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Blood in our hearts or blood on our hands? The viscosity, vitality and validity of Aboriginal 'blood talk'.

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Abstract

Blood metaphors abound in everyday social discourse among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. However, 'Aboriginal blood talk', more specifically, is located within a contradictory and contested space in terms of the meanings and values that can be attributed to it by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In the colonial context, blood talk operated as a tool of oppression for Aboriginal people via blood quantum discourses, yet today, Aboriginal people draw upon notions of blood, namely bloodlines, in articulating their identities. This paper juxtaposes contemporary Aboriginal blood talk as expressed by Aboriginal people against colonial blood talk and critically examines the ongoing political and intellectual governance regarding the validity of this talk in articulating Aboriginalities.

Keywords

Aboriginal Australia, Aboriginality, identity, blood, anthropology.

Introduction

You are the New Australians, but we are the Old Australians. We have in our arteries the blood of the Original Australians, who have lived in this land for many thousands of years. (Patten and Ferguson 1938, 3)

Blood matters. It is a vital fluid for body function and this vitality is present in 'blood talk', which provides us with all manner of vital life meanings. Blood can be blue, new, young, cold, hot, bad, curdled or boiling. It can be on one's hands, tasted, drawn, spat, sweated, smelt or sought after. To talk about blood is to talk about temperament, kinship, ancestry, ethnicity and spirituality, as well as human body functions and physiology (Peile 1997). In the Western world, the most validated blood talk is contained in the biomedical narrative. In this context, blood is tangible, traceable, curable, transfusable and transportable. It is a liquid possessed by us and located within us, but cannot be fully known by us. One must seek out Western medical expertise to know the truth of our blood. Yet, social narratives abound that utilise an intrinsic truth of blood, thus, 'it's in my blood' conjures a deep, fundamental essence of self; indeed, 'blood is thicker than water' and there are no stronger bonds than those of a 'blood brother' or 'blood oath'.

Some time ago, Douglas (1970, 65) observed that the body provides a rich source of metaphors, convenient for talking or thinking about the moral and political problems that surround us (Turner 2003, 1). Blood talk has a particularly powerful social meaning because it is regularly associated with an essential vitality of life (Maluf 1954). Thus, to talk of this vitality is to frame both the meaning of the individual body and also the broader social, spiritual and political body. While blood metaphors remain very much part of everyday vernacular for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, we argue that 'Aboriginal blood talk', more specifically, is located within a contradictory and contested space in terms of its varying meanings, but also in relation to the flow of this talk in personal and public domains as expressed by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. On the one hand, talk about Aboriginal blood flowed freely when allied to the colonial encounter with the 'new world'; bringing sustenance to the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and around the world. Yet, in the postcolonial context, there is a wider political and intellectual governance of Aboriginal blood talk that restricts the ability to articulate particular truths via blood.

This governance of Aboriginal blood talk is evidenced by the more recent admonishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda, by anthropologist Myrna Tonkinson for his public pronouncement that "if you have a drop of Aboriginal blood, you're Aboriginal" (Gooda cited in Tonkinson 2012, 53). Gooda's assertion was in response to remarks from the Liberal party leader, Tony Abbott, comparing the 'urban', Aboriginal Member of Parliament Ken Wyatt as "not a man of culture", whilst the Northern Territory government minister Alison Anderson was juxtaposed as an "authentic

representative of the ancient cultures of central Australia” (cited in Tonkinson 2012, 53). Tonkinson (2012, 53) acknowledges that Gooda was rightly resisting racist, essentialist notions of Aboriginality in which it could “be authentic only when certain criteria, readily discerned by others ... are met”, however, she found his remarks about blood to be “discomfiting”. Tonkinson writes (2012, 53):

Gooda is reported to have said “Aboriginality is not defined by the colour of your skin, or whether you live in a remote or urban community” which is an incontrovertible observation and where he should probably have left it. Reference to blood, however, conjures up the absurd measurements that were used to classify and separate Aboriginal people in the past, including providing justification for removing children from their parents.

Contemporary blood talk, with its characteristic, discursive devices of innateness and immutability, are uncomfortably out of place in the now-intellectualised terrain of the ‘just’ social take on race, where essentialised ideas of race have been replaced with the metaphor of the social construct (Smaje 2014). The association of ‘blood and soil’ discourse within the global history of racial oppression and genocide (including the invasion of Aboriginal soil) is well documented (Kiernan 2007), adding to the danger of contemporary blood talk. Blood reveals, divides and unites (Hill 2014, 7) and whether the talk of it is deemed dividing or uniting is, itself, revealing. Like Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 193), we are not convinced of the neatness of objectivist/subjectivist divides applied to metaphors and neither wish to reify blood talk, mock or mythologise it. Rather, we wish to recognise it as deeply experiential and, therefore, a window into both how we reason and how we imagine. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 193) argue that:

Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness.

This paper examines how Australian Aboriginal identities are comprehended via blood talk in both historical and contemporary Australia, by examining, rather than silencing, Aboriginal people’s expressions of blood. We have juxtaposed the Aboriginal blood talk, which featured heavily in serving the colonial enterprise, with present-day Aboriginal blood talk, as articulated opportunistically by Aboriginal people through the first author’s PhD research. Unlike Tonkinson (2012, 52-53), we do not find Aboriginal people’s expressions of blood ‘absurd’ or less ‘robust’, nor do we see them as steadfast adoptions of the same blood talk that served the colonial enterprise. We do not claim that some blood talk is legitimate while other blood talk is not, rather, we identify the different viscosities of this talk between those expressed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in historical and contemporary contexts. Both the talk itself and the governance of this talk reveal to us the location of Aboriginal bodies and the supposed capabilities of Aboriginal minds and identities in postcolonial Australia.

Contextualising our Conversation

This paper arose from conversations and collaborative efforts about race, identity and belonging, as expressed through the metaphor of blood, between the first author, Aboriginal scholar Bond and the co-authors, her non-Aboriginal PhD

academic advisors. The diverse social biographies within the authorship ironically breached, but also revealed established conventions surrounding who can say what when it comes to race and blood. The process of working together on a publication based on a doctoral candidate's work is a common output of doctoral research, but, unlike most papers emanating from doctoral research, this is not a neat findings paper. Rather, the PhD is positioned here more as catalyst for a critical reflection on the significance of blood talk in that thesis, a thesis that was concerned with health and Aboriginal identity (Bond 2007). Moreover, we draw on a wider set of public commentaries about Aboriginal blood, from both the past and present, to consider the politics of blood talk. Our shared reflexivity surrounding these politics speaks about the interplay between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal metaphors of blood and how blood talk is variously rendered as innocent or dangerous.

Bringing Aboriginal metaphors of blood from the context of insider talk, where they were produced into the public arena, forced us to consider the politics around blood talk; politics that are not just about blood, but also the wider relationship between black and white Australia. Thus, in the public arena, there is much at stake because of the conundrum of an essentialist experience of self that blood talk invokes, signalling the danger of blood talk to non-Aboriginal people, who may disavow essentialist notions of race and identity, rendering such 'talking back' in blood metaphors a new taboo in Douglas' (1966) terms. In the contemporary Australian context, Aboriginal talk of blood within a body both reflects and creates the blood in the social body of shared Aboriginal identity, which non-Aboriginal people taboo in their admonishment and policing of Aboriginal identity. The process of writing this article established that the non-Aboriginal authors can take or leave blood talk in their everyday lives, a luxury and offhand relationship that is not available to Aboriginal people. The experiences of the Aboriginal first author and the Aboriginal people who participated in her PhD research do not reflect this indifference.

We acknowledge that there is a vast and rich literature (Allen 2002; Garrouette 2002; Sturm 2002; Kēhaulani Kauanui 2008; Tall Bear 2013) that exists in relation to blood talk and Indigenous peoples internationally in which there may be similarities and differences to the specific Australian Aboriginal context we examine in this paper. We are cautious as to what meanings we can infer from the opportunistic blood talk that emerged in Bond's PhD, as research participants were asked about their identity and not about the meaning of blood talk specifically. We offer these expressions simply as testimony to Aboriginal people's blood talk, to open up, rather than silence, future lines of inquiry regarding Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing in conceptualising the self via blood. Moreton-Robinson (2013, 343) argues that the anti-essentialist critiques that Aboriginal people are subjected to represent "a form of strategic essentialism" in that it is predicated upon a "conception of self, whose humanness is disconnected from the earth, [and] values itself above every other living thing", silencing those who do not define themselves in the same way. Thus, assertions about the absurdity or robustness of Aboriginal people's talk of blood has "more to do with who has the power to be a knower than the validity of non-western knowledges" (Moreton-Robinson 2013, 343).

Colonial Blood Talk and 'Our Aborigines'

Blood runs through colonial politics as much as it runs through the bodies of the colonisers and the colonised. It raises powerful political questions, particularly relating to racist imaginings of human capacity in the colonised body. Eugenic imaginings of blood in the 20th century provided a framework for classifying racial and national affiliations and was, for a time, a preoccupation of Western medical science. In the Australian colonial context, Aboriginal blood was a contaminating substance that mattered only in the way it inhibited Aboriginal peoples' "transition into civilization" (Elkin, cited in Macgregor 1999, 243). McCorquodale (1997, 24) identified that there were "no less than 67 identifiable classifications, descriptions or definitions ... used from the time of white settlement to the present" to define Aboriginality. In most instances, blood was the 'standard test' for these classifications and was referenced variously in these definitions as a 'strain' 'preponderance' or 'admixture' (McCorquodale 1997).

The emergence of blood quantum discourses in Australia during the early to mid-1900s provided a "perverse arithmetic" (Vizenor, quoted in Strong and Van Winkle, 1996, 554) in which white colonisers believed that they could precisely measure the dilution of race. The sexual liaisons between Aboriginal women and white men and the children of these relationships, which led to a rapidly increasing Aboriginal population, were cause for moral panic, not least because they debunked the colonial myth of a dying race. This new population required a new imagining. Here, Aboriginality was quantified according to categories of 'full-blood', 'half-caste', 'quarter-caste', 'quadroon' or 'octoroon' (McCorquodale 1997) and articulated accordingly in government records, literary texts and everyday social discourse. Blood provided a conceptual framework for talking about Aboriginality in the colonial context, yet it was largely through skin colour that the 'fullness' of one's Aboriginal blood was determined (Broome 1982, 161).

Colonial blood talk was fraught with contradictions in comprehending Aboriginal identities. Some viewed the mixing of blood as inheriting the evilness of both races (Beckett 1988, 197), whilst others attributed 'mixed blood' Aboriginal people with a greater degree of civility because of the presence of 'white blood'. Austin (1992) notes that hereditary explanations of delinquent behaviour remained in scientific thought through the notion of instinct psychology, in that those possessing Aboriginal blood were always susceptible to reverting to their primordial tendencies and instincts of 'savages'. Yet, a drop of European blood could provide a transitional possibility for Aboriginal people to become European and various legislative frameworks put this idea to work, particularly in the governing of Aboriginal sexual relationships (Protection of Aborigines and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Amendment Act 1934, Qld, s7a), the removal of 'half-caste' children from Aboriginal mothers (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families, 1997) and/or exclusion of 'quadroons' from the definition of 'native' in some states (The Native Welfare Amendment Act 1960, WA, s.2b).

Within historical and contemporary public discourses, we can observe a certain frustration at the power of just one drop of Aboriginal blood. In the 1930s, Wilkinson (cited in *The Advertiser*, 1934, 20) asserted that Aboriginal blood was more easily "diluted as not to be noticeable in any way" when compared to that of the "negro", thus heralding a swifter physiological absorption of 'half-caste' Aboriginal people into the Australian population. Yet, an increasingly 'European-looking', Aboriginal population had been observed in various parts of the country since the turn of the last century and this diluted Aboriginal blood did not necessarily lead to the anticipated diluted Aboriginal identities, as articulated and expressed by Aboriginal people. In the same article, anthropologist Norman Tindale (cited in *The Advertiser*, 1934, 20) expresses concern about several cases of "fair-skinned" or "15/16ths white(s)" who "resemble Europeans", but still live off "Government charity" and who seem capable of becoming "true Aborigines" through their "association with the blacks".

Some 80 years later, Australian newspaper columnist Andrew Bolt (2009) expressed similar sentiments about the persistence of Aboriginal identities among Aboriginal people who “out of their multi-stranded but largely European genealogy, decide to identify with the thinnest of all those strands, and the one that’s contributed least to their looks”. Both Tindale’s (cited in *The Advertiser*, 1934) and Bolt’s concerns relate to a certain treachery or deception among the ‘mixed-blood’ Aboriginal people who were apparent beneficiaries of both identities. According to their logic, Aboriginal people should choose one social identity associated with their ancestry, which is to be determined by an imaginary quantification of blood, often evidenced via skin colour. Aboriginal blood quantum discourses were useful when Aboriginal people’s identities adhered to colonial expectations of a diluted and/or disappearing identity, but the logic of Aboriginality was disrupted when Aboriginal identities did not comply with the logic of colonial blood talk.

Today there is a new logic of blood talk imposed upon Aboriginal people, not in terms of measuring Aboriginality, but in terms of measuring the validity of Aboriginal people’s expressions of their identity. Gooda (cited in Tonkinson 2012) is not alone among Aboriginal people in producing conceptually inconvenient ‘talking back’ using essentialist blood talk, nor is Tonkinson in her concerns about the acceptability of Aboriginal expressions of Aboriginality (Berndt and Berndt 1992; Coombs et al, 1983; Keefe 1988; Hollinsworth 1992). Keefe’s analysis of whether Aboriginality should exist as ‘persistence’ or ‘resistance’ is one such example. Aboriginality-as-persistence combines the notion of inheritance and the persistence of traditional practices. References to genes, inheritance and assertions of ‘it’s in the blood’ by Aboriginal people are common here and are “drawn from a notion of an essential, enduring and unilinear Aboriginal culture, transmitted through blood and constantly reproduced despite white intervention” (Keefe 1988, 72). Keefe criticises Aboriginality-as-persistence as essentialist, contradictory, inauthentic and disempowering for Aboriginal people. Lattas (1992) argues that this scholarly stance by Keefe is by no means accidental, suggesting that the paternalism inherent in Aboriginal studies is merely a ‘reformulation’ and ‘redeployment’ of the historical, pastoral paternalism of Europeans.

Thus, Aboriginal blood talk sits at an awkward juncture in Australian race politics. It can be seen to represent a false consciousness of sorts; a taking on of colonial oppression and an embodiment of blood quantum creating a quaint, but ultimately, unfashionable narrative of identity. Yet, it also represents a steadfast ‘talking back’; a refusal to follow the trajectory of a white rendition of race and blood. Surprisingly, there has been little acknowledgement or examination of this type of blood talk. There is a discomfort in the politics of blood talk that appears to dissolve scholarly interest. The essentialist nature of blood talk, from whosoever speaks it, brings its own fear. White racist essentialisms about the colour of blood have been, thankfully, resisted by an anti-racist discourse, however, this has brought its own dilemmas as essentialist ‘talking back’ is then inconveniently based on the same kind of problematic authority that served the interests of oppression.

The dismissal of essentialist blood talk by Aboriginal people ignores the fact that Aboriginal people are forced to engage frequently with blood talk in response to non-Aboriginal inquisition and policing of their identity. Colonial discourses of blood quantum, while absent from legislative and scholarly domains in post-colonial Australia, remains the ‘standard test’ in which Aboriginal people’s identities are made comprehensible to non-Aboriginal Australia (Dodson 1994, 3). Interrogations of ‘how much’ ‘what part’ or ‘what percentage’ of one’s body, or rather one’s blood, is Aboriginal is highly offensive to Indigenous Australians (Reconciliation Australia 2010) because it calls into question the legitimacy of one’s family and cultural connections, history and lived experiences, as well as the motivation and logic of Aboriginal identity expressions. Dodson (1994, 4) asserts,

The moment the question is asked, ‘Who or what is Aboriginal?’, an historical landscape is entered, full of absolute and timeless truths, which have been set in place by self-professed experts and authorities all too ready to tell us, and the world, the meaning of Aboriginality. Nearly suffocated with imposed labels and structures, Aboriginal peoples have had no other choice than to insist on our right to speak back.

We recognise the importance of blood talk as a regular part of Aboriginal social discourse and 'speaking back'. To paraphrase Strong and Van Winkle (1996), counter hegemonic discourse may be, for many reasons, itself embedded in hegemonic essentialisms. When all it takes is a drop of black blood to stigmatise and oppress an Aboriginal person, it is important to address the importance of blood talk that reclaims that same drop as a symbol of Aboriginal strength and pride. Blood talk is written deep within the discourse of colonisation, but is also written deep within the identity of those oppressed by colonisation.

Functions of Contemporary Aboriginal Blood Talk

Blood talk persists in contemporary Aboriginal social discourse, guarding the social body from intrusion and defying non-Aboriginal claims to know how best to speak of blood.

We have observed Aboriginal blood talk within the first author's PhD research as being one way of narrating identity among Aboriginal people (Bond 2007) in an urban Aboriginal community. Interestingly, Aboriginal blood was not an intended site of exploration in Bond's research, but it emerged as one of the key ways in which Aboriginal people articulated their identity. The blood talk analysed here is as 'mixed' as the blood that is said to be running through these bodies and comprises both Aboriginal people's meaning of blood and non-Aboriginal people's meanings of Aboriginal blood. For some, blood talk emerged as a deliberate act of 'talking back' to colonial blood discourses. For others, blood talk was a taken-for-granted way of articulating their identity. That blood flowed throughout Aboriginality narratives in unsolicited, but varied ways speaks to the power and potency of this talk. We identify below key modalities of Aboriginal blood talk, as reflected in Bond's (2007) research and now, juxtaposed with both historical and current public, blood talk as articulated by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voices.

Blood as relationships: 'They're my blood'

References to other people as 'my blood' are common in Aboriginal social discourse and, in these instances, blood is more than "the stuff of kinship" (Lawrence 2011, 1231). Being the blood of a person or group of people represents an embodiment of blood. Embodying blood is a relational act, as one person cannot be 'blood' independently of others. Articulating blood, in this instance, requires a possessive pronoun; one is always 'my' blood or 'their' blood. Most frequently, being someone's blood means being from the same biological family, whether those members are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal family members. Being of the same blood may also refer to shared ancestry, in terms of being of the same traditional, cultural or language group. However, this is not always the case, as references to my 'blood brothers' or 'my blood' can also refer to individuals who do not share a genealogical connection. In this instance, 'my blood' refers to other people who share a close-lived connection with another individual. For example, a child who may have been reared by another family or individuals who share a close upbringing may refer to themselves as being 'blood'. At the same time, those with shared genealogies, but minimal shared social experiences can still be referenced as 'my blood'.

Blood, in this context, infers intimacy between Aboriginal people. Being of the same blood affords individuals within that group certain privileges, as well as responsibilities or obligations. If someone is 'your blood', there are particular social expectations that one must perform, which, in turn, should be reciprocated. The concept of being one's blood shifts blood meanings beyond an internally located bodily fluid to an expression of relatedness for Aboriginal people between Aboriginal people, as well as with non-Aboriginal people. Blood is the connection, but not exclusively in a literal sense of 'blood relative', rather blood acts as a binding agent for intimate social relationships and is a powerful prescriptor of Aboriginal social behaviours and interactions. According to Aboriginal blood talk, blood can explain and affirm relatedness either socially or biologically.

Blood as Aboriginality: 'My identity is Aboriginal and that's it'

Aboriginal identities are frequently explained through the possession of Aboriginal blood within one's body. As articulated by Gooda (cited in Tonkinson 2012) "one drop of Aboriginal blood" acts as a sufficient marker to affirm identity. In Aboriginal blood talk, it is through the possession of Aboriginal blood that one's Aboriginality is known. Blood, in this sense, offers permanence of Aboriginality and counters miscegenative concerns. Neither diluted nor tainted, the social identity of Aboriginality can only be articulated because Aboriginal blood exists in one's veins. Formally recognised definitions of Aboriginality by the state include the notion of Aboriginality 'as descent' and it is through blood that this descent is frequently cited by Aboriginal people.

I want my grandkids to know it no matter who's their mother, or who's their father, they've still got that Aboriginal blood in them and I want them to know their culture and them great-great grandkids ... I would like them to keep the blood just black, but you know, you can't pick ya kids partners, you know but whilst they know where they're from, teach them their grandparents, where their great grandparents are from, and trace back as far as they can you know, cause you know gotta be proud, proud and strong ... I said to my sons and my daughter you know, this is where we gotta go now, up the north, get that you gotta get that good spirit in ya for corroboreeing and your kids, you know your kids, you gotta show your kids because they're mixtures our kids ... (Bond 2007, 133, 146)

This grandmother spoke of her grandchildren's blood 'mixture', avoiding a quantification of Aboriginal blood, while still acknowledging their diverse cultural ancestries. Aboriginal blood, regardless of quantity, was a sufficient impetus for maintaining cultural traditions and Aboriginal genealogies. We observe, here, the colourisation of Aboriginal blood as black, which is evident in colonial narratives of 'black blood'. The notion of 'keeping the blood just black' certainly appears as a philosophical ideal in this instance, but was not synonymous with black skin. Black skin was articulated as a favourable outcome, rather than essential requirement, in commentaries surrounding the birth of children within this community and could be seen as evidence of the strength of Aboriginal bloodlines. In its absence, however, the strength of black blood could be witnessed through behaviours.

The grandmother spoke about the importance of black blood and how it was imperative for her that her children and grandchildren continue to return to their traditional lands and dance and maintain knowledge of their Aboriginal bloodlines. Importantly, the potency of blood talk was not simply a convenient narrative produced by Aboriginal people whose bloodlines were more 'diluted' than others. The power of Aboriginal bloodlines is that its presence (regardless of quantity) requires the maintenance of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and behaviours. Its presence enables a certain comprehensibility of identity, community and culture, as evidenced below:

It felt good actually knowing where your blood comes from. It just sort of eases your mind that just cause you live in a suburban area, that you don't have traditional ties to that particular area where you're living, it's good to have in the back of your mind – you know where your blood comes from and whatever else happens from now on, you know where you're from. (Bond 2007, 133)

Knowing 'self through blood' may also refer to knowing the origins of one's blood. Commonly Aboriginal people introduce themselves in terms of where their bloodline is from, which is articulated as a geographical place or traditional clan or tribal group. Despite not maintaining physical connections to one's traditional lands (alternatively referred to as 'country' by Aboriginal people), knowing the country in which one's Aboriginal blood originates provides a sense of certainty in identity. Blood talk binds one to country, whereby the relationship to country is transmitted via one's bloodlines. Moreton-Robinson (2013, 335) evidences this when she states that Indigenous people possess "bloodline(s) to country through creator and ancestral birth". In light of discourses that threaten to erode Aboriginality, such as skin colour and blood quantum or dislocation from family, community or culture, blood talk provides permanency of identity asserting a seamless continuing connection to

country, but it is not deployed exclusively by those failing to meet 'authentic' notions of Aboriginality.

You can be mixed blood and that but, my identity is Aboriginal and that's it. (Bond 2007, 147)

While some Aboriginal people avoid blood quantum talk, others fiercely resist it by reason of distinguishing quantifications of blood from identity. Aboriginal people are accustomed to colonial constructions and surveillance of their Aboriginal identity, and are frustrated by ongoing requests by non-Aboriginal people to demonstrate precisely which part or percentage of their bodies complies with the category of Aboriginality. Within Aboriginal blood talk, the possession of other non-Aboriginal blood within one's body was acknowledged, but this did not disrupt their ability to articulate a 'full' or complete Aboriginal identity. For some, articulating a cultural identity that encompasses the possession of non-Aboriginal blood was narratively implausible. For instance, one man spoke about his upbringing, camping on the outskirts of a rural town because his family's Aboriginality precluded them from living in the town. Yet he recounted how the truthfulness of his identity narrative as an Aboriginal man was frequently scrutinised by non-Aboriginal people, largely because he did not acknowledge his other bloodlines. This interrogation was offensive to him, because, throughout much of his life, his Aboriginal blood was sufficient to preclude him from accessing the privileges associated with his other bloodlines.

Despite the colonial quantifications of Aboriginal identities via blood, the operationalisation of these categories varied little according to the social histories of oppression, exclusion and marginalisation experienced by Aboriginal people. Thus, blood quantum notions of Aboriginality are incomprehensible for Aboriginal people and the continued requirement to engage with this illogical talk is offensive. Blood talk featured heavily in expressions of Aboriginal identities, although it was via 'Aboriginal bloodlines' rather than 'parts' of Aboriginal blood that Aboriginalities could be understood and explained by Aboriginal people.

Blood as history, memory and emotion: 'Somehow in the blood, the feeling is there'

In Aboriginal blood talk, Aboriginal blood can transmit history and emotion within, between and across Aboriginal bodies and it explains intergenerational inheritance of behaviours, memories and meanings. Here, Aboriginal blood is constructed as being powerful and potent; not always readily understood, but asserted nonetheless as a remedy for uncertainty in identity.

I think we've got the gift of knowing our identity, you know. It don't matter how dark or how fair we are you know, white mother, black father or if we lost. Somehow in our blood, the feeling's there you know. (Bond 2007, 131)

Given that blood is associated with a vitality of life, it is not surprising that Aboriginal blood could transmit a therapeutic 'feeling' in articulating Aboriginality. Rather than subscribe to notions of Aboriginal blood as inferior and diluted, the composition of Aboriginal blood is one of pride, health and wholeness according to Aboriginal blood talk. Interestingly, the task of talking about Aboriginal identity in terms of bloodlines was seen as being a distinctly Aboriginal act and reaffirmed the presence of Aboriginal blood.

I think being Aboriginal is like, I've got two other bloodlines in me, and that's Scottish and Irish, and being Aboriginal on that side is kind of working out your dreaming and stuff, how you work out as a human being, how you react to different things and that, like sometimes I look at me, my three bloodlines. When I used to bash kids up when I was younger ... that was the Scottish side coming out of me. And, then I'd say sorry to them later on down the track, that's the Aboriginal side cause we are a kind people. And then I'd look at it and laugh at it you know, and that's the Irish side coming out of me. But I look at how the race or the culture affected me as a human being, because I don't know how I could have connections to the land if I didn't have the Aboriginal bloodlines through me you know. (Bond 2007, 132)

This person explains how each of his bloodlines, in terms of his Aboriginal, Irish and Scottish heritage, determined his behaviours and actions throughout his life. For him, Aboriginality represents a genealogical inheritance of kindness, empathy and self-analysis, while Scottish and Irish bloodlines manifested themselves through other behaviours, and this speaks of the essentialism warning of Tonkinson (2012) and others. Interestingly, blood lineage is not articulated as an exclusively Aboriginal possession, but making sense of one's self through the lens of blood talk certainly draws from a rich Aboriginal vantage point. For instance, "working out your dreaming" and "knowing how you work out as a human being" was necessary, possible and logical for this man because of his Aboriginal bloodline. Making sense of self through bloodlines enables acknowledgement of a variety of cultural ancestries in which there are no contradictions or threats to his Aboriginality, primarily through the Indigenist framing around bloodline meanings. This narrative of blood represents the reason for his lived experiences of Aboriginality and is evidence of the existence of the Aboriginal blood within his body. Again, blood and its connection to land is expressed, however, rather than knowing where one's blood comes from, here he speaks of how his relationship to the land is itself evidence of Aboriginal blood.

In a similar vein, one community member recounted a 'calling' to work back in her traditional country with a community organisation. She proudly spoke of the success of the organisation she was involved with and how, when she had told this story to another Aboriginal person, they related her success to the strength of her bloodlines. Both the 'calling' and the success of the organisation were evidence of something being transmitted through blood and evidence of the potency of her Aboriginal blood, much like the previous person's connection to land. Within Aboriginal blood talk, bloodlines are powerful in terms of their ability to possess and transmit history, memory, trauma and strength. As one Aboriginal man explains:

Seeing that bloodline that we got, the struggles that we been going through for 200 years, and that struggles been passed on from generation to generation, it's been like, that generation where it carries on to you, that struggles they had from back when they got taken away, and the fears that they had in them, that passed through pregnancy, through bloodlines, through genes, to you and get[s] to you. You're like generations of like, being put down and then seeing someone succeed, it's like all these spirits and all your blood and all your genes is touched at once, and you get the goose bumps and you get the tears and I think that's where you know, like the feelings come from ... It does touch you when something happens you know, the struggles with your mum getting put in a home, and getting raped and bashed and then like, you know, she's touching you. It's like one big thing; the whole community just gets touched by it. And it's something that non-Indigenous people can feel, because they might go and cheer on for Aboriginal people – it's great to see that you know, but it's the goose bumps that you get, the tears is that you know, your whole body you know, of wanting to jump up and punch the air you know, and you can only get it with that bloodline and the struggle coming through. (Bond 2007, 138)

To talk of bloodlines is to reference a biological/genetic inheritance of struggle experienced by Aboriginal people across generations. This notion of Aboriginal blood can be experienced as a physical manifestation, through goosebumps, tears and joy. Aboriginal people are said to experience moments differently precisely because of the presence of Aboriginal blood. Other Aboriginal people have referred to this blood talk as blood memory (Fejo-King 2013, 215-216). Blood memory refers to the ability of blood to transmit dreaming, family, spirits, country and totem and, according to this blood talk, Aboriginal people who have been removed from family and/or country can reconnect with their Aboriginality because of their Aboriginal bloodline. Blood talk, in this sense, ascribes a capability of Aboriginal blood not dissimilar to instinct psychology during the last century. The difference here is the 'primordial tendencies' are reconfigured by a strong Aboriginal voice as desirable, rather than as deviant by the colonist voice. Although it is not the power of 'one drop' of Aboriginal blood that authenticates or affirms Aboriginalities, rather it is the seamless nature of bloodlines that renders Aboriginalities intelligible.

Meaning-making and Truth-telling in Aboriginal Blood Talk

Blood metaphors are not a unique linguistic or conceptual artefact of Aboriginal people and cultures. Blood metaphors flow through various historical and cultural contexts from old English texts of the 11th century, religious ceremonies of innumerable faiths, pseudoscientific theories of the 20th century, popular culture and everyday social discourse, as well as medical science (Lawrence 2011, 1231). In acknowledging the breadth of these domains, Carsten (2013, s13) proclaims that the universal function of blood is that it is the "stuff of truth ... morally, personally, politically and medically". Indeed, social truths of Aboriginality have been witnessed in Aboriginal blood talk espoused by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The historical narratives of Aboriginal blood revealed to us the 'necessary' colonial truths of Aboriginality as dying, diluted and deviant. Not surprisingly, Aboriginal people have asserted alternate truths about their blood.

The alternate truths about Aboriginality in blood talk assert that Aboriginality is not able to be polluted or diluted. When Aboriginal people speak about Aboriginal blood, they speak about the vitality of their identity, culture and community. The transmission of Aboriginal blood talk fuels kinship, identity and sovereignty located in the Aboriginal body politic. To talk about blood memory and the location of traits within one's blood does not signal a potential for deviance, but rather, enables narratives of strength, resistance, connection and pride in Aboriginal identity and agency. According to the logic of Aboriginal blood talk, Aboriginal blood is therapeutic, remedying the conditions that might render Aboriginality problematic, such as skin colour, hybridity or social and cultural dislocation.

When Aboriginal people speak of blood, they are, indeed, resisting white, racist, essentialised notions of blood quantum and inferior, tainted blood. This subversion of white, racist essentialisms in Aboriginal blood talk, however, is not replaced with claims of superior blood meanings to reframe a more desirable racial identity. When Mick Gooda (in Tonkinson 2012) talks about "one drop of Aboriginal blood", he is not suggesting that it is a single biological measure of Aboriginality as Tonkinson suggests (2012, 54). He is speaking about the potency of Aboriginal bloodlines diverting attention away from the quantity of Aboriginal blood; about an appreciation of its qualities. Blood talk for Aboriginal people explains complex and not-readily-tangible concepts of identity, spirituality and relatedness to each other and to country through bloodlines. Because of these bloodlines, Aboriginal people are able to articulate a complete social identity regardless of their 'multi-stranded' heritage. Aboriginal blood talk explains a logic of identity in which it is lived, not compartmentalised. According to this blood talk, there is no precise instrument that can measure, validate or verify these identity truths—the truthfulness is revealed in the vitality of this talk in everyday social discourse between Aboriginal people. The disjuncture between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal assertions about Aboriginal blood could not be more revealing. The colonial enterprise has transfixed its gaze upon measuring Aboriginal blood via blood quantum to anticipate diminishing Aboriginalities and, thus, cannot comprehend Aboriginal blood talk beyond this meaning. Aboriginal people, instead, talk of bloodlines, which evidences the endurance of Aboriginalities and relatedness to one another and to country.

Conclusion

There is something quite powerful about Aboriginal blood as a site of expression and resistance, as it is, seemingly, incontestable by its invisibility. According to Aboriginal blood talk, Aboriginal blood is located inside Aboriginal bodies and is 'felt' rather than observed. In contrast to 'blue blood', which was visible to the naked eye (Ibrahim 2008, 218), black blood can only be narrated by the bodies who 'feel' that blood. Despite all intensive attempts to observe black blood via skin colour, Aboriginal blood talk strongly contests such logic. The Aboriginal body via blood talk thus guards Aboriginal identities from intrusion and the ongoing identity policing and classifications to which Aboriginalities are subjected.

However, that same body must weather the brunt of this talk and this is where blood talk is lethal to Aboriginal bodies. The persistence of colonial blood talk in everyday social discourse dissects Aboriginal bodies into parts, halves, quarters, bits and percentages. This dissection of Aboriginal bodies to 'get at' Aboriginal blood as a measure of identity represents a mutilation of Aboriginalities. Yet, Aboriginal responses to such attacks on their body and identity through assertions of bloodlines are deemed insufficient, illogical and delusional. Aboriginal people's blood talk ignites scepticism and alarm, rather than investigation or analysis. While there is no doubt danger in talking about blood, there is also danger in rebuking this talk. Aboriginal people draw on meanings of blood that appear to be widely shared, in particular, the idea of blood as a core essence of self and identity. In doing so, their blood talk, for some, sits uncomfortably close to the very blood discourses that formed a critical role in colonial oppression. Yet the irony of anthropologists paternalistically explaining the shortfalls of an Aboriginal false consciousness, predicated on an apparent lack of understanding of the instruments of white racial oppression, is, for us, a more telling disjuncture (Berndt and Berndt 1992; Coombs et al, 1983; Keefe 1988; Hollinsworth 1992; Tonkinson, 2012).

Colonial blood talk told us little about Aboriginal identities and much more about colonial aspirations for Aboriginal bodies. From the dying race mythology to discourses of absorption, Aboriginal blood has been measured, pathologised, bred and spilt, each anticipating the demise of Australia's Aboriginal population. Thus, in postcolonial Australia, much like in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Aboriginal blood has come to symbolise guilt. The silencing of blood talk seeks to wash clean from our consciousness white, racist essentialisms of Aboriginal blood and, in so doing, ignores the universal truths of blood as a 'vital fluid' and 'bearer of life' for Aboriginal people. Even "great Neptune's ocean" (Shakespeare, trans. 2014, 2.2:57) cannot wash clean from our consciousness, or rather clean from our hands, the Aboriginal blood that stains them. Aboriginal blood will always remain in the hearts, minds and mouths of Aboriginal people as an essential vitality of Aboriginality.

"A quarter, a sixteenth, an eighth or a half—fuck all that shit, 'cause I'm full in my heart" (Oliver, cited in Heiss 2012).

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