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REVIEW ARTICLE

New Angles on Whiteness and the Making of the Modern World

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Onni Gust, *Unhomely Empire: Whiteness and Belonging, c. 1760–1830*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Clive Gabay, *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 (paperback edition 2020).

Nicola Ginsburgh, *Class, Work and Whiteness: Race and Settler Colonialism in Southern Rhodesia, 1919–79*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

Kama Maclean, *British India, White Australia: Overseas Indians, Intercolonial Relations and the Empire*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2020.

Abstract

These four new books on whiteness show its continuing vitality as a scholarly field, while broadening its purview to encompass North America, Africa, India and Australia from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Thematically they draw together the Enlightenment, intellectual and affective history, gender, economics, the field of international relations, labour and immigration. All will help us to combat white supremacy.

Keywords: whiteness; imperialist; superiority; gender; class

Whiteness studies first burst upon the world in the 1990s, then continued to burgeon in the early 2000s, although they seemed a little less ubiquitous for a while—perhaps because whiteness has been so normalised as an analytical tool. However we can now see from this set of four quite different and complementary studies that the concept and category of whiteness are still highly productive for our understanding of the world, at least since the eighteenth century and right up to today. Much of the pioneering work on whiteness investigated divisions within American society, and to a lesser extent metropolitan Britain through its imperial constitution. India, the Caribbean, and a few settler colonies also figured to a degree. A striking aspect of these new works is the wider geographical diversity of scholarly attention, and the varying scale of geographical frameworks under consideration. India and Africa feature much more significantly now than they did in earlier studies. In some ways, this enables us to consider whiteness more as a global construct than, for example, a dominantly transatlantic one. Of course, some earlier books have pointed

in this direction, such as Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynold's 2008 study of transnational connections in racially based immigration exclusion, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality.*[1]

In recent years whiteness, in various disciplines, has been used as a lens to study race in many parts of the world, including those colonised by a range of European and Western empires, and in both the northern hemisphere and the "global south." The United States continues to be a central focus. While Clive Gabay's *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze* considers Africa as a whole continent, and thus applies to the histories of multiple European empires, like all the other books under review here his detailed sections are on British colonies and Anglophone settler cultures. The centrality of the British Empire to imperial and postcolonial histories is surely in part an artefact of the dominance of Anglophone studies. Nevertheless this new set of books pushes us further in thinking about whiteness in global terms.

Historian Onni Gust's *Unhomely Empire: Whiteness and Belonging c. 1760–1830* takes the study of whiteness back to an earlier period than the field's dominant concentration on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its core focus is on the Scottish Enlightenment and the meanings of "home" versus "exile" for racialised ideas of belonging. In exploring the writings—from philosophy to novels, imperial policy, letters, and poetry—of a Scottish imperial elite, Gust decentres the metropole slightly further north than its usual English locus. Their research develops our knowledge of an aspect of the British Empire already well known: that the Scottish were active participants not only through Highlanders' valued martial roles, but as merchants, colonial officials, and schemers. Scotland had had its own imperial ventures. In the 1690s the small Scottish colony of Darien on the Isthmus of Panama was a spectacular failure with long-term consequences. It resulted in a high proportion of Scotland's finances being sunk without trace in the Panamanian jungle. The Darien scheme's failure resulted in a national emergency, which led to Scotland's Union with England in 1707. Historian Eric Richards claimed that it left a permanent scar on the Scottish psyche.[2] The Scots would continue to play a major role in the British Empire, but the failure of Darien finished the idea of a separate Scottish Empire. By the late eighteenth century, Scottish imperial involvement was through the wider British Empire, in India, North America, and elsewhere.

In Gust's analysis, ideas of "home" comprised expectations of heterosexual reproduction, patriarchal authority, class hierarchy, and characteristics formative of the nation. "Home" also carried affective dimensions through ideas of belonging, and hence of racial difference and white supremacy. "Exile" extended to the places and careers of empire, the imperatives to spend years overseas, often moving across a range of colonial locations. The Scottish imperial elite whom Gust studies expressed their sadness at being away from the "home" for which they longed, even as the vastly expanding empire and their own ambitions spurred on their mobile, often peripatetic, careers. Chapter 4 tells the story of a scheme organised by Thomas Douglas, the fifth Earl of Selkirk, under which between 1760 and 1815 more than twenty thousand Highland Scots emigrated to North America, particularly to Prince Edward Island in Canada. Gust suggests that through their migration the Highlanders, previously considered backward and barbaric to the point of being primitive, were brought into the category of whiteness by becoming part of settled British civilisation. Being part of imperial "progress" brought them into

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[1] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

[2] Eric Richards, "Darien and the Psychology of Scottish Adventurism in the 1690s," chapter 2 in Andrekos Varnava, ed., *Imperial Expectations and Realities: El Dorados, Utopias and Dystopias* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

the fold, even as the cultural discourse surrounding their emigration spoke of exile and banishment.

Gust organises their book around particular writers and concepts, with the final two chapters focusing on gender formation in different classes of the British in India. Chapter 5 turns to the men who worked as East India Company servants in Bombay in the early nineteenth century. Told from the perspective and writings of Sir James Mackintosh, a Scot who served as Recorder of the Court of Bombay, the chapter covers Scottish Enlightenment understanding of Indian history and culture. While Mackintosh had been influenced by Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and other criticisms of empire's effects on the colonised, nevertheless after arriving in India in 1804 he became an advocate for the benefits of British governance there. The Court of the Recorder served the British crown, rather than the East India Company, a position which enabled Mackintosh to keep an eye on what had become the notorious failings of the Company. He became concerned that time spent in India had a degenerative effect on the behaviour and morals of British servants of the Company. Mackintosh sought to clean up and improve British administration in Bombay, including reforming the police and prison systems, ridding them of corrupt practices and instilling more of the principles of the English judicial system. To further this cause and improve the mentality of the British community in India, Mackintosh established a Literary Society that he hoped would pursue studies in natural history, moral sciences, and political economy, including statistics. Such pursuits in colonial knowledge would strengthen the traits of superior English civilisation amongst colonising men. While Gust brings both whiteness and masculinity into this discussion in brief and allusive ways, the weight of their research in Mackintosh's writing centres on his conceptions of Britishness as superior to Hindu, Indian, Asian, or Muslim cultures. In articulating these conceptions, this reforming Scot intellectual showed that he identified not only as British, but specifically English.

Complementing that chapter on East India Company men is the final one, using the unpublished writing of Sir James Mackintosh's family to explore the fears held by the British colony in Bombay about the difficulties of maintaining white feminine virtue amidst moral dissolution. Gust contends that in the wider British imperial imagination, white women belonged at "home" in the metropole. At "home," their feminine virtue would help the continuation of patriarchal and cultural heritage. In the highly masculinised world of the East India Company in Bombay, young women were too quickly sexualised. The blame lay not only at the feet of the British in India, but also with an Indian culture whose practices of domesticity, marriage, and gender contaminated their own. Further, by the early nineteenth century the history of unequal interracial relationships and marriages between British men and Indian women had also complicated racialised ideas of femininity. And the domestic arrangements of colonising family life in India, with far larger households and more servants than they had in Britain, were another novel layer, one which bred ostentation and frivolity rather than domestic virtue. For all of its social glamour, corrupted colonial life in India could never be "home"—that concept was firmly associated with an imagined racially pure Britain.

The originality of Gust's study lies in its emphasis on the history of emotions, and its analysis of Scottish imperial writers' understandings of "home" and "exile." In showing that, in various contexts, the British metropole was always "home" to them in literal and metaphorical ways, Gust parses racialised notions of belonging and imperial moral hierarchies. At times whiteness is assumed more than investigated, but tying it to pervasive notions of British belonging, and the sense of banishment felt by many who pursued imperial careers, is persuasive. Gust compels us to see how emotionally invested at least some colonisers were in their sense of belonging to a supposedly superior culture back "home," and how that emotion fuelled their racist conceptions and practices.

Sharing an interest in intellectual and philosophical history and its intersections with whiteness, Clive Gabay's book *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze* shifts our attention to the twentieth century and to Africa. It shows how early twentieth-century whiteness's conceptions of Africa as inferior, backward, and timeless, in the sense of lacking progress, have a counterpart in early twenty-first-century notions of Africa's postulated rise in the international order. These seemingly contradictory discourses, Gabay argues, are joined through being projections of the white West's own anxieties and desires for confirmation of the superiority and global success of its "civilisation."

Gabay seeks to challenge the discipline of International Relations in which, he contends, studies of racism and the international order have relied upon a straightforward "phenotypical" understanding of whiteness, not seeing it as a mutable social construct as well as a system of social and economic privileging. Studies in IR have conflated these two different conceptions of whiteness through their focus on Eurocentric institutionalism and development. Whiteness must be recognised for its operations and effects, Gabay contends, because it insists on the superiority of European systems and therefore their universal value; we must see how whiteness has worked to support systemic white supremacy. If we are to understand how whiteness has worked to exclude some phenotypically white groups, such as the Irish, and conversely to enable the possibility of their becoming white, we need to recognise how it relies on certain ways of being and behaving. For a historian, much of this argument will be familiar, through a great deal of work in cultural and postcolonial history over several decades, which has pointed to the social and cultural construction of racial divides and hierarchies. Homi Bhabha's venerable insight, that colonialism depended on requiring the colonised to mimic the colonisers while never admitting them to the ruling elite, comes to mind.[3]

The book argues that the notion that only white people can produce Western civilisation has become increasingly shaky, especially in the period since World War II. Its chapters are chronologically arranged. They begin with racist British conceptions of Africa following World War I, followed by a study of the rise of anti-colonial nationalism in Kenya in the 1920s. Harry Thuku and his East Africa Association became the target for settler anxieties. Lines were drawn between the white settlers in Kenya (who included the notoriously decadent group portrayed in the 1982 book and 1987 film *White Mischief*), the colonial government in Kenya, the Colonial Office in London, and British humanitarian organisations. Settlers' determination to defend the ramparts of white supremacy included their suppression of the Indian community's claims for equal rights. Later chapters turn to the period after World War II. Gabay looks at the modernisation theory deployed by Western thinkers and officials to set policy for bringing development, technology, and consumerism to Africa as decolonisation approached. Chapter 5 demonstrates his argument that Western civilisation began to be loosened from phenotypical whiteness in the mid-century. It does so by providing a detailed case study of settler-led interracial groups in the British southern and eastern African colonies in the 1950s and 1960s. Faced with the rise of anti-colonial nationalist movements and decolonisation, and in the heightened context of the Cold War with its fears of communist incursions in Africa, some white settlers who saw themselves as progressives reached out to Africans who met their civilisational standards, through being educated and detribalised. Courting those Africans, some of whom joined the settler-led groups such as the Capricorn Africa Society founded in Southern Rhodesia in 1948, was intended to stave off the rise of nationalism and to sustain Western civilisation's (and the British Empire's) hold in Africa.

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[3] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989).

The final section of the book considers the idealisation of Africa in the early twenty-first century: the emergence of conceptions of "Africa rising" in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. Gabay uses a cover of *The Economist* from December 2011, with a child flying an Africa-shaped kite and a story headlined "Africa Rising" (p. 205) to epitomise the notion that Africa was entering an ascendant phase in its history. Another example was the 2014 conference held by the International Monetary Fund in Mozambique, called "Africa Rising." This discourse about Africa being emergent, accruing political and economic significance, was fairly short-lived. Yet, Gabay argues, it was significant in that it showed how white conceptions of Africa became idealised when African nations seemed to hold regular elections and the African middle class expanded. Africa became evidence for the "historical genius" of the white West in being able to transplant its "civilisation" there. His core argument is that this seemingly dramatic shift in Western views of Africa in fact drew on old myths, standards, and tropes. The idealisations of Africa were congruent with earlier overtly racist and anti-nationalist Western perceptions. What was different was that now they sprang from fears of the West's decline, and anxiety about white vitality. Africa could be whiteness's saviour by being the new locus for its values, even as the West itself declined.

Gabay suggests that one aspect of these invocations of "Africa rising" was their homogenisation of the continent; their failure to grapple with the specificities of its many nations, societies, and cultures. His thesis is intriguing and rather persuasive. At times, though, the broad rubric of whiteness as he deploys it seems to blend white racial supremacy, capitalism, and the Western-dominated international order seamlessly together. These elements have undoubtedly been interconnected—along with the powerful operation of European imperial nostalgia since at least the 1960s—but perhaps at least in some instances they should be disentangled so that the role of each can be assessed. Nevertheless, Gabay is to be applauded for his broadly framed and thoughtful study of the West's imaginings of Africa, and for inserting historical approaches into the field of International Relations.

A quite different study of Africa in the twentieth century is Nicola Ginsburgh's *Class, Work and Whiteness: Race and Settler Colonialism in Southern Rhodesia, 1919-1979.* In contrast to Gabay's outside-looking-in perspective on an Africa that is broadly figured, Ginsburgh's book takes a close look at the formation of class and race on the ground in Southern Rhodesia. Contending that class has been overlooked in settler colonial studies, as has the world of work as opposed to the much-studied domestic contact zone, she sets out to show how class difference operated both within racial groups and between them. One of her aims is "to reinstate class as an essential analytical tool" (p. 3). Southern Rhodesia is a particularly useful case study, Ginsburgh contends, because whites never exceeded 5 percent of the population; as a demographically weak settler state, whiteness was all the more significant.

Ginsburgh takes an avowedly Marxist approach to her understanding of class, and demonstrates a wide reading of the literatures of class relations, whiteness, and settler colonialism. She also has an explicit interest in the role of gender. A strength of the study is the nuanced attention she pays to the simultaneous working of multiple factors of difference. Another is her noting of many practical issues. For example, she makes the point that while in the mining industry white miners could have a vested interest in exploiting the black workers they supervised and thus the colour bar, in hospitals, due to the staff shortages, white nurses were often dependent on African co-workers in ways that minimised coercion.

The book is chronologically arranged. It takes off with the period after World War I when trade unions became powerful, and white workers forged a rocky collective sense. Using evidence from mining and railway union journals, Ginsburgh shows in detail

the ways that white workers sought to manufacture a shared identity, and the roles that race and gender played in this uneven process. In the 1930s Depression, white women entered into waged labour despite unions' resistance to them. Women workers supposedly challenged the masculinity attached to the breadwinner's role in supporting the family. The Depression exacerbated racial division amongst workers and fears of "poor whiteism." The 1934 Industrial Conciliation Act set limits on trade unions' power, while also effectively introducing a colour bar that gave employment protection to white workers. World War II complicated employment patterns even further as white men volunteered for the war, more white women took paid work, and non-British and Coloured workers arrived from elsewhere. From 1953 to 1963 Southern Rhodesia was part of the Central African Federation, and white workers sought a highly unrealistic policy to ensure white dominance of the labour force, despite the economy's reliance on African labour. By the end of the decade with nationalist movements and decolonisation gaining momentum, white workers saw the white supremacist Rhodesian Front as a way of maintaining the colour bar and their own privileges. From 1965 when the Front declared Rhodesian independence, white workers, like everyone else, were increasingly engulfed in the growing African nationalist struggle and escalating violence. By the end of the war in 1979 and Robert Mugabe's ascension to power, many white workers clung to the notion that they had built the country and contributed much to the counterinsurgency struggle, only to be sacrificed by the white elite.

It is a difficult juggling act to take class, race, and gender equally seriously, and Ginsburgh is to be commended for her unusual success in this regard. In a book densely packed with detail and complexities and fine-grained social analysis, it is the social fracturing that emerges as the dominant theme, rather than a simpler picture of historical change. The book coheres around its theory and method rather than a narrative; its determination to show that "Marxism is neither inherently deterministic nor is it unable to provide a sophisticated analysis of culture, gender or race" (p. 258). I am less sure that Ginsburgh's success in her analytical triptych is due solely to Marxism, rather than her wide reading in a range of cultural and other historical fields.

Class, Work and Whiteness has deep historiographical roots, which Ginsburgh acknowledges, with debts to pioneering works in whiteness studies such as David Roediger's work on the racial splitting of the late nineteenth-century American working class, when white workers opted for their own status and privilege rather than class solidarity with black workers. The richness of Ginsburgh's research is exemplified by the way she has drawn pervasively, for example, on Doris Lessing's fascinating memoirs and fiction, as well as numerous oral history interviews. And there are wonderful illustrations from contemporary magazines. Whiteness emerges from this impressive book as a racial identity not only divided by class and gender, but quite particularly shaped by the historical contingencies of settler colonialism in its incarnation in twentieth-century Southern Rhodesia.

Kama Maclean's *British India, White Australia: Overseas Indians, Intercolonial Relations and the Empire* is less about whiteness as a racial identity than as an immigration policy with severe consequences for diplomatic relations. Following a series of racist attacks on Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney in 2009–10, Maclean, who had previously been a historian of late-colonial India, decided to turn her attention to the relations between Australia and India from 1901 (Australia's federation) to 1947 (India's independence). The study necessarily came to focus on the trilateral relationships between Britain, India, and Australia, as well as providing a history of the Indian community in Australia. Australia's racist immigration policy, introduced in 1901 and unofficially known as White Australia, was the central sticking point in the relationship with India. Of course, Indians resented it, and the many Australians who travelled to and around India in the early twentieth century were both shaped and embarrassed by it. As Maclean points out,

Britain maintained the contradictory position of being willing to criticise White Australia even as they maintained a grip on India that was tenacious and repressive.

Maclean opens her study by considering the politics of names applied to Indians in Australia. Before and after the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act, demeaning names applied to immigrants from the subcontinent included Asiatic, Aliens, Afghans, Hindoos, East Indians, Coolies and Natives of India. The very names were freighted with both racism and assumptions about immigrants' potential to undercut the wages of white workers. Racial restriction in immigration was implemented by the notorious dictation test. Officials screened out those not wanted by setting a test in a language they would likely fail. For the Indians and Chinese who had been in Australia prior to 1901 and were allowed to remain, to be able to travel and return they needed a certificate of exemption from the dictation test. Surviving certificates reveal official attribution of nationalities. One Indian man's multiple certificates show that, while first categorised as a Native of India, in subsequent years he was a Hindoo, and then Indian. In contrast, those who advocated Indians' rights in Australia used the term British Indians to convey not just membership of the empire but an equal claim to Britishness and imperial belonging.

Maclean nicely unpacks the complex social status of Indians in Australia in these decades through her analysis of many Indians being called "Charlie." Most Charlies seem to have agreed to the name willingly, yet its use served to render them alien even as it mocked, patronised, and infantilised them. She points out that it was a counterpart to Australians' similarly derogatory name "John Chinaman."

Itinerant Indian hawkers supplied varied merchandise to rural and outback settlers in the early twentieth century. Despite the very real effects of the White Australia policy in proscribing Indian and Chinese immigration and keeping their numbers low, Australians in the bush may have suffered from scurvy or malnutrition if it had not been for Chinese market gardeners. And they would have had far less comfortable homes and fewer clothes if it had not been for Indian hawkers. Maclean contends that at the same time that politicians and newspapers constructed Indian residents as a problem, bush communities often knew them as trusted and familiar individuals who arrived regularly with staple goods. Often single men, the fact that Indians turned to hawking with its lonely existence shows their limited options.

While those in the country valued the services of hawkers, the figure of the hawker was the basis for an overtly racist caricature, which became an icon of Australian popular culture from 1909 to 1920 and well beyond. Artist and writer Norman Lindsay first drew the cartoon figure Chunder Loo for the national magazine *The Bulletin* in 1909; his older brother Lionel would continue it. Chunder Loo symbolised Indian hawkers in various ways, and was used as the comic emblem for Cobra Boot Polish. It was no coincidence that Chunder Loo appeared in the pages of *The Bulletin* which carried its motto on its masthead: "Australia for the White Man." Of course the brand name Cobra invited the link to India, but the racism was overt in using Chunder Loo to represent black boot polish. Over the years the elaborate cartoon advertisements created stories of Chunder Loo's travels and adventures as a loyal subject of the British Empire. Yet he remained a racialised figure of fun, inspired in part by Rudyard Kipling, whom Lionel Lindsay especially admired. Maclean invokes whiteness studies to deconstruct the varied meanings of Chunder Loo. He became such a familiar figure in popular culture, including his adoption for costume balls and masquerades, that "Chunder Loo" took over from "Charlie" to represent an Indian man. The racism intrinsic to Chunder Loo is perhaps clearest from the fact that, even in the late twentieth century, in Australian slang to "chunder" meant to vomit, derived from Chunder Loo rhyming with "spew" in the Cockney-rooted tradition of rhyming slang.

The White Australia policy was resented in India and opposed by Indian community groups in Australia. London's criticisms of it were hamstrung by its own policies in

India. Pressure on Australia grew following World War I, when India's contributions and sacrifices for the empire were so significant. Increasingly in the interwar period, imperial debate contemplated India's status as being or becoming equivalent to the white-settler dominions. But as the anti-colonial nationalist movement led by Gandhi escalated in India, dominant views in Australia were largely negative, often influenced by imperial propaganda. Maclean points, nevertheless, to the growth of voices in Australia presenting sympathetic views of India, from prominent Communist Jack Ryan at the end of the 1920s to activist Winston Burchett, who published pro-Nehru pamphlets during World War II. Then in 1943–44 three separate associations formed in Australia to promote friendship with Indian nationalists.

During the war, India's strategic importance to Australia became obvious. Formal bilateral relations preceded India and Pakistan's independence and separation in 1947. They began with the establishment of respective high commissions in Delhi in 1943 and Canberra in 1944. Australian strategists and leaders wanted an independent India to remain in the British Commonwealth, but were not willing to abandon the White Australia policy to which Indians objected. Maclean contends that, as Australia sought to establish a new bilateral footing with an independent India, it was whiteness that got in the way of appeals to a shared British Commonwealth connection. Australians resisted understanding Indians' historical experience of racism, and continued to defend the British imperial record with which they identified. It was not until 1973 that Australia ended its racially restricted immigration policy. Maclean's book is valuable not only for its extensive and varied research—such as the wonderful photographs of Indian hawkers—and its beautifully clear writing. Her detailed study of early twentieth-century intercolonial relations provides increasingly important historical context for Australia's fast-growing Indian community and relationship with India.

Together this new crop of books on whiteness provokes us to consider how it has functioned: as an identity of racial superiority; a sense of belonging to Western civilisation in its various expansionist guises; a way of imagining the world; and a national conception based on an immigration policy. We can see particular versions of whiteness being formed variously in multiple global sites—from Scotland and India to Southern Rhodesia and Australia. Specific versions of whiteness reinforced each other, as colonies and nations relied on hierarchies and inequalities elsewhere to naturalise their own. Further, as colonisers and settlers travelled from one imperial site to another, they carried ideas and practices of whiteness with them. And we can see the chronological reach of whiteness, from a literary elaboration in the late eighteenth century to its role in shaping global economic and political relations in the early twenty-first century.

Since the first emergence of whiteness studies, we have seen multiplying instances of violent white supremacist movements globally. These dispersed yet connected movements, and the support they lend to dictators, underscore the stakes of recognising the currency of white supremacy. These four books are all to be warmly welcomed. As rich and complementary contributions to the study of white supremacy historically and contemporaneously, they will help us to analyse and combat it.

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