

Research Article

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Racial complaint and sovereign divergence: the case of Australia's first Indigenous ophthalmologist

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Abstract

This is a reflective piece that examines the nature of racial complaint with reference to Dr Kris Rallah-Baker's concerns about the racism that characterised his medical education. It will further examine the anti-racist campaign that sprung up in support of Rallah-Baker with a view to illustrating the limits of conventional critical race theory in understanding the course of events. Using the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Gramsci and Stuart Hall, it will be argued that the Rallah-Baker case illustrates that Australian hegemonic formations can never quite command total legitimacy because sovereign formations, anti-racist in outlook, erupt with a frequency and facticity that lay bare the conceit of settler-colonialism. In so doing the paper will work towards an understanding of the critical Indigenous/race paradigm that goes beyond critical race insights borne of other places and experiences. As will be seen, what followed Rallah-Baker's complaint, the campaign that supported him and the concessions finally won was not, as critical race theory is wont to claim, a case simply of 'interest convergence'; rather it was, I propose, an example of 'sovereign divergence'.

Too many years
Beatin' at the door-
I done beat my
Both fists sore.

Too many years
Tryin' to get up there –
Done broke my ankles down.
Got nowhere.

Too many years
Climbin' that hill,
'Bout out of breath.
I got my fill.

I'm gonna plant my feet
On solid ground.
If you want to see me,
Come down.

Down Where I Am,
Langston Hughes (1950)

The Commonwealth Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 (NATSHIP) has, as one of its key objectives, 'a health system free of racism and inequality' (Australian Government, 2013, p. 8). It is an objective that seeks to enhance efforts to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by means of meeting the Closing the Gap health targets and the discharge Australia's obligations under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). That racism is considered explicitly as factor in the reproduction of health inequalities is a considerable advance over the position that a range of poor behaviours can at least partly explain these egregious disparities (Bond and Singh, 2020). However, just how racism precipitates these outcomes is poorly understood, rendering the challenge of ridding the health system of racism in ten years (the span of NATSHIP) to the merely aspirational as opposed to the practical. Work has begun to chart the ways race works to structure health care (Paradies, 2006; Bond *et al.*, 2019), but we have much ground to make up compared to those who have long instituted the study of race in academy such as the USA and the UK. As a crude measure of just how far behind Australia has fallen, I was conferred a British Master's degree in Race and Ethnic Studies in

1990. It is now 30 years later, and I cannot determine whether any such qualification was on offer in the Australian Social Sciences then or since.

Regardless whether race is studied, it often comes as a surprise to educational institutions that they themselves are marked by a penumbra of racialisation in which curriculum, pedagogy and employment all work, either through commission or omission or a combination of both, to give race local meaning. These meanings can give rise to racial antagonisms that occasionally come to light in the starkest of terms; none more so than those framed by the 'racial complaint': a protestation against racism. Here the antagonism is embodied, captured by a singular, courageous race-based complaint that must be heard beyond a default defensiveness if rectitude and reconciliation are eventually to be reaffirmed as institutional virtues. The personal cost to the student complainant and the way in which that experience and outcome are understood, reflect how we understand race to be operationalised in educational settings and beyond. Is it enough to borrow from theorisations elsewhere to understand race in this place, or do we need a 'home grown' theorisation of race that goes beyond hackneyed, northern hemispheric concerns with race as a social construction, race as an epiphenomenon of class struggle or race as US critical race theory? Such a local theorisation might help us to better understand the example of the racial complaint discussed below, that of Dr Kris Rallah-Baker and concerning the education he received as a trainee ophthalmologist at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO). At present however, the conceptual tools available to understand the outcome of this complaint, and the framing of the protestation have been cast elsewhere. As such, we run the danger of failing to grasp the full political import of complaint and the work done and cost borne by making known personal dissatisfaction. Race locally also needs to inform race internationally, so let us make a start.

'Australian' race—a personal reflection

In this place race is so much more than a marker of difference: it marks an 'originary', dispossessive racial violence (Watson, 2009, p. 45) that is the foundation of the social formation that in turn is the object of Australian sociological, political and anthropological study and thought. Quite how this has escaped even those who adopt progressive positions in their research is astounding. Where did 'race' go for these scholars? In what might just be an answer we have instead a push for centres celebrating western civilisational accomplishments and that furtively take the 'Other' as the measure of those accomplishments (Gilroy, 1993). Is this the conception of race that we must contend, one dressed in triumphalism and embossed with white supremacy? This is one take on race, lately popular as revisionist histories of empire emerge to recast imperial adventures as mostly benign (Gopal, 2019, p. 1). The other 'race', that of subjugation is still there also. It suffuses our *weltschmerz* and is confined to a spectral existence. It haunts, in the case of my own institution, the cloisters of a Sandstone through lapidary Aboriginal faces and bodies, and in the ghostly echoes of another St Lucia,¹ that of sugar plantations and Gold

Coast and Igbo chattel. This 'race' is one that is cast as esoteric and recondite, a folk horror that requires sequestering so as to keep the sociological imagination largely free of reminders of white privilege. Yet, this is the 'race' that is increasingly sought by those for whom the phenomenon structures their life worlds in subordination. Here there is a growing demand to understand how is power is configured in ways that precipitate the same adverse social, economic and political outcomes over and over again. Agency is being reclaimed in these calls for the study of 'race' and that may well be the central reason why these calls have gone largely unheeded.

As the subheading indicates, this paper is a reflective piece. It does not seek to burnish its facility with race theory, which is just as well as I have never claimed to know 'race' in the way of scholarly articles, books and conference presentations. Instead, I know 'race' as one who has been 'raced' and who in turn has used 'race' as a means to foster solidarity; who has worked in 'race' for all of his professional life: as a community organiser, caseworker, policy advisor and now, extremely precariously, as a researcher. I do have an interest in the ways the Australian academy has approached the study of race and how Black communities and those of colour have had to compensate for the institutional neglect of a field that has thrived in elite institutions elsewhere and against whom wanting institutions here claim to compare. Proxies such as 'diversity' and 'reconciliation' have only partially served, as has the discrete 'race' lecture that has lately been squeezed between those on gender and class. Supplementing these meagre offerings postgraduates have understandably turned to US race scholarship, particularly critical race theory. With no corpus of Australian critical race theory to call upon, short cuts to race critical insights in this place are entirely to be expected, though the extent to which key concepts from without can adequately capture the nature of race as deployed here is open to debate.

I am joining this debate with a meditation on an all too common feature of the raced experience, that of the racial complaint. Prompted by the particular and important example of Kris Rallah-Baker, I am interested in the affective dimensions of the racial complaint and in the forms of Indigenous anti-racism called upon to support the complainant. This then leads to me to consider whether one popular critical race theory concept, that of 'interest convergence', can capture both the affective dimension of the real-life complaint referred to and the anti-racist campaign that followed. I argue that this concept, and by extension much of critical race theory developed elsewhere, limits how we view the outcome of Indigenous racial struggle and the effectiveness of anti-racist struggle in this place. The discussion, then, seeks to domesticate race so that it is legible in this settler-colonial context without immediate recourse to the USA. Both race theory and critical Indigenous studies are used to make sense of an episode of health racism which eventually resulted in a satisfactory settlement for all parties. In highlighting this example in this way, the paper hopes to make a modest contribution to the largely fugitive efforts to develop a race and Indigeneity research paradigm in Australia.

Racial complaint

Dr Kris Rallah-Baker is Australia's first Indigenous ophthalmologist and Director of the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association (AIDA). Rallah-Baker was concerned with the racism that marked the medical education and training delivered by the RANZCO and expressed these concerns in a keynote plenary he

¹The University of Queensland (UQ) is located in St Lucia, Queensland, named after the island in the Caribbean where in the 18th and 19th centuries west African slaves toiled on sugar plantations. William Alexander Wilson, born on the Caribbean island in 1863, would later migrate to Queensland where he purchased land, named the area St Lucia and set up a sugar plantation.

was invited to give at the Moving Beyond the Frontline: The National Conference on Indigenous Health Workforce Leadership, held in Brisbane, 2 November 2018. The conference brought together Indigenous health leaders from across the Australian health system in order to reflect on the transformative presence of a rapidly growing Indigenous health workforce. Rallah-Baker's keynote plenary exhorted more Indigenous people to consider studying medicine but tempered his call by making reference to 'direct and unashamed racism' he suffered during his medical training. Seeking to highlight his experience in a constructive fashion, Rallah-Baker had previously penned an article for the magazine *Insight News*, RANZCO's professional magazine. Here he set out his concerns which included the failure of RANZCO to recruit a single Indigenous trainee since 2009. In response RANZCO issued a rebarbative response that did nothing to acknowledge much less allay Rallah-Baker's concerns.

At this point this article would have ideally reproduced, at least in part, RANZCO's response so as to give an indication of the nature of their objections to Rallah-Baker's complaint. Unfortunately, hyperlinks to both Rallah-Baker's *Insight* article and the college's response lead to the same page which reads: 'Oops, page not found. Sorry! We could not find your page. Perhaps searching can help'. Two broken links concerned with the same issue suggests that the article and the response have been intentionally removed. Quite why this should have occurred is of course a matter of conjecture, though a concern with reputational damage does immediately spring to mind. It is regrettable that the college did not see fit to leave the 'offending' documents available for inspection. As was pointed out to RANZCO in a letter from Rallah-Baker's supporters, this was a 'teachable moment', an opportunity to openly receive a critical and telling insight that 'enlightens'. Extending the teaching analogy, RANZCO did not follow the pedagogical injunction, endlessly repeated in the study of mathematics, to 'show your workings' in order to demonstrate how we arrived at our answer.

At the risk of facetiousness, replacing 'Maths' with 'Policy' seems apposite in this context. Showing your 'workings' in policy through dedicated sections on background/context works to reinforce the rationale for the policy intervention. In the case of RANZCO, a constructive response was afforded but, to judge by the absence of key documents, the college would appear reluctant to explain how they arrived at their position. In this way institutional virtue remains intact but not an accurate public record which can be later called upon in the event that the organisation relegates the policy. Furthermore, Rallah-Baker's instrumental contribution to RANZCO's position is elided, with no sense of his altruism or the personal cost he had to bear in bringing the institution round to a more progressive position.

One document that remains in the public domain is the supporting statement issued by Professor David Tipene-Leach, Chair of Te Ohu Rata ō Aotearoa (Māori Medical Practitioners Association) (2018), who was critical of college's initial response to Rallah-Baker's concerns:

'RANZCO's response is not really the best effort it could have made. It didn't for a single instant acknowledge the simple humanity of Kristopher Rallah-Baker's observations. Kris didn't say, when referring to RANZCO, that RANZCO are doing nothing—he just noted that RANZCO have not recruited an Aboriginal trainee since 2009. True statement. [The CEO] was overly defensive of the College—he might have preferred a simple "I hear that it has not been good for you—and I'm sorry we were unable to fix the system in your time". After the

acknowledgement is the time to tell us all about the things that RANZCO is now doing in policy, in coordination of care, in cultural awareness and in seeking appropriate funding for Aboriginal eye care'.

To this we can add Rallah-Baker himself who, in a personal communication (03/03/2020), recalls his principal concerns with his training and the immediate response of the college:

'In essence, I made statements about the health system in general, institutionalised racism and the overall lack of cultural safety for Indigenous trainees across generic colleges and hospital networks. RANZCO took specific offence to me making that statement and in their response denied my own lived experience'.

Rallah-Baker's 'lived experience' was highlighted in his keynote plenary. His audience comprised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leaders, frontline health workers and health researchers. I was one of many non-Indigenous people present and I had the task of making a record of the day's proceedings for the purpose of verbally highlighting key points at the end of the day's proceedings. Listening to the keynote plenary I declined to take extensive notes and chose instead to listen. The room settled and listened respectfully. He had turned to community.

As a former government case worker and policy advisor, in both the UK and Australia, and whose responsibility it was to advance race quality and resolve complaints in range of areas including social housing, education and Social Services, Rallah-Baker's story was all too familiar, as was the evident toll taken as a consequence of speaking out. From my experience of working with hundreds of complainants, be it of racial violence, police violence, discrimination and institutional neglect, we narrate our experiences of racism, both personal and institutional, to ourselves, family and community in the first instance. We do this in order to make sense of what is happening to us and to seek affirmation from those we trust. I recall victims of racial violence and their family advocates presenting me with dog-eared pages that listed in the complainant's determined hand, the various racist indignities they had suffered. The pages listed verbal racist abuse, assault, property damage and police indifference and were offered as a record of their 'lived experience'; a *testamur* of their racial victimisation.

After working as a community advocate, I joined municipal efforts to address racism as a caseworker. We were required to take these truths and record them on standard reporting proforma. In so doing, because of the restrictive template headings, the 'who', 'what' and 'where' of incidents, we winnowed these testimonies of affective content. The bureaucratic nature of the reporting process required the caseworker to reduce experiences to 'incidents' or discrete examples that could be ameliorated through pat institutional responses such as further household visits in order to continue to 'monitor' the situation. In atomising the complaint in this way, we rendered the complaint fissiparous so that it appeared to come apart under the scrutiny of police and bureaucrats if redress involved more than the institution was prepared to allow. The complainant's motives could be questioned such as the oft cited 'they're looking to jump the housing waiting list'.

All the while of course we never could gather enough evidence to prosecute the perpetrators and so all those reporting proformas were never adduced in legal proceedings. In social housing, we moved the victims out instead; in education we asked the parents to move their children to different schools; in policing we moved

individuals and families so that they would no longer fall within the jurisdiction of the police station (watch house) concerned and in social services, we lost our charges to the system, be it mental health, child protection, disabilities or adult care. In each instance, the *structures* and *systems* of racial oppression remained unremarked upon much less addressed.

Such policies also find it hard to reconcile their sections, bullet points and action plans to the emotional palette presented by the complainant. Stress, trauma and anxiety challenge our western, modernist perceptions that insist on emotional binaries, whilst the complainant will oscillate between reason, as encouraged by the policy they are being asked to rely upon, and the passion spurred by the urgency of their concerns. As the encounter between policy and complainant proceeds and no immediate satisfaction is to be had, the stress is heightened as is the defensiveness of the institution. In my case I was advised to press the literal panic button as much as with frustrated victims of racial violence as with perpetrators of racial violence who had been called in to interview to account for their actions. Faced with an institution who is seemingly deaf to appeal, complainants are disempowered, and some will wonder whether they had any recourse all along; that instead they were duped and were in fact necessary to the performance of equity rather than its substantive delivery.

At these moments, the complainant is utterly alone, and I suspect this is something of the lived experience to which Rallah-Baker refers. I have seen many 'victims' of racial violence reduced to a spectral existence, retreating beyond the reach of family and friends as their complaints run aground. Here, racial trauma marks daily existence as something to be endured, not lived. Removal away from the perpetrator(s), to a new house, school or area did not lessen the impact of the experience(s), and the roiling trauma at best was reduced to a simmer. For the institution, bureaucratic duty was satisfactorily discharged, with policy, plan and procedure again considered to be fit for purpose.

For those appointed to advance race equality agendas in these organisations, the community's scorn was clear. It was as a sop to rebellious Black communities that Black and minority ethnic professionals were appointed to well-salaried positions. Dressed as municipal anti-racism, its practitioners were derided as the 'Race Industry' and evermore damming ways were found to remind holders of Black sinecures that they did not speak for the community. This poem by Benjamin Zephaniah, entitled 'The Race Industry', captures something of the mistrust of what another commentator described as Black compradors (Sivanandan, 1990, p. 85):

'The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We despairing they careering.
We want more peace they want more police.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We say sisters and brothers don't fear,
They will do anything for the Mayor.
The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
They're looking for victims and poets to rent.
They represent me without my consent.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
In suits they dither in fear of anarchy.
They take our sufferings and earn a salary.
Steal our souls and make their documentaries.

Inform daily on our community.

Without Black suffering they'd have no jobs.

Without our dead they'd have no office.

Without our tears they'd have no drink.

If they stopped sucking we could get justice.

The coconuts are getting paid.

Men, women and Brixton are being betrayed.'

Zephaniah (2008)

Appointed to redress race inequality within white dominated institutions, be it in terms of service delivery or human resources, we console ourselves at the beginning of our tenure that we are the ones that can finally effect institutional change and that the 'racial complaint', when it comes, will be safely shepherd by us. The community will at first assume empathy on our part and will approach us with a degree of hope not previously felt. We listen intently and bear witness to tears of anger and frustration. We promise resolution and set about advocating on behalf of the complainant to the organisation, harnessing the very same policies our complainant had attempted to use. The difference this time is that we are there; we will make *the* difference. We do not of course. We are, as Angela Davis said, 'the difference as makes no difference, the change that brings about no change' (Davis quoted in Younge, 2007).

To be sure, we may have initial success, but the complaints keep coming and the institution begins to take a dim view of our advocacy. We are then entreated with greater rewards that attend those who are 'model minorities'; we are enlisted in the greater project described lucidly by Fanon:

'In capitalist societies the educational system, whether lay or clerical, the structure of moral reflexes handed from father to son, the exemplary honesty of workers who are given a medal after fifty years of good and loyal service, and the affection which springs from harmonious relations and good behaviour—all these aesthetic expressions of respect for the established order serve to create around the exploited person an atmosphere and of submission which lightens the task of policing considerably....The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native'. (Fanon, 1977, p. 29)

I resigned from such roles on more than one occasion but not before advising complainants to contact community groups as way of securing more effective advocates. For the complainant, reaching for a wider empathetic constituency who bear witness to their pain serves powerfully to challenge relegating practices that subject the Black body to inhumanisation. A relatively small number of such complaints turn into fully fledged campaigns for racial justice. I too have been a part of these of these campaigns where community mobilisation sought legal redress such as the conviction of the perpetrator or a judicial inquiry finding that radically alters the policy environment, such as Macpherson definition of institutional racism² that would later require all public bodies, including the police, to adopt the definition and draw up action plans to remediate discriminatory practices (Home Office (United Kingdom), 1999).

²The definition arrived at by Macpherson is as follows: 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people' (Home Office, 1999, para 6.34).

Anti-racism

In Rallah-Baker's case the keynote plenary was a direct appeal to community as much as it was a catalogue of his concerns. His address was marked by the assertion of his lived experience. At that moment and later in the anti-racist campaign that followed, he was no longer the lonely figure of Australia's first Indigenous ophthalmologist. He was, as an Indigenous colleague explained, with 'mob' and so no longer 'first' and alone. The campaign itself was remarkable for its speed and its effective repudiation of RANZCO's position. A letter dated 8 November 2018 was drafted by prominent Indigenous health leaders and sent to, amongst others, to the President, President-elect and Chief Operating Officer of RANZCO. The letter noted the 'great risk' Rallah-Baker had taken personally and professionally to speak publicly about his experiences of racism and bullying during his training. RANZCO's position was then set against the backdrop of the principal finding of the Moving Beyond the Frontline conference, namely that racism was a central workforce challenge for Indigenous health professionals across the health system. RANZCO was held up to be a case in point, forcing the body on to the backfoot and upsetting any sense of moral rectitude that it may have harboured.

The letter further proceeded to point out that RANZCO's eager dismissal of Rallah-Baker's concerns was particularly egregious given that a 2016 Accreditation Report into the Training and Education programmes offered by the college had failed to meet a number of expected standards (Australian Medical Council, 2016). These included: 'Standard 1.6.4 effective partnerships in Indigenous health sector; Standard 3.2.9 curriculum develops understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori health, history and cultures; Standard 3.2.10 curriculum develops understanding of relationship between culture and health; and Standard 7.1.3 supports increased recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/ or Māori trainees'. The letter additionally noted that a 2015 RANZCO commissioned report found that 50% of Trainees/Registrars reported experiencing discrimination, bullying sexual harassment or harassment; and further, that 84.8% of respondents recollected that they had not received any training to deal with those behaviours in the last 5 years.

In light of these findings, the letter expressed regret that RANZCO had not recognised Rallah-Baker's concerns as a teachable moment in how to respond and address racism in the Australian health system, and had instead chosen to go on the defensive:

'Racism remains a real workplace issue and a very real health issue for Indigenous peoples and ignoring it is counterproductive to ensuring patient safety and is a clear breach of the college's standards of accreditation'.

The letter would conclude with a number of actions that RANZCO was urged to undertake, namely, an unreserved apology from the RANZCO CEO and board for 'its callous disregard of his experiences and bullying and the attempt to publicly undermine his integrity and commitment to his profession and people'; an independently facilitated discussion with Rallah-Baker to 'review and meaningfully address the concerns he has raised' as well an indication of the 'specific strategies it has in place to safely support its members reporting discrimination, harassment and bullying, and what consequences arise from such behaviours';

and the steps to be taken to ensure a 'sufficient practical and theoretical understanding of what constitutes a culturally safe ophthalmology as experienced by providers of care as well as its recipients'.

Following the conference Croakey, the social journalism on-line project concerned with investigations of health issues and policy, covered the Indigenous health leaders' letter and helpfully provided links to the key documents in the paper trail marking the complaint, including the aforementioned letter, Rallah-Baker's original article in *Insight News*, and the college's initial response (Singh and Sweet, 2018). The letter to RANZCO was circulated widely on social media and this, together with Croakey's capture of the conference hashtag Twitter stream, which amplified criticism of RANZCO, meant that the college had no option but to respond positively to this sudden scrutiny by offering a range of remedial measures.

The measures and the current position of RANZCO were later set out by Rallah-Baker in a personal communication (03/03/2020). Since the conference in 2018, the board and senior management have undergone two rounds of cultural safety training in 2019, and a commitment has been given to embedding an ongoing programme of cultural safety training. RANZCO has also drafted and launched a Reconciliation Action Plan and has further pledged to continue efforts to improve the college's culture so that the journey of reconciliation can be realised. For Rallah-Baker, the mood is positive, and he is keen to congratulate the college on the efforts it has made since his concerns were first raised and the community campaign that followed.

From a general anti-racist perspective the campaign that sprung up around Rallah-Baker was surely a success if, by anti-racism, we adopt Bonnett's simple definition that 'anti-racism is broadly "those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and or ameliorate racism"' (Bonnett, 1999, p. 4). RANZCO's position was certainly opposed and their subsequent actions suggest that lessons have been learned. It is also important to accept Rallah-Baker's assessment of the current position, as it was he that braved speaking out and it is he that has since been closely involved in advising RANZCO on how to proceed.

In briefly anatomising the campaign, we can see it was remarkable for the spectacle of the community standing full square behind 'a proud Yuggeral and Birri-Gubba-Juru man'; for the speed of its deployment and for the way it calmly held up a mirror to RANZCO own failings using the first-hand experience of Rallah-Baker in combination with the findings of the accreditation reports. Croakey's role was also crucial for the way it first covered Rallah-Baker's concerns, sought comment from the college and then harnessed the Twitter stream to press home the indignation felt by the community. The campaign also harnessed the 'health system free of racism and inequality' key objective contained in the Commonwealth Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Action Plan. This served to lend the campaign the imprimatur of the commonwealth when holding RANZCO to account for its inaction. Such levers are welcomed by advocates as a means to force institutional change, but there is also an acknowledgement on the part of the same that they are also forged and deployed at the leisure of dominant institutions and so cannot be relied upon sole as means of securing racial justice. Nevertheless, this combination of actions served to unsettle and decentre a professional body and college sporting the signifier 'Royal', no small feat when considering the continuing invocation of the crown when framing and implementing all manner of policy

interventions in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Sovereign divergence

So how then can 'race theory' explain this concatenation. If we are to rely on critical race theory, we would not have to dig too deep before holding aloft the concept of 'interest convergence'. Interest convergence was an idea developed by the critical race theorist Derrick Bell, who posited that the 'majority group tolerates advances for social justice only when it suits its interests to do so' (Delgado and Stefaniec, 2012, p. 149). Put another way, because racism serves the material interests of white people, they mostly have little interest in ameliorating that which benefits them. However, when the racism is intermittently addressed, say structurally through the introduction of legislation and policy, it is because social and economic circumstances are having an adverse impact upon white material interests, rather than any compulsion brought about a refined, civilisational sense of morality. In this framing, civil rights legislation, equity policies and reconciliation plans amount to a topical application; a balm securing temporary relief from an irritant that distracts from the perpetuation of white supremacy. The RANZCO example, then, is a textbook case of interest convergence where self-interested concessions are wrung from the settler colonial state so as to preserve more substantive and enduring racialised power relations. We surely can do better.

In relying on US scholarship to provide a shorthand for understanding what is happening we neglect to fully map the contours of racism as it operates here. Racism is not immanent in the sense that there is one fixed and unchanging expression borne of spatial and temporal conditions everywhere; there is no 'a priorism' (Hall, 2000, p. 210), yet we continue to work with conceptual tools made for racialised social formations not of this place and time. As Hall argues when outlining a *politically relevant* theoretical paradigm, '[ra]cism [here] is not dealt with as a general feature of human societies, but with historically specific racisms. Beginning with an assumption of difference, of specificity rather than of a unitary, transhistorical universal "structure"' (Hall, 2019, p. 210). The smothering blanket of 'interest convergence' tells us nothing of this moment; whether there is an opportunity at all to 'shake things up' through struggle. Interest convergence in this light signals an end to struggle rather than its renewed continuation.

Relatedly there is a failure to grasp the specificity of an anti-racist praxis that has developed in response to the moment. Bonnett's typology of anti-racism (Bonnett, 2000, pp. 84–114) is a useful starting point when surveying the various expressions but it cannot capture the texture of anti-racist expressions, its waft and weave. By this I mean the *dramatis personae* of a campaign or initiative: those who show leadership and whether they work inclusively or not; the courage of those who take a stand and the costs to physical and mental well-being that follows; and the calculations of those who shy away from confrontation and the reasons they adduce for their more conciliatory position. Then there is the consideration of how racism is understood and the nature of anti-racism campaigns they dictate; the role of community in affirming a campaign and the ways opposition institutional opposition is marshalled and deployed; and finally, the gains and losses when a final reckoning is made, and the ways in which key learnings are captured for the benefit of those who will continue the struggle.

The most egregious omission from the compass of interest convergence and critical race theory in general is the significance

of Indigeneity and decisive role played by Indigenous sovereignty in anti-racist struggle. Race theory in its broadest sense, from critical race theory to the sociology of race, cannot conceive of sovereignty much less fail to capture it, and even when reminded that it is a suppressed feature of the social formation, struggles to find a place for it when further reminded that *equality* is not the endgame of a forcibly dispossessed First Nations Peoples.

The present critical race lens we peer through, then, when attempting to comprehend race in this place affords us a distorted myopic interpretation. A different set, one that combines a broad race theory with a critical Indigenous studies focus, where sovereignty is foundational and theorised *through*, would yield clearer view of the ways anti-racism in this place is unique. What was previously taken to be a series of interest convergences are now regarded differently as are the conceptual tools that we were obliged to use up until this point. Below, I attempt to tentatively model this approach with respect to the example of Rallah-Baker and the campaign that supported him.

In an important essay entitled 'The Multicultural Question' Stuart Hall (2000, pp. 209–224) discusses the signifier 'multicultural' and what this key term means generally and in relation to contemporary British society. The essay at once provides a sophisticated way of understanding the significance of the campaign that sprung up in support of Rallah-Baker, and also an example of the way northern hemispheric race theorising is blind to settler-colonialism, Indigeneity and the import of sovereignty. Of importance for our purposes is Hall's discussion of the way contemporary globalisation is marked by a dominant cultural impulse to homogenise. This tendency cannot be fully realised however because its effects are felt unevenly within and between societies because of such factors as different cultural traditions and degrees of resistance to globalising entreaty. Globalisation then is not a process that works inexorably to flatten difference. Instead, as Hall describes it, globalisation works principally as a hegemonising process in the Gramscian sense³:

'It is structured in dominance, but it cannot control or saturate everything within its orbit. Indeed, it produces as one of its unintended effects subaltern formations and emergent tendencies which cannot control but must try to "hegemonize" or harness to its wider purposes. It is a system for *con-forming* difference, rather than a convenient synonym for the obliteration of difference'. (Hall, 2000, p. 215)

This hegemonising process is similar to interest convergence described above in that 'it works by partially accommodating or incorporating the subordinate elements of society rather than simply stamping them down' (Procter, 2004, p. 26). Yet this process has nothing of the seamlessness that interest convergence appears to invoke. Whilst white interests, or the 'ruling bloc' as Hall would have it, have succeeded in *con-forming* difference through a convergence of interests, the bloc must continually work to maintain hegemony because it is a process that can never settle and is forever incomplete. Compounding this sense of insufficiency is what Hall describes as the 'subaltern proliferation of difference' where the globalising project is deflected through stubborn, local vernaculars of difference. Hall calls upon Derrida's notion of *différance* to illustrate this struggle as

³James Procter is an accessible commentator on Hall. He stresses the importance of Gramsci's idea of hegemony to Hall's thinking and defines Gramscian hegemony as describing 'the *process* of establishing dominance within a culture, but not by brute force but by voluntary consent, by leadership rather than rule' (Procter, 2004, p. 26).

'the playing movement that produces... these differences, these effects of difference' (Hall, 2000, p. 216). He points out that this is not the traditionally accepted binary form of difference between what is absolutely the same and what is absolutely 'Other'; rather, it is what he describes as a "weave" of similarities and differences that will not divide into fixed oppositions' (p. 216). The outcome of his position is that 'meaning here has no origin or final destination, cannot be finally fixed, is always *in process*, "positional" along a spectrum. Its political value cannot be essentialized, but only relationally determined' (Hall, 2000, p. 216). Hall's stress on the 'play' of subaltern difference as a spur to continued hegemonising efforts means that there will never be an inauguration of a new set of power relations in which the subordinate class finds favour.

Hall's argument is cogent but only partial because it is written from a place where post-war Commonwealth migration is a feature of the social formation and so must be qualified and/or adapted before it can be used to assist in thinking about other settings. In the British context, multiculturalism, whether by policy prescription or simple demographic description, appears contingent on the grace and favour of the ruling bloc. In these circumstances ethnic minorities are reduced to pleading tenure time and time again, with the subaltern 'play' of difference, often no more than saris, steel bands and samosas, harnessed to maintain the fiction of belonging, whilst simultaneously fostering an environment hostile to immigration and settlement (Goodfellow, 2020, p. 2).

In Australia the ruling bloc itself does not belong, and Indigenous sovereignty was never ceded. This foundational illegitimacy means hegemonising efforts are principally directed at the settlers, whilst Indigenous Australia is openly subjugated. Hall never considered how his understanding of Gramsci would fare against the backdrop of a settler-colonial society, where, because of the facticity of sovereignty, binaries stubbornly remain. I would like to think that the notion of unceded sovereignty would have given him pause for thought, especially as parsed here by Moreton-Robinson:

'Our sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded in complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land. In this sense, our sovereignty is carried by the body and differs from western constructions of sovereignty, which are predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity and individual rights' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007, p. 2).

Moreton-Robinson declines to offer 'a quintessential definition' of Indigenous sovereignty but does confirm that it has 'multiple manifestations'. Hegemonising processes, then, be they global or those of the Australian political order, would struggle to pinpoint where sovereignty lies because of its prismatic nature. You cannot incorporate what refuses to give notice of its precise domicile beyond being in evidence everywhere and at all times; its immanency cannot be conceived much less harnessed to hegemonising imperatives.

As Moreton-Robinson indicates, specific manifestations of sovereignty do appear and Rallah-Baker's turn to community appears to be an example. His keynote plenary, call and response in effect, sought to affirm sovereignty in the face of an organisation that sported the appellation 'Royal' and that felt it had done enough to accommodate 'difference'. The call was answered by the campaign that followed, and the resulting outcomes threw

sovereignty into sharp relief. The episode cannot be easily dismissed as one of interest convergence. It had none of the fatalism that seems to freight the concept. Instead this was an example of what I can only describe as *sovereign divergence*, confirming that a settler hegemony structured in dominance is ontologically impossible much less total. An epigraph quoting Michael Mansell at the beginning of Moreton-Robinson's introduction to the collection *Indigenous Sovereignty Matters: Sovereign Subjects*, captures far more legitimately than I what sovereign divergence presages:

'We are the first people of this land. We have suffered every indignity ever meted out to a people. Yet our strength is in our determination. We did not consent to the taking of our land, nor the establishment of the nation of Australia on our country. Our consent to being subsumed within the Australian nation was neither sought nor given. Our sovereign rights as a people remain intact. By virtue of those sovereign rights we are the sole decision-makers about what we need and will accept'. (Mansell quoted in Moreton-Robinson, 2007, p. 1)

Racial complaint, education as a key site of Indigenous struggle and unceded sovereignty make for a powerful combination that should not be reduced to terms and concepts engendered by oppressions and horrors marking other social formations. The raw material of struggle in this place is abundant and we need only shift our optics in order to refine the race and Indigeneity paradigm that has long been understood by Indigenous communities outside of the academy.

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