Witnessing anti-white 'racism': White victimhood and 'reverse racism' in Australia

1. Witnessing anti-white 'racism': An introduction to the study

As part of a broader study on bystander anti-racism, or how bystanders respond when they witness racism, we undertook a national survey of Australians. The survey asked participants whether they had witnessed an incident that they thought involved racism in the past 12 months and if they had, participants were then asked a series of questions about what happened and how they responded. Our key interest in this study was in how bystanders respond to racism and how responses are shaped by their social context. Thus, the study was broadly framed by the racism literatures on interpersonal relations and racist acts as events. Of the 834 participants who described an incident of racism they had witnessed as a bystander 89, or just over 10 per cent, described a situation where they perceived a white Australian had been on the receiving end of racism. While anti-white 'racism' was not initially a focus of the study, given the prevalence of these reports and disquiet about 'reverse racism' in Australia and elsewhere, we turn our critical attention to claims of ''reverse racism' in this paper.

Discourses on 'reverse racism' can be found in many spheres. In the United Kingdom, for example, the British National Party ran for election in the early 1990s under the 'Rights for Whites' slogan, which "invokes a sense of the minority status of whites and inverts the true nature of racial power relations" (Rhodes 2010: 85). The problem of 'reverse racism' has been described with reference to 'the swinging pendulum' in the United Kingdom (Rhodes 2010) and 'white backlash' in the United States (Hughey 2014). Similarly, in Australia the discourse of reverse racism takes the form of white Australians perceiving themselves to be a racially disadvantaged group, with some seeing particular groups, such as Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers, as receiving unfair privileges (Hatchell 2004). Right wing

political groups, and organised racists, have attempted to leverage from a perceived neglect of anti-white racism. For example, Federal leader of the One Nation Party, Pauline Hanson, in the Australian Senate (24th November, 2016) pointed to the lack of attention to slurs against whites in arguing against the need for racial vilification legislation intended to protect minorities. While acknowledging the dangers of a focus on white victimhood, we present here a critical engagement with the reports of anti-white racism our survey gathered. This paper explores the characteristics of those who report witnessing anti-white racism and examines the contexts within which anti-white racism is perceived to have occurred. In order to do this, we begin with a discussion of the social and political context in which claims of anti-white racism have emerged. In doing so, we extend beyond the literatures on interpersonal relations that framed the original study of bystander responses to racism.

2. A brief history of claims of anti-white racism

White backlash, according to Hewitt (2005), is an international phenomenon that is deeply implicated in contemporary questions of race and justice. White backlash, reverse racism or anti-white racism, as it is variously known, are concepts used to capture perceptions of white victimhood and, in the case of white backlash particularly, related opposition to race-related social policy. Scholars trace the emergence of these discourses from the mid twentieth century (e.g. Hewitt 2005; Hughey 2014). Hughey (2014) situates reverse racism discourses within political shifts in the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the 1980s governments and policy makers moved away from their previous focus on structural inequality towards a 'colour-blind' individualism, whereby racism became individualized as the US was constructed as post-racial. In the 1990s, public commentary and responses to cultural diversity in the US became celebratory and policies of multiculturalism grew, again shifting political and public discussion away from structural inequality. While

multiculturalism was supported by middle class whites, identity politics was a source of concern for working class whites; in this climate, they felt either 'cultureless' or as if their own Anglo traditions were under fire. Hughey (2014) identified a division between middle class whites, who were largely supportive of policies and programs aimed at black advancement, and working class whites who were concerned about the effects of such policies on their own economic and housing security. In Hughey's (2014) view this division broke down once policies for black advancement spread to the traditionally middle class domains of higher education. White backlash or claims of anti-white racism strongly intersect with class politics.

Looking largely at the United Kingdom, Hewitt (2005) presents a similar historical analysis of 'White Backlash', charting manifestations of white victimhood in the UK from the 1960s. He describes white backlash as an ongoing, dynamic project that can be situated within "socially and politically disparate equalities and multiculturalist agendas" (p.4). Like Hughey (2014), Hewitt (2005) argues that claims of unfairness to whites increased in prominence alongside a specific set of social and political changes in the UK. Claims of white victimhood came to the fore alongside the decline of the manufacturing industries and the rise of the service sector in the US, UK and Australia. While these economic shifts were taking place in the UK, the tabloid press was pushing a strongly anti-multiculturalism and anti anti-racism agenda. Political parties were largely unsuccessful in militating against this and by the 1980s and 1990s white backlash had become a political movement in the UK (Hewitt 2005). The international neoliberal agenda that was hostile to government intervention in social issues was also significant in building opposition to race based social policy. Working class white communities were concerned about the implications of remedial race policies, and Hewitt

(2005, p.33) charts the way economic changes were interpreted along racial lines, observing that in the UK:

> Little attempt was made to engage with [expressions of white backlash] as deep problems in social and economic relations or to drive a political wedge between legitimate, self-interested anxieties and the racist formulations of those anxieties. Such would have been a challenging but important task.

During this period Australia was also undergoing social and economic change as a result of the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the service industry. Post-war migration to Australia was followed, from the 1970s onwards, by large-scale migration of people from Asian and other non-European countries of origin. Alongside the changing demography of Australians, there was a geopolitical shift towards Asia, and away from traditional allegiances with Europe and the United States. As the proliferation of discourse on economic rationalism (Quiggan 2005) indicated, Australian politics and social policy became oriented to a more free market approach throughout the 1980s and 90s, with the effect that opposition to social policy intended to benefit groups like Indigenous Australians, new migrants and asylum seekers grew. Claims of anti-white racism become prominent in public discourse alongside these changing economic and social conditions, the combined threat to jobs, place and white culture. As will be elaborated further below, this social and political history provides context for contemporary concerns with, and reports of, anti-white racism. Individual claims of anti-white racism emerge, in part, from, this history of economic and social change in Australia.

3. Understandings of racism and their implications for analysing anti-white racism

The meaning of anti-white racism, or indeed the question of whether white people can lay claim to experiences of racism at all, are issues with which only a handful of race relations scholars have grappled. As Song (2014) observed in the British context, relatively little has been written about "the thorny question of who or what can (or cannot) be racist" (p.109), with some exceptions (Doane 2006; Walton et al. 2013). In this paper, we outline three common analytical entry points into the question of what constitutes racism. The first is an individual or psychological analysis, the second is an analysis of power and its effects, and the final is a historical and structural analysis. We do not claim that this is an exhaustive list of analytical entry points, nor the only analytical means by which to explore claims of anti-white racism. These entry points are also by no means distinct, rather there is much overlap and intersection. They are a set of potentially useful approaches that cascade into each other, revealing both the divergence in how these reported experiences might be understood and the tensions between different ways of approaching the analytical problem of claims of anti-white racism.

Individual or psychological understandings of racism give broad scope to who can be considered perpetrators and targets of racism. According to some academic literature in this area, this understanding of racism makes intuitive sense to those interpreting racialised experiences, particularly young people in urban school settings. For example, the school students in Nayak's (1999) work expressed confusion as to why white racial epithets including 'whitey', 'milk-bottle' and 'milky way' were not regarded as forms of racist name-calling (see also Hughey 2014), whereas black racial labels were. In the schools that Gillborn (1996) worked with, it was decided that all students could utilise the anti-racist procedures that were put in place. While in practice it remained almost exclusively non-white groups that engaged the anti-racism procedures, school policy ultimately allowed for white students to

also utilise anti-racism procedures. For Gillborn, this was seen as a positive development, insofar as the school had "avoided 'moralising' about white power in ways that do not make sense to many white students – especially those from working-class backgrounds for whom talk of their being in a position of power might seem absurd" (p.173):

> The schools (for reasons of pragmatism rather than theoretical elegance) have begun to recast their reforms so that, under certain circumstances, white students might also make use of them as racialised victims. In so doing, the schools are attempting to develop a form of antiracism that goes beyond the inverted racism and essentialism of previous models. They are beginning to work with more complex and fluid notions of race and identity that clearly articulate with contemporary theories of identity construction in late modernity (Gillborn 1996: 176).

This literature leaves open the question of whether assigning an equivalence to racial name calling involving varied social actors is appropriate or useful. As we will return to shortly, it is important to note that while there may be social contexts, like the urban school settings discussed here, where blackness has a positive premium, however momentary, the power yielded in these contexts is often short-lived. The representational associations used to connote black power in these instances may be the very same used to legitimate black academic underachievement or to justify overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Research on the racialised dynamics of urban school settings reminds us that these phenomena call to be analysed within their specific social context. Individual understandings of racism shed light on individual interpretations of racialised experiences. This analytical approach to understanding claims of anti-white racism provides insight into the event itself, providing a site to capture empirically the performance of and the language around privilege and inequality.

Moving beyond individual or psychological understandings of racism, some scholars have argued that while white 'vulnerability' (Bailey 2011) is minimal in most contexts, it may nonetheless be present in others (e.g. Fechter 2005; Hayes 2015). In the UK and the US, claims of anti-white racism strongly intersect with class politics. From their work with secondary school students in the UK, Gillborn and Kirton (2000) observed that white working class boys view their educational and class disadvantage through the lens of race. The interest in class here represents the inclusion of history and social structures in Gillborn and Kirton's analysis. Along similar lines, Thomas and Sanderson (2013) discuss the highly racialised nature of lived experience in Oldham, UK. Oldham is distinctive in that it is one of the only parts of England where white people are more likely to report experiencing a 'racial incident' than those from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the United States, white backlash has also been interpreted as a racialised reading of class changes (Hughey 2014). Reinforcing this link between class disadvantage and race in the US and the UK is the sense that white people feel culturally embattled, and believe that they are not allowed to celebrate their cultures or identities (e.g. Hughey 2014; Thomas and Sanderson 2013). However, in direct contrast to such discourses, scholars in the sub-discipline of Whiteness Studies have insisted that to conceive of the formation of racial or ethnic identity as an embattled project for whites is to fail to acknowledge the manner in which whiteness functions as the invisible norm (Shaw 2008). White racial identity is effectively a project which obscures its own work and such expressions of dissatisfaction should be approached with this in mind. This critique from the critical whiteness literature directs us to analyses of the power relations within events described as anti-white racism.

Analyses of power have long formed an entry point into scholarly examinations of racism. In the 1980s the widely cited equation for determining what constituted racism was 'Prejudice +

Power = Racism'. The subsequent assumption was that because black people were relatively power-less, they therefore could not be racist (Gillborn 1996). According to Sawrikar and Katz (2010), the benefits of this definition are threefold: it (1) moves understandings of racism beyond individual cognitive processes; (2) acknowledges inequities in the way social power is distributed along racial lines; and (3) captures the dynamic relationship between individual and socio-cultural factors. The 'Prejudice + Power = Racism' formula eschews any assumed symmetry between racialised experiences.

However, the 'Prejudice + Power = Racism' formula is problematic for at least two reasons. First, racism can and does occur in the absence of prejudicial intent. Second, the way power is understood in this scenario deserves discussion. Rationalist accounts of power locate whites and blacks in positions of dominance and submission based on their colour. Contemporary understandings of power recognise it as much more relational and diffuse (Nayak 1999). A person's ability to exercise power will be related to their positioning across multiple subjectivities, including gender, race, class and so on. But power is never merely positional; rather, power relations are always shifting, depending on context and situation and on the dynamic relationship between power and resistance. What this means is that the very notion that power can be 'held' is problematic – although this is not to say that certain social actors cannot stand in an advantageous position vis-à-vis power (Nayak 2016). To say that power is performative and to deny that it can be 'held' is not to deny the strong historical element to power relations along racial lines. Expressions of power thus must be read in their historical and spatial contexts.

As foregrounded earlier, research conducted in urban school settings in the UK speak to the situational complexities of racial privilege, observing instances or moments where whiteness

does not necessarily obviously, or uniformly, denote advantage. Gillborn (1996) troubled the equation of Racism = Prejudice + Power in his work with ethnically diverse schools in England. He asserted that while, as groups, black people in the UK are relatively disadvantaged with respect to white people, at particular moments black students certainly exercise power and he draws on the example of peer relations to demonstrate this. It is important to note, however, this power is often momentary and highly transitory. In their work on racial formation in the United States, Omi and Winant (1994) argue that there is nothing inherently white about racism, objecting to the assertion that non-whites cannot be racist as they are not able to exercise power. Indeed, assertions that non-whites uniformly 'hold' no power, or do not exercise power, are unhelpful, essentialising white and non-white subjects. Power is a useful entry point into analysing reports of anti-white racism, but as this brief discussion highlights, there is significant variability in how power is conceptualised. Questions of power necessarily introduce questions of structure and history.

The history and wider social, economic, political and other structures of society feature centrally in analyses of power. As shown above, while historical and structural analyses are presented separately here, they are very much intertwined with analyses that take power as the entry point into understanding racism. For Miri Song (2014) the historico-structural context is central to understanding racism; she describes contemporary conceptualisations of racism as highly imprecise, encompassing a very broad range of racialized experiences. Song is critical of an emerging "culture of racial equivalence" (p.107) under which a divergent range of racialised phenomena are all conceptualised as 'racism'. Racialisation, a looser concept than racism, refers to a range of racial thinking and attributions, typically, but not universally, a process driven by racially dominant groups (Gans 2017). Racism is, more narrowly and specifically, a "historical and structured system of domination" (Song 2014,

p.107). Song argues that conceptualisations of racism that are too broad undermine consideration of "*how and why* particular interactions and practices constitute racism as such" (p.107, emphasis in original). The problem with claims of 'reverse racism' is that they erroneously suggest an equivalence to the multiple means through which subjects are racialised. The consequence of conceiving of racism too broadly is that we all become racists or victims of racism. This is the post-racial universalisation of racism (Lentin 2016). In Song's (2014: 125) view,

> …understandings of racism must consider the complex histories, positionings, behaviours and consequences of such a diverse range of racial interactions and phenomena. The trend toward growing equivalence in how racism is understood (as experienced by almost anyone, and understood to apply to a wide array of interactions involving almost any utterance of racial terms and attributions) is worrying, as it denudes the idea of racism of its historical basis, severity and power.

Song argues that racism is a specific form of racialisation, cautioning against giving parity to racial infractions perpetrated by disparate social actors. Lentin (2016: 36) builds on Song's concerns, arguing that current understandings of racism are sometimes ahistorical: "Racism is most commonly explained in terms of its manifestation as a behaviour, action, or attitude rather than as the expression of systemised racial logics with complex and multi-routed underpinnings". In some cases, this allows for racism to be loosely used "as a descriptor of racial situations or speech" (p.36).

Lentin is calling for a more-than-individual analysis of racism, with the term racism being reserved to describe the structured system of power that has historically institutionalised racial hierarchies and inequalities (Song 2014). While all racial generalisations could be said to racialise us as social subjects, not all racial generalisations, however offensive or

objectionable, should necessarily be referred to as racism. Song observes that public and media discussions of racial incidents in the UK assume that any racial attribution constitutes racism. We must, however, maintain a conceptual distinction between forms of racial hostility, that some ethnic minority people may display toward white people, and racism.

> In order to challenge a widespread culture of racial equivalence, in which all interactions involving some reference to race or cultural difference is deemed racist, or just one of many putatively similar forms of racialization, we need to go further and delineate by what criteria an interaction, person, policy or way of thinking can be said to be racist (Song 2014: 118).

For racism to retain its analytical power, its use ought be limited, and racial speech, even offensive racial speech as presented below, must be viewed in relation to historical race relations, structures and logics. "…Claims of 'reverse racism' can be misleading because the term suggests an automatic (and unqualified) parity and likeness between racial infractions committed by disparate groups of people, with often very different motivations, histories and social experiences" (Song 2014: 119). Conceptualisations of racism that do not attend to the accumulative effects of the phenomenon will capture nothing of its insidiousness. There is good cause to be wary at how broadly 'racism' can be defined.

Although Omi and Winant (1994: 73) suggest that "whites can at times be victims of racism", they then clarify that:

> black supremacy may be an instance of racism, just as its advocacy may be offensive, but it can hardly constitute the threat that white supremacy has represented in the US, nor can it be so easily absorbed and rearticulated in the dominant hegemonic discourse on race as white supremacy can. All racisms, all racist political projects, are not the same (Omi and Winant 1994: 74).

Troyna and Hatcher (1992) distinguish between *racial* name calling, which uses white epithets, and *racist* name calling, which relates to white use of black epithets. The distinction was justified by Troyna and Hatcher because the insults directed toward blacks form part of a coherent system of oppression. In rural Australia, anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw identified the symmetries and dissymmetries between racism directed towards white people and that directed at Aboriginal Australians. In her view, a critical condition for the operation of stigma is structural hierarchy. She argued that while the deployment of stereotypes used by white Australians and Aboriginal Australians may have some equivalence, any suggestion of symmetry is disrupted by the hierarchical relationship overlaying stigma: "Prejudiced "rednecks" are far less vulnerable to symbolic and personal hurt than are disruptive "Abos"" (Cowlishaw 2004: 34).

To bring this together, we have presented here three analytical entry points that inform our exploration of claims of anti-white racism: individual understandings of racism, analyses of power relations, and analyses that highlight racist structures and history. These entry points are mutually dependent – each is useful as an entry point but necessitates the others. For example, we might start with an analysis of individual experience but will come to questions of power and questions of history and structure. We make reference to these analytical entry points in our analysis below. Our reading of the literature presented in this paper directs us to analyse racialised incidents in their specificities, in a way that attends to the individuals involved and their social positioning, the historical context and how the incident relates to structures and histories of domination. Like Hewitt (2005), we ultimately leave aside decisions about whether each incident may be accurately described as racism, focusing instead on the "genre of 'unfairness to whites'" (p.77) narratives. That is, our focus here is what do these narratives tell us about contemporary intercultural relations in Australia? What

do the narratives presented tell us about the current political prominence of reverse racism motifs?

4. Who witnesses anti-white 'racism'?

We start our analysis by asking who witnesses anti-white racism? Here we draw on the survey data to compare those who reported witnessing anti-white racism with those who reported racism towards other targets. This is in line with Song's (2014) insistence that we interrogate racialised acts, asking who engaged in the act, for what purpose and to what effect? We need to look across the individuals involved, the historical context within which these acts occurred and ask whether racialised acts reproduce structures of domination. Our survey data provides a starting point for this interrogation. As introduced above, these data are taken from a national survey of bystander anti-racism, in which participants responded to a series of questions about an incident they had witnessed in the past 12 months that they thought involved racism. Although it was not directly designed to show accounts of those witnessing what they believed to be racism targeting white Australians, the survey responses raised underexplored questions about claims of anti-white racism, worthy of focused and critical reflection.

In March 2014, 3,920 individuals who were members of an online panel (through a commercial survey provider) were invited to participate. The survey included a screening question asking whether recipients had witnessed an incident that they thought involved racism in the previous 12 months. Twenty seven per cent of recipients (*N*=1,068) indicated they had witnessed such an incident and completed the 'incident report form'. A research assistant working on the project conducted a validity check of the incidents reported and found that 834 respondents reported bystander incidents, which were defined as incidents

perceived to involve racism that the participant had witnessed as a third party but not otherwise involved in the event. The remaining reports related to incidents where the participant was the target or perpetrator of racism; the incident/ discrimination was not race-based; or their description of the incident was unclear. Of these 834 reports, 89, or just over 10 per cent, described an incident where they perceived a 'white' Australian had been on the receiving end of racism. Incidents were classified as anti-white racism based on our reading of participants' description of the target and other open-ended survey responses (e.g. description of the incident, outline of how the participant responded). In this paper we describe the targets as 'white' because this was the description far most commonly used by participants, with other signifiers including 'Aussie', 'England', and 'Captain Cook'. We return to, and reflect on, the terms used below. In many cases the target of racism was not known to our survey participants so the visible 'whiteness' of targets was key in interpreting what they had witnessed. We undertook quantitative analyses to explore how the characteristics of those who reported anti-white racism, in terms of demographics and beliefs about diversity, compared to the broader respondent group. A thematic analysis of the open-ended responses was then undertaken to unpack the contexts in which anti-white racism was witnessed (presented in Section 5).

As shown in Table I, the vast majority (92%) of survey participants who reported anti-white racism spoke English only at home or in their community. This is significantly higher than those who reported racism against all other targets, 80 per cent of whom spoke English only ($\chi^2(1)=7.83$; p=.005). There were no significant differences in reporting of anti-white racism according to country of birth ($\chi^2(1)=1.42$; p=.233) or religious affiliation ($\chi^2(1)=1.55$; p=.213). The vast majority of those (93%) reporting anti-white racism were born in Australia or Europe (see Table II). None of those who reported anti-white racism were born in Asia

(Table II). The data reveal that those who witnessed anti-white racism were largely white, Christian, Anglo, and Australia-born. Scholarly understandings of racism stress that the concept is meaningful only in relation to the racialised experiences of minorities, whereby infractions refer to and build on historical, systematic and institutionalised experiences of discrimination. Paralleling work in urban school contexts in the UK (Gillborn 1996), the mostly Anglo Australians reporting anti-white racism in our study did not share this view, interpreting racial comments directed at white Australians as racism. As Song (2014) observed in the UK, lay usage of the term racism amongst our survey participants assumed equivalence between very disparate forms of racialisation.

[Insert Tables I and II about here]

In addition to asking participants about racism they had witnessed, we also asked them about their own personal experiences of racism. Those who witnessed anti-white racism were more likely to report having themselves experienced racism than those who witnessed racism directed at non-white targets. As can be seen in Table III, this was the case for all types of experiences of racism we asked about, including racist talk or jokes, exclusion based on your race, unfair treatment and attack. Almost one in five of those reporting anti-white racism reported experiencing a racist attack, that is, being attacked, abused or threatened because of their cultural background, whereas only four per cent of those who witnessed racism against other targets had experienced a racist attack. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. It is possible that those who report anti-white racism live amidst high racial tension and antagonistic race relations. Alternatively, those reporting anti-white racism may hold a loose definition of racism, which encompasses a broad range of racial incidents, including those where whites are targets.

[Insert Table III about here]

The survey also included a series of statements to assess beliefs about racism, privilege and cultural diversity (see Table IV). There were no differences between those who witnessed anti-white racism and those who witnessed racism against other targets with regard to self-identifying as prejudiced or acknowledgement of racial prejudice in Australia. However, those who witnessed anti-white racism were much more likely to disagree that 'Australians from a British background enjoy a privileged position in our society', with 56 per cent disagreeing with this statement while only 27 per cent of those who reported racism against other targets contested white privilege. These reports suggest that those who reported racism directed at non-white targets were more likely to have a more structural understanding of race relations, through an acknowledgement of privilege. Only 15 per cent of those who reported witnessing anti-white racism acknowledged Anglo-Australian privilege. Those who reported anti-white racism largely do not perceive white privilege or hold any structural perspective on what constitutes racism. That those who report anti-white racism fail to acknowledge white privilege or structural racism can be interpreted within the broader political context introduced at the front end of this paper. The individualised sense of harm that those reporting anti-white racism experience is connected, in our analysis, to an economic and social history in which reverse racism motifs became prominent.

Survey respondents who reported witnessing anti-white racism were more likely to have concerns about cultural diversity than those who witnessed racism directed at other targets. Forty one per cent of those who witnessed anti-white racism disagreed with, or were neutral about, the assertion that it is a good thing for society to be made up of different cultures,

compared to 20 per cent of the broader respondent group (see Table IV). Those who witnessed anti-white racism also had heightened concerns about intercultural mixing. Just under a third of survey participants who witnessed anti-white racism were unsure about interracial marriage, compared to only 16 per cent of those who witnessed racism against other targets. Witnesses who reported anti-white racism were more concerned about cultural maintenance across all ethnic groups (44% agreed Australia was weakened by cultural maintenance), much more so than those who reported racism directed at other targets (20%). Those reporting anti-white racism were much more likely to believe in racial hierarchies. Nineteen per cent disagreed that all races of people are equal, compared to only six per cent of those who reported racism against other targets. Those who have reported anti-white racism are more concerned about diversity and despondent about community relations in Australia.

[Insert Table IV about here]

Taken together, comparing those who witnessed anti-white racism to participants who reported racism directed at other targets, we found that respondents who reported anti-white racism were largely English only speakers, predominantly born in Australia or Europe. Those who witnessed anti-white racism were more likely to report having experienced racism themselves. With regard to their beliefs, they were more concerned about cultural diversity and intercultural mixing, more likely to endorse racial hierarchies and to have heightened levels of concern about cultural maintenance. There were no differences between the two groups in terms of acknowledgement of racial prejudice or the need to combat racism, but for those who witnessed anti-white racism, white people may well be perceived as, at least some of the victims of prejudice and intended beneficiaries of strategies to address racism.

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5. The contexts of anti-white racism

We move to our second primary interest in this paper, exploring the contexts within which anti-white racism was witnessed. Just over half of the witness reports described the perpetrator of anti-white racism as Aboriginal. In a further third of the reports a non-white, non-Aboriginal perpetrator was mentioned, while the cultural background of the perpetrator was not specified in the remaining reports. Given that Aboriginal people represent a relatively small numerical population in Australia (about 3%), the prevalence of this view of Aboriginal Australians as perpetrators of anti-white racism is significant. While the survey instrument that was used to gather participant accounts was blunt, there were several opportunities in the survey for participants to provide open-ended responses or descriptions. These open-ended responses are what we draw on here. We examine in turn the racialised language reported by participants and the uncivil or abusive behaviour reported.

Racialised language

Many of the exchanges described by participants involved strong, highly racialised language. The deployment of racial terms, most commonly 'white', served as key markers for witnesses, indicating that an incident was racist. As shown in Table V commonly used terms were "white trash" (making a racialised class judgment); "white cunt" (gendered); or an insult that referred to the person held in contempt being Aussie, from England, or a "captain cook c*unt" (reference to colonisation). In a small number of incidents an exchange of racialised terms were reported, where, for example, a charge of "white bastard" was returned with "Abo scum".

Table V: Examples of racialised language in participant responses

Actor (as described by witness)	Racialised language reported by witness
Indian man in a car	*you fucking white piece of shit*
Two "ethnic people" in a shopping complex	*People calling white people trash*
Three African teens	*you white bastards this, you white bastards that*
Group of young men; Muslims	*white trash*
'Ethnic' woman	*I hate these bloody pushy Aussis!*
The islanders at the shop	*a white shit*
Group of 5 Indian males	*a stupid old WHITE ARSOLE and to pissoff back to England*
Drunken Aborginal female	Calling police *white dog c*nts* and *captain cook c*nts*
Black male in his 20s	*white bitch*
Group of Aboriginals	*white shit*
Aboriginal person	*a white c...*
Aboriginal child	Calling another child *a white *unt*
Aboriginal male	*fucking white cunt*
Group of 4-6 Australian Aboriginal girls (15-17 years)	*White C*****
Aboriginal male	*White trash, Captain Cook White fucken piece of shit*
Young Aboriginal woman	*f...… ugly white c...* and *you gutless f...… white c...*
2 Indigenous girls	*you White C—t*
"a abo"; Indigenous	*white thash*
An Aboriginal person	*white person trash*
Two Aboriginal boys approx. 12-16 years	*f***en white c****
Aboriginal man	*a white c*
An Aboriginal lady	*white dog, cunt faced cunt*

An Aboriginal guy	a white fat c..t
Aboriginals, some "white Aboriginals"	Fuck You white piece of shit
mid 40s Aboriginal male	white bastards; Abo scum
A group of Aboriginals	a racist white dog, racist white cunt
One man (unknown)	a f@#$ing aussie c#$@
Aboriginal man	white cunts
Lady with her child	a white racist B++++++D
A group of Aboriginals	racist white dog, racist white cunt white dogs or cunts

It is difficult to deny the racialised and prejudicial character of such slurs and we should not be too hasty in dismissing claims of harm by the recipients of them, or even claims that racism has occurred. However, we ought not draw an equivalence to the 'weight of history' behind similar comments directed toward non-whites, for to do so would ignore the history of advantage that still predominately characterises white experience *per se* (Omni & Winant 1994). As Cowlishaw (2004) pointed out, there is a profound variation between the vulnerability of white Australians and Aboriginal Australians. Nonetheless, those who reported anti-white racism here, mostly Anglo-Australians and those born in Australia, deploy the language of racism to describe these incivilities directed at whites. As introduced earlier, we can trace the history of white backlash, or claims of white victimization, to a particular social and political context in Australia. The intersections between claims of white victimization and class are seen in the prevalence of class based racialised comments, such as white trash.

It is significant that the insults were not merely racialised. In the attempt to maximise injury, racialised terms were affixed to other axes of disadvantage in at least some of the expressions

of anti-white racism encountered. In the case of an insult such as 'Captain Cook Cunt', the disadvantage that practices of white colonisation have wrought upon Indigenous Australians is clearly at the fore; in this sense, anti-white racism underscores the disadvantaged colonial position of the person issuing the utterance. In the case of insults such as 'white trash' and 'white cunt', in contrast, the term 'white' gains its negative status by association with other prejudicial judgments and the weight of history that they carry. The concept of 'white' becomes more negative through its association with negative class or gender status. A slur such as 'Abo scum' fulfills its performative function easily, as it runs with the grain of already established speech acts. White trash has to do the work of translation from the southern USA context to Australia.

It may be that other axes of disadvantage (class, gender and so on) *need* to be brought into anti-white slurs to taint an attribute (whiteness) that is otherwise positively valued (although not in the case of an anchor of nationality used below when 'Aussie' was referenced). While a term such as 'Abo scum' is superficially similar to 'white trash', the use of 'scum' is more redundant in the first slur than 'trash' is in the second, since the history of advantage and disadvantage means that the insult 'Abo scum' borders on the tautologous. In any case, as Bhabha (1985) notes, the subaltern and the coloniser are always differently placed vis-a-vis the dominant discourse.

In many of the accounts provided to us, the social context was an exchange between an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal person. Some of these exchanges exhibit what Cowlishaw described as "robust physical expression and rude assertiveness". These exaggerated performances of Otherness are engineered to "irritate and disturb restrained and disapproving fellow citizens" (p.153). In this context, white responses to public performances of swearing

and violence amongst Bourke Aboriginals operate to assert the value of order and normality within this settler-society. In this sense, the settler-society "is the present structure within which" Aboriginal and other Australians are "caught, rather than a series of historical events that occurred in the past" (Rogers 2016: 4), and Cowlishaw's work demonstrates that it continues to shape the interactions between Aboriginal and other Australians in the present.

If we understand power relationships as dynamic and fluid (Foucault 1979; Hindess 1996), we can read the racial (and gendered/classed) slurs reported in the survey as an exercise of the power to unsettle, to discomfort. This power may be one of the few resources available to those who exercise very little social power in most contexts. The obscenities in Table V created discomfort, or at a minimum elicited a reaction from those present, as demonstrated by the fact that observers are reporting what happened some time (up to 12 months) afterwards. Alongside the racialised obscenities in some cases sits an accusation of racism, a powerful allegation that most people are highly motivated to avoid (Nelson 2015).

Uncivil, abusive or anti-social behaviour

Much of what was witnessed by participants could be described as racialised uncivil, abusive or anti-social behaviour. Three intersecting, mutually dependent analytical entry points were outlined above: racism operating at an individual level, understandings of racism as structural and historical and analyses of power within racialised or racist events. The following participant understands racism to operate between individuals, for her racism is "a physical and verbal attack on someone who was not of their race":

> *Two Polynesian women approached the mother (who had a baby in a stroller), and*
> *told her to get up from the seat where she was sitting, sorting her groceries. She*
> *refused, and one of the Polynesian women threw the young Mum's groceries and*

belongings onto the floor. They stood over her, intimidated her and called her an 'Aussie slut'. They said they wanted the seat themselves, and they shoved her away. It was a physical and verbal attack on someone who was not of their race.

When is 'a physical and verbal attack' racism? Of primary interest here is not what occurred between these women but the way this story is recounted by our participant, how this event is narrativised (Hewitt 2005). The epithet 'Aussie slut' is used here as evidence that this attack was racially driven, with 'Aussie' being understood by the observer as a racial term. Out of context 'Aussie' refers to nationality, but we can read 'Aussie' in this context to mean white. Miri Song (2014) is critical of labelling as racism any utterance of racial terms. If the way we define racism relies on power, analysing the power dynamics here may be instructive. The event could be interpreted in various ways, contingent on our conceptualisation of power. In the account provided, the Polynesian women expressed violence toward, though perhaps not power over, the 'young mum' sitting in a Bankstown shopping centre in South-West Sydney. Arendt (1969) contends that violence occurs at the limits of power, that is, where power has ceased to operate. It is in the agreement with customs of civility, and to laws requiring non-violence, that the institutions and those aligned with them, derive power. From this perspective, violence is not the culmination, nor guarantee, of power, but a sign of its absence (see Arendt, 1969). Moving on to our third analytical entry point, the reported event does not build on historically embedded systemised logics of racial inequality (Lentin 2016; Sharpe and Hynes 2016). In Song's (2014) framework, this is an example whereby racialisation must be made distinct from racism. On the other hand, a perspective that defines racism by its effect and impact rather than intentionality or historical over-structuration (Kowal and Paradies 2005) may classify this incident as racism.

The sexuality of white women was targeted in a number of reports of anti-social behaviour:

A couple of African males were acting in an intimidating manner. They looked aggressive and made derogatory comments about 'white girls'

It was outside a shopping centre and a few young middle eastern young men were sitting outside on a bench and were crudely commenting on every white woman walking past on how [they] thought they would fare in bed to how they were so ugly….

Commentary about women's bodies such as that described in the second account is prevalent across Australian society. That these incidents are described as racist may reflect a tendency to locate sexism within non-white groups. While the logics of racial privilege position white Australians advantageously in relation to black Australians, the gendered interactions described here complicate the power relationships of these moments. In public space, men are often in an advantageous position in relation to power and the above commentary about women's bodies does objectify those white women. These examples highlight the dynamism of power relationships in interracial interaction, shifting from moment to moment, changing across place and time, and graduating across actors' multiple subjectivities. In many cases the verbal attacks attempted to maximise the injury inflicted by affixing racialised terms to other axes of disadvantage. We cannot ignore the history of advantage that characterises white experience and this may be why other axes of disadvantage, including traditionally negative class and gender statuses, were brought into 'white racist' slurs to taint an otherwise positively valued attribute.

Antagonistic exchanges across racial lines were described by some participants as routine and everyday experiences:

well it is a daily occurrence in Carnarvon for the Aboriginals to direct racist comments towards us 'white dogs or cunts'.

One participant described leaving Rivervale (a suburb in Perth, Western Australia) because of the regularity of racialised conflict:

> *This is common in this suburb, and we found that, it would happen at least once a week to someone in the community. Most of the community felt uneasy or even scared when leaving their home and there were even some that felt scared in their own home… It happens so often that it is part of everyday living in the suburb of Rivervale*
>
> *everyday occurrence in Dubbo*
>
> *young Aboriginal kids were asking for cigarettes when i said no i was called a f***en white c***. Pretty typical behaviour around High Wycombe*

The accounts reported here are of course not neutral, objective recollections of these encounters, but must be understood as narratives that construct white Australians as victims of Aboriginal dysfunction. Bearing this in mind, geographical work on racism does emphasises the spatiality of racism, that place matters in race relations (e.g. Dunn et al. 2004; Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Dwyer and Bressey 2008). Place is centrally important in these accounts, in which participants construct antagonistic intercultural interactions as routine and everyday. Carnarvon is a small coastal town 900km north of Perth in Western Australia, where just under a quarter of the population identify as Aboriginal. Rivervale and High Wycombe are suburbs to the east of Perth. Dubbo is a large rural centre in New South Wales, with a significant Aboriginal population. These 'contact zones' (Wise 2010) are where daily negotiations of post-colonial life occur.

Wise has argued that in understanding interethnic relations there is a need for greater acknowledgement of the difficulties associated with sharing, or even defining what happens in, contact zones. Participants describe routinely antagonistic race relations. It would be useful to explore this further through in-depth interviewing, for example, looking at how

settler colonialist power structures continue to shape the everyday experiences of Australians in the present. The narratives put forward by our survey participants depict relations in these spaces as entangled, fraught and complex to quote Cowlishaw, with strongly felt senses of injustice and hurt.

We cited Cowlishaw's (2006) nuanced consideration of the antagonistic sociality in Bourke. Cowlishaw drew upon Secomb's (2000) notion of fractured communities, which regards disagreement and disunity as a productive part of a community. Acknowledgment of disagreement is important, in Secomb's view, because "The creation of a totalizing unity is the movement of totalitarianism and unfreedom. Disagreement, on the other hand, holds a space open for diversity and for freedom" (p.134). This resonates with recent scholarship on agonism as a productive approach to Indigenous race relations in Australia (Maddison & Partridge 2014). Within these spaces, victim discourses are increasingly common, both from minority and majority groups. But are all claims to victimhood equal? In their discussion of the sense of Anglo resentment and loss in relation to the sharing of public space by diverse groups, including Muslim Australians, Bloch and Dreher (2009) highlight the need for researchers and policy makers to differentiate and evaluate competing claims of victimhood. Contact zones, and especially those with longstanding inter-communal tension or undergoing fractious cultural change, are places where incivilities across ethnicity are variously interpreted, as can be seen in our data. Those reporting such uncivil incidents see whites as the victims of racialisation and intentional harm, and thus describe these events as racism. But these incidents are not enacting and reinforcing a historic privilege or hierarchy. The frustrations of minorities in these contact zones reflect historic, systematic, structural inequality, and references to 'Captain Cook' are a stark indication of that background.

Acknowledging the asymmetry of claims to race-based victimhood, we can then explore the complexities of the sharing of contact zones and the expressions of both discontent and actual incivilities to which they often give rise. Scholars who have grounded interest in the context and future of race relations in such places have best advanced this work through nuanced and sensitive analyses that maintain a respectful disposition to the various stakeholders. Wise (2010), for example, referred to the more difficult aspects of sensuous multiculturalism in the context of elderly white Anglo and European women living in Ashfield, who are overwhelmingly uncomfortable with the changes taking place in their local neighbourhood associated with Chinese migration to the area. Wise described the displacement and disorientation experienced by these women. While Wise was certainly not arguing for exclusionary concepts of belonging, she did assert that it too seldom acknowledged that the sharing of 'contact zones' can be difficult.

Drawing back to Secomb (2000), through Cowlishaw's (2006) grounded work, and the more recent turn to agonism as productive (Maddison & Partridge 2014), we can see how debate and contestation are critical components for addressing the root causes of tension, such as inequality and privilege. However, there may be civil limits to such 'debate', and those limits may include allegations of non-belonging, violence or otherwise non-productive performances. Academic judgement on these criteria would be context specific, if we were attempting such a judgement.

6. Conclusion: Asymmetry of victimhood

At the outset of this paper we introduced three analytical entry points for approaching the problem of claims of anti-white racism: individual level analyses, analyses of power within and beyond events, and analyses that focus on histories and structures. These intersecting

entry points reveal divergence in how reports of anti-white racism might be understood and the tensions between different ways of approaching the analytical problem of anti-white racism. We set out to analyse the racialised incidents reported to us in their specificities, attending to the individuals involved and their social positioning, the historical context and the way in which the event relates to structures and histories of domination. We were interested in the way that these events were narrativised by our participants.

What do the narratives of anti-white racism constructed by our participants tell us about contemporary intercultural relations in Australia? We have highlighted the *asymmetry* of claims to race based victimhood. One lens through which we analysed our survey respondents' accounts of witnessing anti-white racism was in their *differences* to other experiences of racism. This was most evident in our analysis of the racialised language reported to us, where we observed other axes of disadvantage, such as class and gender, brought into anti-white slurs in order to taint an attribute (whiteness) that is typically positively valued. The survey data showed that those who reported witnessing anti-white racism were also more likely to report personal experiences of racism, including those at the 'harder' end or more extreme forms of racism, such as racist attacks. This suggests that perceptions of victimhood amongst this group of respondents are strong. It may be that these participants reside in areas of antagonistic race relations. Perhaps more likely is that these participants have a broad, loose understanding of racism that encompasses white Australians as targets. This interpretation marries well with the findings that this group of participants fail to acknowledge structural, white privilege.

What are the implications of the events reported here for anti-racism? Looking beyond conceptual concerns, there is a need to address and ameliorate the degraded socialities

described by participants in our study. This work will require a variety of multiply reinforcing strategies appropriate, within the Australian context, to the specifics of antagonistic race relations resulting from the colonial dispossession of Aboriginal people (e.g. Ranzijn and McConnochie 2013), the particularities of white-migrant relations (e.g. Blair 2015) and the intersection of both (Dandy and Pe-Pua 2013; Mitchell 2014). This work would need to be complemented by research that engages directly with the views of Aboriginal people (and migrants) in order to further elucidate dynamics of power/privilege from multiple perspectives, including among those who are radically different (i.e. who have alterity) in comparison to white (Anglo) Australians.

Claims of reverse racism, or white backlash, have become prominent under particular social and political conditions. Individual claims of anti-white racism emerge, in part, from the history of economic and social change in Australia, the perceived threat to jobs, place and white culture. The prominence of claims of anti-white racism found in our research was striking. Interrupting the interpretation of social and political changes in racialised ways is an important, if challenging, task for Australian anti-racism.

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Table I: Demographic background

	All Other Targets (n=745)	**White Australian Target (n=89)**
Speaks language other than English	20.1%	7.9%
English only at home or in community	**79.9%**	**92.1%**
Born outside Australia	24.8%	19.1%
Australian born	75.2%	80.9%
Christian or no religion	87.6%	92.1%
Non-Christian (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Other)	12.4%	7.9%

Table II: Country of birth of participants witnessing racism

	All Other Targets (n=745)	White Australian Target (n=89)
Australia	75.2%	80.9%
Other Oceania & Antarctica	3.1%	3.4%
Europe	10.3%	12.4%
Africa & Middle East	1.9%	2.2%
Asia	8.2%	0%
Americas	1.3%	1.1%

Table III: Personal experiences of racism for survey respondents

	All Other Targets (n=739)	White Australian Target (n=87)	Statistical test
Personal experience of racist talk or jokes	**30.6%**	**49.4%**	$\chi^2(1)=12.59$; p=.000
No experience	69.4%	50.6%	
Personal experience of racial exclusion	**16.4%**	**28.4%**	$\chi^2(1)=7.72$; p=.005
No experience	93.6%	71.6%	
Personal experience of unfair treatment	**12.2%**	**20.7%**	$\chi^2(1)=4.91$; p=.027
No experience	87.8%	79.3%	
Personal experience of attack	**4.3%**	**18.2%**	$\chi^2(1)=27.4$; p<.000
No experience	95.7%	81.8%	

Table IV: Racial attitudes of survey participants

	All Other Targets	White Australian Target	Statistical test
TOTAL RESPONDENTS	**745**	**89**	
It is a good thing for society to be made up of different cultures			
Disagree/strongly disagree	**7.8%**	**14.6%**	$\chi^2(2)=20.16$; p<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	**12.8%**	**27.0%**	
Agree/strongly agree	79.5%	58.4%	
There is racial prejudice in Australia			
Disagree/strongly disagree	4.4%	6.7%	$\chi^2(2)=0.956$; p=.620 1 cell with expected count <5
Neither agree nor disagree	9.4%	9.0%	
Agree/strongly agree	86.2%	84.3%	
I am prejudiced against other cultures			
Disagree/strongly disagree	64.0%	53.9%	$\chi^2(2)=5.318$; p=.070
Neither agree nor disagree	24.6%	27.0%	
Agree/strongly agree	11.4%	19.1%	
Australians from a British background enjoy a privileged position in our society			
Disagree/strongly disagree	**27.8%**	**56.2%**	$\chi^2(2)=34.45$; p<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	32.8%	29.2%	
Agree/strongly agree	39.5%	14.6%	
It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry each other			
Disagree/strongly disagree	78.9%	64.0%	$\chi^2(2)=11.09$; p=.004
Neither agree nor disagree	**16.4%**	**30.3%**	
Agree/strongly agree	4.7%	5.6%	

Australia is weakened by people of different ethnic origins maintaining their cultural traditions			
Disagree/strongly disagree	58.3%	32.6%	$\chi^2(2)=30.54$; p<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	22.1%	23.6%	
Agree/strongly agree	**19.6%**	**43.8%**	
All races of people ARE equal			
Disagree/strongly disagree	**6.8%**	**19.1%**	$\chi^2(2)=20.23$; p<.001
Neither agree nor disagree	11.0%	16.9%	
Agree/strongly agree	82.1%	64.0%	
Something should be done to fight or minimise racism in Australia			
Disagree/strongly disagree	2.8%	5.6%	$\chi^2(2)=3.42$; p=.181). (1 cell with expected count <5
Neither agree nor disagree	11.8%	15.7%	
Agree/strongly agree	85.4%	78.7%	