

Postgraduates in the White Spaces Research Network

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The White Spaces Research Network developed out of a concern for the difficulties in interdisciplinary dialogue around issues of race, ethnicity and diversity and in critical reflection on the reproduction of whiteness as a social relation of power. In response to these concerns, the Network aims to provide a unique interdisciplinary international forum to engage with ideas from the field of 'critical whiteness studies'. This diverse field of scholarship has produced complex debate around white ethnicities which have been circulating for some time within cultural, postcolonial, literary and historical studies, but which have remained marginal to more traditionally framed social science contexts such as politics studies and organisational theory. The network has developed in response to this marginalisation, focusing its work on exposing, describing and analysing the reproduction of white institutional power in formal and informal organisational settings. The network has sought to develop more inclusive forms of scholarship engaging a range of professionals, activists and learners at all levels. Since its formal estab-

lishment with funds from the World Universities Network it has run a range of events, face to face and ICT enabled; supported a range of student and staff mobility and other research outputs. In 2010 a special issue of the journal *Social Politics: Studies in Gender, State and Society* 'Reproducing and Resisting Whiteness in Organizations, Policies and Places' (Hunter, Swan and Grimes, 2010) published a range of articles from the networks inaugural conference held at the University of Leeds in the Summer of 2009. Since then the network has developed to include members from over 16 countries, with its core members located in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. Its various activities have also been funded by the Feminist Review Trust, Social Policy Association, and the Universities of Leeds and Sydney.

In August of 2010, the 'New Territories in Critical Whiteness Studies' Postgraduate Conference at the University of Leeds officially launched the postgraduate arm of White Spaces. This postgraduate arm – run by and for postgraduates and early career researchers

– focuses on postgraduate development within critical whiteness studies and aims to create a graduate community that understands the specific pressures, constraints, and opportunities facing postgraduate scholars working in the field. It understands that the critical examination of whiteness within multicultural societies is an important approach for a greater understanding of the shifting accumulations of racial power that shape these societies. As such, they employ critical whiteness studies in order to contribute to significant social debates and pressing contemporary issues. The PG network works semi-autonomously to the broader network – for instance sometimes developing projects specific to postgraduates – but the two have dynamic exchanges, share resources, and feed into one another. The network's activities have garnered their own funding from the Worldwide Universities Network, the Leeds Humanities Research Institute, the Social Policy Association, the Economic History Society, and the University of Leeds. The New Territories conference attracted participants from across Europe and North America. Aside from showcasing their work, these researchers took the opportunity to map out a framework, aims and projects for the postgraduate network.

Transnational, interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches

The network strives to maintain

the transnational character of its founding conference and encourages a broader application of critical whiteness theory to extend it beyond its dominant UK-US-Australia context. Researchers in the network reside in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, France, Norway, Canada, the US, South Africa, and Australia. Their research is contextualised in various global locales and often aims to extend the field of critical whiteness studies into new geographic terrains in ways that transcend national, regional and continental borders. We promote international/transnational collaboration by connecting members with similar research interests and providing resources for the creation of virtual programming which allows for global inclusion.

Similarly, network members span different fields in their work, applying for instance sociologically based research on whiteness to literary or historical research. Many also push critical whiteness studies into disciplines in which it has generally been absent (such as music, politics, business, and management). The network's collaborative efforts draw a widening range of involvement, from the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, education, and even engineering.

Our approach to whiteness understands that race constantly interacts with gendered, classed, sexualised and other positions. The interlocking nature of oppressions requires that

an examination of race/racism must not be separated from analyses of gender, class, sexuality, ability and other axes of domination. Thus, we promote an intersectional approach to the study of whiteness.

Enabling postgraduate development

As part of an understanding of the particular needs of postgraduate researchers, the network enables postgraduates to develop as critical researchers and future academics. To do this, the network provides its members with resources such as innovative technologies, connections with other postgraduates and with established academics in the field, and platforms for showcasing research and sharing ideas, with which they may design and lead projects. Some members have developed a series of virtual 'master classes' with established academics from the larger White Spaces network, wherein this mix of researchers from different parts of the globe discuss each other's research in the context of significant debates and ideas surfacing in the field. The postgraduate network has also led to several collaborations and publications, including this important special issue on methodological approaches to critical whiteness studies. Efforts like the masterclasses and publications provide postgraduate members with the skills and experiences necessary for academic employment. The relationship be-

tween the larger White Spaces network and its postgraduate arm also means that members of the latter are able to build relationships with experienced scholars in their field who can share their knowledge with members on the unique pressures and prospects of being a critical whiteness scholar.

Wider engagement

The network aims to build links with practitioners, activists, community groups, and others in order to make an impact beyond the confines of the academy. For many of us, such connections are created through our individual research, yet we also strive to include the participation of non-academics in our projects, particularly those that are web-based or involve virtual technologies. Members also promote educational and activist racial justice efforts taking place in their local settings.

Since the New Territories conference, the network has been active in a number of ways, and it is always open to new members, ideas and contributions. Two important development strands at the moment are: (1) the use of innovative technologies to showcase research and share information and (2) the fostering of research connections and publications. Researchers in the network have established a blog (En/countering Whiteness: <http://encounteringwhiteness.wordpress.com/>) that they will soon be using to

'host' the next virtual master class in order to offer the experience to a greater number of individuals. The blog offers an interactive and thought-provoking platform to bring issues of critical whiteness studies to a wider audience including those outside of the academy. The master class series utilises a video-conferencing technology that has allowed postgraduates and established academics from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US to regularly connect in postgraduate-led seminars.

Aside from participating in these and other projects, postgraduate members of the network connect with one another through an email listserv that includes individuals from all over the globe and from all stages of postgraduate study. Through this listserv, members share information on opportunities, relevant publications, and conferences and other events; seek support or guidance from each other, for instance in particular aspects of the research process; and pose ideas for projects or publications. The connections fostered here and through other efforts have led to several research collaborations, including joint papers and panels, virtual seminars, and co-authored papers and special issues.

Get involved

The network provides a dynamic, challenging, and critical space in which to debate issues and open

up dialogue within the field of critical whiteness studies and beyond. We are interested in exploring the diversity of perspectives, both ideologically and geographically, and value the personal engagement that people from different approaches and backgrounds can bring to researching whiteness and white ethnicities. The network aims to build on this engagement and to reflect the debates, challenges, and developments in critical whiteness studies, and with the collaborative efforts of current and future participants, it proposes to be an exciting and ongoing enterprise.

Anyone interested in becoming involved in the PGR arm of the White Spaces network should contact Say Burgin hy08snb@leeds.ac.uk or Maddy Abbas ss08msna@leeds.ac.uk at the University Of Leeds. Anyone interested in learning more about or becoming involved in the White Spaces Research Network should contact Dr Shona Hunter S.D.J.Hunter@leeds.ac.uk.