Through different lens: The study of Australian anti racism and racism in new times

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Abstract

Racism has been a central construct throughout the formation of post

colonial Australia. During the last 20 years a number of approaches

have been developed to confront this racism. Events show that these

approaches have largely failed to achieve their lofty aspirations,

have serious theoretical and practical limitations and, most

seriously, share many of the same assumptions which underpin the

racist elements about which they are concerned.

Recent British, American and Australian theorists suggest that anti

racism be researched through a different approach informed by

post-structural, post-colonial and feminist literatures. This paper

analyses the literatures of racism and anti racism, to understand how

these theories could best be used to critically examine various

practical, conceptual / theoretical and political approaches to

Australian anti racist education. The paper concludes that

Australian studies of racism and anti racism studies must broaden the

way they understand and analyse the conception, effects and dispersal

of racial constructs in contemporary societies. The development of a

more systematic and coherent approach to anti racism studies requires

us to gaze through a different lens which highlights changing concepts

of 'culture', public discourse, everyday activities and the formation

of "us' and 'Other' in body, time and space.

The politics of difference in Australia has always been contradictory

and confused. Since the time of European settlement Australia's

history has been one of silences, exclusions, misunderstandings and

symbolic violence. A contradictory, ambiguous and protean list shows

that at various times Aboriginals, Kanakas, Asians, Jews, Irish,

Italians, Germans, Chinese, Blacks and Non English Speakers have

become essentialised, separated, excluded, abused and differentiated

from the main body, 'Us'. In recent days these discussions have

become focused around vehement defences of freedom of speech, calls for

multiculturalism, arguments for "one Australia", tentative moves

towards apology and adamant denials of guilt.

An examination of Australian strategies for combating racism finds

that they have assumed a confused and inadequate view of racism and

ways it can be combated. These assertions are predicated on assumptions

which are often inadequate or mistaken. Popular public debate about

racism and ways of combating it portrays similar difficulties. It is

often difficult to clarify how and when racism has taken place. Racism

is often understood as something too dangerous to discuss at all or as something superficial or in error. Far from explaining these complications, the Australian literature has often been similarly problematic: individualising subjectivity, essentialising culture and homogenising the social .

The task I have set myself in this paper is to examine the silences, the confusions, the negligences and the contestations which have accompanied the discussion and implementation of policies to combat racism in what Stuart Hall has called New Times. Recent literatures produced in Australia and overseas suggest that racism and anti racism studies must broaden the way the conception, effects and dispersal of racial constructs in contemporary societies are understood and analysed. These writings argue that a more coherent approach to anti racism asks us to understand racism in other ways which are both conceptual and material: culture', public discourse, everyday activities and the formation of 'Us' and 'Other' in body, time and space. These arguments make it clear that to understand racism we must not only change epistemologies of racism, but also redefine meta-theories underpinning taken for granted notions such as subjectivity, truth and history.

Australian multiculturalism: negotiations, silences, euphemisms, and contestations.

Over the last 20 years, multiculturalism has formed the central focus for Australian anti-racism strategies. From the first however, understandings of and support for multicultural policies has taken a

carefully negotiated, constantly changing series of often quite dissimilar forms(eg. Foster, 1988; Kalantzis and Cope). Al Grassby's (1973) initial dream of an egalitarian Australian family to which everyone could belong regardless of their particular history, culture or ideology is a vastly different notion to the Fraser Liberal Government's (1976 - 82) call for pluralism, consultation and 'unity within diversity'; and different again from concerns about social justice and communality of rights, responsibilities and economic opportunities asserted by the Hawke Labor Government(1982 - 1991). The Multicultural Agenda Statement propounded in 1989 is a complex and carefully negotiated statement which posits multiculturalism as both descriptive term and community relations policy consisting of three important but discrete, poorly defined and quite dissimilar elements: cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency (OMA, 1991, piix). Policies of multicultural education, similarly fraught, define education as a hotch -potch of concepts and practices: the teaching of ESL and LOTE, parental involvement, multicultural perspectives in education and access and equity for all students (Australia, 1987). The few studies undertaken to explore the way these multicultural policies and practices have been expressed in schools slam policy makers for the lack of resources which had been deployed to carry out multicultural policies and practices (AIMA, 1982 Cahill Report, 1985).

Schools themselves, have not implemented and are commonly unaware of Government strategy documents. Only a very few schools have implemented policies which are even similar to those of Government intent (Arber,

1993, pp. 191-195).

This conglomerate and often inconsistent support from institutions and

governments of different persuasions disguises an enormous ambivalence

towards multicultural concepts and practices. Grassby lost his

parliamentary position after a vicious political campaign was launched

against him, the Fraser Government maintained, even embellished

multiculturalism but with severe limiting clauses and the Hawke and

Keating government tried both successfully and unsuccessfully to

dismantle many of the institutional supports which had maintained

multicultural practices(Foster, 1988). Recently, attempts have been

made by the Howard Government, to retreat from conceptions which invoke

either anti-racism or multiculturalism. Changes to immigration and

community relation policies, within both the state and federal

governments, take place through the implementation of

interdepartmental memos rather than through the more visible process of

legislation. The suspicion of , and abhorrence for multicultural

social perspectives exhibited by government leaders becomes most

transparent in a recent bipartisan statement reluctantly produced by

party leaders in reply to statements made by parliamentarian Pauline

Hanson. This document carefully avoids using the 'm-word' even as it

repeats, changes and extends many of its underlying concepts.

These confusions, inconsistencies and ambivalences which define

multicultural polices and practices become silences when discussing

anti-racist strategies. The Racial Discrimination Act (1975, p.5)

defines only the most basic human rights making the act of

'distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference' of any person

based on 'race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin' unlawful.

More recent attempts to extend this legislation has had only minimal

success federally and within the state of Victoria, in spite of the

introduction of legislation against racial vilification in some states.

More often, discussions about episodes of racism are avoided

altogether or described by euphemisms which negate the severity of the

events described. A recent document touted by the Victorian Government

suggests that care be taken 'where units with negative titles such as

'racism' or 'stereotyping' are used' as if even speaking about racism

would bring it into existence (Draft multicultural policy, 1996, p.6).

The credo that difference must be dealt with generously and

knowledgably, alongside a recognition of Australians as an educated

generous, peace loving and tolerant people remains a central tenet of

most policy statements. Australia's cosmopolitan nature is extolled,

as if its very presence is a strategy for negotiating difference

(Australia, 1995)

If discussions about race and racism are defined by silence and

euphemism definitions of who is described by multicultural policies

flounder completely. Despite the oft repeated suggestion that

multiculturalism is for 'all Australians'(eg Grassby, 1973; AIMA, 1982;

OMA, 1989,1995) it is not at all certain who All Australians are. The

discussion of Aboriginal relations has never been included within

mainstream discussions of community relations policies so as 'not to

overlap with the functions of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs or

the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies' (AIMA , 1980, p.v).

More particularly, the place of citizens of white Anglo Saxon descent

is not discussed at all. In a recent study, teachers in schools, for

instance, easily placed students into groups (Muslims, Greeks, Asians,

Aborigines, Australians) regardless of actual citizenship or

generations lived in Australia and argued that multiculturalism was for

those others or for teaching Australians about other cultures (Arber,

1993). Similarly, Hanson's calls for One Nation or Prime Minister

Howard's appeals to Australia's battlers both included and excluded

from the national body; contrasting and comparing the real identity of

the true nationals against the quasi identity of the false nationals:

the Ethnic, the Aboriginal, the Asian, the Black, the Muslim, the Jew

(Homi Bhabha, 1997).

Finally, the arguments which underpin multiculturalism often underpin

those opposing it even as those terms and understandings are bitterly

contested. Remarks made by Pauline Hanson in her maiden speech in

parliament (Hansard, 1996), repeated conceptions commonly held by

Australians at other times: memories of British pre-eminence and the

resulting tyrannies of distance; fears about the dispossessed other,

the orientalised other, the Black other and the migrant other; and a

dawning comprehension that we don't really know any more who we are

(Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morrissey, 1988). Hanson's assertion

that 'to survive in peace and harmony, united and strong, we must have

one people, one nation, and one flag' both parallels and contrasts

with Keating's use of the same term 'one nation' only three years

before (Keating, 1993, p.6). Keating's appeal, underpinned as it was
by conceptions of nationalism and economic rationalism stood for the
'benefits and opportunities provided by diversity in one nation'.
Thus, the terms related to the discussion of multiculturalism and anti
racism become blurred. The same concepts become used by those
defending racism as those attacking racism: the same eulogising of Our
Community; the same fixated discussion about racism and turmoil without
ever mentioning the words; the same confusion as to who we really are
(Gilroy, 1992, 1987). The languages and understandings which define
multicultural and anti racist strategies become seen as confused and
inadequate and as tightly enmeshed within other, quite different and
everyday understandings such as economic rationalism, immigration,
environmentalism, democracy. Yet even as they do so the meaning given
to these terms is fiercely controversial. As Pauline Hanson explained:
Let me make one thing clear: I am not a racist by any definition of
that word. None of my remarks in their proper context could be fairly
regarded as racist. I am not opposed to any person or group because of
their race, colour, or national or ethnic origin. I do not think that
anyone is superior or inferior to anyone else because of their origin
or background (Hansard, 1997).

Critiquing Multiculturalism
Until recently Australian studies of multiculturalism and anti racism
have been premised by three main approaches each of which have been
only partially satisfactory in explaining the ambivalent, confused and
inconsistent nature of these strategies. An anthropological approach

(for example: Chipman, 1985; James and Lindsay, 1988; Smolicz and Secombe, 1981; Bullivant, 1981) studies the activities of different, coherent and already formed beings whose activities are understood as being already predicated by programming experiences derived from definitive childhood experiences. Cultural characteristics are seen as portable features which belong to specific groups of people whose existences are shaped by those forms. The task for these writers becomes to formulate the vocabulary, to catalogue and define the elements and to spell out the limitations of co-existence between seemingly homogenous, exclusive and incommensurably different peoples. Ethnicity and culture become permeable only in that the individual can be lingual in more than one world (Smolicz and Secombe, 1981). Racism and ethnocentrism are understood as the covert, ideological ways of a naturally occurring and quite rational process whereby members of the in-group are defined, their location with community members and out-groups maintained and competition between incompatible goals and sparse resources resolved. (Bullivant, 1981). Strategies to combat racism aim to reduce incompatibility between already culturally programmed individuals (Bullivant, 1981); develop the culturally balanced individual (Smolicz and Secombe, 1981); allow 'staatsvok' and 'ethnics' to compete fairly within institutions (Bullivant, 1981, p.46); and limit any disruption to core community institutions by differently enculturated groups (Zubrzycki, 1982). Thus far from explaining multiculturalisms confused and inconsistent nature, the anthropological approach seeks to mark out and homogenise incommensurable differences ignoring diversities and similarities,

conflicts and intersections within and between groups. The way these

conceptions are contested is well illustrated in the following

newspaper article whereby the same conceptions used to explain ethnic

disadvantage are used to argue that:

A significant number of Anglo Australian students at Melbourne schools

are at risk of becoming a new category, 'the self deprived' ... many

second generation ethnic students had higher achievable aspirations and

motivations than many Anglo-Australian students (The Age, 29/11/1986,

p.10)

A second major influence on the way Australian multiculturalism has

been comprehended and analysed has been that of a 'sociology of

knowledge' approach. In her influential report, Jean Martin(1978)

defined 'man' as an animal suspended in self made webs of meaning where

he monitors and refines behaviours, concepts and identities in a

constant interaction between an independently realised self and a

constructed and socialised reality. Within a politically pluralist

society, ethnic groups are one of many competing, legitimate interest

groups which negotiate to construct social knowledge. The capacity of

individual parties to define knowledge construction is a function of

that group's dominance. Changing Australian institutions to give all

groups equal access, rather than the accommodation of individual

prejudices, practices and attitudes, become seen as more relevant

strategies within a multicultural society.

The definition of even an interactive dualism of private and the

public spheres, fails to properly explain the complex nature of this

relationship. Martin's work describes the individual as someone rational and free who can dispassionately choose to become part of ethnic or racial groups in the same way as they might choose to become members of recreational, consumer or professional societies. Ethnic cultural knowledge is understood as separate, homogeneous and holistic, belonging only within the private world of the ethnic group and immaterial to the understandings required in the public domain. These arguments suggest that individuals can somehow make decisions separately from understandings evident within the public sphere and ignore the way individuals are the preliminary site of those same material and conceptual constructions. Furthermore such conceptions assume that 'everyone is the same underneath' presuming a 'colour blindness' organised around an effort to not see, or at any rate not acknowledge the material nature of ethnic or racial differences and the effects that these have on people's lives. (Frankenberg, 1993, p.142)

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Neo Marxist frameworks have provided a third important focus Australian studies of multiculturalism and underpin a multiplicity of writings. These studies argue that as Australia is a capitalist country and a class society, the overriding imperative for social analysis is to define and analyse unequal and exploitative relationships of class Collins, 1988). Multiculturalism is critiqued as replacing the need for real structural change in political and economic relations with a superficial cultural relativism and the celebration of cultural difference. The instigation of multicultural policies and practices is explained as being fundamentally ideological (Rizvi, 1985). This

analyses takes several forms including the study of: the relationship

between the immigration and labour needs of the Australian industrial

elite (Collins, 1988); elitist considerations for maintaining cultural

hegemony (Jakubowicz, 1981); the plight of ethnic groups as 'status

devalued minority groups (Jayasuriya, 1983.); the relationship between

multicultural policies and policies of economic rationalism (Stockley

and Foster, 1990) and the effects of these movements on education (for

example, Rizvi, 1986, Foster, 1988). Birrell(1981) and Betts(1988) see

this process as particularly malevolent arguing that multiculturalism

has continued to emerge, despite serious shortcomings, because of

alliances built between the ethnic intelligentsia, the immigration

department and the middle classes.

Marxist theories provide a useful tool for studying multiculturalism

and anti racism in so far as they define and analyse the way social

inequalities and exclusions are located within the economic structures

of capitalistic societies. They explain the way multicultural policies

and practices are fundamentally ideological in philosophy and praxis;

celebrating ethnic heterogeneity rather than uncovering and

delegitimising class inequalities (Rizvi, 1986) They are important in

that they demonstrate how ideologies; certain forms of consciousness

and inadequate apprehension of the world are systematically related to

class interest(Barrett, 1991). This analysis of ideology shows how

taken for granted notions about truth, history and individual

understanding might be questioned. However, these writings are limited

in so far as they reduce other understandings, including those

describing race, to the structures, ideologies and practices of the production process. Racism and multiculturalism are dismissed as sets of falsehoods perpetuated by various and demonic groups: the capitalists, the middle classes, the mass media, the state or academics. The working class are often dismissed as cultural dopes; traitors to their class and their community and easily bought off by the multicultural community (Rattansi, 1992). Ethnicity and race are often essentialised and conflated with a unitary and reified conception of a universal proletariat. Contextual variations such as the emergence of an ethnic middle class, fragmented notions of ethnic nationalism, and the cosmopolitan nature of the working class are ignored (Gilroy, 1992) and the crises of representation inherent modern working class organisations and institutions (technological change, recession, demographic change and ways of national and community understanding) remains unaccounted for (Gilroy, 1987). These analyses failed, therefore, in so far as they neglect to reflect on the ambivalences and contradictions within and between classes and the way these articulate with race and racism.

New resources for studying multiculturalism and anti racism strategies
Studies of multicultural debate and policy making display its underlying confusions, inconsistencies, ambivalences, controversies and silences. Materials critiquing multiculturalism become limited in so far as they essentialise, reify, homogenise and make incommensurable the subject, culture and the social. In order to understand multiculturalism and anti racism strategies in modern times,

it seems, we need to ask new questions, to discuss racism and anti racism in new ways, to look at these questions through different lens.

A reading of post - colonial literature, its analyses, allegations and debates, suggests new and different theoretical resources for studying multiculturalism and anti-racism strategies. These analyses describe and define the terrors and violence's inherent within the colonialist tradition. As part of this examination they explore the conceptual as well as the material aspects of those undertakings. In his preface to Fanons' book The wretched of the earth Sartre reminisces that:
Not so long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had the word: the other had the use of it (Sartre in Fanon, 1990, p.7).

Speaking out of the violence that was the Algerian revolution Fanon(1990) begins to untangle the proposition that it is not just the weapons but the 'word' of the coloniser that is used to totally colonise the other. The world of the colonised becomes understood only through the eyes of the colonisers so that that even as the intellectual other attempts to defend his very existence - his very psyche, his very self - he does so through the mechanisms of an invisible, uncontested and all-embracing Western culture. The result of these manipulations is that the coloniser indeed believes that the colonial way of life provides the light to 'lighten their darkness', 'the loving mother who protects her child', 'the very categorisation of

negritude'. The fight against such domination therefore takes on both

material and ideological considerations, being not only to bring about

an end to domination but to eradicate the untruths planted by the

oppressor.

Said's (1978) work Orientalism shows how the word of the western

coloniser conceptualised and constructed, that is orientalised a

geographical entity and made it 'The Orient'. Said's work carefully

documents the writings of French and British academics, explorers,

soldiers, administrators and diplomats to show that literature and

culture are not politically, or historically innocent. The Orient,

located as it is in real geographical terms, is shown to be an idea

with a history, traditions of thought, imagery, and vocabulary created

both 'in and for the West'. It is through such constructions that later

conceptions of the orient become focused, and consent for Western

cultural and political hegemony becomes established. Heavily

influenced by the works of Foucault, Nietsche and, to some extent,

Gramsci, Said argues that it is this construction of how the West 'made'

the orient which needs to be studied if we are to understand the

relationship between the Orient and the Occident.

The analysis of systems of thought as they are 'easily made, applied

and guarded'(Said, 1978, p.5) within a context of power and history and

the material effects of these constructions on future understandings

and actions suggest new ways of understanding multiculturalism and anti

racism. What Said's work does not ask is on what grounds, with what

discourses and with what authority people are able to stand outside of

these discourses and critique or resist them. Furthermore, if we understand the world as being framed by such a complexity of discourse, in what ways can we claim to discuss our world, and acts of racism or anti racism as being material or real.

Post-colonial and race theorists have set about answering these questions even as they continue to re-examine the way commonsense understandings are formulated by and reformulate political positionings and material action. Spivak, asks whether the 'subaltern', the person of marginalised social position, can speak at all. She argues that it was not that the subaltern does not talk or make an insurgent effort but that the story of continuous subaltern insurgency is always failing (Spivak in Landry and Maclean 1996). As history, as it is expressed by imperial nations, becomes established as the normative and best version of reality, so, these nations are able to obliterate any other understandings which can be used to investigate or protest their activities. The subaltern other is therefore left with no way to speak and intellectuals, forced to speak through the languages of imperialism, are left without agency (Spivak, in Ashcroft et al., 1995).

Homi Bhabha (in Ashcroft et al., 1995), suggests that even as the West creates the Other, the dualism between them is corroded as the other mimics, mocks and repeats western discourse. This process of 'cultural translation' creates a hybrid identity, a third space where boundaries can be crossed, shifted and subverted (discussed in Sakamoto, 1997).

Homi Bhabha(in Hall and Du Gay, 1997) uses this concept of hybridity to

describe the construction of a cultural authority or 'institital'

agency no longer part of the binaries of social antagonism. Thus, for

Bhabha these hybrid agencies; their visions of community; versions of

historic memory; narratives to describe their positions as 'the

outside of the inside: the part in the whole" do speak in those spaces

between seemingly incommensurable discourses.

Gilroy(1987, 1992) notes that in Western societies ethnic and racial

groups have tended to demonstrate political, cultural and economic

agency similar to that associated with class. However, such social

movements are almost inevitably ineffectual because they are unable to

survive contact with or co-option within the agencies against which

they struggle. Gilroy argues that another and more effective vehicle

for social resistance is found in the highly symbolised world

represented by community cultures as they interact between historical

processes and are changed, developed, combined and dispelled. Beneath

these cultural forms, the political forms, the unspoken discourses,

contained within cultural productions such as stories and songs, form

chromotypes. These work together to project the deep structures of

collective memories, perceptions of experience and community

constructions of antagonism and struggle and make them central to the

social resistance process. The way Black cultural practices (

particularly music) as they are made and remade in the spaces and

intersections between local and globalised cultures, specific and

national experiences and historical memories become key ways of

instigating and investigating social struggle. Racism, itself becomes
understood as a central and volatile presence in modern society
constructed by a multiplicity of complex, ambiguous and contradictory
discourses and not just a 'coat of paint' which can be removed, albeit
painstakingly, leaving the basic economic and social structures of
Western life unchanged.

In his work The perversions of inheritance, Cohen(19*) sets out to
analyse constructions of experience and of fantasy and their
relationship to ways of understanding and fighting racism. 'Map',
'territory' and 'mirage' become interdependent, but otherwise unfixed,
sometimes separate, concentric, overlapping or eccentric metaphors to
interpret constructions by ethnic and racial groups of their particular
'tunnel histories'. The map represents the desire to stand outside of
the terrains of experience and to fix and name the unknown, to render
the unknown accessible to conscious control as something real, rational
and known. Map, as it is structured by the fantasies and desires of the
racist imagination, selects defines, and then transforms associations
collected from varieties of sites and sources to establish sets of
constant topological relations which function to exclude and define the
Other. Territories are always and already delineated by specific
contexts and conjunctures staked out by relations of power and human
intentionality. They anchor the dissociated desires of map to
particular historical configurations of common sense. When the map no
longer corresponds to territory; when the effects of meaning are not
locatable on any map; are not part of any recognisable terrain; then

the racist imagination can take its desires for reality. That is the

mirage. Cohen argues that to defeat the racist imagination and shift

the ground through which racist ideology reproduces itself, we need to

read between the lines, to become as sensitive to the silences and

ambiguities of discourse and its underlying fantasies and constructs

of experience as we already are to its more vociferous and oppressive

forms (Cohen, 1992).

Frankenberg(1993) reminds us that the material and discursive nature of

racism and anti racism refers not only within the terrain of the

marked subject who is already marginalised but also within the unmarked

terrain of Whiteness. Whiteness, like Orientalism and Blackness refers

to sets of locations that are historically, socially, politically and

culturally produced and linked to unfolding relations of domination.

However, unlike these other constructions, the site of whiteness

becomes a site in which privilege and dominance seem normal, its

structures invisible and its understandings and practices unmarked and

unnamed The race privilege of whiteness translates directly into

forms of social organisation that both shape daily life and in turn

shape individual perceptions of race in ways which are historically

specific, politically engaged and provisional. The study of racism

takes place within such taken for granted sites as the historic moments

of discourse construction, social geography and sexual intimacy. The

'social geography of race': how race is lived; the way physical space

is divided, inhabited and used; the physical landscape of the home,

street, neighbourhood, school; becomes a first focus for research.

Understanding racism, therefore becomes a matter of understanding
people's options and desires but also one of understanding how racism
shapes lives and identities throughout every facet of daily life.

Finally, Goldberg posits that the intersecting formations, expressions
and conditions of the material and discursive formations of racism have
multiplier effects which exacerbate racist understandings, just as they
intensify material wrongs. Analysing racist cultures therefore means
the identification and interrogation of the ambiguity presented by the
contested, and constructed nature of racialised identities and an
examination of the effects of those exclusionary practices,
institutions, subjectivities and subjections sustained by the
discourse of race. The eradication of racism means finding and
eradiating those invidious and exclusionary conditions and experiences
which underpin racism. Because racist culture so totally permeates
contemporary identity, and the identification and eradication of racism
takes so many forms, Goldberg argues that anti racist practice can
only be one of pragmatism whereby:

Pragmatic antiracists must be concerned to articulate views of persons
and of the political, of selves and the social, that are not just
non-exclusionary but anti-exclusionary, not just integrative but
incorporative, not merely neutral but committed ... Anti-racism,
accordingly, has in many senses to be an all-or-nothing commitment, a
renewable undertaking to resist all racisms' expressions, to strike at
their conditions of emergence and existence, to promote 'the internal

decomposition of the community created by racism. (Goldberg, 1993, pp. 236-7)

Most recently, Australian academics have become more or less influenced by these writings. Sneja Gunew(1994) in her book Framing Marginality argues that knowledge construction as it is understood and developed by language is predicated by considerations of perspective and positionality within systems of representation , history and the prevailing circumstances of power. She argues that conceptions of subjectivity as well as of 'nation', 'culture' and 'community' can no longer be understood as transcendent, unified, homogeneous or unchanging. Rather they must be understood as discursively produced and constrained by a range of defined discoursal subject positions. The politics of difference and the incorporation of 'Other' within Australian society therefore needs to be understood differently. Gunew posits that to manage diversity, Australian multicultural policies have often constructed communities in terms of an 'ethnic absolutism'; categorising, essentialising and marginalising them into separate and homogenous communities represented by those few activists who speak on their behalf. At the same time, diasporic languages and customs have served to deconstruct a sense of community and a nationalism based on the exclusive 'imaginaries' of a commonly inherited Anglo Saxon language and culture. This 'reductive homogenisation and representation by tokenism' (Troyna and Rizvi, 1997, p.364) means that Others are rendered invisible by Our aspirations for colour blindness at the same time as they are marked out and stereotyped. Racist understanding and

practice, therefore, is resisted by setting up 'cultural difference'

(Gunew, 1994) as a category within cultural analysis; deconstructing

systems and conceptions which categorise and thereafter racialise;

franchise and disenfranchise; render visible and invisible others and

ourselves.

Some other Australian Neo- Marxist writers have taken into account such

post modernist philosophies. Castles et al. (1988), for instance,

analyses the way arbitrary historical inventions, new forms of communal

identity, and changed historical conditions have been used to

reconstruct a new but culturally heterogeneous Australian nationalism.

Vasta and Castles(1996) links ethnicity, class and gender with the role

of the state and the politics of identity and community.

Pettman(1992) focuses with more complexity on the interaction between

race, ethnicity, class and gender showing that these categories are not

alternative, natural or fixed, but are political in their construction

and have shifting and relational qualities. Nevertheless, many of

these writers still conceive of a dualism between people and state,

public and private, individual and system, structure and

superstructure which portray essentialist and often Manichean

qualities. Like Gunew, Rizvi(1996), points out the tenaciousness of

such positions, positing that, subject as they are to historical

conditions, conceptions of the individual and the social as sites of

conflicting, disjointed, episodic, fragmentary and contradictory

discourses, construct and reconstruct both self and other.

Through different lens

Studies of Australian multiculturalism and anti racism are often not able to properly explain racism's ambivalent and contested nature. These writings are concerned about a variety of often Manichean concerns: the spectre of others as homogeneous, primordial and unconquerably different; the machinations of separate and often sinister, conspiring and omnipotent systems; the amelioration of misguided, misinformed, ignorant or malignant individuals. Recent literatures of anti racism and multiculturalism stress that it is necessary to break down such dualisms between: individual and social; public and private; and Us and Them. These writings argue that racist practice and thought underpin not only the discourses and understandings which define knowledges and commonsense but they structure our very thinking, our fantasies, our desires, our material and cerebral world. They suggest that the study of racism should take place through different lens; should focus our understandings of racism in other ways; should re-examine complex theories and our most common sense understandings. In order to understand the epistemology of racism, therefore, we must first redefine the theories which underpin some of our most basic conceptions including those which define: our very selves, our relation to the social, truth, rationality and history. These redefinitions are not so easily made. However, most recently some race theorists have tried to deal with these questions and the way in which they apply to discussions of racism and anti racism.

Rattansi(1992), mirroring the work of Henriques et al.(1986) calls this

process one of Changing the subject. This conception of social theory

argues that the subject can no longer be seen as coterminous with a

consistent, undivided and unitary individuality. Rather, the subject

is understood as composed of, or existing as, a set of, multiple and

often contradictory positionings formed within a multiplicity of sites

of power knowledge relations. Subject positions are constituted and

reconstituted as individuals actively interpret the world and are

themselves governed through the realisation of particular versions of

meaning. This realisation of social meaning is structured through

competing discourses, or common sense ways of understanding, which are

always in the process of informing and being informed within the

historical processes of social organisation and power distribution. In

this way the subject is both site and subject of discursive struggle

(Weedon, 1995).

Stuart Hall(1996) asks how particular sets of ideas come to dominate

social thinking within a historical or a geographical context. Central

to his thesis is Gramsci's (1921-26) standpoint that ideological

struggle and the conceptualisation of ideas take place, not within

what he termed 'wars of manoeuvre' (whereby discourses struggled to

'rush in and obtain a definitive 'strategic victory') and but in the

more haphazard 'wars of position'(fought over a variety of different

fronts). As the site of these wars of discourse, the multifaceted

nature of consciousness is defined as a collective rather than an

individual one where many systems of philosophical thought co-exist;

each competing for control of the discoursal terrain. The complex

ideological formations manifest in societies cannot be reduced to an

economic function nor to individual self knowledge; but rather are

constantly renovating and remaking a multiplicity of existing

activities within the materiality of the civil society and the state

(Hall, 1996). Change and resistance takes place through those wars of

discourse as they become transformed or within the junctures and

breaks between them.

This concept of changing the subject changes not only our understanding

of individual and social but also of truth and rationality. Paradigms

defining the individual as unitary, imagine common sense as monolithic,

fixed, obvious and therefore true. Language is conceptualised as

transparent, expressive and as labelling an always real and fully

understandable world. The unitary and 'rational man' who uses the

transparency and honesty of language is seen as able to make consistent

and infallible decisions about a fully knowable universe and use these

to make sensible decisions about future activities. These arguments

ignore the contractedness of truth and concentrate instead on the

belief that an objective and rational individual chooses between what

is a correct and what is an incorrect response. They fail to recognise

that subjectivity is not exclusively rational and that people can have

wishes and aspirations which pull in different directions (Henriques et

al., 1984).

Changing the subject changes not only ourselves and our relationship to

society but our very understanding of what is truth and how we can be considered rational. This paper defines a fragmented subject which is composed of, or exists as, a set of, multiple, conflicting and often contradictory positionings formed within a multiplicity of sites of power knowledge relations. It is these never completed positionings that inform our understanding of the outside world. These discourses, or positionings are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing and speaking, of being in the world. Products of social history, they are always and everywhere changingly there, as they battle to both define and inform individual behaviour. (Gee, 1996) Different discourses divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways. These cannot be reduced to one another nor can they appeal to universally shared concepts reflecting a fixed reality. How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interest which they represent(Weedon, 1995).

Truth therefore becomes something which is contested both within and between ourselves. Racism and anti racism cannot be eliminated simply by finding out and teaching the 'truth' about others or ourselves. Rather, research about racism must first identify but then question the way racist understandings and events are understood to take place in our society and study the effects of these understandings. The ambiguity presented by the contested, and constructed nature of

racialised identities needs to be constantly deconstructed by

ourselves as reasoning beings constantly striving for a most proper

response to an everchanging almost but not quite vacuous racism.

Finally, changing the subject in the way suggested within this paper

means that history cannot be understood as something which can 'totally'

reconstitute the overall principles of a society; give significance to

all the phenomena of a particular period; show the course of

homogenous sets of relationships; or objectively identify networks of

cause and effect Barrett, 1991). History can no longer be seen as a

linear and coagulant progression of events and activities drawn

towards a single centre and marching remorsefully towards utopian ends.

The history of Australian racism and anti racism policies cannot be

understood as a series of discrete and cumulative events. Nor can this

history, be understood as a series of interchanges between powerful and

Manichean forces of good and evil, might and right or racism and anti

racism. Rather what we have termed history traces the 'struggles for

manoeuvre', between discourses and practices and studies the way they

articulate with elements of corporality, time and space to create and

recreate ways of thinking, social identity, conceptions of truth and

history itself.

Stuart Hall argues that in new times:

Our models of 'the subject' have altered. We can no longer conceive of

'the individual' in terms of a whole, centred, stable and completed Ego

or autonomous rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualised as more

fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities
in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with
history, 'produced' in process. The 'subject' is differently placed or
positioned by different discourses and practices (Hall, 1996, p.226).

Representations of truth and history, of the subject and the social, of
racism and anti racism therefore take on another meaning. These
representations can no longer be understood as a objective
correspondence between an individual's information- processing
procedures and external reality. Alternatively, they cannot be
understood as an inevitably distorted set of ideologies inherent within
such systems as the relations of production, hiding the oppressive
nature of social reality to a particular class or social group
(Henriques et al., 1984). Representation becomes instead a process:

whereby the reality we apprehend is always already classified and
distributed according to a system of discursive practices which are
locked into differences in material effects (Henriques et al, 1984,
p.113).

Thus, representations of reality do not refer to re-presentations of
the objective, pure and real but rather to the effects of indeterminate
and open struggles and resistances between previously established and
historically grounded practices and phenomena which are intrinsically
intertwined within power and social relations(Henriques et al., 1984,
p.114).

The definition and analysis of racism and anti racism therefore takes place through new lens. These lens allow us to focus upon the ambiguous, contested, concentric, parallel forms which re/present not just our understanding of racism but the way these understandings have become intrinsic to every aspect of our selves. Race forms become seen as a central and volatile presence implicit in every aspect of contemporary western society: its language, culture, fantasies, desires and memories as they are embodied in its physical landscapes, its relationships, the very bodies of men and women. The goal of anti racism study therefore becomes that of identifying and interrogating the form of anti racism strategies as they are contended, intended, implemented and experienced; their historical antecedents and their consequences. In discussing the mind boggling nature of just such a project David Goldberg (1993, p.225) argued that:

Ultimately resisting racist exclusions in the wide array of their manifestations is akin to guerilla war. It will involve, often unpopularly, hit and run sorts of skirmishes against specific targets, identified practices, and their rhetoric of rationalisation; against prejudices and institutional rules; against pregnant silences and unforseen outbursts

Nevertheless, it is only through grasping these new lens that inroads to understanding the contested and ambivalent nature of racism and anti racism strategies can finally be made.