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**Subjectivation and Performative Politics – Butler thinking Althusser and Foucault:
intelligibility, agency, and the raced-nationed-religined subjects of education**

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Abstract

Judith Butler is perhaps best known for her take-up of the debate between Derrida and Austin over the function of the performative and her subsequent suggestion that the subject be understood as performatively constituted. Another important but less often noted move within Butler's consideration of the processes through which the subject is constituted is her thinking between Althusser's notion of subjection and Foucault's notion of subjectivation. In this paper, I explore Butler's understanding of processes of subjectivation; examine the relationship between subjectivation and the performative suggested in and by Butler's work, and consider how the performative is implicated in processes of subjectivation – in 'who' the subject is, or might be, subjectivated as.

Finally, I examine the usefulness of understanding the subjectivating effects of discourse for education, in particular for educationalists concerned to make better sense of and interrupt educational inequalities. In doing this I offer a reading of an episode of ethnographic data generated in an Australian high School. I suggest that it is through subjectivating processes of the sort that Butler helps us to understand that some students are rendered subjects inside the educational endeavour, and others are rendered outside this endeavour or, indeed, outside student-hood.

Introduction

This paper considers the usefulness for education of Judith Butler's thinking between Althusser's notion of subjection and Foucault's notion of subjectivation and the possibility for discursive agency and performative politics that this thinking opens up. While concerned with the broad utility of these conceptual tools, the paper illustrates their usefulness by deploying them to analyse the processes of raced-nationed-religioned subjectivation at a 'Multicultural Day' event in a Sydney high school. In doing this, the paper proceeds from a series of what might be termed 'left' or 'critical' concerns centred around the differentiating and exclusionary effects of schooling, and, with a focus here on the subjectivation of 'Arabic' students, on the operations of race, racism and Whiteness.

These may seem unlikely points of departure for a paper offered as a post-structural piece. But as Foucault's (1988a) discussion in *Critical Theory/Intellectual History* points out, 'left' thinkers have for some time been looking for tools for understanding and strategies for interrupting material inequality through an engagement with language; a decentred subject; and an unstable truth. Rather than asking what structures and institutions (economic, social, or linguistic) produce material inequality, this move reconfigures this concern and asks how the self comes into being, what the costs of the self might be, and how the self might be made *again differently*.

A Central project has been developing tools and strategies for interrogating the 'nature of the present' (Foucault 1988a p. 36), an interrogation that seeks to expose the relationship

between ‘the subject, truth, and the constitution of experience’ (1988b p. 48). These efforts are wholly political in that they focus upon those aspects of the present that Foucault finds ‘intolerable’. Foucault seeks to develop understandings of how the present is made, and so how it might be unmade, by ‘following lines of fragility in the present’, trajectories that might allow us to ‘grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is.’ (1988a p. 37). Butler takes this further and posits a performative politics in which she imagines discourses taking on new meanings and circulating in contexts from which they have been barred or in which they have been rendered unintelligible, as performative subjects engage a deconstructive politics that intervenes and unsettles hegemonic meanings (Butler 1997a).

In exploring these conceptual tools and putting them to use, the paper focuses on the subjectivation of a group of Lebanese and Turkish young. The analysis suggests a series of political, educational, popular and (sub-)cultural discourses that circulate in this school setting and beyond and which provide the discursive terrain on and through which these students are subjectivated. Specifically, the paper explores how Lebanese and Turkish students (collectively called ‘Arabic’ in this setting) are subjectivated in ways that render apparently incommensurable constitutions of the good-Arabic-student-subject and the bad-Arabic-subject through the citation and inscription of an Orientalism (Said 2003) reinvigorated by post-9/11 anti-Islamic discourse (Lipman 2004). This, then, is the intolerable present I want to interrogate. The paper also considers how these students render themselves through the possibilities for practices of self, or discursive agency, that subjectivation brings. This is a consideration that demonstrates the capacity of Butler’s

performative politics to maintain in view simultaneously a sense of the context of constraint in which these performatively constituted subjects are effected and the potential for these subjects to act and to act with intent.

Methodology

My experiences of ‘Multicultural Day’ in an Australian high school are situated in the conduct of a school ethnography during 2001. There has been significant debate about the implications, and even the possibility, of undertaking ethnography in a post-structural or Foucauldian frame. Critical, interpretive, and feminist traditions in school (and other) ethnography have long emphasized the multiplicity of meanings and perspectives that exist within contexts; the complexities of and tensions within the roles and status’ of the researcher and the researched as well as relations between them; and the potential and limits of reflexivity (see for instance, Carr and Kemmis 1986; Delamont and Atkinson 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Lather 1992; Skeggs 1994, Stanley and Wise 1993). These methodological insights have been usefully supplemented and, indeed, scrutinized in the light of post-structural ideas and adaptations of qualitative methodology informed by these ideas (see, for example, Alvesson 2002; Britzman 2000; Harwood 2001; Lather 2000; Maclure 2003; McCoy 2000; Miller 1997; Prior 1997; St. Pierre 2000; Silverman 1997; Stronach and MacLure 1997).

In doing ethnography in school framed by a concern to interrogate the subjectivating effects of an intolerable present, I make use of the usual methods of interview, observation, collection of artifacts and texts. I am not, however, asking the researched to

explicate their understanding of the context and relations within it. Rather, I am looking for moments in which subjects are constituted and in which constituted subjects act. I am looking for discourses and their subjectivating effects. I ask myself what discourses might be circulating inside and/or across school contexts, how these are being deployed, what their effects might be. While at times it seems that discourses and their effects are clearly evident, more often it seems that these are subtle and oblique, needing to be teased out, to be deconstructed. Ultimately, I want to know whether thinking in terms of the subjectivating effects of discourse can help me to understand how students are made within particular constraints and how these constraints might be breached. This is not the collection of ‘real’ or ‘actual’ discourses but is wholly constrained by my own discursive repertoire – the discourse that I see and name – and my capacity to represent these. I am, then, absolutely entangled in the data I generate and the representations I produce.

These data are inevitably simulacra (Baudrillard 1994) of my own creation, copies without original that cannot reflect any ‘real’ moment in a field that is itself inaccessible without the mediating discursive frames that fill it with meaning. In this way the ethnographic data offered bear a heavy interpretive burden. I am not seeking to describe the nuances of the context and tease out what is happening within it. Rather, I am seeking to construct compelling representations of moments inside school in order to untangle the discursive frames that guide meaning and render subjects within it. My research process is unavoidably implicated in the very subjectivating processes about which it speaks. Yet these data are recognizable. They do not contain, expose or reflect any universal truth, but these *petite narratives* do resonate.

Given the focus on subjectivation in this paper, the place of the subject deserves some further consideration here. Serious attention is increasingly being paid to the problematic relationship between the ‘knowing’ subjects implicit to empirical research and the ‘troubled’ subjects of post-structural writing (see once again, Britzman, 2000; Lather 2000; and St Pierre 2000). Yet there is no easy solution. Understanding the researching and researched subject to be perpetually but provisionally constituted through discourse means that research practice is wholly implicated in processes of ongoing subjectivation (of both the researcher and the researched) even as these subjectivities form the objects of study. Replacing sovereign agency with the notion of discursive agency (Butler 1997a) – which I will explore in some detail below – goes some way to illuminate and relieve these tensions, offering an ethnography that retains agency and intent in the context of discursive constraint without implicitly casting this subject a sovereign.

Understanding the subjects who inhabit schools and school ethnography in this way suggests that the discourses deployed by students and teachers (and researcher) may be both intentional and unintentional: discourses intentionally deployed may escape or exceed the intent of the subject who speaks or acts and/or the subject may unwittingly deploy discourses whose historicities and/or intersections assert unanticipated meanings. Indeed, discursive practices may entail the deployment of complex combinations of intentional and unintentional discourses and their discursive effects. Taking up Butler’s notion of discursive agency, this analysis assumes multiple degrees of both intent and understanding amongst subjects in terms of the embedded meanings and effects of

discourses. On the one hand, it suggests that subjects do not necessarily regurgitate discourse unwittingly. On the other hand, however, it suggests that discourses are not necessarily cited knowingly and that they are not necessarily known explicitly to the subject and/or audience. As such, subjects need not be self-consciously alert to the discourses deployed in order for their familiar and embedded meanings to be inscribed. Furthermore, the analysis suggests, again after Butler (1997a), that discourses do not need to be explicitly cited in order to be deployed. Rather, multiple discourses are referenced through the meanings, associations, and omissions embedded in the historicity of apparently simple and benign utterances and bodily practices.

As I have explored elsewhere (Youdell 2005), these discussions render indeterminable the question of whether I should offer an account of myself as the researcher. The risk of slipping into an inadvertent essentialism tempts me to avoid such an account, however, the risk of assuming a disembodied authorial authority by not doing so seems much greater. Given the centrality of visual economies to prevailing discourses of gender and race (see Jacobson 1998; Seshadri-Crooks 2000), my own location within these discourses (woman, White) is undoubtedly 'visible' to and taken as immutable by the students involved in my research. Yet my social class, sexuality, sub-cultural, and age locations are perhaps less singular or 'obvious' and, therefore, less tightly constrained. For instance, in the context of prevailing hetero-normative discourse, it is likely that students locate (constitute) me as heterosexual – the unspoken Same of the heterosexual/homosexual Same/Other binary – as long as an alternative sexuality is not asserted. And as a British ('English') woman doing school ethnography in Australia,

nationality was an explicit axis of my subjectivation: students who had speculated privately that I might be “very posh” or “from England” (but not both) were reassured by my Englishness (in ways that posh-ness may not have been reassuring in this low-income locale) and at the same time this Englishness was constitutive of my position as an outsider whose lack of knowledge of the context was acceptable and whose interest in it was comprehensible (or just about).

Performative subjects, subjectivation, performative politics

As my discussion so far has indicated, this paper is concerned with two interrelated threads – understanding (some of) the intolerable effects of education and the contribution that can be made to this by Judith Butler’s work on the subject; the subject’s potential to act willfully; and politics. For me, it is in Butler’s return to Althusser via Foucault that an understanding of subjection/subjectivation, agency, and the political is most usefully developed (Butler 1997a, 1997b, 2004).

Judith Butler begins by adopting Foucault’s notion of discourse as productive and uses this alongside the notion of the performative to consider the production of sexed and gendered subjects (Butler 1990, 1993). This is not the performativity, after Lyotard, of the marketised and corporatised education work place that Stephen Ball (2003) writes about. Rather this performative is borrowed from a debate between Derrida (1988) and Austin (1962) concerning the nature of language and its relationship to the world in which a performative is: ‘that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names’ (Butler 1993:13). Butler suggests that:

‘Discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make. ... [g]enerally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it declares’ (Butler 1993:107).

Butler argues that the subject must be performatively constituted in order to make sense *as* a subject. While these subjects appear, at least at the level of the everyday or commonsense, to precede their designation, this apparently pre-existing subject is an artifact of its performative constitution. A key contribution made to debates concerning the function of the performative is Derrida’s (1988) assertion that any performative is open to misfire and so might fail or doing something unintended or unexpected. And Foucault’s (1990) account of discourse insists that no discourse is guaranteed – while particular discourses prevail in some contexts and endure over time, the potential for the meanings of these to shift and/or for subordinate discourses to unsettle these remains.

Developing this notion of the performatively constituted subject, Butler (1997a, 1997b, 2004) takes up Althusser’s notion of subjection and Foucault’s notion of subjectivation to elaborate a nuanced understanding of production and constraint.

For Althusser (1971), ‘subjection’ is achieved through the action of ‘ideological State apparatuses’ (p136). These *ideological* State apparatuses are understood as representations of ideas, outlooks, and beliefs that are imaginary or ‘distortions’ of a scientifically accessible ‘real’ (p153) (in Althusser’s terms, the ‘real’ conditions of

production and consumption). As these ideas are translated into actions and social practices and come to be embedded in social ritual, ideology is given a material existence that is at once a distortion and implicated in the production of this distortion. These ideological state apparatus are both at stake in and the site of struggle, with the school identified as a key site.

For Althusser, ideology, and ideological State apparatuses, are inextricably linked with the subject (Althusser 1971). The subject, Althusser argues, is constituted by ideology which constitutes the individual as a subject. The subject is hailed as an individual, even as s/he is constituted a subject. This transformation of the individual into a subject, and the ‘obviousness’ of subjecthood, are key functions of ideology.

Recognition is central to these processes. The subject recognizes her/him self as s/he is hailed. Furthermore, s/he recognizes her/himself reflected in/by the Subject – Althusser’s ‘Subject *par excellence*’ (p167 original emphasis) who occupies the centre of ideology – by whom/on whose behalf the subject is hailed. This is Althusser’s ‘mirror-recognition’ (p168). It is through this recognition that the subject is ‘recruited’—subjecthood is freely taken and subjection is freely accepted by the good subject. In Althusser’s neo-marxist Science this recognition is, in fact, a mis-recognition – the subject is not a reflection of the Subject but *subject to* the Subject: ‘*there are no subjects except by and for their subjection*’ (1971 p.169 original emphasis).

This recognition of the hail and transformation of the individual into a subject is simultaneous and inseparable. In Althusser's account there is no 'before' subjection when the subject was an individual – as Althusser asserts, 'individuals are always-already subjects' (p164). Nevertheless, just as ideology suggests real knowledge free from distortion, the individual/subject binary does seem to retain an implicit sense of an individual free from subjection. Freedom, albeit constrained, is suggested again by the idea that the subjecthood is freely taken up, even as this is a freedom taken *inside* subjection. Althusser argues the intrinsic ambiguity of the subject:

'In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his [sic] submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.*' (1971 p. 169 original emphasis).

A foreshadowing of Foucault's notion of the individual constituted in discourses and through the technologies of disciplinary power (1990a and 1991) or through practices of the self (1990b and 1992) is evident in Althusser's account of ideology and subjection. I am provoked to wonder, much as Judith Butler has, what would 'happen' if I were to

think of ideologies (as well as the ‘undistorted truth’), and ideological State apparatuses, and the subjection that ideological State apparatuses effect, as discursive, as performative.

According to Foucault, the person is *subjectivated* – s/he is at once rendered a subject and subjected to relations of power through discourse. That is, *productive power* constitutes and constrains, but does not determine, the subjects with whom it is concerned. Yet while Foucault indicates a concern with the subject at the centre of his work, he says relatively little directly about the notions of subjection and subjectivation.

Foucault says of the relation between productive power and the subject, and the subject’s location in productive power:

‘This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscious self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.’

(Foucault 1982 p 212).

In a similar vein, in *Critical Theory/Intellectual History*, Foucault suggests that ‘If I tell the truth about myself, as I am doing now, it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others.’ (1988a p.39). Here the echoes of Althusser’s model of subjection resonates through Foucault’s thinking about the subject, despite the very clear divergence of these thinkers in relation to the status of science, knowledge, Truth and so on.

In Foucault’s final interview he offers a direct account of his understanding of subjectiv(iz)ation. He says:

‘I will call subjectivization the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more precisely, of a subjectivity which is of course only one of the given possibilities of organization of a self-consciousness.’ (1988c p.253).

While the operations and constraints of productive power remain evident, here power relations appear in the background, with the self, and the possibility of (contingent) self-knowledge and volition foregrounded. This is more clearly stated by Foucault in *An Aesthetic of Existence* when he says of the subject:

‘the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, or liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment.’ (1988b p.51)

Here, the self-conscious practices of the subject, and her/his involvement in her/his own constitution, are indicated as (potentially) ‘practices of liberation’ *at the same time as* the constrained context in which this subject acts is indicated by ‘practices of subjection’.

The subject acts, but s/he acts within/at the limits of subjection.

Perhaps more significantly, processes of subjection/subjectivation are demonstrated through Foucault’s specific contextual studies in which the subject is a key field of concern at the same time as the subject *as* a field of concern is interrogated. In particular, *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1991) and *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (Foucault 1990a) show how the subject is subjected to relations of power as s/he is individualised, categorized, classified, hierarchized, normalized, surveilled and provoked to self-surveillance. These are technologies of subjection brought into play within institutions. This is not because such institutions are ideological State apparatuses as in Althusser’s account. But because institutions improvise, cite and circulate discursive frames and coterminous technologies that render subjects in relations of power. As Althusser notes the simultaneity of subjection and the making of a ‘free’ subject, so Foucault notes the non-necessary effects of discourse and the disciplinary technologies it makes meaningful and the persistence possibility of resistance intrinsic to productive power (Foucault 1990a). It is to the potentialities of being otherwise or, to adapt a construction of Foucault’s, that-which-is-not, that Foucault’s *Uses of Pleasure* (1992) and *Care of the Self* (1990b) turn. Here the aesthetics, self-care, the technologies of self, allude to the possibilities of being otherwise not through lessons of/from resistance but from the self-

conscious practices of subjects, even if these subjects come into being through the condition of subjection, or subjectivation.

Considering these Althusserian and Foucauldian accounts of subjection together, Butler asserts that:

‘“subjectivation” ...denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection – one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency. [...] Subjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production’ (Butler 1997b: 83-4 original emphasis).

Likewise:

‘It is important to remember at least two caveats on subjection and regulation derived from Foucaultian scholarship: (1) regulatory power not only acts upon an preexisting subject but also shapes and forms that subject; moreover, every juridical form of power has its productive effect; and (2) to become subject to a

regulation is also to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated.’ (Butler, 2004 p. 41).

Butler develops these ideas to detail how subjectivation as an effect of discourse and, more specifically, the performative offers political potential. She engages with Althusser’s understanding of interpellation (Althusser 1971) – the turn to the hail of authority – to think about how the hail might be understood as a performative and how the performatively constituted subjects might engage in the sorts of insurrectionary acts that Foucault speaks of. She suggests that while the subject needs to be named in ways that make sense in discourse in order to be ‘*recognizable*’ (Butler 1997a:5, original emphasis), by being subjectivated the subject can subjectivate another. Butler writes:

‘the one who names, who works within language to find a name for another, is presumed to be already named, positioned within language as one who is already subject to the founding or inaugurating address. This suggests that such a subject in language is positioned as both addressed and addressing, and that the very possibility of naming another requires that one first be named. The subject of speech who is named becomes, potentially, one who might well name another in time’ (Butler 1997a:29).

Butler calls the capacity to name and so constitute that results from subjectivation ‘discursive agency’ (Butler 1997a: 127). By thinking of agency as discursive – as being

the product of being inaugurated in and by discourse and so able to join its citational chains – Butler moves past an understanding of intent and agency that is the property of an *a priori*, rational, self-knowing subject but *retains* a subject who can act with intent. Discourse and its effects ultimately exceed the intent or free will of an agent, but, like Foucault's practices of self, the performatively constituted subject can still deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive.

Butler suggests that as a politics these practices involve:

‘decontextualizing and recontextualizing ... terms through radical acts of public misappropriation such that the conventional relation between [interpellation and meaning] might become tenuous and even broken over time’ (Butler 1997a p.100).

This ‘performative politics’ (Butler 1997a p. 127) offers significant promise for a post-structural politics of change. Through such practices, Butler insists, the sedimented meanings of enduring and prevailing discourses might be unsettled and reinscribed; subordinate, disavowed, or silenced discourses might be deployed in, and made meaningful in, contexts from which they have been barred; and challenges to prevailing constitutions of subjects might be deployed self-consciously through the discursive practices of subjects who are themselves subjectivated. Butler sets out, then, a possible method for Foucault's struggles against subjectionⁱ.

These ideas have massive implications for education. With this understanding of subjectivation, the school student is so because he/she is designated as such. Indeed, while these designations appear to describe pre-existing subjects, understanding these designations as performative reveals that *it is the very act of designation that constitutes these subjects* as if they were already students. Simultaneously, the practices of these discursive agents amount to a politics that insists that nobody is necessarily anything and what it means to be a teacher, a student, a learner might be opened up to radical rethinking. The political challenge, then, is to intercept these subjectivating processes in order to constitute students *again differently*. Butler's performative politics offer tools for thinking how this might be done. These are understandings that I put to work in the analysis of school data that follows.

Subjectivating practices at 'Multicultural Day'

Data

Multicultural Day, Plains High, Sydney, Australia, December 2001

It is an extremely hot, sticky day – even for Sydney's outer-west at the top of summer. Set up around Plains High's outside spaces there are stalls, dance and drama events, sports activities, and a ducking pool (offering up the male PE teachers for a dunking). Students and their family and guests mill around, visiting stalls, socializing and watching performances.

The Deputy Principal and a team of 4 male teachers, all White Australians aged around 40, patrol the school grounds, communicating with each other on walkie-talkies. I – a White English woman invited to experience an 'Australian Multicultural Day' by some of the students who have been

participating in my research – watch the Deputy Principal and his team watching the students and their guests as I wander around the school grounds from one event site to another.

As well as being a multicultural ‘celebration’, this is also a school fund-raiser and a key part of this is the stalls provided by students, parents, family and friends. These stalls are set up under a covered walkway that surrounds 3 sides of the school’s main quad. These have hand-written A3 size signs: *‘International Hotdogs’*; *‘International Food’*; *‘Italian Food’*; *‘Hair Braiding’* and *‘Hair braiding started in Africa but is now popular around the world’*; *‘Flower Lais’*; *‘Make your own beads’*; *‘Philipino Food’*; *‘German Cafe’*; *‘Arabic Food’* and *‘Kebabs’*.

White chalk on the fascia board above the Arabic Food stall reads *‘Lebanon’* and *‘Lebs Rule’*. *‘Lebs Rule’* has been crossed out, but not erased, and *‘Turks Rule’* chalked next to it. A half moon has also been drawn there.

The Arabic Food stall is constantly surrounded by a press of students, as well as guests and teachers, who wait for kebab rolls or chat with friends. The stall staff – a group of 14 and 15 year old students and a small number of slightly older young men and women – work hard to keep up with demand. The atmosphere around the stall is buzzing, and it continues to trade long after the other stalls have sold-out.

The Deputy Principal, or a member of his walkie-talkie team, regularly stands in the quad in front of the Arabic Food stall watching.

Around the middle of the afternoon I see the Deputy Principal standing with two Arabic boys (aged roughly 16-18) who have been hanging out at the Arabic Food stall on a BMX bike. The Deputy Principal tells the boys to ‘leave the school premises immediately’. One motions towards a students on the stall and replies ‘you told him to invite his family and friends, well I’m his friend

so I can be here'. The Deputy Principal responds 'No, we say who can be here, now please leave'.

A while later, the Deputy Principal ejects another Arabic boy, also on a BMX, who has spent the afternoon at the stall. The Deputy Principal says to him 'You were going to light up on the premises – now leave'. The boy cups an unlit cigarette in his hand. One of the students from the stall asks: 'Sir, what if I personally vouch for him?'. The Deputy Principal does not respond to this offer and directs the boy away. The Deputy Principal watches me watching.

Later in the afternoon I walk past the car park behind the quad and see a police van parked there. The Deputy Principal stands nearby with one of his walkie-talkie team and says to him 'the thing they have to realize is that we decide who comes onto the premises'. His colleague replies 'they don't realize that'.

(Fieldnotes)

Critical multiculturalism, critical anti-racism and, more recently, critical race theory (CRT) in education offer significant criticisms of the sort of pluralist multiculturalism that appears to frame Multicultural Day at Plains High. These critical accounts argue that pluralist (as opposed to political or critical) multiculturalism presents cultural difference as naturally occurring and neutral, and race/ethnic harmony (tolerance) as following on from a recognition and celebration of these differences. This version of multiculturalism is criticized for ignoring the persistent (discursive) constitution of race/ethnicity as axes for differentiation and stratification, erasing historical and contemporary exploitations and subjugations, and failing to note, let alone challenge, the enduring supremacy of the majority race/ethnicity. There is not scope within this paper to explore these criticisms as

fully as might be justified, but see Gilroy 1986; Gillborn 2004; Ladsen-Billings 2004; McCoy 2000; Rizvi 1997 for excellent accounts.

Work in these areas has also extended significantly our understandings of race and racism. In particular, critical analyses of Whiteness and the mechanisms whereby White supremacy (Gillborn 2005) or White hegemony (Youdell 2003) are secured; White Noise becomes overwhelming (McCoy 2000); and Whiteness is reproduced as at once normative and invisible (Leonardo 2004), offer extremely fruitful tools for interrogating the discourses that circulate in school settings and the subjectivating effects that these discourse might have. Also particularly useful for the analysis offered here are Lipman's (2004) account of how anti-Islamic discourses are pervading educational discourse and settings 'post- 9/11' and McCoy's (2000) reminder of the sense of 'epidemic' and being 'out-of-control' that infuses official and popular discourses (including pluralist multiculturalism) and so frames the terms in which difference might be intelligible.

The data that I produce and analyze here offer a series of moments from 'Multicultural Day' at Plains High. These readings are tentative and inevitably incomplete. They are also contentious and unsettling. The 'tokenism' of one-day-only ethnic food and craft stalls, wearing of traditional dress, and ethnic music and dance that form the focus of many such days of 'celebration' is evident (Solomos and Back 1996). And the inclusion of the traditional 'Aussie' dunking pool and cricket match underscores the refusal of Whiteness and its cultural forms to be shifted from the centre for even this token day. This, then, seems to be a very typical example of a (pluralist) 'Multicultural Day'. Also

evident, and the focus of this analysis, are struggles over the place and meaning of the 'Lebanese', 'Turkish' and 'Arabic' subject within this contemporary Australian high school.

Edward Said's works *Orientalism* (2003) and *Representing Islam* (1992) usefully identify the peculiarity of the 'Orient' and the 'Oriental', and later Islam, in the Western imagination. For Said, the problematic is the gap between how the Orient, the Oriental, Islam, and the 'Arab' actually are, and how these are envisioned and represented in Western ideas and media. While Said's work stresses heterogeneity and change, what is at stake for him is the distance between the real and the imagined. Taking a Foucauldian approach to these ideas, in particular approaching them through Butler's conceptions of performativity and subjectivation, radically unsettles this real/imagined divide. It does this by underscoring the discursive construction of this real and, therefore, exposing Orientalism(s) as constitutive of subjects, as performative, as subjectivating. Thinking about Orientalism as discourses steeped in historicity and sedimented meaning helps to expose how the scientific rationale of colonial north Africa; the religious rationale of Crusades in the near and middle east; and the Empire's deployment of these in the construction of the Orient as the Occident's exotic Other and the Oriental/Arab as in the proper service of his (sic) colonial master, all suffuse contemporary Western discourses of the Orient and of Islam. The 'Savage Arab' once in need of taming and Christianizing comes, in contemporary discourse, to be in need of Westernizing, 'democratizing'. And these are needs heightened to epidemic levels in post- 9/11 discourses of 'terror'. As Butler (1997a) notes in *Excitable Speech*, such discourses do not need to be made explicit

or spoken to be cited and to have performative force. On the contrary, discourses that go unspoken, that are silent or silenced, remain constitutive. Furthermore, Butler's suggests that the subjectivated subject acts her/his place in the discourses through which s/he has been rendered intelligible, through which subjecthood, albeit subjectivated and subjugated, is effected. In a discursive frame in which Whiteness (synonymous with Western-ness) is normative and these enduring (but mobile) discourses of the Orient/Islam continue to be cited, the White/Anglo/Aussie and the Arab act their respective place in discourse (but not necessarily always). And in a discursive frame of school authority in which a Teacher/Student binary is a fundamental subjectivating divide, the teacher and the student act their respective place in discourse (but, again, not always).

These conceptual tools, then, help us to identify these discourses as they are deployed, resisted, recuperated, and deployed again in the events of Multicultural Day. This is not an exhaustive account of the discourses that frame this setting (such an account is surely impossible). Further discourses are also clearly at play, intersecting the prevailing discourses of the Orient/Arab that I have sketched above, for instance, adult and youth heterosexual-masculinities, street/youth sub-culture, national and religious pride. This partial account, then, is offered as fragments of a porous network of discourses that are particularly significant to the subjectivations I am exploring here.

In the school's acceptance of the Arabic students' donation of an Arabic Food stall the school constitutes 'Arabic' as a legitimate axis of minority cultural difference and

subjectivates the Arabic subject as a good student. And in donating the stall and participating in Multicultural Day, this good-Arabic-student-subject takes up this subjecthood. In doing this, just as the school cedes the good-Arabic-student-subject, so this subject cedes the authority of the school institution by which s/he is subjectivated. And the students gain the rights of the student (to invite guests) but also subjection to teacher authority (to have their guests ejected).

The stall, the food it sells, and so the students and others who staff it, are named (by the students?) 'Arabic'. This collective performative interpellation is particularized by the further performative names 'Lebs' and 'Turks'. And nationalism meets competitive team sports (or in another discourse something more sinister) in the chalked proclamation (performative?) 'Lebs Rule' and 'Turks Rule'. The crossing out, without erasure, of 'Lebs Rule' (by the author of 'Turks Rule'?) does not lessen the constitutive effect of this textual practice. That the crossing out, the replacement of one 'ruling' nationality with another, is left for public display continues to cite the claim as well as the erasure and the overthrow that calls up. It seems that this is not a battle but a playful skirmish – Lebanese and Turkish students have organised and are staffing the 'Arabic Food' stall together under that collective given and taken name: 'Arab'. Indeed, there is a collectivity evident in these claims. Rather than erasing each others' self-constituting performatives, then, each claim in this apparent contest acts to render the other intelligible (Butler 2004), even if this is also a subjectivation.

In a discursive frame of normative Whiteness, the claim that Lebs or Turks rule cannot have performative force. The subjectivating practices of the school render the Arabic subject (the Leb or the Turk), but s/he remains (reviled?) ‘ethnic’ⁱⁱ in this context – in the school and the wider social context of contemporary Australia, Lebs and Turks certainly do not rule. Yet this practice of self, made possible through the prior subjectivation of these raced-nationed-regionalized subjects, is simultaneously felicitous. That is, Lebs and Turks may not rule, but the statement is not empty. Instead it silently calls up once again the threat of the savage Arab Other. What might be read as (invisibly) written on the fascia board is ‘Arabs Rule’. And the crescent moon of Islam drawn alongside these claims interpellates collective regional identity in religious terms – these good-Arabic-student-subjects also silently constitute themselves Islamic. And the constitution ‘Islamic’ alongside a proclamation of ruling calls up that deepest of post-9/11 Western/White fantasies – that Islam aims to Rule. And the spectre of 9/11, anti-Western “terror” silently rises. In this discursive frame, the Lebs and Turks (Arabs and Islamist) do not rule, but they would. And so these once good-Arabic-student-subjects are potentially subjectivated (through the coalescence of performative practices as external as the US media and as intimate as their own) as Islamic-Fundamentalist and even potential terrorist threats – and in urgent and absolute need of surveillance. And as the Arab/Islamist threatens to burst out of the confines of service and studenthood this is not the surveillance of the panopticon, but a very immediate and visible coercive surveillance – the White, male, senior teacher stands in the quad in front of the stall, walkie-talkie in hand.

This, then, is a moment in which the ‘Arabic’ students in the school gain public recognition as legitimate, and this subjectivation opens up the opportunity for self-constitution. But, given the discursive terrain of this subjectivation and practices of self, this self-constitution is one that threatens to slide back into injury and the constraint of the Savage Arab/Islamist threat.

It appears from this reading that it is the students’ practices that have suggested confrontation, a possible risk or danger – the wider discourse of Arabic threat is implicit in the claim that Lebs/Turks rule. Yet it is likely that the discourse of Islamic/Arabic threat would permeate this context at this moment without these chalked claims, that it would be ‘on the lips’ of White teachers – it was already one of the discourses of the Other that effect Whiteness and its normativity long before 9-11 happened. Again, Said’s reading of the relation between the Occident and the Orient, inflected with a notion of discourse and the performative, is pertinent. These long-established discourses echo in contemporary contexts without ever being spoken. Indeed, perhaps the absence of the need to explicitly cite a discourse in order for it to be cited goes to its endurance and performative force. But the appearance that this discourse was deployed by the students and only *responded to* by the school renders ‘legitimate’ the teachers’ apparent diagnosis of cultural discontent or threat and makes their move to police this threat not a raced and racist subjectivation but a necessary response. This is not to say that the squad of senior teachers armed with walkie-talkies is a response to this constitutive chalked claim – the establishment of this squad and the procurement of walkie-talkies to facilitate the best government of this population surely dates back to the students volunteering to mount the

kebab stall, their arrival in the suburb, the school, the White Australia Policy, the refusal of Orientals at 19th century colonial ports?

Butler's theoretical tools, then, enable us to see how the teachers subjectivate these students as particular raced-nationed-religioned subjects, with the possibilities for discursive agency and the constraints of the discursive terms of subjection that this entails. While the pronouncement 'Lebs/Turks Rule' might be a performative constitution of self as Arab not normally permitted in school, practicing these technologies of self simultaneously evokes the very discourses of epidemic difference and threat through which a school and wider society infused by Whiteness subjectivates the Arab Other. As Butler's work suggests they will, these students act their place in this web of discourses. And the school subjectivates these (no longer good) students in these terms and 'responds' accordingly – by keeping vigilant watch at the Multicultural Days most popular stall (and no doubt biggest fund raiser) and by ejecting from the premises any Leb/Turk/Arab youth who fails to fulfill the schools requirements of the 'good ethnic'. Indeed, the Arab as a good-student-subject might be outside prevailing intelligibility after all.

The notion of subjectivation also allows us to see how these teachers (and potentially their colleagues inside and beyond this school) are constituted by prevailing discourses of education, professionalism, the teacher and teacher authority (perhaps no longer the good teacher) as well as wider discourses – particularly pressing here hetero-masculinity and Whiteness. And, within this discursive frame, they are also constituted by their own

practices of self: White supremacy-masculine authority/entitlement is inscribed through their surveillant practices even as it also subjectivates these men racist and vulnerable (and so perhaps not masculine at all). The cost of being made subject here is not borne by the Lebanese/Turkish/Arabic subject alone. Indeed, by understanding these discursive practices as subjectivating we can begin to consider how these constitutions and their framing discourses might effect other students and subjects more broadly.

A series of tensions seem to endure through these subjectivations. First, the students are good students who contribute (very well) to the school's fund raising effort. They are also good 'ethnic' students who participate in Multicultural Day by displaying their 'difference'. But at the same time they are 'bad' students, or bad subjects: their ethnic(ized) sub-cultural display – Islamic crescents, Lebs/Turks Rule proclamations and BMX bikes – are all well outside the good student-subject. Second, this ethnic(ized) sub-culture is entangled with a further axis of tension in the subjectivation of these students – the discourse of the Islamic threat presses here and overwhelms the possibility of the good student – in this discursive frame the Arab/Islamist is a bad subject. Finally, multicultural pluralism (as enacted by Multicultural Day) also sits in tension with the Islamist threat and the policing of this. And yet, in post-9/11 Western contexts, perhaps this pluralism and policing are reconciled in the subjectivation of the good teacher and good citizen who celebrates diversity as long as it remains minoritized, marginalized and willing to be (impossibly) Westernized.

Performative politics, or politics in subjectivation

Butler uses the notion of the performative, the notion of discourse, and the notion of subjectivation to think about the constitution, constraint and political possibility of the subject. This paper has demonstrated the deployment of these notions for understanding practices inside schools and begun to show how performative politics might begin to destabilize both the explicit and silent discursive ties between biographies and studenthood, ties that make possible, and normal, the continued subjectivation of differentiated student-subjects.

Yet the relationships between the performative, discourse, and subjectivation, and the significance of these relationships for thinking about a post-structural politics merits further consideration.

The performative, Butler tells us, enacts what it names, it names and makes. In this sense, all categorical names and claims to action are potentially performatively constitutive of the subjects to whom they refer. But it is not only utterances that have the potential to act performatively. Butler (1997a, 1997b) also notes the possibility of bodily practices being performative and examines this possibility through her consideration of Bourdieu's (1991) bodily *habitus*. I have not pursued this here, but if we reflect on the bodies of the teachers and students in the episode above, we can begin to see how, for instance, the *particular way* that the boy sat on his BMX bike, unlit cigarette cupped in his hand, and the *particular way* that the Deputy Principal stood legs apart, shoulders square, walkie-talkie in hand, are bodily practices that simultaneously enact particular sorts of subjects.

In the move from the performativity of names to wider utterances, and from utterances to practices, the performative can be seen as a function within discourse. Indeed, it might be helpful to think of the performative as a particular element of discourse *and* as a nuance within the discursive processes through which discourses come to have productive effects. Discourse itself might be as performative. This suggests that the performative might be understood very specifically, after Butler's earlier engagements with the idea, and that the specific performative *and* the wider discursive field in which it is located can be understood as discursively constitutive.

Subjectivation understands the constitutive effect of discourses in this way, but the notion of subjectivation underscores how this constitution *is simultaneously and unavoidably entangled in the production of discursive relations of power*. Constitution within constraint is always present within the notions of the performative and discursive constitution, but when we take up a notion of subjectivation this simultaneous constitution within constraint – made subject *and* subjected to/by – becomes wholly explicit. Indeed, that discursive relations of power are integral to being a recognizable subject is central to the notion of subjectivation.

Subjectivation is effected through discursive practices, and understanding the performative is an important tool for understanding the constitutive effects of these discursive practices. But it is the more explicit sense of the way that power is implicated in subjectivation that I find particularly helpful. And this has led me to think, alongside Butler's (1997a) notions of performative politics and politics of hegemony, about a

politics in subjectivation in which discursively constituted and constrained subjects deploy discursive agency and act within and at the borders of the constraint of their subjectivation. By interrogating and rendering visible the subjectivating practices that constitute particular sorts of students tied to particular subjectivities and, by extension, particular educational (and wider) trajectories, we begin to uncover the potential of Butler's performative politics or a politics in subjectivation. Whether challenging the effects of, for instance, discourses of poverty, heredity, intelligence, heteronormativity, or, like here, racism and Whiteness, understanding these processes helps us to see where discursive interventions might enable new discourses to be rendered intelligible or enduring discourse to be unsettled within school contexts.

In mapping the subjectivating practices of a school and its teachers, and the practices of self of teachers and students, the paper demonstrates the importance of engaging these ideas for making sense of the practices and effects of schooling. The particular analysis offered here adds another layer of understanding to existing analyses of enduring patterns of raced educational inequality and exclusion. Yet it is not a pessimistic analysis – these theoretical tools insist that the potential to act with intent and, therefore, shift meaning is inherent to the contingent nature of discourse and the discursive agency inherent to subjectivating processes. The teachers' and students' practices that I have interrogated here are performative politics that both reinscribe and unsettle hegemonic meaning. These teachers are involved in practices of Whiteness that subjectivate raced-nationed-religioned students and these students are involved in practices of insurrection as they are subjectivated. The teachers' performative politics constitute themselves and Arabic

students in their respective places in enduring discourse. The students' performative politics are the skirmishes that these subjectivated subjects engage in when their discursive agency is worked against the prevailing discourses through which they are subjectivated. Or when these subjects deploy subjugated discourses through their practices of self, even if these discourses, and the subjectivities they constitute, are rapidly recuperated. Performative politics does not entreat us to identify the subjectivation and then move on to design a corresponding performative insurrection (although at the level of collective action activists/academics might want to do this). Rather, these are *politics in subjectivation*, enacted at any (every?) moment of constitution.

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ⁱ In *The Subject and Power* (1982) Foucault suggests that we might recognize three forms of struggle that exist in 'complex and circular relations' (p.213): struggles against domination; against exploitation; and against subjection. These struggles against subjection, for Foucault, are increasingly significant both to the subjects who struggle against their own subjection and to the enquirer into the present. At the centre of Foucault's work, then, is a concern with struggles for change. This is not a struggle for the liberation, or self-determination, of the subject. But struggles played out through the persistent potential for resistances in the circulation of counter- and subjugated discourses (Vol. 1) and the freedom suggested by the possibility of transformation (1988a).

ⁱⁱ In this setting, like many in multi-ethnic, urban Sydney, 'ethnic' is commonly used on its own to name minority ethnic individuals and communities. Indeed, it has become the object of ironic recuperation.