

## 'Naming Whiteness':

### AN INQUIRY INTO LINDY CHAMBERLAIN'S *THROUGH MY EYES* AND AUSTRALIAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSES.

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On the day before Australia Day, in 1995, an article by Martin Flanagan (1995) entitled 'A Land Like No Other' appeared in *The Age*, Melbourne's well respected major daily newspaper, inquiring into Australian 'national identity' and questioning how Australian nationalism addresses issues of racial identity.

Who are we?' Flanagan asks, 'and how is our culture defined?' In his attempt to answer these questions, he identifies the figures who have contributed to Australia's cultural identity. The two female exceptions to his list of male contributors are Cathy Freeman and Lindy Chamberlain.

These two women are said to function as 'symbols' who inform Australians about the nature of their identity. In the article Flanagan associates Freeman with Chamberlain, and then connects Chamberlain with Aboriginal people in general. His associations are based on the underlying assertion that both Chamberlain and Aboriginal people have encountered discrimination from the dominant culture, and that Australians in general can learn from their experiences. Flanagan states:

The person who did most to advance Australian identity in 1994 was athlete Cathy Freeman. She resolved the debate about the flag. For the moment, at least, we have two of them. Any sense of identity is largely based on symbols, and the woman before Cathy Freeman who probably told us most about ourselves was Chamberlain. Found to be from a strange religion, she was burnt

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at the stake of a nation's fearful imaginings. Aboriginal people said all along that a dingo took the baby (Flanagan 1995: 9).

In the above extract, Freeman's success as an athlete, and as a representative of Aboriginal Australia, contributes to the status or 'advancement' of non-Aboriginal Australia at an international level. Flanagan's 'two flags' refers to the incident where Freeman displayed the Aboriginal land rights flag, alongside the Australian flag, at the 1994 Commonwealth Games. He interprets the 'two flags' as the embodiment of a pluralist solution to debates about the position of Aboriginal people in nationalist discourses. In a gesture towards the encouragement of racial and ethnic diversity, the Land Rights flag is not enveloped by 'The Flag' but is allowed to remain alongside it.

Within the context of Flanagan's discussion of national diversity, Chamberlain appears as a cautionary figure, a victim of a national moral climate now thankfully past. The Chamberlain affair represents the potential of the nation to discriminate against, and revile, those people who are perceived as different from the dominant culture, as such, Chamberlain is a kind of 'moral barometer'. The gender-specific nature of Chamberlain's experiences is alluded to by Flanagan's description of Chamberlain as being 'burnt at the stake'. This image is reminiscent of the witch trials where deviant female behaviour was criminalised. It is also an image of martyrdom.

In a curious leap of association, Flanagan moves from Chamberlain back to the issue of Aboriginal Australia by declaring that 'Aboriginal people said all along that a dingo took the baby'. Thus, alongside Chamberlain's martyrdom is the vague and generalised representation of Aboriginal people, voicing an opinion and being ignored. The implication is that since the advent of national figures such as Cathy Freeman, this situation has been advanced upon. Hence, discrimination against Aboriginal people is implicitly represented as taking place at the time when the 'Chamberlain Affair' took place. The suggestion is that this era is now relegated to the past by the moral climate embodied by Cathy Freeman's 'two flags.'

When Flanagan uses Chamberlain as a symbol of discrimination, which he then conflates with the hostility encountered by Aboriginal people, he obscures the specificity of Aboriginal people's experiences of colonialism in Australia. For instance, the actual circumstance of Chamberlain's imprisonment was, in part, predicated on the court's unwillingness to accommodate the Pitjantjatjara people's cultural differences at the first

inquiry in Alice Springs. In Chamberlain's autobiography entitled *Through My Eyes*, Chamberlain (1990) details the fact that most of the evidence from the Pitjantjatjara people, who had done the tracking when Azaria disappeared, was deemed inadmissible by the court because of confusion relating to the collection of the Aboriginal trackers' evidence.

Chamberlain, who became familiar with some Pitjantjatjara customs in Berrimah jail, observed, in retrospect, that the court's use of a woman interpreting for a senior community leader would have been deemed an 'insult', while the female tracker required to give evidence would have had to sought permission from the 'tribal council' before speaking to a male interpreter. Further, the tracker 'Nipper', the head elder, was entitled to speak on behalf of a tribal member in the first person, a fact that the court was ignorant of. As a result, most of Nipper's evidence was improperly 'discounted as hearsay' (Chamberlain 1990: 152-3). The cultural myopia that the Aboriginal witnesses encountered from the Northern Territory Crown is indicative of the wider society in which Aboriginal authority is received. Adrian Howe says of the trial: 'To the extent that the media failed to report or misrepresented the testimony of Aboriginal trackers, their construction of the criminality of Chamberlain was profoundly racist' (Howe 1989: 6).

Race is conventionally used as a term to refer to those other people, whose racialisation serves the purposes of exclusion or discrimination. However, whiteness is just as ethnically specific as Aboriginality, and in this paper, I address white racial identity in relation to Chamberlain's strategic mobilisation of white and Anglocentric subject positions in *Through My Eyes*. The issues raised in Flanagan's article provide an introduction to the way that race and ethnicity are represented in *Through My Eyes*. Flanagan is able to overlook the issue of Aboriginal specificity because he does not perceive Chamberlain to be an ethnicised subject. Ironically, in *Through My Eyes* it is Chamberlain's positioning of herself within Anglocentric stereotypes that allows her access to the dominant narratives of Australian nationalism. Thus, Chamberlain's mobilisation of an Anglocentric subject position is the central means by which she attempts to reintegrate herself into the mainstream narratives of femininity in the dominant culture.

In Australia, to be Anglo-Celtic is to be 'normal,' which means the ethnicity of Anglo-Celtic discourses is often left unexamined. However, as Ruth Frankenburg (1993) argues there is a cultural and racial identity to white people—it is only the race-privilege and dominance of white people that allows them to appear 'normal' and therefore racially invisible. My inquiry into Chamberlain's racial positioning focuses on the implications of her use

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of a white identity in the context of its dominance within Australia. This analysis is motivated by Frankenburg's political contention that by 'naming whiteness' it is displaced from the 'unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance' (Frankenburg 1993: 6).

Although, Chamberlain assumes an overtly Anglocentric position in *Through My Eyes*, this position is depicted as neutral by both herself and her publisher, Louise Adler, of William Heinemann Australia. For example, in the publicity that accompanied the release of the book, Adler states that Chamberlain's autobiography is written for 'ordinary Australians,' and that it would appeal 'across class and gender' (qtd in Schwartz 1990: 32). By depicting Chamberlain in the broadest of terms Adler attempts to appeal to a wide audience. Similarly, Chamberlain's mode of address attempts to cut across divisions, and reconstitute her readers into a singular, unified constituency.

For instance, the introduction to *Through My Eyes*, Chamberlain positions herself as part of a homogenous group, made different only as the result of her experiences. She states 'I'm just an ordinary person, yet the events of the last ten years have been extraordinary' (Chamberlain 1990: x). Chamberlain's asserts her normativity to such an extent that she warns her readers that her position is potentially exchangeable with theirs. In the final section of *Through My Eyes*, she states: 'This is your Australia. This time all this happened to me-the next time it may be you' (Chamberlain 1990: 759). By presenting a scenario in which the reader may be substituted for herself, Chamberlain implies that 'average citizens' (Chamberlain 1990: xii) are under the threat of being randomly, and unjustly, incarcerated. This stance does not address the specificities of the 'Chamberlain Affair' as it detracts from the political and historical contexts in which the case was situated, contexts such as religious discrimination, the enforcement of oppressive notions of 'acceptable' female behaviour, and racist evaluations of Aboriginal knowledge (Howe 1989).

While Chamberlain does critique the media and the criminal justice system in her autobiography, she frequently attempts to do so while claiming a position of normativity. For example, although she refers to the religious discrimination that she encountered, she also tries to integrate Seventh-day Adventism into the dominant culture, rather than emphasise its uniqueness:

Anybody who knows anything about religion is aware that Seventh-day Adventism is very much in the mainstream of the Protestant faiths... Australia isn't what you'd call a deeply reli-

gious country on the whole, these small deviations from the so-called 'norm' caused people to think we were weird (Chamberlain 1990: 235).

Chamberlain's supposed strangeness and difference from the mainstream was central to the media furore that enabled her imprisonment. Her consequent collusion with conservative and stereotypical images reflects her desire to avoid further attention of this sort. She embraces representations of normalcy that are linked with the dominant nationalist images of 'Australianness'. These images draw on two central themes. The first theme is the battler narrative as it is commonly represented by the mythologies of the bush. The second theme is based on the iconic figure of the 'Ideal Mother,' an image of femininity that has salience in contemporary and historical representations of a racially 'pure' Australia (Matthews 1984). Mobilising these two themes, Chamberlain's depicts Australian identity not in terms of nationality, but as an indication of an Anglo-Celtic ethnicity. It is Chamberlain's racial positioning as a white woman that allows her access to these dominant images; as such, her 'whiteness' is a central aspect of her self-representation.

At this stage it is important to emphasise that *Through My Eyes* is an inherently contradictory text. Chamberlain's rhetorical positioning of herself as both a 'Aussie battler' and a 'perfect mum,' contrasts markedly with her Seventh Day Adventism and the religious discrimination that she encounters as a result of her faith. Moreover, *Through My Eyes* also depicts many incidents where Chamberlain is under surveillance and penalised for not replicating stereotypical gender roles such as the 'ordinary housewife and mother'. The contradictory nature of Chamberlain's positioning is such that she simultaneously appeals to conventional stereotypes and depicts them as an impossible criterion.

It is my intention to intend extend gender-based interpretations of the 'Chamberlain Affair' by incorporating the issue of race into my analysis of her autobiography. Jane Marcus's statement that Chamberlain's imprisonment was a 'sacrifice' to 'the male gods of Australian society' typifies the gender-based interpretations of the 'Chamberlain Affair' (Marcus 1988: 260). Howe (1989) also examines the case from a feminist perspective, as well as incorporating a critique of the racist and masculinist assumptions that affected the matter. Howe analyses the misogyny that Chamberlain encountered from the media and the public before her imprisonment, and argues that Chamberlain was persecuted because she did not embody a stereotypical femininity. She details the widespread perception of

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Chamberlain as 'dangerous, provoking' and 'counter-stereotypical' (1989: 3). Moreover, Howe contends that this image was constructed by 'a male-dominated media that was angered and terrified by' Chamberlain's 'refusal to play the role of a properly gendered woman' (1989: 3).

*Through My Eyes*, which was published after both Howe (1989) and Marcus's (1988) articles, presents Chamberlain's own responses to the treatment that she received during the trial. Consequently, the autobiography provides insight into her behaviour during this period. Chamberlain's apparent inability to cry publicly, engendered much criticism from the public and the media, and earned Chamberlain her reputation as a 'hard-faced, murdering bitch' (Chamberlain 1990: 94, 209, 233). Chamberlain mentions this epithet three times in *Through My Eyes*, as it seems that it best illustrates the extent of the public's hostility towards her. In *Through My Eyes*, when Chamberlain explains why she did not wish to be seen crying in public, the Anglocentrism of her subject position becomes apparent. Chamberlain states:

... because I hadn't apparently acted 'appropriately' and fitted some people's idea of 'the norm', lamenting, screaming, yelling, abusing, or bursting into tears all over the place, I was unfeeling, and therefore a murderess. I'm neither a watering pot nor of Latin temperament. That's not my way (Chamberlain 1990: 235).

Chamberlain's identification with the masculinist, and ethnicised narrative of the battler culture is a strategic attempt to gain access to a normative identity. The quote above outlines an implicit, yet distinct, moral code. Chamberlain's suggestion that she is 'not of Latin temperament' is an aside, yet it provides insight into the means by which she negotiates, and defines, her racial identity. Chamberlain implicitly compares the emotionalism of a 'Latin' personality to the restraint of a non-Latin personality who is assumed to have an 'Anglo' temperament. It seems that to be an Australian one must have an Anglo-Celtic background. For example, Chamberlain describes one of her lawyers by stating that 'he looked Greek or Italian, but is pure Aussie' (Chamberlain 1990: 621).

Chamberlain's representation of a pure Australian type echoes the racist doctrines that are the founding tenet of colonial societies. In Australia, particularly, racist narratives have been combined with masculinist narratives to create the myths of a specifically Australian bush culture. This culture is represented as a particular moral community where supposedly masculine characteristics are encouraged, even in women. In *A Secret Country*, John

Pilger (1989) describes the image of the battler culture succinctly:

In Australian literature the poets Henry Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Patterson romanticised battlers as brash, rugged, sardonic combatants against nature in a harsh land. Women did not exist, or they coped stoically (Pilger 1989: 317).

One such representation of a bush woman is Lawson’s short story entitled ‘The Drover’s Wife’ where the female protagonist whose catch phrase is “‘No use fretting’” reminisces about single-handedly fighting bush fires and floods, while staying up all night to kill a snake that has entered her home. Chamberlain’s description of herself as not ‘bursting into tears all over the place’ because she is not ‘a watering pot’ (Chamberlain 1990: 235) reveals a contempt for emotional display that characterises the stoicism of the ‘Aussie battler’.

Chamberlain’s further identification with the bush narrative is alluded to in the epigraph that prefaces her narrative. Here, she associates her release from prison with a masculinist narrative of the exploration of rural Australia: ‘To broad shoulders / the freedom of the outback, / a freedom kept at such high cost’. These examples demonstrate that the Chamberlain family’s Anglo-Celtic ethnicity is a primary aspect of Chamberlain’s rhetorical positioning of herself as normal. In the autobiography, Chamberlain introduces herself and Michael Chamberlain as ‘innocent Australians’(ix), while her readers are ‘fellow Australians’ (xi). The publishers of the autobiography mobilise the same rhetoric. For instance, the publisher’s blurb on the back cover of the paperback edition states that the text ‘is like a trial by fire and no Australian will come out of it unsinged’. The implication is that it is the reader’s patriotic duty to believe in Chamberlain’s innocence. Chamberlain’s own patriotism is overtly apparent in the representation of her family’s history; she states: ‘I love Australia and want to stay here. My forbears helped explore and settle this island continent. They were free settlers - I added the convict stock later’ (Chamberlain 1990: 751). While Chamberlain’s reference to herself as ‘convict stock’ is no doubt ironic, it also an attempt to integrate her story, and that of her family, into the traditional narratives of Australian colonial history.

The narrative of the ‘Aussie battler’ is a central feature of the autobiography. The circular letters that Chamberlain sent to her supporters from jail contain many examples of this narrative, they are reprinted in *Through My Eyes*. For instance, one letter thanks her supporters for their correspon-

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dence and states 'It shows me that the real mateship of Australia is not dead. I do not believe it is just for me that you are fighting, but Australia's basic community is at stake' (Chamberlain 1990: 462). Here, the references to 'mateship' and 'Australia's basic community' are overtly related to the iconography of the battler. Mobilising the myth of Australia as the land of the 'fair go for all,' Chamberlain, who is 'middle-class' (Howe 1989, 7) uses populist egalitarianism as a means to gain access to a mainstream audience. This masculinist, class-based narrative is part of a middle-class, Anglo-Australian tradition of idealising the working class, who are perceived to embody a utopian vision of natural equality among men.

The contradictory nature of the text is such that Chamberlain's strategic recreation of a traditionalist moral community to which she belongs is undermined by the experiences that she depicts. Consequently, when she describes the religious discrimination that she encountered, the community that she represented herself as a part of is now represented as estranged. In these instances, she refers to her Seventh-Day Adventism explicitly, and positions herself as part of this assembly. Throughout the Chamberlain's court proceedings the Seventh-Day Adventist church underwrote most of the legal expenses; however, the church officially distanced itself from the campaign to have her released from prison. Chamberlain reasons that the 'trouble, of course, was that they couldn't really stay apart [sic] because many people in the Australian community tended to be hostile to us because of our religion' (Chamberlain 1990: 541). This 'Australian community' is not the idealised moral community that she had previously invoked, it is now an antipathetic audience.

Ironically, Chamberlain finds a sense of community in Berrimah jail amongst the Aboriginal women. Their compatibility is based on a shared sense of religious conviction. In *Through My Eyes* Chamberlain describes an instance of solidarity with the women, she states: 'the girls were all Christians from mission stations and loved singing, which took their minds off their own troubles, as well as mine. It was a lot better than all crying in sympathy with each other, which we had been in danger of doing' (Chamberlain 1990: 399). The impact of colonialism on Aboriginal religious practices is such that Christianity has a governing role in many contemporary indigenous people's lives. Rita Huggins (1994) in her autobiography entitled *Auntie Rita*, outlines this experience in Murrie communities:1 'Even though the missionaries had control, our spiritual life and white religion existed together somehow. I don't know any Aboriginal people who don't believe in something' (1994: 115). Chamberlain's own religious dedication forms the basis of her interaction with the Aboriginal



women and eventually she is given the name 'Lindy Gulla' by the women. She finds out that this means 'a good fellow or good one'. Chamberlain comments that being called 'Lindy Gulla' mean that she 'never had the trouble with difficult new Aboriginal girls that a few of the other white girls did. Hearing me called "Gulla" was an automatic acceptance signal' (363). In the predominantly secular society of mainstream Australia Chamberlain is perceived as excessively religious or cultist. However, within the Aboriginal society, as it is represented in the prison, she is less of an anomaly.

The subject positions that Chamberlain occupies are founded on a contradiction: she describes being discriminated against, however, she undermines this expression of difference by attempting to include herself in mainstream narratives. Consequently, the community of 'average citizens' (Chamberlain 1990: xii) to which she argues she belongs paradoxically consists of the same people who wanted her imprisoned. The statement that best embodies this inconsistency is the question that she asks her reader in the introduction to *Through My Eyes*: 'How do you think we felt knowing most of you, our fellow Australians, were often maliciously discussing us over the morning coffee?' (Chamberlain 1990: xi). The imaginary audience that Chamberlain addresses are both different and the same. Like her, they belong to the imagined community of the nation, yet, they drink coffee, whereas Seventh-day Adventists cannot consume caffeine. When Chamberlain refers to specifically Seventh-day Adventist practices her difference from the mainstream culture is made more apparent as she locates herself within the particular sociocultural context of Seventh-day Adventism, and the religious discrimination encountered by this sect. For example, when a team of police raid her house on a Saturday, Chamberlain has difficulties contacting her lawyer, 'he too was a Seventh-day Adventist and did not appreciate a visit from the police on the Sabbath....My impression was that the police had deliberately chosen Sabbath' (Chamberlain 1990: 184).

Chamberlain's descriptions of the religious discrimination that she encountered contrasts greatly with the rhetoric of universality that she uses in her narrative. The rhetoric of universality diminishes the differences between religions to the extent that, in one instance, Chamberlain prays with a follower of the Hindu 'Guru Maharaja Ji' and claims 'after all we all worship the same God' (Chamberlain 1990: 50). Chamberlain's evangelism draws on a moral economy founded on a binary between 'good' and 'evil,' it asserts a doctrine of universal humanism through an emphasis on the salvation of the soul:

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there is very little difference in confirmed Christians, regardless of their so-called religious tenets, and regardless of their colour or race....God accepts our hearts for what they are. He does not count the brand name on our back (Chamberlain 1990: 723).

In the statement above, the spiritual realm takes precedence over the material world, and renders racial and religious differences insignificant. Consequently, the particular sociocultural position of the 'Christian' is overlooked. Frankenburg (1993) contends that there is an association between Christian theology, liberal humanism as a philosophical discourse and 'color-blindness' (1993: 146-148), which she describes as the assertion that 'we are all the same under the skin' (1993: 14). Frankenburg argues that all three doctrines propose 'an essential human sameness to which "race" is added as a secondary characteristic' (1993: 148).

The practice of separating selfhood from racial identity has a number of political outcomes. Frankenburg identifies the fact that 'claiming to be the same as everyone else makes other cultural groups invisible or eclipses them' (1993:198). She also argues that 'one concomitant of viewing people in terms of universal sameness overlaid within individual difference is the disinclination to think in terms of social or political aggregates' (1993:149). Further, the nature of autobiographical writing is such that it often involves the subject having to construct 'an ethical vision of the self' in order to cope a difficult situation. Stephen Muecke argues that this style of writing 'harmonises with religious discursive practices' as they are both involved with the 'management of the "soul"' (1988, 409).

In *Through My Eyes*, the strategic use of a Christian, humanist discourse enables Chamberlain to position herself as a normative subject unmarked by religious difference. Chamberlain's active effacement of the specific sociocultural circumstances that constitute her position illustrates a disinclination to examine her own experiences, and the experiences of others, within the context of sociocultural differences among groups. Consequently, Chamberlain recreates a masculinist and Anglocentric model of Australia by mobilising the images of 'average citizens' (1990: xii) and the 'ordinary mother' (1990: 236), the very same images that she was vilified for not embodying.

Much of the hostility that Chamberlain encountered was the result of the media and the public's enforcement of stereotypical representations of motherhood. Howe observes that Chamberlain 'stood condemned for violating the stereotypes and sanctity of motherhood, of transgressing the

boundaries of normal, passive motherhood' (Howe 1989: 4). Although feminist analysis has often represented Chamberlain's conduct during the trial as 'counter-stereotypical' (Howe 1989: 3), *Through My Eyes* reveals Chamberlain's investment in the reproduction of stereotypical representations of femininity, in particular, motherhood. These representations reiterate rather than contest a hegemonic idea of normative female behaviour, they are Chamberlain's strategic attempt to access the mainstream culture that she has been excluded from.

By reproducing conventional gender roles, Chamberlain creates an audience of women who may potentially occupy her position. This strategy is illustrated when she addresses her reader, and asks them to put themselves in her position:

One day I was just a happy housewife and mother, known only to my friends and acquaintances, next day a household word. I never dreamed it could happen to me—how about you? If this continues will you be next? (1990: xi)

The potent theme of the 'happy housewife and mother' is a dominant factor in the construction of gender relations in Australia. Jill Matthews contends that 'to be a housewife is part of the very definition of true femininity in modern Australia' (Matthews 1984, 151). Matthews argues that the fascination with white female's domestic labour has a historical basis in 'population ideology' which was major, national concern from the '1870s till the 1950s'. She contends that during this era, the 'size, composition and health of each nation's population was an obsession in the western world, including Australia'. 'Population ideology' reflected the 'White Australia' policy as it was held that 'a large, healthy and "racially pure" population was central to moral and economic progress'. The central focus of population ideology was 'women's bodies' with the principal mode of control being 'women's work within their families'. Wives and mothers were both overtly and implicitly compared to the 'Ideal Mother', the ideology's 'central icon' (1989: 74-75).

Chamberlain attempts to access popular representations of femininity by presenting herself as an 'Ideal Mother'. *Through My Eyes* is frequently occupied with the minutiae of motherhood, with an emphasis on the conventional triptych of "cleanliness, orderliness and godliness." It is important to note that this narrative of middle class, white motherhood is a racially structured position, rather than just an individual experience. By way of comparison, a brief examination of state representations of Aboriginal

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families illustrates the centrality of race in narratives about motherhood.

Contemporary research into the relationship between Aboriginal people and the criminal justice system has noted that within state institutions, Aboriginal families are “always already” positioned as an aberration. In *After Mabo*, Tim Rowse (1993) examines the creation of the nuclear family as normative within the Australian legal system. He refers to Gale, Wundersitz and Bailey-Harris’s study of Aboriginal involvement in South Australia’s juvenile justice system to support his argument that: ‘Aboriginal kinship, in particular the practices governing the distribution of young people among urban households, is construed by the juvenile justice system as deviant and disorderly’ (1993: 50). The justice system’s criminalisation of Aboriginal practices that differ from an ideal norm, is based on Anglocentrism and class bias. Rowse cites the study’s contention that:

the system requires middle-class characteristics such as parental care in nuclear households and employment status in order for it to operate to the benefit of the child. Yet this does not mean that Aboriginal families are more criminal; merely, that they are poor and often have different values and lifestyles (qtd. in Rowse 1993: 50).

As such, the gendered construction of the ‘bad’ mother as a disordered female works in conjunction with the class-based, and racialised, construction of the deviant non-nuclear household to render Aboriginal maternity as perpetually unfit.

The impact of this racist image is such that in recent decades, legal and welfare institutions have intervened in the structure of Aboriginal families to such an extent that Link-Up in New South Wales—a body organised to reunite Aboriginal families—estimates that ‘there may be 100,000 people of Aboriginal descent in our country who do not identify as Aborigines because they or their ancestors were separated’ (Link-Up 1993: 50). From the perspective of racialised differences, it appears that Chamberlain is able to gain access to the ideology of the ‘Ideal Mother’ by way of her racial neutrality within the dominant culture. Nevertheless, it is clear that the specific experiences that Chamberlain details in *Through My Eyes* undermine her rhetorical positioning of herself as a normative subject.

There are many instances in *Through My Eyes* where Chamberlain appeals to conventional gender stereotypes of relations. She particularly emphasises-

es her role as a mother, as obviously it was Chamberlain's maternal capacity that was most doubted by the media and the public. Paradoxically, Chamberlain's response to accusations of deviance are situated within the same paradigm of the 'Ideal Mother' that had been imposed upon her. For example, *Through My Eyes* begins with Chamberlain's pregnancy with Azaria, thus she enters the narrative immediately positioned in terms of her motherhood. Moreover, from the outset of the text, the nuclear family has normative status. In the first chapter of *Through My Eyes*, Chamberlain's husband, Michael Chamberlain, is represented as 'the head of his family' (1993: xiii) who habitually speaks for his wife, even when she is being questioned about her own 'medical history' (1993: 3). So, when the doctor questions her:

Michael gave the answers, much to my amusement. Although it seemed to throw the doctor a little, I was used to Michael doing that when we went out, so as long as he didn't give the wrong answers, I let it ride (1993: 3).

Chamberlain's description of the activities that she planned with Azaria, had she lived, can also be interpreted as an induction into femininity. The activities are the same predominantly non-vocational pastimes that white middle-class women have been encouraged to participate in since the Victorian era:

I thought of the little girl I had been going to dress up, make things for, do things with-the little girl I would never have again. There were the cooking lessons I had been going to give her, the embroidery and sewing lessons, and art...Boys were fun, and I dearly loved my boys, but they weren't the same as a little girl. Girls liked different things (1993: 61-62).

Against the background of the 'happy housewife' and the daughter dressed in pink, Chamberlain recounts the difficulties that she had fulfilling these stereotypes in the eyes of the public. In contradiction to her desire to conform to stereotyped femininity, Chamberlain also expresses much anger at the demands that the public placed upon her to reproduce the stereotype of the 'Ideal Mother'. At each of her appearances in court, Chamberlain describes how she and her lawyers negotiated her appearance and demeanour in an attempt to construct the illusive image of a publicly determined normalcy. Chamberlain states: 'When it came to the trial, everybody was still telling me how to dress. I shouldn't look too well dressed. I must be careful to project the image of an ordinary mother' (original emphasis;

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1993: 236). This statement also seems to reveal that Chamberlain has an understanding of the constructed nature of the images that she was attempting to emulate.

At the time of the trial, the public's definition of the distinction between deviant and normal behaviour became a crucial aspect of Chamberlain's reception. Matthews (1984) describes how, with the increase in child welfare legislation in the 1930s, the practice of mothering moved from the personal to the public realm. She states that with the 'entry of legislative prescription and professional surveillance into the family-of teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, truancy officers, labour inspectors-mothering became more uniform, more circumscribed, more responsible to external judgment, more amenable to expert advice' (1984: 84).

During the Chamberlain affair, public surveillance, as represented by the media, became the intermediary between Chamberlain and the criminal justice system. On national television the Chamberlain family became a microcosmic symbol of all that could go wrong in a family. Noel Sanders (1993) comments on the media's role as a moral sentinel when he analyses the context in which the Chamberlain family was depicted during the first trial in 1980:

Eyewitness News on Channel 10, in Sydney, presented daily revelations alongside serialised snippets on how to make the home safe for children and how to control finances. Against the dramatic unfolding of crisis within the Chamberlain family and the daily revelation of new evidence were set the minutiae of the perils of suburban living and the instability of family life (1993: 88).

A telling indictment of the media's impact upon the proceedings that lead to Chamberlain's imprisonment is Mr Justice Muirhead's statement that he had 'underestimated the influence of the press' when he had assumed that the jurors at the inquest would judge Chamberlain 'not guilty' (Chamberlain 1990: 284).

*Through My Eyes* abounds with examples of media-enabled public surveillance. For instance, when Chamberlain is photographed with Azaria, at Ayers rock, and the photo appears in the newspaper, Chamberlain notes the public's reaction, she states: 'I attracted some heavy criticism because I hadn't shaded Azaria's head in the hot sun' (57). Similarly, the reproduction of another photograph of Azaria in the newspaper leads the public to speculate on the normality of Azaria herself:

I selected a photograph that had been taken of her the moment she came home from hospital, sound asleep and relaxed at five days old. (I didn't realise what a fuss there would be about that photograph, because she was so tiny and her little hand and wrist were just relaxed. Later on it was represented as a current photograph of a nine-and-a-half-week-old baby and people said that because of the formation of the hands, she must have had a physical disability, or be a cretin, or a spastic) (1993: 60).

The extent of the surveillance that Chamberlain encounters is such that she describes becoming hysterical at home, when her next daughter, Kahlia disappears momentarily:

if anything happened to Kahlia or the boys—whatever it was—I'd be blamed for it. Nobody would believe it was an accident. So ... I was very anxious about where Kahlia was and I had to know at all times.... I simply couldn't face the thought of what the media or the public would do or say to me if the slightest thing went wrong (1993: 319).

When she explicitly depicts the public as working against her, Chamberlain's idealised image of a united, egalitarian battler community of Australia is revealed to be a fallacy.

The complexity of Chamberlain's subject position reflects the multiple discourses that constitute it. Laura Donaldson (1992) provides an interesting insight into the intersection of discourses of race, class and gender, and their relation to subjectivity. She argues that the gendered subject is simultaneously affected by a variety of discourses, thus it may occupy multiple subject positions. In her analysis of the subject position of white 'colonial women,' Donaldson contends that: 'a conception of gender as a site of conflicting subjective processes...makes it impossible to ignore the contradictory social positioning of white, middle-class women as both colonized patriarchal objects and colonizing race-privileged subjects' (Donaldson 1992, 6). Although I would argue with Donaldson's use of the metaphor 'colonized' to describe the experience of white women under patriarchy<sup>2</sup>, her description of 'the contradictory social positioning of white, middle-class women' aptly applies to Chamberlain.

Within a sexist society, Chamberlain is incarcerated because she departs from the stereotype of the 'Ideal Mother'. Ironically she also embraces these stereotypes as a means to access mainstream narratives. In *Through*

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*My Eyes* Chamberlain describes in great detail how she is vilified for being strange, while at the same time she asserts a normative identity. Her use of the narratives of the 'Aussie Battler' and 'happy housewife and mother' may only have a rhetorical effect, but they also indicate her race-privilege within Australian society. Howe (1989) argues that after Chamberlain's release from prison, in February 1986, 'it was time for the media to start decriminalising her by reclaiming her as a normal, natural woman' (Howe 1989: 7). Consequently the Chamberlains become represented as 'just a typical suburban family' (7). For the most part, it is Chamberlain's whiteness, with all its accompanying significations, that allows her access to these narratives.

Fifteen years after the death of Azaria, articles about Lindy Chamberlain and her family are still widely circulated. *Woman's Day* celebrated the twenty-first birthday of Chamberlain's son, Aidan, with a series of photographs of the family 'posing for the camera' and looking 'the picture of happiness' (Barnes 1994). Similarly, *New Idea* presented an in-depth interview with Chamberlain, 'Rick, Babies, Family Pressures ... Lindy Reveals All' only to 'reveal' that the 'cold and stony-faced' Chamberlain, an image with which we were so familiar, was just a figment of our collective imagination (Russel 1995). *New Idea* waxes: 'If she ever existed, that woman has simply disappeared without trace'. The old Chamberlain has been replaced by the new, and this 'wife and mother' has 'a strong, happy marriage, close family ties and new-found peace', in fact, this Chamberlain is 'softer and warmer than many could imagine' (Russel 1995).

In conclusion, I am prompted to return to Flanagan's original question regarding Australia's national identity. He asks 'Who are we?' I would like to ask some questions of my own:

Does the mysterious disappearance of a traumatised and bitter Chamberlain, to be replaced by the ideal 'ordinary Aussie mum', herald a new future for Australia's national identity? Is the new Chamberlain a sign of the dominant culture's increased tolerance and flexibility? Judging from the means by which Chamberlain has gained entry to the mainstream, I would argue that this is not so. My inquiry into Chamberlain's *Through My Eyes* reveals that whiteness is an identity that colludes with dominant nationalist narratives. For it is through the strategic championing of an Anglo-Celtic identity that Chamberlain becomes not only Australian but also normal. While federal government policies attempt to legislate ethnic and racial diversity into all aspects of society, it is only when the full political effects of Australia's dominant whiteness is examined that we can hope



for a more equitable society.

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## NOTES

1 The term Murrie refers to an Aboriginal person from Queensland.

2 When the term 'colonized' is used to describe white women's oppression: 'the actual condition of less privileged women' is 'appropriated for use as a metaphor to signal the condition of the privileged' (Lake 1993: 160). This act elides the specificity of black women's encounters with colonialism, as it metaphorically conflates their experiences with those of colonial women.