

Taylor, E. (2009). The foundations of critical race theory in education: An introduction. In E. Taylor, D. Gillborn, & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *The foundations of critical race theory in education* (pp. 1–13). New York: Routledge.

Wadham, B., Pudsey, J. & Boyd, R. (2007). 'We grew here ... you flew here': Race, nation and education. In B. Wadham, J. Pudsey, & R. Boyd. (Eds.), *Culture and Education* (pp. 167–211). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Pearson Education.

The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race

Alison Ravenscroft

Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, England, 2012, 195 pp, ISBN 9781409430780

Reviewed by Alan Han, School of English, Media Studies and Art History, The University of Queensland, Australia.

Email: a.han@uq.edu.au

doi 10.1017/jie.2012.34

Postcolonial studies has been critiqued by many Indigenous studies and critical race and whiteness studies scholars for its inadequate theorisations of race and Indigenous sovereignty. Building on many of these critiques, Alison Ravenscroft's *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race* is an important contribution to understandings of race and postcoloniality in Australia. Using the theme of the 'visual field of race', Ravenscroft examines historical writing and literature about and by Indigenous people, to argue that there are cultural divides between settlers and Indigenous people that remain perpetually unbridgeable, and out of the white subject's field of vision. According to Ravenscroft, 'modern Indigenous cultures remain in significant ways profoundly, even bewilderingly, strange and unknowable within the terms of settlers' epistemologies' (p. 1). Examining the white Australian subject's sense of out-of-placeness, Ravenscroft asks: are there alternative 'ways of seeing' that might make it possible for a white subject to 'approach Indigenous cultural practices as a stranger or foreigner might'? Is there a way for the white subject to see the Indigenous subject without trespassing or colonising, but instead by 'acknowledging radical difference' and Indigenous sovereignty?

Ravenscroft approaches these theoretical questions by drawing upon the colonial archive and Australian literature. For the most part, theories of race and vision are condensed in the book's first three chapters. While these theories could have been further developed throughout the book, Ravenscroft is more concerned with illuminating particular passages and descriptions of Indigenous people and their culture, to expose the limits of white settler discourse and interpretations of the Australian landscape. Ravenscroft employs a method of critique throughout her book that aims to interrogate the often heavily loaded genre of white settler writing, as exemplified in her study of Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs groundbreaking book, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (1998). According to Ravenscroft,

Gelder and Jacobs install a white settler sensibility and sense of belonging by reading an 'Aboriginal settlement' as a 'homestead' instead of as a place of Indigenous dispossession and colonisation. Ravenscroft argues that Gelder and Jacobs frame Aboriginal belonging through the lens of the white settler through which Aboriginal people appear to be only at home in 'the white man's home instead of their own?' (p. 85). This notion of the blurred white settler vision is developed throughout the book.

To expose the limits of white settler literary criticism, Ravenscroft examines Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997) and *Carpentaria* (2006). White scholars, as Ravenscroft notes, have failed to acknowledge the 'unimaginable, invisible ... gaps and holes' and the 'particular places where a white reader might remain blind before' Wright's work (p. 45). Although this particular section of Ravenscroft's book would probably only appeal to literary theorists, her theorisation of 'white reading practices' will have a wider appeal to critical race studies scholars by showing that whiteness is embodied in how white settlers read Indigenous-signed texts. As Ravenscroft asserts, even though many Australian literary critics acknowledge that Indigenous texts cannot be completely understood by white readers, 'still the idea persists that white subjects can know the meaning of Indigenous-signed texts and the intentions of their authors, if only we are careful and canny enough' (p. 47). According to Ravenscroft, white settler literary critics should not seek to 'know' the Indigenous subject through literature, but rather acknowledge the imperfections and partiality of white settler vision. This perhaps is the most unsettling aspect of writing by Indigenous people that Ravenscroft suggests might productively enable white settler scholars to account for their own whiteness.

While the notion of blurred White vision is developed persuasively throughout the book, it is surprising that Ravenscroft does not devote as much attention to photographs as she does to literature. For this reason, the book will perhaps belong on a literary studies shelf, although

historians and anthropologists may find crucial insight in her close-readings of W.E.H. Stanner's anthropological writings and Rita Huggins' personal correspondence with the Superintendent at Cherbourg, William Porteus Semple, in the 1940s. Nevertheless, Ravenscroft's deftness at moving between contemporary Australian literature, literary criticism and the colonial archive is one of the book's strengths. Yet, for a book that deploys the 'visual field of race' as its central theme, it is disappointing that only one chapter — Chapter 8: 'Matron always carried a small whip' — explores photographs of Indigenous people. In this chapter, Ravenscroft examines the work of amateur white photographer, Agnes Semple, who took a keen interest in photographing Indigenous people at Cherbourg mission in the 1920s and 1930s. Ravenscroft's argument that Semple's highly staged photographs offer whites a scene of 'their own narcissism' (p. 128), most clearly encapsulate the book's argument, which would have been most useful at the beginning of the book, rather than towards the end.

For those interested in exploring questions of how white settler subjects can engage with writing about and by Indigenous people, this book is certainly worth reading. The theoretical questions that Ravenscroft raises will enable this book to have a wide appeal to many scholars, especially those with an interest in postcolonial studies, critical race and whiteness studies, and of course, literary studies. The case studies in the book and Ravenscroft's focus on close-readings rather than on theory, makes this book easy to read and accessible to many readers.

References

- Gelder, K., & Jacobs, J. (1998). *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and identity in a postcolonial nation*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.
- Wright, A. (1997). *Plains of promise*. Brisbane, Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Wright, A. (2006) *Carpentaria*. Sydney, Australia: Giramondo Publishing Group.

Belonging Together: Dealing With the Politics of Disenchantment in Australian Indigenous Policy

Patrick Sullivan

Aboriginal Studies Press, Acton, ACT, 2011, 192 pp, ISBN 10 0855757809

Reviewed by Ian Mackie, Austeur Enterprises Pty Ltd formerly an Assistant Director General with the Queensland Education Department. Email: mackieian0@gmail.com

doi 10.1017/jie.2012.35

At the outset I wish to welcome this book. It is a timely intervention in the Indigenous policy debate. Admittedly there is very little in the book about education, nevertheless it does provide us with the means for a critical engagement with policy, which is badly needed in this the post-ATSIC and Native title era.

The key question that Sullivan sets out to address is: 'How can we move towards a public policy philosophy in which Aboriginal and settler interests converge, without either perpetuating second-class separate development in the name of self-determination or effacing Aboriginal differences?' (pp. 1–2).

What is crucial for me here is the framing of Aboriginal and settler. It is a welcome reminder to all non-Indigenous Australians that we are indeed settlers and that there is a particular dynamic to the ways in which settlers tend to recognise and therefore behave towards the Indigenous populations that they conquer and dispossess. Central to that dynamic I would argue is the tendency to see the dispossessed as the Despised or Pitiful/Childlike or Comical or Resented or Exotic Other.

Sullivan outlines three main policy approaches — assimilation, self-determination and what he terms 'norma-

lisation', which tends to swerve towards assimilation. The arguments around self-determination currently receive a good deal of attention. This has led to a 'disenchantment' among the public with regard to Indigenous policy. It would be naïve here to believe that powerful interests have not played a role in creating that same disenchantment. Nevertheless, the continuation of Indigenous disadvantage constitutes a powerful argument for policy change.

I would like to add that the process of disenchantment, especially in the field of education, generally takes the form of the narrative 'we have tried everything and nothing works'. I have always found this a strange position because, as Hattie's research shows, almost everything works in education. Generally, however, it is fairly easy to get to the ideological basis of the narrative by asking 'Well, what exactly have you tried?' and then refusing to take 'everything' as an answer.

There are several mentions of Sutton's (2009) *The Politics of Suffering* as there might well be, given its public prominence. Sullivan, in my opinion, is overly kind to Sutton's book. To my mind, Sutton's work is marred above all by a total absence of any attempt to answer what should be done. The advocacy of culture as a resource raises the