of governing reorganise sociopolitical space and the relations among sectors of the population (Ong, 2006, pp. 13-14), new demarcations and differentiations do not replace, but are mapped on to preexisting racial regimes. Neo-liberal logic redeploys these regimes of race and ethnicity while simultaneously *transcoding* them into the terms of its own, seemingly racially unmarked, economies of morality and value. Brought into play as the backdrop to the reorientation of Australian citizenship in neo-liberal terms, Cronulla Beach testifies to the unspoken nexus between the two and points to a key paradox in the official campaign to redesign citizenship: the dependence of a neoliberal incarnation of Australian citizenship that is meritocratic, inclusive and positive on the silent shadow presence of its fearsome and intractable racial other.

### **Cronulla country**

On the first anniversary of December 11, 2005 the news cameras were assiduously trained on Sydney's ocean suburbs in the expectation of more racist violence. But it is elsewhere that the exclusionary violence of Cronulla Beach was being most clearly reenacted. A few days later, the Tamworth Regional Council voted to refuse five Sudanese refugee families the opportunity to resettle in this



NSW country town.<sup>1</sup> The reason, according to Mayor James Treolar, was that Tamworth residents feared having to face a "Cronulla riots-type situation". In interviews with the media Treolar stated: "the community has expressed enormous concerns of mistrust against the Sudanese people, and I think this is largely based on previous events like the Cronulla riots" (Stapleton & Madden, 2006). He went on to attack the record of Sudanese-Australians already living in Tamworth, clinching his remarks with: "ask the people at Cronulla if they want more refugees" (Norrie, 2006).

Treolar's words suggest how Cronulla Beach circulates in popular understandings one year later. While many accounts of the violence focus on a narrowly local microanalysis of events—alleged attacks on two lifeguards; the fraught relations between Anglo- and Lebanese-Australians; the availability of alcohol on the day<sup>2</sup>—Treolar invokes Cronulla Beach as both an enactment and a vindication of Anglo-Australia's accumulated hostilities towards nonwhite migrants and refugees in general. At the same time his rhetorical injunction to "ask the people at Cronulla if they want more refugees" (Norrie, 2006) confers on the mob violence at Cronulla Beach the status of a national referendum on questions of race and refugees. Treolar's statements recall the tendency in much of the commentary on Cronulla Beach to understand racist violence as an unfortunate, but understandable, reaction to the 'provocations' of young Lebanese-Australian men. In Tamworth, Treolar suggests, Sudanese refugees must carry the burden of the Cronulla riots and implicitly bear responsibility for the racism of Tamworth residents.

In the Tamworth decision, multiculturalism, crime, misogyny, disease and race signify through a single term that enfolds them in a coherent narrative and renders them culturally meaningful: Cronulla Beach. Old racist phobias such as fears of nonwhite migrants spreading "TB and Polio" (Norrie, 2006) intersect with more recent concerns over security and law and order to position Sudanese refugees as unfit subjects for citizenship and as threats to 'our way of life'. Kevin Tongue, one of the Tamworth councillors who voted to exclude the Sudanese, cited the "community's concerns ... for our future generations" as his primary motivation. "Is this the lifestyle that we want to leave to our future generations", he challenges in an interview on TV, "a multicultural lifestyle?" (Lockyer, 2007).

In Tamworth, as at Cronulla Beach, 'values' and 'culture' were endowed with the kind of fixity that attaches to 'race' in order to enforce boundaries between 'communities' seen as irretrievably different. In both instances the protection of women, that indispensable thematic of colonial and racist discourse, was singled out as the primary concern. Mayor Treolar explained to *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Damien Murphy, "you see, in the culture they come from, women are treated abysmally. I mean, we've given women the vote here" (Murphy, 2006).

---

<sup>1</sup> Following the negative publicity, the council agreed on 16 January 2007 to reconsider its previous decision and negotiate a "pilot resettlement program" (Overington, 2007) for Tamworth with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. However, at the time of writing it is not yet clear whether this pilot program will indeed proceed. One counsellor who voted against the original decision to exclude the refugees has suggested that the 'pilot program' was a window dressing exercise aimed at minimising embarrassment during the Tamworth music festival.

<sup>2</sup> These were among the explanations offered by some of the participants at the Borderpolitics of Communities Forum in Sydney on 11/12/2006.

For Treolar, 'giving women the vote' is both the ultimate indicator of Australian (men's) benevolence towards 'women', and the measure of their distance from the Sudanese (men).

To further buttress claims of a biologised difference of 'culture', Treolar originally claimed that eight out of the twelve Sudanese-Australians currently living in Tamworth had been "before the courts for everything from dangerous driving to rape" (Norrie, 2006). In his article, however, Murphy challenges Treolar's claims, citing a statement by local police:

While Treolar keeps running off at the mouth about resident Sudanese, the Oxley Local Area commander, Superintendent Tony Jefferson, gives the lie to the Mayor's words. He says some have been charged with assault, traffic and domestic matters - but 'they do not stand out over any other ethnic group in the community'. Unrepentant, Treolar says: 'If this is racist, well so be it. Call me a racist then'. (Murphy, 2006)

Confronted with evidence that contradicts his claims, Treolar is quick to change tactics: he defiantly owns the title of racist. I read this again as a response enabled by the precedent of Cronulla Beach, a site where racism was camouflaged through its proxy terms as it was also defiantly staged as public display. At Cronulla Beach the line that distinguished between a "community picnic" where "thousands of Australians gathered to defend their way of life", in the words of the Australia First Party (Gosch, 2006), and exclusionary violence as a display of "100% Aussie Pride" was not only blurred, it was indistinguishable. Cronulla Beach thus signifies on a national scale as a name that absorbs white racial fear and resentment and presents them anew, defiantly wrapped in the colours of national pride.

In detailing the ways in which Cronulla Beach provided an enabling environment for the events at Tamworth, I want to call into question an often reproduced binary distinction in political commentary between a regressive and redneck rural Australia and its cosmopolitan urban centres. This self-serving distinction between centre and periphery effectively marginalises racism in the Australian landscape. Rather, the connectivities between Cronulla Beach and Tamworth suggest the deep implication of these sites alike in racist hierarchies and demarcations that are, as I have already shown, constitutive of Australia as a nation-state. In the following section of the essay I explore further the enabling role of Cronulla Beach in renewing racist imaginaries through new circuits of identification and consumption at a national scale.

### **Reworked repertoires of Australian racism**

One context in which I locate the Tamworth Mayor's comments is a highly publicised artefact that emerged as a tribute to Cronulla Beach, the Cronulla 2230 Board Game. Treolar's responses reproduce in a number of ways the unabashed racism of the Cronulla 2230 game, dedicated "to all those who stood up for the freedoms of fair dinkum Aussies" (Sydney beach riot game condemned, 2006). The game, freely available on the internet despite the NSW government's attempts to restrict it, overtly solicits support for the white

supremacist Australia First Party (although the party itself has denied any involvement with the game).

Structured as a Monopoly-type board game, the objective of Cronulla 2230 is for the winning player "to become the wealthiest person in the Cronulla area through buying, renting and selling property [in order to] ... fund patriotic organisations like Australia First and the Patriotic Youth League, so they can get into parliament and Win Back Australia" (Gosch, 2006; Moses, 2006). An uneasy mix of racism and real estate, the game reproduces the racial polarisation and divisiveness that is also reflected elsewhere in the landscape of Australia's wealthiest city. At the same time, the aim of 'Winning Back Australia' interpellates publics at different levels, appealing to the aspirations of 'ordinary Australians', carefully fostered over the last decade, to amass real estate, while also playing on underlying anxieties about globalisation in the form of foreign investment and competition.

Cronulla 2230 is accompanied by a series of "Aussie Luck" cards that alternatively reward or penalise players. The term 'Aussie Luck' references the title of Donald Horne's 1964 classic, *The Lucky Country*. Although Horne (1964/1988) intended the title as a warning and an indictment, the term has long since acquired a self-congratulatory nationalist gloss. Among other things, it is used to invoke a promised land of plenty into which nonwhite migrants should be grateful for receiving admission and, simultaneously, to suggest a golden age before the advent of multiculturalism. Elsewhere I have suggested that Horne's text betrays more ambivalence about multiculturalism and the coming Asian century than is often realised (Perera, 1995, pp. 4-7). The return of the "Aussie Luck Cards" in the Cronulla 2230 game can be seen as exploiting the buried ambivalences in Horne's brand of reformist nationalism.

The messages on the cards refer not only to events immediately relating to Cronulla Beach but reproduce the full repertoire of white racism. Messages such as "Health inspectors find dogs & cats in fridges in Asian restaurants, Pay \$15" appear side by side with "Lebos spoil Cronulla Beach for families, Pay \$5". Reward cards proclaim: "Rally for compulsory vaccinations for Asians, Collect \$20"; "More and more Aussies fly the Australian flag from their cars and utes, Collect \$30" and "Locals rally to stop the Captain Cook memorial from being moved, Collect \$40".

On the board itself images and slogans from 11 December 2005 (*We grew here, you flew here; Freedom for Aussies*) are surrounded by the street names and landmarks of Cronulla Beach. Also marked are places labelled as 'rallying points' for various white supremacist groups such as the Patriotic Youth League and Australia First. Chillingly, selected sites such as "Captain Cook's Landing Place Park", Beach Street and the Cronulla train station (where the mob hunted for 'lebs and wogs' to assault) are designated as points of "Aussie Luck". The board therefore maps a localised itinerary of racist violence from the arrival of Captain Cook to the pogrom on the beach. Players re-enact this racist itinerary as they progress through the game.

On one level Cronulla 2230 is a product of the normalisation of racism in Australian life. The "Aussie Luck" cards recycle the banal racisms of the radio talk show and the internet conspiracy theory, and reproduce the xenoracism that

characterises mainstream Australian politics in the Howard era. What is new in this mix, however, is the triumphalist declaration of "Aussie Pride", materialised in photographs of bared white bodies and massed displays of the Australian flag reprinted on the game board. These images suggest the ways in which Cronulla Beach has reenergised and reactivated racist imaginaries, enabling their address to a range of new publics and their ability to engage new circuits of consumption and specularly. While the Cronulla 2230 game itself is one instance of these new sites of display and consumption, the reanimation of racist imaginaries is also reproduced at more mundane levels.

As spectacle Cronulla Beach references a visual archive that includes white supremacist iconographies of bared Aryan bodies and of the Australian beach as a site of white privilege, as well as images of fascist mass rallies and ANZAC day parades (Perera, 2006). As such this capacious visual archive addresses a range of viewers, presenting an 'innocent' and 'patriotic' as well as a 'sinister' and 'extremist' aspect. These two-faced or double-coded images of Cronulla Beach, distributed through conventional as well as alternative media sources such as *YouTube*, have provided the impetus for what I want to name a *reworked aesthetics of white Australian racism*. This aesthetic can be deployed in contexts that range from the mainstream consumer culture of the suburban shopping mall to the staging of underground or sub-cultural white supremacist identities.

The reworked repertoire of white Australian racism I have identified is sometimes referenced through (ambiguous) gestures of self-reflexivity, as with the 'Sam Kekovich' character's TV commercials endorsing red meat as a remedy for unAustralianism in the lead up to Australia Day 2007. More insidiously, it works through the production of a set of submerged associations. At my neighbourhood supermarket, part of a major national chain, even before the Christmas specials were retired, a red, white and blue display enjoined: "Wear with Pride" as an array of products manufactured mostly in China—water bottles, towels, thongs, sandals, plates, socks, mugs, backpacks—suggested that in the lucky country there was only one place for the patriotic to celebrate the national day.

The display, one I don't remember from previous years, inescapably recalled the mass mobilisation at Cronulla Beach, and the spectacle of swarming, flag-bedecked bodies. What brought me to a standstill before this menacing display, in the everyday space of an inner city supermarket, was precisely its two-faced ability simultaneously to camouflage and to stage racist violence. Post-Cronulla Beach, the flag, recoded through the aesthetics of white Australian racism, has emerged as the season's essential beach accessory.

A convergence of forces enables the circulation of these mass-produced mementos and souvenirs of Cronulla Beach. The production and national distribution of these artefacts by a large supermarket chain within a relatively short space of time; the public and acceptable face of patriotic display in the context of the war on terror; the Commonwealth government's campaign to increase the visibility of the flag in schools and offices: all these factors collude with heightened emotions called forth by the aesthetics of white Australian racism post-Cronulla Beach.

**Flying the Flag: A beer in one hand and a baseball bat in the other**

In an interview on December 12, 2005, Channel 9 journalist Ellen Fanning interviewed Prime Minister Howard about the previous day's scenes of terror on Cronulla Beach.

ELLEN FANNING: Prime Minister, part of what was chilling yesterday was seeing a lot of people in between the violence doing things that you'd see at the cricket, singing 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi', wrapping themselves in the Australian flag. What do you say to people who use the Australian flag in that way?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I would never condemn people for being proud of the Australian flag. I don't care – I would never condemn people for being proud—

ELLEN FANNING: What if they've got a beer in their hand and a baseball bat in the other? (Howard, 2005)

Despite the Prime Minister's emphatic refusal to entertain Fanning's argument, the question of the role played by the Australian flag as an emblem of racial particularism and aggression erupted again a year later in the lead-up to Australia Day in January 2007. The organisers of the Big Day Out concert in Sydney held the day before Australia Day asked audiences to leave their flags at home, citing instances of concertgoers the previous year being forced to kiss the flag to prove their patriotism (Mulvey 2007). The concert organisers were immediately denounced for a ham-fisted move that could only provoke a backlash from 'ordinary Australians' who would now feel impelled to defend the flag (Birmingham 2007).

The ensuing debate, however, returned to the question Fanning had attempted to raise a year earlier when she described the racist violence on Cronulla Beach as interspersed with 'things you'd see at the cricket': the distinction between deploying the flag as a celebration of 'harmless' nationalist sentiment and deploying it as an emblem of exclusionary violence. The Prime Minister's response was that both alike were demonstrations of national pride. A year later he elaborated on these comments by saying, in words that inevitably recall the infamous "guns don't kill people" argument of the US gun lobby: "flags don't have legs and arms, if anyone was breaking the law at Cronulla, or breaks the law at any time in the future, they should be dealt with by the authorities" (Mulvey, 2007).

In contrast, Harold Scrooby, the executive director of Ausflag, a group campaigning for a new Australian flag, called attention to the exclusionary racial meanings indelibly inscribed on and reproduced by the flag: "I've no doubt that in the Cronulla riots, those waving it at the opposition were saying 'I'm Australian and you're not because I'm of British descent' and it would be similar [at the Big Day Out]" (Mulvey, 2007). Scrooby's comments return me to Galligan and Chesterman's argument that the subjection to Britain that founds Australian citizenship has resulted in a 'tradition of non-citizenship' for Australia (1999). Consequently, racial identification with Britain provides the basis for Australian national identity and continues to privilege it over other, potentially more inclusive, identities. Here the ambiguities of the term 'subject', as able to simultaneously encompass both subjection and subjecthood come into play: Australian citizenship continues to reproduce subjection to an imagined white homeland that includes Britain (and its successor, the United States) while also deploying this white British subjectivity to exclude and devalue other identities in Australia.

Simultaneously, the meanings of the flag ramify within a transnational network of significations. "Is it a gang to be a western democracy?" an interviewee demanded in response to the charge that the flag was deployed in the manner of "gang colours" on Cronulla Beach (Mulvey, 2007). Here Cronulla Beach is resituated as a front in the war on terror, linking it to what Goldie Osuri and Bobby Banerjee describe as the "ideoscapes of democracy and freedom ... particularised as the identity of 'white' Western countries" (2004, p. 167). Osuri and Banerjee argue that in these spaces "whiteness [is] expressed as transnational loyalty" (2004, p. 151) that at the same time represents itself as transcending ethnoracial categories by "proclaiming democracy and freedom ... as universal values" (2004, p. 167).

These responses suggest that displays of the Australian flag carry a range of inflections in which imagined local, national and transnational spaces are layered on to one another, producing new maps of identification and exclusion. While in the Prime Minister's understanding, 'being proud of the flag' is a practice that has a singular and static meaning, since Cronulla Beach new articulations of the flag have emerged that overlies and reinflects its previous uses. It was in this context that the Big Day Out organisers, although themselves enmeshed in the wider nationalist project of Australia Day, called attention to what had become, post-Cronulla Beach, almost a naturalised relationship between the flag, Anglo-Australian identitarianism and racist violence.<sup>3</sup> While this nexus had been remarked on in different contexts (eg. by columnist Lisa Pryor's call to fly the flag upside down 'as a sign of distress') the Big Day Out intervention was publicised on a national scale that, potentially, short-circuited the process of naturalisation.

In the (different) context of the ubiquitous displays of the Stars and Stripes after 9/11, Inderpal Grewal notes that "nationalism ... does not emerge out of one imaginary community but rather is produced through the changing specularity of consumer culture and contingent community affiliations created by new and historical hierarchies of race and gender" (Grewal, 2003, p. 2). Grewal's formulation allows us to think of nationalism itself as a contested space, where the meanings of national symbols such as the flag are continually rearticulated and renegotiated by subjects differentially positioned within intersecting hierarchies. Whereas the Prime Minister's refusal to distinguish between different uses of the flag contributes to a normalisation of its association with racist displays, Big Day Out's intervention opens up room for further public debate over the meanings of the flag, styles of whiteness and possible countermobilisations. As such it is a rare expression of dissent against the exclusionary and violent forms of nationalism unleashed on Cronulla Beach.

### **January 27, 2007**

On the national day at the 'Birthplace of modern Australia', the Dharawal people remember the arrival of Cook, Philip and La Perouse on their land, marking the day of invasion even as they celebrate their own survival. As Maria Nugent

---

<sup>3</sup> I thank Kristen Phillips for her research on this event and for discussing her insights about the Big Day Out with me.

discusses, a powerful tradition of protest on this site from the 1939 Day of Mourning to the demonstrations of 1970 and 1988 unsettles the triumphalism of the nationalist anniversary (Nugent, 2005, pp. 174-175). The government chose Australia Day 2007 to announce that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), previously known as the Department of Multiculturalism, Ethnic and Aboriginal Affairs (DIMEA) will henceforth be renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIaC). This series of name changes in recent years is one indication of the succession of administrative and classificatory regimes brought to bear on racialised and ethnicised others. It also indicates the making and remaking of borders between Indigenous and other racialised/ethnicised bodies within the space of the nation. At the same time, the new focus on citizenship, a category from which both Aboriginal and nonwhite migrants were excluded in 1901, reinforces the shift already suggested above, to a new policing of the cultural and linguistic, as well as the territorial, limits of the nation. As a technology that aims to search out the enemy within, the new emphasis on citizenship extends at an official level the project of national purification undertaken at Cronulla Beach and the resurgent border politics of Australian citizenship that I have mapped in the course of this essay.

### **Author Note**

Suvendrini Perera (Curtin University of Technology) is currently working on an ARC-funded research project on coexistence and multiethnicity in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. Her most recent book is the edited volume *Our Patch: Enacting Australian Sovereignty Post 2001* (Perth: Network Books, 2007).

### **Acknowledgments**

This essay originated as a contribution to the plenary panel, 'The Borderpolitics of Communities' in Sydney on 11 December 2006. Warm thanks to the convenors, Goldie Osuri and Lara Palombo.

### **References**

- Appadurai, A. (2006). *Fear of Small Numbers*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Birmingham, J. (2007, January 24). Take this flag out of my cold dead hands, *Australian*.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA]. (2006, December 11). Australia to Introduce Citizenship Test. Retrieved from [minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/mediareleases/medrel06/111206.htm](http://minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/mediareleases/medrel06/111206.htm)
- Funnell, N. (2005). Non-lethal intelligence: Strike force Coburn and the police response to the Redfern riot. *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 17. Retrieved from [beta.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/ILB/2005/17.html](http://beta.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/ILB/2005/17.html)
- Galligan, B., & Chesterman, J. (1999). Australia's Citizenship Void. In A. Davidson & K. Weekley (Eds.), *Globalization and Citizenship in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 73-86). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- Giannacopoulos, M. (2006). Terror Australis: White sovereignty and the violence of law. *borderlands e-journal*, 5(1). Retrieved from [borderlands.net.au/vol5no1\\_2006/giannacopoulos\\_whitesov.htm](http://borderlands.net.au/vol5no1_2006/giannacopoulos_whitesov.htm)
- Gosch, E. (2006, October 17). Game glorifies race riot. *Australian*. Retrieved from [theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/game-glorifies-race-riot/story-e6frg6nf-1111112372080?nk=24d2e84723238b9cd5f38f5879e059e8](http://theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/game-glorifies-race-riot/story-e6frg6nf-1111112372080?nk=24d2e84723238b9cd5f38f5879e059e8)
- Grewal, I. (2003). Transnational America: Race, gender, and citizenship after 9/11. *Social Identities*, 9(4), 535-561.
- Horne, D. (1988). *The Lucky Country*. Ringwood: Penguin. (Original work published 1964)
- Howard, J. (2005, December 12). Transcript of the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP Interview with Ellen Fanning. Retrieved from [parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/tvprog/T7AI6/upload\\_binary/t7ai61.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22A%20CURRENT%20AFFAIR%22](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/tvprog/T7AI6/upload_binary/t7ai61.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22A%20CURRENT%20AFFAIR%22)
- Jackson, R. (2001, April 1991/April 2001). WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN? An End of Decade View of the Royal Commission Recommendations into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Retrieved from [transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/pdfs/aboriginal\\_deaths\\_jack\\_son.pdf](http://transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/pdfs/aboriginal_deaths_jack_son.pdf)
- Kremmer, C., & Pryor, L. (2006, August 5). Crime and prejudice. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [smh.com.au/news/national/crime-amp-prejudice/2006/08/04/1154198328970.html](http://smh.com.au/news/national/crime-amp-prejudice/2006/08/04/1154198328970.html)
- Lockyer, P. (2007, January 15). Tamworth divided over rejection of refugee families. *ABC*. Retrieved from [abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1827409.htm](http://abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1827409.htm)
- Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics (L. Meintjes, Trans.). *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11-40.
- Minnecon, R. (2004, February 17). Despair the reality for a race lost in the alien space of Redfern. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [smh.com.au/articles/2004/02/16/1076779903465.html](http://smh.com.au/articles/2004/02/16/1076779903465.html)
- Moses, A. (2006, October 17). Cronulla game falls between legal cracks. *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Mulvey, P. (2007, January 22). Flags "not banned" but unwelcome. *news.com.au*. Retrieved from [news.com.au/national/flags-not-banned-but-unwelcome/story-e6frfkp9-1111112867945](http://news.com.au/national/flags-not-banned-but-unwelcome/story-e6frfkp9-1111112867945)
- Murphy, D. (2006, December 23). Tamworth tainted by small minds. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [smh.com.au/articles/2006/12/22/1166290740841.html?page=fullpage](http://smh.com.au/articles/2006/12/22/1166290740841.html?page=fullpage)
- Norrie, J. (2006, December 16). Outrage over town's rejection of refugees. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [smh.com.au/news/national/outrage-over-towns-rejection-of-refugees/2006/12/15/1166162322975.html](http://smh.com.au/news/national/outrage-over-towns-rejection-of-refugees/2006/12/15/1166162322975.html)
- Nugent, M. (2005). *Botany Bay: Where Histories Meet*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as Exception*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Osuri, G., & Banerjee, S. B. (2004). White diasporas: Media representations of September 11 and the unbearable whiteness of being in Australia. *Social Semiotics*, 14(2), 151-171.
- Overington, C. (2007, January 17). Duo succeeds in changing town's tune on Sudanese. *Australian*.



- Overington, C., & Warne-Smith, D. (2005, December 17). Countdown to conflict. *Weekend Australian*, p. 17, p. 20.
- Perera, S. (1995). Fatal (Con)junctions. In S. Perera (Ed.), *Asian and Pacific Incriptions: Identities/Ethnicities/Nationalities* (pp. 1-12). Melbourne, Meridian.
- . (2001). Imprison and Detain: Racialised Punishment in Australia Today. Retrieved from [transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/pdfs/introduction\\_perer.pdf](http://transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/pdfs/introduction_perer.pdf)
- . (2005). Race Terror, Sydney 2005. *borderlands e-journal*, 5(1). Retrieved from [borderlands.net.au/vol5no1\\_2006/perera\\_raceterror.htm](http://borderlands.net.au/vol5no1_2006/perera_raceterror.htm)
- . (2010). "I Don't Mind the Headscarf, but": Desperately Seeking Australian Cosmopolitanism. In J.V. D'Cruz et al. (Ed.), *As Others See Us: The Australian Values Debate* (pp. 137-148). Kew, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- Perera, S., & Pugliese, J. (1998). Parks, mines and tidy towns: "Post"colonialism, enviro-panopticism and the politics of heritage in Australia. *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1(1), 69-99.
- Pryor, L. (2007, January 6). Flying the flag for an upside-down kind of patriotism. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/flying-the-flag-for-an-upside-down-kind-of-patriotism/2007/01/05/1167777276567.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/flying-the-flag-for-an-upside-down-kind-of-patriotism/2007/01/05/1167777276567.html)
- Pugliese, J. (2007). The event-trauma of the carceral post-human. *Social Semiotics*, 17(1), 63-86.
- Reynolds, H. (2007). Part of a Continent for Something Less than a Nation? In S. Perera (Ed.), *Our Patch: Enacting Australian Sovereignty Post 2001* (pp. 61-70). Perth: Network Books.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sandercock, L. (2000). When strangers become neighbours: Managing cities of difference. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 1(1), 13-30.
- Stapleton, J., & Madden, J. (2006, December 16). Sudanese 'betrayed' by mayor's comments. *Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/sudanese-betrayed-by-mayors-comments/story-e6frq6nf-1111112697080>
- Sutherland Shire Council. (2007, February 2). Birthplace of Modern Australia. Retrieved from [sutherland.nsw.gov.au/ssc/home.nsf/AllDocs/RWP968960D9346BADD3CA256D56001BAC2A?OpenDocument](http://sutherland.nsw.gov.au/ssc/home.nsf/AllDocs/RWP968960D9346BADD3CA256D56001BAC2A?OpenDocument)
- Sydney beach riot game condemned. (2006, October 18). *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=2&objectid=10406385](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10406385)
- Welsh, R. (2005, May 30). Sydney Aboriginal people reburied at Botany Bay. *ABC*. Retrieved from [abc.net.au/message/news/stories/s1374941.htm](http://abc.net.au/message/news/stories/s1374941.htm)