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Whiteness and futurity: Towards a research agenda

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Abstract
The category whiteness has received considerable attention in geography over the last 15 years. This paper argues that this research is oriented almost exclusively towards some notion of the past and as such fails to consider the way the category of the future might shape geographies of whiteness. The paper explores this proposition by showing how the geographic study of whiteness is carried out through three past-oriented modes of analysis: labour studies; postcolonial theory and identity; and critical whiteness studies and anti-racism. It then offers suggestions as to how each mode might benefit by engaging with the notion of futurity.

Keywords
futurity, geography, labour studies, postcolonial theory, whiteness

I Whiteness and futurity

This paper argues that research on whiteness and geography is oriented almost exclusively around some notion of the past. While this is perhaps to be expected given that whiteness studies builds off two past-oriented bodies of scholarship – US labour studies (Roediger, 1991) and postcolonial theory (Said, 1994) – the argument is that privileging the past when researching geographies of whiteness risks overlooking the ways in which whiteness and hence various forms of racism are configured in relation to a different temporal horizon: the future. In pressing this claim, the argument is not to suggest that history is irrelevant for understanding the politics of whiteness. Analysing the past remains indispensable for understanding the numerous forms whiteness can take. Instead, the argument is that analysing discourses of 'the future' can reveal important insights about the ways in which white geographies are configured that might otherwise be foreclosed if the past is privileged as the exclusive time-space through which such geographies are produced and maintained. As such, any politics seeking to challenge whitenesses and their hold on racist social imaginaries may benefit by analysing how the future is invoked in articulations of white identity and how such future-oriented articulations shape geographies of all kinds.

Why the future? By future I refer to an imagined time that is yet-to-come. The future can be understood to follow sequentially from a past-present trajectory, or it can be understood as a form of absent presence. From tropes of uncertainty, Utopia, apocalypse, prophesy, hope, fear, possibility and potentiality, the future shapes the present in all manner of ways. For instance, in politics, rights are often suspended

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to safeguard against future events of insurrection, catastrophe and terror. In religion, moral judgements in the present are shaped by a concern for one's safe passage into a future afterlife, and, in finance, the pricing of securities necessarily entails some calculation of future risk. Given the ubiquity of the future in the present, it is perhaps no surprise that the future is an important object of inquiry in contemporary thought (see, for example, Adams and Groves, 2007; Anderson, 2010b; Jameson, 2005; Luhmann, 1993).

Ben Anderson (2010a) provides a useful sketch of this research in a recent article in this journal. His point is that the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e. calculation, imagination and performance) and, in turn, intervenes on the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e. pre-caution, pre-emption and preparedness). So, too, others have made the case that pre-empting the future is now a common feature of contemporary political life (Braun, 2007; Cooper, 2006). Futurity is also an important feature of the affective dimensions of daily life. Take, for instance, fear (Pain, 2009) and hope (Anderson, 2006; Anderson and Holden, 2008). Both are simultaneously embodied experiences and atmospheric qualities animated by imagined futures: one fears the yet-to-come and the other hopes for better things to come. In both, the here-and-now of the psyche or of collective mood is shaped by the yet-to-come. Or, as Brian Massumi (2002) argues, affect occurs precisely in the overlap between the actual and the virtual, which I take to mean an overlap between that which is and a very specific form of the virtual – the yet-to-come. By virtual I refer to things that are real but not actual (Shields, 2003); in this way, the future is exemplary of the virtual. It can be known and hence real, as Anderson suggests, but because it can never be fully actualized *as the future*, the future remains a permanent virtuality. Thus, analysing atmospheres of fear and hope, for instance, may tell us something about the way politics takes shape through the conjugation of the actual and the virtual, or at the threshold of the future event.

But the future as an object or orientation of inquiry is not limited to the affective, and nor is it confined to an actual-virtual binary. Hegel, for instance, paid considerable attention to transactions of the actual and the possible. For Hegel, the dialectic is made possible by the actual-possible relation where the dialectical movement of the actual *is* the possible.[1] So, too, Heidegger argued that the future is indispensable to meaning. For instance, the significance that attaches to certain kinds of information would vanish were it not for the anticipated (i.e. future) consequences that lay dormant in information. Currency exchange rates would matter little, for instance, were it not for the anticipated consequences of exchange rate volatility. Although radically different, the Hegelian and Heideggerian traditions share in common the idea not simply that politics take shape through the collision of social forces that gathered pace in the past, but that political contests are shaped by the future as well.

This essay argues for a research agenda that situates the future at the centre of analyses of white geographies. It shows how the geographic literature on whiteness is past-oriented and suggests how this literature might benefit by attending to the ways in which white geographies are infused by notions of futurity. I develop this argument more fully below. For now let me offer a few preliminary thoughts about geographies of whiteness. By whiteness I refer to a racialized subject position that is remarkable for its seeming invisibility (Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Dyer, 1997). In this sense, whiteness is only partially about skin. More important, whiteness plays a foundational role in racist epistemology by serving as the norm against which others come to be viewed as different (Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). As such, whiteness does not name a set of stereotypes, so much as a set of 'narrative structural

positions, rhetorical tropes and habits of perception' (Dyer, 1997: 12) that stand in for the normal. This makes defining whiteness almost impossible but then, as Richard Dyer (1997) argues, the power of whiteness lies in its capacity for almost infinite variability (see also Kobayashi, 2003; Vanderbeck, 2006). For myself, the power of racisms rest in their capacity to normalize their corresponding whitenesses (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000).

What, then, are geographies of whiteness? For my purposes here, they refer to geographies – spaces, places, landscapes, natures, mobilities, bodies, etc. – that are assumed to be white or are in some way structured, though often implicitly, by some notion of whiteness (Bonnett, 1997; McCarthy and Hague, 2004; Vanderbeck, 2006). The argument put forward in this paper is that research on geographies of whiteness is almost invariably past-oriented (Bonnett, 1997, 2000; Hoelscher, 2003; Pulido, 2000). By 'past-oriented' I mean that whiteness, whether understood as a past or present phenomenon, tends to be explained, accounted for and examined as an expression of social relations that took shape in the past (Satzewich, 2007). In the paper, I aim to show how this work is dominated by an orientation that looks to the past as the temporal horizon through which research and learning about past or present white racial identity occurs. By and large, this work assumes that in order to challenge or reconfigure whitenesses and their corresponding racisms whiteness must be diagnosed using some form of past-oriented analysis (Bonnett, 1997). The racist past is, thus, used to explain the racist present. A brief example makes the point. In an essay that many (Baldwin, 2009a; Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Jackson, 1998; McCarthy and Hague, 2004) suggest is a main point of reference for debate about whiteness in geography, Alastair Bonnett (1997) argues that whiteness ought to be understood as a function of historical geography.[2] As such, Bonnett privileges a methodological approach that reaches into the past for answers about contemporary race and racism. Elsewhere, Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake (2000) make a similar claim that whiteness is a historically constructed position: to understand whiteness requires understanding its multiple genealogies.

I do wonder, though, whether a past-oriented approach to the study of white geographies reproduces the teleological assumption that white racism can be modernized away. Such an assumption privileges an ontology of linear causality in which the past is thought to act on the present and the present is said to be an effect of whatever came before. Consequently, efforts to understand racism are thought to proceed from, or be enhanced by, some correct historical analysis of whiteness. According to this kind of temporality, the future is the terrain upon or through which white racism will get resolved. It cleaves the future from the present and, thus, gives the future discrete ontological form. Yet, in so doing, this kind of temporality disregards the ways in which the future is very often *already present* in the present not as a discrete ontological time-space, but as an absent or virtual presence that constitutes the very meaning of the present (Anderson, 2010a; Massumi, 2007). This is a rather significant oversight when attempting to account for geographies of whiteness because it means that such geographies are not simply a function of the past but of the future as well.

So, then, what about the future? To what extent are geographies of whiteness a function not just of the past but of the future? How are white geographies maintained in relation to the future? In what ways is the future already present in various forms of whiteness? It seems that the geographic literature on whiteness is silent on these questions. In pointing this out, I do not mean to indict or discredit the historicist approach that has come to dominate understandings of whiteness. Again, past-oriented analyses of various kinds have been and continue to be critical for understanding whitenesses and the various racisms to which they give rise. I simply

wish to acknowledge that by foregrounding the past in the present the geographic study of whiteness risks overlooking how whitenesses are made and maintained in relation to futures both distant and immanent. Here, the task for a future-oriented geographic research on whiteness might be to understand how both contemporary *and* past forms of whiteness relate to the future (Anderson, 2010a), or how specific geographic expressions of whiteness are contingent on the future. For instance, the task might be to understand how discourses of futurity shape various forms of white supremacy from right-wing xenophobias to left-nationalisms to practices of liberal humanitarianism, and how these shape, for instance, geographies of place, nature, space, mobility, bodies and so on. A worthwhile starting point for this work might be to analyse how discourses of white crisis, such as those found in Great Britain in the early 1900s (Bonnett, 2004) or throughout the West during processes of post-Second World War decolonization (Thobani, 2007), relate to and are shaped by notions of futurity. They do relate to the future. The question is: how and to what effect?

Acknowledging how the future is made present in white geographies is important for at least three reasons. First, as many now argue (Grusin, 2010; Massumi, 2007), the future is an important site through which individuals and societies are governed (Anderson, 2010a). A focus on whiteness and futurity provides scope for thinking about the way in which governing through the future might inaugurate new or reconfigure old forms of whiteness. Eugenic science is a useful example here. Eugenics was underwritten by an imagined future eradicated of human imperfections. Thus we might seek to understand how white geographies are reproduced through new future-oriented technologies, like genetic screening and nanotechnology (Rose, 2007). Second, understanding how white geographies articulate with discourses of futurity opens up new terrains for conceptualizing and challenging racism. If white supremacy is, in part, reproduced through shared practices of futurity, what then are these practices? What kinds of futures do such practices seek to expunge or produce, and how can they be resisted? The case of genetic medicine is again illustrative. For instance, individual gene mapping allows 'genetic citizens' to witness their 'future' health by assessing their genetic predisposition for disease (Rose, 2007). Genetic citizenship is, in turn, shaped by new practices of bodily purification aimed at foreclosing certain 'unhealthy' futures. We might ask whether and how these practices are white. Third, a focus on whiteness and futurity points to the idea that affect shapes white racial formation (Hook, 2005). For the future can never exist except as a form of virtual present, and affect can be understood, in part, as a generalized attitude towards the presencing of particular futures. (Important, however, is that affect can also be understood as a generalized attitude towards presencings of the past. Think, for example, affects of nostalgia and loss.) Thus, we might ask: what futures infuse the affective logics of whiteness? How does this future presencing occur? And how, if at all, are these futures constitutive of specific white spatio-temporalities? These reasons together provide a rationale for a research agenda concerned with understanding how the future works as a resource in the geographic expression of whitenesses.

The remainder of the essay is organized into three sections – labour history; postcolonialism and identity; critical whiteness and anti-racism – and a conclusion. The first section is associated with historical materialism, the latter two with genealogy. Each specifies in general terms a methodological approach to the study of whiteness in geography that is past-oriented. Each also shows how various forms of whiteness give presence to the past differently. For instance, in labour history, the past is re-enacted, expressed in the wage relation or experienced through nostalgia. In postcolonialism, the colonial past is

said to be written onto contemporary landscapes or spatialized and thus robbed of its temporality (Massey, 2005), or it can haunt the present as in spectral geographies (Cameron, 2008). Following brief accounts of how each approach construes whiteness as an effect of the past, I then suggest by way of example how each might benefit from attention to futurity.

This paper does not attempt to position geography within the broad milieu of whiteness studies. Numerous studies already do just this (McCarthy and Hague, 2004; Shaw, 2006; Vanderbeck, 2006). Nor does it purport to be an exhaustive genealogy of geographers' engagements with the category of whiteness. Much more modestly, it brings attention to the past-orientation of much of this work. Important here is that much (but by no means all) of this research can be traced to a few key interventions formulated in the 1990s (Bonnett, 1997; Jackson, 1998), which urged geographers to attend to whiteness as an object of geographic research on race and racism. Such claims rightly pointed out that geographic research on race and racism had hitherto focused on the experiences of people of colour without commensurate attention paid to the ways in which white subjectivity is constitutive of racial discourse. These interventions urged geographers to examine the historical geographies and shifting morphologies of whiteness (Bonnett, 1997; Jackson, 1998) in various literary, national, ethnographic and scalar contexts (Jackson, 1998). Although it would be gravely misplaced to suggest that these interventions catalyzed geographic research on whiteness – feminist research on geography and racism arrived at the category of whiteness through a very different intellectual trajectory (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Razack, 2002b) – they are nevertheless important points of reference in the genealogy of whiteness in geography, and at a minimum symbolize the historical orientation embodied in much of this research.

II Labour studies and the economic value of whiteness

One route into whiteness studies begins with the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Du Bois, 1935; Roediger, 1991). This work traces the production of white supremacy in the USA through the history and legacy of US slavery and labour politics. One of Du Bois' many insights was to show how, during the Reconstruction era, white workers received financial and psychological compensation from the capitalist class in the form of white privilege. Embracing white identity allowed white workers privileged access to the labour market and the benefits of citizenship in exchange for their loyalty. The most notable contemporary study in this genre is David Roediger's classic text *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991; reprinted 2007), which shows how white working-class identity in the USA was forged in relation to black slaves. Other accounts in this genre show how various American immigrant groups overcome their 'difference' through the denigration of blacks in the labour market (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2005).

These studies are important because they illustrate how white privilege operates as a form of economic currency, or 'cash value' (Lipsitz, 2006: vii). Thus, being white has meant (and continues to mean) greater likelihood of employment, higher wages, access to finance capital and mobility. This line of research is further developed in work that recognizes a 'possessive investment in whiteness', the idea that white people invest politically, economically, culturally and socially in a racialized value system that confers material advantage (Lipsitz, 2006). Whiteness here operates as a form of property. As such, it has been argued that an identifiable system of legal and social norms has evolved in America to ensure that the asset value of whiteness is not undermined (Harris, 1993). This work is especially important to my argument because it recognizes how whiteness 'has always been influenced by its origins in the

racialized history of the United States' (Lipsitz, 2006: 3). It recognizes that the economic value that attaches to whiteness is historically constituted and that confronting white racism in America necessarily entails exposing the historical production of whiteness as a form of economic value.

Urban geographers working on the spatialization of white privilege and white identity partly build on this intellectual trajectory, although not explicitly. For instance, that whiteness carries economic value has played an important part in the configuration of urban space in North America after the Second World War (Davis, 1998; Pulido, 2000). Whiteness as economic value is, of course, one of the main reasons behind the American phenomenon of 'white flight'. Alongside industrial relocation to the suburbs and the Cold War fear of urban nuclear annihilation (Farish, 2003), white homeowners relocated to the suburbs in order to protect their real-estate investments (Kruse, 2005; Pulido, 2000). The fear was that as more and more black people moved into what were ostensibly white neighbourhoods property values would decline. As such, we might reinterpret white flight as a form of anticipation, a speculative hedge against devaluation both of the real-estate asset price and its underlying value: whiteness. That black Americans have been blamed for the subprime mortgage crisis and the sharp decline of real-estate values in the USA has an antecedent in the phenomenon of white flight. White flight has also been used to explain environmental racism in Southern California (Pulido, 2000) where the placement of toxic and hazardous waste sites in black and Hispanic neighbourhoods is said to be a function of the economic value of whiteness spatialized across the urban and suburban landscape.

That whiteness carries an economic value is further affirmed in geographies that explain whiteness as a function of both economic and cultural loss. Jamie Winders (2003) considers how the identities of the white rural poor are often figured around notions of economic loss. In Great Britain this work has considered how segments of the white working class are rearticulating their identities in response to deindustrialization (Nayak, 2003) and welfare reform (Haylett, 2001). In the USA, the fear of white economic loss drove the phenomenon of white flight and gathered steam in response to the civil rights movement (Kruse, 2005). In Canada a similar politics of white loss continues to play out within debates on globalization (Sharma, 2006). Globalization is framed in Canadian English left nationalist and liberal discourses as the loss of national sovereignty under conditions of capital mobility. Yet framing globalization as the loss of sovereignty elides the critical historical fact that the loss of sovereignty (not to mention the loss of jobs, life, security, land and rights) has been a defining experience for people of colour for centuries (think colonialism and slavery) (Sharma, 2006). Cultures of loss also figure in white identity through, for instance, themes of white nostalgia and the 'used to' that permeate the aural and verbal language of country music in the USA (Mann, 2008), heritage tourism (Hoelscher, 2003) and certain notions of Celtic identity (Hague et al., 2005; McCarthy and Hague, 2004).

While the foregoing discussion on whiteness as economic value is brief, it nevertheless provides evidence that the labour studies approach to whiteness in geography is a past-oriented body of research. How then might attending to the future shape the labour history approach to whiteness? What is missing from this approach such that it requires attention to discourses of futurity? Geoff Mann's (2007) insights on this point are apposite. For Mann, 'the wage – that very expression of an individual's worth in capitalist terms – is one of the ways in which [the] past-present-future link is constructed in capitalism' (p. 158). Yet 'the crucial ways in which the politics of the wage in fact produces workers' orientation to the future are obscured' (p. 159). Thus workers' interests, of which the future forms an indispensable part, are not objectively

expressed *in* the wage but are indeterminate and worked out in struggles *over* the wage. As such, the future, specifically how it might be configured, is an object of struggle in wage politics. But so is whiteness, if we follow the logic that whiteness is a form of economic value. Whiteness, in this sense, has a stake in the future, and hence wage politics, to the extent that white people seek to maintain the future value of whiteness. Thus the challenge for researchers working in this milieu might be to work out what this stake is, and how and by whom this stake is cultivated. This is, by no means, a straightforward task. Indeed part of the challenge might be to work out how 'the future' is 'priced' or 'presenced' into the economic value of whiteness. What are the mechanisms by which this 'pricing' occurs? To what extent does the policing of white identity involve some calculation of the future 'price' of whiteness?

White suburbanism is a useful empirical site for addressing some of these questions, and there is arguably no better place to think them through than Los Angeles, given that it was at the forefront of 20th-century North American suburbanization. Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* (1998) includes a history of white suburban development in Los Angeles, where from as early as the years preceding the First World War white housing associations, often with the backing of developers, were hard at work implementing covenants designed to exclude Black and Hispanic home ownership (pp. 153–219). Here I would argue that the economic value of whiteness is underwritten by a spatial politics in which the future is priced into white real-estate values through the restrictive covenant. That is, the covenant can be interpreted as a form of white asset protector that safeguards against the ever-*present* possibility but never materialized future of Black homeownership. In this sense, the covenant is the political expression of an affective logic itself produced through the conjugation of an actual value of white home ownership and the virtuality of future Black homeownership. Here, I would suggest that an imagined future of white loss and Black homeownership is precisely what gives the covenant its meaning, which in turn suggests that the white suburban landscape of Los Angeles is as much an expression of the future as it is of the past; indeed, both past and future are what give the white suburban landscape its performative force as such. Pushing this thinking further, one could even argue that suburban geographies of whiteness emerge at the threshold of the virtual event of Blackness.

But white suburbanization in Los Angeles was not solely a function of the restrictive covenant (Davis, 1998). In the post-Second World War period, it functioned through a politics that sought to delink property taxes from the financing of municipal services (Davis, 1998). Here, new real-estate developments sought independent incorporation, which allowed suburban housing associations greater local control over zoning and thereby the capacity to insulate home values through exclusionary zoning. It also meant that affluent, white suburban homeowners no longer had to pay for the municipal services associated with low-income areas. Mike Davis (1998) refers to this strategy as the 'exit option' (p. 168) for affluent white homeowners. I would argue that, like the restrictive covenant, at stake in the 'exit option' were similar white anxieties about the virtual event of Blackness. However, the difference between the restrictive covenant and the exit option is that while the former was a defensive strategy that 'priced' the future into the economic value of whiteness through a restrictive policy, the latter 'priced' the future into the economic value of whiteness by way of regressive taxation.

Both the restrictive covenant and regressive taxation in suburban Los Angeles may thus be read as expressions of white anticipation where what is anticipated are the effects on the economic value of whiteness of an always present but never realized virtuality of Blackness. As such, we might then understand the economic value of whiteness not simply as the accrual of

value over time, but as an anticipatory system of valuation in which the value of whiteness is preserved through the imagined effects and infinite deferral of undesirable Black futures.

III Postcolonialism and white identity

In an important contribution to the field of whiteness studies, Richard Dyer (1997) observes that racial genealogy is often traced through tradition (history; culture) and environment (biology; nature). In making this claim, Dyer echoes Stuart Hall (2000) and David Theo Goldberg (1993), who claim that racisms come in two related forms: biological and cultural. The former claims that racial difference is a function of one's biological composition, and it follows a simple maxim: 'their difference is in their blood'. This racism traces difference through biological and genetic lineage, and it is often associated with eugenic science and Nazism, and policed through prohibitions on sexual miscegenation. It is currently undergoing a renaissance in light of advances in genetic science, which allow geneticists to probe human DNA for genes that authenticate racial difference (Rose, 2007). In contrast to its biological cousin, cultural racism claims that racial difference is a function of culture, and it, too, follows a simple maxim: 'their difference is in their culture'. This racism traces difference through culture and history, and is often associated with post-Second World War racism (see, for example, Winant, 2001). It finds expression in the denigration of cultural others, but also, paradoxically, through tropes of tolerance and accommodation (i.e. multiculturalism). Its corresponding mode of violence is the fixing of cultural difference in time and space (Brown, 2006; Pred, 2000; Said, 1979, 1994; Thobani, 2007). Although each form of racism might come to symbolize a particular historical moment or era, giving the impression that each is a discrete political phenomenon, in actuality both work in tandem (Hall, 2000).

What is important about these racisms is that, through each, difference comes to be understood as a function of time. In biological racism, difference is understood to be a function of natural history, whereas in cultural racism difference is understood to be a function of cultural history. Moreover, each privileges a corresponding form of whiteness also expressed as a function of historical time. In this sense, white identity is either biologically or culturally prefigured, lived out temporally through either determinist or historicist teleology, respectively (Goldberg, 2002). As such, white identity is said to be essentialist to the extent it accounts for its existence not through any constitutive relation with an Other, but through genetics, common ancestry and/or national history (Dwyer and Jones, 2000). Thus one of the defining features of white essentialism is its non-relationality, an epistemological system that presupposes its boundedness held together through a belief in shared origins. Dwyer and Jones (2000) call this the socio-spatial epistemology, or non-relationality, of whiteness.

The second route into the study of whiteness works against such non-relational epistemology, which, for better or worse, I refer to as postcolonialism and identity. Here, the methodological orientation is less in the direction of labour history (i.e. whiteness as a form of economic value) and more towards understanding the meaning of whiteness as a function of colonial otherness.[3] In this line of thought, the various meanings of whiteness, alongside its various collateral concepts (i.e. European, Occidental, Eurowestern, colonial settler and white settler, to name only a few) are constructed through specific historical narratives in relation to an Other. Indeed, one of Edward Said's (1979, 1994) pioneering achievements was to show how something called the Orient did not pre-exist its study in Orientalism but was produced by it (Gregory, 2004; Wainwright, 2005). In this sense, whiteness can be said to be performative (Baldwin, 2009b; Braun, 2003). That is, whatever object white identities

take as their foundational points of reference (i.e. history, language, ancestry and genetic lineage) are fully contingent on their 'founding repudiations' (Butler, 1993: 3). Thus the story of whiteness is not internal to itself but forged in relation to that which has been excluded from it, for instance, blackness, indigeneity (Lozanski, 2007; Shaw, 2006, 2007) or all manner of ethnicities (Anderson, 1991, on Chineseness; Peach, 2000). Moreover, that the meaning of whiteness shifts and changes as a function of time and place (Bonnett, 2000) further underscores the contingency of whiteness.

Postcolonial analyses of various kinds are then precisely about exposing this contingency, about showing how forms of identity that aspire to domination are constituted in relation to the perceived inferiority of others. However, they are also concerned with showing how contingent relations of domination (i.e. colonizer/colonized, white/black, European/Indigenous) continue to endure long after the period of formal colonialism came to a close (Braun, 1997; Gregory, 2004). Postcolonial analyses thus provide another good example of a methodological orientation to the study of whiteness that is past-oriented. Numerous examples of this can be found in the literature on white identity.

One prominent example comes from feminist scholarship. Much of this work locates whiteness in the embodiment of gender and sexual norms set in motion during the height of British imperialism in the second half of the 19th century (McClintock, 1995; Ware, 1992). For Anne McClintock (1995) whiteness did not pre-exist various colonialisms but was invented by them, in particular through the racial hierarchies that justified colonial intervention. Here, white women often featured as the bearers of national and imperial, and hence, white identities. Elsewhere Ann Stoler (1995) shows how 19th-century bourgeois identity 'drew on images of racial purity and sexual virtue' (p. 10) produced through colonial encounters. Stoler then goes on to suggest how colonial signification in the present is not always a function of continuity, but of rupture and recuperation as well. Another example examines postcolonial social formations in white settler societies (Razack, 2002b; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). Such work shows how white settler identity relies on mythologies of nature that disavow their violent histories (Barthes, 1988; Coleman, 2006; Razack, 2002a). In the case of Canada, notions of wilderness (Baldwin, 2009a, 2009b; Blyth, 1998; Ekers and Farnan, 2010; Mackey, 2002; Mawani, 2007) and north (Berger, 1970; Grace, 2002; Shields, 1991) signify whiteness in national myth. Both symbolize the desire for a primordial national origin, a symbolism which enables white settlers to believe that the space of Canada was uninhabited prior to European colonization (Razack, 2011).

The geographic literature that examines whiteness from the vantage of postcolonial geography is surprisingly sparse. A notable exception, however, is found in Kay Anderson's (2001) work in which she shows how 'racial' difference was conceived as recently as the 1960s as a function of the human-animal distinction. For Anderson (2001), white European identity formed through the colonial encounter came to represent 'culture' or 'civilization' by virtue of its practices. Animal husbandry and the domestication of landscapes, for instance, were expressions of white civility that stood in stark contrast to Aboriginal savagery signified by its very lack of such 'cultured' practices. Thus, for Anderson, the colonial encounter was especially important for grounding white Imperial identity, and like postcolonial theory more broadly, she is right to point out that such distinctions continue to endure, not least, in settler societies like Australia. According to Bruce Braun (2003) colonial signification also constitutes present forms of whiteness associated with adventure sport in the Pacific North West. Here, Braun argues that activities like mountaineering are easily construed as white by virtue of the way they signify colonial exploration.

In spite of its diversity, the work mentioned above shares a common trait: it looks to past (colonial) signification to understand how white identities are constructed both historically and in the present in relation to Others. Much of it also seeks to foreground the contingency of whiteness in both the past and present. Curiously, though, this work neglects to consider what the notion of futurity might offer an analysis of the contingency of whiteness, which is ironic given how future-directed notions of progress, betterment and modernity have been and remain so foundational to colonial ontology. What, then, might be gained by examining constructions of postcolonial whiteness through futurity? Answers to this question could go in numerous directions, so let me illustrate one possible route by way of a contemporary example: the issue of climate change and migration.

Climate change and migration represents a growing body of policy. Figured mainly through the so-called climate change adaptation agenda, migration is considered to be an inevitable consequence of climate change through, for instance, rising sea levels. The general parameters of the debate about climate change and migration fall squarely within the security literature. On the one hand, climate change migrants are pictured as a threat to various forms of national security (Campbell et al., 2007). However, conversely, vulnerability to climate change (i.e. the possibility of migration) is thought to be a matter of human security (Adger, 2010). Here is not the place to rehearse these debates. Yet one striking feature of the policy debate that surrounds climate change and migration is that climate change-induced migration is almost always configured as a *future* phenomenon, the one notable exception being the relocation of the Carteret Islanders to Bougainville.

A rather poignant example of the way in which futurity shapes climate change and migration discourse is found in a Museum of London exhibit called *London Futures*. The exhibition is a collection of magical realist photographs that depict London under conditions of climate change. In one of the photographs, Buckingham Palace is shown surrounded by a vast informal settlement of the kind that might be found in parts of Mumbai or Nairobi. The image is clearly fictional. But as a 'postcard' from the future,[4] it provides a virtual rendering of a climate-changed future bearing down on one of the most iconic symbols of Britishness and hence of British whiteness. Here, the iconic figure of postcolonial theory, the dark skinned, Third World Other, threatens to transform the London cityscape. Although open to wide interpretation, I would argue that the image works, in part, as an affective technology by conjuring the white anxieties of postcolonial Britain in order to mobilize the environmental citizen to action. As such, the image tethers the politics of climate change and environmental citizenship to those of race and whiteness through an appeal to the future. The here-and-now of London is thus re-imagined through an imagined yet-to-come, the virtuality of Blackness is pressed onto an actual, realist portrayal of whiteness. Perhaps the most important effect of the image, then, is to remind us that the environmental citizen is a future-oriented citizen and that to act on the basis of the future image of the climate change migrant reanimates the white-black binary of colonialism. However, and this is crucial, what is at stake here is not the colonial past infusing the present; to read the image this way would repeat the practice of understanding whiteness through a past-oriented lens. Instead, the image, alongside the entire discourse of climate change and migration, offers a way of thinking about how whiteness is constituted through an imagined future, even if that future is itself a colonial artifact. What this suggests is that while postcolonial white identity in Britain is, indeed a contingent formation, it is contingent not solely on the events of an imperial past, but on some form of future Other as well. In this sense, we could argue that British postcolonial identity is forged

as much through anticipation as melancholy, as much through a glance forward as a citation of past signification.

IV Critical whiteness and anti-racism

Critical whiteness and anti-racist scholarship provides a third route into whiteness studies, and it, too, I argue, is past-oriented. One of the most important insights found in this work is the idea that the anti-racist white subject is a political impossibility (Ahmed, 2004; Wiegman, 1999). Although a potentially paralysing analysis for white people wishing to engage in anti-racist struggle, this work is important for showing how whiteness scholarship engages in a form of disaffiliation (Baldwin, 2009a; Wiegman, 1999). It argues that whiteness scholars gain distance from the violent legacies of white supremacy through the act of disrupting or historicizing the category of whiteness while simultaneously reproducing their white privilege (Thompson, 2003).

The past orientation of this work lies in its use of genealogy. As such this work is concerned less with the ways in which whiteness is socially or historically constructed than with the way in which whiteness scholars themselves obtain material and cultural benefit by analysing discourses of whiteness. To arrive at such a conclusion entails examining how the logics of whiteness scholarship shift over time and how these logics are contingent on the historical processes within which they were written and thought. Robyn Wiegman (1999), for instance, locates the emergence of whiteness scholarship at a historic moment in which American universities were downsizing and in which the hegemony of the white intellectual was being called into question. Wiegman's suggestion is that whiteness studies offers a means for white scholars to retain their privilege by rearticulating their identities through kinship with Black particularity rather than white universality at historical moments when it is politically expedient to do so. For Sarah Ahmed (2004) whiteness scholarship is replete with 'declarations of whiteness' that are non-performative. What she means is that declaring one's whiteness or even one's racism in critiques of whiteness is not a route to anti-racism, nor does it make one an anti-racist. For Ahmed, the declaration does nothing more than position white subjectivity as a central agent in anti-racist politics where the declaration is figured not as something beyond race, but as a speech act that merely reconfigures the way in which the politics of race are spoken. In Wiegman and Ahmed's accounts, whiteness studies is constructed as an object of analysis, the meanings of which are themselves effects of past and contemporary racialization.

This work is deeply self-reflexive and is echoed by a very small number of anti-racist geographers working to challenge the whiteness pervasive in much geographic research (Kobayashi, 2003; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Pulido, 2002). Not surprisingly, Wiegman and Ahmed's work on whiteness has been taken up only sparingly in geography. The challenges it presents to geographers are legion, which may go some way in explaining why. First, geography is a notoriously white discipline (Kobayashi, 2003; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Pulido, 2002). A reflexive engagement with the category of whiteness in geography would require acknowledging this, which, again not surprisingly, not all geographers seem willing to concede. This is, of course, the normative power of whiteness hard at work: the category is easily ignored because it appears irrelevant or tangential (if it appears at all), when in fact whiteness is everywhere. Second, a critical whiteness approach to whiteness studies bars white people from retreating into a position thought to be anti-racist. Instead of allowing white people the comfortable experience of being anti-racist (as opposed to the discomforting experience of acknowledging one's racism or being perceived to be racist), this body of scholarship asks that

white people get used to the uncomfortable experience of being white (Thompson, 2003). That the vast majority of geographers are disengaged from this literature is almost to be expected. Indeed, even Bonnett's (2000) rather sophisticated plea that whiteness studies in the 21st century ought to focus on drawing more and more white people 'inside the anti-racist project' (p. 141) is noteworthy in its reluctance to reflect on what this enterprise might mean for him as a white male scholar. The same allegation might be levelled against my own writing on whiteness.

Perhaps one of the important contributions critical whiteness scholarship makes to whiteness studies is to recognize the way in which the meaning of whiteness rests, in part, on the mobility of whiteness: whiteness moves. It *disaffiliates* from 'old' racisms; cultural racism and neo-Nazism are common in that they are both founded on the move away from older, more biologically grounded forms of racism. Whiteness also *gains distance* from racists. For instance, white anti-racists and the British National Party share in common the view that they are avowedly not racist. Whiteness also *gains distance* from blackness as evidenced by both Roediger (1991) and the phenomenon of white flight. It even *gains distance* from whiteness itself, for instance through acts of travel and the use of psychedelic drugs (Saldanha, 2007). What might futurity mean to a critical whiteness approach to whiteness studies? This is of course a wide open question, but a starting point might be to position futurity at the centre of reflexive engagement on questions about whiteness by both people of colour and white people. Ahmed offers the beginnings of such an exercise. She argues that in asking 'what can I do' upon hearing about racism, white people shift the politics of racism from the present 'what is' to the future 'what can be done'. This, she argues, blocks white people from hearing the message of racism. The fact of racism thus gets deferred into the future through the hope of its *future* reconciliation, abolition or even absolution. Here, we might even argue that its deferral is precisely that which allows for a modernist approach to race, the notion that racism can be modernized out of existence. A reflexive engagement with futurity might therefore build on Ahmed's insight by asking how whiteness studies rely on some notion of the future. Here, it might ask what whiteness scholars, indeed *white* whiteness scholars, gain by constructing racisms as temporal phenomena that could be resolved in the future. For instance, if we accept Richard Dyer's (1997) claim that the power of whiteness lies in its infinite variability, then surely the future is formative of this variability insofar as the idea of temporal infinity relies squarely on the future as an open horizon. Perhaps then there is scope to disrupt the power of whiteness by thinking carefully about how this future is integral to ways in which the meanings of whiteness scholarship shift and change.

V Conclusion

This paper has sought to show how the study of whiteness in geography has a strong tendency to conceptualize whiteness as an effect of the past. Work in geography that approaches the study of whiteness through labour history and, more specifically, through economic valuation, by and large assumes that the economic of whiteness is constituted by the accrual (or loss) of value as a function of historical time. Thus, 'white' real-estate value accrues overtime, or conversely white labour value decreases over time (i.e. real wages decline). A similar assumption is found in postcolonial analyses of white identity. As with much postcolonial theory, this work tends to assume that *past* colonial relations continue to organize contemporary experience, thus allowing some to speak about the colonial present (Gregory, 2004). In *critical* whiteness studies, the meaning of whiteness studies is produced within very specific historical-geographic contexts, which means that the study of whiteness,

more than simply a critical orientation, is itself an object to be explained.

My argument is that a past-oriented approach to accounting for geographies of whiteness often neglects to consider how various forms of whiteness are shaped by discourses of futurity. This is not to argue that a historicist approach to conceptualizing white geographies is wrongheaded; the past continues to be a crucial time-space through which to understand whiteness. It is, however, to argue that such a past-focused orientation obscures the way the category of the future is invoked in the articulation of whiteness. As such, any analysis that seeks to understand how whitenesses of all kinds shape contemporary (and indeed past) racisms operates with only a partial understanding of the time-spaces of whiteness. My argument is that we can learn much about whitenesses and their corresponding forms of racism by paying special attention to the ways in which such whitenesses are constituted by futurity. I have offered some preliminary remarks on how we might conceptualize geographies of whiteness qua futurity, but these should only be taken as starting points. Much more pragmatically, what seems to be required is a fulsome investigation into the way the future shapes white geographies. What might such a project entail? For one, geographers would do well to identify whether and how the practice of governing through the future inaugurates new and repeats old forms of whiteness. It would also be worth comparing and contrasting how the future is made present in various dialectical accounts of whiteness. For instance, what becomes of whiteness when understood through the binary actual-possible as opposed to an actual-virtual binary, which has been my main concern? Alternatively, what becomes of the category of whiteness if it is shown to be constituted by a future that has no ontology except as a virtual presence? And, perhaps more pressing, how might whiteness be newly politicized?

Futurity provides a productive vocabulary for thinking about and challenging whiteness. It does not offer a means of overcoming white supremacy, nor does it provide white people with a normative prescription for living with their whiteness guilt- or worry-free. Futurity is, however, a lacuna in the study of whiteness both in geography and outside the discipline, and this alone suggests the need to take it seriously. But equally, and perhaps more urgently, there is the need to study whiteness and futurity given how central the future is to contemporary governance and politics. Indeed, at a moment when the future features prominently in both political rhetoric – in his inaugural speech, Obama implores America to carry 'forth that great gift of freedom and [deliver] it safely to future generations' – and everyday life, how people orient themselves towards the future is indelibly political. The future impels action. For Mann (2007), it is central to interest. For Thrift (2008), 'value increasingly arises not from what is but from what is not yet but can potentially become, that is from the *pull of the future*'. Attention to whiteness and futurity may at minimum enable us to see more clearly the extent to which the pull of whiteness into the future reconfigures what is to be valued in the decades ahead.

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Notes

1. I owe this insight to Geoff Mann.
2. Whether Bonnett's essay is the founding moment of whiteness studies in geography is not a foregone conclusion and ought to be opened up for debate.
3. This is a good place to remind readers that the analytical distinction between whiteness as a function of labour history and whiteness as a function of colonial history is hard to maintain given how deeply imbricated are the histories of slavery and colonialism.

4. All the images in the exhibition are considered postcards from the future. See the exhibition website: http://www.postcardsfromthefuture.co.uk.

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