



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

TITLE: Theorising Settler Whiteness: Reflections on a Study of Pākehā Identity Narratives in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Author/s: Jessica Terruhn

Affiliation/s: University of Auckland

Abstract:

Traditionally, scholarship has compartmentalised critical examinations of whiteness in settler locales into studies of whiteness vis-à-vis indigenous *and* immigrant/ethnic Others. In this presentation, I argue for bringing these issues into one analytical frame in order to problematise the reproduction of white settler privilege in ethno-culturally diverse settler states. I illustrate my argument with a study of Pākehā identity narratives in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Data from 38 life story interviews demonstrates that participants discursively constructed cosmopolitan post-settler identities. These mainly found expression in stories of personal transformation, which emphasized a new recognition of indigenous culture, as well as in stories that stressed the normality of everyday intercultural encounters with ‘ethnic others’. However, these narratives often remain wedded to colonial and racialised discourses and, I argue, serve to ‘shake off’ the tainted settler identity while securing the group’s normative and privileged position. Participants use the rhetoric of liberal multiculturalism as a discursive strategy to dismiss the continued relevance of colonialism and settlerness. A number of specific discursive tropes emerging from the research will be presented and discussed as contemporary expressions of colonial control over indigenous as well as migrant populations.