

## **'Practices of Inclusiveness' in Newcastle: protocols of whiteness, Indigenous protocols and power relations**

Dr Deirdre Howard-Wagner  
Sesqui Lecturer Socio-Legal Studies  
Department of Sociology and Social Policy  
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry  
University of Sydney  
[deirdre.howard-wagner@arts.usyd.edu.au](mailto:deirdre.howard-wagner@arts.usyd.edu.au)

### **Abstract:**

Hage's (1998: 121) *Stew that Grew* relates to white Australia (in that case the Anglo-Celtic couple and their 'Eureka stew') enacting its capacity to manage cultural diversity; 'an ode not only to the white Australian capacity of recognising the value of ethnicity, but also, above all, to the white Australian art of mixing'. In Hage's analogy of the *Stew that Grew*, it is the 'white Anglo-Celtic' couple, who add the ingredients and assesses the relative value of each, as well as determining the *mix*. In this paper, I apply Hage's analogy to an analysis of how members of the non-Indigenous community in Newcastle go about adding an Indigenous component to community events. But, unlike Hage's analogy of the *Stew that Grew*, I argue that an Indigenous component is not added because of the initial *poverty* of Newcastle's culture; Indigenous culture is added as a gesture of goodwill. In doing so, however, through determining how such events will incorporate an Indigenous component, non-Indigenous people reproduce practices of whiteness and power relations. The paper explores how Indigenous culture is incorporated into community events in Newcastle, giving consideration to protocols of whiteness and Indigenous protocols in terms of power relations.

In this paper, I explore how Indigenous culture is added to Newcastle's cultural *mix* through non-Indigenous people enacting their capacity to manage cultural diversity (Hage 1998). However, I extend this analysis to one in which I explore the specific forms of practices of governmentality involved in the non-Indigenous community determining the *ingredients* and *mix* making up Newcastle's 'culture' at community cultural events. This

paper introduces specific observations made during my PhD fieldwork and the theoretical analysis applied to explain these observations. The data was collected over a two and a half year period in which I conducted a sociological study of policies and practices of the non-Indigenous community relating to the incorporation of Indigenous rights into the mainstream in Newcastle. My research involved extensive participant observation, in-depth interviews, short interviews and discussions, and content analysis of various historical, policy, organisational and media documents. I attended over twenty community cultural events and participated in the organisation of six community cultural events. In analyzing the data I make particular theoretical claims, which are as follows.

I argue that it is the practices of the white ethical subject, who believes they are practicing 'inclusiveness', that govern Indigenous representation. Here I turn my analysis to 'the discourse, the culture, the structures, the mechanisms and the social relations of whiteness that produce ... subjects...' (Levine-Rasky 2000: 271). In part, my analysis is concerned with the decentred capacities of the reproduction of normative whiteness through practices of inclusion (Frankenberg 1993; Schech and Haggis 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2004). I demonstrate how non-Indigenous people structure the field of actions for Indigenous people in Newcastle through determining Indigenous representation. Indigenous representation is governed within what I refer to as ethical practices of 'inclusiveness'. Throughout the paper whiteness is operationalised as power relations and explored in terms of how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects (Foucault 2003a, b and c).

While Foucault did not give consideration to the concept of whiteness, I argue elsewhere that Foucault's notion of power relations and subjectivity are useful for studying whiteness (Howard 2006). Power relations and whiteness are almost interchangeable, which Homi Bhabha has observed. Bhabha points out that: 'Recent work on the experience of 'whiteness' ... makes the Foucauldian line practically axiomatic. The critique of whiteness ... attempts to displace the normativity of the white position by seeing it as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential 'identity'' (Bhabha 1998 cited in Durie 1999: 153). What Bhabha draws our attention to is the obvious overlaps here between the theorising of whiteness and Foucault's analysis of power relations. In analysing whiteness as one would analyse power relations, the epistemological privilege of whiteness and the normativity of whiteness can be unpacked.

Foucault's work is useful too in providing a more fluid, relational and productive notion of whiteness that extends the analytical focus beyond static forms of domination toward rationalities and technologies of governing (Carter 1997: 149).

I attempt to demonstrate how the ethical subject of whiteness constructs the Indigenous 'other' within its own modalities of knowledge – an essential knowledge. Whiteness, its taken for granted rules of conduct and its norms, shape interactions; whiteness produces; it produces realities; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (see Foucault's definition of power relations 1977: 194).

Before entering into a discussion about my observations and applying my theoretical analysis to these observations, I wish to begin by defining what I mean by the term Indigenous protocols. Indigenous protocols institute an ethical code of conduct, which inculcates ways of being. Indigenous protocols, for example, are a set of expectations that requires non-Indigenous people and non-Indigenous organisations, such as governments, to consult, negotiate and collaborate with Indigenous communities (Adams 2002: 44). My experience over the years, having worked in the area of Federal Indigenous affairs policy, has demonstrated that this means widely consulting the organisations, and Indigenous peoples that make up a local community, on anything from policy matters affecting Indigenous communities to events involving the Indigenous communities. This is no different in Newcastle. In applying for ethics clearance to conduct my fieldwork, I had to demonstrate that I had prior informed consent from the local Indigenous community. Ethical practices concerning the consultation of Indigenous communities are set out in the NHMRC Guidelines *Values and Ethics: Guidance for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research 2003* and AITSIS *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies 2000*. In preparing my ethics application I had approached a local Indigenous organisation, which facilitated my access to the research setting, introducing me to various Indigenous people and Indigenous organisations throughout Newcastle. This, for me, was consistent with Indigenous protocol. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999)

Consulting Indigenous communities is not a simple process. Newcastle's Indigenous community is diasporic and made up of professional, service delivery and genealogical

organisations (Adams 2002: 52), as well as individuals and families, and no one organisation or person is representative of the community. The 'community' is not a homogenous entity and intra-power relations prevail. As such, consulting the Indigenous community involves engaging many different organisations and people. It also means that consulting one organisation and not consulting another can trigger pre-existing tensions and can lead to future unexpected dilemmas. Through consulting only one person or one organisation, non-Indigenous people and organisations accidentally alienate or exasperate local Kooris and Gooris. As in other locations, the politics of representation are complex in Newcastle.

As learnt through my fieldwork, for local Kooris and Gooris, respecting Indigenous protocols is also about respecting the customs and culture of the people and community you are engaging with. Local Kooris and Gooris often note respecting the customs and culture of Indigenous people in Newcastle involves acknowledging that one is on Awabakal soil and acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of Awabakal country at public events. Recognising Indigenous protocols is also about respecting intra-Indigenous power relations (Adams 2002). For example, only an Elder or particular member of an Indigenous community can perform a 'Welcome to Country'.

Also, as a local Koori woman reminded me, respecting Indigenous protocols is about acknowledging Indigenous people have the right to self-determination in relation to the representation of their customs and culture. For local Kooris and Gooris, self-determination is expressed through having control over such representation of their culture and customs at local community events, rather than having Indigenous culture "trotted out" or "tacked onto" a programme (see below). It was the latter assertions that drew my attention to the actual 'practices of inclusiveness' in relation to the organisation of community events.

I observed that the non-Indigenous community invests in presenting an image of Newcastle that is 'inclusive' of Indigenous culture. Nonetheless, Indigenous culture is one of the ingredients added to the *mix* that makes up the dimensions of Newcastle's culture, thereby sanctioning it as an 'inclusive' society. Moreover, although the focus is on 'inclusiveness' and the celebration of 'cultural diversity' provides a space for counter-cultural expressions,

via such practices, non-Indigenous people, as opposed to local Kooris and Gooris, commonly determine representations of Aboriginality in Newcastle. Through the construction and determination of how such events will celebrate cultural diversity, non-Indigenous people reproduce practices of whiteness and power relations.

For example, if an Indigenous component is incorporated into various Newcastle festivals, such as Cultural Stomp, Fiesta, Mattara or Australia Day celebrations, it is usually only a minor element reproduced as spectacle in the form of a traditional dance performance or smoking ceremony. In this form, Indigenous culture is added to the *mix* of cultural diversity. Indigenous participation is pre-determined rather than negotiated. The event organising committees are essentially comprised of non-Indigenous people, who plan the events and decide what activities will take place. For Cultural Stomp, as with the other events, this involves a brainstorming exercise and committee members determining what activities will form part of the annual one-day festival of events. The local Indigenous community's involvement in Cultural Stomp involves performing some predetermined role, such as individuals conducting a 'Welcome to Country' or 'Smoking Ceremony', traditional dance performance or a local Indigenous spokesperson participating in a forum on reconciliation. Through such practices of incorporation non-Indigenous people unconsciously control and regulate the domain in which Indigenous culture can be legitimately expressed; it does not allow Indigenous people to determine how their culture will be represented in the public domain. As a form of governance, such practices operate as a way of ordering the world (Laaksonen 2003: 5); they direct conduct with the institutionalised practices of whiteness shaping conduct.

Discussions with various non-Indigenous people about Indigenous protocols confirmed that non-Indigenous people did not understand Indigenous protocols. Non-Indigenous people have their own protocols that shape their conduct. For example, I asked the event co-ordinator for Cultural Stomp how they intended to involve the Indigenous community in the forthcoming Cultural Stomp. As the event co-ordinator, it was the person's job to determine the programme and organise the event, including getting people to play a predetermined role in the event, in consultation with the Cultural Stomp Committee. The person indicated that they would be asking the local Awabakal dance group to perform a traditional dance as part of the event, which was typical of the practice that I had

observed so far. As a cultural festival with fluid parameters and no set programme, and it was about ten months before the event, the situation itself provided scope for consulting Indigenous organisations and people more widely and getting their guidance and feedback on how they would like to participate, if at all. I explained this to the event co-ordinator and also noted how it provided an opportunity to give local Kooris and Gooris control over their involvement in this cultural festival.

To date, and several discussions later, not much has changed, apart from the fact that in 2005 the Cultural Stomp programme included a 'smoking ceremony' rather than a traditional dance performance. To demonstrate, despite earlier discussions, I was asked to provide a written reference supporting a grant application for a proposed series of radio discussions about reconciliation scheduled to air on the local community radio as part of the broader programme for Cultural Stomp, which is held during Reconciliation Week. On inquiring about the Indigenous community's involvement in the project, I was informed "that they had had no involvement in the project to date". Once again, Indigenous people had not been consulted in the development of a project that they would later be expected to participate in. While the good ethical white citizen was proposing an act of reconciliation, the very act of reconciliation reproduced asymmetrical relations of power.

Following Hage (1998), the broader community remains the managers of cultural diversity. The recognition of Indigenous culture and incorporation of the Indigenous 'other' into the cultural citizenship of Newcastle is also ordered in terms of dominant practices and protocols of whiteness. It is the dominant culture that creates its own cultural images of Aboriginality, which becomes incorporated into Newcastle's cultural citizenship. However, as noted above, it is not simply that the dominant culture enacts its capacity to manage cultural diversity. These discursive practices are not deliberate attempts to shape Indigenous culture. They emerge from an ethical subjectivity in that it is believed that they are 'inclusive' practices. *Practices of inclusion* are an ethical practice of the 'well intentioned' non-Indigenous person, who practices 'inclusiveness'. Thus, while such practices are regulatory practices in that they manage cultural representation in Newcastle, they are not intentional; they emerge from particular ethical subjectivities. Inadvertently, these practices frame and determine representations of Indigenous culture

because those organising events believe that their practices are emancipatory and positive as they are inclusive of 'other' and 'all' forms of cultural representation. Such discursive practices are not deliberate attempts to exert power over Indigenous people. Yet, certain actions structure the field of possible actions (Foucault 2003a: 140); they are constitutive of power relations in that they frame representations of Indigenous culture.

Whiteness, and the epistemological protocols of whiteness, enforces specific understandings about culture, society and emancipatory politics, and cultural events generate truths and constitute reserves of legitimacy and effectiveness. These practices inhibit the possibility for the construction of alternative representations.

As the following statement made by a representative of the local Aboriginal community, Aboriginal culture has been been "boxed in":

Aboriginal people need to take a strong role in controlling the view of Aboriginal culture that is put forward – what we do in NSW is we allow our culture to be boxed and everybody wants to see it. Because of requests to put together dance groups, etc everybody is doing the same thing. Aboriginal culture has been boxed. It's been imaged into that black fella silhouetted against the sunset. For too long we have been allowing bureaucrats to trot us out and be the kind of Aboriginal culture that's acceptable (Ray Kelly Treaty Forum Newcastle: 2001).

The speaker argues that "Aboriginal culture has been boxed" – constrained within the confines of dominant practices and protocols. As indicated above, non-Indigenous event organisers tend to put an Indigenous component, such as a dance, performance or speaking component, into a programme and then seek out an Indigenous individual, group or organisation to fill this role. Indigenous culture gets "trotted out" as if an unreflexive or mechanical repetition.

What often happens is that an Indigenous component often gets "tacked on" to Newcastle community events and festivals, with the Indigenous community reluctantly complying with such demands. For example, Indigenous people that hold publicly prominent positions within the Newcastle community, inadvertently, become representative of the community, and are always seized upon to perform a function on behalf of the Indigenous community. To demonstrate, at an official Newcastle Council function, I was standing talking to a prominent local Koori woman when a senior bureaucrat from Newcastle

Council approached us. The senior bureaucrat proceeded to tell the Indigenous woman that Council needed an Indigenous performer for an upcoming event. She asked if the woman could recommend someone or perform herself. The whole time the senior bureaucrat had one of her arms protruded and its fist and hand shaped like a puppet head miming as if it were someone speaking. For me, the miming puppet fist was symbolic of the 'performance' wanted of the Indigenous 'other'. The Indigenous woman was continually easing uncomfortably away from her throughout the discussion. The power relations of 'inclusiveness' were reproduced in this casual interchange. Despite the senior bureaucrat's mannerisms, power relations are not simply processes of domination. Power works through ethical practices of whiteness that work to create, shape, and utilise Indigenous culture. Whiteness here is an ethical project. The senior bureaucrat, unaware of her actions, mechanically reproduces the protocols of whiteness in her attempts to include the Indigenous community. Whiteness is thus embedded in *practices of inclusiveness* in that such practices emanate from protocols of whiteness. She is a senior bureaucrat carrying out her official duties, ensuring that an event is organised according to a predetermined programme. Whiteness has its own way of shaping the conduct of the white subject. In this way, whiteness is exercised, and is productive in that it constitutes both the white and Indigenous subject (Coffey 2000: 40). However, whiteness does not negate the capacity of Indigenous people; it is productive and works through cultural ethics and techniques, and through moral agents. It inculcates ways of being.

Nevertheless, power relations are not static or fixed; power is productive. Different ethical subjectivities come into conflict through relations of power. The protocols of whiteness clash with Indigenous protocols. These tensions play out in interactions between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous community. For example, one former member of the Newcastle City Council Indigenous Consultative Committee noted that a number of members of the Newcastle City Council Indigenous Consultative Committee officially visited Newcastle's sister city in Japan. He noted that during the trip the Council members on the Committee acted in an inappropriate manner, ignoring Indigenous protocol. This was manifested for some when the Councillors on the tour presented a totem to official representatives of Nara, made by the young Kooris on the tour, in their absence. The non-Indigenous Councillors assumed a position of authority in relations between them



and the Japanese. After protest from the Indigenous members of the party, the ceremony had to be re-performed later that day. It was noted that the discord between dominant institutional practices or protocols and Indigenous practices or protocols put relationships between local Kooris and the Councillors into conflict. Not only did it marginalise the Indigenous representatives on the tour, but betrayed the shallow understanding of Indigenous cultural practices and protocols. There was a presumption that because you are the authority figure (Councillor) you have a right to hand over the totem; a protocol of whiteness. However, the dominant cultural practice is done at the expense of the Indigenous cultural practice, or Indigenous protocol. It is evidence, for those recounting the experience, of whiteness taking precedence over the Indigenous. The non-Indigenous Councillor expresses authority. Whiteness is performed through its normative cultural and social practices (Hill and Riggs 2004: 1). Yet, the challenging of dominant social practices demonstrates how local Kooris and Goooris resist and interrupt the normalisation of whiteness. Through the re-performance of the ceremony the normalisation of dominant practices were displaced.

### **Conclusion**

Whiteness and the epistemological protocols of whiteness govern representations of Indigenous culture in mainstream cultural events. Specific forms of ethical subjectification and governmentality are involved in non-Indigenous people determining not only the culturally diverse *mix* but also Indigenous representations of culture. The 'well intentioned' ethical subject governs representations of Indigenous culture through *practices of inclusiveness*.

Moreover, whiteness is *positive*. It is ever constitutive of the subjectivity of the agents of power relations. It is normalising and normative. Thus, whiteness was not analysed in terms of an all-important essence, but in terms of its specific conditions of existence and their effects in terms of social relations and practices (Hindess 1977: 95; Kendall and Wickam 1999: 149). Whiteness is a mode of action on actions (see Foucault 2003a).

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