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# What's love got to do with it?

## Ambivalence and the national imaginary

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**W**riting this paper as a white, middle-class gay male, I ask some difficult questions of lesbian and gay rights campaigns that employ the slogan 'love makes a family', namely; how may white lesbians and gay men be complicit with white terror in colonial nations, and how may our desire for acknowledgement work in the service of new forms of empire that seek to justify histories of white violence? Drawing on the work of Irigaray, Butler and Ahmed (amongst others), I examine how certain discourses of love circulate within Australia, and how they come to serve what Moreton-Robinson (2004) terms a 'possessive investment in patriarchal white sovereignty'. By explicating some of the complex ways in which discourses of love exclude certain groups from the national imaginary, I follow Ahmed (2002) in proposing that any examination of white privilege by white people must involve a 'turning toward the other': a recognition of the intimate relationship between privilege and oppression that is clearly demonstrated by the ambivalent status of love in colonial nations such as Australia. I suggest that 'loving other-wise' may entail a focus on how we are 'undone' by love, and what this may mean for the families that lesbians and gay men seek to engender.

'I think white gay people feel cheated because they were born, in principle, into a society in which they were supposed to be safe. The anomaly of their sexuality puts them in danger, unexpectedly' (James Baldwin, cited in B?rub?, 2001, p. 256). There is an inherent danger, I believe, in writing as a white person about white terror. This danger

extends beyond what Adrienne Rich (1996) has referred to as 'white solipsism', and exhibits the potential for resulting not only in the reification of the 'good' white self through claims to being 'anti-racist', but also in the ongoing enactment of white terror. In other words, the white person who writes about whiteness may come to see their writing as an act of 'giving up power' – that the speaking of white privilege by white people is inherently subversive, critical or predisposed to changing the power dynamics of race in Western nations (Probyn, 2004). Understood in this way, such acts of white writing can be seen to designate a subject position for white people that is somehow disaffected or othered, a position that may be taken to denote a location of powerlessness. However, such claims to 'giving up power' in this fashion (where power is taken as referring to a property held primarily *within* subjects), may be understood as being far more disingenuous than simply claiming a disaffected subject position (Moreton-Robinson, 2006). There is also the potential that such claims may implicitly attribute blame for this disaffected position to those who call for the challenging of white privilege: if those of us who are white are called to account for our privilege, then surely those who call us to account are in some way (negatively) implicated in the responses that result from this call?

What can often happen, then, when white people write about whiteness, is that this writing performs a function in the service of white terror – it speaks for, and attempts to take the place of, those people who are positioned as being non-white. As a result, I propose that our understanding of 'white terror', as elaborated throughout this special issue, must recognise the ways in which those of us who identify as white may be involved in what are considered acts of terror at precisely the moment when we believe we are setting out to challenge or interrogate white terror. Indeed, I would take the notion of white solipsism (defined as the belief that the white self is the only reality) one step further, in suggesting that white writing can work to reassert the claim that the white self is all we *need* to know, or that whiteness as a system of representation (for defining or labelling 'terror') is sufficient to account for all selves and all experiences of oppression. This generates a logic wherein difference is understood as an aspect of the same – that all selves are but a variation of a common (white) sameness, and that difference only represents a derivation from this norm, rather than a radical alterity whose incommensurability cannot be subsumed within any particular hegemonic white framework

(Hook, 2005; Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005). White writing may thus become one site where the location or the subjectivity of those who position themselves/are positioned as non-white is erased yet again. White terror may therefore be played out at precisely the moment when white people attempt to challenge it.

Having said that, however, I do not believe that it must always and only be the case that white writing on whiteness enacts terror (or at least only enacts terror). There is the possibility that such writing may serve to effect, as Sara Ahmed suggests, 'a double turn ... [where] in turning towards their role and responsibility in histories of racism, as histories of this present, [white people may] turn away from themselves, and towards others' (2004, p. 59). Ahmed suggests that rather than white people claiming an 'anti-racist' subject position, or indeed even attempting to posit what 'anti-racism' may look like, 'whiteness studies should instead be about attending to forms of white racism and white privilege that are not undone, and may even be repeated and intensified, through declarations of whiteness, or through the recognition of privilege as privilege' (p. 58). This has been the work of scholars such as Fiona Nicoll (2000), Jane Haggis and Suzanne Schech (2000), white women in Australia who have sought to attend to some of the complex ways in which 'declarations of whiteness' may serve to mask the work that is yet to be done on examining white privilege *as a turn towards others*. One central focus of such work, particularly as it is informed by the theorising of Indigenous scholars (e.g., Moreton-Robinson, 2000), is the need to develop an understanding of power that sees it not as a possession of the autonomous subject, one who can take or give power at will, but rather as an effect of subjectification itself. Understanding how power operates in the service of privilege thus requires an understanding of how power circulates between people as the very mode of our existence (see also Butler, 1997; Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005).

In order to engage with these issues, I focus in this paper on the slogan 'Love makes a family', a catch-all statement that has been recently employed in a number of (predominantly white) lesbian and gay rights campaigns. Such campaigns draw on a discourse of love to demonstrate that lesbian and gay parents love their children in much the same way that heterosexual parents love their children. Whilst it is presumed that this will be an important counter to constructions of lesbian and gay parents as pathological, my suggestion is that it may do very little to actually examine how discourses of love work in the

service of the nation, and how they may render those of us who identify as white lesbian and gay parents complicit with white terror against non-white people (in particular Indigenous people and those people positioned as 'enemies of the nation'). This I believe is an important analytic move, as it has been far too easy for those of us who identify with this subject position to presume that our marginalised position in regards to sexuality somehow locates us outside white privilege (see also Barnard, 2004; B?rub?, 2001; Riggs, in press). Examining the intersections of gender, race and sexuality, particularly as they are played out within discourses surrounding parenting and families in Australia, may thus provide an opportunity to understand some of the ways in which forms of white privilege are left undone, or how a focus on white 'disadvantage' (e.g., in regards to sexuality) may only serve to further enforce the normative status of whiteness.

In the sections that follow I elaborate how discourses of love in regards to the slogan 'Love makes a family' hinge upon possessive understandings of parenting and families, and I locate this within a broader national framework wherein white privilege in Australia is maintained through 'possessive investments in (hetero)patriarchal white sovereignty' (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). By examining how such discourses of love may work in the (dis)service of white lesbian and gay parenting rights, I suggest that rights campaigns must do more than simply push for legislation that recognises the rights of lesbians and gay men who are taken to be always already white and middle-class. They must also occur in a context whereby we examine how citizenship and belonging is constructed in Australia upon the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty, and through the construction of certain people as being enemies of the white nation. I will propose that these types of disavowal demonstrate some of the ways in which a desire on the part of some lesbians and gay men in Australia to be acknowledged or recognised as citizens with particular rights may be seen to render lesbian and gay rights campaigns complicit with the new forms of Empire that are being played out in (post)colonial nations.

My intention in analysing the slogan 'Love makes a family' is not to suggest that 'love' doesn't have a place in lesbian and gay families, but rather that love as a 'turning towards the other' may constitute part of the work of understanding how power operates through privilege, and what this may mean for white lesbians and gay men in Australia. Such an approach would not locate those of us who identify

as white lesbians or gay men outside of white terror, but rather may allow for an ethical engagement with love that recognises its inherent ambivalence as constitutive of possibilities in the context of a 'post-colonising nation' (Moreton-Robinson, 2003).

## The object of love

Privileging the use of verbs which take a direct object encourages the subject-object relation to the detriment of the subject-subject relation, which needs a little more indirection in order to avoid the reduction of the other to an object of one's own ... 'I love to you' is more unusual than 'I love you', but respects the two more: I love to who you are, to what you do, without reducing you to an object of my love. (Irigaray, 2002, p. 60)

In her recent work on love, Luce Irigaray highlights the problems that arise within the English language as a result of its predominant focus on substantive meaning. This focus on the substantive produces a logic whereby language is assumed to represent the literal interpretation of objects, rather than understanding language as an always inadequate tool for interpreting ourselves and our experiences. This literalisation of language is evident in the slogan 'Love makes a family', which produces a very particular form of love that is rendered intelligible within a substantive framework. More specifically, the 'love' in 'love makes a family' is accorded a functional role, where it is understood to be productive of the category family. Love thus becomes something that: a) is done to us (i.e., we are 'loved' into a family), b) is formative of who we are, or are not (i.e., those of us in families are 'loved'), c) excludes certain forms of family (i.e., those that are not 'all about love'), and d) produces a realm of intelligibility within which subjects are acted upon as objects (i.e., 'love' is an agency that is directed towards or upon us). One outcome of this is that when we talk of 'love making a family' we are directed into making a series of substantive assumptions that promote certain family forms over others, and which construct 'love' as an action that is all encompassing. The implicit directive is that a 'real' or 'good' family will know that it is constituted through love – that the meaning of love or its value within a family is unequivocal.

One of the problems that arise from rights campaigns organised around the slogan 'Love makes a family' is that the endorsement of

love becomes an organising principle for political action. Yet, following Sara Ahmed, we may ask the question: 'How has politics become a struggle over who has the right to name themselves acting in love?' (2003, p. 1). Ahmed's question challenges us to look at what the naming or claiming of love may achieve in relation to politics. Moreover, it questions which types of love are allowed, and which types of love are disavowed. If, as common knowledge tells us, lesbians and gay men have historically been constituted as engaging in forms of love that are prohibited, or which are actively depicted as immoral or pathological, then surely any political rhetoric that highlights 'love' as the central motif will potentially work in the service of those who would seek to perpetuate the disavowal of lesbians and gay men. It would be naïve to think that simply by claiming to be acting 'out of love' lesbian and gay parents will be accorded rights.<sup>1</sup> Thus as Phelan (2001, p. 64) suggests; 'Appeals to [lesbian] maternal love and examples of happy families will continually confront the fear that these parents' love will lead their children to accept that which should not be accepted. Maternal love then becomes not domesticating and instructive, but seductive'. Such fear is often evidenced when public opinion is solicited in relation to legislation over lesbian and gay rights. For example, in relation to same-sex marriage rights in the US, one heterosexual respondent stated that:

Contrary to some opinions, love does not make a family. Love, certainly, is one component of a healthy family, but to say that love makes a family places the well-being of children into the hands of subjective emotions and standards. I would offer, instead, that based on centuries of experience and valid research, that only when a man and woman lovingly commit to a lifetime of fidelity, responsibility and hard work are the best interests of children and society served (Finn, 2002, p.2).

Here it is proposed that the statement 'Love makes a family' must be measured against 'valid research', which takes as central the role of 'man and woman' in constituting 'valid' (rather than 'subjective') love. Here again the substantive function of the slogan 'Love makes a family' works against lesbian and gay parents to deny that we can adequately 'do' the type of love that is required to constitute a family.

The above point about seduction also demonstrates an important consideration with regards to the gendered nature of discourses of love. The stigmatisation and pathologisation of same-sex attraction

does not occur in the same ways for both lesbians and gay men. Whilst this may be an obvious point, there are several implications that result from it in relation to the slogan 'Love makes a family' that may be less obvious. The first of these is the degree of threat that lesbian or gay bodies present to the patriarchal nation. Lesbian bodies (and by association, lesbian parents) may challenge the nation through the repudiation of men's control over women, or through the refusal to recognise patriarchy as legitimate. Gay men's bodies (and gay parents) threaten the hegemony of patriarchy in different ways. Gay men may be seen as undermining patriarchy through a refusal to perform masculinity in particular acceptable ways, or in performing acceptable masculinity within the context of a gay (read: non-normative) body. Of course, lesbians and gay men may do all or none of the above. My point is that the ways in which lesbians and gay men are differentially understood as threats to the nation impacts upon the types of access we are allowed in relation to families and parenting. Whilst as Phelan suggests above, lesbian mothers may be depicted as seducing their children into an 'unhealthy lifestyle', gay men may be (and indeed are) depicted as physically seducing their children (Riggs, 2004a; 2006; Rofes, 1998). The gendered nature of parenting, alongside the acceptable forms of maternal and paternal love available under heteropatriarchy, work in conjunction with one another to position lesbian and gay parents as 'loving inappropriately'. Claiming that 'love makes a family' may thus do very little to destabilise negative portrayals of lesbian and gay families in regards to normative discourses of familial love.

A final outcome that may result from the use of the slogan 'Love makes a family' is that love becomes primarily functional – it serves to do things. Love in this sense becomes a form of legitimisation, a form of justification, and ultimately, I would suggest, a form of domestication. Robson (1992) suggests that lesbian parents become domesticated when certain normative understandings of family and parenting are imposed upon, and accepted by, lesbian parents. The notion that 'love makes a family' is of course not solely the product of lesbian and gay rights campaigns. The use of love as a rhetorical tool for justifying certain family forms (i.e., the heterosexual nuclear family), and for protecting the rights of certain family members over others (i.e., men over women, parents over children), has long been identified as oppressive (e.g., Pollack and Vaughn, 1987). Taking on board the notion of 'love makes a family' without problematising it or

questioning the logic that inheres to it may thus be counterproductive to the aims of lesbian and gay rights campaigns. As I will discuss in the following section, there is also the potential that 'love' as a constitutive discourse of family may work in the service of the white nation, regardless of the sexuality of the parent.

### **Possessive investments and citizenship**

'Moving towards citizenship for sexual minorities will require not just an expansion of some boundaries, but a wholesale rethinking of the relations among citizenship, family, masculinity, religion and sexuality' (Phelan, 2001, p. 9). As the Australian nation continues to be confronted by the fact of Indigenous sovereignty, alongside a recognition of ongoing histories of colonisation and dispossession, there exists a profound uneasiness in relation to white claims to belonging in this country. For some people, this uneasiness is routinely dismissed through recourse to discourses of 'Indigenous violence', or 'the inevitability of progress'. Such discourses seek to justify colonisation and thus discount the histories of white violence that Indigenous narratives demonstrate (Riggs and Augoustinos, 2004). Yet in much the same way, this uneasiness is dismissed by white people who seek to 'right the wrongs', or engage in 'anti-racism'. Claims to benevolence, to 'giving up power', or involvement in 'practical reconciliation' also serve to overwrite Indigenous narratives of violence, or at the very least, to justify white belonging in Australia (Riggs, 2004b). Such claims do not represent a 'turning toward the other', but rather demonstrate one of the ways in which a focus solely on 'showing the face of the white subject ... *sustains the direction or orientation of [the] gaze*, whilst removing the "detour" provided by the reflection of the other' (original emphasis, Ahmed, 2004, p. 5). In other words, a focus on the 'good things' that white people engaged in anti-racism do, or a discussion of privilege that fails to look at what privilege is founded upon, serves to maintain a focus primarily on white people, without actually examining the relationship that white people are always already in with Indigenous people, amongst others (Nicoll, 2004).

These points about the disavowal of white violence are also evidenced in the ways in which white lesbian and gay parents attempt to seek equality with the white heterosexual majority in regards to rights. The claiming of rights by white lesbians and gay men signifies a desire not only to have entitlement to such rights recognised, but also to have the legitimacy of lesbian and gay identities acknowledged

as valid forms of citizenship (Phelan, 2001). This desire for an acknowledgement of validity (in addition to the right to civil liberty and protection), whilst understandably representing a desire to live a life free of anti-lesbian/gay violence, also signifies a desire for acknowledgement within the national imaginary. Such a desire, however, could potentially come at significant cost. One aspect of this cost would be a committed investment to the terms for belonging as set by the nation. Whilst the nation is composed of a great range of people from a wide range of cultures, the politics, economics and social fabric in Australia is predicated upon 'illegal possession' (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). To seek protection within the nation, and to do so through a desire for an acknowledgment of being, thus requires a taking on board (at least to some degree) of the terms for sanction set by the State (Butler, 2002). This obviously presents a problem to white lesbians and gay men, namely; whose rights and desires take precedence in a postcolonising nation? Should our primary responsibility as white lesbians and gay men be first to an ethical engagement with Indigenous sovereignty, and only then to securing rights for groups of people who are also currently disenfranchised within the national space? Or, as Phelan suggests in the above quote, does a desire for full citizenship on the part of white lesbians and gay men require a radical rethinking of national belonging that would take as its ground the fact of Indigenous sovereignty, a move that could be productive of a 'queered' national space that begins the important work of rethinking how we understand belonging, families and parenting (Barnard, 2004; Nicoll, 2001)? And of course there is the pressing need to examine what it may mean for a queer Indigenous person who lives within the Australian nation (shaped as it is upon the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty), and who may well experience an uneasy relationship to lesbian and gay rights movements, which typically do not allow a space for representations of queer Indigenous people: how is citizenship possible for someone whose life is disavowed in multiple, concurrent ways?

To return to my focus on the slogan 'Love makes a family', the above point about reconfiguring the national space requires that we examine how love has been used to secure the white nation. Ongoing contestations over land rights and native title, and the refutation of them under the current Howard government, represents a form of white terror whereby Indigenous people are positioned as not adequately 'loving the nation' – as knowingly attempting to destabilise

the white nation. This, in combination with the ongoing pathologisation of Indigenous families and parenting (as evidenced through the refusal of the Howard government to offer an apology to the Stolen Generations), suggests that we may see how the type(s) of love given sanction within the nation are those that pledge allegiance to a white history of Australia. As Povinelli suggests, 'Love does not make an Indigenous family qua traditional family to the Australian Parliament and courts, nor do local notions of corporeality, proximity, affect, place, context, or spirituality' (2002, p. 227). The reification of national love therefore serves to perpetuate the colonisation of Indigenous people's lives by confirming the status of white hegemony in Australia. White lesbian and gay parents who seek a place within the nation as recognised citizens thus trade on the forms of national love that are currently sanctioned, and which are founded on both the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty and the construction of other groups of people as enemies of the nation.

What is required here, then, is an understanding of how the use of the slogan 'Love makes a family' by lesbian and gay parents works in the service of Empire. Empire-building from this perspective becomes a practice of co-option, whereby previously disenfranchised groups (such as white lesbians and gay men) are given space within the national imaginary (albeit on terms highly delineated by the heterosexual majority) in order to reinforce the hegemony of whiteness. This provision of space turns on the reification of particular forms of love, and requires that lesbian and gay parents accept the particular 'ideal object' of love that is reinforced by the white nation. Complicity with such practices of Empire thus reveals the contingency of lesbian and gay rights upon the forms of citizenship already available within colonial nations, rather than necessarily representing a radical repudiation of 'heteronormative citizenship' (Johnson, 2003).

### **National loving and 'good queers'**

'The construction of subordinate identities may sometimes not necessarily take the form of constructing minority plaintiff identities so much as constructing plaintiff identities that still privilege, and indeed in a sense perform, dominant identities – identities that pass' (Johnson, 2002, pp. 327-328).

At this point it may be instructive to return to Irigaray's (2002) questioning of the substantive logic of love-as-having. In her excellent discussion of love and its operations in relation to nationalism, Sarah

Ahmed (2002) elaborates how love-as-having (object-directed love) becomes a form of national ownership, whereby the love that we lay claim to reinforces who we are. In other words, when we claim a form of love as our own – when we take an object as being the site of our love – then that love enables us to claim a position within the national ideal in regards to loveable objects. Our love for another thus becomes the love of what another can bring us, or what they represent to us. Love in this sense does not represent a turn towards the other, but rather forecloses the reciprocity that a ‘love to another’ (in Irigaray’s terms) could engender. Love-as-having, love as a symbolic approximation of a national ideal through ownership of the object, may do very little to refuse the types of love that claim hegemony within the nation. Indeed, love as ownership may very well reinforce the types of ‘loving belonging’ that have informed white belonging in Australia since colonisation.

It is of course important to clarify here the limitations to the above explication of love-as-having in regards to white lesbian and gay parents. Whilst the slogan ‘Love makes a family’ would appear to demonstrate a certain willingness to commit to the terms for belonging or acknowledgement within the white Australian nation, it must also be recognised that under the current Howard government there are limitations as to how far lesbians and gay men will be admitted into the national space, regardless of any commitment to possessive investments. Carol Johnson (2002) suggests that the terms for lesbian and gay belonging that are set by the nation encourage a form of passing, whereby lesbians and gay men must be complicit with our own oppression in the form of passing off our relationships as ‘just like’ heterosexual relationships, and in not being ‘too threatening’ in our behaviours and words in public spaces. She suggests that this encourages the performance of the subject position ‘good queer’, where certain non-heterosexual bodies are granted recognition as a result of their ability to look as the nation would desire them to look (i.e., not queer, not threatening, not subversive etc.) In regards to ‘Love makes a family’ campaigns, the notion of the ‘loving (lesbian or gay) family’, whilst potentially running the risk for accusations of ‘seduction’, may also in part conform to the non-threatening image of lesbians and gay parents as being ‘just like’ heterosexual parents (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004).

One of the key problems that arises from this location of lesbian and gay parental love within the terms of a national imaginary (along-

side the previously discussed problems of objectification and ownership), is that it is premised upon the exclusion of non-heterosexual families and parenting styles that do not or cannot conform to those deemed acceptable (Phelan, 2001). Thus for instance, whilst ‘Love makes a family’ type campaigns may push for the rights of all queer families, it is far less likely that children in families with bisexual or transgendered parents, or where the parenting roles are shared between a wide range of people (for example in polyamorous relationships), will be recognised as exhibiting legitimate forms of love. This again draws attention to the distinction between access to rights, and acknowledgement of being – whilst some lesbians and gay men may be able to gain acknowledgement of the validity of their relationships within the national imaginary, this may come at the expense of those non-normative families or relationships that are not accorded acknowledgement (Riggs, in press; Stoler, 2001).

Furthermore, it is not only the case (as previously outlined) that white lesbians and gay men are able to claim a space for our love as a result of ongoing colonising violence against Indigenous people (e.g., in regards to the refutation of land rights claims and the refusal to offer an apology or negotiate a treaty). The white nation also reinforces its hegemony by positioning certain groups of people (e.g., asylum seekers) as being enemies of the nation. Whilst of course many white men and women, both heterosexual and queer, do indeed challenge the government’s policies on mandatory detention and other forms of human rights violations against asylum seekers, this does not negate the fact that our belonging as white people is further secured through the construction of certain groups of people as enemies. Indeed, the recent political and media representations in Australia of ‘children overboard’ demonstrates one of the ways in which a position of love is claimed by the white nation through contrast with those positioned as unable to appropriately ‘love their children’. In other words, reports of asylum seekers threatening to throw their children overboard in order to be granted asylum (reports which have since been shown to be false) are used to bolster the contrast between white Australians who ‘love their children’, and asylum seekers who will ‘risk their children’s lives’ (O’Doherty and Augoustinos, 2005). Here the motivations for any person seeking asylum are marginalised, and asylum seekers are instead positioned as threats both to their own children, and to the ‘national love’ of white Australians (Hage, 2003).

Finally, in a global context, where white/dominant group members

maintain such a stranglehold on economies, politics and social welfare, it would be disingenuous to suggest that white lesbians and gay men in Australia do not stand to benefit from such imbalances in power. Claiming a position of love in Australia currently is thus extremely tenuous, and whilst it may be true within particular lesbian and gay households that 'love makes a family', such love is highly contingent upon the contents of a national imaginary that refuses love to many groups of people, and which is founded upon the denial of Indigenous sovereignty.

### Loving other-wise

We cannot then equate love with justice. Justice is not about learning to love others, let alone loving difference. Justice is not about 'getting along', but should preserve the right of others not to enter into relationships, 'to not be with me', in the first place. The other, for example, might not want my grief, let alone my sympathy, or love ... Love is not what will challenge the very power relations that idealisation 'supports' in its restriction of ideality to some bodies and not others. In fact 'to love the abject' is close to the liberal politics as charity, one that usually makes the loving subject feel better for having loved and given love to someone whom is presumed to be unloved, but which sustains the very relations of power that compels the charitable love to be shown in this way ... In the resistance to speaking *in the name of love*, in the recognition that we do not simply *act out of love*, we can find perhaps a different way of orientating ourselves towards others (original emphases, Ahmed, 2002, pp. 44-47).

In this section of the paper, I would like to tentatively sketch out some of the possibilities for 'loving other-wise'. This term, which I take from the work of both Luce Irigaray (2002) and Lorraine Johnson-Riordan (2005), suggests a number of important dimensions of love in the context of a postcolonising nation. Most importantly, this term is *not* intended to suggest a benevolent turn towards the other – that 'all we need is love' to do the work of addressing white violence in Australia. Instead, the term 'loving other-wise' suggests two potentially more productive and honest engagements with an ethics of love in a postcolonising nation. First, there is the need, as Sara Ahmed (2004) suggests, for white people seeking to challenge white privilege to not simply stop at looking at our own privilege, but

that such an examination of privilege must entail a 'turning towards the other'. Such a turn need not be one of benevolence (i.e., to 'help the other'), nor one seeking solace (i.e., 'the other can teach me what to do better'), but rather would constitute a recognition of how white privilege is constituted through its corollary of both Indigenous disadvantage, and the construction of 'enemies of the State'. 'Loving other-wise' in this sense may represent a move towards recognising the role that the location of the other plays (and has always played) in the constitution of the white self: the ways in which notions of the 'good white person' have always already been contingent on constructions of 'the primitive'; constructions that, whilst not reflecting the actual location of the other, *do* signify how the (absent) presence of the other is engaged with. This generates questions such as 'what purpose do constructions of "Indigenous threat" (for example) serve the white nation?' rather than questions that seek to look simplistically at either 'what is white privilege?' or 'what are the problems faced by the non-white other?'. Whilst understanding white privilege and non-white disadvantage has an important place in challenging white terror, the notion of being 'wise of the other' may enable us to actually turn towards the other at the same time as we examine white privilege. This may also involve, as Sara Ahmed suggests above, a recognition of the fact that the other may not want to enter into a 'loving relationship' with me, or that claims to love may be unwelcome in regards to racialised power imbalances.

This brings me to the second implication of the term 'loving other-wise'. This is perhaps a more literal meaning: that there is a need to understand how love is constituted in a network of power relations, 'otherwise' we will fail to see how claims to love may work in the service of white hegemony. This understanding of 'loving other-wise' places a prohibition on blithely continuing the government-sponsored agenda for 'practical reconciliation', with the presumption that all that is needed is yet more (white) attention to issues of Indigenous disadvantage. Such a presumption constitutes what Fiona Nicoll (2001, p. 154) has referred to as the difference between 'reconciliation to' ('to make another resigned or contentedly submissive'), and 'reconciliation with' (which 'conveys the meaning of "harmonising", "healing" or "making friendly after estrangement"'). The term 'loving other-wise' in this sense is thus a clear signal to those of us who identify as white to begin the work of thinking through how white violence continues to be enacted in the name of the national good (Rutherford,

2002). The term also suggests, again following Ahmed (2002), that attempts by white Australians to engage in ‘reconciliation with’ Indigenous people may be refused – that the ambivalence of love in a postcolonising nation such as Australia requires that those of us who identify as white must recognise that our desire for ‘harmonising’ or ‘healing’ may be neither desired or welcomed by Indigenous people. Recognition of the ground of Indigenous sovereignty as the precursor to any engagement with reconciliation by white people thus allows for the possibility of refusal as an inherent right of Indigenous people who are recognised as knowing subjects. To do anything else would be to yet again fail to understand white identities as constituted through racialised power networks that cannot be side-stepped simply by naming whiteness or ‘owning up’ to white privilege (Ahmed, 2004).

Whilst an extended discussion of how racialised power acts in the service of subject constitution is beyond the scope of this paper (but see Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005), it is important to point out how power as an artefact circulates *between* people in the service of subject constitution (as opposed to the assumption that it operates solely *within* people). Such an understanding of power holds important implications for how we understand ‘loving other-wise’. If power is understood as the property of the (white) individual, something that can be taken or given up at will, then power will always remain the property of those who hold hegemony (Moreton-Robinson, 2006). Thus the power to tolerate, or to give up power becomes yet another reinforcement of power itself, rather than an actual engagement with the other who may be the object of power (Hage, 1998; Nicoll, 2001). Power in this sense is evident in the slogan ‘love makes a family’, where a substantive logic makes one person an object of another’s love. This notion of a one-to-one correspondence between the object of our love and our approximation of a national ideal of love fails to adequately understand how the national ideal circulates as an object that is impossible to have. To have love (to own or possess love) is not the same as *being for* love (Irigaray, 2002), much the same as to lay claim to power is never sufficient enough to actually occupy a site of unequivocal power (Butler, 1997).

Racialised power circulates upon and between bodies, but cannot be pinned down as a property that is held without challenge. Obviously certain (white) bodies lay claim to a position of power, and indeed occupy a site of privilege that is dependent upon the enactment of

power, yet such bodies are always constituted in a relationship to historical and spatial forces that are constantly under contestation. To see power as a property solely of particular white bodies (and thus to see other bodies as always without power) is to reinforce the illusion of white sovereignty that has itself been dependent upon a disavowal, rather than an overwriting, of Indigenous sovereignty. Following Hook (2005), we may thus understand this disavowal as having forever changed white claims to power. In other words, the confrontation with the fact of Indigenous sovereignty cannot be simply denied or displaced, but rather the act of disavowal demonstrates that the white subject (and nation) is forever changed by the encounter. Forms of ‘national love’, and the types of ‘love for the other’ claimed within the rhetoric of government-sponsored reconciliation demonstrates one of the ways in which this encounter is managed.

### The ambivalence of love

I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must. Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire (Butler, 2004, p. 23)

This quotation points about the ways in which power circulates around discourses of love and how postcolonising nations such as Australia demonstrate the ambivalence of love. Love, whether it be for the nation, for another, or as an act of familial constitution, is always contingent in Western (post)colonial nations upon the suppression of its other: hate. This suggests that in order for us to understand how love functions as a nationalist practice (and what this may mean for ‘love makes a family’), we must look at the location of claims to love within a range of historical frameworks (Stoler, 2001). How do claims to love work to distance us from violence? How does love-as-having serve the purpose of claiming ownership or a right to acknowledgment? And how may the claim to ‘act from love’ actually enact a violent erasure of those who are taken as an object of this love? These are questions that this paper has circled around, sometimes touching on, sometimes signalling as requiring further thought and examination.



What this paper has demonstrated is some of the problems that may arise from the claim that 'Love makes a family'. Slogans such as these, whilst potentially having some utility in equal rights campaigns, may do very little to challenge white lesbians and gay men to examine our complicity in practices of exclusion, particularly those more subtle forms that work in the service of empire. Though it may be important to gain access to rights for the sake of our families, and whilst an accompanying acknowledgement of the validity of our family forms may be politically important for some lesbians and gay men, it is important that this not come at the expense of examining how discourses of love may demonstrate a possessive investment in patriarchal white sovereignty. Rights claims that start from the individual lesbian or gay man, and which rely on singular identity politics to make their claims, may not adequately account for ongoing histories of white violence, and their role in legitimating white belonging and citizenship.

What would seem to be required, then, is a move towards what Butler (2004) has referred to as the ways in which our relationships with others 'undo us'. Rather than positing that 'loves makes a family', we may instead look at how love 'unmakes' a family, both in negative and positive ways. For example, in regards to the former, how may discourses of love marginalise particular families, or tear families apart when violence results from claims of love? How may families fall apart when some members refuse to accept the types of love that other family members value? In regards to the latter understanding of love 'unmaking' a family, we may look at how the deconstruction of discourses of love holds the potential for creating radical understandings of family and kinship (as queer families have long been engaged in, see Weston, 1994): How may the unmaking of particular family forms (specifically, the heterosexual nuclear family) contribute to the destabilisation of heteropatriarchy, and result in a concomitant shift in understandings of rights, citizenship and the white nation itself? These types of questions, which draw attention to the inherent ambivalence of love, demonstrate how we are undone by the relationships we have with other people. This is not only the case for those we are 'in love' with, or those we take as the objects of our love, but also for those with whom our relationships are based less on love and more on fear, resentment or disavowal. We are undone precisely when our claims to love reflect back to us those people we refuse love to, or whose love we designate as invalid. Reflecting on

how love operates in the service of hate and exclusion will be an important role for rights campaigns that recognise the need to acknowledge and engage with their complicity with regimes of white terror and new incarnations of empire.

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## Notes

1. There is an important point to be made here: my intention in this paper is not to suggest that lesbian and gay parents should not talk about our experiences of love within our families, or the ways in which sexuality operates in our lives. To do so would be to conform precisely to the types of desexualised subjectivities that are often expected of non-heterosexual individuals when we present ourselves in public spaces (Malone and Cleary, 2002). Rather, my point is that we need to be mindful of how we use discourses of love within rights campaigns. This is quite a different question, in my opinion, than actually questioning the need to talk about love, sexuality or families at all.

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