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## Race and the City: Series One

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*Race and the City is a blog that is dedicated to talking about race. Funded by Arts NSW through the Western Sydney Artists' Fellowship program, this blog is an interactive site which aims to explore issues and ideas about race, culture, sexuality and gender through dialogue and exchange. Race&The City (R&TC) is an intervention into the public domain using the medium of the portal to engage with a community of thinkers and thought that doesn't reduce race to the usual suspects, but rather produces critical commentaries about power, inter-communal relations, identity, history and culture. In short, R&TC convenes a space to talk about race and power. In this essay, I want to map out how R&TC evolved from and is informed by the community-based cultural and political activism of the past two decades of my work.*

*Mass media are everywhere. Race is elusive. Resistance is unclear.*

—Darnell M. Hunt

### Introduction

2008 will be archived as the year when race was the subject *du jour* in the sphere of global discourse. I can't recall a time where so many texts in the mainstream English language press privileged race in a framework that did not involve a riot, urban crime or some other sensationalist news story. After the historic election of Barack Hussein Obama in November 2008, analyses and autopsies on race continue to be published in the Anglo-American mediaplex and posted across the blogosphere, even if some commentators labour under the delusion that the elevation of the first black president to the White House heralds the end of institutionalised racism in the United States.[1]

In considering how race is discoursed in the public sphere in the Australian context, the adversarial model is a familiar experience.[2] Such a model has been constituted through (inter)racial negotiations in Australia and this past decade has been no different in deploying a particularly bitter period for race relations. The defeat in November 2007 of a punitive neo-conservative government that prided itself on silencing those who dared speak back to the predatory race politics that defined its tenure was cause for much relief, if not ululation.[3] Under the former political regime, to invoke the 'R' word was tantamount to a declaration of war. To talk about racism and discrimination was to invite vindictive reproach and virulent hostility. The former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, was grand master wizard of this game. Most notably, during his almost 12-years at the centre of power, non-government agencies (NGOs), in particular community-based advocacy organisations' capacity to speak out, was severely curtailed if not extinguished, as in the case of migrant resource centres.

In *Silencing Dissent: non-government organisations and Australian democracy* (2004), Sarah Maddison, Richard Denniss and Clive Hamilton map a picture of NGO perceptions of the barriers limiting their ability to participate in public debate during the Howard years. Canvassing 290 agencies, they found that 58 per cent believed that the Howard Government silenced debate, with 33 per cent believing it was tolerated. Only 9 per cent believed public debate was encouraged. These concerns were heightened by the proposal put up by Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister Peter Costello to disqualify any charity that engages in advocacy that is other than ancillary or incidental (Maddison et al, 2004: 2). In this narrow portal, race would most likely be viewed as 'ancillary' and 'incidental'. Consequently, those who dared bring race into the public discourse invariably were seen to challenge the dictate of executive power. Community agencies have traditionally acted for the marginalised and socially excluded, voicing concerns that are denigrated as 'ancillary' and 'incidental'. In a political environment that punishes dissent with threats of defunding, self-censorship and internal policing inevitably ensue, creating a climate of fear and a debilitating culture of silence.

For those directly affected by the exclusivist and racialised discourse of nation into the new century, Howard's end was a long time coming. Reconfiguring Australian identity via a determinedly aggressive reassertion of white primacy, Howard resituated xenophobia and racism as an acceptable form of nationalism. Reclaiming nation for himself (and his tribe), Howard reset the parameters of what constitutes being 'Australian'. This reassertion has been a violent exercise in neo-colonial posturing and regressive policy-making: a brute return of the past. The social and psychic damage of these years continues to be felt across communities, constituencies and sectors.

*Race and the City (R&TC)* is a project that has evolved, in part, out of the Howard years. The racialised discourses of the state in NSW in the last decade have also played their part in motivating this act of creative praxis. *R&TC* is an intervention into the public domain using the medium of the portal to engage with a community of thinkers and thought that doesn't reduce race to the usual suspects, but rather produces critical commentaries about power, inter-communal relations, identity, history and culture. In short, *R&TC* convenes a space to talk about race and power. The name of this project trades on the popular culture TV sitcom and film *Sex and the City*, a somewhat ironic gesture given race is all but invisible in the social landscape of this series, even though it is set predominantly in the multiracial metropolis of New York.[4] While there are many critiques to be made of *Sex and the City*, not least 'the racial homogenisation of New York City' (Harvey, 2008), my aim in this project is to encourage a frankness in talking about race in the same way that this show embodied a frankness in women talking about sex. While race is the obvious cynosure of this site, a refusal to marginalise questions of gender and sexuality in particular to a sub-domain is of critical import. In this essay, I want to map out how *R&TC* evolved from and is informed by the community-based cultural and political activism of the past two decades of my work.

### **The Disavowal of Racism**

Having engaged with immigrant and refugee communities, in particular with women in Western Sydney, race is as pertinent as ever. This is especially for those who confront social exclusion and suffer discrimination daily. Speaking back to racism is never easy. If anything, the rhetorical shields that serve to hinder and limit dialogue have become more sophisticated as racist terminology has been replaced with a series of moves and tricks including that old favourite, the dog whistle (see Hussein and Imtoul in this issue for more analysis on 'dog whistle' politics). Consider John Howard's language back in 1988 as a mere politician without much power, when he expressed his rather unreconstructed views on Asian immigration. His anti-Asian stance was criticised by those within his own political party, including the former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, Liberal premier Nick Greiner, the Victorian Liberal leader Jeff Kennett, sitting Liberal Member of Parliament Philip Ruddock, and former Immigration ministers Ian McPhee and Michael McKellar (Mares, 2001: 153).

Fast-forward to 2001, thumping the podium as Prime Minister in election mode, Howard caterwauled to a revived white nationalist polity, 'We decide who comes here and the circumstances in which they come'. He elicited euphoric ovation from the party faithful. Howard's targets this time were on-shore refugees, mostly Iraqi and Afghan men, women and children, asylum seekers arriving in boats in Australian waters. This 'new' approach won Howard the 2001 election, dubbed the 'race election'. By avoiding the explicit racist terminology of the past, Howard's strategic conversion to the rules of

'new racism' worked perfectly well for him politically, appealing to the *petit* nationalist haunted by the spectre of unauthorised brown arrivals, a condition otherwise known as Border Panic Disorder (BPD).

Howard's 'we decide who comes here' comment is tied to the 'children overboard' incident in which the Government claimed asylum seekers threatened to throw their children overboard. His statement also encapsulates how the politics of othering became a productive force in reiterating populist attitudes towards refugee asylum seekers as barbarians, while reaffirming 'an Australian "self" — that of a "good", "moral" Australian citizen' (Slattery, 2003: 94). Howard's racialised tropes of otherness drew on 'a binary of good and bad citizenship within a family context' when he said that 'I don't want in Australia people who would throw their children into the sea, I don't think any Australian does' (Slattery, 2003: 95). While the claims were found to be baseless, the story was decisive in portraying refugee asylum seekers outside the norms and values of the 'ordinary' Australian, and hence provided a strategic mask for Howard's racialised discourse.[5] His emphatic and violent responses to asylum seekers was legitimated on the construction of the Arab/Muslim/ Middle Easterner as a threat, not just to the sovereignty of the nation, but to the Australian 'way'. The construction of the refugee in such racially troubling ways provided immediate legitimacy to the Howard government's brutal disciplinary practices towards those seeking asylum. The racialising process is at once a dehumanising process, and in this case, the refugee asylum seeker — the most vulnerable of individuals — was Howard's pawn in his strategic recuperation of mastery over the immigration debate.

Race scholar and professor of sociology, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's critical study on racial ideology and discourse in the United States, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (2001), unpacks 'the frames, racetalk and storylines that help lubricate a social order at a particular historical juncture' (138). Bonilla-Silva sets out the central frames of colour-blind racism that include 'abstract liberalism ("Race should not be a factor when judging people")', and minimisation of racism — denial of the structural character of discrimination viewed as limited, sporadic, and declining in significance' (2001: 142) as new ways of expressing racial ideology. Australia has a distinct history of the denial of racism, significantly, the disavowal of genocide perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples.[6]

Bonilla-Silva's frames are useful in identifying how racial discourse has adapted to the times to accommodate a chorus of new actors and post-September 11 storylines. Immediately after the spectacle of 5000 people rampaging in Cronulla in December 2005 inflicting racial terror on non-whites, Prime Minister Howard stepped up to the plate declaring: 'I do not accept that there is any underlying racism in this country'. On Australia Day in 2009, a crowd of mostly young white men - wrapped in their comfort blanket, the Australian flag - chanted racist epithets as they ran through the town centre of Manly, a popular

beach and tourist locale in the northern suburbs of Sydney, terrorising and targeting people of non-white appearance. Institutional figureheads including local police Commander Dave Darcy asserted, 'To suggest that there were racial overtones is ... I think, way over the top' (Robinson, 2009). Adding to this, federal politician Tony Abbott stated: 'Some people seem to be suggesting there was a racist element to it. My instinct, as someone who has just read the reports, is that I think alcohol was to blame, not racism' (Phillips, 2009).

### **Race and Feminism: the limits of sisterhood**

We talk about (neo-colonial) interventions and dress them up as salvation, whether they are in the Northern Territory, Iraq, Afghanistan, or funding Muslim communities in the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. Saving women and children has been the strategic message of this latest civilising mission, a legitimising device that has effectively functioned to justify attacks on Aboriginal communities and colonial expansionism both inside and outside the country. A paternalistic feminism has emerged, a sister to colonial feminism which Arab feminist theorist Leila Ahmed defines as a form of 'feminism used against other cultures in the service of colonialism' (1992: 151). Those who attempt to critically call into question the politics of what passes for 'social' and foreign policy are shut down, silenced and marginalised. It is for these reasons that *R&TC* suits the times. The emergence of digital media has facilitated a different sort of intervention that makes it possible to talk and write back to the discourses of state in critical and creative ways.

I remember reading some words of feminist theorist Anna Yeatman in the nineties: 'Equality is claimed but its achievement is perpetually deferred' (1993: 229). This line perfectly sums up my experiences as an anti-racist feminist/activist over the past two decades. Reflecting on the years spent at the NSW Immigrant Women's Speakout Association in the nineties, the traditional gestures of activism underlined our collective community-based work towards political and social change. The battles and skirmishes wore us all down. The bruising politics of fighting over crumbs is debilitating enough, but the crushing blows between women provided me with an insight into the contested politics of race meets gender. How many years spent arguing for intersectionality, for an anti-racist practice of feminism?

Feminist theorist Hazel V. Carby's essay, 'White woman listen!' (1998), first published in 1982, was a strident declamation that spoke to and still speaks to the boundaries of sisterhood. A key text in unravelling the authority of white feminism, Carby argues for a critical feminism that acknowledges the existence of racism and recognises that 'experiences and struggles of Black women have been structured by racism' (1998: 49). Carby writes: 'Black feminists decry the non-recognition of the specificities of Black women's sexuality and femininity, both in the ways these are constructed and also as they are addressed through practices which oppress black women in a

gender-specific but none the less racist way' (1998: 49). From Carby's 'White woman listen!' to Indigenous Australian feminist theorist Aileen Morton-Robinson's *Talkin' Up To The White Woman* (2000), a genealogy of speaking and writing back to the authority and practices of white liberal feminism defiantly articulates a critical counter discourse to a monolithic feminism. Moreton-Robinson scrutinises white feminist subjectivities in relation to Indigenous women in Australia, arguing that because Western liberal feminism centres white middle-class women as occupying the normative position from which to judge all other women, it lacks an understanding of the different historical and material conditions that affect the lives of women of colour (2000: 35). Moreton-Robinson points out that the invisibility of white race privilege in Western liberal feminist theorising gives 'primacy to gender oppression and sex difference' over and above race and class concerns (2000: 35). Thus, 'belonging to a privileged group means that liberal feminists can centre themselves as the subject of their theory while excluding other women' (Moreton-Robinson, 2000: 36).

Leila Ahmed's 1992 study, *Women and Gender in Islam*, importantly explores the specificities of the contested relations between Western feminism and Muslim women via the imperialist trajectory, exposing how 'the discourse of patriarchal colonialism captured the language of feminism and used women's position in Islamic societies as the spearhead of the colonial attack on those societies' (1992: 243). Ahmed argues that research on 'Middle Eastern women thus occurs in a field already marked with the designs and biases written into it by colonialism' (245). Ahmed connects this to 'the way in which Arab and Muslim "oppression" of women is invoked in Western media and sometimes in scholarship in order to justify and even insidiously promote hostility towards Arabs and Muslims' (246). Western liberal feminism remains the hegemonic feminism that defines human rights discourses in the contemporary political sphere. The contesting of a woman's right to wear the *hijab* in its various forms is a clear example of how Western liberal feminism is unable to divest itself of its universalising practices and colour-blindness to make space for other women's concerns, issues and voices (van Gulik, 2009).

While the atomised liberal feminist continues to obsess over the *hijab*, a report released by the Islamic Women's Welfare Centre of Victoria (IWWCV) in December 2008 tells another story. In *Race, Faith and Gender: Converging Discriminations Against Muslim Women in Victoria, The Ongoing Impact of September 11, 2001*, Muslim Australian women speak of 'the detrimental impact racism had on their sense of well-being, freedom of movement and sense of safety, sense of belonging and participation in society, and sense of control and agency over their lives' (2008: 7). Many participants of the focus groups of this study stated that 'they experienced a consistent sense of low grade fear and vulnerability. They no longer travelled alone' (2008: 7). The report confirms that the 'experience of racism undermines efforts to promote equality, and also increases the vulnerability of Muslim women and their communities to human rights

violations and marginalisation' (2008: 14). The majority of women who participated in this research identified media as 'a significant issue of concern. Both groups surveyed believed that the media does not appropriately represent issues connected with Islam and Muslims and felt that media representations affect how Muslims are viewed and treated' (2008: 14).

### **Media, race, gender and public space**

For me the links made between media representations and what happens on the ground is a key finding in the IWWCV report. The battle over representation is where I have directed my creative energy over the last sixteen years. I have written plays and short stories as a means of making performative sense of race and gender, power and identity, but also, as a way of engaging publics in critical dialogue. My first play *the politics of belly dancing: a choreopoem* (1994) explored gender, race, sexuality and representation of Arab women and culture in the West. Edward W. Said's landmark work *Orientalism* (1991) provided the theoretical framework to open up questions of race and culture to produce a particular account of representation, Orientalist subjectivities and Arabic identities in an Australian context. Said's questions, 'How did and does Orientalism work? How can one describe it all together as a historical phenomenon, a way of thought, a contemporary problem, and a material reality?' (1991: 44), foregrounded the complexities involved in making sense of this particular mode of Western knowledge and thought as it played out in our everyday political and cultural work. Further, drawing on feminist and postcolonial verities sketched out by Ahmed (1992) facilitated the emergence of a new language that spoke to the specificities of Arab and Muslim women that helped to define and articulate a politics of experience.

Around the same time, I remember Filipino Australian activists being outraged over the Orientalist representation of a female character in the hugely popular film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. The portrayal was racially suspect: a vulgar gold-digging sex worker. Filipino activists made their anger public by linking this representation to the systemic violence against Filipino women at a 'Stopping Violence Against Filipino Women' conference. The deaths and disappearances of Filipino women were well documented at this time, but the human rights of Filipino women were nothing if not secondary to the rights of the Australian male in search of a bride (or five) and entertainment industry terms.[7]

This episode has always stayed with me because in the intervening years, many Arab women have railed against the violence of representation and what it means materially for individuals and communities. These connections with Filipino women in their history of struggle remain crucial because they have agitated around violence, protection and gender just as Arab and Muslim women do today. The links between reel representations of violence and real

time violence continue to be played out every day in both public and private spaces. It makes sense to many of us that the racist and dehumanising characterisations of the other, be they Aboriginal, Filipino, Muslim or Arabs, have a deadly impact on people's lives. Much of my work this past decade has been concerned with exposing and subverting the neo-colonialist, Orientalist and racist underpinnings of media output via community cultural development projects and my own writings and filmmaking.

One such project, *Media Spaces and Places: A community project about race and the media* (2002) explored the nexus of media, race and public space. This project emerged from a very real sense of powerlessness felt by communities and artists around media representations of minorities. It is through the domain of the popular media that representations of racialised subjects are enabled, understood and circulated to the everyday consumer of news and current affairs. More than any theorist, Stuart Hall has developed a critical understanding of the media as an apparatus of ideological production, producing social meanings and distributing them throughout society (Hall, 1981: 33). As media theorists Frances Henry and Carol Tator confirm, 'the media are one of the most powerful institutions in a democratic society because they help transmit its central cultural images, ideas, symbols, as well as a nation's narratives and myths' (2002: 4).

The news in particular, as a medium for the dissemination of actual and everyday events, plays a crucial role in how race, ethnicity and culture are deployed and understood, and how racial ideologies are cultivated through its narratives. Media theorist, Teun A. van Dijk argues in *Racism and the Press* that 'it is white elites who control the contents and structures of the system of ideological ethnic representation' (1991: 33), framing stories as 'ethnic events'. These stories include 'immigration, racially based social disturbances and socio-cultural conflicts between the dominant majority and immigrant or other minority groups' (van Dijk, 1991: 3). As Hall attests, the media are 'not only a powerful source of ideas about race, [t]hey are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated' (1981: 35).

Perhaps more significantly, the media helps us understand 'who is *us* and who is *them*' (Henry and Tator, 2002: 4). It is the 'we-they' character of race representations in media practice that is of great import in decoding how racialised others are positioned in news media. In Australia, we have a media that is neither diverse nor robust enough to sustain a conversation longer than the proscribed 600 words. This does not mean that critical dialogue does not happen. Indeed, theorising and talk has always taken place in the interstices of community, around kitchen tables, communal meeting rooms, discrete sections of the media, and in the academy. But as ever, it is difficult to sustain a meaningful dialogue across communities because we have

neither the resources nor access to publics (outside the counter publics) to ensure maximum participation.

### **Speaking Back to Power**

In *Media Spaces and Places*, challenging the racialised discourses of media was central to how this project was conceived and how the narratives of community groups were developed. A team of community-based artists worked with groups to provide a platform to speak back to a particularly virulent form of racialised politics peculiar to Sydney at the beginning of the new century. Together, we produced a series of billboard posters for public display in north-west and Western Sydney. 'Crime. It ain't ethnic' could well be a permanent fixture on every metropolitan bus shelter as a counter to the insidious practice of racial profiling in NSW. This poster was inspired by the frequently invoked racial term, 'of Middle Eastern appearance', deployed by police and the media to describe persons of interest. Here, specific groups are processed in terms of a 'racialised regime of representation' (Hall, 2002: 245). This intervention spoke to a much wider public, providing a counter to the state government and media's insistent racialised discourse, without the dissenters having to put their bodies on the line.

Another billboard reflected the acuity of older Italian Australian women with the failure of official multiculturalism to deliver anything more than a superficial engagement with difference on someone else's terms. 'My mother tongue: As Australian as gelato', said it all in the colourful vibrancy of the gelateria. This group of post-war migrant Italian Australian women knew only too well how the racialising processes functioned to demonise and isolate particular communities at specific times. They were critical of the way they continued to be treated by virtue of their accents. More than anything, they understood the politics of the contemporary anti-refugee, Islamophobic campaigns because they had endured the hysteria and violence of anti-Italian hatred a generation before.

There have been so many events and episodes in the last decade alone that seemingly necessitate convening a space to talk about race and gender, most especially, how they are strategically fragmented in the service of racism. Who can forget the racialised discourse that framed the gang rapes that took place in the southwest suburbs of Sydney in 2000? Gender was notably absent in the bulk of media texts that tracked this story. Rather, race was invoked in problematic ways and set the terms for how this story came to be understood. A critical examination of how the Sydney gang rapes of 2000 were represented is a lesson in how racial ideologies are mobilised for news and how myths about racialised masculinity are reified to reassert subject positions. Both the media and politicians presented these rapes as a manifestation of Arab male bestiality, and in so doing, positioned the spectre of sexual violence as a product of Arab Islamic culture. In the media texts detailing this case, the ethnic male

body functioned as race capital to produce the sort of racialised spectacle that is both enabled by and understood within the dominant conceptual frameworks of Orientalist media narratives. The sexually predatory Middle Eastern/Muslim/Arab male became the local 'face of evil'.

This figure was made productive through the media practice of foregrounding the ethnic and religious background of the accused, serving the ideological function of causally linking being Lebanese and Muslim to sexual assault. That is, *being* Lebanese and Muslim was offered as the reason *for* the sexual violence. In this context, it was inferred that the accused committed the crime because they *were* Lebanese and Muslim. This reading is unavoidable given this practice was so insistently mobilised in each and every text. The use of ethnicity and religion as a mode of describing the perpetrators emphasised the crime as a wrong committed by a member of a particular group, rather than an individual. I remember feeling silenced by the threatened violence of the media commentary, with anti-racist feminists being offered the obscene choice of either being 'against the rapists or with them' should any critical observer happen to disagree with the way the media causally linked the culture and religion of the perpetrators to the crime of sexual assault. This oppressive regime passes for public debate and has inevitably pushed many of us into digital activism to create a critical alternative to how race is figured in the city and how we speak about it.

### Conclusion

At the end of 2008, *The Sydney Morning Herald* opinion page editor confessed to what is universally known in critically informed reading circles:

For a variety of reasons, the [opinion] page [of *The Sydney Morning Herald*] this year [2008] published more pieces by men than women (and received far more submissions from men than women), more by people over 40 than under, and more pieces by white Australians than other ethnicities (Dick, 2008).

If the aim of the editor was to shock and awe us with this finding, then his is a lonely discovery as the alert reader knows only too well that diversity of representation has never been a strong suit of the Sydney broadsheet. What is perhaps more intriguing is his insinuation that in previous years things have been different. When has the *Sydney Morning Herald* ever published the views and ideas of, say Arab or Aboriginal women under the age of 40, as anything more than a token presence? We used to proclaim tokenism is racism. Omission is also racism. If the editor understood racism as power, then perhaps his findings might not be fobbed off in a flippant like confession, but approached as a systemic long-term problem.

Do we fight the power or set up an alternative space? My motivation in setting up *Race and the City* can be found in this question.

With the emergence of the blog, we have a proliferation of voices. By their very presence, these voices displace the spectre of the monolithic expert. In blogville there is space to challenge the print media in ways that disrupt the time-honoured tradition that there are only two opinions on any one subject. The interactive blog provides for a diversity of opinions, so much so that most newspapers have incorporated blogs into their online editions. The traditional realms of media influence are slowly breaking up and with that disintegration of centralised power, we have new spaces to speak and write. If you have the resources and access to technology, then the act of self-representation is simply a matter of (b)logging on.

Theorist Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* how nothing more precipitated the rise of nationalism than print-capitalism, 'which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways' (Anderson, 1991: 36). This point is especially important in understanding the possibilities of facilitating the dissipation of nationalism through the blogosphere because it convenes many publics and communities that are neither mediated nor limited by the borders of the nation state.

The age of the blog augurs well for social change. New technologies of writing have revolutionised getting ideas into the public domain, without having to pass through the checkpoint of the mainstream media or pass muster with the gatekeepers of the publishing industry. New writing technologies represent an important phenomenon in creating new publics and counter publics, most especially for those who have been marginalised because their views can't be easily packaged or digested at the mass level. Blogville provides a space that recognises the hidden articulations of intellectual activity that take place, facilitating the development of new avenues for interactive dialogue and debate. The blog is like a virtual speaker's corner, allowing for a more democratic approach to writing because it is not constrained by populism or corporate concerns. The blogosphere has the potential to disrupt and transform conventional approaches to writing and publishing precisely because it doesn't play by the traditional rules. In this digital life, most anyone can blog. As Ernest J. Wilson III writes, 'new media are opening new channels of communication for all, creating unprecedented opportunities for participation in traditional and new ways, and promoting the competition of ideas' (2008: 2).

Yet, while we quote reports and try to find creative ways to support marginalised women in meaningful ways, the mainstream media continue to court Celebrity Native Informants (CNI) like Irshad Manji (*The Trouble with Islam*) and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (*Infidel*). Hailed as mavericks and insider experts, these usual suspects pen their

bestsellers about how backward Islam is, how monstrous Muslims are, intent on lobbing some fatwa over the fence or jihad into the jamboree. How can two women represent roughly over 1 billion people from vastly different backgrounds? Hirsi Ali and Manji are feted in the West in the most respectable of literary and media circles as the 'critical' feminist voice of Islam. Both are a favourite with popular culture celebrities like Oprah and feed into and off the Islamophobic strain that underwrites Western liberal feminism. Attempts at speaking back to the CNI are highly improbable given their exalted status. With the proliferation of blogs, subverting the insidious CNI and undermining their 'expertise' can only be a good thing.

*R&TC* is one such site. Its essence is best summed up in the first post:

If we don't have critical conversations about race and how it is experienced - especially with and by those who don't have the power or space to speak back to the race ideologues who more often than not, monopolise the floor and broadsheets and broadcasts of public discourse - then we are destined to perform the same old routines of snap and retort. So, let's talk about race. (Nov 2008 <http://raceandthecity.com/>)

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## Notes

[1] The term post-racial has been both embraced and contested by commentators and analysts alike across the media and in blogs including

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122627584403012071.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122627584403012071.html?mod=googlenews_wsj); 'Cornell West on a post-racial America'

[http://www.racewire.org/archives/2008/11/cornel\\_west\\_on\\_a\\_postracial\\_am.html](http://www.racewire.org/archives/2008/11/cornel_west_on_a_postracial_am.html); Project Race's 'Is this President Obama's Post-Racial America?'

[http://www.projectrace.com/fromthedirector/archive/012009\\_obama\\_post\\_racial\\_america.php](http://www.projectrace.com/fromthedirector/archive/012009_obama_post_racial_america.php); Meryl Dakin's 'Professors, Faculty Discuss Obama Election, Aftermath,'

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/12/02/politics/uwire/main4642997.shtml>; Shelby Steele's 'Obama's post-racial promise'

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-oe-steele5-2008nov05,0,1642069.story>; John Iceland's 'Post-Racial America?'

<http://ucpress.typepad.com/ucpresslog/2009/01/postracial-america.html>; and Darnell Hunt's 'Does Obama's victory signal the dawn of post-race politics?'

<http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/does-obama-s-victory-signal-the-72101.aspx>.

[2] By this, I do not mean to state that the adversarial model is unique to Australia, but since I am focusing on the Australian context, I discuss the ways in which this model constitutes racialised discourses within Australia.

[3] Advocates for asylum seekers and refugee rights especially welcomed the end of Howard era politics that abolished the capacity of community-based agencies like migrant resource centres (funded by the Department of Immigration) to speak out against the introduction of policies including Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), effectively locking TPV holders (deemed to be refugees) into a system that denied them rights to services and entitlements that permanent refugees were afforded. Human Rights Watch found that 'Australia's Temporary Protection Visa regime violates several core rights of recognized refugees, denying many of them any prospect of family reunification and condemning them to live in perpetual limbo.'

(<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/australia/australia1202.pdf>).

On 9 August 2008 Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) were abolished by the Rudd Government. This means that all initial applicants for a Protection visa who are found to engage Australia's protection obligations now receive a permanent Protection visa

([http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/68tpv\\_further.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/68tpv_further.htm)).

[4] An exception to this elision however occurs in season three when race is brought to the fore in 'No Ifs, Ands, or Butts'. In this episode, the sexually rapacious Samantha Jones - one of four white female protagonists whose sexual and romantic exploits colour in each 30 minute episode - sets her sights on an African American, one of the few times an African American appears as a character in this six

season long series. In an essay on how sex and citizenship are commodities to be consumed, Susan Zieger unpacks how 'Samantha's "conquest" is a familiar white appropriation of African-American bodies, though with the gender reversed' (2004: 102). Racetalk peppers this episode culminating in an acrimonious exchange between Samantha and the sister of Samantha's latest bed buddy, who doesn't approve of her brother dating a white woman. Carrie Bradshaw, the lead character, calls him a 'big black pussy' for acquiescing to his sister's demands. Zieger argues that this episode 'appears to make claims on behalf of the civil rights of sexual freedom' as well as defending 'the right to consume cross-culturally in order to enhance one's own signification' (2004: 103). For a discussion of *Sex and the City* movie and its erasure of race, see Adia Harvey's review at <http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2008/06/19/race-and-sex-and-the-city/> and a short piece at <http://www.goleft.org/index.php/news/entry/509>. Harvey's review importantly critiques the politics of the Jennifer Hudson character in the 2008 film version of *Sex and the City*. Academy award-winner Hudson plays an African American woman who is hired by Bradshaw to 'sort out' her messy white life. Harvey sees this character as a 'disappointing throwback to the [Mammy image](#) of earlier films—the darker skinned, full figured black woman who was content to tend to her white family at the neglect of her own, and who typically was responsible for providing emotional support and nurturance to a white woman who couldn't take care of herself'. This black female prototype, typecast in perpetual servility to white women and marginal to the main story represents the gendered racism that continues to underwrite mainstream US film culture. Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and Louise Beavers in *Imitation of Life* (1934) are historical examples of this regime of representation. Douglas Sirk's 1959 remake of *Imitation of Life* provides an ironic examination of race, gender, whiteness and passing. For a critical appraisal of both versions of *Imitation of Life*, see Sybil Del Gaudio's essay, 'The Mammy in Hollywood film' at <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC28folder/Mammy.htm>

[5] For media analyses of the 'children overboard' incident, see (eds) Jacka, L. and L Green *The New 'Others': Media & Society Post September 11* No 109 November 2003 Media International incorporating Culture and Policy Faculty of Arts, Griffith University.

[6] I use the term genocide as set out in Article 2 of the present Convention (that was in force as of 12 January 1951) to mean any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. [http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p\\_genoci.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm)

[7] See Cunneen and Stubbs, 1997.

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