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Tiddas talkin' up to the white woman: when Huggins et al. took on Bell

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For those in power in the West . . . whiteness is felt to be the human condition . . . it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it . . . white people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's; white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set the standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail. Most of this is not done deliberately and maliciously; there are enormous variations in power amongst white people, to do with class, gender and other factors; goodwill is not unheard of in white people's engagement with others. White power none the less reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.¹

WHITENESS IS BOTH the measure and the marker of normality in Australian society, yet it remains invisible for most white women and men, and they do not associate it with conferring dominance and privilege.² However, many Indigenous women and men do not suffer from such blindness; whiteness is highly visible and imbued with power. In its corporeal

form, whiteness is a signifier of many things—including nationhood. The very existence of white women and men is thus a constant reminder that our lands were invaded and stolen, our ancestors massacred and enslaved, our children taken and our rights denied and that these acts of terror forged white identity in this country. The presence of white bodies is connected to invasion, theft, murder and domination. White corporeality is thus one of the myriad ways in which relations between the colonising past and present are omnipresent. This means Indigenous women and men have relations to whiteness that are based on premises different from that of 'third-world-looking Australians' and other migrants.³

In Australia, whiteness is invisible but centred in any public discussion on 'race'. Even in feminist spaces where difference is accepted as part of political practice and theory, 'race' belongs to 'other'. Australian feminist literature has been extremely useful in exposing the oppressive conditions of Indigenous women's existence and it repatriates both Indigenous and white women in Australia's historical landscape. However, relations between Indigenous women and white women are analysed through the white woman's filtered lens, a lens which is blind to the way in which white race privilege manifests itself in and through these relations. Whiteness remains invisible, unmarked and uninterrogated and Indigenous women's subjectivity tends to be objectified within the text. As important and as useful as this literature is, it does not reveal how Indigenous women study the whiteness before their eyes—how Indigenous women penetrate the subjectivities of white women and men and have come to understand and be knowledgeable about them. White women and men do not just position us as being the 'unseen': we are also perceived as 'unseeing'.⁴

But Indigenous women do see, analyse and have knowledge about whiteness—knowledge that is usually dismissed, ignored or rebuffed by whites upon whom we cast our gaze and about whom we write. As I have argued elsewhere, the dismissal and suppression of our knowledge about whiteness is tied to the maintenance of white racial domination and privilege in this country.⁵ In this essay I cast my gaze on the subject position 'white woman', which has dominance in ideological constructions of womanhood in Australian society. This subject position is dynamic and finds expression in different ways in a variety of contexts; it is only one in the repertoire of multiple subject positions white women deploy.⁶ I make visible this subject position through analysing its deployment in the Huggins et al. and Bell debate in Australian feminism, showing how 'certain forms of knowledge, values and white race privilege' operate in inter-racial relations between women.⁷ All women possess racialised subjectivities, but we do not all possess the same degree of consciousness of or about them.

Tiddas talkin' up

In Australian feminism in 1989 something interesting happened. Indigenous women challenged in public one of Australia's leading feminist anthropologists, denouncing her claim that she and everyone else had the right to speak about rape in all Indigenous communities.⁸ The debate is still perceived as being about who could speak for whom, and a blanket of silence conceals the contention which remains unresolved. The debate arose over an article written by Diane Bell and Topsy Napurrula Nelson. The article was titled 'Speaking about rape is everyone's business', and was published in *Women's Studies International Forum* in 1989.⁹ A few prominent white feminists critiqued the debate in writing, but not all received a response from Bell, the exceptions being Jan Larbalestier¹⁰ and Anna Yeatman.¹¹

The article by Bell and Nelson dealt with a number of issues concerning Indigenous women, feminism and rape in Indigenous communities. Bell and Nelson decided to break the wall of silence and speak out on intra-racial rape in Indigenous communities in Australia. Bell had been 'authorised' to speak by her friend Topsy Napurrula Nelson, a 'traditional' Indigenous woman who was born south of Tennant Creek and who 'grew up with her extended family, wise in the ways of the land. Responsibilities for the maintenance of the mythology, songs, painting, dances, and ceremonies which commemorate these places is one [sic] Topsy has taken seriously'. Bell met Nelson when she was doing an 'eighteen-month stint of participant-observation fieldwork at Warrabri (now Ali Curang)' and over the years they became good friends.¹²

In the article Bell states that rape and intra-racial rape has been scrutinised by feminists and placed on the political agenda elsewhere and 'no matter how unpleasant, feminist social scientists do have a responsibility to identify and analyse those factors which render women vulnerable to violence. The fact that this is happening to women of another ethnic or racial group cannot be a reason for ignoring the abuse'.¹³ She then provides the reader with a brief overview of colonisation and its impact on gender relations in Indigenous society, followed by an outline of Indigenous women's perspectives on rape, which, she argues, are confined to perspectives on inter-racial rape. In the same article Bell asserts that unlike African-American women, Indigenous women have not engaged in theoretical debates about rape. We have not recognised the relevancy of some feminisms and we have been unduly influenced by the socialist left in our political activity. However, she asserts that 'the underlying dilemma in the theoretical positioning of the topic of rape which polarised feminists in the seventies is now entering the writing of Aboriginal women'.¹⁴ In Bell's narrative she deploys the subject position 'white woman' to speak as the

authoritative voice on the limitation and extent of Indigenous women's intellectual capacities. On the one hand, we are not able to discern which feminisms are relevant to us. On the other hand, we seem to have been able to distil the underlying dilemma in the theoretical positioning on the topic of rape in feminism.

Bell's narrative displays a striking contradiction: the positioning of Indigenous women as children who cannot discern theory and develop political strategies versus our positioning as women when we write about the same things as white feminists. How can we reconcile Bell's endorsement of our womanhood with her reduction of us as children? Such a positioning is not arbitrary; it is grounded in the hegemony of whiteness which positions Indigenous women on the racial continuum as the 'most encumbered by nature and, therefore, understood to be least civilised, most child-like and more degenerate'. The same hegemony positions white women closer 'to the other end of the continuum' where the dominant subject position 'white man' represents culture and civilisation.¹⁵ Bell is thus able to exercise her white race privilege to include or exclude Indigenous women from the category 'woman' according to her current purpose.

The remainder of Bell's article is devoted to an analysis of the relationship between the judiciary, bureaucracies, Indigenous legal services and Indigenous women on intra-racial rape. After identifying the common problems faced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous rape victims, Bell argues that 'it is the radical feminist strategies which emphasise the universality of key experiences of women and the need for separate institutions and it is this which offers Indigenous women the most likely strategy for success'.¹⁶ She then identifies areas for reform in the area of intra-racial rape. Bell again provides us with an interesting contradiction. Bell, the white feminist anthropologist, sees no differences between the key experiences of white and Indigenous women, yet her academic career is based on representing differences of the Indigenous 'Other'.¹⁷ How do we reconcile Bell's acceptance of radical feminism's subscription to the universality of women's key experiences and her career based on constructing cultural differences of Indigenous women? Bell centres the experiences of white women in two ways. White womanhood is the universal and the norm from which to judge and include the experiences of Indigenous women, and it is white radical feminists who have the solutions to Indigenous intra-racial rape. So first, Bell deploys the subject position 'white woman' to exercise her white race privilege to include Indigenous women in the category 'woman'; but second, she simultaneously denies our subjectivity so that in effect we remain objects. According to Bell's logic, the subject position 'white woman' represents the standard by which Indigenous women are measured and from which they are distanced.

In the article, Bell positions Nelson as the authentic voice that speaks for the women who have been raped and the families who have experienced this violence; she is the only Indigenous voice. We do not hear from the victims themselves. Bell acknowledges in this article that she is walking on controversial ground. She recalls that at a conference when she and Nelson spoke on white women writing about Indigenous women there were 'hostile urban Indigenous and black American women' in the audience.¹⁸ Bell defines her position on writing about Indigenous women in the following way: 'I did not speak for, nor did I merely report, but rather my task was to locate issues of gender and race within a wider perspective'.¹⁹ Nelson, according to Bell, responded to the audience by stating it was the quality of the relationship between women that was important when white women write about black women. Nelson could trust Bell to write about her ideas. It is interesting that Bell used the adjective *hostile* to describe her non-white critics instead of stating that Indigenous women and black American women engaged in critical dialogue with her. Its use also provides an insight into how easily and surreptitiously the subject position 'white woman' can be deployed strategically to represent innocence, virtue and the moral high ground. Hostile conjures up an image of the defenseless white woman—on a mission from the radical feminist Goddess—being gratuitously attacked by warlike black women. The issue of representation is thus more than who has the right to speak for whom: representation is a seamless tapestry, richly woven and sutured with multiple meanings in relations of power.

Despite the issues raised in relation to representation at this conference Bell submitted the article for publication. It is not surprising that it generated debate and a written response by Indigenous women. In 1990 Jackie Huggins wrote, on behalf of a group of Indigenous women, a letter of protest to the editors of the *Women's Studies International Forum*, objecting to the publication of the article on the grounds that Bell did not have the right to speak for all Indigenous women on the issue of rape.²⁰ The Indigenous women also took issue with Nelson being positioned as the co-author in the article on the grounds that her voice had been appropriated by Bell and relegated to that of the authoritative informant. The letter was not published immediately by the editors of the journal. In the words of Renate Klein:

We never refused to publish the letter by the Aboriginal women. But we felt that the debate deserved more than an unsigned letter with typed names, and no return address(es) . . . Our managing editor wrote twice to Jackie Huggins asking her to sign and fill out a copyright form with all the signatures as is standard practice. Neither response nor signatures were forthcoming. Consequently, we had to ask our publisher to seek legal advice in order to protect the 12 writers as well as the journal in case of legal action.²¹

Connected to Klein's explanation for not publishing, Jackie Huggins, to the best of her recollection of events, also notes that she was told the letter lacked 'academic rigour' and was seen to constitute 'a personal attack on Bell'.²² Huggins's recollection may seem to be implausible to white women given the testimony of the editors in writing. However, white women do say things to us they would not repeat in front of other whites because it is safe to do so. They can count on our version of the event being questioned and usually dismissed; it is one of the invisible and unacknowledged privileges conferred by whiteness. White race privilege also operates in other invisible and unmarked ways. Huggins is portrayed as the uncooperative black woman, who does not seem to understand she has to conform to white procedures if she wants the Indigenous women's voices heard. However, these seemingly neutral procedures of the dominant white culture worked to suppress the voices of Indigenous women for some time. Inadvertently the debate was placed in the hands of the white feminist editors who were unable to publish. Eventually the letter was published and so was the editorial position on the debate. In her editorial letter to readers of *Women's Studies International Forum*, Renate Klein states:

We find it deplorable that speaking out about rape still means paying a price—even in feminist circles. We are deeply distressed about these happenings but more than ever determined to continue publishing radical analyses of the grim realities women continue to face globally. We urge our readers to send us papers on violence against women: we must continue to speak out in order to devise strategies to stop the abuse of women.²³

The white feminist editors' political position is consistent with that of Bell, and they were able to articulate their political agenda from a position of dominance. White feminist values and interests were centred and represented as being correct and proper, and the values and claims of the Indigenous women were by implication positioned as being improper, unjustifiable and ignominious. The subject position 'white woman' was deployed by the editors in a way consistent with the premise that the white woman is the universal woman who has the right to speak on behalf of all women.

The article became the subject of further debate. In April 1990 Jackie Huggins, Jo Willmot and I participated in a discussion on the article at the Women and Australian Anthropology Conference in Adelaide.²⁴ In this discussion, the issue of control and ownership of knowledge did not arise, and while I attempted to raise problems with Bell's methodology, questions from the audience attempted to position us as angry and ungrateful native informants. It appeared that we did not believe in the spirit of equal treatment for all rape victims, irrespective of race and culture. White women in

the audience, by positioning us in this way, used their race privilege to dismiss the issues and questions being raised by us. Such a positioning allowed them to feel good about themselves while simultaneously reinscribing white superiority. What remained invisible to the white women in the audience was the way they exercised their white race privilege to represent Bell's work as morally correct and our position as less morally sound. Our objections about use, ownership and control of knowledge were reduced to a purely moral issue. They were not perceived as having epistemological and intellectual value. In the discussion Jackie Huggins, Jo Willmot and I were both objects and subjects of the audience's gaze. We were objectified to the degree that what we were—Indigenous women—was crucial to the discussion, and our subjectivity was acknowledged—in that we were allowed to speak, but the unpalatability of what we said relegated us to being the 'unseeing'. Indigenous women continued to comment and participate in the debate in public forums. Jackie Huggins and a few other Indigenous women in Adelaide discussed the article on *The Coming Out Show* on ABC National Radio in May 1990. This was the last known public engagement made by Indigenous women on the issue.

White women talkin' up

In September 1990 Professor Anna Yeatman intervened in the debate. She states that her intentions were 'to accord more public representation of the objections to the Bell piece from Huggins et al. on the assumption that they were opening up an important politics of voice and representation in respect of Indigenous women and white Australian feminists'.²⁵ Yeatman argues that when the hegemonic white feminist intellectual representations of the 'Other' are contested by those positioned as that 'Other', what tends to occur is that the Indigenous intellectual becomes scrutinised according to a binary of same/difference which seeks to disrupt and dislocate their representation. Yeatman states that 'the Bell debate is more of a debate between the custodians as to which of them is the better advocate of Aboriginal women than it is yet an elaborated politics of difference within Australia'.²⁶ For Yeatman such a politics would require the current custodians to relinquish some control over the agenda so that women positioned as 'Other' could have a voice and differences within the movement would not be accounted for by any one binary.²⁷ While Yeatman acknowledges the power of white feminists, her politics of difference does not make visible why their values, privileges and knowledges remain dominant in Australian feminism. It is taken for granted that they do.

Jan Larbalestier responded to the Bell debate in an article entitled 'The politics of representation: Australian Indigenous women and feminism'.²⁸ Larbalestier critiqued Bell on the way in which she shaped the text and

created a false traditional/urban binary. She noted Bell was more concerned with the appropriateness of radical feminism, both in theory and practice, for understanding and acting on male violence against women than for providing an analysis of intra-racial rape. Larbalestier states that 'Bell seems to gloss over her own position as a white academic in settings that are inscribed with the politics, the considerations and the positions and the strategies of power.'²⁹ For Larbalestier the Bell-Huggins debate highlights conceptual flaws in feminist anthropology that relate to developing 'ways in which racial difference is constructed through gender and [offers an opportunity] to deconstruct the category women'.³⁰ This would require changing conceptual and analytical frameworks because

difference is both a conceptual, cultural and material problem. It is embedded in politics of identity which are in turn embedded in relations of power. Dealing with patterns of inequality along with its accompanying positions and strategies of power may well prove to be the greatest challenge for all of us.³¹

Bell responded to Larbalestier's critique by reasserting her claim that she has the right to speak because she is a feminist anthropologist and because Nelson said she could. She dismissed Larbalestier's positioning of her as the creator of a false binary between Huggins et al. and Nelson because 'to note differences is not to fall into a racist division of authentic/unauthentic'.³² Bell draws on her white race privilege to affirm she has the white authority of science and the authority of Nelson, an Indigenous woman from the Northern Territory, to speak, which is doing more than just noting differences. She strategically deploys geographical difference, which is a covert marker in anthropology of cultural and racial authenticity, to legitimate her position within the text and the debate. Bell responds to Larbalestier's criticism of her shaping the text by stating that she is not concerned with this, as she wanted to get the debate focused on the substantive issue of intra-racial rape:

My interest in the relationship was in as far as it illuminated the issue of intra-racial rape. In returning to the issues ... I argue that forging a sustainable vision of a meaningful future in the current crisis requires that the needs of women are addressed; that in pursuit of the politics of difference we not lose sight of questions of power; that the politics of law, the nation state, the academy, and Indigenous liberation struggles which shape the 'master narratives', are interrogated from within and from 'elsewhere'.³³

Bell's statement represents a privileged position where power is deemed to be external, thereby denying the power she is able to exercise as a professional white middle-class woman. While Bell acknowledges questions of power, she seems to lack an understanding that she is immersed in racialised power relations that are both asymmetrical and reciprocal, involving power and resistance which can be unintentional, intentional, direct and

indirect. Bell does not recognise that the subject position she deploys and its middle-class dimension provide her with more power than Indigenous women within the debate. Nor does she perceive the contradiction between her radical feminist position, with its emphasis on the universality of key experiences of all women, and her use of difference to distinguish between Indigenous women. This contradiction can only be reconciled by recognising that its function is to support Bell's political agenda.

Some more talkin' up

In 1991 *Women's Studies International Forum* published an editorial on the debate, the letter from Huggins et al., a letter from Nelson and a response from Bell as well as another article.³⁴ The letter from Huggins et al. is clear in its intent and advocacy. Rape in Indigenous communities is not everybody's business; it is the business of Indigenous people. Huggins et al. position the article written by Bell as an example of racist imperialism at work in the twentieth century. They also take issue with Bell's positioning of Nelson as co-author to legitimate the article; in their opinion Nelson's role was one of informant, not one of co-author. Since Nelson is not a qualified anthropologist and has no other academic qualifications, her ability to co-author the article with Bell is therefore circumscribed. In effect, the article is informed by the different knowledges of both Bell and Nelson, but it is written in an academic genre. Huggins et al. respond to Bell's assertion that Indigenous women have not recognised feminisms that are relevant to them. They assert that they share common interests with social feminists rather than radical feminists because 'our fight is with the state, the system, social injustices, and primarily racism, far in excess of patriarchy'.³⁵ They also note that they are conscious of the way in which white women create divisions among Indigenous women and suggest that the article contributes to widening this gap. They point out that colonisation has had a different impact in different contexts and that white women have contributed to its application. Huggins et al. conclude by asserting that sexism does not overshadow racial domination in Australia.

Nelson's letter was also published.³⁶ In it she states that Bell has worked with her since 1975, and, despite the fact that she has asked Indigenous women to write down her stories, they did not respond to her requests. Bell is the person who listened and wrote down her stories. While Nelson positions the Indigenous women as not interested, it has to be acknowledged that Bell is in the privileged position of having both resources, time, skills and knowledge to be able to undertake the task. There could be any number of reasons why Indigenous women in Nelson's community did not respond to her request. Poverty often means Indigenous women's priorities

are caught up in the daily struggle to survive with limited resources. They do not have white race privilege or the luxury to participate in what could be perceived as a difficult exercise. In her letter Nelson does not present herself as the woman of authority in her community represented by Bell; in fact, Nelson's self-presentation raises concerns about Bell's use of Nelson's traditional authority to legitimate her claims to speak on the issue of intra-racial rape. My concern here is not to diminish Nelson's authority, but to point out that in Indigenous communities people of authority do not automatically have the total support or endorsement of their community on every issue of concern to them. Bell's use and privileging of Nelson's authority to defend her position is strategic but problematic, because if such authority carries power and privilege then rape should not be an issue.

Bell wrote another article and a response to the debate in which she re-centred her morally superior position by reiterating that speaking about rape in Indigenous communities is everybody's business.³⁷ She asserted that the issue of women being hurt is being neglected in the debate and reminded her audience that she was driven by their pain to speak out despite being 'white listed'. Apparently those who speak out against taboo subjects about Indigenous women become 'white listed'. It is unclear what Bell means exactly by the term 'white listed' other than as an inversion of the racially pejorative term 'black listed'. Nor is it clear who develops this list: one can only assume she means Indigenous women, who have no power within universities over research grants and academic positions. She further asserts that other researchers working in the field have had to temper or withhold their findings 'for fear of an attack on their personal and professional integrity'.³⁸ Bell fears for her future work and that of her colleagues who will be reluctant to co-author with Indigenous women because of the attack on her collaboration with Nelson whose 'imprint is firmly on the ideas and structure of the piece'.³⁹ In this statement, Bell shifts Nelson's position from being one of co-author to informant, which confirms Huggins et al.'s analysis of Nelson's role. Statistically and corporeally, Indigenous women as a group constitute a powerless and underprivileged minority in Australian society, but Bell positions us as threatening, powerful, uncontrollable and ubiquitous when the authority of her work is challenged. Bell further makes her whiteness work to define the boundaries between herself and Indigenous women by positioning Indigenous women as being irrational and unreasonable.

Bell takes issue with Huggins's statement that rape is not everybody's business by rationalising how knowledge is situated and located in Central Australian 'idiomatic formulations'.⁴⁰ She argues that knowledge in Indigenous society is owned and highly valued: those who appropriate knowledge without consent are seen to commit theft. What Bell omits is

that what constitutes public and private knowledge within Indigenous communities is contextualised by elders and the kinship relations of the participants involved in the event or circumstances which govern these deliberations. Bell states that she has abided by this law, which is not just restricted to Central Australia; yet her statement that rape is everybody's business contravenes it, because she and Nelson are making public certain knowledge without the appropriate deliberations of the Indigenous communities concerned. Bell refuses to acknowledge and accept that it is precisely this cultural premise which motivates Huggins et al. to take issue with her statement that rape is everybody's business. Bell does not have the authority of Indigenous women to speak on behalf of the communities represented by Huggins et al., but she does have the white cultural authority of 'science', which supports the white race privilege that she exercises in asserting her 'right' to speak. As Zane Ma Rhea argues, universities were and are part of the colonising process in which 'the primary outcome of such a process was, and is, the globalisation of a scientific world view which is ontologically and epistemologically committed to the idea of "white" superiority'.⁴¹

Bell concludes by discussing the 'racial cringe'⁴² displayed by white researchers who do not speak out on issues of concern to them, because of the fear of backlash and the possibility of job discrimination. To my knowledge there has never been a case where an anthropologist has lost his or her job in a university as a result of criticism by Indigenous women. There is also a hidden assumption here which is consistent with a position of white superiority: Indigenous people have a duty to participate in research and researchers have an inherent right to jobs because the rationalist metaphysics of western science requires it. The question that needs to be asked is: who benefits the most from the research? Bell believes that researchers have a right to do research among Indigenous people, and that as long as they abide by the rules of white methodology then it is unproblematical. As I have argued elsewhere, anthropological methodology is problematic because it creates a racialised binary that centres the subject position of middle-class 'white woman' and produces distorted representations of Indigenous women. Bell positions herself as a feminist but fails to adhere to a premise of white feminist methodology: that all research is circumscribed, and that when researchers embark on research they must do so with some knowledge of the political context and the potential consequences to themselves.

Bell notes that some white women have pursued and encouraged the debate, but that in all the responses there are no practical suggestions given about how to change the situation of women being raped in Indigenous communities, through empowering them or forming national alliances.

Bell appears to target Yeatman and Larbalestier in stating that, instead, 'Aboriginal women's experiences are providing fodder for the deconstructionists' mill'.⁴³ Bell believes that the substantive issues have not been dealt with in this debate. She concludes that 'in our article we asked: who speaks of the anguish, shame and risk for Indigenous women? The question is still floating out there.'⁴⁴ I concur with Bell that the substantive issues in this debate have not been dealt with—but then, this is not surprising. Where is the evidence to show that writing about Australian Indigenous women's concerns, without their support, in an international feminist journal has resulted in bringing about change in our communities? I leave the reader to contemplate this question.

The Huggins–Bell debate speaks to central issues within feminism about irreducible differences, incommensurabilities and white race privilege. The subject position 'white woman' as the representation of true womanhood has been constituted historically and was deployed to position Huggins et al. in particular ways, largely as unacademic but also as not traditional—meaning 'authentic'—Indigenous women. This subject position is embodied in various forms of feminist agency and is socially empowered because it has a structural location within the hegemony of whiteness. The Huggins et al. critique challenged the authority of Bell's white race privilege and the white institutional basis from which she derives her knowledges and power. What is evident in this debate is that as socially situated subjects white feminists and Indigenous women speak out of different cultures, epistemologies, experiences, histories and material conditions which separate our politics and our analyses. As Huggins argues, white feminists' representations of Indigenous women are

based on a menial or sexual image: as more sensual but less cerebral, more interesting perhaps but less intellectual, more passive but less critical, more emotional but less analytical, more exotic but less articulate, more withdrawn but less direct, more cultured but less stimulating, more oppressed but less political than they are.⁴⁵

Indigenous women in Australia know that we live in a society in which we will never be sufficiently powerful to reverse the nature of the conditions of our existence. For Indigenous women all white feminists benefit from 'the continued dominance of their culture and the exploitative effects of their freely exercised power over our people, our lands and our place in our own country'.⁴⁶ If we enter feminism and its debates, it is not on our terms, but on the terms of white feminists whose race confers dominance and privilege. What sort of sisterhood can be constructed when we begin from such unequal positions within a politics that defines our racial difference yet masks its own?