

Who is Australian? National belonging and exclusion in Australian history textbooks

Abstract

Although multiculturalism replaced the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, the Australian nation continues to be imagined predominantly as a White space from which Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and peoples of non-White immigrant heritage are excluded. Whereas White people's positioning as Australian is secure and taken-for-granted, non-White peoples' Australianness is fraught and tentative. In this article, I employ critical whiteness studies to explore the reproduction of racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion. Using textbooks as records of dominant narratives, I examine how Australian history narratives in secondary school textbooks produce and maintain the White solipsism which enables the nation to be imagined as White.

From a sample of 16 texts released this century by a leading Australian publisher of secondary school textbooks, I excluded ten which duplicated the content of other texts or did not cover my chosen focus: narratives of the Australia gold rushes and national identity. I conducted iterative critical discourse analysis on the remaining six texts. My analysis shows that, despite explicit attempts to improve textbook content, implicitly White solipsism is reinforced rather than disrupted. This functions to uphold constructions of the nation as White, excluding Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and peoples of non-White immigrant heritage from national belonging.

Further work is needed to ensure history narratives interrupt and contest White solipsism and its attendant privileging of White Australians. Educators raised in White societies need to recognise their likely enculturation in White solipsism and learn to avoid unintentionally reinscribing categories of national belonging and exclusion.

Key words

Textbooks, whiteness, solipsism, Australian history

Introduction

The twentieth century saw a self-conscious transition in Australia's national identity from White Australia to a multicultural nation. Nevertheless, the cultural pluralism suggested by multiculturalism is confined to 'the private domain of personal and familial lifestyle and belief' (Dutton 2002, 155). Australian multiculturalism is limited to 'a celebration of costumes, customs and cooking' (Gunew 1994, 22) while political, economic and social institutions remain overwhelmingly monocultural. The White culture of the White Australian era persists as the core, or mainstream, culture, with non-White cultures marginalised and non-Whites positioned as 'perpetual foreigners' in the nation (Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos 2004, 32). Managing multiculturalism in this way ensures that dominant whiteness is not undermined (Moore 2012). Rather, power relationships established in the colonial and White Australia eras are preserved: Australia is conceptualised as a White nation, regardless of demographic diversity and the legal status and self-understandings of non-White peoples (Vass 2016).

Imagining Australia as a White nation produces racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion. Whereas Whites are made to feel confident, comfortable and at home in 'their/our' nation, non-Whites are made to feel uncomfortable and alienated (Hage 1998). In this article, I examine performances of whiteness implicated in reproducing these concepts; in particular, enculturation in White solipsism. White solipsism refers to a standpoint in which the White perspective is implicitly (mis)interpreted as universal (Rich 1979). The implicitness of this misconception is crucial. Rather than a conscious choice to privilege one among multiple perspectives, White solipsism produces tunnel-vision in which 'only white

values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention' (Sullivan 2006, 17). Employing textbooks as records of dominant narratives, I show how White solipsism is maintained, often without conscious intent. I argue that, despite genuine improvements in textbooks, White solipsism endures, reproducing racialised categories of belonging and exclusion.

Whiteness

My theoretical framework is critical whiteness studies (Castagno 2013; Dyer 1997; Moreton-Robinson 2004). Frankenberg (1993, 6) states that whiteness is not a transhistorical essence, but 'a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced'.

Given that conceptions of whiteness are 'situationally specific' (Green, Sonn & Matsebula 2007, 393), I focus on twenty-first century manifestations of whiteness in Australia, where it is constituted in opposition to Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and non-White immigrants.

Adopting the analytical lens of White solipsism, I examine how this myopic reproduces 'conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement' resulting in the 'relations of White dominance and non-White subordination' that Ansley (1997, 592) identifies as central to whiteness.

It is important to emphasise that race is a social construction rather than a biological reality.

Discourses operate through institutionalised practice to create the races and racialised subjectivities they appear to merely describe (Gillborn & Youdell 2009). I use the term White to refer to those who, irrespective of appearance or ancestry, 'willingly and unwillingly, knowingly and unknowingly' benefit from racialised social structures which position them/us as White (Kowal 2008, 341). Correspondingly, I use non-White to refer to those who are racialised by social structures as non-White. I am mindful that arbitrarily categorising people as White/non-White is fraught. As Perry (2002, 220) notes, racial categorisations 'reduce the

whole of a person's humanity to a singular fiction that has real consequences for one's status and life chances'. Categorising people according to race also negates other axes of privilege and disadvantage such as class, gender, sexuality, religion and (dis)ability. Moreover, the terms White and non-White centre whiteness, reinscribing whiteness as the standard against which non-Whites are measured and positioning non-White as a residual category defined by what it is not.

Notwithstanding the limitations of White/non-White terminology however, this dichotomy is apposite for my analysis of the discrepancy between the positioning of these groups in Australian society. As Mills (1997, 80) argues, the White/non-White dichotomy 'really does capture the essential structure of the global racial polity'. Similarly, Sullivan (2006, 199) states that, while problematic, the term non-White fulfils the need for a term that 'broadly describes people who are disadvantaged by white privilege'. My use of these terms recognises that, in Australia, the lived experience of peoples racialised as non-White is markedly different to that of Whites (Hollinsworth 2016; Walter 2010). Moreover, by racialising Whites, I avoid the contemporary practice whereby Whites are regularly positioned as the human norm by being framed in non-raced terms, such as people, Australians or us, while racial terms such as Asian or Aboriginal continue to be applied to non-Whites. Naming whiteness, especially racialising the routinely un-raced White subject, is a central tenet of critical whiteness studies (Dyer 1997; Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004).

In a similar way to my use of White and non-White, the language I use to demonstrate and destabilise racialisation is complicit with it, in particular my use of racialised descriptors such as Aboriginal or Chinese. While I recognise troubling aspects of this practice, such as the implication that humanity can be unproblematically divided into distinct racial groups, avoiding the use of racialised descriptors altogether was not feasible. My focus on contrasting dominant and marginalised racial perspectives rendered my description of White or Chinese

perspectives functional, despite the implication of homogeneity within these ostensibly disparate groups. To clarify, when discussing the White perspective, I am referring to the dominant, solipsistic White perspective as defined in the literature. When discussing non-White perspectives, I use the plural form to indicate multiplicity and note only their absence rather than reinscribing a putatively singular, shared understanding.

In societies such as contemporary Australia in which whiteness is normalised, the beliefs and practices of whiteness are often unarticulated (Aveling 2004). White enculturation positions whiteness as universal yet imperceptible to Whites (Doering 2016; Green & Sonn 2005). The discursive practices of whiteness centre White ways of being, knowing and doing while masking whiteness through normalising these beliefs, policies and practices. This functions to create the appearance of race-neutrality and transform whiteness into a vacant social category, thereby shielding it from examination. The unnamed and unmarked nature of whiteness means that its reproduction may often be unintended. By identifying performances of whiteness, I aim to increase their visibility so that their unintended reproduction can be minimised. While my research focus is the education system, the solipsism I describe is applicable to diverse fields. I examine the education system not because it is more culpable than other social institutions but because it plays a pivotal role in social reproduction. As such, the education system is powerfully positioned to reiterate or contest problematic attitudes which circulate in broader society. Many advances in this regard are evident in the explicit content of textbooks. Nevertheless, progress has stalled and, in some cases, reversed (Moore 2020). Further progress is unlikely without an examination of implicit, and often unintentional, constructions, such as racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion (Walton et al. 2018).

By identifying performances of whiteness within texts, I aim to contribute to decolonisation. Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005, 2) state that decolonisation is the ‘intelligent, calculated and

active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies and lands'. In this article, my focus is decolonisation of our minds. I employ Mackinlay and Barney's (2014, 55) definition of decolonisation is 'a way of knowing that resists the Eurocentrism of the west'. Eurocentrism reflects a colonised mind in which White solipsism is normative and unexamined. I use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992) to highlight and disrupt this normativity, contributing to the decolonisation of Australian history narratives and conceptions of Australianness.

Education

The education system forms one of the 'white, middle-class institutions responsible for defining and sustaining a normative cultural order' (Kenny 2000, 9). Due to its positioning as a legitimate and knowledgeable authority, the education system is a key site of cultural reproduction (Wadham, Pudsey & Boyd 2007; Walton et al. 2018). The silence which normalises whiteness positions White cultural practices, such as how education is 'done', as race-neutral and meritocratic, erasing the power relations which privilege particular cultural practices over others (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughan 2007). In fields such as education, whiteness operates as an 'unacknowledged and unquestioned norm' (Freie 2014, 14) in which White epistemological, economic, political, and cultural representations hold 'unquestioned universal sovereignty' (Banerjee & Tedmanson 2010, 148), thereby negating and silencing non-White perspectives.

My decision to examine textbooks was based on their status as 'consensus documents' (Provenzo, Shaver & Bello 2011, 1), which provide a unique window into a society's authoritative and legitimate knowledge (Silverman 1992). The expression of knowledge is never a politically neutral act (Foucault 1980; Gustafson 2007). Bradford (2001, 12) states that children's texts are 'an important and neglected component of cultural formation, and

crucially implicated in the development of ideologies of race'. Similarly, Bettelheim (1977 cited Pescosolido, Grauerholz & Milkie 1997, 444) asserts that literature is 'one of the most powerful vehicles through which children assimilate their cultural heritage'. The influence of textbooks is particularly profound (Foster 1999); in comparison to fiction, textbooks disseminate cultural norms to all children who attend school – a 'vast "captive" audience' (Silverman 1992, 203). Moreover, the 'intended clarity and moral certainty' of the authorial textbook voice invests textbooks with an aura of authority that is difficult to challenge (Pescosolido, Grauerholz and Milkie 1997, 444). The canonical status of textbook knowledge is crucial to legitimising White ideologies and normalising whiteness.

Rather than representing objective and impartial knowledge, textbooks define, shape, construct and elevate one version of reality as legitimate (Zinn & Eitzen 1996). Textbooks are the product of negotiations between the state, subject experts and special interest groups, including parents (Godlewska et al. 2016). Ultimately however, textbooks evidence the outcome of power struggles by revealing whose perspectives are legitimated and whether singular or multiple perspectives are represented: 'what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender/sex, and religious groups' (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991, 2).

These power struggles are evident in Australian history textbooks, which demonstrate marked changes in terms of whose 'subjective interpretations of reality and value judgements are projected as fact' (Sleeter & Grant 2011, 185). For most of the twentieth century, Australian history narratives were largely consensual, narrating a triumphant tale of White economic, social, cultural and political development, overwhelmingly focused on elite, White males (Curthoys 2008; Reynolds 1999). These histories dominated until the production of alternative historical narratives from the 1970s, which began including previously silenced voices — non-White immigrants, Aborigines and White workers and women (Macintyre &

Clark 2003; Manne 2003). The legitimacy of revisionist histories has been consistently challenged. In particular, the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in revisionist histories, and the accompanying disruption of the normative privileging of White history, generated debate within both the academic realm and public forums, becoming known as the ‘History Wars’ (Carter 2006).

Due to their powerful positioning and reach, textbooks are a crucial medium for reiterating or disrupting performances of whiteness. Racialised categories of belonging and exclusion are produced, in part, by systemic, structural phenomena that ‘remain entrenched, often unconsciously, in our minds, and within the structures of our society, and particularly our educational structures’ (Smith & Lander 2012, 336). However, the practices and assumptions of whiteness that are erased by their acceptance as normative can be critiqued by ‘exploring the characteristics of the Eurocentric curriculum’ (Mlcek 2011, 824-5). In this regard, it is important to note the divergence between the explicit and implicit content of textbooks. For example, in comparison to textbooks published in the mid-late twentieth century, both the volume and nature of representations of non-White peoples in recent textbooks has improved. These changes evidence the genuine intentions of writers to correct the blatantly disparaging and/or paternalistic representations of previous eras. It is in this spirit of improvement that the recommendations in this article are forwarded.

Intentionality and ignorance

By and large, Whites have little conscious awareness of their/our role in reinscribing whiteness. Textbook producers are, to varying extents, enculturated into whiteness. Consequently, as Gillborn (2005, 490) emphasises, the reproduction of whiteness in textbooks may be largely unintentional: ‘those who are implicated in whiteness rarely even realize its existence – let alone their own role in its repeated iteration and resignification’.

Critical whiteness scholarship, therefore, is ‘not an assault on white people per se’ but on the often-unintentional reproduction of whiteness (Gillborn 2005, 488; see also Nicoll 2004). The implicit quality of the tunnel-vision of White solipsism suggests that this myopia can be disrupted by making it explicit. Rather than critiquing textbook producers, my aim is to identify performances of whiteness within texts in order to disrupt their unintended reproduction, thereby contributing to decolonisation.

Given that critiquing others can implicitly position the self as outside of what is being critiqued, it is important to stress that my own writing is not exempt from reproducing whiteness (Ahmed 2004). Moreover, as a White woman, I am an ongoing recipient of the power and privileges of whiteness (Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004). My writing does not position me outside of these systems. Indeed, as Nakayama and Krizek (1995, 302) state, ‘[w]hether or not one discursively positions oneself as “white”, there is little room for maneuvering [sic] out of the power relations imbedded in whiteness’. Being positioned as White by racialised social systems results in the accrual of privileges regardless of consent or awareness (Kowal 2008).

While Gillborn (2005, 499) acknowledges that whiteness is not always consciously reproduced, he nevertheless avers that its reproduction reflects the ‘tacit intentionality’ embedded in social structures: ‘racist outcomes of contemporary policy may not be coldly calculated but they are far from accidental’. My contention is that White solipsism is implicated in this ‘tacit intentionality’. Enculturation in solipsism ensures Whites remain largely unaware of their implication in reproducing racial inequality. Hence, the need to disrupt White solipsism.

Mills’ conceptualisation of the racial contract offers an explanation of the structural forces by which whiteness is unintentionally reproduced. For Mills (1997, 3), White ignorance is

predicated on the social contract being ‘profoundly misleading’, so that it obscures the ‘ugly realities of group power and domination’. This gap in class contractarianism is remedied via Mills’ explication of the racial contract which underlies the social contract and has the intent of privileging Whites as a group at the expense of non-Whites. Of particular relevance to this paper is Mills’ (1997, 93) assertion that ‘the Racial Contract prescribes, as a condition for membership in the polity, an epistemology of ignorance’. For Mills (1997, 19), ignorance is the defining feature of whiteness, which he conceptualises as the systemic production of ‘misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion and self-deception on matters related to race’. This ignorance is

... in no way *accidental*, but *prescribed* by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity. (Mills 1997, 19; emphasis in original)

Mills (1997, 18) contends that structural reproduction of ignorance produces ‘the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made’. I argue that White solipsism is a fundamental aspect of self-perpetuating epistemologies of ignorance.

Discourse and race

I employ a post-structural understanding of discourse as ‘constitutive and constructive rather than reflective and representative’ (Phillips & Hardy 2002, 13). From this perspective, language is not a neutral medium but a performative activity which creates the reality it appears to merely describe (Foucault 1972). While there is an ontological level of existence regardless of meaning attribution, discourses construct the ‘truth’ assigned to the physical dimension and constitute the social world (Attwood 1992). Discourses, therefore, are not ‘mere talk and text’ but have tangible effects (van Dijk 1993, 95). The extent to which

discourse ‘constitutes the world’ is contested (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 18-20). I employ a Foucauldian perspective in which all social practices are considered to have a discursive aspect to the extent that they all entail meaning (Hall 1992).

As a discursive discipline, race is ‘not ontologically prior to its production and instantiation in discourses’ (Carbado 2002, 181). Racialised discourses attach meanings to arbitrary, fluid elements of ‘morphology or ancestry’ (Haney-Lopez 2006, 10). Nevertheless, race appears real through its instantiation in discourse; racial discourse produces the very bodies that it classifies and describes (Ehlers 2008; Gillborn & Youdell 2009). Moreover, the discursive reproduction of race renders it real as a lived experience (Carbado 2002; Frankenberg 1993; Riggs & Augoustinos 2005). There are consistent, predictable, racialised differences on a range of socio-economic indicators – health, life expectancy, education, employment, income, wealth and interaction with the criminal justice system – with White Australians consistently advantaged in comparison to non-Whites (Walter 2010). Additional axes of privilege/disadvantage, such as class, gender and sexuality, modify race privilege/disadvantage rather than eliminating it (Frankenberg 2001). Race is a social reality.

Sample

This paper is part of a large project which examined history narratives in Australian secondary school textbooks published from 1950 onwards.¹ I elected to analyse history narratives due to the centrality of historical knowledge to conceptions of nationhood (Tosh 2008). Whereas a representative sample from a comprehensive list of compulsory or recommended textbooks would have been ideal, Australia has a long tradition of rarely prescribing texts. For example, in the Review of the Australian Curriculum the decision not to review classroom resources was justified by stating that ‘teachers are best placed to choose

¹ Secondary school in Australia encompasses four compulsory post-primary years for students aged approximately 13-16.

the most appropriate resources for their teaching and learning plans' (Donnelly & Wiltshire 2014, 7). Similarly, the Core Curriculum for Australian Schools (Curriculum Development Centre 1980, 5) states that is not the Centre's role to provide 'detailed curriculum content and teaching methods, or to prescribe syllabuses or texts'.

Having determined that obtaining a representative sample was not feasible, I settled for a convenience sample instead. Convenience samples are characterised by reliance on available subjects (Babbie 2005). However, the dearth of out-dated textbooks meant this was not a straight-forward process. My experience mirrored Bromley, Meyer and Ramirez' (2011, 552) observation that, 'outmoded [text]books are rarely preserved'. An exception is the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI) in Germany whose collection includes more than 70 000 non-German social science textbooks. Closer to home, I located a few textbooks at public and university libraries and purchased some relatively recent textbooks from second-hand online sites. To bolster this meagre collection, I had an article published in my local daily paper requesting the loan of textbooks from the general public. Over the next few weeks, I received 25 email responses, mainly from ex-teachers and collectors. Following up on these responses yielded a further 128 texts, resulting in a sample of 157 texts.

Through the process of cataloguing the texts loaned to me, I excluded 106 which were duplicates, off-topic, not written for secondary students, outside the time period of my research or which focused on particular incidents, personalities or locations rather than covering Australian history more broadly. At this stage, my sample consisted of 51 texts. In order to prevent a wide disparity in numbers of texts for each decade, and to make analysis manageable yet not unduly restrict my sample, I limited the number of texts per decade to a maximum of four. I favoured texts on the basis on longevity (subsequent editions) and popularity (multiple copies in my sampling frame, multiple re-printings). For example, texts

from the current century were chosen due to their market saturation as judged by their availability in bookstores, libraries and second-hand online sites. This stage eliminated 14 texts, leaving a sample of 37.

My analysis of textbooks employs Fairclough's (1992) model of critical discourse analysis. The three dimensions of this model are examination of discourse as text (such as words chosen), discursive practice (rhetorical strategies employed) as well as how these discursive elements structure social practice (reproduction of hegemony). I not only analysed the manifest content of textbooks, but omissions and concealed elements as well, focusing on the 'epistemologies of ignorance' (Mills 1997) which inform the performance of whiteness. Discourse analysis was the method of choice because of its applicability to the analysis of both explicit and oblique social practices. As Green and Sonn (2006, 391) contend, discourse analysis 'makes explicit the social structures and processes ... that would otherwise be viewed as opaque'.

The discourses I identified emerged in the process of analysis rather than being determined beforehand. A key strength of inductive approaches such as this is the flexibility to match analytic techniques to the emerging data. On the other hand, as a qualitative and critical researcher, I acknowledge that every aspect of research, from the topics chosen to the interpretations made are influenced by my standpoint, research questions and theoretical lens (Gustafson 2007). As Wetherall (2001, 396) states, results are not 'found', but narrated into being. My analysis produces one set of results among multiple possible interpretations. In order to minimise any misleading effects of these influences, I followed guidelines for qualitative researchers: clarifying my standpoint and incorporating quotes from the analysed texts to facilitate readers' critique of my interpretations (Phillips & Hardy 2002).

Working through my sample in chronological order, I examined the content of the texts for explicit or implicit discourses related to national belonging or exclusion. This was an iterative process. Throughout the analysis process, I observed discursive strategies that I had not noticed previously. Each time this happened, I returned to the beginning of the sample to check for the presence of the newly observed strategy. This process continued until no new results were generated. I then contrasted each text with others, noting similarities and differences.

Analysis

Data for this article is taken from a subset of my sample — six texts published this century that covered the topics of the Australian gold rushes and national identity (see Table One). All texts analysed are published by Jacaranda. This helps ensure that differences between the texts reflect the changing social context and/or curriculum rather than individual publisher preferences. Jacaranda texts were chosen not because they are any better or worse than other texts, but due to their market saturation as explained above.

[Table One here]

The texts analysed in this section provide a snapshot of the way whiteness is performed in contemporary Australia. Later texts are clearly modelled on those previously published, with some repetition of authors. While the commonalities between the texts reveal customary performances of whiteness, the differences between them illustrate points of tension. I contextualise the analysis by noting substantial modifications to White solipsism in the twentieth century history narratives.

Traditionally, Australian history was seen as one chapter in the larger story of British history (Macintyre & Clark 2003). As such, it was constructed as beginning with European

‘discovery’ and British colonisation, with no place for Aboriginal history. As Murdoch (cited Attwood 1992, xii) states in his 1917 Australian history textbook:

When people talk about ‘the history of Australia’ they mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia ... we should not stretch the term to make it include the history of dark-skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe ... for they have nothing that can be called a history.

This pattern was disrupted in the 1970s, when a chapter on Aboriginal Australia became a standard inclusion as the initial chapter in history texts. In comparison to earlier histories’ focus on White history, this shows a lessening in White solipsism. Moreover, these chapters gradually transitioned from representing an exclusively White perspective to some inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. Nevertheless, the explicit attempt of these chapters to widen the scope of Australian history was contradicted by their segregation from the standard story of national development, from which Aboriginal peoples were/are excluded. This contradiction is compounded when initial chapters on Aboriginal peoples are followed by narratives that incorporate White ‘discovery’ and ‘exploration’, which are meaningful only if Aboriginal peoples are erased. White solipsism renders non-White experiences invisible so that it ‘becomes possible to speak with no sense of absurdity of “empty” lands that are actually teeming with millions of people, of “discovering” countries whose inhabitants already exist’ (Mills 2007, 27).

Texts published from 2000-2010, resolved the contradiction of recognising and subsequently ignoring pre-colonial Aboriginal life by omitting White ‘discovery’ altogether. Instead, the narrative of White history begins with colonisation, with the British framed as ‘arriving’ (or

invading) rather than ‘discovering’ the land. The two most recent texts in my sample no longer cover pre-invasion Aboriginal life. Rather than a chronological structure, topics are clustered under themes such as ‘movement of peoples’ and Australian history is once again positioned in terms of (White) world history, as one aspect of the transition to modernity. Within this framework, Aboriginal history is again positioned as a ‘melancholy footnote to Australian history’ (Stanner 1969, 25).

Conceptualising White solipsism

White solipsism refers to a standpoint in which the White perspective is implicitly (mis)interpreted as universal (Rich 1979). White solipsism produces tunnel-vision in which ‘only white values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention’ (Sullivan 2006, 17). The tunnel-vision of White solipsism is reproduced by representing events from a White perspective, normalising this outlook and by focusing disproportionately on Whites. Examples include framing colonisation as peaceful settlement or the land as new, distant or alien. Whites are framed as individuals with diverse occupations and interests, while non-White peoples tend to be seen in stereotypically raced terms. The White perspective interprets territorial expansion by Whites as unlocking rather than losing the land, centring the importance of land to Whites while discursively erasing Aborigines. The distortion inherent to White solipsism also produces discourses of reversal in which, for example, Aborigines are framed as threatening to Whites instead of Whites being deemed as a threat to Aborigines.

Overall, the blatant privileging of the White perspective in portrayals of early colonisation has been moderated in texts published this century. As explained above, Aboriginal experiences of dispossession, disease and violence are discussed and included alongside the traditional White narrative. Nevertheless, the explicit representation of Aborigines is

contradicted by implicitly positioning Aborigines as separate from normative Australianness. For example, the crucial input of Aboriginal peoples at every stage and site of colonisation is omitted (Langton 2008; Reynolds 2000; Wolfe 1994). The absence of Aborigines from narratives of national development implicitly reproduces racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion.

As with Aboriginal peoples, the contribution of non-White immigrants to national development is also absent. An exception in this regard is the 2012 text's discussion of the 'important role' of 'Afghans' [sic], such as accompanying 'explorers' (Anderson et al. 2012, 222). Recognising the role of 'Afghans' while failing to acknowledge the dependence of White 'explorers' on Aborigines to guide, negotiate safe passage, interpret and locate food and water sources is intriguing. Arguably, this omission reflects the uncritical repetition of previous historical narratives. Historically established norms determine what can meaningfully be said, resulting in a tendency for specific domains to produce repetitive and predictable statements (Jørgenson & Phillips 2002).

Contradictions between explicit and implicit representations may be the result of social changes in the late twentieth century where conscious attempts to re-imagine Australia as diverse fail to supplant long-standing conceptualisations of Australianness as exclusively White. Until this White nation 'fantasy' (Hage 1998) was rendered untenable following World War II, it was asserted explicitly as demonstrated by the ardently nationalistic magazine, *The Bulletin* (1887 cited White 1981, 81):

All white men who come to these shores ... and who leave behind them the memory of the class-distinctions and the religious differences in the old world are Australian ... before they set foot on the ship which brings them hither ... No

nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no kanaka, no purveyor of cheap coloured labour
is an Australian.

Despite contemporary textbooks explicitly broadening conceptualisations of Australianness, implicit framing of Australians as White persists. For example, a heading in the 2017 text asked ‘Whose Australia: Free selectors vs squatters’ (Hughes et al. 2017, 178). The possibility of Australia as other than a White possession is ontologically unintelligible (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Textbook authors’ inability to position non-White immigrants as Australian is evident in the absence of these peoples from pre-twentieth century narratives. While all texts include sections on Chinese diggers on the goldfields, and the 2012 text has a unit on ‘the experiences of non-Europeans’ (Anderson et al. 2012, 222), these peoples are framed as ‘in Australia’ rather than as Australian. The taken-for-granted nature of this exclusion from national belonging and the concomitant disproportionate focus on Whites reproduces White solipsism.

In the following sections, I analyse solipsism in narratives of the gold rushes and Australian identity in texts published this century. These two topics were chosen out of the four topics covered by the four earlier texts in my sample. I chose these topics, rather than Aboriginal Australia and the ‘arrival’ of the British, as exemplars of the traditional White Australian historical narrative that are implicated in implicit constructions of national belonging and exclusion. Analysis demonstrated contemporary practices which reinscribe White solipsism by normalising the White perspective. I show that challenges to White solipsism introduced in the 2005 text are often reversed in subsequent texts, evidencing their tentative nature. I argue that this retrenchment of White solipsism demonstrates an increasing reluctance to unsettle whiteness.

Gold rushes

Narratives on the gold rushes relate experiences of the White working class. As such, these sections partially address Australia history's previous focus on 'great [White] men' (Curthoys 2008, 235). The gold rushes are also significant in terms of immigration. Following British invasion, the gold rushes represented the next major wave of immigration to the continent. Crucially, this wave of immigration enabled the colonies to be re-imagined as a land of opportunity, rather than a convict dumping ground (White 1981). Nevertheless, there are many problematic aspects of gold rush narratives, such as environmental destruction, further dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and anti-Chinese racism which culminated in Australia's first race riots.

White solipsism is reproduced via the unremarkable representation of the gold rushes from a White perspective and the taken-the-granted absence of non-White experiences. Portrayals of the gold rushes reinscribe Australia as a White nation, with gold framed as the rightful property of Whites. Solipsism is also evident in the unexamined positioning of the gold rushes as central to the national story. Gold is only meaningful from a White worldview in which capitalism is taken-for-granted and gold has monetary value. In other words, the gold rush itself is a White construct.

The White perspective is evident in the following extract from the 2007 text:

The colonies of Australia in 1850 were regarded as small British outposts.
Squatters, shepherds, stockmen and shearers lived in remote pastoral areas ...
When gold fever hit, thousands dropped whatever they were doing and took off
for the diggings ... (Mraz et al. 2007, 28)

This extract demonstrates the convention of the White perspective being unmarked but implicitly understood. At first glance, this extract appears to be race-neutral, referring to people in general rather than a particular racial group. However, on closer examination it is

apparent that it reflects White people's outlook and experience, with the White perspective positioned as universal. Consider, for example, which racial groups regarded the colonies as small British outposts and 'took off for the diggings'. Note also the absence of Aborigines from the portrayal of people living in remote pastoral areas. Even the depiction of these areas as pastoral privileges the White perspective, discursively erasing Aboriginal land usage. The unmarked nature of the White perspective in passages such as the one above normalises this perspective, fostering its reproduction outside of conscious awareness, thereby reproducing White solipsism.

Aboriginal peoples' experiences of and responses to the gold rushes are absent from all analysed texts. Instead, some texts provide minimal information on the impact of the gold rushes on Aborigines, narrated by a putatively disembodied authorial voice. This practice positions Aborigines as passive — impacted on, rather than responding to, particular issues or situations. It is also dehumanising, framing Aborigines as objects rather than subjects.

Whereas detailed coverage of the hardships experienced by Whites during the gold rushes fosters empathy and understanding, the absence of a similar account of Aboriginal peoples' travails normalises disregard. Narratives such as these reflect, reproduce and normalise White solipsism with its attendant disproportionate focus on White experiences and suffering, while 'the other's reality is hardly known or even entirely absent' (Steyn 2012, 14).

The 'Alive' texts from 2005-2010 note the impact of miners cutting down trees on Aboriginal peoples' reliance on trees for food and shelter. However, there is no discussion of the lived experiences of dispossession for the Aboriginal nations whose ancestral lands were usurped. The brief intimations of disturbance to Aborigines in these texts are less than in the previous decade in which forced removal from traditional lands, destruction of sacred sites and loss of food sources were itemised in a text published by Jacaranda (Bassett, Bomford & Abrahams 1994). Fleeting references to Aborigines evidence disregard, repositioning Aborigines as a

‘melancholy footnote to Australian history’ (Stanner 1969, 25). Yet, the absence of similar Aboriginal impact statements in more recent texts suggests that retaining even this marginalised position is tentative, with Whites holding authorial control. These changes to gold rush narratives reveal that White solipsism has become further entrenched in recent texts.

The White perspective is also evident in gold rush narratives about Chinese miners, with the Chinese subjected to the White gaze. As with Aborigines, Chinese people’s experiences of the gold rushes are either absent or minimal². For example, rather than Chinese grievances being discussed, Chinese miners are framed as one of the hardships faced by White miners; the Chinese are positioned as problems, not people. This functions to reinscribe the White perspective and position Chinese miners as objects in the White nation (Hage 1998). In contrast to the almost total absence of content about Aborigines however, all texts outline White perspectives on Chinese miners. These sections are located separately to the main story of the gold rushes. Siloing the discussion of Chinese miners from the remainder of the chapter distinguishes between the Chinese and the White norm, reproducing and naturalising this division.

Changes to the narratives over time, again reveal the entrenchment of White solipsism. For example, the title of this topic in the 2005, 2006 and 2010 texts is ‘Chinese diggers’. This title explicitly challenges constructions of diggers as White. Nevertheless, implicit constructions of diggers as White remain. For example, the putatively non-raced diggers discussed in the previous units are revealed to be White in contrast to Chinese diggers. Enculturation in White

² An end-of-chapter activity in the 2005, 2006 and 2010 texts includes an extract from a petition by the Chinese to the government protesting their potential deportation. The 2012 text includes two extracts of Chinese perspectives.

solipsism ensures that this is understood without being explicitly stated; a non-raced subject is implicitly understood as White.

Contradictions between implicit and explicit constructions suggest that the reproduction of White solipsism is not necessarily intentional. Nevertheless, reversals in subsequent editions suggest tacit, if not conscious, intentionality. For example, in the 2017 text, the title is 'the Chinese in Australia' (Hughes et al. 2017, 156). This change suggests a refusal to position Chinese diggers as Australian. Combined with unchanged implicit constructions, the retraction of explicit challenges to the White perspective suggests that the progress made to history narratives in the last century has not merely stalled but has reversed direction. White solipsism appears to be deliberately cultivated.

For example, some of the earlier texts in my sample disrupt the traditional narrative of the Australian goldfields being 'swamped' by Chinese by emphasising that most immigrants to the goldfields were British: '[t]he greatest majority of immigrations were from Britain and Ireland, but there were also a significant number of people from China and Europe' (Lamont et al. 2006, 57). However, later texts failed to retain this important contextualisation, noting instead the large number of Chinese miners arriving: 'By 1857 there were 25 000 Chinese in Australia and this soon rose to 50 000' (Anderson et al. 2012, 224). Intimations of invasion enables the entry tax to limit Chinese immigration to be framed as a legitimate and prudent measure. The absence of an entry tax for White immigrants establishes the Australian colonies as White possessions, with Whites framed as possessors rather than immigrants (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). White possession augments White belonging and non-White exclusion by positioning Whites as 'worried national managers', exclusively entitled to opine on national governance (Hage 1998, 244). In contrast, the Chinese are framed as 'national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will' (Hage 1998, 18). These

examples show how Whites are made to feel confident, comfortable and at home in ‘their/our’ nation, while non-Whites are made to feel uncomfortable and alienated.

My analysis of gold rush chapters in twenty-first century textbooks demonstrates how White solipsism is reproduced, often unwittingly, by being narrated from the White perspective.

Although usually unmarked, the White perspective is implicitly understood and positioned as universal. An overall absence of non-White experiences or perspectives transforms the White perspective from one way of perceiving to the only way, reproducing the tunnel-vision of White solipsism. When included in the narrative, non-Whites are subjected to the White gaze, which reproduces and normalises the White perspective while erasing alternative perspectives. White solipsism is also reproduced by distinguishing between normative and raced bodies. Whites are positioned as universal subjects by being un-raced. As Dyer (1997, 1) asserts, ‘as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as the human norm’. In contrast, non-Whites are raced, creating distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. These practices restrict national belonging to Whites. While the reproduction of White solipsism may often be unintentional, the minor but significant changes to historical narratives revealed by my analysis reduce challenges to the White perspective and shield Whites from critique. This privileging of White interests is another example of solipsism. Moreover, the extent of these reforms fluctuates according to White discretion. Overall, however, textbooks published this century appear to be regressing rather than progressing in terms of producing more inclusive and balanced narratives of national belonging.

Australian identity

Chapters on national identity are a relatively new feature in secondary school history texts.

Australian national identity is either absent or a minor narrative in texts published prior to the 1990s. The recent priority given to this topic signals its importance to the contemporary

nation (Soutphommasane 2007). National identity is closely linked to the gold rushes. When Australian nationhood was imagined in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was largely formed in response to White fear of invasion which had been exacerbated by the influx of Chinese miners to the goldfields (Ang 1999; Jupp 2007). In the context of the 'History Wars', the contemporary prioritisation of national identity reasserts a triumphalist, exclusive version of Australian history (Henderson 2005).

As with narratives of gold rushes, a pattern of regression rather than progression in twenty-first century texts is evident in chapters on Australian identity: explicit challenges to White solipsism are provisional while implicit constructions of White Australianness endure.

Overall, this functions to bolster White national belonging. In textbooks published in the late twentieth century, chapters on Australian identity reproduced the standard story of a sense of Australianness developing in the late nineteenth century in opposition to Britishness as epitomised by itinerant male bush workers. These tropes constitute Australians as White, implicitly excluding non-Whites from incorporation as Australians. The whiteness of this conceptualisation of Australians is enhanced by locating narratives of Australian identity in the late nineteenth century, thereby excluding post-World War II non-British immigrants. The myth that Chinese overwhelmingly returned to China after the gold rushes negates the presence of Australians of Chinese ancestry (Fitzgerald 2007). Whereas texts published this century incorporate some (minimal) representation of Aborigines in their narratives of national identity, non-White immigrants are consistently omitted and, consequently, excluded from being positioned as Australian in these chapters.

The solipsistic twentieth-century narrative of White Australian identity is challenged in the 2005 text by attempting to incorporate Aborigines within constructions of Australianness: the impact of White settlement on Aborigines is mentioned and photographs of Aboriginal women are included, thereby implicitly positioning Aborigines as Australian (Jackson et al.

2005, 73, 75, 83). The absence of explicit justifications for introducing these photographs bolsters their inclusivity by constructing this positioning as unexceptional. An example of Aboriginal art is also appended to the White story of the development of Australian identity. In twentieth-century texts, this topic comprised White art and literature, such as landscapes by artists of the Heidelberg school and writings by Andrew ‘Banjo’ Paterson and Henry Lawson. In addition to these examples, the 2005 text includes William Barak’s 1898 ‘Figures in possum skin cloaks’ (Jackson et al. 2005, 87). The accompanying narrative emphasises the common theme of attachment to land present in all the images. The attempt to challenge the notion that Whites were the only artists to demonstrate connection to the land, or see Australia through ‘Australian eyes’, is noteworthy.

Notwithstanding these attempts at inclusivity however, standard national identity tropes of White Australianness are reproduced in the rest of the chapter, contradicting the explicit changes outlined above. For example, Australianness is again framed as developing in opposition to Britishness, thereby excluding those of non-British heritage from being considered Australian. Similarly, the White perspective is reinscribed despite occasional references to Indigenous people. Indeed, occasional references to racialised others, augment normative whiteness. The first unit, ‘[n]ot the “old country”’, frames Australians as British:

Between 1832 and 1850, some 200 000 people migrated to the Australian colonies ... While many British settlers came prepared to start a new life, others wanted to create a ‘little England’. Most were not prepared for the harsh Australian climate and landscape. (Jackson et al. 2005, 74)

In contrast, when discussing the impact of ‘settlement’ on ‘Indigenous people’ the British are inaccurately reframed as European (Jackson et al. 2005, 75). As Jupp (2007, 4) observes, Australia was colonised by the British, in part to prevent European colonisation. The decision

to use the term European may indicate an attempt to obscure the Britishness of the perpetrators, reflecting White interests (Sharp 2012). Framing the colonies as ‘not the “old country”’, colonisation as settlement rather than invasion and the climate and landscape as alien also reflect a White perspective. Solipsism renders Whites oblivious to the possibility of different experiences. As explained above, solipsism is also apparent when the word White is absent but implicitly understood, as in this extract: ‘[f]rom the colony’s beginnings, there was a shortage of females’ (Jackson et al. 2005, 74). The sentence refers only to White females. This is understood without having to be stated, demonstrating enculturation in White solipsism.

In many ways, the chapter on the 2006 text duplicates that of 2005, with Aboriginal content simply appended to the existing narrative. However, the Aboriginal content is noticeably reduced with the photographs of Aboriginal women replaced with non-Aboriginal images and the art section in ‘Australian perspectives’, which included Barak’s artwork, omitted. Replacing these representations of Aboriginality is a sole photograph of pastoral workers in a new unit ‘Community snapshots’ (Lamont et al. 2006, 83). The reduction in Aboriginal content in this text demonstrates the tentative nature of positioning Aborigines as Australian and reveals the power of White Australians to determine constructions of Australianness and Aboriginality. The second edition of this text also removes the section on the impact of ‘settlement’ on Indigenous people (Bedson et al. 2010). The erasure of material which may impugn White behaviour reveals that White interests are prioritised. Resistance to constructing Aborigines as Australian in chapters on national identity seems to contradict initial chapters in which Aborigines are framed as ‘First Australians’. However, it is consistent to the extent that positioning Aborigines as ‘First Australians’ does not effectively broaden the category of ‘Australian’. Prefixes such as ‘First’ or ‘New’ reinscribe rather than interrupt the normativity of White Australianness.

The chapter 'Australian identity and nationhood' in the 2007 text reverts to a more inclusive approach, implicitly positioning Aborigines as Australians. Nevertheless, this positioning is immediately discounted by the reproduction of standard tropes of White nationhood. A section on 'Identity and the Dreamtime' is featured early in a unit on the development of Australian identity, supplemented once again by Barak's 'Figures in possum skin cloaks' (Mraz et al. 2007, 60). A novel feature of this section is the use of phrases such as 'non-indigenous residents', 'non-indigenous population' and 'native-born non-indigenous Australians' in preference to (White) Australian (Mraz et al. 2007, 60, 63). Whereas normative whiteness positions Australians as White, such that hyphenated names are applied only to non-White Australians, this section's hyphenating of White Australianness disrupts White normativity. However, the term 'Australian' reappears occasionally, perhaps unintentionally, when referring to White Australians. For example, interspersed amongst the hyphenated phrases mentioned above, Australians are constructed as British: 'Representations of an Australian identity showed Australians as people moulded by different experiences from those of their British counterparts' (Mraz et al. 2007, 62). Despite seemingly genuine attempts to explicitly expand the concept of Australianness, implicit constructions of Australians as having British ancestry persist. This finding supports Solomona et al.'s (2005, 150) conclusion that, regardless of authors' intention, educational materials 'will continue to reinforce marginalisation and exclusion' as long as the impact of whiteness is not adequately grasped.

Conclusion

In this article, I identified White solipsism in secondary school Australian history textbooks published this century. White solipsism is defined as tunnel-vision in which 'only white values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention' (Sullivan 2006, 17). The tunnel-vision of White solipsism is reproduced by representing events from a White

perspective, privileging White interests and by focusing disproportionately on Whites. Despite occasional disruptions to the White perspective, it remains dominant yet unmarked in the analysed texts, which functions to normalise this perspective and position it as representative of Australianness. White solipsism is also maintained by the convention of racialising non-Whites while leaving Whites unraced. This functions to normalise whiteness while marking non-Whites as ‘other’ to this norm. Even the increased representation of non-Whites fails to unsettle this dynamic; by siloing this content, dominant whiteness is augmented rather than disrupted (Godlewska et al. 2016). Despite minor amendments to textbook narratives, overall a pattern of reinforcing rather than disrupting White solipsism is evident in texts published this century. These performances of whiteness construct the nation as White, reproducing racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion.

Some progressive amendments, such as explicit attempts to incorporate Aborigines into conceptualisations of Australianness, were identified in the texts analysed. Explicitly broadening the category of Australianness demonstrates a commitment to producing more inclusive narratives. However, the fact that this inclusion is noteworthy in twenty-first century texts is a conspicuous demonstration of the whiteness of standard conceptions of Australian identity. Moreover, inserting additional content without modifying the text’s original content or organising framework produces contradictions within texts whereby implicit constructions of otherness remain despite seemingly genuine attempts at inclusivity. Contradictions between the explicit and implicit portrayals in the texts analysed reflect enculturation in White solipsism, which renders educators oblivious to their relative disregard of non-Whites.

Deliberate modifications such as ‘inserting Aborigines’, while seemingly well-intentioned, do not overpower implicit constructions. Indeed, attempts at inclusivity which do not decentre Whiteness function to hinder progress by insulating whiteness from examination and critique,

thereby maintaining the status quo. By being ‘embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior’ (Dyer 1997, 45), the power relations of whiteness and its associated privileges and disadvantage, such as constructions of national belonging and exclusion, are obscured and reproduced. Reversals to explicit attempts at improvement in later publications are more worrying: the commitment to producing more inclusive narratives is no longer apparent. Rather, an increasing reluctance to unsettle whiteness is evident. Consequently, White solipsism, in which only White interests are considered important, is augmented. In the context of the ‘History Wars’ the impetus to support White interests may reflect a deliberate agenda to redeem whiteness.

The persistence of White solipsism in Australian history narratives reproduces anachronistic constructions of the nation as White, generating racialised categories of national belonging and exclusion. Despite a nominally multicultural polity, non-White peoples’ Australianness is fraught and tentative. In contrast, White people’s positioning as Australian is secure and taken-for-granted. Further work is needed to ensure history narratives contest White solipsism and its attendant privileging of White Australians.

Reforming textbook production entails two key strategies. Firstly, additional perspectives can be incorporated by genuine collaboration with marginalised peoples at all stages of textbook production (Rogers Stanton 2014). As Schaepli, Godlewska and Rose (2018, 477) observe, ‘the greatest insight into the operations of racialized, gendered, classed, and anthropocentric power comes from the socially marginalized’. Yet, these voices are often silenced in textbooks. Adopting an attitude of allyship can assist White textbook producers—writers, editors and publishers—to support and follow the leadership of non-White peoples rather than reproducing historical power relations (Patton & Bondi 2015).

Incorporating historically marginalised peoples in textbook production is a necessary, but not sufficient, strategy for genuine reform. Power sharing must be managed such that it does not repeat the pattern outlined in this article, whereby new information is added while the organising framework of the textbook remains unchanged. As noted, this leads to contradictions between the explicit and implicit content of textbooks. A further caution when incorporating non-White peoples in textbook production is that this strategy does not directly address the solipsism of White textbook producers, suggesting that their social and educational practice will inevitably continue to be shaped by this myopic perspective (Rogers Stanton 2014). Moreover, it may lead White textbook producers to absolve themselves from responsibility for improving textbooks, leaving historically marginalised peoples to shoulder this burden. While non-White peoples have heightened awareness of White solipsism, the responsibility for addressing White solipsism rests with White people.

As such, it is crucial that White textbook producers disrupt their own solipsism. Having good intentions and not deliberately marginalising others is not sufficient. Imagining curriculum materials in new ways requires a decolonising mindset so that normative assumptions are rendered visible (Winter 2018). Textbook producers need to critically engage with dominant culture narratives (Tuck & Fine 2007). For example, White peoples need to overcome their/our 'deeply learned habits of disregard' for the experiences of Indigenous peoples (Donald 2011, 91). There is no simple tool kit or check list for this work (Rogers Stanton 2014). The practice of self-education to disrupt learnt ignorance and confront our biases and blind spots is a life-long process (Schaepli et al. 2018). The changes evidenced in the explicit context of textbooks to date demonstrates the commitment of textbooks producers to genuine improvement. Extending this work to implicit representations is long overdue.

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Table One. Sample

Year	Title	Authors
2005	SOSE History Alive 2	Jackson, Bedson, Grogan, Reid & Saldais
2006	Humanities Alive 3	Lamont, Mraz, Easton & Saldais
2007	Essentials Humanities 3	Mraz, Low, Chapman, Anderson & Bedson
2010	Humanities Alive 3 Second Edition	Bedson, Darlington, Kwiatkowski & Wiggs
2012	Retroactive 9	Anderson, Keese, Low & Harvey
2017	History Alive 9	Hughes, Smithies, Wood & Darlington