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Mis/taken identity
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> I'm gasping for breath in my own struggle and am not too sure
> where to turn. My life abounds in incongruities. I can't return
> whence I came, yet I dare not and cannot forget, for I am reminded
> by the pain and passion of what it means to be Aboriginal in this
> country—not just by my past and my ongoing experiences, but by
> those of the Aboriginal community as a whole (Holt 1993, p. 176).

Like Lillian and other murris I know only too well what it is like to
grow up aboriginal in australia and to experience racism. The racism
directed toward murris in this society has been a constant reminder to
me that I belong to a black family. Yet growing up blonde, blue-eyed,
and fair-skinned, I certainly cannot deny my english and irish heritages.
Nor can I deny the opportunities I have been afforded as a result of
my whiteness and being mis/taken as white in this racist society.[1]

Living in a white body and identifying as a murri[2] means that my
experience of racism has always been different to that of a murri living
in a black body. Only recently have I been able to identify and deal
with the various ways racism has affected my own life and that of my
family. In learning to deal with the patterns of behaviour that I have
developed over the years as a result of my own internalised racism, I
am much more aware of the various ways we, as murris, perpetuate
the racism within our own communities. Essentialist notions of
aboriginality that exist within many murri communities reinforce
racism. For example, some murris take the position that being born
aboriginal makes one an expert on all matters related to aboriginal
people. While it is important to recognise that essentialist positions do

have strategic political value at times, essentialist notions of aboriginal-ity often restrict us from acknowledging and celebrating the diversity within our own families and communities. It also denies the differences that many of us embody within ourselves.

Growing up for the most part of my life in an inner-city, working-class and culturally diverse neighbourhood I, like my family, have come to know a lot about difference. In recent years I have also come to appreciate more fully that many individuals and groups now living in this country are also affected by racism. The collapsing of the binary opposition—through which many of us have come to view the relation-ship between murri and non-murri people as simply a relationship between black and white australians—is necessary in order to facilitate a broader understanding of racism.

Given the recent high court *Mabo*[3] decision and subsequent negoti-ations, plus the federal government's aboriginal reconciliation plans and discussions in relation to republicanism, I believe that all australians are witnessing a critical moment in the history of this country. It is a time when the authenticity of *the* aboriginal identity is being fiercely contested among murris as well as between murris and other austra-lians. The identity of 'who is a *real* australian' is being subjected to much debate and it is time for those of us who often live on the margins of this society to put forward our positions and refuse to be silenced.

In order to explore these issues further in this chapter, I have chosen to reflect on my own experiences growing up and living in a racist society. This exploration is therefore intensely personal and grounded in a subjective experience. It has been written with a number of audiences in mind. I hope that this chapter is useful to people from a variety of social and educational backgrounds who are interested in working against racism. Of utmost importance has been my desire to communicate in a way that is accessible and meaningful for a broad readership.

Re/membering

The british invasion of this country brought with it a culture which had a long history of racism. We can instance the british attitude toward the irish, whose country they first colonised in the thirteenth century. Taking over people's lives and land, as the british did in africa, india, north america and then australia, has been justified on the grounds of moral, social and cultural superiority when the underlying reason was really political and economic expediency.

The creation of the legal fiction *terra nullius*, meaning empty land, by the british deemed aboriginal people to be less than human. It provided the basis for the decimation, dispossession, displacement, institutionalisation and exploitation of aboriginal people.[4] The process of constructing 'aborigines' as *Other* enabled the british to justify their invasion and colonisation of this land and its first peoples. There were no treaties made between the aboriginal peoples of this land and the invaders. Reynolds (1995) suggests that this legal fiction, which had been developed in britain, had no credibility amongst the invaders or the invaded at the time.

While indigenous people suffered this insult first, racism was soon extended to other groups. Murris and many others within australia have subsequently suffered from the racism of a dominant white australian culture born of a british invasion. It manifested itself against the chinese and afghan immigrants in the nineteenth century. Later waves of european immigrants became known as 'wogs', 'balts', 'dagos', etc. while more recently the 'lebs', the 'boat people' and the 'slopes' have suffered from the racism of the dominant culture. For many of these people there has been some hope for improvement in their position as a new wave of immigration brought a new set of victims. In contrast, many murris have remained at the bottom of the pile.

Now I am not saying that all white australians *are* racist, or for that matter all non-white australians *aren't* racist. It is understandable, but not justifiable, that many post-1788 'new australians' have absorbed unquestioningly the racism of the dominant white australian culture and have learned to act out the racism toward murris in this society. I am not saying either that murris can't be racist toward others: of course we can! However, I am saying that racism is about power and that there are very few murris in this country who have managed to have power over their own lives, let alone power in relation to the affairs of this nation.

Re/membering is a form of resistance; it is a life-affirming and self-defining act. Re/membering is a cry of defiance in the face of that which would steal our past, predetermine our future, cut short our present, challenge our humanity, render our lives meaningless, and make us invisible. It is our refusal to be silent, our rejection of oppression (Featherston 1994, p. v).

Re/membering the past is important because the past has shaped our present. Often murris are accused of dwelling on the past. A lot of australians, in particular white australians, would be happy if we just forgot the past. What is to follow is my story, a story about difference and some stories about my own past and experiences of racism.

My earliest re/membering of my own cultural difference and that of other australians was when I was five years of age. Sophia and I were in the same class at school. She was greek australian. We used to be friends until my family moved to a different suburb.

The other kids at school used to harass Sophia because they considered her to be different from themselves. They'd call her a 'wog' and pick on her for no reason. They would tell her to go back to her own country, which didn't make much sense to me because I knew she had been born in australia and that made her greek-australian as far as I was concerned. I just didn't understand it because I thought Sophia was okay, she was my friend. I used to get really angry with those other kids. I didn't understand at the time that those kids were being racist toward Sophia.

I didn't understand too much about my own difference either, despite the fact that I was experiencing it through the racism directed toward Sophia. It has only been in the last few years that I have been able to make sense of myself, my own family difference, and that time with Sophia.

Sophia and her family were just like the people who had lived next door to me when I was living with my mother's family. They too were greek-australian, and my experience of them was that they were good neighbours. They never seemed to worry about the fact that some of my family were fair-skinned while others were black.

I never had much to do with my father's family, who were white. It seemed that some of them didn't think too much of my mother's mob because all they could see was our blackness. It was *their* racism that got in the way of us ever really getting to know one another as a family. Their racism was also a constant reminder to me that I belonged to a black family. My father seemed to be able to mediate his way through the situation quite well, although he himself had more to do with my mother's family than his own and I am certain that at times it must have been difficult for him. It was always my mother who would remind me that I was as much my father's child as hers and that I should show respect to his family.

The family that I grew up with didn't think of themselves as different from anyone else in the neighbourhood. We didn't have a need to go around naming ourselves 'aboriginal' or for that matter 'black' because it wasn't necessary, nor was it an issue within my family. Now that's not to say that we were ashamed of being murri, it's just that it didn't matter. It only mattered when we moved outside the safety of our own home and immediate community.

Where we lived, people knew that most of my family were murri

and they generally accepted us for who we were. This was because of the culturally diverse nature of that neighbourhood. Besides, my family were respectable—quiet and hard-working people who mostly kept to themselves. Looking back I suspect that my family behaved and lived the way they did because they were very much aware of the racism and their position as blacks in the broader community. They were trying to be 'cleaner than clean, better than best'. They were obviously determined not to let racism beat them.

The decision on the part of my family to conceal their identity as aboriginal can be viewed as a creative strategy in dealing with racism. It wasn't a matter of my family 'selling out' on their aboriginality or that they thought they were better than other murris. It was simply one strategy they adopted for survival reasons!

School was the place where I first re/member experiencing racism. It was also the place where I re/member learning about my own family difference via racism. My schooling offered little in the way of providing an understanding of aboriginality and the reality of murri life in the 1960s and 1970s. I will never forget the brief moments in which '*the australian aborigines*' featured in our lessons at school. It was in my early years at primary school that 'aborigines' got their first mention. They were typecast as black, naked and unintelligent, and were portrayed as nuisances to the european explorers.

The last mention of 'aborigines' was when I was in my final year of primary school. I clearly remember the one page that had been dedicated to '*the australian aborigines*' in our *Effective Social Studies* text. 'Aborigines' and their society (note singular usage, as if 'aborigines' were monocultural, which was clearly not the case) were depicted as simplistic, childlike and heathen. Aboriginal women didn't even get a mention, it was as if women didn't exist. 'Aborigines' were presented as if they were transfixed in time. There was no reference, let alone any discussion, in relation to the british invasion and colonisation of this land and its impact on indigenous people. The one and only illustration on the page of the text was of a naked black man standing on top of a rock with one leg up on the other, poised holding a spear as he gazed into the distance . . . ah, the timeless 'noble savage'!

When I explained in class that some of my mother's family were aboriginal and that we did not live like the murris depicted in the textbook, I re/member feeling really embarrassed and confused when the teacher dismissed my family as not *real* 'aborigines'. It was in that moment that I re/member recognising the complexities and contradictions

inherent in naming my own identity, or rather multiple identities. I can re/member feeling confused for a long time.

It was when I left home to go to teachers' college in rural new south wales that I became acutely aware of racism, my own difference and the politics of difference. At that particular point I re/member being really angry and defiant in the face of racism. I re/member how I refused to be named by others and would name myself aboriginal, which created a problem for some of my peers on campus. It also created a problem for me from time to time, because I often felt a sense of isolation. This experience of isolation was often the result of the *covert*, as much as the *overt*, racism operating among the student body.

The issue of addressing racism in society was very much on the agenda for the college for a number of reasons. Firstly, the college was located in a town where there was a significant murri population and it considered it had a responsibility to that particular part of the community. Secondly, through its affirmative action program the college was attempting to open its doors to murris who wanted to become teachers. Thirdly, the college recognised the importance of educating *all* australians in the area of 'race' relations. A one-semester *Race Relations* course had been introduced as a compulsory part of our teacher training.

It was an extremely exciting and challenging time for myself and many other students. In *Race Relations* lectures there was often heated debate. It was hard not to show my anger with some of my peers for example, when some of them spoke out about their complete dislike for blacks because of what they had experienced in their own home towns. I also re/member the debates which attempted to discredit and deny aboriginality to us fair-skinned murris. They were intense times, and I was often affronted by the level of ignorance and fear of difference among my peers. What was of real concern to me was that these students were in training to be teachers and that one day they would be out in schools teaching. It was frightening to think what some of them might be like in a classroom where there were aboriginal kids, or kids from other culturally different backgrounds for that matter.

One particular *Race Relations* episode I will never forget was the experience orchestrated by a couple of students and a lecturer around the issue of difference. This experience really heightened my awareness of difference and what happens to people who fear differences in others. I have titled this story . . .

The Robed as Other

Over a period of about a month, two students dressed up in robes (their whole bodies completely covered) appeared at different times and in different locations on campus. They had been briefed by the lecturer not to speak to anyone. What they were required to do was to observe people's reactions to their presence, especially when they remained stationary for any lengthy period. No-one at this stage knew their identity except for the lecturer.

When these fully robed bodies appeared in different parts of the campus, the initial response from people was usually one of curiosity and interest. Some people attempted to ask questions of the robed bodies, but information was never forthcoming. Most students just went about their campus life without making too much fuss about the robed bodies, until one day when one of the robed bodies was attacked by a group of male third-year students.

It actually got a bit scary when this 'gang' started to harass one of the robed bodies. They barricaded one into a corner, shouting abuse. A few other students tried to intervene to stop people from getting hurt. It became obvious that the time had come to call a halt to the exercise.

A few days later, the robed bodies appeared behind the lecturer in front of the two hundred-odd students. As they slowly made their way toward the lecturer, she began to reveal the purpose of the exercise and the real identities of the robed players. Tension and anger from some of the students, in particular those students involved in the harassment episode, began to mount.

The two students spoke about their experiences during the exercise. Of course they talked about the curiosity expressed by some, but they also revealed some really disturbing experiences. The lecturer then took the opportunity to expand on the issue of difference and to reinforce the seriousness of the consequences of fear of difference. It was an unforgettable experience for many students in the course.

I will always respect this particular lecturer for orchestrating such a powerful experience, which I am sure prompted many students to confront their own racism in a very immediate way. However, the exercise operated in a framework that was confined to notions of external appearance. While it recognised the oppression of people who looked different, the oppression of those of us who did not embody the physical aspects of being black was ignored. For those of us murris who were fair-skinned, our aboriginality went unrecognised; this rein-forced racism in the silencing of what we had to contribute to the

discussion. The experience of being murri goes far beyond surface physical appearances.

I am still reminded of *The Robed as Other* experience and of my own difference living in this society. Post-war immigration opened up this country significantly in terms of 'race' relations. The referendum of 1967 giving murris citizenship was a milestone in australian black–white relations, and the demise of the white australia policy[5] in 1972 meant australia began to come to terms with its own racist past. However, the racism of the dominant white culture toward murris is still deeply embedded within the australian psyche.

To name or not to name

Before 1788, those of my ancestors who were indigenous to this country would not have considered themselves aboriginal or, for that matter, black. The indigenous people of this country only became 'aborigines'/blacks as a result of invasion and colonisation by the british who, ironically, came to be australians. The use of the term *aboriginal* is problematic, in that it carries so many different meanings and it is one of the most disputed terms in this country. According to aboriginal anthropologist Marcia Langton (1993, pp. 28–9), it has been noted that there are at least sixty-seven definitions of aboriginal people, which, she says, reflect:

> not only Anglo-Australian legal and administrative obsession, even fixation, with Aboriginal people, but also the uncertainty, confusion and constant search for the appropriate characterisation: 'full-blood', 'half-caste', 'quadroon', 'octoroon', 'such and such an admixture of blood', 'a native of Australia', 'a native of an admixture of blood not less than half Aboriginal' and so on. In one legal case, whether or not an Aboriginal person lived in a 'native's camp' became an important issue of definition.

Langton goes on to say that:

> This fixation on classification reflects the extraordinary intensification of colonial administration of Aboriginal affairs since 1788 to the present. Elaborate systems of control aimed, until recently, at exterminating one kind of 'Aboriginality' and replacing it with a sanitised version acceptable to the Anglo invaders and immigrants. Perhaps Aboriginal affairs is the longest 'race' experiment in history?

For many murris, cultural hybridity is an extremely sensitive issue. It stands to reason, given Langton's reflections and the legacies of past racist government policies, that there is such strong resistance by many murris to recognising any 'dilution' of aboriginality. It just doesn't make sense to speak of oneself as 'full-blood', 'part-aboriginal', 'half-caste' or 'quarter-caste', etc. Besides, you would never hear a white australian speaking of themselves as being 'full-blood celt'! Identity is not about hierarchies. No one experience of being 'aboriginal' in this country is more real than or superior to another. It is racism that has taught us to think in this way. So it is not uncommon to hear comments from one murri to another, or to someone who might be struggling to come to terms with their aboriginal identity, like 'You better make up your mind whether you're aboriginal or you ain't!', or 'You're aboriginal and that's all there is to it!' While this all-or-nothing stand is a good example of the strategic political nature of identity, it can in turn lead to essentialism.

Essentialism within murri communities only works to reinforce the racism of the dominant culture. It is evident in the way some murris say that only aboriginal people can speak on aboriginal matters. It is also evident in the way some murris make out that all whites are bad. Essentialism is evident in the way some murris want to romanticise the so-called *traditional* aboriginal society and write off the society we live in today. As Langton (1993, p. 27) says in reference to aboriginal people and film-making:

> There is a naive belief that Aboriginal people will make 'better' representations of us, simply because being Aboriginal gives 'greater' understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated Other. More specifically, the assumption is that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other, without regard to cultural variation, history, gender, sexual preference and so on. It is a demand for censorship: there is a 'right' way to be Aboriginal, and any Aboriginal film or video producer will necessarily make a 'true' representation of 'Aboriginality'.

Stuart Hall (1992a, p. 310) challenges the notion of essentialism when he refers to us as now living complex, fragmented lives as post-modern subjects, without fixed or permanent identities.

> Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the

product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world.

Essentialism within many murri communities is about the denial of difference that has always existed and continues to exist within our communities. These days I never assume that other murris are necessarily prepared to work against racism in the broader community, let alone sexism, class oppression or homophobia.

Interrupting the gaze

This next story is set in the early 1980s. It is a story about addressing the issue of racism in the classroom and the cultural politics of identity. I had been appointed to a year six class where there was a range of abilities and skills. Apart from one student who identified as 'aboriginal' and three or four other students who had southern european australian heritages, the rest of the students were mainly white australian. It was a rather difficult and unruly class. As a new teacher to the school I had a lot to deal with. Although I was well placed to address any matters of racism within the classroom and/or staffroom, choosing the right time was crucial.

At the beginning of second term my grade supervisor advised me that I was to teach the themes '*australian government*' and '*australia's natural resources*'. For a number of reasons I knew that teaching these themes just wouldn't work with my class, so I planned a series of lessons about *australia and what it meant to be australian*.

In opening up the discussion I asked the students what they had learnt about *australia and being australian*. As there was little response, I tried asking them what they knew about aboriginal people. Using present tense, I asked them, 'Who are the first australians?' and of course their response was 'The abos, miss!' My immediate reaction was to make it clear to them that I would not tolerate derogatory labels such as *abos* in the classroom. I then explained why the term was offensive to murris. There was general agreement not to use such a term again.

Once we were over that hurdle I persisted with wanting to know what they knew or had learned about 'aboriginal' people. They responded with comments like: they're 'black' 'lazy', 'uneducated', 'smell a lot', 'ladies don't do their housework', 'eat witchetty grubs', they 'go walkabout', 'don't work', 'want land rights' and that 'the people living in their neighbourhood were more civilised than those aboriginal people living in the northern territory', etc. Their negative

stereotypes far outweighed the positive aspects of murri lifestyles and cultures, which was not so surprising given how deeply embedded the racism is within this society.

My immediate reaction was to challenge their stereotypes in order to point out that what they had told me didn't fit with my experience of being an aboriginal australian. Until that moment the students had assumed that I was white and were quite shocked when I revealed to them my family background and history. In naming myself aboriginal I was aware of the problems inherent in describing my identity in this way. At the time I was conscious of the very powerful position I was in as a teacher when challenging the students' perceptions of what it means to be aboriginal in the 1980s.

In discussing my identity with the students, I became aware of my own use of 'australian' in describing my english and irish heritages. What I had done was to equate my whiteness with being australian, ignoring the fact that many post-1788 'new australians' were not necessarily white. I took the opportunity to then discuss the issue of 'who is an australian' with the students. I made a point of talking through the fact that a number of people who had immigrated from various places and for different reasons who were now living in australia were not white and that they were as much australian as white australians. The few southern european students in the class obviously felt acknowledged and supported by my stance because they were able to express their annoyance at the way they were considered not australian.

The next day in class we discussed at length the previous day's session. We defined and explored the issues of 'stereotyping', 'generalising', and 'ethnocentrism'. When I made the point to the students that what they had done the day before was to stereotype murris, it was interesting to hear their response. It was quite obvious that many of the students had discussed the issue of intermarriage with their families the night before in an effort to understand what I had told them about my family.

One student proceeded to explain how it was wrong and unfair to stereotype groups of people as the class had done in relation to aboriginal people. The student compared this experience with that of his own in growing up in a western suburbs housing commission estate. He discussed how he hated the way outsiders to their community often stereotyped them as 'housos', 'westies' and 'dole bludgers'. Other students joined in the discussion by talking about their own experience and what it was like for them to be labelled in derogatory ways, for

example, as 'wogs' and 'lebs'. Some of the female students raised the issue of being put down on the basis of their gender.

In the midst of all of this, it came to my attention that some members of staff didn't really know how to deal with my difference. I re/member one day, when I was in the middle of teaching, I happened to notice the principal gazing at me from the back of the room. His gaze was penetrating. To interrupt his gaze, I looked at him and smiled. Without saying anything, he just turned and walked out of my classroom. He looked so perplexed, I knew he didn't know what to make of me. In the course of a conversation not long after this particular incident, the principal said to me, 'You know Wendy you're obviously more intelligent than most blacks.' I was so surprised by his comment that I didn't know what to say in response. I re/member feeling really angry and confronted by his racism. I also re/member thinking to myself at the time, 'What, because of my whiteness I'm more acceptable than, say, my sisters who look more like my mother!' and deciding not to react in the situation. As a relatively new teacher to the school, I recognised that the principal had more power than I did in the situation.

In the context of my own classroom, I recognised that I was in a position of power to be able to challenge the students' racism and understanding of aboriginality. I also recognised the importance of being open to what students had to say and the need for real dialogue in order to further develop their understanding of identity and that of aboriginality. My relationship with the students changed dramatically as a result of that moment in the classroom. The students' relationships with each other also changed.

As Langton (1993, p. 33) says:

> 'Aboriginality', therefore, is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create 'Aboriginalities', so that in the infinite array of intercultural experiences, there might be said to be three broad categories of cultural and textual construction of 'Aboriginality'.

Langton continues by explaining these three broad categories. She identifies the first category as the experience of aboriginal people interacting socially with one another largely within an aboriginal cultural context. The second is the stereotyping, iconising and mythologising of aboriginal people by white people who have never had any real first-hand experience of aboriginal people. The third is those constructions which are generated when aboriginal and non-aboriginal people engage in actual dialogue, where individuals test and adapt imagined

models of each other in order to find some satisfactory way of comprehending the other.

By providing a substantial overview of the various constructions of aboriginal identity, Langton is not at all reactive or defensive in her approach. She encourages an opening up of the identity debate in this country, not just in relation to what it means to be aboriginal, but what it means to be australian in the context of post-colonialism. 'Rather than making prescriptions, I am trying to move boundaries and undo the restrictions which make it so difficult for any of us to speak' (Langton 1993, p. 7).

Despite Langton's efforts to provide a substantial overview of the various constructions of aboriginal identity, I am still reluctant to use the word *aboriginal* in describing my own identity. By my very being, I disrupt essentialist notions of aboriginality and no longer find it useful to identify in a way that denies a part of myself or any part of my family. These days I find it much more useful and liberating to be able to speak of myself as having multiple identities and to recognise that in different contexts and at different times I assume different identities. As Hall (1992, p. 277) so eloquently puts it:

> Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about.

> To illustrate my point, I tell one last story. I have titled it . . .

Too much police rescue

I was making my way home through the back streets of an inner-city suburb one night when I happened to notice two police officers standing over a black youth. They had the youth pinned against a wall, with a torch shining in his face. As I drove by I felt really uncomfortable about the situation and wasn't sure what to do. By the time I had driven around the block, I had made up my mind that I would idle my car so that the headlights were shining right on the police.

Less than a minute after I turned up, the police officers turned off the torch, and a couple of minutes later, they let the youth go. It was obvious that they started to get a bit nervous about being watched. I

continued to sit in my car while the youth walked away. I made a point
of watching the police as well, and they knew it too. While I am not
quite sure what the youth had been up to for the police to take the
action that they did, I was convinced that he didn't deserve the
treatment that he received.

Now what was interesting was what went through my mind at the
time of the incident. I re/member feeling really angry and ready to
jump out of my car in order to take on the police in relation to the
way they were treating the youth. However, I knew that if I did, I
probably would have ended up being abusive toward the police . . .
creating even more trouble. I also recognised that it was safer to be in
my car, rather than on the street, given my gender. At the same time
I distinctly re/member recognising the power I had in the situation as
I sat within my car.

Looking white was to my advantage in this particular situation, and
I knew it! I also knew that if I were questioned by the police I could
use my position within my workplace as well as support from other
members of staff to challenge such racism. This is not the first time
that I have been placed in such a situation and it probably won't be
my last. Racism is alive and well in australia today, and I know only
too well what it is like to be on the receiving end of it.

Conclusion

Writing this chapter has been a challenge in that it represents a
significant shift in the way I have come to speak more recently about
my own identity. I have become extremely aware of the complexities
and contradictions inherent in the process of naming one's identity and
have only just begun to confront this issue myself. The process of
re/membering some of my own, and some of my mother's people's
experiences of racism has been painful. It has also been difficult to
recognise and to name some of the ways in which many of us, as
murris, have internalised the racism of the dominant australian culture
and developed essentialist notions of aboriginality reinforcing racism.

My own experience of racism has always been different to that of
a murri living in a black body. I am constantly aware of the way that
others gaze at me, both literally and metaphorically speaking, when I
identify with my blackness as much as my whiteness. I often find
myself being aware of the literal gaze and my constant internalising of
that gaze and how it translates in an internal sense according to the

shifting positions I find myself in. I am also constantly gazing outwards in an attempt to make sense of the cultural systems that surround me.

There is a certain silencing that happens around a discourse informed by both historical and contemporary essentialist notions of 'race'. In writing this chapter, like Marcia Langton I am attempting to open up dialogue in order to move boundaries and undo the restrictions that make it difficult to speak. Subjectivity is dependent on coming into language in a way that enables us to identify ourselves. It is through dialogue with each other that we will come to understand the differences and complexities involved in living in a post-colonial context.