

Trauma, Shared Recognition and Indigenous Resistance on Social Media

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Abstract

This paper investigates the ways in which Indigenous Australians respond individually, and collectively, to racial vilification by means of social media sites. Introducing the concept of “shared recognition” this paper describes the collective sense of anger and frustration experienced by Indigenous people when traumatic events in the public domain act as reminders of ongoing colonialism. Three examples are explored to demonstrate collective trauma as a result of racist and discriminatory acts that are made public, and the ways in which social media is utilised by Indigenous Australians to make sense of and cope with trauma. Firstly, the *Four Corners* program on ABC television entitled ‘Australia’s Shame’. Secondly, a cartoon produced by the editorial cartoonist for *The Australian* newspaper, Bill Leak depicting Indigenous fathers as neglectful. Finally, the social media movement, #IndigenousDads, that emerged in response to these events and demonstrates ongoing resistance to colonial narratives. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2004) notion of “affective economies” this paper unpacks the politics of pain, shame and pride in the aftermath of both the *Four Corners* program and the Bill Leak cartoon.

Keywords: Shared recognition; Social Media; Indigenous; Trauma; Resistance; Linked Fate

1 Introduction

This paper investigates the ways in which Indigenous Australians respond individually, and as members of broad and diverse communities, to racial vilification by means of social media sites. We introduce the concept of “shared recognition”—a term we have coined—to describe the collective sense of anger and frustration experienced by Indigenous people when traumatic events in the public domain act as reminders of the enduring-ness of colonial violence. It refers to the ways in which we continue to internalise white domination, and also in this instance, to our responses and reactions to it on social media. The term “shared recognition” acquires meaning through the widely held understanding that colonialism is not finished business, and that indeed, its effects continue to permeate the political and social domains in Australia in ways that adversely affect the health and well-being of all Indigenous subjects. “Shared recognition” takes note of the communal acknowledgement that is felt when all forms of racism toward Indigenous people are publicly displayed through a variety of social media events, some of which will be discussed here.

We build on the concept of “linked fate” as described by Michael Dawson (1995) who applies this particular usage to Black American subjects. Dawson (1995) argues that race still has a strong influence on the life chances of African Americans and as a result there is a connection between their interests as individuals and the collective fate of the group. “Shared recognition”

by contrast refers specifically to Australian Indigenous people's shared understanding and recognition of race-related discriminatory events, their knowledge of the effects of colonialism, both past and current, and their response to it by way of social media forums. We are interested in how in instances of public iterations of racism, collective trauma and hurt manifest on social media, and how platforms are accessed, deployed, and used as sites of resistance.

In order to flesh out the ideas that support and substantiate claims to "shared recognition", we use the following three examples as case studies: a broadcast of the *Four Corners* program on ABC television entitled 'Australia's Shame' aired on July 25th 2016. This program covered the violent mistreatment of Indigenous youth at the Don Dale Juvenile Justice Centre in Darwin. Secondly, we draw from a cartoon produced by the editorial cartoonist for *The Australian* newspaper, Bill Leak. This cartoon raised, and has continued to generate considerable public debate about depictions of Aboriginal people. Finally, we examine the social media movement, #IndigenousDads, that emerged in response to both of these events. We contend that these events and reactions may demonstrate that as a result of "shared recognition", Indigenous Australians suffer a deep sense of collective trauma when racist and discriminatory acts committed against their group are made public, and that they utilise public media spaces to make sense of and cope with trauma. We draw on Sara Ahmed's (2004) notion of "affective economies" to unpack the politics of pain, shame and pride in the aftermath of the screening of this episode of the *Four Corners* program. We believe that future empirical studies can establish firm links between traumatic events, social media's treatment of such events and the implications for emotional and mental states that users experience as a result of interactions with social media, as well as the coping mechanisms they may employ to deal with the effects of online trauma.

2 Background

Explicit images of tear-gassing and the violent abuse of young Aboriginal boys being held in the Don Dale youth Detention Centre in Darwin were screened on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's, *Four Corners* program on July 25th 2016. The program showed a series of leaked images and video footage that revealed that Aboriginal boys as young as 13 had been subject to treatment described by Aboriginal journalist, Jack Latimore and colleague Clare Land as "torture comparable to the abuses committed against inmates of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison" (2016, np). Social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, among others) was flooded with posts about the program and images of the abuse were shared widely, nationally and internationally, in fact, the image of one of the young boys, 17 year old Dylan Voller, made national and international headlines (see Figure 1). The image showed Voller handcuffed, hooded and strapped to a mechanical restraint chair. Other footage and images showed Voller being thrown across his cell, kneed and knocked to the ground, repeatedly stripped naked and kept in solitary confinement for lengthy periods of time. The public was repeatedly exposed to this story and images over the following weeks.



Figure 1: National Post in the Vancouver Sun, July 27th 2016

The Prime Minister immediately announced that a Royal Commission would be established to investigate the treatment of Indigenous youth in the juvenile justice system. Indigenous lawyer, Noel Pearson, responded by reminding the Prime Minister that a Royal Commission was held 25 years ago into Aboriginal deaths in custody with little changing despite a raft of recommendations, and that Indigenous people are still over-represented in the criminal and juvenile justice system. Pearson commented that more needs to be done to empower Indigenous communities and stated that,

Blackfellas have got to take charge and take responsibility for their own children. That part of the message really struggles to get traction...we're united in relation to the outrage about the end consequences, but we're divided over the question over whether Indigenous responsibility is a crucial part of the solution. And I say it is (Lateline 2016).

Shortly after the interview with Pearson, *The Australian* published a cartoon by Bill Leak depicting an Aboriginal boy being returned by a police officer to his father who is holding a beer can, and asks the police officer, "yeah righto, what's his name then?". Like the *Four Corners* story and images of young Aboriginal boys being abused, the cartoon was repeatedly shared on social media accompanied by commentary that was often racist and derogatory about Aboriginal parents, and fathers particularly. Bill Leak's depiction of Aboriginal fathers was defended at the highest levels with the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Prime Minister John Howard stating publicly that the cartoon was not racist.



Figure 2: Pedestrian TV @pedestriandaily, October 27th 2016

In response, Aboriginal father and Twitter user, Joel Bayliss tweeted an image of himself and his children with a comment "to counter the bill leak cartoon here is a pic of me & my kids. I am a proud Aboriginal father". The backlash against the cartoon saw the rise of a social media campaign using the hashtag #IndigenousDads, where Indigenous children and parents posted images documenting how their fathers had raised them and how their families have inspired them. Bill Leak defended his cartoon claiming his objective was to promote discussion. The Press Council who are responsible for establishing standards of practice for print and online publications, received over 700 complaints however, decided that the cartoon did not breach press standard that caused "substantial offence, distress or prejudice" (Meade 2016a, np).



Figure 3: Tweet by Bayliss, J. @jb_bays, 5th August 2016

Contrary to this decision many Indigenous people expressed “substantial offence” via Twitter and other social media platforms. Dameyon Bonson, founder of Black Rainbow an advocacy group for Indigenous LGBTQI people and communities said he felt “gut punched” when he saw the cartoon. He stated that he “felt crippled by it” and particularly as it was published on National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day (Davey 2016, p. np). Roy Ah-See, Chairperson of the NSW Aboriginal Lands Council said he was disappointed that Australians did not recognise the hurt and humiliation the cartoon had caused (Davey 2016, np). Journalist Allan Clarke Tweeted that the Bill Leak cartoon drew on outdated stereotypes and seeing it made him sick.



Figure 4: Tweet by Clarke, A. @AllanJClark, August 15th 2016

Many of the responses revealed a significant level of distress as expressed by Gerry Moore, CEO of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), who stated that,

this cartoon was never going to foster a constructive debate about intergenerational trauma, or issues of alcoholism and family breakdown that are born from it, or the lack of support for frontline services that work to address these issues ... personally, as an Aboriginal father, the cartoon offended me. It saddened me to see such tired old stereotypes trotted out in a national publication (Meade 2016a, np).

Following Joel Bayliss, Indigenous people took to Twitter expressing widespread outrage about the way the media represented Indigenous men and families. Using the hashtag “#IndigenousDads” they posted images celebrating their relationships with their fathers and other significant role models in their families. Luke Pearson, founder of the rotating Twitter account IndigenousX stated that the #IndigenousDad campaign,

was an important demonstration aimed at countering racist depictions and stereotypes, an essential reminder in any ‘national conversation’ that is going to take place. It sets the conversation tone and reminds us and reinforces the importance of our collective strength and humanity (2016, np).

#IndigenousDads trended on social media demonstrating a “shared recognition” and response from Indigenous Australians in a show of solidarity countering stereotypical media representation that continues to plague Indigenous people (Bogle 2016, np).



Figure 5: Tweet by National Indigenous Radio @NatIndigRadio 7th August 2016

3 Social media and Trauma

Although Indigenous Australians are enthusiastic social media users (Carlson 2016a) there is a paucity of research that examines the individual and collective effects of being subject to ongoing and often consistent racial discrimination and traumatic events on social media (Carlson 2016b). Online hate and harassment are very real issues for Indigenous people and constitute a form of “shared recognition” whereby trauma is understood as a consequence of colonialism and the continued subjugation and vilification of Indigenous people. Such expressions of hatred are not always confined solely to online environments. In fact, online expressions of intolerance can be correlated with violent actions offline. Recently, for example, in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, online hate preceded the tragic death of a young Aboriginal boy. Prior to his death several comments were posted on a community site. In one example, a

woman posted about Aboriginal youth breaking into a vehicle. The comments that followed urged people to hunt them down and run Aboriginal youth off the road referring to them as “sub human mutts” (Purtill 2016, np). Two days after the posts, a 14-year-old Aboriginal boy was struck by a utility truck while riding his dirt bike. Following his death further posts were made celebrating the death and expressing hope that more Aboriginal youth are killed and calling for an “annual cull” (Purtill 2016, np).

Subject to a continual barrage of hate and discrimination, the levels of distress and anguish amongst Indigenous Australians are understandably high (Carlson 2016b). An extensive literature exists that documents a litany of real and perceived discrimination in the lives of other historically oppressed groups and the mental and physical health consequences they suffer as a result of this reality (Carter 2007; Clark et al 1999; Krieger et al 1993; LaVeist 1996; Williams & Harris-Reid 1999; Williams 1996). William Smith, Tara Yosso and Daniel Solorzano (2011) liken the everyday extreme stress people of colour face to the stress soldiers face in battle. “Racial Battle Fatigue” they argue, refers to the “psychophysiological symptoms resulting from living in mundane extreme racist environment” (2011, p. 302). They suggest that the stress of constantly battling racism can be “mentally, emotionally, and physically draining and/or lethal” (2011, p. 302). A recent report conducted by the charity organisation, Mission Australia, revealed that Indigenous Australians suffer psychological distress at twice the rate of non-Indigenous people and are much more likely to be admitted to hospital for self-harm (Medhora 2016, np).

According to feminist researchers Jane Bailey and Sara Shayan, online hate and harassment can lead to depression, anxiety and in some cases suicide (2016, pp. 333-334). Carlson argues that the rise of social media has meant that Indigenous Australians are “prive to sadness in unprecedented and unique ways” (2016b, np). Injustice, discrimination and violence against Indigenous people make regular appearances in our news feed on social media resulting in further trauma.

Combined with lived experiences of racism, exposure to confronting and violent news content on social media can lead to psychological problems similar to PTSD. According to psychologist Monnica Williams, a collective trauma can be experienced by groups of people who are subject to such conditions (Williams, 2015). While social media has some very tangible positive aspects, we contend that participating on social media—especially exposure to racist or discriminatory content—can be overwhelming and can have serious negative impacts on people’s wellbeing.

3.1 Trauma

Trauma and the experiences of trauma can shatter basic assumptions and beliefs about personal identity and about the social fabric of the world (Ainsenburg & Ell 2005, p. 217). To understand the ways in which trauma impacts one’s life through a wide range of health, mental health and social problems, we have to understand what it is (The World Health Organization (WHO) 2013). Trauma has been defined as “a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows that assaults the person(s) from externally. Traumatic experiences are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (Terr 1990, p. 8). Van der Kolk (2015) makes a point about the complicated nature of trauma arguing that, “Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat” (p.393). As mentioned, it is not the trauma itself that does the damage; rather, it is how the individual’s mind and body reacts in its own unique way to the traumatic experience in combination with the unique response of the individual’s social group.

Trauma is transmitted through several pathways, which may include psychological, physical, social and cultural conditions (Sotero 2006). Intergenerational trauma is one such way that transcends each of these pathways and includes a wide range of experiences where people are physically threatened, hurt or violated, or when they witness others in similar situations. Intergenerational trauma impacts the entire person or people including the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world are. These conditions are all

profoundly altered by intergenerational trauma (Bacciagaluppi 2011). Intergenerational trauma, also referred to as historical trauma, is described as the complex experience of various populations that have been subjected to tribulation in the form of war, genocide, colonialism, among other distressing incidents (Gone 2013, p. 687). Intergenerational trauma is also connected to the impact that these experiences have had throughout the lifespan of those feeling violated and in the lives of generations that follow through re-traumatization via television, video, news, and other forms of media (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) (Denham 2008; Carlson et al. 2015).

3.2 Trauma and Indigenous People: Shared Recognition

Intergenerational trauma has been increasingly utilised within community activism, as well as in scholarly work, to discuss the health and overall well-being of Indigenous people. Sotero (2006) connects trauma and deep emotional and psychological scarring to a public health issue, as growing health disparities are connected to intergenerational trauma and ongoing distress caused by natural disasters, racism, physical and sexual assault, among other issues of social injustice experienced by Indigenous populations. Sotero (2006) also discusses a correlation between the collective distressing experience of trauma and how it impacts the psychological, emotional and physical health outcomes of those affected.

The collective experience of trauma emanates from a “shared recognition” of the continuity of colonial practices. This manifests often from the deep seated internalising of inferiority that comes with the repeated onslaught of racism; Indigenous people, whether politically motivated or not in the ‘white’ sense of that term, have a deep and abiding knowledge of how we have been, and continue to be perceived, as evidenced by the previous examples, which are but a smattering of random events used here to demonstrate recent articulations of racism; there are, unfortunately many more. “Shared recognition” ‘kicks in’ immediately as we ‘see’ ourselves depicted, mis-represented and vilified in the public domain (Sotero 2006). Like all other ethnic and racial groups in society, we have vastly differing views on many things, but we do hold a “shared recognition” of the historical and continuing application of colonial rule and its perpetually violent effects on our communities.

Among Indigenous peoples, intergenerational trauma, as an effect of “shared recognition” is often linked to the innumerable deaths of many peoples through violence, mass genocide, and the spread of disease (Kirmayer et al., 2014). Intergenerational trauma is also related to the impact of loss in connection to the loss many Indigenous people endure of their homes, lands and for some generations their culture (Dudgeon & Kelly, 2014; Ranzijn, McConnochie & Nolan, 2009). Health disparities contribute to the elevated mortality and morbidity rates of Indigenous subjects, adding to the traumatic experience and in many cases, the unresolved psychological impacts resulting from ongoing trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2011).

Brave Heart et al. (2011), discuss the collaborative reaction that a group of peoples may experience as a result of trauma as Historical Trauma Response (HTR). One aspect of this response is historical unresolved grief, which Brave Heart describes as the “profound unsettled bereavement resulting from the cumulative devastating losses” (2011, p. 283). Entire communities are affected, resulting in responses such as social malaise, dysfunctional family and social structures and high rates of suicide (Carlson & Frazer, 2015). Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2009) have suggested that chronic exposure to trauma can manifest in individual symptoms such as anxiety, depression, grief, addiction, self-harm and suicide. Experts have suggested that Indigenous populations experience higher levels of stressors associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Evans-Campbell 2008). However, according to Bryant-Davis (2007) a diagnosis of PTSD is too narrow for the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people. Bryant-Davis suggests Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) is more accurate. Menzies (2010) likewise argues that PTSD diagnoses ignore the role of culture and intergenerational trauma and fail to give insight into the relationship between historical and contemporary trauma, between policy and practice and the on-going effects of colonial rule.

3.3 Theorising Collective Trauma and Linked Fate Through “Shared Recognition”

While intergenerational trauma speaks to how trauma is experienced across generations, collective or cultural trauma refers to the social and political process through which a group—a collective—comes to see themselves as traumatised by both historical and current events, and how collective identities attempt to understand and represent this trauma, and ultimately, to seek a remedy or compensation for the trauma (Alexander et al., 2004). The key to cultural trauma is the social process through which members of the collective begin to construct events as traumatic: an active process of meaning making in which multiple agents such as social commentators, academics, community leaders, and spokespersons, for example, begin to filter particular events or a single event through the lens of trauma, therefore creating a shared understanding within the group (Alexander et al., 2004). The process includes several steps including identifying the cause of the trauma, who suffered harm, and who/what perpetrated the harm, as well as ascertaining the extent of the harm.

In order to share a sense of collective trauma through “shared recognition”, individuals must first share a sense of belonging to a group. This group consciousness is defined as the politicised in-group identification based on one’s identity as a member of a racial/ethnic minority group that is disadvantaged and that this status can only be overcome through collective action (Gurin, Miller & Gurin 1980; Jackman & Jackman 1973; Miller et al., 1981; Garcia 2003). The concept of “shared recognition” emphasises this point: because of the centrality of racial stratification in many industrialised countries with heterogeneous populations, individual people of colour often perceive that their fates are tied to those of racial/ethnic group to which they belong.

In the United States, where much of the literature on “linked fate” has focused on the experiences of African Americans and other Black ethnic populations, studies report a common consciousness amongst Blacks because of skin colour, experiences with being a victim of discrimination, and a sense that their group is disadvantaged and therefore they too, are likely to be disadvantaged (Wright-Austin, Middleton & Yon 2012). Evidently, factors such as racial discrimination have implications for the formation of a pan-ethnic identity—meaning that even if a traumatic event happens in the African American community, Latinos and Black Caribbean Americans are likely to also feel traumatised by the event because of group consciousness to a superordinate identity; Blackness or ‘minority status’ in such instances are understood as shared modes of oppression, despite obvious differences in histories and cultural status. Studies have shown this sense of linked fate to exist even as groups may state preference for being acknowledged by their sub-group identities (Crisp, Stone, & Hall, 2006; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; Hornsey & Hogg 2000; Masuoka 2006). According to Hurwitz, Peffley, and Mondak (2015) linked fate may serve to “heighten sensitivity of problems associated with disadvantage, not just problems associated with the group to which one feels linked” (p. 516).

Many scholars also claim that in-group consciousness leads to increased political participation (Sanchez 2006; Sanchez & Vargas 2016), and support for coalitions with other racial/ethnic groups (Kaufman 2003; Sanchez 2008; Uhlaner 1991). Therefore, even as one sees differences between one’s own group victimisation and another’s, if similarities in victimisation or disadvantage exist, groups can feel a sense of linked fate to the group to which one does not belong thereby invoking a kind of group-based victim consciousness and more importantly, a sense of collective traumatisation (Volhardt 2009; Volhardt 2010; Volhardt 2012). This form of consciousness, embedded in the knowledge of a broad based oppression to a range of minority groups, can have both positive and negative consequences. Indeed, collective recognition of racism and oppression can engender a feeling of solidarity, but also, importantly, it negates the specificity of histories that individual groups experience thereby obfuscating an understanding of the inherent causes and effects of race hatred, their particularities and historical precedents, and the manifold ways racism plays out in the public domain for specific groups and individuals. Solidarity in this context, while providing a sense

of commonality among many racially vilified groups, serves the interests of dominant forces precisely as it obscures racialised histories and lumps together all “minorities”.

Although a dearth of similar studies involving Indigenous groups inside or outside the US context exist, one can surmise that similar processes of group consciousness are at play amongst colonised peoples, and all socially disadvantaged groups. Recent worldwide outpouring of support from Blacks throughout the diaspora and by other groups who understand themselves to occupy similar positions in their own social contexts as Blacks occupy in the US—groups like Indigenous Australians—for the #BlackLivesMatter social media driven campaign, illustrate the group-based victim consciousness and activists throughout the world not only joined in solidarity against racial discrimination and violence, but also saw themselves as experiencing variations of the same struggle. Therefore, Indigenous Australians marching in Australia’s largest cities holding #BlackLivesMatter banners was not only an act of support and allegiance, but also an indicator of “shared recognition”. In this context, solidarity can be a positive and affirming consequence of “shared recognition”, but as suggested, individual groups need to be wary and develop a sound consciousness of the particular historical causes and consequences of their oppression.

4 The Affective Economies of Collective Trauma

We draw on Sara Ahmed’s (2004) notion of “affective economies” to unpack the politics of pain, shame and pride. Ahmed rejects both the “inside–out” and “outside–in” models of emotions. In the first instance, “psychological” accounts of emotions, such as emotional pain or distress, reduce emotions to internal bodily experiences. They posit emotions as that which is purely private and personal; emotions are fully contained within an individual’s body, which may then be expressed outwards (hence, the “inside–out” model). On the other hand, the second “sociological” account posits emotions as social but impersonal. Individuals are seen as passive victims of emotions that are generated outside of the body.

Emotions “do not reside in subjects or objects,” Ahmed writes. Rather, she challenges the very distinction between a pre-existing “inside” and “outside”, instead arguing, “emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place” (2004 p.10). It is through the circulation of particular emotions that the surfaces, skins and borders of both individual and collective bodies are intensified. In short, bodies themselves (and therefore their “insides” and “outsides”) are an effect of the circulation of emotions. Ahmed talks about this social circulation of emotions in terms of “affective economies” (2004, p. 10). She shows how pain and pride, for instance, through their circulation, are entangled in the very achievement of bodies—both individual and collective. It is through the circulation of emotions such as pain, shame and pride that bodies come into being, what she calls “surfacing”.

Following Ahmed, then, and in the context of this paper, we ask not “*what are emotions?*” but “*what do emotions do?*” By framing the question in this way, we look towards the *politics* of emotions, rather than the *experience* (i.e. the ‘feelingness’) of emotions. Because they are implicated in the production of bodies, emotions are always already political. We raise the question, how do the emotions of pain, shame and pride “work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individual and collective bodies” (Ahmed 2004, p.10) in the context of Indigenous people responding to racial vilification. We, too, reject both the “inside–out” and “outside–in” models of emotions. Rather than reducing collective trauma to internal bodily processes, whereby the body registers physical or psychological damage which the individual may then express as “pain”; and rather than seeing collective trauma as pre-existing/historical pain that is passively received by subjects, we understand collective trauma as implicated in the very production of political, *politicised* bodies. In this way, we will track the “affective economies” of Twitter in the wake of the Don Dale detention centre report.

5 The Circulation of Pain

In this section, we ask: *What does the online expression of collective trauma do?* The *Four Corners* report generated a huge public response. The images—of boys hooded, shirtless, tied to chairs alongside stories of them being tear gassed while playing cards and of being left in isolation for weeks on end—provoked an immediate debate about juvenile detention in Australia. As stated, the harrowing accounts, videos and images were circulated widely on social media in the days and weeks following the airing of the episode producing a wide range of responses and commentary.

Through the tweets that followed the Don Dale episode, we witnessed the mass expression of pain by Indigenous Australians. By conceptualising this as the circulation of an event that produces, collective trauma, we can see that Indigenous people are able to recognise the continuity of colonial power structures contained within these events, constituting a “shared recognition” of the specificities of our own colonial history and continued subjugation.



Figure 6: Finlay, S. M. @OnTopic, October 1st 2016



Figure 7: Brennan, B. @bridgeyb, July 25th 2016



Figure 8: Goat, S. @Senor_Goat, July 25th 2016

This case is an example of collective trauma and not simply an isolated incident of racial vilification based its political and historical precedents. This includes its links to the discourses produced to justify the removal of children. i.e. The Stolen Generations, Indigenous incarceration, and the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody government inquiry and its subsequent report, represent the longstanding colonial tactic of holding Indigenous people accountable for the violent effects of colonialism.



Figure 9: Clarke, A. @AllanJClarke, July 25th 2016

6 Pain: The re/production of collective bodies

The Don Dale episode made visible the colonial mechanisms of Indigenous incarceration, Indigenous peoples' over-representation in prison, and also, the trivialisation of attitudes towards Indigenous life and culture, despite the gesture of a national inquiry. Indigenous people already know, following the previous national inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that a national inquiry into our welfare is meaningless insofar as any expectations of governmental action. For Indigenous people, the story of Dylan Voller and other child prisoners was about more than state violence against children in detention. This was about state violence specifically aimed at *Indigenous children*.

Indigenous children make up more than half of the children currently in juvenile detention (Soldani 2016). Such statistics clearly reflect the continuity of colonial practices. We argue that such practices constitute for many of us a reactivation of what was the attempted genocide of our people during the early colonial era. Through a "shared recognition" of the continuity of colonial violence documented in the episode, Indigenous people express their pain vociferously on Twitter; there was an immediate response that can be tracked which demonstrates acute anguish, extreme sadness, and in many cases, rage by Indigenous social media users. These various manifestations of pain are both visceral and palpable.



Figure 11: Bungajee, S. @Bunbajee, 4th August 2016

Ahmed argues it is often through pain that social collectives are formed and, that simultaneously, pain becomes a vehicle that identifies both victims and survivors of colonial histories. Such histories are inscribed on the bodies of colonised subjects. Ahmed notes this is "bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places" (2004, p.27). More specifically, Ahmed points out that, "[P]ain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside, and it is through this transgression that I feel the border in the first place" (2004, p.27). Thus, we contend that collective trauma is implicated in the production of political collectives. This pain creates an "inside" and "outside" of an Indigenous body politic that is situated in a subaltern position to the colonial state. In this case, the circulation of pain intensifies the border between a white colonial state and its Indigenous colonial subjects. It is

through pain that socio-political structures are realised: colonised nations become nation states through the maintenance of divisions between white colonisers and ‘others’ that function to sustain colonial power relations.

7 Shame and Strategies of Containment

Colonial power, although omnipresent, is subject to fragility, however. The images of children being subject to violent carceral practices in the Don Dale detention facility and the expressed pain circulated online afterwards, threaten to destabilise the dominant narrative of the benevolent nation state that is reproduced by the Prime Minister’s reaction and call for a “national inquiry”. To borrow from Ahmed, in relation to the report into the Stolen Generations of Indigenous Australians: the pain represented the “broken skin of the nation” (2004, p.35). An injustice is being committed, children being abused, the situation demands resolution through the laying of blame, invariably returned to the victims of violence. Ahmed argues that pain is implicated in the production of shame and that shame works to expose a failure to fulfil an ideal such as a “benevolent state” or “compassionate nation”. In doing so, shame deprives one the ability to feel pride: “what makes [...] injustice unjust is that it has taken pride away; *it has deprived white Australia of its ability to declare its pride in itself to others,*” Ahmed writes (2004, p.112; italics in original).

As national pride is central to any idea of a coherent nation-state, it must be reclaimed. This can only happen if shame is ‘shifted’ from white Australia to Indigenous Australia. And Indigenous people know from past experience that any gesture towards a national inquiry is likely to be lip-service based on a transient feeling of shame that will be replaced by efforts to reconstitute national pride.



Figure 12: Williams, M. @IndigenousX, 7th August 2016

In the first move Prime Minister Turnbull announced a Royal Commission into youth justice in the Northern Territory the morning after the episode aired—the swiftness of action by the state was unprecedented. Through this move, the federal government maintained legitimacy by demonstrating a firm resolve to find justice—and also made it clear that if fault was found anywhere, it would be with the territory government, not the federal government. This is an important political manoeuvre because it shifts the onus of responsibility from the broad body politic to the domain of the Northern Territory who can then be found responsible and ‘brought into line’. While Turnbull recognised the seriousness of the injury, and displayed appropriate horror at the *Four Corners* report, his silence since this occurred, and his shifting of the onus of responsibility to the Territory government represent a deflection of responsibility on a national level and an acknowledgement of the effects that such brutality will have on the nation state as a whole.

8 The Leak Cartoon

Soon after the airing of the episode, *The Australian* published a cartoon by Bill Leak depicting an Aboriginal boy being returned by a police officer to his father, who is holding a beer can and asks the police officer, “yeah righto, what’s his name then?”. The obvious implication was that incarceration of Indigenous youth—such as those in Don Dale—is a direct consequence of neglectful, alcoholic parents. The Leak cartoon, and the colonial discourse it reproduced, thus worked to contain the political potential of national outrage by redirecting its source back onto Indigenous people. The reading of this image by many Indigenous people was that if Indigenous people were hurt and traumatised by the images of the Don Dale detention centre, it was their own fault. While what happened to Dylan Voller, and many other Indigenous children, is abhorrent, the image worked discursively to reinforce the notion that the fault rests in the hands of Indigenous people: parents, communities and their sympathisers. In this way, and following Ahmed, the location of shame, returned to Indigenous people, seeks to mollify the pain felt by Indigenous people by replacing it with feelings of shame.

9 Resisting the Colonial Narrative Through the Circulation of Pride

Framing the online response in terms of the “politics of trauma” (instead of simply the experience of trauma) we are able to make positive links from this what is known as the #IndigenousDads campaign. The online circulation of pain produced a politicised collective that, as we will now discuss, can then coordinate a response that troubles Leak’s colonial discourse. Leak’s image reduces all Indigenous people to incapable and uncaring parents, unable or unwilling to acquiesce to the dictates of white parenting practices. The image is thus a reproduction of the discourse that produced The Stolen Generations and continues to see Indigenous kids being removed, incarcerated, or violated for being Indigenous. Defending his cartoon, Leak stated that, “if you think things are pretty crook for children locked up in...Don Dale Youth Detention Centre, you should have a look at the homes they come from” (Meade 2016b, np). The fact that Leak and his supporters attempted to refute any intentional harm is evidence of the enduringness of this discourse.

Notwithstanding Leak’s protestations regarding his intent that the cartoon was to generate much needed national discussion, Indigenous social media users, through a “shared recognition” of the colonial discourse being deployed in the image, recognised the colonial discourses that attempted to deflect blame for Indigenous disadvantage. Through Twitter, users were provided a platform to contest the placement of shame on Indigenous people. Although the democratic potential of social media is heavily contested, it is clear that social media platforms are often ‘seized’ by users as sites for oppositional politics and new forms of political engagement.

The backlash against the cartoon saw the rise of a social media campaign using the hashtag #IndigenousDads, where Indigenous children and parents posted images documenting how their fathers had raised them and how their families have inspired them. These images and stories stood in direct contrast to the colonial stereotype of the neglectful Indigenous parent while also promoting culturally specific parenting practices that involve wider familial networks. In this way, the #IndigenousDads campaign worked to undermine Leak’s totalising colonial discourse and to provide a platform for Indigenous Dads, grandparents, Uncles, family friends and Elders who often collectively share the responsibilities of raising and nurturing children and ensuring their safety.



Aboriginal Health @NACCHOAustralia

10h

There's something VERY special happening on Twitter tonight #IndigenousDads @Matt_Cooke86



Figure 13: Aboriginal Health, @NACHOAustralia

10 Shared Recognition

Our research suggests a commonality of responses by Indigenous respondents to social events that indicate the extent of knowing that comes from “shared recognition”. Indigenous people in Australia are far better informed, as a consequence of social media (Carlson 2016c) about the historical events surrounding colonialism, but also, about the current effects, the inter-generational trauma, and the deep seated depression, anxiety and general ill health that comes from public perceptions and on-going vilification. Our access to, and increasing use of social media as a viable means of response to “shared recognition” is evidence of our understanding of the codes of racial vilification, but also, our resistance to it. In addition, social media provides a cultural framework where Indigenous people can speak to, and about, the various familial and socio-cultural formations that constitute the broad spectrum of Indigenous life in Australia.

11 Conclusion

This paper is a starting point for continued discussion regarding the utility of social media sites for Indigenous people in Australia. We have demonstrated that the effects of racism in the public sphere, often normalised or marginalised, have a considerable, detrimental and on-going impact on us. A “shared recognition” of the impact of colonisation and its continuity in the public sphere enables us to understand and respond to the collective responses to public utterances of racism, and also, to their often disastrous effects. We are aware that having a “shared recognition” of the historical precedents of racism does not imply we all react in the same way, but that Indigenous people who use social media to respond to racism do so as agents of resistance with the knowledge that their opposition will often bring about further articulations of racism. There is much to be done, we feel, in the area of understanding the use of social media as a political tool for dissent. The case studies we offer here testify that social media sites can be powerful vehicles of opposition for Indigenous politics, and can form a basis for discursive shifts, and potential change.

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