

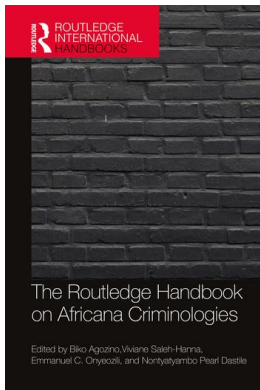
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Biko Agozino, Viviane Saleh-Hanna, Emmanuel C. Onyeozili,
Nontyatyambo Pearl Dastile

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Mandisi Majavu

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15

THE WHITE INTERNATIONAL

“The cause of the White man on the Pacific coast”

Mandisi Majavu

Introduction

In both Australia and New Zealand, the fundamental and diffused perception of Africa is that the continent is “the jungle home of backward people” (Craig 2002, 50), and thus Black Africans are regarded as a people who are “unfit” for “modern life.” This narrative is an offshoot of the long-standing discourse of a “Dark Continent.” The Dark Continent narrative features Black Africans as “brutish, benighted, and unprogressive” (Olivier 1906, 2). Within this discourse, Blacks of African heritage are considered to be “half-devil and half-child,” and thus it is concluded that “African races” are the “most important uncivilized mass of colored humanity” (Olivier 1906, 3).

To correct this alleged inferiority in Blacks, the White man is then tasked, “in the interest of humanity,” with the thankless task of bringing Blacks into the modernity fold (Olivier 1906, 2). This civilizing project is often referred to as the “White man’s burden.” This project has historically compelled White thinkers to ponder whether the African “savage” is “capable of growing at all into the industrial forms of our civilisation?” (Olivier 1906, 3). Based on the racist premise that “‘the native mind’ of the African is inscrutable,” Whiteness has historically wondered whether or not “it is desirable” to “civilise” (Olivier 1906, 3), “uplift,” “tutor,” and subject Black Africans to an “assisted evolution” (Legassick 1995).

In 21st-century Australia and New Zealand, these racist sentiments map on to the African refugee trope, which serves as a discursive shorthand for simple, unschooled, stateless, and primitive people who, for one reason or another, have been playing tom-toms in refugee camps or in the African bush for decades, living outside modernity (see Majavu 2017). The refugee discourse subscribes to the cultural deficit model

– a potent and liberal academic narrative that overvalues Whiteness and the West (Boucher and Helfenbein 2015). The refugee discourse is a stigmatizing discourse, and it portrays Black Africans in the context of problems they are assumed to create for the government and White citizens of the West (Essed 1991). Thus, in the past, in both Australia and New Zealand, Black Africans have been described as not fitting in socially and through the media as deviant and criminogenic. The refugee discourse depicts Black Africans as a source of poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, and criminality (Boucher and Helfenbein 2015).

For instance, in 2007, the then-Australian immigration minister Kevin Andrews questioned the ability of some Black African migrants to “integrate” into Australian society. Interestingly, 2007 was the same year that the minister announced that significant cuts were to be made to Australia’s intake of African refugees (see Haggis and Schech 2010). Two years later, in 2009, New Zealand introduced an effective ban on African refugees (see Stephens 2018). Citing security concerns and potential “insurmountable” resettlement and integration challenges that African refugees could possibly face in New Zealand, the New Zealand government “banned new refugees from Africa and Middle East from being settled in New Zealand,” with a condition that refugees from Africa or the Middle East “would only be accepted if they already had family in New Zealand” (Stephens 2018, 76–77).

Without fail they redirected the percentage of refugees originally allocated to Africa and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region when insufficient family-linked places were found. Over the years, a lack of people qualifying for the family link criterion became the norm, with intakes from both Africa and the Middle East dwindling to single figures.

(Stephens 2018, 76)

The African refugee discourse in New Zealand has created a racial climate in which Black Africans are racially profiled as potential criminals at New Zealand airports and by the police (see Elliott and Yusuf 2014; Mugadza 2012). Participants in my PhD research project talked about being racially profiled at Auckland International Airport. As far as the research participants were concerned, the racial profiling of Black Africans at this airport is one of the biggest problems facing Black Africans living in Auckland. Mireille Johnson (2009, 4) – a post-graduate student at Auckland University of Technology – writes in her MA thesis about her experiences as an employee of the New Zealand Border and Investigations team at Auckland International Airport:

[O]n my second day at the airport in the early evening, I had to escort two African males along with the police to their plane. They were being removed from New Zealand but were considered potentially too dangerous to be taken via the normal internal route to the plane.

In their study of the over-policing of African youth in Auckland, New Zealand, Nakhid, Azanaw, Essuman, et al. (2016) found that police subjected their participants to racist abuse. Additionally, they found that the New Zealand police behavior

appeared to intentionally criminalize African youth, and, consequently, young African and White friends who were stopped by the police at night were separated on the spot, with the African youth being arrested and locked up while their White friends were not charged or arrested but driven home to their parents by the police. Nakhid (2018, 40) argues that African youth in New Zealand report “disturbing accounts of racial provocation and abuse by the New Zealand police.”

Meanwhile, in Australia, Peter Dutton, Australia’s home affairs minister, has been, for the past two years, inciting a moral panic about “African gangs.” During the December 2017 holiday season in Melbourne, I observed the city’s restaurants to be packed full of happy diners, day and night; Dutton falsely claimed that that the community of Melbourne was “scared to go out to restaurants” because of “African gangs” (see Majavu 2018). Dutton is no outlier – the trope of associating Blackness with criminality and gangsterism is widespread in the Australian mainstream media. Africans are referred to as “foreign-born thugs” in the Australian media (see Majavu 2018). This criminalizing narrative about Africans has led the Australian government to amend its immigration policy. For instance, the legislative amendments give the Australian government “greater powers to cancel visas and remove non-citizens on character grounds as a means of ensuring national security and public safety” (Hoang and Reich 2017, 1). Additionally, the minister of immigration has the power to cancel a visa of a person suspected of being a member of a gang or suspected of being involved in crime (Hoang and Reich 2017). Moreover, the Character Act

lowered the bar for cancelling a visa on the basis of potential future conduct.

A person does not pass the character test if there is a “risk” (previously, a significant risk) that the person would engage in criminal conduct, or harass, molest, intimidate or stalk a person, or vilify a segment of the community, or incite discord or in any way represent a danger to the Australian community.

(Hoang and Reich 2017, 10)

The point that emerges from this discussion is that in both Australia and New Zealand, immigration policies and laws have, in the past decade, been repurposed as an instrument for managing crime (Hoang and Reich 2017). Black Africans, the discursive subject of this essay, have largely been targeted as “security risks” by these laws and policies. Black Africans are regarded by the governments of these countries as potentially criminal and dangerous. Thus, the presence of Black Africans is discouraged via restrictive immigration policies – and draconian laws in the case of Australia.

This work further connects these anti-Black immigration policies to Australian and New Zealand historical efforts to build White countries in the Pacific. The historical efforts to build White countries in the Pacific were part and parcel of the White International project, which is discussed in depth later in this chapter. The White Australia policy was, for example, an explicit racist immigration policy meant to discourage people of color from immigrating to Australia. Although New Zealand never explicitly adopted a White policy like Australia, New Zealand had its own unstated “White immigrants only” policy to keep the country White (see Majavu 2017).

White International

What is referred to in this chapter as the “White International” dates back to medieval Europe. It is a canonical discourse of Whiteness that has historically pronounced decisively on the ethical and moral value of Blackness and Whiteness (Heng 2018). It is a historical discourse that offers a “scientific” race theory of climate in which cold weather is said to produce Whiteness while, on the other hand, a hot climate is seen as producing Blackness (Heng 2018). In this narrative, Whiteness represents a visual marker of inner courage “while the men of Africa, possessing black faces, short bodies, and crisp hair, are ‘cowards of heart’ and ‘guileful’” (Heng 2018, 16).

The White International was developed as a shared project among Western countries in medieval Europe and was theoretically deepened and scientifically established as part of the eugenics project in modernity. This is not to say that the White International has been, throughout history, a homogenous project. In fact, the defining feature of the White International is the contradictory way in which it has been implemented and adapted in different ways “across the countries of Latin Christendom in all localities, regions, and contexts through some three or four centuries of historical time” (Heng 2018, 4).

In Australia and New Zealand, the White International ideology found expression in the discourses of “White man’s country” and “White labourism.” Both countries were founded on the idea of a “White man’s country” – a discourse that is part and parcel of the eugenics project. Discursively, the “White man’s country” is a transnational White settler perspective that was developed in response to White angst at the emergence of a post-colonial world (Lake 2003). In the 19th century, the “White man’s country” was a legitimate colonial project “shared by places as demographically diverse as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Kenya, South Africa, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Australia” (Lake 2003, 352). The “White man’s country” discourse enabled settler states like New Zealand and Australia to trace their Whiteness “in the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon race history that dated back to the mythic glories of Hengist and Horsa” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 6). As far as these settler societies were concerned, “they shared an English speaking culture and newly ascendant democratic politics, priding themselves, as Anglo-Saxons, on a distinctive capacity, indeed a genius, for self-government” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 6).

Additionally, the “White man’s country” is a White settler discourse that emerges “in the context of nineteenth-century imperialisms and the great modern migrations that saw some 50 million Chinese, the same number of Europeans and about 30 million Indians migrate to new homes around the world” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 6). Therefore, the “White man’s country” discourse served as both a colonial discourse to justify the colonial project and the basis of racist immigration policies designed to legislate against immigrants of color and to counter what White settlers regarded as “the Asiatic danger in the colonies” and “the rising tide of colour” (see Neame 1909; Stoddard 1923). In this narrative, racist immigration restrictions were viewed as racial segregation on a global scale (Lake 2003).

Australia and New Zealand have historically not just regarded themselves as “White man’s countries,” but as “White workingman’s paradises.” Through a racist

ideology of “White labourism” – a discursive synthesis of demands for social democracy and White supremacy, Australian and New Zealand workers help create exclusionary White societies founded on White racism. In Australia, “the high demand for white labour led to relatively high wages” (Greig, Lewins, and White 2003, 169). By the 1950s, New Zealand had achieved “the second highest standard of living in the world” (Phillips 1996, 265).

Due to racist immigration policies, which favored protestant Anglo-Celtic immigrants and which resulted in a large surplus of White men compared to White women in the population, New Zealand became literally a White man’s country (see Phillips 1996). The combination of the myth of a workingman’s paradise and the colonial discourse of a “Better Britain” became the founding narrative of the country’s national identity. In other words, New Zealand was founded around a White mythology of a classless society, and it was envisaged that handshakes and greetings to strangers would become a feature of the country’s social etiquette (Pratt 2006). In both New Zealand and Australia, the discourse of mateship developed within this framework of a White mythology of a classless society. In both countries, mateship has historically been deployed as an acknowledgement of comradeship amongst White workingmen in workingmen’s paradises (Dyrenfurth 2007).

Moreover, the discursive synthesis of demands for social democracy – characterized by the “workingman’s paradise” narrative – and Whiteness – characterized by racist immigration policies that favored Whites – produced a political mythology of egalitarianism in both Australia and New Zealand. According to Greig, Lewins, and White (2003), in Australia, this discourse mythologizes the ethic of “a fair go.” Furthermore, this political mythology “assumes that Australians do not tolerate injustice and that everyone can have, and should get, a ‘fair go’” (Greig, Lewins, and White 2003, 167).

It is worth noting that the idea of ‘fair go’ is also a key phrase in New Zealand society and one that is said to describe the country’s norms and values (Rashbrooke 2013). Additionally, in New Zealand, the political mythology of egalitarianism has historically been framed within a Christian trope – Godzone. For instance, Richard John Seddon, one of the country’s great political leaders, once expressed this idea by referring to New Zealand as “God’s Own Country” (King 2003). According to Michael King (2003), the New Zealand liberal government of the early 20th century felt that the programs it had introduced to the country had achieved something in the country that offered an example to humankind as a whole:

The view emerged that, with votes for women, old age pensions and labour legislation in particular, New Zealand was “showing the way” to the rest of the world – that Seddon’s “God Own Country” was, among other things, a social laboratory which other countries could study with envy and profit.
(King 2003, 282)

However, in both New Zealand and Australia, “this myth of egalitarianism was founded on an exclusionary premise of a ‘White man’s country’” (Greig, Lewins, and White 2003, 160). In Australia, aboriginal peoples were denied citizenship, people of color were denied entry through racist restrictive immigration laws, “and women

were denied the same industrial rights as men” (Greig, Lewins, and White 2003, 160). Similarly, in New Zealand, the Godzone trope applied to Whites only – it refers to a racist White social laboratory with social democratic features for White settlers. For the Māori, it was a colonial project on a grand scale. For the Chinese, it was a Herrenvolk state.

At this juncture, it is important to emphasize the point that White liberalism, which philosophically underpins the White International project, has historically restricted full personhood to Whites and relegated Blacks and other people of color to an inferior category “so that its schedule of rights and prescriptions for justice were all color-coded” (Mills 2017). Thus, the liberal tropes of workingman’s paradise, mateship, and fair go have not been historically employed to disrupt White normativity in either Australia or New Zealand (see Majavu 2016). Rather, the language of mateship and fair go are important devices in the White liberal toolbox – and these particular devices are often deployed to function as a kind of social blindness and color blindness to facilitate an inability to think critically about Whiteness and racism (DiAngelo 2011).

Although the White International is premised on the imagined community of Whites – a transnational project in its inspiration and identification – its political objectives and modus operandi are nationalistic (Lake and Reynolds 2008). One of the objectives of this project in both New Zealand and Australia has historically been to bolster “regimes of border protection and national sovereignty” against a “Yellow Peril” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 4). In fact, White settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States once regarded themselves as the last line of defense against the threat of the “Yellow Peril.”

The racist discourse of the “Yellow Peril” has historically facilitated the close political ties between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. In the early 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt – United States president at the time – became “convinced that the Japanese must be barred from immigration to so-called white men’s countries” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 191). Furthermore, “with the ascendancy of Japan as a naval and military power in the Pacific, Australian political leaders had become increasingly concerned with the imperative of self-defence” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 193). The *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, an Australian newspaper, asserted that “time, not prophecy will unfold whether Caucasian Australia is to hold her own against her next door neighbour – the countless Asiatic” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 196).

As far as the newspaper was concerned, the Pacific was the ‘true Armageddon of the world’ in which “the tawny and yellow, or both combined, will engage in a life and death struggle with the white for final supremacy, may be fought out in the Pacific south of the Equator” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 196). The *Daily Telegraph* advised that Australia needed to enter into a White partnership with the United States to hold the Pacific for the White man: “the Pacific and its innumerable islands of amazing fertility and beauty will be secured to the Caucasian for all succeeding time” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 196). The New Zealand *Wellington Post* concurred: “the United States as ‘the champion of white ascendancy in the Pacific’ represented ‘the ideals of Australia and New Zealand far better than Britain’” (Lake and Reynolds 2008, 203).

The ascendancy of Japan as a naval and military power in the Pacific also made the United States nervous. Against this backdrop, Theodore Roosevelt told a deputation of British Columbian politicians in Washington that U.S. and Canadian political and economic interests were “identical” in the matter:

we have got to protect our working men. We have got to build up our western country with our white civilisation, and (very vehemently) we must retain the power to say who shall or who shall not come to our country. Now it may be that Japan will adopt a different attitude, will demand that her people be permitted to go where they think fit, so I thought it wise to send that fleet around to the Pacific to be ready to maintain our rights.

(Lake and Reynolds 2008, 191)

Australian politicians wanted the U.S. naval fleet to extend its tour to Australia as a show of White solidarity. According to Lake and Reynolds (2008, 197), Roosevelt was keen to accept the invitation of Alfred Deakin, Australian prime minister at the time:

[I]nforming the Secretary to the Navy: “I particularly desire the fleet to visit Australia.” Provocatively, he told a correspondent of the *New York Times* that the visits (New Zealand was added to the itinerary) were intended to “show England – I cannot say a ‘renegade’ mother-country – that those colonies are white man’s country.”

Conclusion

The White International project overvalues Whiteness and regards people of color as potentially dangerous and the source of social ills. Black males in the West have to contend with mainstream images that depict them as criminals (Essed 1991). In my book titled *Uncommodified Blackness*, I argue that in Australia and New Zealand, Blacks from African countries are viewed through a lens of an “uncommodified Blackness” image while Black Americans are seen via a commodified Blackness image (see Majavu 2017). An uncommodified Blackness image portrays African Blacks as the embodiment of backwardness and the “heart of darkness,” and, therefore, unsuited to the Western way of life.

A commodified Blackness image, on the other hand, has been discursively manufactured via the American popular culture – for example, through hip-hop and certain sports like basketball. It is the kind of Blackness that mainstream Whites in Western countries find appealing, safe to mimic and to consume (Leonard and King 2010). The discursive construction of this commodified Blackness is achieved through a complex and contradictory discourse that presents American Black male bodies as fashionable and deviant at the same time (Leonard and King 2010).

Unlike commodified Blackness, the discursive construction of uncommodified Blackness is characterized by the simultaneity of dehumanization and demonization – “each of which offers a narrowly defined inscription of blackness that elicits societal

panic” and fosters a climate justifying restrictive immigration policies against Black Africans (Leonard 2006, 18). The uncommodified Blackness image dovetails with the refugee discourse to manufacture an African male stereotype of a “toxic hypermasculinity” – a disruptive and an “out-of-control male body” (hooks 2004). In the Australian public imagination, the figure of the Sudanese male in particular has become criminal and fearsome (Anderson 2011).

For many, it is difficult to reconcile the image of racist New Zealand with the image of a country known for its friendliness, hospitality, and egalitarianism. However, the country is a settler colony in which aspirations to be friendly and welcoming have always been intensely and purposefully racial (Pratt 2006). According to New Zealand academic John Pratt (2006, 553), “throughout the history of New Zealand, the famed qualities of friendliness and openness have been denied to those who were outside its narrow parameters” of Whiteness. New Zealand “was never intended to be opened up as a paradise for allcomers” (Pratt 2006, 553). Thus, immigrants of color like the Chinese were regarded as “undesirable aliens” in New Zealand. For example, between 1908 and 1952, no Chinese person could be naturalized in New Zealand, and “every Chinese lived on temporary permits of six months to two years, renewing them periodically, and living in the acute sense of uncertainty that they could be expelled at any time” (Ip 1995, 177).

The racist and selective immigration policies that have historically been adopted by both New Zealand and Australia have ideological roots in the racist science of selective breeding, also known as eugenics. In late 19th- and early 20th-century New Zealand,

those deemed as “unfit” included criminals, the insane, and those described under what were, by the interwar years, scientific definitions of the “imbecile” and “feeble-minded,” as well as the diseased at birth, the physically deformed, deaf, blind and those who transgressed the moral code.

(Wanhalla 2007, 165)

The New Zealand government dealt with those considered “unfit” through the Mental Defective Act 1911, which was amended in 1928. Through this law, “a new class of ‘degeneracy’ was introduced in the form of the ‘social defective,’ a moral category that was concerned with juvenile delinquency and immorality” (Wanhalla 2007, 165). Anxious about the “future of the white ‘race,’” it was argued that the “unfit” posed a threat to the national identity of New Zealand (Wanhalla 2007). “Through sterilization, immigration restriction, segregation and restrictive marriage laws it was proposed that the country could maintain its image as a social progressive” (Wanhalla 2007, 165). New Zealand politicians and welfare professionals “feared the consequences of racial degeneration” and therefore proposed ideological and legislative solutions that “fell under the broad goal of ‘race improvement,’” which “focused upon white women and their capacity to reproduce” (Wanhalla 2007, 165). By 1928, the *Eugenics Review*, a “scientific journal” published by the Galton Institute, “lauded New Zealand as the ‘first Dominion seriously to consider sterilisation’” (Fleming 1981, 12).

In Australia, the eugenics project was carried out with the goal of “breeding out” aboriginality and Blackness in the early 20th century (Anderson 2005). To achieve this goal, Australia invested in “scientifically managed breeding” programs (Anderson 2005). As far as colonial scientists in Australia were concerned, they were the guardians of tropical Whiteness – “unswerving in their efforts to fend off alleged pathogenic colored races” (Anderson 2005, 165). At the Australasian Medical Congress in 1920, J.H.L. Cumpston, the first director-general of the Australian Department of Health, credited the physical strength and strong health of “tropical whites” to immigration restrictions.

Immigration restriction had worked wonders, but now, in addition, a federal health department would be required to ensure constant vigilance against the introduction and spread of disease. “It is all very well to have a white Australia,” he announced, “but it must be kept white. There must be immaculate cleanliness” (Anderson 2005, 139).

In both Australia and New Zealand, the eugenics project was carried out under the aegis of racist and restrictive immigration policies, as well as “breeding programmes,” with the aim of producing a “strong white race” – “one more pure, virile, and cleanly even than in its European homeland” (Anderson 2005, 140). Needless to say, “until this glorious day, it would still be necessary to use immigration restriction and quarantine to protect the emergent strain of whites from unfair microbiological completion” (Anderson 2005, 140). The language utilized to refer to this eugenics project may have evolved and changed to be consistent with the moral and ideological sensibilities of 21st-century Australia and New Zealand, but the objectives have not changed in either country.

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