



Institute for Culture & Society,  
Western Sydney University

# Disenchanted Diversity

*Interrogating diversity  
& crisis against the  
racial-colonial*

*Keynote: Patricia Hill  
Collins*

**PARRAMATTA  
CITY CAMPUS  
WESTERN  
SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY  
LEVEL 6, ROOM 21**

5 February 2020  
9am - 6 pm

## Workshop description

Diversity has long been criticized as obscuring material accounts of the colonially assembled nature of race as a technology of power. Against current open white supremacist politics, diversity acts post–postracially to universalise antagonisms, equating the dominant and the oppressed in an insidious ‘both–sidesism’. This one–day workshop interrogates the relationship between diversity and crisis. What has become of diversity as a policy mechanism at a time when multiculturalism has been declared dead? Is there anything that can be recuperated from the concept of diversity? Can it be infused with the radical potential necessary to challenge Eurocentrism, ‘white nationalism’, and capitalist heteropatriarchy. Or, do we need to jettison it in favour of other more encompassing aims?

Participants:

Debbie Bargallie

Chelsea Bond

Patricia Hill Collins

Selda Dagistanli

Nilmini Fernando

Sonia Tascon

Katerina Teaiwa

Sista Zai Zanda

Organised by Alana Lentin

*Limited places are available. Please register your interest with [a.lentin@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:a.lentin@westernsydney.edu.au)*

# Programme

**9.00 – Registration and coffee**

**9.30 – Welcome to country by Aunty Zona Wilkinson & workshop opening (Alana Lentin)**

**10.00–11.30 – Session I: Naming the problem (Chair: Lara Palombo)**

Managing Diversity? Race, Class, (Tres)passing and Resistance (Selda Dagistanli)

Diversity as Dispossessing (Chelsea Bond)

Diversity at Work: Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap? (Debbie Bargallie)

**11.30–11.45 – Comfort break**

**11.45–12.45 – Session II: Artistry (Chair: Ruth De Souza)**

The Shift (Sista Zai Zanda)

The “Blue Pacific” and Australia ... in a Time of Crisis (Katerina Teaiwa)

**1.00–2.00 – Lunch**

**2.00–3.30**

**Keynote: Where Do We Go From Here? Setting New Agendas for Black Feminist Thought (Patricia Hill Collins)**

**3.30–4.00 – Afternoon break**

**4.00–5.00 – Session III: Untangling the matrix of domination (Chair: Sara Motta)**

Critical Intersectionality Praxis in settler coloniality: Doing but not ‘un-doing’

Intersectionality and Putting the Power Back (Nilmini Fernando)

Diversity is not Enough: Matrix of Domination Disrupting White Social Work (Sonia Tascón)

**5.00–5.45 – Conclusions**

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Diversity at Work: Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap?**

*Debbie Bargallie*

The Australian Public Service (APS) champions its commitment to establishing a diverse workforce. Diversity is romanticised and taken as a messianic solution. Key diversity groups are identified as Indigenous Australians, people with disability, women, and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Despite APS efforts to be a space of fairness, inclusion, opportunity, respect and racial equality, Indigenous employees in the APS languish on the lower rungs of the institutional ladder. Lumping Indigenous employees together as a diversity group homogenises our identities; secondly, placing Indigenous employees under the banner of diversity contains us as a problem to be solved. This paper provides an Indigenous critique of APS diversity drawn from doctoral research that examines the experiences of Indigenous employees working in the APS. My research unmasks a racial contract manifested through everyday racism that diversity strategies camouflage. I argue that diversity for Indigenous employees is non-performative, it is a dirty deed done dirt cheap through hollow employment strategies, values, principles and initiatives that perpetuates white supremacy. Diversity must be jettisoned in favour of critical racial literacy and rigorous anti-racism praxis to advance Indigenous employment in the APS.

**Dr Debbie Bargallie** is a descendent of the Kamilaroi and Wonnarua peoples of the North-West and Upper Hunter Valley regions of New South Wales, Australia. Her doctoral thesis is the 2019 winner of the prestigious Stanner Award, and will be published by Aboriginal Studies Press in 2020 as *Unmasking the Racial Contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service*. She is currently a Postdoctoral Senior Research Fellow at the Griffith Institute for Educational Research at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia.

---

## **Diversity as Dispossessing**

*Chelsea Bond*

In 'On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life' Ahmed critically interrogates what diversity "does" including what it obscures drawing upon examples from Australia and the UK. In the doing of diversity, she reminds us that racialised relationships can get reproduced because such labour is typically associated with "certain bodies". Further, diversity can be a poor substitute for agendas of social justice and equality, instead becoming nothing more than a system for "counting commitments", "paper trails" and "public relations" exercises. Despite this, Ahmed sees a utility for diversity, so long as it continues to be retained as question that cannot be solved instead of the solution. Here I argue that the problem of diversity for Blackfullas is the fundamental question that it is incapable of asking or answering. In its "doing" diversity fails to foreground Indigenous sovereignty, instead relegating our emancipatory aspirations to equity measures which are all but divorced from land. Indigeneity is diluted into yet another category of ethnicities, which locates us at the very bottom of the imagined racial hierarchy that persists in the minds of all settlers, old and new. For Blackfullas, diversity as a question, answer, theory and practice is always and only dispossessing. Bio:

**Associate Professor Chelsea Bond** is a Munanjali and South Sea Islander woman and Principle Research Fellow at The University of Queensland's School of Social Science. Her current research supported by the Australian Research Council seeks to examine how race and racism operate within the health system in producing the persisting health disparities experienced by Indigenous peoples. A/Professor Bond is a board member of Inala Wangarra (an Indigenous community development association within her own community), and one half of the Wild Black Women on Brisbane's 98.9FM and NITV's The Point.

---

## **Where Do We Go From Here? Setting New Agendas for Black Feminist Thought**

*Patricia Hill Collins*

I'll argue that the kinds of reactions to diversity that are detailed in conference papers reflects a backlash against the kind of vision and politics raised by Black feminism and similar resistant knowledge projects. Now that we know the forms that these reactions take, where do we go from here? I'll identify three core questions for Black Feminist Thought, each of which requires dialogical engagement across differences of power. Each also illustrates intersectionality as praxis:

- What types of dialogues are needed among Black women to deepen Black Feminist Thought? This involves broadening and recontextualizing multiple expressions of Black feminist thought within in a broader Black Diasporic context. This context is both cultural, e.g., Black cultural similarities, and also political, e.g., the forms of anti-Black racism across different societies. An example includes U.S. Black feminism and Black Brazilian feminism.
- How can the intellectual and political contours of Black feminist thought and similar resistant knoweldge projects be placed in dialogue? What can they learn from each other? The theme here is intellectual and political coalition building and the lessons that can be learned from rethinking political solidarity through an intersectional lens. Some examples include Black/Latinx relations and Black/indigenous relations in the US.
- How might Black feminist Thought contribute to and be informed by social justice projects? I'm thinking here of how social justice increasingly appears as a way of framing social issues, e.g., environmental justice, reproductive justice, racial justice, etc.

Distinguished Professor Emerita Patricia Hill Collins is a social theorist whose research and scholarship have examined issues of race, gender, social class, sexuality and/or nation. Her first book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge), published in 1990, with a revised tenth year anniversary edition published in 2000, won the Jessie Bernard Award of the American Sociological Association (ASA) for significant scholarship in gender, and the C. Wright Mills Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Her second book, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, 8th ed. (2013), edited with Margaret Andersen, is widely used in undergraduate classrooms in over 200 colleges and universities. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (Routledge, 2004) received ASA's 2007 Distinguished Publication Award. Her other books include *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998); *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Temple University Press 2005); *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media and Democratic Possibilities* (Beacon Press, 2009); the *Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies*, edited with John Solomos (Sage, 2010); and *On Intellectual Activism* (Temple University Press, 2012). She has published many articles in professional journals such as the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, the *American Sociological Review*, *Signs*, *Sociological Theory*, *Social Problems*, and *Black Scholar*, as well as in edited volumes. In 2008, she became the 100th President of the American Sociological Association, the first African American woman elected to this position in the organization's 104-year history.

---

### **Managing Diversity? Race, Class, (Tres)passing and Resistance**

*Selda Dagistanli*

In a poignant account of her grandmother's experience as a Black woman in 1930s Chicago, Cheryl Harris (1993) describes how it was possible for Black people with 'white' features to enter the white labour market, 'albeit on a false passport, not merely passing, but trespassing'. Each evening, Harris wrote, her grandmother 'tired and worn, retraced her steps home, laid aside her mask, and re-entered herself'. In this paper, I reflect on how subjects deemed to be 'diverse' perceive and manage their own status as 'diverse subjects' at various social and historical junctures and across different fields. More specifically, I ask how racialised subjects, in societies marked by the legacies of colonialism, feel inclined or disinclined, to disrupt the scripts that set the terms for their diversity status and inclusion. To answer this, I explore the possible ways in which class background, gender and different markers of social capital (or its lack), may underscore varying responses to reductive, externally imposed ideas of diverse subject status, whether those responses are to variously cover racial identities and pass (Goffman 1963) as 'white', subscribe to a public 'forced narrow telling of themselves' (Skeggs 2004), or engage in either small or ostentatious acts of resistance. The paper concludes with my musings on whether, in light of all of this, diversity should be reclaimed or discarded by those who are defined by it.

With a continued commitment to her background in philosophy, **Selda Dagistanli** researches in a range of inter-disciplinary areas relating to "cultures of abuse" and the racialisation of gendered violence, multicultural politics and (anti-Muslim) racism, and cultural diversity and the law through a critical analysis of legal and political discourses. Her overarching research priority is an exploration of the various ways in which unpopular minorities are morally, politically and culturally marginalised in legal, institutional, and broader community arenas. Selda has a particular research interest in the intersections of disadvantage experienced through race and gender. She was recently a CI on an ARC Discovery Project exploring 'Sharia in everyday life in Sydney and New York' with Professors Possamai, Turner and Voyce. Selda is completing a monograph with Routledge titled, *Trialling Culture, Protecting Women: Racialising Sexual Violence in Legal and Political Discourses*. Her most recent research explores gender equity and violence (including symbolic violence) against women in the Australian Defence Force.

---

### **Critical Intersectionality Praxis in settler coloniality: Doing but not 'un-doing' Intersectionality and Putting the Power Back**

*Nilmini Fernando*

In the Australian post colonising context, Intersectionality, co-opted and mainstreamed in white neoliberal feminist frames and multiculturalism, is suffocating under family violence (and other) social policies depriving Indigenous, Black and Women of Colour feminists and their critiques of oxygen. Post-racially, if 'both-sidesism' in diversity equates the dominant and the oppressed, intersectionality in diversity, cloaked under white feminist innocence, ignorance and supremacy propagates a dangerous 'all sides-ism.' This robs intersectionality's theoretical potential to name state violence and provide rigorous anti-racist, anti-capitalist praxis. In this paper, I present critiques of Intersectional policy failures in the family violence/ women's sector. I identify key elements from a piloted training model for practitioners that effectively "undoes" the limits of identity based, race-evasive praxis to put the power back into intersectionality and re-articulate it as a urgent form of race/class/gender literacy

**Dr Nilmini Fernando** is a Sri Lankan Postcolonial/Black Feminist scholar whose Doctoral research theorized Postcolonial Asylum in the Irish settler colonial context. Her work is published in *Postcolonial Studies* and her chapter 'Wahala: African Women troubling Irish Borders' is in Press with Routledge in an edited collection, *Irish Migrant Adaptations*. Nilmini's current focus is to contextualize Critical Intersectionality Praxis for the Australian context. She is research fellow at Griffith University, Queensland and a practice-based scholar at WIRE Women's Information and Referral, Melbourne.

---

## **Diversity is not Enough: Matrix of Domination Disrupting White Social Work**

*Sonia Tascón*

The contemporary emphasis on diversity, in popular culture, employment policies and other 'equity' practices sustains power relations in fairly intact form because its use (diversity) has failed to re-calibrate power itself by disarming its multi-dimensionality. Diversity appears to fragment its unitary power, to permit many to share its benefits, while remaining centred around whiteness. As Patricia Hill Collins and others have pointed out the power of race to shape lives and our social imagination is multi-dimensional, and its undoing is not a matter of simply describing each singular structure of oppression, or even of adding-on a number, but in their distinctive interactions. In this paper I bring these ideas to Social Work, a profession and discipline that has been epistemologically and ontologically premised on whiteness, specifically that of the anglosphere. How can the ideas offered by this concept – Matrix of Domination – help to disrupt Social Work's racialised power, so that it may more fully fulfil its social justice promise?

**Sonia M. Tascón** is Senior Lecturer at Western Sydney University in the School of Social Sciences, and has published widely on topics of race, whiteness, migration, refugees, national identity, and human rights film and film festivals. More recently her research interests have moved towards diasporic communities and the use of film festivals to sustain as well as reshape them, and Decolonisation. As a first-generation Chilean-Australian of Mapuche (Indigenous peoples of Chile) origin, Sonia has maintained a colonial/ decolonial/ racial analysis approach at all times.

---

## **The “Blue Pacific” and Australia ... in a Time of Crisis**

*Katerina Teaiwa*

In this informal paper I share a bit of background on my research and visual arts practice on the impact of extractive Australian, New Zealand and British phosphate mining in the central Pacific. I reflect on Australia's broader popular, research, security and policy relationship with the island region, how this intersects with Pacific migrant experiences, and trans-indigenous relations, knowledges and activism, particularly in a time of environmental crisis.

**Katerina Teaiwa** is Associate Professor in Pacific Studies and Gender, Media and Cultural Studies in the School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, at the Australian National University. She is author of *Consuming Ocean Island: stories of people and phosphate from Banaba* (2015). She has a background in contemporary Pacific dance, and is a visual artist. Her research-based multimedia work *Project Banaba* has been shown at Carriageworks in Sydney, and MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri in New Zealand. Katerina is of Banaban, I-Kiribati and African American descent, born and raised in Fiji.

---

## **Welcome to Country**

*Aunty Zona Wilkinson*

**Aunty Zona Wilkinson** is a Western Sydney University Elder on Campus (Community Elder) and Kamilaroi Elder. She is an Aboriginal woman from north eastern New South NSW Wanneroo Singleton NSW Gumilaraay country/ She has volunteered in the community at the Holy Family Church, Policing support, Housing, and NSW Rugby League where she worked as a coach. She is a cultural educator and visual artist in textiles, ceramics, sculpture, painting, and printmaking. Her artwork was collected by The Power House Museum. And has been an Aboriginal curator at Penrith Regional Gallery and Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre. Aunty Zona is also a founding member of Blacktown Arts Centre. Blacktown Arts Centre.

---

## **The Shift**

*Sista Zai Zanda*

Her *Africa Is Real* is a collective of Black southern African women who live in Narrm/ 'Melbourne' and creatively reimagine the African archive in 'Australia' through engagement with sites, history and people. Taking the library as a key site of historical record and mis/representation, the collective recently undertook a creative development hosted and funded by a leading contemporary performing arts institution. Representing the collective, Sista Zai presents a performance lecture collectively written and workshopped during their two week residency. In character, Sista Zai critically engages "diversity" in the context of "multiculturalism". Framing libraries as key institutions of "disenchanted diversity", the performance lecture also indicates possible pathways towards alternative future libraries.

**Sista Zai Zanda** is a storyteller, educator and curator. She has facilitated poetry and storytelling workshops in Australia, Zimbabwe and Denmark and contributed to defining the strategic direction for Melbourne as a UNESCO City of Literature. In 2011, Zai founded Stillwaters Storytelling Collective, a platform for diverse women's voices led by Black African women. Stillwaters performed at the Emerging Writers Festival, the Big West Festival, La Mama Theatre and the Light In Winter Festival. Currently, Zai hosts and curates the Pan Afrikan Poets Café, the home of new, cutting edge and classic Afrikan literature. This is a pop up literary event for stories by and about Afrikan and First Nations' storytellers. Zai established the Pan Afrikan Poets Café in 2015 with the intention to celebrate Africa's rich literary legacy and diverse storytelling traditions while showing love and respect for First Nations peoples. Since 2015, Zai has spoiled audiences in Melbourne and Sydney with over 100 performances by Afrikan, First Nations and Pasifika artists. Recently, she co-produced a Pan Afrikan Poets Café event, #BlackGirlMagic at the Arts Centre Melbourne and it sold out in less than 5 days bringing a highly diverse audience to Australia's largest performing arts venue. Zai is also known for a literary dance party called *Sankofa The Love Vibration*, a celebration of Motherhood, female ancestry and the Divine Feminine within us all, which debuted at Next Wave Festival as a sold out show. You can catch an afternoon of beats, performance and community conversation at Zai's monthly Afrikan High Tea party, an interdisciplinary platform for artists which also serves as a practice-based mentorship for new and emerging literary curators who are driven by an ethic of community self-care and collaboration.