

## THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT: BRITISHNESS AND WHITE POSSESSION

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The formation of specifically white subject positions has in fact been [the] key, at times as cause and at times as effect, to the socio-political processes inherent in taking land and making nations (Frankenberg 1997: 2).

'I do not believe that the real life of this nation is to be found either in the great luxury hotels and the petty gossip of so called fashionable suburbs, or in the officialdom of organised masses. It is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest contribution to the immortality of their race.' Those words are in substance as true today as they were then (John Howard quoting Robert Menzies, 3 September 1997).

The Prime Minister is touring the battlefields of France where his father and grandfather fought, carrying with him one of their wartime diaries. Is such wallowing in the past healthy? Sounds like black armband travel to me (Melissa Lucashenko, in *The Australian*, 29 April 2000).

The British imperial project was predicated on taking possession of other peoples' lands and resources for the benefit of Empire. Britain took possession in a number of ways: in Canada, the United States and New Zealand it was through negotiated settlements and treaties with Indigenous peoples that lands became appropriated by the Crown. The right to take possession was embedded in British and international common law and rationalised through a discourse of civilisation that supported war, physical occupation and the will and desire to possess. Underpinning property rights, possession entails values, beliefs, norms and social conventions, as well as legal protection, as it operates ideologically, discursively and materially. Property rights are derived from the Crown which in the form of the nation-state holds possession. Possession and nationhood are thus constituted symbiotically. This leads me to ask whether the form of Britishness and national identity that developed in Australia is 'free of, uninformed, and unshaped by' Indigenous sovereignty (Morrison 2002: 266). In this article I explore how the core values of Australian national identity are located within the house that Jack built; a nation that in its denial of Indigenous

sovereignty is perceived to be a white possession.

### The Perceived Loss of Dominance

Despite the dominance of whiteness culturally, politically and economically, since Australia's bicentenary there has been a concerted effort to write about and reiterate the relationship between Britishness and Australian national identity through a discourse of loss and recuperation. The emergence of this literature coincided with Australia's bicentenary, evoking a new sense of nationalism, which celebrated and promoted the idea of a unified nation, born in part as a response to more than a decade of multiculturalism. Keating's policies in particular were thought to undermine the idea that the nation was a unified white possession. The push to see Australia as part of Asia did not sit well with members of a growing conservative electorate who perceived themselves as a country with more in common with Britain, Europe and America than our neighbours to the north. A discourse of loss emerged, tied to the ideas that there were too many non-British migrants, mainly Asian, entering Australia and the granting of native title to Indigenous people after the *Mabo* decision. Both, the fear of Asian 'invasion' and of 'dispossession' by Indigenous people, were orchestrated to recentre white possession of the nation. The conservative reaction to the Keating government resulted in the election of John Howard and the emergence of Pauline Hanson, representing the One Nation party, onto the political scene. Both Howard and Hanson espoused a return to 'core values' of the mainstream and the reduction of fiscal and policy support for multiculturalism and Indigenous affairs. The Office of Multicultural Affairs closed and Howard appointed a National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) in 1997 to provide policy direction and strategies for implementation over the next ten years. The NMAC's report *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*, was launched on 5 May 1999.

In response, the government presented its multicultural policy in parliament in December of the same year 'highlighting the need for Australian multicultural policy to be a unifying force and relevant to all

Australians' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Fact Sheet 6*: 1). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's budget was decreased and its policy direction changed from one of rights-based advocacy to practical reconciliation. The native title legislation was amended to reduce the degree and amount of rights enshrined in the original Act. By selectively demonising migrants, Indigenous people and later refugees, Howard effectively recuperated national identity and white possession, which he constructed as threatened by the 'political correctness' of the Hawke and Keating governments.

Another way that Howard strategically deployed the discourse of loss and recuperation was by reifying the digger whose embodiment in Weary Dunlop, a white heterosexual male, represents the core national values of mateship, egalitarianism and a fair go (Howard 1997). Such an embodiment implicitly excludes non-white migrants and Indigenous people from holding such core values. As Ghassan Hage argues 'it means making the ludicrous claim that other people in the world are less committed to them or actually committed to opposing values' (2003: 73). Howard's assertion of such nationally-held core values paradoxically excludes the power relations which support and nurture white dominance while simultaneously exalting its seemingly invisible existence. The core values which were displayed by diggers on the battle fields are never linked to their colonial origins and the part they played in claiming the nation as a white possession.

Like Howard, Paul Keating also deployed the digger in nationalist rhetoric but he did so in a different way. As Fiona Nicoll argues in her book *From Diggers to Drag Queens*, Keating's eulogy to the unknown soldier 'presented ... a figure capable of drawing the diverse threads comprising contemporary Australian society together in tolerance' (2001: 29). In his attempt to reorient Australia's core values towards a postcolonial future, Keating walked the Kokoda trail in the ex-colony of Papua New Guinea, relocating the digger in the Pacific and away from Europe, also signifying Australia's role as a colonising nation. Though Keating was willing to acknowledge past injustices and presented an Australian national identity that did not privilege Britishness, he did not alter the perception that the nation is a white possession (Johnson 2002).

Prime Minister Howard has visited the majority of overseas Australian war memorials where his attendance and conveyance of respect were televised to the nation. In particular, his visit to French battlefields signified to the nation that he had been touched by war through carrying to the site a diary belonging to a member of his family. Promoting his family's wartime contribution assists in legitimating his authority as an Australian leader of the nation and vicariously links him to the digger tradition. Howard strategically deploys the digger, connecting the First World War to East Timor and then Iraq to substantiate our involvement in war; it is no coincidence that all our soldiers are now referred to as diggers. He will be at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli, when Australia's latest contingent of armed forces, who will be under the command of the British, arrives in Muthanna province, Southern Iraq on the 25<sup>th</sup> April (*The Weekend Australian*, 26-7 February 2005: 19). The icon of the digger defending all that his country represents, in the guise of protecting other people's land and sovereignty, reaffirms in the national imaginary that the nation is a white possession. Similarly, the link between the digger and his British roots will be performed through Prince Charles presiding over the Gallipoli ceremonies this year.

Ghassan Hage argues that this apparent sense of loss and affirmation of white Australian heritage is tied to the perception that there was an assault on Australo-Britishness and its importance to the way in which people perceive their sense of belonging. He argues that white Australia's sense of loss is directly connected to what he terms '*governmental belonging*'. This involves

the belief that one has a right over the nation, ... the belief in one's *possession* of the right to contribute (even if only by having a legitimate opinion with regards to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it remains 'one's home' (Hage 1998: 46 my emphasis).

The right to possess is inextricably tied to perceiving the nation as a white possession. As Hage illustrates, during the years when multiculturalism was policy-driven, a white middle-class exerted their governmental belonging to give voice to their aspirations and ideals on being cosmo-multicultural. The 'cosmo-multiculturalist' could be distant from the material reality of multiculturalism but appreciate and enjoy the aesthetic interaction

and food (1997:118-146). Extending Hage's argument, the cosmo-multiculturalist could support the granting of native title because the law and government limited the material reality for Indigenous people and Indigenous sovereignty rights were not granted. White possession was understood as not being threatened by these concessions. The discourse of loss and recuperation was in response to a split and crisis within whiteness producing a sense of declension and melancholy that gave impetus to recentring white possession.

That such a sense of loss of governmental belonging is underpinned by the belief that the nation is a white possession is evident in the recent High Court decision in the native title claim of the Yorta Yorta people (Moreton-Robinson 2005). The High Court consolidated its legal and political resistance to native title by creating judicial and legal impediments that were presented as though they were race blind. Yet, the origin and assertion of property law in Australia continues to be based on racial domination and white possession. The denial of the Yorta Yorta's native title was based on a regime of statutory interpretation that usurped the common law property rights of Indigenous people. Pearson argues that 'it is the fact of occupation that excites recognition and protection by the common law. Possession is the conclusion of law that follows from the fact of occupation...it is the occupation of land that the common law recognises and protects in the first instance' not traditional laws and customs (2003: 22). Traditional laws and customs identify entitlement and territory, allocate rights, interests and responsibilities within communal possession and regulate their exercise by community members. According to Pearson

When you approach the question of what continues after annexation by answering the rights and interests established by traditional law and custom – rather than by answering that it is the right to occupy land by authority of, and in accordance with, one's traditional laws and customs – this has profound implications for the way in which one conceptualises native title and ultimately, how one deals with proof (2003: 25).

According to Pearson on the basis of the fact of occupation, under Australian common law, the Yorta Yorta proved their native title. In effect, the High Court's decision assumed 'only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights' (Harris 1995: 277–

8). The High Court refuses the continuity of Indigenous sovereignty as the precondition and genesis of all concomitant rights, interests, entitlements, responsibilities, obligations, customs and law. In doing so, the High Court imputed reified white social standards to the Yorta Yorta which 'not only denied their right to historical change but also the reality of their paradoxical continued existence' in white Australia (Torres & Mulin 1995: 186). The perception that the nation is a white possession was visible in this decision.

### **The Return to Britishness**

Since assuming power in 1996, Howard has given numerous speeches outlining the Australian core values of 'fairness', 'tolerance', 'equality', 'mateship', 'down-to-earth common-sense', 'decency' and 'a commitment to democracy' (Hage 2003: 70–3). These values in one form or another are echoed in the literature on Britishness and Australian national identity. There is consensus that they are the core white values of the nation. For Howard, and writers such as Miriam Dixson, these values 'hold' the nation and they need to be reaffirmed and their social capital enhanced.

A common thread woven through the literature is that Australian national identity has been shaped by British values shared by convicts, explorers and pioneers, the nation's founding ancestors. Their ethnic origins are acknowledged as being English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh, but collectively they constitute the British. It is often argued that the form of Britishness that developed in Australia was homogenous due to the lack of overt class barriers, the shared experience of immigration or transportation and the struggle to survive in a harsh and difficult landscape. This distinctly Australian and homogeneous form of Britishness is racialised as being Anglo-Saxon (English), Anglo-Celtic (English and Irish) or the British patriotic race (English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh). Deploying these racial categories in this way suggests that there were a number of different races operating in Australia which in effect conflates ethnicity with race and masks the homogeneity of whiteness that developed through the spread of Empire (Allen 1994). So while whiteness masked the ethnic heterogeneity of British immigrants in the service of the egalitarian myth up to the latter years of the twentieth century, today the egalitarian myth that Australia is a 'tolerant society' is deployed to mask the persistently privileged position of whiteness

and its possession of the nation which simultaneously disavows Indigenous sovereignty.

Representations of Britishness take a number of forms in historical narratives written since the late 1990s. In their respective articles in an issue of the *Journal of Historical Studies*, Neville Meaney and Stuart Ward illustrate that Australia has a British inheritance consisting of economic, cultural and political affiliation with Britain until the late 1960s. Australians share with the British kinship and familial ties and this is why they supported Britain in the two world wars, why they continued to trade with the motherland even when it was not in their best interests and why they thought Britain's protection would continue. It was only after Britain decided to invest its trading future in Europe that Australia sought trade and security in the arms of the United States (Ward 2001: 104; Meaney 2001: 89). Meaney and Ward both fail to acknowledge Australia's British inheritance resulting from the spoils of colonialism and British law which provided the context for the assumption of white possession of the nation and the denial of Indigenous sovereignty. The separation of Australia's institutional affiliations with Britain may have been born of necessity in the 1960s, but that did not result in the same affiliations being established with Asia; instead they were forged with another imperialist white nation.

According to Tara Brabazon in *Tracking the Jack*, threads of British culture have woven the fabric of the Australian nation. Australia's British inheritance manifested in our form of government, education, legal and industrial systems and is signified through the incorporation of the Union Jack in both the flags of New Zealand and Australia. Brabazon's excellent book traces the various forms Britishness took in its colonies, acknowledging the role of colonisation in shaping their content. However, she does not extend the implications to engage with white possession and Indigenous sovereignty. In *Scatterlings of Empire*, an issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, Amanda Nettelbeck illustrates how British migrants who came to Australia in the 1880s envisaged their task as being the establishment of a new colony for Britain. She presents them as 'pioneers' who, through hard work and determination, contributed to the development of the nation, making it their own. (A similar portrayal is being represented in the current series *The Colony* on SBS television.) What is clear in

Nettelbeck's work, though not argued, is how these attributes instilled a sense of possession that was connected to, but separated from Indigenous dispossession.

In his recent essay *Made in England: Australia's British Inheritance*, David Malouf argues that, essentially, the values Australians inherited from Britain involve

[a] low church puritanism and fear of the body and its pleasures, British drunkenness; British pragmatism and distrust of theory; British philistinism and dislike of anything showy, theatrical, arty or 'too serious'; British good sense and the British sense of humour (Malouf 2003: 39).

According to Malouf, these attributes are tied to a habit of mind that is essentially Anglo-Saxon.

One that prefers to argue from example and practice rather than principle; that is happy, in a pragmatic way, to be in doubt as to why something works so long as it does work; is flexible, experimental, adaptive, and scornful of all those traps it sees in habit and rule (2003: 43).

Malouf simultaneously disaggregates Anglo-Saxons into being British but does not explain why this conceptual shift is made. A racialised category (Anglo-Saxon) is constituted as a nationalist category (British). So Malouf understands that there is a relationship between race and nation but does not extend his analysis to engage with how Australia's inherited values were racialised, that is whitened, in the process of becoming a nation. Instead he argues that a racialised habit of mind informed these values, one which is tolerant and finds expression in the form of English used by Australians. Malouf argues further that Australian English is derived from late-Enlightenment English and as such it is 'purged of all those forms of violent expression that had led men to violent action' (Malouf 2003: 47-8). It is moderate language grounded in reason, negotiation and compromise that created a form of social interaction in Australia, which tempered extremism and kept 'the worst sorts of violence at bay'. It is the language of Australian literature, courts and the education system. What Malouf does not acknowledge is that this language is also tied epistemologically to a possessive investment in whiteness. Binary oppositions and metaphors had, by the eighteenth century, represented blackness within the structure of the English language as a symbol of negation and lack. Indigenous people were categorised

as nomads as opposed to owners of land, uncivilised as opposed to being civilised, relegated to nature as opposed to culture. In Australian history books, the violence continued in written expression by denying Indigenous sovereignty through portrayals of peaceful settlement, not invasion and war. Yet Australian nationalism is now heavily invested in the tradition and memories of war and the defending and taking of possession, albeit in other countries (Nicoll 2001).

Miriam Dixon, in *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity—1788 to the Present*, argues that Australia's British inheritance manifested in a core Anglo-Celtic culture primarily derived from the English and Irish free immigrants and convicts. This core culture was 'shaped to a disproportionate extent not just by the politics but by the entire folkways of founding generations' (Dixon 1999: 24). She notes that it was the ideas and practices associated with authority, work, freedom, liberty, individualism, community, equality and gender that formed this core identity. She argues that whether the narrative is about bush pioneers, battlers and farmers or the 'noble' proletariats, they share common values. They involve 'decency, a dedicated practicability and sense of finitude and a commitment to fairness which, as in all cultures where it appears, is a commitment within limits' (Dixon 1999: 30). Dixon's preoccupation with core Anglo-Celtic values that 'hold' and affirm the nation has the effect of reducing Indigenous dispossession to a mere blemish on the historical record. For Dixon, whiteness does not appear to be one of the limits to making commitments which are fair and equitable through its possession of the nation.

Dixon and Malouf, among others, espouse it was the founding ancestors' conquering of the landscape that shaped these values, for they had to battle flood, fire, disease, famine and drought in contributing to the spread of Empire. There is also agreement among scholars of Britishness that the Australian nation in the latter part of the twentieth century was changed by the introduction of multiculturalism. Some perceive this as a positive thing, though they give little explanation as to why this is so. Others perceive it in terms of loss associated with the core values of the nation but the specificities of what has been lost is not addressed—leaving the sense that white people feel this way because there are too many racialised 'others' here who are 'taking over'. Regardless of whether multiculturalism is perceived as a threat or promise, however,

the nation must first be believed to be a white possession.

The discourse of loss and recuperation implicitly underpins studies of Britishness in contemporary Australia derived from the testimonials of British migrants who arrived after the 1940s. These studies identify similar values to those contained in historical narratives. Perseverance, struggle, self-reliance and adaptability are encapsulated in the icon of the battler and echoed in the respective work of A James Hammerton, Catherine Coleborne and Alastair Thomson. Hammerton and Coleborne reveal British migrants have a sense of being 'left out' of the migration experience of multicultural Australia. Alastair Thomson concurs that 'though the British continued to be the most numerically significant migrant group, the British migrant experience was not central' to Australia's migration story (2001: 106). They agree that the apparent cultural and political similarity of British migrants to the mainstream has worked against their inclusiveness in the story of migration. Hammerton and Coleborne argue that while the testimonies disclosed that there were two competing narratives: one of 'misery and failure', the other of 'vindicated struggle and success', on the whole the dominant tale is one of 'successful struggle'. Similarly, Thomson's work illustrates how British migrants were successful in coming to terms with 'a new physical and cultural environment' (2001: 114).

Jon Stratton (2000: 47) argues that British migrants' sense of being overlooked in the migration story is directly linked to feelings of loss and a perceived decline in their ideological status as non-migrants and thus more authentically Australian. These feelings are connected to the Hawke and Keating governments' attempt to shift

the thinking about Australia itself from the idea that it is some sort of offshoot of British society in the southern Pacific to seeing Australia as being, and always having been, engaged in, and to some extent moulded by, the South Asian region (2000: 23).

Stratton argues that British migrants' response to being overlooked is tied to the new self-ethnicisation being expressed in the form of associations, festivals and pubs. Sara Wills and Kate Darian-Smith take issue with Stratton arguing that these performative and symbolic displays of Britishness are not so much a form of empowerment through ethnicisation but

[r]ather they can be seen as the attempted remobilisation by an uneasy but socially empowered group of a heightened public presence for their conception of history, culture and nationhood ... in this process, British ethnicity is positioned as 'other' — although certainly not as 'alien'—to the mainstream (Wills & Darian-Smith 2003: 67).

Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis's study of British migrants in South Australia extend the findings of Wills and Darian-Smith. They agree that British migrants do not perceive themselves as 'foreign or strange' but argue that they perceive migrants and Indigenous people as continuing foreigners or strangers who do not belong to the nation. It is British migrants' whiteness that enables a sense of being part of the core of the nation. Schech and Haggis further argue that

[t]he British migrant's expectation of fitting in was predicated on their knowledge of Australia as an extension of British whiteness. The presence of family members already in Australia tended to reinforce the idea of Australia as a member of the white Commonwealth family. Despite the long journey, moving to Australia felt to many like moving next door. None of our respondents who were adults at the time of migration recall fear or trepidation commonly associated with migration to an unknown place, even though few had detailed information on Australian life and environment. They just knew it was a place they could go (2004: 6).

The discourse of loss and recuperation is expressed in contemporary British migrants' narratives as an exclusion from the migration story, a change in their dominant ideological status as non-migrants and a remobilisation around their ethnicity as a recuperative strategy to claim a unique space within Australia's migration history. Simultaneously they understand that they are part of the core or mainstream because of their race. However, the mobilisation around British ethnicity signifies a split within Australian whiteness because British migrants' inclusion in the narrative of Australian migration history works to separate them from the history of Indigenous dispossession. This is in spite of the fact that their migration is one of the benefits they accrue from that history. They feel included in the nation because prepossession has been claimed on their behalf, hence their implicit understanding that the nation is a white possession.

### **Whiteness and Indigenous Dispossession: Beyond Britain**

Anne Curthoys argues that 'Australian popular historical mythology stresses struggle, courage and survival, amidst pain, tragedy and loss'. It is 'a history of suffering, sacrifice and defiance in defeat' which unfolds as narratives of victimisation (1999: 2–3). Similarly, the literature on colonial Britishness expressed through the bush battler, the pioneer, the explorer and the convict place these founding ancestors as struggling against the landscape. Thus, the landscape stands in as the oppressor in these narratives of victimisation and a displacement occurs; the violence committed against Indigenous people is disavowed. It is the landscape which must be conquered, claimed and named not Indigenous people, who, at the level of the subconscious are perceived to be part of the landscape and thus not human. By creating the landscape as oppressor, the values and virtues of achieving white possession can be valorised and Indigenous dispossession can be erased; the mythology of peaceful settlement perpetuated and sustained. As Ken Inglis illustrates in his book *Sacred Places*, despite the landscape holding memories of colonial land wars, conflicts between black and white are seldom commemorated (1998: 21). The values and virtues associated with overcoming an oppressive landscape are not easily recuperated when there is evidence of white inhumanity. As they became part of Australian national identity these values and virtues are underpinned by the denial of violent invasion. Therefore the shaping of national identity cannot be detached from white possession of the nation and the denial of Indigenous sovereignty wars. This is why in the 'history wars' the virtue of white possession and denial of Indigenous sovereignty are inextricably woven into these debates about the nation's history.

As I have argued elsewhere, during the years of frontier wars and subsequent occupation, it was the intersection between race and property that played a definitive role in constructing and affirming white domination and economic success at the cost of Indigenous racial and economic oppression (Moreton-Robinson 2005). The incarceration, removal and extermination of Indigenous people were validated by regimes of common law based on the assumption that terra nullius gave rise to white sovereignty. 'Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights' and national identity

(Harris 1995: 277–8). The white nation cannot exist as such without land and clearly defined borders; it is the legally defined and asserted territorial sovereignty that provides the context for national identifications. In this way *terra nullius* indelibly marks configurations of national identity. This is evident in Australian films ranging from *The Sentimental Bloke* through to *Walkabout*, and including *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave*, *Crocodile Dundee*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *'Mad Max 2*, *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* and *The Castle*, where myths of national belonging and identity are clearly tied to land, disconnected from the continuity of Indigenous sovereignty. Representations of Indigenous people in these films are through ghostly images or nomadic props appearing and then disappearing within the landscape. Although *The Castle* purported to offer something else, it lampooned the *Mabo* decision in the common law, and proceeded to reinscribe white possession. Refracted in this fantasy of film are representations of whiteness taking centre stage in the narrative of adversity, through virtue, intelligence, resilience, loss and hard work, effectively disavowing Indigenous sovereignty.

The assumption that the nation is a white possession is evident in the relationship between whiteness, property and the law which manifested itself in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the form of comprehensive discriminatory legislation tied to national citizenship (Markus 1995: 238). Colonial and subsequent governments legitimated the appropriation of Indigenous lands, racialised incarceration and enslavement and limited naturalised citizenship to white immigrants (Lipsitz 1998). While blackness was congruent with Indigenous subjugation and subordination, whiteness was perceived as being synonymous with freedom and citizenship. The right to determine who was allowed into the country and therefore who could belong was exercised by a white male British constituency at the heart of the nation. It was whiteness, not Anglo-Celticity or Anglo-Saxness, that served to unify the nation.

The social reproduction of whiteness was legalised through the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* and the white Australia policy, which, until the 1940s, gave preference to white British, Canadian, American or New Zealand migrants (Markus 1995). In this way the law accorded 'whiteness actual legal status converted an aspect of identity into an external object of property, moving

whiteness from privileged identity to a vested interest.' (Harris 1998: 104). The Australian definition of 'white' was expanded to include a variety of Eastern and Central European refugee groups by 1949. Stratton argues that the Australian usage of white covered all the people in Europe who 'were technically thought of as white ... the geographical definition of European had come ... to equate with the racial classification of white' (1999: 177). The integration of various Europeans into a white Australian identity, coalesced around Anglo norms, was enabled by a worldview that defined Indigenous people up until the 1960s as non-citizens. Despite being revoked in 1973, the white Australia policy continued in immigration practice for many years. 'The courts played an active role in enforcing this right to exclude ... in that sense the courts protected whiteness as they did any other form of property' (Harris 1995: 283).

### Conclusion

Contemporary and historical narratives of Britishness and Australian national identity reveal that the values required to establish the nation as a white possession are those that were also required to dispossess Indigenous people of their lands. That these values can be linked across generations of those who trace their ancestry through Britishness is evidence of the perseverance of a white national identity and its possessiveness. Through the law, politics and culture the nation has been created as a white possession. 'White [Australians] are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power and opportunity' and to adhere to narratives that valorise their past and their present (Lipsitz 1998: vii). Not all white Australians benefit from whiteness in the same way and some resist profiteering, but Australian national identity is predicated on retaining the benefits of colonial theft on the one hand, while exalting a sense of tolerance and fair play on the other. Britishness has metamorphosed into Australian national identity and culture but Indigenous sovereignty continues, through the presence of Indigenous people and their land, haunting the house that Jack built, shaking its foundations and rattling the picket fence.

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Plot "United States, 1970. Jack is an engineer and a psychopath with obsessive-compulsive tendencies. After killing a woman who asked for his help in the street, he convinces himself he needs to keep killing people in order to reach perfection. Every one of his killings has to be a masterpiece, each time more ingenious and complex. Thus, he starts a dangerous chess play with the police, starring one of the cleverest and ruthless serial killers. The White Possessive explores the links between race, sovereignty, and possession through themes of property: owning property, being property, and becoming propertyless. Focusing on the Australian Aboriginal context, Aileen Moreton-Robinson questions current race theory in the first world and its preoccupation with foregrounding slavery and migration. The nation, she argues, is socially and culturally constructed as a white possession. Moreton-Robinson reveals how the core values of Australian national identity continue to have their roots in Britishness and colonization, built on the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. Moreton-Robinson reveals how the core values of Australian national identity continue to have their roots in Britishness and colonization, built on the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. Whiteness studies literature is central to Moreton-Robinson's reasoning, and she shows how blackness works as a white epistemological tool that bolsters the social production of whiteness-displacing Indigenous sovereignties and rendering them invisible in a civil rights discourse, thereby sidestepping thorny issues of settler colonialism. Written by William Hone according to British Museum. Catalogue of political and personal satires, 13292-13304; Cohn, A.M. G. Cruikshank, 663; British Museum Catalogue; Halkett & Laing. A political satire, in verse, parodying "The house that Jack built.". Title vignette has caption: The pen and the sword. Thirteen woodcuts, including title vignette by George Cruikshank. Dedicated to "Doctor Slop" [i.e. Sir John Stoddart] by the author. Includes: The clerical magistrate: p. [4] at end. NCBEL. Cat. With: The life of William Cobbett. London : Printed by Macdonald and Son by