Becoming Australia
JAS Symposium Series

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Becoming Australia
is dedicated to
Bill Hauritz
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Foreword

Phillip Adams

It was like stepping into a Drysdale painting. Lots of kids on a square of hot asphalt, squinting up at a polychromatic textile dangling limply from a pole on a windless morning. ‘I love God and my country’, they chanted with right hand on left pectoral although some, as I recall, got that arse-about. ‘I will serve the King and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the law’.

Does that ceremony from the 1940s survive in the 1990s? Any part of it? The King is long gone and God isn’t what He used to be. But ‘our country’? What’s become of that?

Understanding Australia seemed easy then. First of all, we were a dirty great island — two, if you remembered to include Tassie. So you could use your Derwent pencil to put a blue fringe right around the plastic template. How many nations were as easily delineated? And as a branch office of Britain, Australia was, clearly, at the top of the food chain. For most of us, Aborigines were out of sight and mind and migration was just beginning to confuse the issue. In those happy days we were a sort of eucalyptic master race.

Half a century later Australia is more elusive. What is it? What are we? Yes, Australia still looms large in Mercator’s Projection, but it has become a montage of mythologies, a choice of histories, a profusion of beliefs and disbeliefs and demographics. On the one hand it is a travel brochure depicting Uluru, the Opera House and trademark fauna. On the other, it is a roll call of famous names. From Captain Cook to Phar Lap. Behold a set of cultural cliches, not to mention a flag and a host of familiar arguments.

But Australia is also a bewilderment, a confusion, an intensification of conflicts thanks to a multiculturalism that extends far beyond race or religion. Australians now live in a plethora of parallel uni-
verses that, whilst occupying the same space, remain blissfully igno-
rant of each other. The consensus that defines a nation — at least as
important as its constitution — falls victim to what newspaper lift-
outs call ‘lifestyles’

While the oceans may still lap the shore, Australia is being nib-
bled from the edges, as we surrender to the new technologies that
transcend geographies in favour of globalism and electronic tribalisms.

In the 1970s I wrote a report to John Gorton which began ‘It is
time to hear our own voices, see our own landscapes and dream our
own dreams’. That led to the establishment of a new film industry —
designed to ward off the leviathan from Los Angeles and help with a
‘national identity’ Thirty years on that battle is effectively lost. Out
of every $100 spent at the box office, around $95 are spent on an
American film. Which leaves $5 for Australian film and the films of
every other country. And if Drysdale was to paint some kids now —
as an update to his ‘Cricketers’ — they’d be wearing baggy pants,
Reeboks and reversed baseball caps.

In this book some of our finest minds consider what Australia is,
and why. Where it has come from and where, if anywhere, it’s going.
Becoming Australia is challenging and, frequently, exhilarating. And
not entirely without hope. Perhaps, despite all the evidence of disin-
tegration, including the recent outbursts of bigotry, we are still in-
volved in nation-building.
Introduction

Michael Peterson

Constant conversation is the hallmark of a healthy society. It enables a voyage of discovery where we can learn as much about ourselves as we can about others. At the social level conversation allows us to encounter contrasting views of the world and learn to respond creatively to others’ values and experiences. We learn to perceive and examine our own prejudices, to develop humility for our opinions and respect for others’. It is the potential for enlightenment inherent in the process of informed and open discussion that is perhaps our proudest living cultural product.

We are rewarded with a flood of possibilities each time we invest the time and energy in opening up the appropriate cultural space for informed and informing conversation. The Woodford Forum, from which this book springs, offers just such an opportunity for transformative dialogue. Each year the festival highlights some of the best Australian music, dance, theatre, comedy, visual arts, and performance poetry, interwoven with films, workshops, talks, forums, and debates in an environment of creativity and participation. Held each year between Christmas and New Year, a time of year that invokes both celebration and reflection, the convivial Woodford atmosphere is an ideal setting to facilitate public discussion on important issues relating to modern Australian life.

A public forum in this context is a site of gathering, of negotiation and renewal, a place of dialogue, of top-down, bottom-up and lateral deliberation. Determined to awaken and encourage thought rather than direct it, such public conversations remind us that we all have a hand in discovering and shaping our own cultural identity. Conversations like this are a glowing example of the great potential of a civil society.
Becoming Australia engages with many of the tensions currently experienced in the broader Australian context — notions of identity, place, history, tradition, environment, reconciliation, multiculturalism, our national and international responsibilities. On these issues we have some tough decisions to make, but it is exactly these choices that will define us.

Our collective 'becoming' is an open commitment to view debate and conversation, not as a contest, but as a context. We are a nation actively in the making; a work in progress, a work in process.

Will we choose a becoming Australia? We need an optimism that is creative, strategic, practical and committed. For all of Australia's millenarian anxiety, this point in time can be our watershed. The only promise our society holds is the commitments we are constantly making to it.

As long as Australia remains a byword for change and creative possibility, Australians retain a very real chance of being a worthy community.
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Humphrey McQueen, the well-known historian, biographer and critic, defines the historian’s work as ‘predicting the past’. This is the idea of history I want to invoke in thinking about future options for the Australian identity, a sense of history which sees the past as still active, still changeable, powerful and elusive, still up for grabs in the present. Any sense of identity, especially national identity, brings with it a particular history which we can align ourselves with, or take our bearings from, and which determines our options for the future. I was very struck a few years back to hear a young Aboriginal kid on television say, ‘You can’t have a future without a past’ As well as anything could, that statement defines my theme.¹

What pasts can we predict for Australia? As we move into the new century, the new millennium, and perhaps, too, the new republic, what histories or traditions will prove the most powerful for the Australian nation? What understandings of the past will we draw upon to make sense of where we are in the present and where we’re heading in the future? What history of Australia will matter, either because it’s widely accepted or because it becomes central to debate and disputation about who we are as a nation?

In posing these questions I’m not just thinking about the histories that are written in universities but about the much wider circulation of history in our political and popular cultures. Histories — ways of understanding the Australian past and its bearing on the present — are created for us and by us every day and circulate through the wide range of public and media spheres: through political and legal talk, popular history and coffee-table picture books, Australiana shops, cinema, radio and television, newspapers and magazines, historical
theme parks and museums like the Stockman’s Hall of Fame, and informal activities such as the collation of family genealogies, pilgrimages to Gallipoli, community history groups and so forth.

However much the teaching of history is in decline in schools and universities, and the statistics indicate this is serious, history in these broad terms is still a booming business. Perhaps there is something of a lull at the moment, for certain interests are more than happy for certain aspects of Australian history to remain remote, events that happened 200 years ago with no connection to the present. But as we approach the end of the century and perhaps the end of the Asian economic miracle, as we approach the centenary of federation, the Sydney Olympics and a referendum on the republic, it seems likely that we’re also approaching another period of intense history-making.

As a nation, Australia has a history of claiming either too much or too little history for itself—‘too much’, for example, in the way that colonial history was pumped up into a noble story of destiny or the Anzac landing into the nation’s coming of age; ‘too little’ in the way that many Australians for many decades could scarcely believe that Australia had a history at all, not in the real English or European sense. Either way, claiming too much or too little, the case was symptomatic of a colonial mentality. Although we can’t escape the residues of this colonial past altogether, there have been profound changes in the last three decades in our attitudes to our own history. One symptom of this has been an explosion of history writing, and history-making in other forms, both at the academic and popular ends of the market, in heritage projects, museum and gallery exhibitions, local histories, media specials, mini-series and so on. Historians such as Henry Reynolds have become best-sellers. Newspapers have become intensely history-conscious, not least about their own anniversaries. Rediscovering or reclaiming aspects of our past has become a national pastime. History is a new passion—or fashion.

The point is not that we are now necessarily better informed about our past than previous generations. Much of the new history is merely ‘recreational’ history, history as life-style accessory. The point is rather that these recent developments reveal shifting attitudes to Australia and being Australian, to ways of being at home here and situating ourselves in time and place. A few years back I could write much more optimistically about these changes and see them in almost wholly
positive terms. Now, of course, with battle lines drawn across the nation around questions of national identity, the achievements seem much more ambiguous. But however we understand Australian history, all now assume that we do have a history. So much so that it sounds odd even to make the point. But as recently as the 1950s and early 1960s, the sense of a distinctively Australian history was thin and unsustaining. There were few books and few other forms of public historical participation. Aborigines appeared as remnants of a pre-historical civilisation but had virtually no place in history itself. Historians were still having to invest most of their energies in arguing that Australia had a history worth studying and understanding.

I want to spend some time on the great changes to Australian society and culture — and therefore to history — since the 1960s because in certain ways they’ve been so complete and become so familiar that we now take them for granted. We tend to underestimate the revolution that has taken place in the last two or three decades. After all, no other nation in the world with the possible exception of Israel has so massively changed the nature of its population as Australia has over this period. Perhaps the fact that these changes are profound and complex has become clearer recently with the emergence on the political stage of extreme reactions to them.

Some of the causes of change are reasonably familiar: the ethnic diversity produced by post-war immigration, the decline of Britain as a world power and the decline of its political, economic and cultural importance for Australia, and the rise of Asia as a reality within as well as on the borders of the Australian nation. Perhaps less familiar, but no less important both as cause and effect, is the shift of Indigenous culture and Indigenous politics into the mainstream of Australian society. It is very much part of my present theme that we can now talk about ‘Aboriginal history’, a term which would not have made much sense in the 1960s. I’ll return to this subject a little later.

It has generally been recognised that sometime after the second world war Australia’s relations with Britain changed forever and Britain’s significance to Australia began to decline. What hasn’t been fully taken into account is the relatively sudden and absolute nature of the changes which have occurred; nor their far-reaching effects, for once Britain disappeared from the centre of the relationships that
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held our national identity together everything else had to change, or was able to change, too. In the space of only three decades at most, Australia has gone from a nation that was almost one hundred per cent British in orientation to one in which Britain and Britishness plays almost no significant part. This is a remarkably short span of time for such a major shift to have taken place. The notion of ‘British Australians’ or ‘Australian-Britons’ made good sense for the majority of Australians until the second world war and perhaps right through to the 1960s. It makes no sense now. If we used a term like this now we’d use it to identify recent migrants from Britain; in other words, to distinguish them from the rest of us.

This kind of change is not a left-wing plot or an exercise in elite social engineering despite some of the right-wing conspiracy theories that fly around these days. It has its popular forms, its conservative forms, its ugly as well as its beautiful forms, in sport, television, art and policy. It can encompass ocker nationalism or multicultural diversity. The Constitutional Convention on the republic, held in February 1998, showed some of this range and provided some interesting evidence. Despite the subject, Britain was scarcely mentioned by either side during the whole two weeks of debate. The British connection was irrelevant to the issues except in the most formal legal sense. In the cultural sense Britain was beside the point. Even the constitutional monarchists recognised this fact and staked nothing on Australia’s Britishness. Their arguments were that Australia already had its own head of state in the governor-general, that we were already an independent nation, indeed that we were already in effect a republic, so why risk making the change? The symbol they chose for campaigning was not the union jack or the queen’s head but the Australian flag.

Let me quote also from the journalist Greg Sheridan, a social conservative but an economic radical. Sheridan lists what he calls the ‘great questions of public policy in Australia’.2 ‘Shall we promote immigration or seek a closed society? Shall we promote racial unity or racial diversity? … Shall we rely on a great and powerful friend to defend us or seek to defend ourselves? Is our region … a threat or an opportunity? Can we cope with Asians in our midst? … What are the appropriate symbols of our nationhood?’ For Sheridan these were the central questions in the 1890s and they still are in the 1990s. The difference is that ‘on nearly all the great questions of public policy we
are deciding now to take the opposite directions from those we took a hundred years ago' (and I might add, thirty years ago too). 'White Australia has given way to perhaps the most authentically racially non-discriminatory immigration policy in the world ... Imperial benevolence has faded as the relationship with the United States has become less important in itself than as part of the matrix of Australia's relations with its region ... The institutional aspects of our once pervasively important relationship with Britain are seen as anachronistic' In addition the 1980s saw 'the Asianisation of almost every sphere of Australian life' which was 'the total reversal of the means of national self-identification throughout our history' This, Sheridan concludes, 'is the stuff of revolution' Of course his enthusiasm is pre-Hanson and pre-Asian financial crisis. Still the points he makes about the reversal of Australian attitudes remain valid, although now perhaps more contested.

Finally, let me take a quick detour to illustrate these points from another angle — though the detour goes right to the centre of my concerns. There has been a profound shift in the writing of history itself in Australia, a shift that reveals much more than just swings in academic fashion. The central question for Australian history until the last ten or twenty years was the relationship between Australia and Britain. Histories traced the evolution of the Australian colonies into a nation, sometimes in terms of struggle and opposition among those who saw Britain as representing colonial oppression, sometimes in terms of progress and adaptation for those who saw the British heritage as a gift from God or his worldly servants. There were different approaches depending on method and ideology, but the unavoidable question remained the Australia-British relationship. This is no longer the case; the issue hasn't disappeared of course but it has shrunk in importance because it no longer seems to be able to tell us as much (or very much at all) about who we are here and now.

Now the history that matters most, that seems to have most to tell us about who we are, is the history of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. This really is a major change, from an Australia that defined itself as a nation primarily in terms of its relationship to an outside power to an Australia that defines itself primarily in terms of a set of internal relations and an internal dynamic. This is where most of the energy is going — or rather where people are finding the energy that is driving historical interpretation
forward. There’s fascinating and challenging work appearing, from Henry Reynolds’s books to the stolen generations report, unforgetta-
bly, and the work of Aboriginal historians and novelists. The rela-
tionship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is the
deepest issue for the question of national identity and community.

At least it should be. It might be more accurate at present to see
the question of attitudes to indigenous issues as one of those deep
fault lines running through contemporary Australian society, divid-
ing it, and producing a bitter politics of mutual incomprehension.
We could draw a pretty clear line between those who think indig-
genous issues are central to contemporary Australia and those who see
them as fringe or marginal issues, if they see them at all. I suspect
that the majority would still lie on the side of the latter group but
perhaps not by much. The balance is shifting, although it can shift
backwards as well as forwards. The emergence of One Nation be-
tween 1996 and 1998 revealed not just political disaffection or eco-
nomic pain; it has revealed fundamental racism. Whatever economic
or political causes exist, the fact remains that these found expression
most readily in terms of racial oppositions. Whatever else is involved,
racism is still at the core.

There are two ways of reading this situation. On the one hand,
given the relative speed of the social and cultural changes, it’s not at
all surprising that we should find the past and the present co-exist-
ing, an older and a newer version of Australia and Australian iden-
tity living side-by-side and so coming into conflict with each other.
The problem with this reading is that it too complacently casts One
Nation and the rest as merely residual, that is, merely as leftovers of
an earlier era. This can’t begin to explain the emergence of these
parties in the 1990s. They are creations of the nineties, not the fif-
ties, after all.

The other way of reading their emergence is precisely as a reac-
tion to the fundamental changes I’ve indicated. They are proof posi-
tive that such changes have taken place and that they are indeed
profound — and therefore potentially disturbing. In short, they tes-
tify to the fact that the mainstream has shifted. Older ways of defin-
ing national identity and community have been pushed off the agenda,
not by elites in Sydney and Canberra for the purposes of social engi-
neering but because they just don’t work any more as inclusive im-
ages of the nation. What does work is another matter, and it might
just be in the nature of the question that there can be no clear, single, final answer.

Either way, we shouldn’t be surprised to find a great deal of resistance to re-configuring Australian history. This will inevitably raise discomforting questions about our present society (or to put this the other way: reshaping our present raises some large and uncomfortable questions about our past). We are not used to thinking of our history as being as interesting, as complex or dynamic (that’s the positive side), or as contentious, morally compromised or volatile, as dangerous, as, say, Japanese or South African history, American civil war history, or recent Russian history. But we’re going to have to get used to it. Discovering history on our own doorstep, in our own homes, in our own backyards, is double-edged — as even John Howard knows.

I’m still not sure whether Howard really couldn’t see why an apology to the stolen generation for the actions of the state was appropriate — an apology to the nation for the actions of the nation — or whether he could see precisely what such an apology might mean. His notion that the pendulum had swung too far — the obscene idea that somehow Aborigines were getting too much — wasn’t just about money or land. It was also about moral or symbolic authority. Aboriginal Australians were getting too much moral authority for the comfort of those committed to versions of Australian history that see it as only a story of progress, the spread of civilisation, capitalism or cricket; or for those who haven’t been able to commit to any other Australian story except this threadbare tale of destiny. Such histories of Australia can happily embrace all sorts of past ‘mistakes’ or ‘crimes’ as bad policy or well-meant ignorance from which, of course, we’ve since learnt. But we won’t get far by rejecting the so-called ‘black arm band’ view of history for a ‘white blindfold’ view.

Howard’s refusal to apologise was extremely hurtful to indigenous Australians. For non-indigenous Australians the effect has also been destructive, in that Howard refused an opportunity to bring the experience of Indigenous Australia into the heart of the nation’s experience. Just imagine how the matter could have been handled—a prime minister taking upon himself, in his role as national leader, the burden of suffering and responsibility, manifesting that this was a nation-defining moment in which all Australians had a share, opening up a space for the whole matter in the national consciousness, letting
it sink in, letting it take its place in an ongoing national history. But in this as in the Wik case, Howard’s first and deepest response was only not to give too much away (in every sense of the phrase). Once again, in Mungo MacCallum’s words, John Howard shrank to the occasion. Pauline Hanson also regularly used the rhetoric of ‘restoring the balance’. The alternative view, of course, is that we still have a very long way to go.

Howard was quite overtly trying to change the course of history, and with some success. If I retain any optimism in the face of the clear evidence that this is still a deeply racist society, still in the grip of colonial mentalities, it is because I believe that the changes in Australian culture over the last two or three decades have been so profound that they can’t be wound back — despite the damage already done. If Howard appeared to be out of sympathy ‘subjectively’ with the goals of multiculturalism, reconciliation and greater enmeshment with Asia, ‘objectively’, in his public institutional function, he could not do otherwise than support these principles despite his best efforts to avoid them. This is evident too in Howard’s position on the republic. He has virtually admitted that his own pro-monarchist position is historically obsolete, a residual minority sentiment.

Even if Australia’s principal institutions or manners are still in some sense predominantly (or historically) British, the British reference now has almost no role to play in their present meaning or function. So, too, for our history. The past is now a wholly Australian past, responding to internal dynamics and starting from here even when it turns to examine external relations. Just as the Australian constitution has, to all intents and purposes, been repatriated from England, so Australia in recent times has repatriated its history. I don’t think this implies an isolationist mentality or any simplistic boxing-kangaroo nationalism. What it does is to move to the centre of our historical understanding such matters as Aboriginal history and ethnic difference; and also such questions as our relationship to our environment and to our region, to Asia and the Pacific. In the most optimistic terms, this is a truly post-colonial situation in that Australia is now re-defining itself without reference to the original mother country.

But the result of these shifts has not been a smooth evolutionary slide from a British to British-Australian to a wholly Australian na-
tional identity, from one single, unified identity to the next. What has happened instead is a multiplication of possible identities. There is now no single image of national identity which can mobilise the large majority of the population except perhaps in the momentary triumphs of sport. Or rather there is a wide array of such images offered to us, diverse images and definitions that can all call forth powerful national identifications. The problem is that while some of these are complementary and can exist side by side without strain or confusion, others are clearly contradictory. We might be able to reconcile the Anzac legend with images of Aboriginal Australia with images of Australia as a modern, cosmopolitan society, but not without some very revealing intellectual or ideological gymnastics. It is a testimony to the power of national identities that we even try.

One way of understanding John Howard’s politics is as an attempt to reign in these proliferating, multiplying identities, to bring them all back into a subordinate relation to what he sees as core Australian values — differences can then be acknowledged and ‘tolerated’ but they also become merely peripheral in relation to the deeper values we all supposedly share. I’m sure Howard genuinely believes in his benign version of Australian history which embraces all in a tolerant, democratic national community — but which, by the same token, is more nervous about overt signs of difference than about anything else. Howard’s ‘vision’ implies that Australia doesn’t have to change at all, and hasn’t changed fundamentally. We can all feel totally comfortable and confident knowing what we’ve always known, being what we’ve always been.

But it makes little sense to think of the Australian identity as one fixed thing; it is many things and it is a process, never fixed or settled. To see Australian identity as settled or static is to allow those misleading internal oppositions between ‘Australian’ and ‘other’ to enter our political and cultural exchanges. And exactly the same can be said of our history. Understanding the diversity of the present has led to a rediscovery of the diversity of our past(s), to an appreciation of the ways in which Australia was never simply British, colonial, parochial, never one fixed thing. This has been one of the most exciting developments in recent Australian history, producing a much more dynamic and varied sense of Australia’s past. It leads to a rediscovery of Australian ‘originality’ — of Australian diversity, cosmopolitanism and creativity — alongside Australian ignorance,
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racism, colonialism and sexism. Aboriginal history discovers a past of creative relations between black and white as well as exploitation; women’s history discovers a history of powerful, creative women; multicultural history discovers a cosmopolitan past; gay history discovers a complex sexual past; republican history discovers a past of complex political ideas, and so on. Such are the consequences of discovering a complicated, diverse history here and now.

Nonetheless, the multiplication of ways in which Australia and Australianness are now presented to us and the pervasiveness of images of nationality are unprecedented. This is a result of the unprecedented changes in the Australian population described earlier, but also of unprecedented developments in media and other technologies since the 1960s: above all, the universal spread of television and the emergence of mass air travel and mass tourism. These developments have altered the place of Australia in the world, altered our sense of time and place. Australians no longer need to perceive themselves as being remote, far away in time and place from England, Europe, the other side of the world. Think of the emergence of mass air travel. Not only was London made more accessible for greater numbers of people, it was also ‘relativised’ as a destination. As air routes multiplied across the globe Australia and London became part of a network of multiple possible journeys rather than points in a single straight line from Down Under to Over There.

It’s not just that more Australians experience a wider range of foreign cultures, important as that is; more significantly it alters the place of England in our hearts and minds, in the geo-cultural coordinates that determine our sense of our place in the world. Our connections to the world now spread out like one of those maps of air routes at the back of an in-flight magazine rather than like the maps of the British Empire that used to link us firmly to England — as does my 1960s school atlas which still shows the commonwealth in pink and, after the maps of Australia, begins the rest of the world with England. The 1994 Macquarie World Atlas, by contrast, shows Australia, then Asia and Oceania, then the Pacific and Indian oceans, then North and South America; England comes after Scandinavia.

And then there’s television. The post-war generation growing up in the sixties was Australia’s first television generation. Television altered the place of America in our daily lives, an effect reinforced by rock and pop music, and the invention of the teenager as a consumer
category. While this played an important role in displacing Britain from our hearts and minds, the result was nothing as simple as 'Americanisation' American popular culture was one of the tools to hand which young Australians used in order to fashion their own identities often in opposition to an older sense of Australianness which seemed hopelessly out of date. American popular culture became part of Australian culture, not merely an exotic import, in ways that hadn't been the case previously. If anything this new accession to contemporary American culture led to a renewed sense of being Australian. It enabled a break with the past: the fact that it was contemporary and popular was crucial. The renaissance of Australian literature in the 1970s, for example, was in part a product of American popular culture. And increasingly, from the late 1960s on, with the help of Australian content requirements, Australian television became Australianised, from Graeme Kennedy to Homicide to Bellbird to the top-rating Australian drama series of today.

Television, for better and for worse, is now undoubtedly the most important medium for producing and circulating images of the nation and national identity. Through current affairs and documentaries, drama series and soaps, life-style and nature programs television has played an enormous role, not in Americanisation but in 'Australianisation'. It recreates for a much wider audience effects earlier presented in literature and cinema. We mightn't like all the effects — no doubt a limited and regressive sense of nationality dominates — but we do need to be aware of the range of images of the nation which television offers in its own indiscriminate way and their sometimes positive potential.

Television has offered us a whole range of new ways of being at home in Australia. It has made our locales, our cities, towns and suburbs, places with an imaginative reality — that kind of reality and meaning which culture gives back to our mundane lives. It has brought the whole continent into our living rooms and presented new environmental understandings of the relationship between land and people. It has helped us accept the Australian accent (still suspect in the sixties) and the 'look' of Australian places and people. Think of the recent series Sea-Change on the ABC. I'm not pretending that television doesn't broadcast all the biases and prejudices of the wider society. It dresses them up and sends them back out to us more seductive than ever. But its effects can't be summed up simply as
dumbing-down or duplicity. If TV addresses us first and foremost as consumers it also frequently addresses us as citizens.

For most of us, the primary form of our participation in national events — from Anzac day to award shows to sport and politics — will be via television. National events are now media events, which is not to dismiss them but to describe the nature of their being. Television is peculiarly powerful because of its combination of a global or nation-wide address and domestic intimacy: it brings the whole nation into our living rooms on a daily basis. There is not just a greater variety of national images available to us today but they are also more pervasive, a constant rather than an occasional presence. We are constantly being asked to identify with this or that mode of Australianness, from Blue Heelers to Good News Week to the Bush Tucker Man or Burke's Backyard — not to mention advertisements or the SBS. The result, although not the result of television alone, is a new multiplicity of national identities which cannot be easily aligned or reconciled with one another, but which are all offered to all Australians.

What, then, are the main representations of national identity presented to us at present and those which are likely to carry most weight into the future? What versions of history do they carry with them? Although such images and definitions are media creations they are never just that, for to get anywhere they have to connect to people's everyday lives and produce a coherent sense of the past. For the same reason they can never just be the product of political manipulation although they are always being manipulated for one purpose or another — that's their mode of existence.

The range of Australian identities at present covers something like the following: multicultural Australia or the idea that we are a 'nation of immigrants'; Aboriginal Australia — Aboriginal culture and history as an essential element in Australian culture and history; the land — traditionally linked to the bush and the outback but now also to wilderness and desert, to environmental and Aboriginal perspectives; folk Australia — the mainstream stories which white Australians have told themselves, from convicts and pioneers to Anzacs and larrikins; global Australia — the emphasis on Australia as a young, technologically sophisticated 'clever country'; Asian Australia — defining Australia in terms of its regional enmeshment; and republican Australia — defining Australia in terms of the new republic.
Each of these often very different ways of representing Australia — as ancient or new, high tech or earthy, local or international — has its own kind of historical logic in connecting with certain aspects of Australia’s past, and a present logic offering to make sense of contemporary life and future aspirations. As I suggested, they are all offered to all Australians as images of identity and community, but clearly they cannot just be neatly fitted together into a single composite identity. As recent political events have shown, they are more likely to describe battle grounds where utterly opposed versions of national identity, community and history will be fought out. Each is ambiguous in its potential political effects; each has the capacity to enfranchise important sections of the community but also to disenfranchise others. And I suspect this is going to get worse before it gets better. Australian society is divided as journalists and other social commentators have been saying, although the divisions are multiple and cross over each other: there are not just two worlds in Australia — urban versus rural or elite versus popular — but many. There’s no neat solution, no single right answer that can satisfy everyone. But the positive aspect I want to emphasise is that the more inclusive, pluralist, open-ended ways of defining Australia have moved firmly onto the agenda, and have done so not only in official domains or on large-scale national occasions but also in mundane and popular forms.

I don’t have space to mention all my possible Australias, but let me discuss one or two of the most important. First, the idea of multicultural Australia or the ‘nation of immigrants’ This provides a way of defining Australia’s distinctiveness that isn’t dependent upon one ethnic identity. It celebrates ethnic diversity as the product of the journeys of migration that all of us have taken, whether last year or last century. As a nation of immigrants Australia’s modernity is thus celebrated and our lack of traditions is actually turned into an advantage — we have everyone else’s traditions! At the same time, we’re given a new history in which coming first (ie, for the British) carries no special privileges. A multicultural history is offered to all Australians, ethnic diversity becomes central to the nation’s historical formation. By turning immigration into a shared national characteristic, Italian, Irish, Greek, Turkish, Vietnamese — and English — pasts become ‘our’ past, a shared Australian past. The English her-
itage is gently displaced from a normative position while 'Australian' is defined as something other than an ethnic identity.

That's the positive view. But we can also see that this version of Australia risks turning Aborigines into just another ethnic group, denying the cultural and political force of indigenous rights. Second, differences between ethnic groups are effaced. Third, despite the broad rhetoric of inclusion — multicultural policy explicitly states that it is for 'all Australians' — it does not easily take account of those Australians who do not feel like migrants of any sort or who cannot easily participate in public multiculturalism. These are the people likely to feel that the whole idea is a Canberra plot that denigrates their culture. I think we should take these responses seriously despite their politics. We have not yet found a convincing way of incorporating 'Anglo-Australian' identities into multiculturalism; we have not even found the right words to describe those Australians who identify with nowhere other than Australia. The problem then is that the majority culture can still define itself as outside multiculturalism. We also need to take seriously the uneven spread of the experience of ethnic diversity. Multiculturalism makes sheer practical sense of everyday life in most parts of Sydney and Melbourne; it is a far more abstract proposition even in Brisbane, and how much more so in many remote areas. From certain parts of the nation there might well appear to be much to lose and little to gain by investing in a multicultural vision of Australia.

Despite all the critiques, despite its bad press recently, with even some supporters saying we need a new word, multiculturalism remains essential to any coherent version of contemporary Australia. Even John Howard found that. What Howard failed to do when hansonmania first appeared was not to attack Pauline Hanson but rather to come out with a positive statement on ethnic diversity that showed the prime minister embracing or inhabiting multiculturalism. The statement could have been perfectly conservative, explaining how multiculturalism was not a policy designed to encourage ethnic divisions but precisely the reverse, a way of producing an inclusive national community. Anglo-Australian identities could have been argued into the picture in a positive manner. But I suspect that despite his own government's policy, Howard has difficulty not thinking in terms of an opposition between multiculturalism and core Australian values; this enables him, again, to think of the problem in terms of re-
storing the balance. But if we collapse the opposition then I think we can argue that the appropriate conservative view — conservative in the good sense — is to argue for more multiculturalism not less. There is no serious alternative.

Next, ‘Aboriginal Australia’. It is a mark of the changes I described earlier that virtually no representation of Australia is possible today without reference to Aboriginal cultures. Of course much of this is sheer appropriation or tourist exotica, but I don’t think we should decide in advance that the effects of these practices will necessarily be negative. How do we respond to the Qantas jumbo painted all over with an Aboriginal design? I don’t think the answer is a simple one by any means.

Both the frequency and the meaning of representations of Aboriginality have altered fundamentally in the last decade. The idea that Australia’s history is forty or sixty thousand years long is now common. But the changes it makes to that history are remarkable. The nation’s history is pushed backwards so that one of the newest nations on earth is given one of the longest histories. It’s as if our superficial colonial society is suddenly granted a deep sense of belonging; and this deep Aboriginal past is made available, again, to all Australians. Aboriginal history and culture can be celebrated and identified with an Australian culture. Of course all these meanings are thoroughly ambiguous in their potential political effects. On one side, Aboriginal culture is made accessible to non-Aboriginal Australians in a way that passes over the politics of the reverse equation. On the other side, though, Aboriginal cultures can no longer be seen as the nation’s pre-history for by seamlessly linking white and Aboriginal history the latter is given a contemporary presence, here and now, not remote in time and place. Aboriginal culture is now inextricably part of the meaning of contemporary Australia; a nexus has been established between Aboriginality and Australian modernity (the Qantas jumbo) which will not be easily broken. Contemporary images of the land have likewise begun to change: the landscapes which now most powerfully signify the nation are not those of white pastoral settlement but those of wilderness and desert, and in ways not always recognised these are profoundly ‘Aboriginal’ landscapes.

What’s clearer to me now is how disturbing these changes are to some Australians because the infiltration of Aboriginal meanings into the centre of national meanings, even in the relatively benign ways
I’ve described, isn’t just a matter of adding another layer to the nation’s history or culture. It starts to change the whole picture. The very foundations of earlier stories of the nation seem to be their weakest point: the heroes begin to look like villains, the past begins to leak into the present releasing quite different odours. From existing only on the fringes of consciousness Aboriginality suddenly seems to be everywhere. As I said, we’re not used to thinking of our past as being as interesting or as complicated as South Africa’s but we’re going to have to get used to it. The cultural shifts I’ve described make this more unavoidable, more contentious, but also more ‘do-able’.

In the national imagery surrounding the land I think we can see the emergence of new ways of defining Australian identity in relation to the environment which we can call post-colonial, ecological and, much more riskily, Aboriginal. The older colonial notions of the land as exotic or needing to be conquered haven’t disappeared but they’ve been joined by new perceptions. From the *Bush Tucker Man* to *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* there’s a new sense of intimacy in our appreciation of the land’s uniqueness, strange and familiar at once perhaps. The land, which might seem least political, has been the most politicised of all our national images and is likely to remain disputed symbolic territory. To some extent the older pastoral and pioneer stories have been reinvented in order to survive, discovering within themselves some of the newer meanings as if they had always already been there. Similarly with aspects of what I’ve called ‘folk Australia’. Despite their appeal to tradition, many are contemporary developments, part of the new discovery of historical density outlined earlier. If some define a narrow version of ‘one nation’ others reveal complex local histories. Again they cannot be dismissed as merely residual or as a kind of historical aberration. These vernacular histories need to be drawn into a web of other histories, to be connected rather than disconnected from the other stories that surround them.

Let me conclude by considering the possibilities contained in the notions of ‘Asian Australia’ and ‘republican Australia’. The notion of Australia as an Asian country has not found deep roots in the Australian population except to the extent that it has accorded with some economic imperatives (not least in the bush) and, very differently, with some dimensions of multiculturalism. The reasons for this include the fact that the history of Australia’s enmeshment with
Asia, not least the Asian populations within Australia, is only begin­ning to be written. It certainly hasn’t yet had any significant general, popular effect. Asia is still largely ‘out there’. But that history is now starting to appear, in terms of both Australia’s internal and ex­ternal relations. I suspect the sense of Australia’s Asian past will get much more complicated and interesting just as our Asian present is doing. Alongside the complexities of our anti-Asian history, we are going to discover an ever stronger sense of Asia having always been inside Australia and Australia having always been inside Asia. The history of enmeshment with Asia is already being pushed back decades before Paul Keating announced it.

Stephen Fitzgerald’s recent book was called *Is Australia an Asian Country?* In many ways this is the wrong question, although perhaps the answer is ‘straightforward’: yes and no. Australia does not have Chinese, Hindu or Islamic culture as its majority culture; the majority of its population is not of Asian descent; although in both cases we can point to very significant minorities. Perhaps more significant, only a minority of the population is what Fitzgerald calls ‘Asia-literate’. Certainly culture matters; it might even be crucial. And while there is no single Asian culture or population, there is a shared Asian experience of westernisation very different from Aus­tralia’s. On the other hand, in terms of economic, diplomatic, educa­tional, tourist, defence, immigration and other links Australia has taken its place in regional networks naturally and inevitably. From these perspectives we are already part of Asia and the links are increasing. Fitzgerald, like Sheridan, believes that Australia has been ‘Asianised’ in significant ways, referring not to any supposed Asian ‘take over’ but to our increasing ‘interconnectedness with Asia in our external relations and in our daily lives’. More interesting, he argues that Asianisation is only a small part of Australianisation, the process in education, culture and politics of Australians coming to terms with its own history, geography, demographics and institutions. In short, the more we understand the complexities of our own history the more we’ll understand our interconnectedness with Asia which will come to have a natural place in how we define Australian iden­tity.

The idea of a republican Australia is in a similar position. Only with the Constitutional Convention did it seem to capture much of the popular imagination, and since then the issue has virtually disap-
peared, suggesting that it still has only a shallow hold on most of us. The reason it fails to excite the passions, though, is not because Australians cling to Mother England but the reverse, because England is now so irrelevant to our identities and our daily lives that it’s difficult to be impassioned, at least by this aspect of the republicanism debate. Earlier positions on the issue have nonetheless shifted in interesting ways: it is now quite likely for monarchists to be the most vocal nationalists, while republicans often disavow nationalism in favour of internationalism.

Note, too, how without thinking about it we refer to the ‘republican debate’, never the ‘monarchy debate’, suggesting that on one level the issue is already decided and all that remains for discussion is the kind of a republic we want. It’s wholly appropriate that the main issue is the head of state question for this is where the key symbolism resides. But there has yet to be any great public mobilisation behind any broader notions of republicanism, any sense of the republic as a vehicle for revitalising Australia’s political institutions or notions of citizenship except perhaps in the calls for a popularly elected President. Only monarchists have been passionate about the Australian Constitution and there has always been something absurd about their attempts to turn it into a noble, democratic founding document.

But the republican history of Australia is also beginning to be written, with new histories of Australian republicanism, federation and the constitution appearing. And once again the history that is emerging is of a more complex and creative past of political thinking and institution-making than was previously understood, bringing out American and European as well as British influences, and democratic and cosmopolitan ideals as well as imperialist ones. Most optimistically, the centenary of Federation and a successful referendum result will move questions about Australia’s political institutions and civic values to centre stage. Federation, if not the republic, is one symbol that John Howard could wholeheartedly embrace in a prime ministerial, even a presidential, manner.

What should be added to the idea of an Australian head of state is the idea of citizenship defined in civic rather than ethnic terms. This is already formally the case but the notion has not been promoted and embraced as it might be, probably because the idea of a core culture is still over-ridingly powerful. Civic identity means that the nation-
state requires citizens to work within its legal, social and political institutions; beyond that, in terms of religion, culture and so on, the state can make no demands for conformity, nor can it discriminate. A positive future for Australia, and a way of conceiving our national identity adequate to such a future, seems to me to require bringing together the ideas of multiculturalism and republicanism, both in the fullest sense. In this way ethnic diversity and civic identity can work to define each other. But we also need to find ways to make both ideas popular; not just abstractions but ways of seeing ourselves and our fellow Australians that make sense both of our present and our past.

Writing in 1994 I used the image of a ‘smorgasbord’ of national identities and national pasts upon which we could all draw; at least we could all draw on some of them some time. This was a moment of high optimism for some, when a whole raft of social and cultural changes seemed to be bound together and carrying us towards a new, modern Australia — the republic, multiculturalism, the clever country, the turn to Asia, reconciliation, and so on. Six years on and the optimism looks suspect. What I (or we) didn’t ask seriously enough was who benefits from these changes? In whose image is the nation being remade? Who’s left out? The happily abundant smorgasbord can begin to look like a recipe for social division.

It’s true, I think, that my up-beat reading of the tendencies of change is an ‘elitist’ one: I see the changes as positive because in most ways I’m in a position to benefit from them. This is not the case, or appears not to be the case, for others. The distribution of cultural, social and economic capital is widely uneven. But this is also why I’ve insisted on the degree to which the changes are manifested in popular and everyday culture, in people’s lives, in neighbourhoods and communities, not just in books. The changes haven’t just happened from above. Still, we need to find new ways to make pluralism as popular as populism; we need to expand our sense of local historical density but leave aside notions of destiny which just can’t manage complexity. We need to commit ourselves to an interesting history in the future, however dangerous and difficult that might prove to be.
Endnotes

1 In part this essay is a reconsideration, in the light of political events since the election of John Howard and Pauline Hanson, of ideas first presented in an essay entitled `Future Pasts', in David Headon, Donald Horne and Joy Hooton (eds), The Abundant Culture: Meaning and Significance in Everyday Australia, St Leonards NSW, 1994, pp 3-15.


3 Mungo MacCallum, `Little Big Man', Australian, 19-20 September 1998, p 36. Even as I write, in mid-October 1998, John Howard has signaled some change of direction on Indigenous issues, admitting in his first press conference following his government's return that his approach to reconciliation had not been the most helpful, committing his government to reconciliation (but not on Labor's terms) and agreeing that reconciliation involved acknowledging `history', including Aboriginal prior occupation and past injustices. We'll just have to wait and see.

4 See the essays in Wayne Hudson and Geoffrey Bolton (eds), Creating Australia: Changing Australian History, St Leonards NSW, 1997.


6 This point suggested to me by Chris Healy.

7 See Jan Ryan, `Chinese Australian History' and David Walker `Australia as Asia' in Hudson and Bolton (eds), op. cit.; A Broinowski, The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia, Melbourne, 1996; Eric Rolls, Sojourners, St Lucia, 1992 and Eric Rolls, Citizens, St Lucia, 1996; Jan Ryan, Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia, Fremantle WA, 1995; Lyn Strahan, Australia's China, New York, 1996.


9 ibid., p 67.


The Wik Debate, Human Rights and Australia’s International Obligations

Henry Reynolds

Late in 1997 the Australian government issued a white paper on the country’s foreign and trade policy entitled *In the National Interest*. It was the first time such a white paper had been released detailing the principles underpinning foreign policy. It appeared bearing the imprimatur — and the photographs and signatures — of the two responsible ministers: foreign affairs minister Alexander Downer and trade minister and deputy prime minister Tim Fischer. The ministers explained that it was written to inform both parliament and people of the priorities, policies and strategies which inform the government’s approach to foreign and trade policies. The document, they pointed out, provided an outline of the conceptual framework on which their policies and strategies had been woven.

*In the National Interest* embodied a discussion of what was termed ‘The Whole of Nation Approach’ which consciously linked international and domestic strategies and policies. The ministers predicted that over the next fifteen years ‘integrating domestic and international policies will become even more important’. Foreign policy, they declared, must give expression to the aspirations and values of the national community.

But what aspirations and values? High among them was a strong commitment to human rights:

The Government views human rights as an inseparable part of Australia’s overall foreign policy approach, both because the treatment of human beings is a matter of concern to Australians and because promoting and protecting human rights underpins Australia’s broader
security and economic interests. The Government’s human rights policies are based on the universality of fundamental human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural.3

As well as a strong commitment to human rights in general the ministers referred specifically to the question of race. They unequivocally rejected any taint of racism and observed that the matter was of central importance to the country’s international reputation. ‘Central to the values to which the government gives expression’, the ministers declared was:

an unqualified commitment to racial equality and to eliminating racial discrimination. This is a non-negotiable tenet of our own national cohesion, reflected in our racial diversity, and it must remain a guiding principle of our international behaviour. The rejection of racial discrimination is not only a moral issue, it is fundamental to our acceptance by, and engagement with, the region where our vital security and economic interests lie. Racial discrimination is not only morally repugnant, it repudiates Australia’s best interests.4

Among expert bodies welcoming the white paper, members of the Asia-Australia Institute noted that the strong, principled and unambiguous position on race was the most distinguishing feature of the document and was the thing which really mattered most for ‘Australia’s future identity, as well as its prosperity and security’.5 The commitment to make such moral issues an explicit and integral part of foreign policy was possibly the ministers’ ‘greatest contribution to the post-Labor evolution of a foreign policy for the twenty-first century’.6 The institute’s observers admired the ministers courage but thought that holding to their declared positions externally and domestically would be challenging.

Challenging indeed! In fact the government in general, and the deputy prime minister in particular, were not holding to professed principles domestically even when Mr Fischer signed the document in August 1997. Throughout 1997 he had travelled the country demanding that Aboriginal interests on pastoral leases, which had been recognised by the High Court in the Wik judgement in December 1996, be extinguished. It was Mr Fischer who boasted with bucolic
candour that the prime minister’s Ten Point Plan to deal with Wik promised to deliver bucketloads of extinguishment.

Was it a case of monumental hypocrisy or of schizophrenia? Or are there two Mr Fischers — the minister of trade who tells the world how he abhors racism and the leader of the National Party who when speaking domestically, tickles the ears of his rural supporters by advocating policies which are by their very nature profoundly racist. It is clearly unthinkable that mainstream politicians would demand the expropriation of the property rights of any other recognisable group in society. Property ownership is only viewed as a problem when it extends into the Aboriginal community.

Tim Fischer, along with the conservative state premiers and leaders of farming and mining bodies, do not think they are being racist when they demand race-specific expropriation. But this only indicates how deep and intractable the problem is. Australians are dangerously unaware of the degree to which racism underpins popular attitudes, customary expressions, and what passes for common sense. That is just the way things are done in Australia.

The deputy prime minister saw and condemned the racism inherent in Pauline Hanson’s speeches and understood the damage they did overseas, but he appears to be unaware of the profound racism which informs his own discourse on Wik. It is racist to call for an end to Asian immigration; it is just good, popularist practical politics to insist on wiping out indigenous property rights. Exclusion of non-Europeans is unacceptable and retrograde; expropriation of Aborigines is an appreciable way to give certainty to miners and farmers. The trouble began when demands for total extinguishment were accepted as reasonable and acceptable bargaining positions.

Mr Fischer and his political allies present a far greater threat to the long-term image of Australia overseas than the transient passage of Pauline Hanson across the firmament of federal politics. The Wik debate casts deep shadows of doubt over the professed rejection of racism expressed in the document of August 1997. The two ministers’ desire to wed domestic and international policy falls at the first hurdle. Australia’s commitment to human rights is profoundly compromised. The government’s Aboriginal policies appear to contravene the country’s commitment to two central UN documents: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was adopted by the general assembly in December 1965 and came into force in January 1969. Australia signed the convention in 1966 and ratified it nine years later.

The provisions of the document are wide and sweeping. Racial discrimination is defined in article 1 as any destruction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which had the purpose of impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. States ratifying the convention undertook, under article 2, to take active steps to ‘pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms’ They undertook to engage in ‘no act or practice of racial discrimination against persons or groups of persons’ and to ensure that all public authorities and public institutions, national and local, acted in conformity with the obligation. Ratifying states also agreed to provide a report on their compliance with the Convention every two years. Under article 2C ratifying states promised to take effective measures to amend, rescind or nullify any laws and regulations which had the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination wherever it exists.

In the recently concluded Hindmarsh Island Bridge case, the Commonwealth argued that the Australian constitution, under the so-called race power (section 51: xxvi), enabled the federal parliament to make laws which discriminate adversely on the basis of race. The view was upheld by two high court judges, and supported by state governments and assorted conservative politicians who, in order to overturn the provisions of the Wik judgement, are happy to celebrate the fact that the Australian Constitution allows discrimination that runs directly counter to the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The general applicability of the convention to the Aborigines is obvious. The more direct relevance was outlined as recently as August 1997 by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which is charged with oversight of the Convention. In a document, ‘General Recommendation on the Rights of Indigenous People’, the committee emphasise its commitment to the societies of the so-called ‘fourth world’. It consistently affirms that discrimination
against indigenous people falls under the scope of the convention 'and that all appropriate means must be taken to combat and eliminate such discrimination'. The committee was aware that in many parts of the world indigenous people were still facing discrimination and that 'in particular' they had lost their land and resources to colonists, corporations and state enterprises. Consequently the 'preservation of their culture and their historical identity' had been and still was in jeopardy.

The committee calls in particular on states to: recognise and respect indigenous distinct culture, history, language and way of life as an enrichment of the state's cultural identity and to promote its preservation; ensure that members of indigenous peoples are free and equal in dignity and rights and free from any discrimination, in particular that based on indigenous origin or identity; provide indigenous peoples with conditions allowing for a sustainable economic and social development compatible with their cultural characteristics; ensure that members of indigenous peoples have equal rights in respect of effective participation in public life and that no decisions directly relating to their rights and interests are taken without their informed consent; and to ensure that indigenous communities can exercise their rights to practice and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs and to preserve and to practise their languages.

But it is the committee's recommendations regarding land that are most immediately relevant to current developments in Australia. The committee especially calls upon states parties to recognise and protect the rights of indigenous peoples to own, develop, control and use their communal lands, territories and resources and, where they have been deprived of their lands and territories traditionally owned or otherwise inhabited or used without their free and informed consent, to take steps to return those lands and territories. Only when this is for factual reasons not possible, the right to restitution should be substituted by the right to just, fair and prompt compensation. Such compensation should take the form of lands and territories.

The second instrument of relevance to this discussion is the centrally important International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1966 and came into force in 1976. It was signed by the Whitlam Labor government in December 1972 and ratified by the Fraser coalition government in August 1980.
The covenant is the single most important international human rights document. While the emphasis is on individual rights, article 27 addresses the problems faced by minorities, members of which should ‘not be denied the right in community with other members of their group to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion or to use their own language’ When drafted, the article was seen to be limited in scope. It referred to individual rather than group rights and called on states to leave minorities alone rather than to discriminate in their favour. 

But since 1966 article 27 has assumed far greater importance. It has grown in significance as the world has paid increasing attention to the circumstances of indigenous and tribal minorities. Jurists in many countries have come to the view that in order to enjoy their culture, minorities need much more from government than benign neglect. Indigenous minorities, in particular, require secure access to their traditional lands and support for economic activities related to traditional cultures. The views of the Human Rights Committee, which oversees the covenant, were outlined in a statement issued in 1994 and which included the following provisions:

1 Article 27 of the Covenant provides that, in those States in which ethnic religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language. The Committee observes that this article establishes and recognises a right which is conferred on individuals belonging to minority groups and which is distinct from, and additional to, all the other rights which, as individuals in common with everyone else, they are already entitled to enjoy under the Covenant ...

6.1 Although Article 27 is expressed in negative terms, that article, nevertheless, does recognise the existence of a “right” and requires that it shall not be denied. Consequently, a State party is under an obligation to ensure that the existences and the exercise of this right are protected against denial or violation. Positive measures of protection are, therefore, required not only against the acts of the State party itself, whether through its legislative, judicial or administrative authorities, but also against the acts of other persons within the State party.
6.2 Although the rights protected under Article 27 are individual rights, they depend in turn on the ability of the minority group to maintain its culture, language or religion. Accordingly positive measures by States may also be necessary to protect the identity of a minority and the rights of its members to enjoy and develop their culture and language and practice their religion, in community with other members of the group ...

7 With regard to the exercise of the cultural rights protected under Article 27, the Committee observes that culture manifests itself in many forms, including a particular way of life associated with the use of land resources, especially in the case of indigenous peoples. That right may include such traditional activities as fishing or hunting and the right to live in reserves protected by law. The enjoyment of those rights may require positive legal measures of protection and measures to ensure the effective participation of members of minority communities in decisions which affect them ...

9 The Committee concludes that Article 27 relates to rights whose protection imposes specific obligations on States parties. The protection of these rights is directed to ensure the survival and continued development of the cultural, religious and social identity of the minorities concerned, thus enriching the fabric of society as a whole. Accordingly, the Committee observes that these rights are conferred on one and all under the Covenant. States parties, therefore, have an obligation to ensure that the exercise of these rights is fully protected and they should indicate in their reports the measures they have adopted to this end.10

The Human Rights Committee developed its position on the obligation of states towards indigenous people in a number of cases brought before it between 1977 and 1992 by Canadian Indians and Sarni from Finland and Sweden.

The first, decided in 1981, was that of Sandra Lovelace versus Canada. Very generally, it turned on her right to return to her reservation, having married a non-Indian, and the Human Rights Committee determined that indeed she was being denied her right under article 27 to enjoy her culture. Her capacity to enjoy her culture was dependent on her ability to actually live on the reservation in a specific place where her culture, and not a generalised Indian culture,
her specific culture, was practised. She could only enjoy her culture in that particular place.

The second case was decided in 1985, the case of Ivan Kitock versus Sweden. Kitock took his case to the Human Rights Committee because, he said, the government regulation prevented him from reindeer-herding and he was therefore not able to enjoy his culture in the way in which Sweden had committed itself to under article 27. The decision in this case came out in favour of Sweden, but both sides of the argument accepted, as did the committee, that reindeer-herding was a critical factor in being able to enjoy Sami culture and that although government regulation tried to prevent Kitock, he was able to hunt and herd, if he wished, and therefore, the critical 'facts' in allowing him to enjoy his culture had not been completely denied.

The third case, in 1990, was that of the so-called Lubicon Lake band of Indians in northern Alberta versus Canada. This turned on the question of whether economic development in the tribal territory threatened the right to enjoy culture. Whether article 27 included the right of persons to engage in economic and social activities which are part of the culture to which they belong. Now in this, the UN decided that indeed economic developments of the sort that were being proposed for the area would cause irreparable damage to the traditional way of life of the Indian band and Canada therefore felt obliged to take remedial action.

The fourth case, 1992, was another Sami case, Larndusman versus Finland, when Larndusman said that quarrying in his territory interfered with reindeer-herding and thereby prevented him from enjoying his culture. The committee concluded that at present the quarrying in question was not large enough to threaten enjoyment of the culture, but if it expanded it would well do so, in which case such economic activity could be seen as directly threatening the right to enjoy traditional culture.

The Indian and Sarni cases were taken to the Human Rights Committee because Canada, Sweden and Finland had signed the necessary instruments to provide access to aggrieved individuals who had exhausted legal remedies at home but were still not satisfied. Australia, too, has recently signed the optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and accepted the similar provisions embodied in Article 14 of the Convention on Racial Discrimination.
Australia became aware of the significance of the optional Proto­
col to the Covenant when Tasmanian gay activist Nick Toonen ap­
pealed to the Human Rights Committee immediately following Aus­
tralian ratification in December 1991 and won a favourable judge­
ment in April 1994 to the effect that the Tasmanian criminal code 
contravened his right to privacy as guaranteed under Article 17 of
the Covenant. The Australian government felt obliged to respond to
the decision and legislated to override the Tasmanian code to the
extent that it related to sexual conduct involving consenting adults
acting in private. The Bill received bi-partisan support, the second
reading speech passing the House of Representatives by 114 votes to
four. The liberal back-bencher, Trish Worth, best summed up the
sense of obligation to remedy the matter. She argued that:

Having signed and ratified this international treaty, Australia com­
mitted itself to ensuring that human rights standards set out in the
treaty were observed in this country. When the Human Rights Com­
mittee published its view that Australia was in contravention of their
standards. Australia became bound, not by the threat of force but by
honour to address this breach.11

It is certain that the path blazed by Toonen will be followed by indig­
enous Australians if they are unable to achieve their objectives through
the parliament and the courts. How future governments respond re­
mains to be seen.

So what obligations does Australia have towards Aboriginal Aus­
tralians and Torres Strait Islanders under the covenant and the con­
vention over and above the rights which they share with all other
Australian citizens?

There is a clear responsibility to enable indigenous Australians to
enjoy their culture and practise their religion. Inseparable from this
responsibility is the requirement to allow communities to own, de­
velop, and control their traditional lands and, where necessary, to
continue customary economic practices undisturbed by large-scale
development projects.

How does this place the present federal government and the deputy
prime minister who both expresses a fundamental commitment to
human rights and welcomes the prospect of bucket loads of extin­
guishment? It is clear that if the government follows this advice and
legislates to significantly reduce Aboriginal rights over pastoral leases it will be in breach of its international obligations.  

The professed abhorrence of racism would appear to be little more than empty posturing underpinned by hypocrisy and bad faith. Would that matter? According to the government’s — and Mr Fischer’s — own white paper it would matter a lot. Rejection of racial discrimination, the Paper declared, is fundamental to Australia’s acceptance by, and engagement with, the region. 

Can we get away with such duplicity? Many countries do. But Australia is in a difficult position and is in danger of losing all the ground made up in its retreat from injustice over the last twenty years. In any contest between Aboriginal Australians and government for hearts and minds in the world outside, Aboriginal Australians would win hands down. We must forever keep in mind Gough Whitlam’s admonition of 1973 that our treatment of the indigenous people ‘will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians — not just now but in the greater perspective of history.’ 12

Endnotes

1 Commonwealth of Australia, In the National Interest, Canberra, 1997.
2 ibid., p 5.
3 ibid., p 13.
4 ibid., pp 12-14.
6 ibid., p 4.
The Story of a Gentle Man

Ros Kidd

When white settlers moved into Queensland last century there was bitter conflict in the north as the Aboriginal occupants fought to stay on their land. The death toll among Aborigines has been numbered as high as 20,000 people, and countless more fell to starvation and disease. Families were destroyed as women and children were kidnapped as sex objects, and it was common practice to capture adults and children and 'break them in' as servants. By 1886 more than 1,000 Aborigines were in permanent work around Queensland. Without this labour force, which doubled in the next twenty years, outback Queensland may never have been developed; few white men had the skills or were prepared to endure the risks of pastoral work in remote areas, and the promise of Aboriginal servants did much to persuade white women to join their men on stations and emerging outback towns.

But this vast network of Aboriginal workers was unpaid in any real sense of the word. Most survived on a few food scraps and cast-off clothes, or relied on food-gathering skills in their extended families. All too commonly, however, compliance and dependency were induced through the supply of alcohol and opium, the latter a legal drug in Queensland until 1905. The police were commonly implicated in the culture of abuse and exploitation — records show some officers did a brisk trade in captured Aboriginal children, others also kept women for their own use, many turned a blind eye to the vendettas and killings as whites acted to clear Aboriginal families from land allocated for farms and stations, and too many officers earned their stripes as sergeants in the native police, a murdering machine feared by Aborigines throughout Queensland.
The normal protections of law were often brushed aside by local judiciaries — police magistrates and justices of the peace — who were usually appointed from the ranks of the squating hierarchy, who routinely made a mockery of available penalties or provisions for interpreters, who were difficult to monitor and control from the capital in the south-east corner, and for whom, in any case, there were few more reliable replacements.

So in 1897 the Queensland government passed a law aimed specifically at imposing a legal framework of controls over all aspects of inter-racial relations, a framework which enclosed only the Aboriginal half of the equation. *The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* prohibited the supply of opium or alcohol to Aborigines, it allowed for areas to be set aside as reserves restricted for the use of Aborigines, it introduced a whole set of limitations and controls on the employment of Aboriginal men and women, and it initiated a network of police ‘protectors’ to inspect, monitor and record every facet of the lives of local Aboriginal families. Most importantly, it decreed that almost any person of Aboriginal parentage could be declared a ward of state at the behest of these protectors, who also held the power to subsequently remove any Aboriginal individual from their family and home country for confinement on any nominated government settlement or church mission. For nearly a hundred years, merely to be an Aboriginal person in Queensland was to live in fear of being seized ‘under the Act’.

What were the implications of being declared a ward of state under the ‘protection’ of Queensland’s Aboriginal department? First and foremost, you lost almost every right for yourself and your family, rights which are, for the rest of us, so basic as to defy listing: the freedom to live and work where you pleased; the right to marry according to your choice; the conditions of your baby’s birth and whether that birth was even registered; whether your child was taken from you and confined in a dormitory; the right to provide adequate food and safe water for your family’s health; the choice to keep your growing children with you rather than have them sent to contracted employment for twelve months at a time; the right to choose your place and type of employment and the right to receive an equitable wage for your labour; the right to retain the monies earned by the sweat of your brow and to use these to better the conditions of yourself and your loved ones; the right to reasonable comfort and reasonable shel-
ter; in short, the right to make your own life choices in line with the choices of all other Australians.

Now I'm one of the millions of Australians who have never lived in hunger. I have never been cast adrift from my family, I have always had a roof over my head, a warm bed, a fair return for my labour and my wages to spend according to my family's needs. Many Australians with non-indigenous backgrounds could say similar things. So it is very confronting to realise how many thousands of Aboriginal families were defined against their wishes as wards of this state, and how many were thereby condemned to a lifetime of poverty and despair. Now the operations of Queensland's Aboriginal department have been shrouded in secrecy: between 1914 and 1986 this was practically the private kingdom of only three men, the last of whom was nicknamed 'the possum' because it was said he was so intent on keeping out of the spotlight. So complete was government control not only over the facts of its operations but also over the terms of debate of Aboriginal affairs in this state, that we have been kept almost in total ignorance. And thereby have been hard pressed to counter the distortions and deceits which continue today.

In order to lift the veil on this shameful period, in order to give you some sense of what it has been like to be an Aboriginal person in the department's 'care', I thought I would tell a story.

Once upon a time, around 1920, a young boy lived with his two brothers and older sister at Halifax, near Ingham. Their parents had died and they lived in their grandmother's house. He was nine years old and busy at his lessons in school when the police picked him up, stopping in at grandma's to collect his two little brothers. His grandmother was distraught and pleaded to keep the boys but the police were unmoved. They flourished orders from the native affairs department and declared that the boys were to go to Palm Island. Grandmother pleaded that the family be allowed to go together, but this was refused. Although he lived to be a very old man, the boy never saw his grandmother and sister again.

As with all Aboriginal people moved around Queensland under departmental orders, no overnight accommodation was provided — except to be locked in the cells at the police station. And next morning the youngsters were put on the boat to Palm Island. Many of their relations had already been shifted there after a cyclone in 1918 had devastated the coastal area, but the children were not allowed to
know the comfort of their aunts and uncles and cousins. Instead, they were locked up in the dormitory with about one hundred other little boys.

Life was hard and cruel. You got flogged with a big cane if you did anything wrong, if you didn’t obey instructions, if you didn’t go to school, if you wet the bed, if you tried to talk to your friends or relations through the wire which enclosed the dormitory. There weren’t enough beds and several children shared a single mattress, sleeping head to foot on a filthy sheet and a single blanket; they were often very cold. You were locked in for twelve hours a night, with only a single lantern and nothing to do, just stare out through the wire and wait for morning.

Most days there was a few hours’ schooling in the bark hut; but there were no trained teachers, there were no real desks or chairs, there were only outdated textbooks and a few slates and chalks, and when it rained the wooden shutters had to be closed and it was too dark to see by the one lamp. Mostly you were taught the basics of sums and writing, and practical skills fitted for a life of labour.

Dormitory children were trained as workers after their morning in school. The girls had to clean and sweep and wash clothes, and sew and cook for both dormitories, a total of nearly 300 children. The boys had to wipe down and weave hundreds of palm fronds for the palm thatch houses, pull out the big clumps of bladey grass with their hands, move rocks and stones to keep roads and pathways clear, hoe and weed the vegetable gardens. Like all dormitory children, at fourteen his childhood was over, because he was then sent out to work.

Perhaps this boy was one of the luckier ones. He was not sent, alone, frightened, bewildered and extremely vulnerable, to cane farms on the mainland or to remote pastoral properties, without a youngster to talk to or a black face to comfort them. This was the fate of many of the dormitory boys and girls — called into the office and told they were to be sent to strangers in places they had never heard of, yelled at when they burst into tears, given a change of clothes and some shoes and a few shillings, put on the boat to Townsville and then locked in the watchhouse overnight, terrified by the drunks and foul-mouthed men, to emerge a trembling wreck in the morning and be put on the train to — anywhere.

It was policy to send this forced labour contingent out year after year. Youngsters were worked sixteen or twenty hours a day, the girls
at cleaning and washing, cooking and child minding, and many also worked illegally at horse work and fencing. For the boys it was early morning milking and yard chores, farm work, fencing, droving, mustering, branding — continual work, prevalent physical abuse, no choices and no reprieve. Even the boys were not safe from sexual assault. Youngsters and adults were sent out repeatedly for a twelve-month work term, allowed only a week or two with their families in between contracts. These were laughingly called 'work agreements', and you had the option to sign — or be jailed or removed to another settlement.

And these workers saw little for their labour. Since 1919 Aboriginal pastoral wages were pegged at only two-thirds the white rate, but the department was so lax that adjustments in line with increased white wages were often years behind. In 1950, for instance, Aboriginal pastoral workers were still paid relative to the 1938 rate, effectively at 25 per cent the white wage. Yet periodical surveys of Aboriginal employment consistently revealed acknowledgement that many pastoral stations would not survive without this heavily discounted workforce; indeed the minister declared — confidentially to his colleagues — that Aboriginal workers were as skilled as the whites and were the mainstay of the pastoral industry.

We know now that the government took direct control of all the wages, except for a little pocket money which was supposed to be regularly paid, but in fact was never properly checked. We know that wages went to the local police protectors, who were supposed to make sure workers were not cheated of their money. But this system, in reality, simply deprived workers of their earnings. You had to ask for permission to spend any of your own money, and permission was frequently denied, even for the most trivial purchase. And the records show widespread fraud and embezzlement by the police themselves, which continued even after thumbprinted and witnessed dockets were introduced specifically to minimise cheating by these protectors.

From your wages the government took several levies each year and kept your bank interest, not that you would know this because it was policy that you could never see any record of dealings on your account. One thing was for sure, no matter how hard you worked, you were only ever allowed to get a small amount of your money; we know now that the government profited nicely from investing huge amounts of these bulk savings, raising revenue to offset expenses. By
the 1960s, in fact, the government was withholding, in today's terms, around $17 million, while those whose money it was, were living, and dying, in poverty. There are hundreds of stories which could be told today by impoverished Aboriginal men and women who have worked thirty, forty and fifty years, and found to their horror, when they gained control of their savings in the late 1960s, that little or no money remained in their accounts.

Fewer young lads were sent from the settlements to pastoral work, because they were essential to the building and development of these institutions. There was no pay for the hundreds of men and women who worked the settlements and for whom, by regulation, a minimum of thirty-two hours labour was required: to refuse was to be jailed or penalised with reduced rations. The lad in this story was not sent to the mainland. He worked for eighteen months as a mill hand, clearing sawdust from the pit and cleaning the yard. He got no pay, just a bit of tea, flour, and tobacco. He then worked full-time as a deckhand on the steamers which were essential to island life. He was on call twenty-four hours a day for two years, making two trips a week in a circuit from the mainland to the islands, bringing supplies and transporting staff. In searing heat and driving rain the boats kept operating, and it was hard work. But again, as an Aboriginal employee of the Queensland government, he got no wages and no sick pay. Only the white workers got paid.

After a severe bout of pneumonia he was sent out with one of three youth gangs working eight hours a day felling trees, clearing the bush, and clearing and constructing the airstrip and the hillside road back to the settlement. Again there was no pay — just the lousy rations and a bit of tobacco. As a lad of nineteen he fell foul of the dozens of petty rules on the island, and was given two weeks jail for walking down Mango Avenue, a road reserved for white staff. In his old age he still remembered the humiliation of the regime, stating that 'It hurts all the people on the island'.

Records for Palm Island reveal a death rate of over six percent at that time, mainly from malnutrition and chest infections. Sacks of meat transported from Townsville on open boat decks were rancid by the time they were off-loaded. Medical reports state that most of the ill and aged were slowly starving to death and children suffered from chronic skin diseases, that nearly every baby died who was not breast fed, because the only available food was a mixture of arrowroot and
water. In his monthly report the doctor pondered: 'Should they be properly fed on peptonised milk ... Is it worth while trying to save them?' And this was a government institution.

In 1940, at twenty-seven, the man in our story got married. Now there were token wages, and as a ganger he got five shillings a fortnight, the equivalent today of $12.60. Like thousands of other Aboriginal men from missions and settlements he spent most of the war years working on the mainland in positions vacated by enlisted soldiers. Because this was a federal scheme he was paid award wages for his labour as a cane cutter. But he never saw his money: it went directly to the superintendent on the island, and from it was taken income tax and a levy of twenty percent towards running costs of the settlement. All he got was vouchers for the island store, where fresh food and milk was rarely available, where groceries were routinely past their used-by date, which ran, by department decree, on a profit margin of forty percent. For four years he cut cane from May to December for a good wage; in the off-season he worked on Palm Island as a painter for a pittance. Often he was told there was no money left for his family.

After the war the white foreman suggested he train as a painter and he grabbed the chance, beating three whites for the position as apprentice. As a family man in his thirties he was determined to better himself. For seven years he set aside £2 a fortnight, nearly a quarter of his pay, to have lessons sent over from Townsville. But on finishing the course he had to go to the mainland to earn decent wages. Here, in the mid-1950s, he joined a painting firm and got his ticket after only two weeks' trial, and joined the union. Now he was paid £19 a fortnight (around $363 today), a huge sum compared to the pittance on the island. But he was allowed only enough for board and food; most of this money went directly to the superintendent on the island, to be dispensed to his wife as vouchers on the department’s profitable store.

In the 1960s he was pressured by the superintendent to stay and work. Although he desperately wanted to stay with his family there was no margin for skill — all the jobs paid around thirty shillings a week ($27.60 today), less than 8 per cent of the award rate for this experienced tradesman. He presented his hard-won qualifications as a painter and decorator but the superintendent pointed to the waste-paper basket and told him they were worthless on the island. Once
again he had to leave his family in order to earn a living wage. For two years he was overseer to three other men, but in 1968 when his wife became ill, he finally took permanent work on Palm Island.

This was the same year that the government finally introduced wages for this compulsory labour force, allowing community residents cash to spend on their needs. Managers on some reserve communities urged payment should equal the basic wage, and the Palm Island manager stated several of his workers were eligible for award rates. But as head of the department, Patrick Killoran gave the orders. Wages were set at only 30 per cent the basic rate, less than 10 per cent of the award for qualified tradesmen and women. Families were thrown further into crisis; store prices were often double those on the mainland; merely to survive was a struggle.

Records show the deadly levels of malnutrition and sickness on the island at this time, where fresh bread, milk and vegetables arrived only twice weekly and sold out within hours, where 75 per cent of child outpatients at the island clinic registered as severely underweight, where children evacuated to Townsville hospital during a deadly gastroenteritis epidemic in the 1970s were described as looking like ‘starving Biafrans’. And don’t forget, this is a government-run institution for compulsory wards of state.

Perhaps I could state here that internal documents of the mid-1970s acknowledge the impossibility of managing a family on only 57 per cent of the basic wage, considered as the minimum for survival for all other Australians. The documents show Aboriginal families were struggling with hunger and sickness, but the government was profiting nicely: it was saving $15 million a year in today’s terms relative to the basic wage for these employees, and $29 million a year if award wages had been paid where due.

When he retired in 1979 at the age of sixty-five the man in our story was supervising three gangs of four men each, yet his gross pay was almost the same as his mainland pay of twenty years earlier. From this he paid tax, rent, electricity and kept his family. Other white painters, often without qualifications, got far more than him. He couldn’t afford to buy a car until he got the aged pension, despite thirty years as a qualified painter and fifteen as an overseer.

With six other workers he started an action against the Queensland government in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in 1985, charging that the department’s refusal to pay award
wages was racial discrimination. He knew, as surely as other Aboriginal workers knew, that it was only because of his race that he had been paid so little; that as a skilled overseer he got less because he wasn’t white. After the 1996 hearing, in which contemporary evidence revealed cabinet discussing the illegality of its practice, the commission found in favour of the Aboriginal workers. The Borbidge coalition government scorned the finding; only after the threat of renewed action in the federal court did it make a public apology and pay compensation of $7000 to each complainant, having spent in the vicinity of $1million on a deceitful defence.

This story is a true story. This is the story of Mr Kitchener Bligh. The oldest and most respected man on Palm Island, Kitchener was an active and important member of the community, serving on the council from 1966 to 1972, on the board of the state school, and a key figure in assisting in correctional work with young hotheads in the community. Kitchener was eighty-five when he passed away in February 1998.

Kitchener had been reluctant to accept the compensation, knowing full well that it nowhere near equated to the amount of monetary deprivation he and his family had endured during his working life. But he and his friends had struggled for ten years to bring the government to accountability, and most of them were elderly and tired; they deserved their win, despite its inadequacy. As the TV news briefly showed the then minister Kev Lingard making his apologies to each complainant in April 1997, Kitchener told a reporter, ‘It’s not finished yet’

Briefly I’d like to tell you of the continuing fight for justice. Several more workers have initiated actions to recover their underpaid wages; others are seeking the money missing from their savings accounts; and a group of several hundred people is seeking accountability from successive governments for the negligence, fraud, and mismanagement of trust funds which is clearly documented over the whole period of official control of Aboriginal monies. We know trust funds were spent on development projects on missions and settlements, we know the bulk of private savings was withheld to raise revenue for the department, we know child endowment was diverted to capital works, we know only a small portion of pensions was passed on to the elderly, to widows, to invalids. We know the government sacked 1,500 workers between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s in
full knowledge of the devastation to housing and community amenities, brought frequently to crisis point, and in full knowledge of the devastation to the social fabric — they even discussed the inevitable increase in violence and alcoholism this policy would cause. We know the government did this out of a bloody-minded determination not to put a single cent towards paying its Aboriginal workers the legal wage.

So when we hear talk of ‘extra’ money going to Aboriginal communities today, of positive ‘discrimination’ in funding to address appalling health and housing and living conditions endured in so many Aboriginal communities, be well aware that this money is not ‘for Aborigines’. It is to redress deficiencies in government management. It is to redress money withheld — both through intention and through negligence — during a century of government control.

Many people today say that to acknowledge Aboriginal pain is to wallow unnecessarily in guilt. But when governments claim the moral high ground for so-called ‘well-intentioned’ practices of the past they are in fact invoking a collective social amnesia. They are hoping that a century of poverty, hunger, sickness, despair, under-education and under- or non-employment will continue to be blamed on those who were trapped, unwillingly, in the most comprehensive regime of controls ever imposed in this country. But today’s circumstances are an outcome of carefully crafted and deliberately implemented practices which continued to the present. Surely the body which controlled all aspects of Aboriginal lives for all of this century must be questioned as to why its guardianship created and sustained the worst outcomes on all social indicators for those people who they decided to call ‘wards of state’? Guardianship which continued into the late 1980s cannot be masked as a ‘well-intentioned’ policy of the past.

Acknowledging the truth of the past has nothing to do with self-defeating guilt. It is about living honestly in the present. We must all know the whole truth of how governments have operated to dictate the possibilities and limitations of Aboriginal lives. We must ask why children who were removed from their families and homelands ‘for their own protection’ were then institutionalised in dormitories which were well known as health risks, were encaged and suffered shameful punishments merely for acting like the children they were? Why were they given schooling which was well known as substandard, why were youngsters sent out to work on remote prop-
erties where it was well known they were prey to sexual and physical abuse? Why were families on reserves fed rations which were well known as medically inadequate? We must ask why people who worked all their lives were deprived of the bulk of their savings, and why they were then somehow blamed for living in overcrowded poverty. What other agency of ‘care’ would be allowed to walk away from eighty years of failure in its duty? And insist that those whose lives were so dreadfully damaged have no right to question their judgement, that they are vindictive in exposing the scandals, that they are ungracious to seek an apology.

So I ask you, when you think about this story, think about your own grandfather, your mother, your brother, yourself. It is only an accident of birth which condemned thousands of men and women to a life of unrewarded struggle. As whites who escaped this purgatory, we should feel angry that we have been kept ignorant for so long. We have a duty to understand all of our history, to acknowledge the pain of those whose lives have been so terribly mismanaged, to stand beside them in their fight for justice, to say, ‘never again’. Because this story is ultimately about our own brothers and sisters; it is about ourselves as Queenslanders.

I’d like to thank Kitchener’s family for allowing me to tell you his story. Contextual information is fully referenced in Ros Kidd’s book, *The Way We Civilise*, UQP. St Lucia, 1997.
White People on Sacred Ground: 
A Study in Reconciliation

Deborah Bird Rose

‘If it moves shoot it, if it doesn’t move, chop it down’, Australians used to say. The conquest of the colonies was a war against nature as well as a war against the natives. We stand in the wake of that destruction. In 1998 ecological crises are all around us, and reconciliation with indigenous peoples seems ever more difficult to achieve through government action. Uncontrolled ‘development’ carries on the violent work of conquest. These are dark times for Australians, and for we the descendants of settlers in particular. Looking at these issues historically, it seems to me that the generations alive today may be the first wave of settlers to try to grasp the enormity of conquest, and to understand it as a continuous process. In consequence, many of us are genuinely searching to understand how we may inscribe our moral presence into the world.

My purpose here is to explore some possibilities for peace, and for the undoing of conquering violence, through an exploration of action in the forest. I will say that social justice and environmental justice are two sides of the same coin, and can be achieved in Australia through engagement with indigenous sacred ground. I will draw on words of indigenous and settler individuals, but as I believe that white people are the problem, I particularly seek inspiration from white people who have discovered for themselves what it means to be a settler with a conscience and with enormous love for a particular place in this world.

Gulaga / Mt Dromedary

Captain Cook came sailing up the eastern coast of Australia in April of 1770. He saw ‘a pretty high mountain’ that looked to him remark-
ably like a camel, and so he named it: 'Mt Dromedary'. According to the local Aboriginal people, Captain Cook discovered neither their mountain nor them. They had been advised of his journey, and many of their compatriots from the inland had joined them at the coast to watch him sail by. The Aboriginal people responsible for this mountain are the Umbarra people (people of the black duck) of the Yuin nation. These people call their mountain Gulaga.

It is important to understand that the term 'Dreaming' refers both to creation and to connection. Dreaming refers to the beings who made the world to be as it is, and it further refers to the process of coming forth into the world. In terms of connection, Dreaming speaks to relationships that structure obligations of care, and constitute webs of connection within the created world. Gulaga is a Dreaming place, or sacred site, for local Aboriginal people. It is a place to which they are uniquely connected as a consequence of creation. Gulaga is a Dreaming woman, and she is linked by story to her two sons Little Dromedary and Montague Island. As Ann Thomas explained, 'Gulaga is the women's mountain and Mumbulla the man's mountain. The men and women have separate, independent teachings and they are not told each other's teachings. Women determine their own lifestyles and spiritual traditions'.

The geological account echoes the Dreaming story. The mountain is an extinct volcano, linked geologically to Little Dromedary and Montague Island. The mountain is located near Central Tilba and Tilba Tilba, and is seen from all the neighbouring communities: Narooma, Bermagui, Cobargo, and others. This is a rural area of small towns, farms, and, increasingly, of tourism and holiday/recreation homes. Central Tilba is a heritage town; it is an attractive and popular tourist site. In this area many local people have successfully made the shift out of primary production — dairy farming and logging — and into the kinds of economic ventures that work with tourism: wood turning galleries, bed and breakfast cottages, and such. Today, part of the mountain is incorporated into Bodalla State Forest, part is a Flora Reserve. Farms and small villages cluster around the lower slopes on the eastern side, other adjacent areas include nature reserves and Aboriginal land.
Local Histories

The Aboriginal people and the mountain have both experienced the full gamut of colonisation since the 1840s when white people first settled in the grassy plains around Narooma.

The mountain’s encounter with colonisation began in about 1877 when it became the site of intensive mining: 335 kilograms of gold were extracted in the period 1877-1910. Mal Dibden, a local dairy farmer with whom I have conducted extensive interviews, described this period: ‘The place was totally raped, turned upside down, burnt everywhere. It was just like the action of a mob of pigs. The mountain had sat there for 80 million years minding its own business, and then came this twenty years of damage. It must have been reeling’.

Timber getters have been active on the mountain for most of the history of settlement. Farmers have cleared up the slopes to the point where it just was not viable any more. Human disruptions opened areas on the mountain that were subsequently swept by violent fire. The 1952 fire is remembered vividly. According to Mal Dibden, people down the coast at Bermagui said that the mountain went up like an atom bomb.

In spite of these impacts, the mountain is botanically rich. The Working Plan of Management states: ‘Botanically, Mt Dromedary Flora Reserve is of unusual interest and of high conservation significance ... it includes a large and diverse range of plant communities, and in particular, for its latitude, of rainforest communities’ It includes isolated stands of rainforest, the southern limit of a number of species, and many uncommon or rare species.5

In the 1960s Mal Dibden started agitating for protection for the mountain. In 1966 it was incorporated into Bodalla State Forest, and as part of that transfer, the eastern side of the mountain and the summit were designated ‘Mount Dromedary Flora Reserve’ under the forestry act in recognition of the unique concentration of different plant communities. The result was that one half (the eastern side) of the mountain was protected, while the other half was held for forestry.

The ecological significance of the Flora Reserve led to its inclusion in the Register of the National Trust and listing by the Australian Heritage Commission. In 1986 the New South Wales government nominated the Flora Reserve for inclusion in the World Herit-
The Flora Reserve is managed by a committee whose members include local white people, local Aboriginal people, and foresters.

In sum, the colonising history of the mountain reflects the history of white people in this region: mining and logging were sporadic activities, while small-scale farming ensured that during the period 1880-1970, the area around the mountain was a thriving dairy community. These rural farming communities collapsed in the 1960s and 1970s. The white people with whom I spoke looked back on the time before extreme mechanisation as a time when they had close and often warm relationships with local Aboriginal people. In contrast, most of the Ombarran people with whom I spoke emphasised their sense of apartness throughout the twentieth century.

The colonisation history of the local Aboriginal people is punctuated by two main periods of concentrated brutality. The first was in the mid nineteenth century. Devastating epidemics, dispossession and some massacres caused the loss of about ninety percent of the population. There followed a period of adaptive co-existence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. During this period some Aboriginal people became owners of land under Anglo-Australian title. Farming and fishing were the two main activities that articulated with a cash economy, for whites and for Aborigines. There were Aboriginal cricket teams and musical events. Aboriginal people asked for and were allocated a school. At the same time, the ceremonial life, while diminished, was still a rich part of the Aboriginal culture of the region. This period of adaptive coexistence came to an end in the twentieth century with a new wave of dispossession and confinement on reserves under the rule of the Aborigines Protection Board. In this period language and formal ceremonies were extinguished. By the 1950s assimilation policies and practices were actively moving people into 'white' society, and at the same time a lot of the former reserve land was sold off. Through all of these years of conquest, policy shifts, and enforced evictions, the mountain has remained a constant. It is visible from surrounding communities, so that even people who were moved into white settlements like Cobargo were still in sight of the mountain. It was there on the horizon: a visible presence signalling identity, belonging, responsibility, and the presence of the sacred.
Since gaining unconditional citizenship in 1967, the Umbarra people have seized opportunities for cultural and economic renewal. They now run a successful cultural centre with cultural tours to several areas, including the Mountain. In addition to cultural tours, there are teaching camps. Ann Thomas and Gaboo Ted Thomas have each been active in promoting spiritual development, and the mountain is one of the important sites for teaching. Their teaching groups bring indigenous and non-indigenous people to special places on the mountain for instruction, growth, and healing.

Umbarra people love this mountain, and look to it for affirmation of themselves. The enduring relationship is one of connection. The mountain is understood and experienced as an active presence that exerts a hold on people. Umbarra people say that no matter where they go, the mountain calls them back.

Logging

In 1989 the Forestry Commission of New South Wales (hereafter referred to as forestry) began a timber removal project on the west side of the mountain. Umbarra women and their relatives sought to ban that logging, and they were joined in their action by white people from all of the communities within sight of the mountain.

The women took their concerns to forestry, and to the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Forestry agreed to halt logging while the matter was investigated. I was approached by the Umbarra women and asked to assist; my appointment was formalised in consultation with forestry and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The basis of the women’s action was that the mountain is a sacred place, one of a series of sacred mountains along the south coast. Gulaga is a Dreaming woman; the mountain is her body. There are portions of the mountain where men can go, and portions where only women can go. The main division is into two sides, east and west, and the west side — the side that was being logged — is exclusively for women. The mountain is ringed with tall standing stones called guardians, some of which are male, some female. As well, the mountain is home to a number of extra-ordinary beings who guard it, and whose presence sustains its spiritual integrity. The mountain was an initiation and teaching place ‘from time immemorial’, and in recent
years Umbarra people have publicly resumed teaching and other ritual activities on the mountain. Like many white people, they spoke of the need to protect water supplies, to control erosion, and to sustain biodiversity. Underlying the action to stop logging, there was a sustained belief amongst Umbarra people that the mountain is theirs: they belong to it, and it belongs to them. Furthermore, it continues to be a living presence. As one woman explained to me, ‘They should not log the mountain. If they keep on logging there’ll be nothing there. We’ll have nothing to show our kids. It will be just a legend’.

Now, while contested logging activities in many parts of New South Wales and other states have pitted local people against ‘environmentalists’ and others who want to conserve forests, here at Mt Dromedary most of the local people opposed forestry. They formed several action groups; the most prominent were the Gulaga Protection Group, and the Women’s Forest Action Group. Many of the white people involved in these groups knew many of the local Umbarra people, and had known for some time that the mountain was sacred to Aboriginal people. I want to be clear: many white people did not believe that the mountain was sacred, but they still thought it was significant for a range of reasons, and so they opposed logging.

A small but active segment of the local white population had also forged their own views about their lives in relation to this sacred mountain. For some years, at least some of the local white people had understood the mountain to be sacred in reference to themselves as well as in reference to Umbarra people. Some of them understood themselves to have been drawn to the area by the power of this place. They deferred to the Aboriginal people’s statements of sacred significance, and they regarded Aborigines as the primary spiritual custodians of the mountain. At the same time, many of them asserted that the mountain was sacred to them too, that it influenced their lives, that they had assumed responsibilities toward the mountain, and that their lives would be diminished if the mountain were damaged. Some of these people had participated in teaching events organised by Ann or Ted Thomas. Others had brought their own spiritual practices to the mountain with the permission of Umbarra people. Thus, the fact that indigenous and non-indigenous people could converge in their concern for the sacred significance of the mountain was made possible in large part by the generosity of local Aboriginal people. The fact that Umbarra people are spiritually connected to this place within
their own law and culture impels local white people to assert, as does Mal Dibden, that the mountain must be looked after from an Aboriginal point of view first; other values follow along.

I can summarise the outcomes very quickly. I completed my investigations and offered two main proposals: that forestry desist from logging, and that they develop workable mechanisms for consultation with the Aboriginal women and other members of the community so that they could jointly determine a boundary beyond which there would be no logging. Forestry agreed to these proposals, and the western side of the mountain is not logged. The Flora Reserve has been extended to cover the whole of the upper reaches of the mountain, and there have been discussions about transferring bureaucratic responsibility for the place to the NSW Parks and Wildlife Commission. In recent years, more spiritually oriented people have come to the area; Central Tilba has a thriving new age community, and very recently the Dzogchen community of Australia has purchased a large block of land in the foothills of the mountain and has established a residence and teaching centre for the Rimpoche Chogyal Namkhai Norbu.

One Foot in Paradise

Almost everybody I spoke with in the area advised me to speak with a local dairy farmer named Mal Dibden. He had the Flora Reserve put in place, and was on the advisory committee; he was active in working against logging, but tried to keep a profile that would be in keeping with his status as a local farmer. As it turned out, Mal was an elusive character, and I had to speak with a lot of other people before I got to speak with him. In 1990 the historian Peter Read and I went to the Tilba area to interview Mal Dibden about his attachments to place.

Mal started off with a 400 acre farm called Spring Hills that had been in his mother's family. It is right up against Mt Dromedary, and much of it is too steep to farm. His father purchased the place in 1948, and Mal worked there with him. He had spent his childhood holidays there, and the place was already dear to him. Over the years he bought more and more properties. Some are on the flatter land near Wallaga lake and are pretty good dairy country. Most, like Spring Hills, is poor dairy country, and a lot of it is bush.
By 1990 Mal had 1300 acres, of which only about 300 were cleared. That is to say that less than one quarter of his land was economically productive. In this area property values and property taxes are rising very rapidly, and like many farmers, Mal is strapped for cash. As Mal explained:

Its a privilege to own and a burden to try and hold.

It doesn’t produce much, unless you want to cut the trees down, and the rates around here are enormous. So, you’ve just got to be crazy to kid yourself that you can hold onto it in the long term.

You’ve got to be honest with yourself, really. For me, my beef effort, and even the dairy effort are only efforts I’m making to kid myself and kid the banks that I’m a farmer.

The rural way of life that Mal treasured has collapsed and he speaks of a double shame: the shame of clearing in the first place, and the shame of losing those self-supporting communities to mechanisation and development.

If you look at it one way, you’d have to say it was a waste and a shame, you can look at it in so many different ways. You can say well it’s a shame now the way it’s gone, neglected, only rabbits and regeneration; but you can look at it and be honest and say, its a shame it was ever cleared in the first place.

So, maybe its all a shame.

Mal started returning to the mountain in the 1960s and he kept coming back. In his words: ‘As the Aboriginals say, it seemed to draw me back’. The place has become tremendously important to him, and he took Pete and I up the mountain too. We spent a day straggling along behind him with camera and tape recorder, while he pointed out to us particular places and trees that he had been visiting and observing for decades.

I feel that it’s so beautiful, and it looks after itself. It’s completely natural, a natural perfect garden. Nothing looks out of place except intruders, and I class myself as being an intruder.
I feel it is a very spiritual place, really. It has more spiritual — if that’s the right word — more spiritual meaning to me than walking into a church anywhere. I think this particular type of forest, being such a lovely tranquil cool temperate rainforest ... I feel more tranquil and peaceful and responsible in appreciating the values of it, so I’m even careful about where I put my feet. There’s a responsibility to the beauty, and to the values it must have meant to Aboriginals, and does now.

Mal was not sure if ‘spiritual’ was the right word. I am not sure either. It is clear that we do not have a vocabulary that works well for us in talking about relationships to place. However, looking at it in term of context, Mal’s term ‘spiritual’ requires that the mountain be understood as ‘nature’, and that nature be understood as a living entity, something to be encountered, something that acts in the world.

You’ve got to get the impact, be hit by the beauty. It’s almost got to startle you, I reckon, to stop you in your tracks and just make you change yourself to a degree while you’re enjoying the beauty of it.

Nature, then, is an active force, it calls people into relationship. If you put your body into the place with an attitude of attention, the place will call you, and engage you by requiring you to make changes in yourself.

I can see my mistakes, and the good values have come into my head. I can take [the lesson of the mountain] with me, I’ll never lose it. And it was in the minds of the Aboriginals too. The mountain drew them back.

The lessons that Mal has learned by working with nature and going to the mountain inspire him to keep on working to protect the land and waters of his region. His reverence for the perfection of nature is in contradictory tension with the labour of his farming life which required him to clear and transform the land. Mal’s great respect for Aboriginal culture is founded on his view that they had developed a form of labour that worked with nature.
I’m sitting on the edge of the lake where Aboriginals have lived for probably thirty or forty thousand years without cutting one single tree down, not thousands, but one single tree. And they were healthy and happy people, healthier, probably than I am now and healthier than most Europeans are who’ve tipped the place upside down to make a dollar out of it.

As the mountain reached out and changed Mal, he had to query everything about himself, his society, and the public values that surrounded him. His conclusions, while related to his life problem of holding land in a commodity economy, speak directly to the heart of contemporary violence:

We’ve all been conned. I’m pretty sure we’ve all been conned into a system where we’ve got to have heaps of money just to maintain the basics.

I think it’s going to be extremely difficult to coast along with it and survive. The pressures are too great.

The relationship of humans to the earth. That’s the serious question, I think, really. And, it scares me. I think things are running riot, really, and out of hand. Its showing up all over the world, where economics is governing people’s relationships with the earth. It shouldn’t be economics at all. It should be sensibilities and responsibilities.

It seems certain that forestry would have had more support if a significant proportion of the local population had been engaged in logging. The reconciliation that was manifested through the joint action of indigenous and settler peoples as they struggled to protect a place that mattered to all of them testifies not only to the state of the local economy but even more to the commitment and determination of local people. At the same time it offers evidence for another factor: the mountain itself. Gulaga is one site in the sacred ground of this continent on which we all now live. Before white conquest, the tracks and sites that constituted the sacred geography of Australia criss-crossed the continent and sustained its ecological, social and spiritual integrity. Much has been destroyed, but still today much remains. Much is threatened, and it matters to all of us that it be
protected. This is a living geography; it can propel itself into the minds and bodies of settlers. It can sort us out, restructure our values, and enable us to make peace with indigenous people and with country.

Stories of sacred ground, spiritual teachers, and farmers being changed by mountains do not lead us to known places. Rather, they are like paths that help us to put one foot in front of the other in dark and risky times. One story concerns reconciliation. It involves indigenous people whose connections to place and to the knowledge of sacred places is alive and well. At the same time, it involves settlers who, in their own lives or the lives of their forebears, actively or passively promoted the practices that sought most specifically to eradicate these indigenous people, to wipe out their knowledge, and to destroy their connections to place. Reconciliation started long before forestry threatened the mountain, but forestry promoted reconciliation by generating the need for people to come together, and by their responsiveness to the local communities. Social justice for Aboriginal people, and ecological justice that will sustain ecosystems and biodiversity, are not divergent or necessarily conflicting goals; each is part of the other. More difficult, but no less contentious: we can learn to think of social justice for settlers who seek to take upon themselves moral relationships with place, relationships which are grounded in an ethic of care.

This is a story that is full of reverence for place, and full of labour to sustain the integrity of place. It runs counter to the regimes of violence that are labelled development, and thus seems to fit what Mal calls the earth logic: the balance that sustains relationships between humans and the earth.

Endnotes

3 Anon, 'Interview with Ann Thomas', The Mirror, no 34, Jan-Feb 1996, p 16.
4 Forestry Commission, op. cit., p 5.
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8 Persons wanting to know more about the significance of Gulaga can contact the Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre & Tours, Wallaga Lake, NSW.
9 Rose, op. cit., p 61.
Remembering the House of Shadows: A Dialogue Between the Father and the Daughter

Peter Read

The Historian

The conversation between the Father and the Daughter is taken from two interviews recorded in Sydney in June 1996. For reasons we will soon understand, the interview with the Daughter took place at North Sydney, at the site where once stood Kedron, the old family home. The interview with the Father took place at Balmoral, a Sydney beach suburb. The words of the Poet are by the American Linda Pastan, whose poem entitled ‘Shadows’ appears in the anthology Generations: Poems Between Fathers, Mothers, Daughters, Sons.

The Poet

Each night this house sinks into the shadows under its weight of love and fear and pity.

Each morning it floats up again so lightly it seems attached to sky instead of earth, a place where we will always go on living and there will be no dead to leave behind.
The Daughter

As a child, before you build up all the barriers and scaffolding of this rickety old thing we call life, you flow with the environment. It is absorbed through your pores and by osmosis you flow back out and surround the so-called external world.

Without the filters and word barriers the world is registered in great, uncensored chunks of experience. Smell, touch, sound, sigh, all tasting the same and coming in at the same volume. Undiluted. So naturally, the places where you start delineating your own special being are embedded in the very fibre of your physical and psychic being.

The Poet

Always save your pity for the living who walk the eggshell crust of earth so lightly in front of them, behind them. only shadows.
The Father

My father bought the house in the depression, and he bought it for a song, and they hated him. The people who owned it have never forgiven him for buying it. A bit less than three acres. My father rented in Wollstonecraft, and bought Garston which was his surgery, we lived there four years, and he looked over the fence at Kedron, and talked to Mr Palmer and his sister who lived there. It was like living in a lighthouse, Mr Palmer said, he lived downstairs and his sister lived upstairs. He was always busy raking leaves and so on. [In the early 1930s] It was going to pieces, leaking shingle roof, downstairs had electrical fittings coming through the gas, upstairs was still gas, and it was deteriorating. Auctioned, it was turned in, too big. Father made an offer, 10 000 pounds, ‘I’ll offer that.’ ‘Done’, but he didn’t consult his sister.

She gassed herself in the house rather than move.

So there was someone else before who cared about it very much too. Kedron meant a lot to a lot of people.

The Poet

We think of whom we’ve left behind
already in the ever hungry shadows

The Father

Mrs Fisher was another sister, and before we moved in, she came round to take things out of the garden, surreptitiously, they had a big property in Faulcon Street. I was at school with one of his kids.

The Daughter

My Uncle Hugh used to say good morning to a big pine tree every morning. I didn’t, I was just a part of the tree. I in fact thought I was one of the fairies in the garden. My favourite book was Greenmansions. My brother Mike and I used to get our bread and cheese and go up in the tree and be hunters.
The Father

There was originally a chookyard on the Walker Street side, and father thought he’d sell it to the church to keep the rates down. Covered in blackberries and lantana, I burned a lot and brought goats in, and grandfather had got Corriedale sheep in.

I was fifteen when they moved from Garston. And I was at Kedron for about 36 years.

The Daughter

Let me draw a map of the garden. In the centre of this space here — this was a very important space here which grandfather designed — this was just all garden and trees, but all this was open lawn, and then there was this very grand circular garden there. Do you remember that? With the fish pond in the middle. A very important space. It was sort of formal, but a nice friendly formal space. In the middle of that there was a little tiny thing with a water spout and the fountain came out of that, and that was all paved around the edge, with water lilies and tadpoles and all those things that kids play with, and then there was a garden with hydrangeas and pretty things around the edge here. And there was a secret place here — there were all these secret places in the garden. There was a secret place where you put your hand under and turned on the tap which turned on the fountain. Directly opposite that there was some grand stone steps coming up here. This is the bank here ... You actually went down the steps here to a lower level. A scruffy bit of bush at the back there, and a magnificent flowering peach there and another flowering plum here, and another flowering plum here, and at some stage this area here was quite a formal vegetable garden. This was also the bank going down here, it was even steeper this side. Maybe the bank should come over here a bit more ...

So this is the house here. This area here was called Fairyland, and it’s where all the drunks used to hide at night and sleep in all the weeds. This was an enormous space here. It was a complete gamut of all the worst weeds in Sydney, balloon vine ... but it was a magical space. It was all green, just organic, from the ground up was all green and vines growing up into the trees, and nobody ever went there, there were masses of mosquitoes and things there. It wasn’
really very pleasant, but it was a special place because it was away from everybody.

**The Father**

I feel it just as one place, house and garden together.

**The Daughter**

This area here was a bit more formal with azaleas scattered amongst the other trees, and some other steps that went down there. A very overgrown pathway going down here, that was so overgrown you could hardly see it.

Drawing Kedron on a map. This is a very strange thing to do.

This is the path that went over to Garston through the garden. This is one of the big figs you can see now ... Lovely stone steps. There were masses of beautiful old stone steps everywhere, going down and up, all beautifully, big solid sandstone steps, really fabulous steps.

**The Poet**

we pause a minute and are filled with pity for the lovely children of the earth who run up and down the stairs so lightly and who weave their careless songs so lightly through the hedges which they play behind that the fruits and flowers of the earth rise up on their stems above the shadows ...

**The Daughter**

The house is straight across here, and straight down there, and then there was a little halfway house that stuck out here. Maybe I should just go inside the house now.

Here’s the front door. You walk in and it’s this wonderful thing of space going right through the house. Remember how the doors were
always open? You never shut anything? We never had anything locked.

Grandfather and Grandmother lived upstairs while we lived downstairs, and after grandfather died, grandmother lived there by herself. And there was this wonderful thing, grandfather said, you could find an 'appletite' in the garden. When we didn’t want to eat our dinner, grandfather would tell us to go into the garden and look for an appletite. It never failed. I don’t know what we thought we were looking for, but it gave us a sense of adventure and vaster possibilities. But do you think that Grandmother was attached to the place?

**The Father**

I don’t know. She liked going back to Garston, and she quite enjoyed going into the little cottage there. Whether she enjoyed Kedron I wouldn’t really know. She probably didn’t know either.

**The Daughter**

If you came through a door here you should be able to see right through the house to the other end. So you could look through these doors and you could see the garden out here from right over this end of the house. And this lovely aspect right through. And that was the formal front door, and this was the more rural back area. The front was mostly straight lines, and adults lived there. The verandah was here. All these big posts on the verandahs. Every thing was solid, nothing was mean or skinny. A big wooden chest, you could lift the lid up, and it always felt as though there was something magic inside it even though it was only the tennis court net, you always felt there was something special happening in that box. And just below that on the verandah — that was the bathroom that stuck out here ...

**The Father**

I was always happy wherever we lived, though I preferred Kedron, but we owned Garston anyway. I walked through the garden to Garston to the surgery. You’d be walking through the garden and at night time and owls’d come floating past you. The roots of trees to stumble over, those big fig trees have enormous roots.
The Daughter

There was a wonderful umbrella pine at the bottom of the tennis court, and there was a mossy bank at the back of the tennis court, that’s a place I remember very well. It was always covered with very green thick soft moss, that bank there.

Here there were all these white azaleas, pure white azaleas, and at the bottom of these steps, actually in the bank itself, there was a door ... and what was interesting was that the soil here always was wet but it wasn’t muddy or anything, it was all clay, and it always smelled of clay, so every time I smell strong wet clay this area I remember it, really well. So the white azaleas and there’s this lovely smell of wet clay, and you go down here and it’s all mossy and there’s stone here, and you go into this door, and underneath the bank, and there’s a passageway under the bank, this is where they were going to hide in the war ... and in the hallway here inside the house, there’s a doorway here that goes into what ended up being mum and dad’s bedroom, but was originally a dining room when I was a child. There was the staircase coming down stairs, which was very elegant and beautiful, it had lovely wooden panelling coming down the side, and we tried to get the National Trust to save it when the house went.

But they didn’t.

Underneath here there was a door and you went in under the stairs there, and in the floor there was trapdoor. And you opened the trapdoor and went down underneath, stone steps you went down, through the trapdoor, down the stone steps, and there was a whole area under the house there ... and there were little grids under the verandah that you could just see people’s legs going past, so you could see all the people walking past outside. The best thing of all was coming out that little wooden door into the white azaleas with big pines going up into brilliant blue sky! It was a very special place, because there were all these different dimensions, nothing was straightforward, there were all these little places you could go into that were quite different. There was a lovely old bath here with lion claws, and the loo was old, very traditional, with wooden seat. Father, did you have special spots in the house or the garden?
The Father

Not me, particularly. When we moved in we had to reshingle the whole house, have those shingles cut up the coast somewhere, all the plumbing and electricity right through the place. It was a big job setting it up again. What about you?

The Daughter

It depends where, there are some many different places. There’s an area down here I often go to, there’s a whole mysterious other part. That gate from Garston was my entrance into fairyland, this whole magic mysterious place, and there was even an arch over this gate, and you walked through there and you were in this magic other place. I used to have lots of dreams about this area here and finding money buried in the ground when I was little. Beside the steps there was a little nest where wrens lived. All this area here, nobody ever went there except kids, and not even us. It was a wonderful space for birds and possums and creatures of all kinds.

Out here, out the back in this part of the house, was much more rural and much more relaxed, and was made of brick, because it was an addition...

Now here there was a bedroom which Janey and I shared for a while, this one here which went out a bit further, that was sort of, dunno ... Never had much feeling about that room, I remember I was there when John F Kennedy was killed.

The laundry. There was an old scrubbing board, we had everything, the whole works, the old stuff, a really old lovely old scrubbing board, and any time anyone did the washing there was masses of soap suds and we’d all grab all the soap suds and run out here and have a soap sud fight on the lawn. It was very big feature, it was a simple thing that you did, just wonderful fun. I still have the stained glass windows from the garage. Dad had a big shell that was under the tap.

The Father

Yes, I’ve still got it. I took it with us to Balmoral and put it in place under the tap in the front garden.
The Daughter

There were the most wonderful trees here, you could walk up these trees into the sky. Like a continuation. You know those huge cumulus clouds that come sometimes, it was as if you could walk right up there into the clouds.

The Poet

Each morning it floats up again so lightly it seems attached to sky instead of earth, a place where we will always go on living and there will be no dead to leave behind.

The Daughter

Up here on the top of the cliff, in retrospect was the most degraded bush you could imagine. It must have at some stage have been fabulous bush, and what it had become was just dark pittosporum and privet and that’s about it. And there were a few little rock lilies hidden on the edge of the cliff. And there was just all weeds.

The Father

That’s near where you and Andre were married.

The Daughter

Andre and I got married under this arch here, on these formal steps. It was the most glorious day. I came down these steps with Dad, walked round this bed, and this fountain was playing, and there was a currawong in the garden singing. We just came round here and stood here and we got married. It was just the most wonderful experience, so I had this fabulous experience just before it went.

The Father

Before it went? You mean before we sold it?
The Daughter

[To the audience:] Yes. They — the parents — decided they would have to move when I was overseas and it happened just after. It was probably a reason why I came back, though I don’t remember getting the letter telling me it was to be sold. [To the Father:] No, I came back six months before Andre, and they decided during that time. How strange. I’d already said good bye to you both, and Australia and I’d gone overseas forever, so I’d already made my break, so when I came back having the place still there, it was a bonus.

The Father

Did the house know on your return from overseas?

The Daughter

Good question. I’ll have to think about that. Because you’ve got to remember that I came back to see you and mum as well too, as well as the house and the trees. [To the audience:] I think I must have detached myself quite a bit since then. [To the Father:] Now you put your side of the story.

The Father

Well, the council said, you can stay here, but we’ll put up the rating to commercial rating all round you, in other words you can stay on in the house, but we’ll take the garden. They would’ve forced me out. It was just too expensive. There were all sorts of plans so that we could stay there, but none of them suited me. What really made me want to leave was that because my sister wanted to get money. She wanted to sell her bit of the property. And if she sold her block separately she would have got quite a bit less, and I would’ve had to stay there while they developed a big commercial building next door, and that would have hurt.

So what happened was that we sold it bit by bit. There was never a time when we exactly decided to go. The government wanted to resume the whole place. They were going to bring the school, I think it was Greenwood school, down the bottom there, to where we were.
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So we sold the bit which became Georgian House, the motel, in order not to be resumed. But soon after that the Council started threatening to put up the rates again. Your Aunt Elizabeth wanted to get out, which would’ve left us surrounded. I never contemplated having just the house. That suggestion was put up to me a few times, I didn’t like that, I couldn’t bear it. Just imagine what it would’ve been like, all these high buildings, oh no. Hopeless, I reckon.

And when they came to pull it down I asked if they could put it somewhere else, and they said they’d have to number every stone and rebuild it exactly the same way to make it possible.

When I sold, I made restrictions on trees that had to stay, and restrictions on height, which they didn’t keep to. We moved to the family place in Balmoral, well I bought two blocks to build a new place. The developer was going to do very well out of it. So we started making plans to move out.

The Daughter

Andre took photos of it when it was still in situ but nobody was in it. So he took all these very formal photographs of the house with the grandfather clock and the mirror and all the important things, but already it was losing itsambience because we weren’t in there any more. And some of the blinds were down on the windows. Already the process had begun. And because I was beginning a new relationship, that helped me detach myself too, in a funny sort of way.

I’m glad I didn’t come back and find it gone, I’m glad I saw it going step by step. I think coming back and finding it gone would have been an awful shock. A time of saying proper goodbyes and taking films and photos. I took a lot of film just before the house went because I wanted to capture all these things. With the movie camera I took film very slowly of parts that I wanted to etch into my mind like the back of the house up here — there was a wonderful roof on this part of the house ... And this angle here was particularly lovely too.

You took out a lot of plants; cement things from taps, but I couldn’t conceive of the importance of the physical things so much as the feeling of the place, but you actually picked up the physical things and brought them. Four friends helped, ‘they took bits of our memories through the garden’
The Poet

Always save your pity for the living
who walk the eggshell crust of earth so lightly
in front of them, behind them, only shadows.

The Father

I thought it was important that we took as many things as we could. We took the front door of Kedron, here. Sliding doors, and all the other doors, that fireplace, and tennis court fence post to stop the ash getting on the carpet, the mirror, the iron gate was part of a double gate coming in from McLaren St, which actually came from St Thomas’ church before we had it. A lot of azaleas and camellias, some stonework set in the garage, foyle from above mother’s window. But we didn’t come straight here, we went to Garston first and put it in the cellar, and a lot of it’s still there, I think. All sorts of stuff, like posts that held up the front door, and the big wooden spiky things on the roof. I bought one of them over here to Balmoral.

The Daughter

I took those photos of it happening and I took friends over and I made myself walk through it and look at it ... It was just such an extraordinary thing, the whole concept of this place which had been your life, this solid life that you’d lived all this time, was actually being dismantled, it was just fascinating really, to see these physical things going. And it wasn’t just physical things that were going, it was layers and layers of memories and actions and thoughts and relationships were all being dismantled. And there was this wall with very little meaning, I was just standing there and they were blank ... They weren’t there any more. The thing I remembered wasn’t those physical things at all: they were there but they weren’t the same shape or the same configuration, but just bits of old plaster and bricks.

And outside. There were three very tall formal pine trees. One, two, three, which were all kept when the house went. That one died first, that one died second, and that one’s still alive. They died because the house went and everything changed.
The Father

I think you were the most upset of all of us.

The Daughter

I felt outraged all the time, I mean, really outraged! It wasn't the demolishers' fault though. I don't think I actually saw them and the destruction, I just saw what had been destroyed. I never went over when it was actually happening, unless I've actually wiped that out. I went later. The garden was extraordinarily intact, that was the weird thing. That was rather comforting. I can just remember one occasion when I went over specially with a very old friend who'd known me a long time, and she had a new relationship with this fellow and she wanted to show him where I'd lived, and we were standing on top of the bank and looking out on the garden, and the house didn't mean anything any more. I was thinking, the vision that I was looking at in front of them was still the same, the garden was still the same and the trees and everything. But the house had gone. That was really weird.

Kedron was everything. It was just one's whole life.

The Father

The poor old garden.

The Daughter

[To the Father:] Well the pine trees didn't take long to cark it, I tell you what. And all the other trees looked terribly unhappy. There was a particular magnolia which they saved which was down here, a very beautiful magnolia which was saved and put back in the same spot: and it didn't survive. Died slowly.

[To the audience:] See a really important part of the deal was that the trees be looked after properly. Unfortunately in retrospect they were all the wrong trees anyway. [To the Father:] That magnificent clump of bamboo, well they planted a very nice grove of banksia which was much nicer than what was there before, when you think about it (should've been natives, probably, throughout).
The company was a conglomerate from Hong Kong called Jardine Bowan and Slipman, but the fellow who did the liaising had a big flash Mercedes. Whenever I see that name, I hate him. I don't hate much, but I hate the company. Now there's a hotel, an office block on the court and Noah's Restaurant where the house was.

**The Father**

In a way the site hasn't changed much even though everything's gone. Do you look across now and try to remember?

**The Daughter**

I don't have to. Driving down Walker Street, if you look across, the visual landscape is very similar, and you get this thing where suddenly you're back to Kedron because there's a set of trees that are the same. You can't stand there exactly. But I know exactly where everything was. I can tell you, I could walk there and tell you. I can go through there in my head. The hotel is so alien and so totally... other, and it even smells revolting, that you could never relate to that, no. The only things you can relate to are the visual shape of the trees, certain aspects. But the hotel's really alienating, it's all cement and very ugly. What about you?

**The Father**

I didn't feel very upset at the thought of going back. But I never did go back. I knew what I was doing with selling up, and I wanted to get into Balmoral. I was more interested in getting in here, the new place. But I still imagine myself wandering round there occasionally, I know all the trees and I know where I am in the garden. I know the initials, there's a lillypilly, and on the rock face are the initials... They're still there even now.

What's your clearest memory of all?

**The Daughter**

I can remember Sundays, if I actually consciously try and think about Kedron I remember Sundays with the sound of tennis balls on the
grass. And there's lemonade, and white clothes and the line maker with the white lime in it and the roller, the big heavy roller which we had to drag up and down, and the string that you had to mark out the white lines with, and special little metal pegs in the grass all over the place. I just remember the roller and the white marker, and we did that over and over again. And there was a board here that we used to practise tennis on, and the balls used to hit that and go plok plok plok. It was always spring time. There were all these wonderful white daisies with blue petals. I always knew the names of everything, because grandfather always told me ...

Kedron was never the same, it changed its conglomeration so many times in my lifetime, because it was grandparents, then cousins came. Christmas dinners, then us at Garston, then us there and grandparents upstairs and changed everything, then I went to boarding school and grandfather died, and then she was up there by herself, then domestic help faded and we changed the shape of the house, and my bedroom became what used to be the laundry, so the pattern of dreams and memories was changing all the time, so it was never a constant thing that I was relating to, it was something that was always evolving and changing. And I remember different things at different times, it depends on who I'm speaking to, and what the situation is. It's not just Kedron it's my whole world, it's my past, it's everything. Even the family evolves and changes. There's all these memories and accumulated ghosts.

The Poet

In this house where we have all been living
we bind the family together lightly
with knots made equally of love and pity
and the knowledge that we'll leave behind
only partial memories, scraps of shadows
trinkets of our years upon the earth

The Father

I don't think of it as my place any more. No. All the sweat on the court, it was a wonder the building didn't sink. The roller was made from cables from the bridge, they held the cables till the bridge ends met.
We filled it up with cement, and the last thing I saw at Kedron was the roller, and it was still there for a long long time, a terrific weight. I used to scythe the banks, we had to cut the ficus. But daughter, do you think it helps by living close to the site, to lay those ghosts of memory?

**The Daughter**

I couldn’t live anywhere else, that’s my problem. I cannot orientate the world unless I’m living here. If I think of living somewhere else then the whole focus changes and the centre of the world doesn’t exist any more. When I lived in Europe, Kedron gave me a tremendous amount of freedom and capacity to just relax, because I had such a stable childhood and such a central place to be, and all the memories were very ...

And what was over there isn’t there any more, that’s not living close to it. It’s more like feeling alienated.

[To the audience:] I think I’m often in this area actually, and I’m also inside upstairs. I’m often walking round the outside climbing on the roof, because I used to climb all over the roof. On the verandah, for example, there were roofs that came down, and I used to climb along them and look through windows and climb in windows, and often when I’m dreaming that’s what I’m doing. Outside looking in. You don’t want them to see you there because you don’t belong there any more, that’s right. They know who I am but I shouldn’t be there because we sold it to them. In one of the dreams they were the people who’d moved in next door to mum and dad at the beach, and in one of the dreams they were definitely the people who had taken over Kedron, and that house next door to mum and dad at the beach also belonged to the family. So there’s a constant pattern of being alienated from the houses that belonged to the family. I had a dream last year. I’m often climbing along this roof ... and also upstairs here...

[To the Father:] But only you and I talk about it. I don’t talk with the others. I don’t know, we never talk much in our family anyhow, we’re not talkers.

[To the audience:] Dad can walk around the whole garden like I can. Dad and I have a dream about flying too, on the tennis court. Dad runs along the tennis court and takes off. I do too.

But we never meet in our dreams.
The Poet

Each night this house sinks into the shadows under its weight of love and fear and pity,
Each morning it floats again so lightly it seems attached to sky instead of earth,
a place where we will always go on living and there will be no dead to leave behind

The Daughter

But these dreams are very interesting because I never brought them consciously, they just welled up. And I’ve had not just one but about six, and very strongly. But the funny thing is that the rooms aren’t even there and there are still strangers walking as far as I’m concerned.

In the dreams it’s a feeling of terrible frustration that there’s someone else in your house. I can’t even relate to the hotel that’s there now. But when I go back to it in my dreams the house is definitely there, it’s exactly the same house. It hasn’t even been altered, but there’s someone else living inside. That’s the strong thing. It’s alienation. It’s not resentment because I don’t resent them, I just feel a bit lost, I think, a bit strange. ’Cause it’s not my house any more. I think that’s all it is. I get angry about the trees going, I got very angry about that. I’ve actually written eulogies to the trees in spring and described everything.

The Father

I can shut my eyes and wander round the garden easily, I mean I know my way round the garden.

The Daughter

Inside the house too?
The Father

Yes, I think so, though we altered the house quite a bit too, you know. Various relatives living at Garston came to work in the garden. I cut about half a dozen of the big pine trees down, too old and shading the court.

The Daughter

Would you still move if we had our time over again?

The Father

I’d move if had the time again. I think so. Shingle roof is expensive, all the woodwork fancy cutouts were getting very old, and roof was going again in the shallower places.

The Historian

Eighteen months after these interviews were taped, the father died, at his new home at Balmoral.

The Poet

I think about my father in the earth
as if it were a room in which he’s living,
as if it were a house composed of shadows
where he remembers those he loved not lightly,
where he remembers what he’s left behind.

The Daughter

The feeling that the physical and psychological space which Kedron was still remains my central reference point for everything and everywhere else.
The Poet

He had a great capacity for pity
but told me that I mustn’t waste my pity
on him — he’d had his share of life on earth,
and he was happy just to leave behind
daughters of daughters who would go on living.
So he seemed to leave us almost lightly,
closing the curtains which were stitched with shad­

Always save your pity for the living
who walk the eggshell crust of earth so lightly
in front of them, behind them, only shadows.
In April 1998, the Centre for English Cultural Tradition at the University of Sheffield hosted an international conference called *The State of Play: Perspectives on Children's Oral Culture*. The conference organiser was Dr Julie Bishop, a folklorist who undertook doctoral studies in the folklore department at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. After the conference, Julie Bishop sent to conference delegates, for their interest, the following letter from the *Guardian* supplement of 9 May 1998. It is part of a letter sent to their headmaster by a group of boys at St Thomas's Preparatory School in London. The boys were preparing for a seminar on free time; their parents had been calling for free time to be more structured.

Dear Headmaster,

From the moment we are awake we are chivvied and chided by our well-meaning parents into action for school, rushed through breakfast and piled into the family car ready for the traffic jams. As soon as we arrive, we are dropped in the teaching block from where starts the great ‘pindown’: assembly or chapel followed by lessons, the routine of lunch, followed by organised games (which are not always the fun activity adults presume them to be), followed by more lessons, followed by prep.

Our family cars arrive and all the way home we are grilled about the day — one fast swipe at prep and then to bed. Although this is not exactly child abuse or a case for Amnesty International, we would suggest that the one moment of sanity we need is the freedom to do
our own thing in the two small breaks. Surely 20 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes after school lunch is not too much to ask.

We have so much organisation in our lives that there is no chance simply to be ourselves. We have the indignity of being observed at break — this we understand, because you have so often noted that some of our number may be potential savages, as in Lord of the Flies. However, we feel that if animals have rights, so do children ... This unstructured time is the best part of our day, and now you want to ruin it with yet more adult involvement.

If “the best days of one’s life are schooldays” is indeed to remain true and not an adult fib, then give us our free time back. We note that in the adult world there are coffee breaks, which appear to be totally free and not structured by employers.¹

The St Thomas’s protest, from May 1998, is the first I have seen from children themselves, although adult friends of children, often folklorists, have frequently spoken on behalf of this little-known aspect of children’s rights. The St Thomas’s incident is only a recent example of long-standing attacks on the culture of childhood. In the Summer 1988 issue of the TASP Newsletter (The Association for the Study of Play), Brian Sutton-Smith, the New Zealand-born psychologist formerly at the Department of Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote with great delight about a school where the parents succeeded in restoring recess time, which had been abolished in 1970 in favour of daily physical education classes. This was Loudon County in Northern Virginia and the parents’ move was initiated by a mother, Rosemary Alley, who, as Brian Sutton-Smith wrote, “notices one day that her daughter is always coming home with headaches. “When do you get them?” she asks. “Before or after recess” “What’s recess?” says daughter Amie” And so on.

An interesting study was carried out in the 1980s by Barbara Tobin, an Australian educator based in the southern American state of Georgia. In a paper presented to the Third National Child Development Conference held in Perth in 1984, she described the school’s practices which meant that the children had almost no ‘free time’, as we know it. She wrote that:
Minimal unstructured student time was a deliberate strategy to achieve the desirable educational goals of academic excellence and group discipline. The recess break was short and, for older students, was usually given over to a teacher-directed kick ball game. The lunchroom was also strictly supervised and lessons resumed shortly after the consumption of meals.²

This rather chilling interpretation of ‘education’ did not succeed in killing children’s traditional play, although it did produce some adaptation, in ways which have more than a slight resonance with the characteristics of a prison culture. According to Barbara Tobin, the school’s regiment:

... meant that folk games requiring considerable time, equipment and players were often abandoned in favour of shorter partner activities that could be played spontaneously in impromptu situations. Thus, in their irrepressible instinct to play, these students had developed an extensive range of verbal tricks, finger plays, teasing rhymes, divinations, handclaps and miniature table top games. They could circumvent adult restriction through activities such as divining futures whilst standing in the lunch queue; exchanging handslaps and finger tricks in corridors en route to lessons; spreading the dreaded ‘cooties’ around the lunch table, passing right through the unsuspecting supervising teachers; performing intricate handclaps on the school bus; sharing non-verbal riddles during class; and by constructing folk toys using school notepaper.³

Attacks on children’s traditional play have a long history. The nineteenth century, for example, was characterised by capitalism’s desire for order, control and ‘fear of the mob’ This fear had powerful influences on popular culture in Britain, America and Europe, and had such results as removing Shakespeare’s plays away from the music hall and the disorderly ‘groundlings’, and into the serene world of upper class ‘high culture’.⁴ At the same time some adults began to fear children’s traditional street play, and attempted to restrict it in a variety of ways. In 1990, Amanda Dargan and Steven Zeitlin produced a book called City Play about the rich history and contemporary life of children’s play in New York City. They also wrote about adult intervention noting that:
Beginning in the middle to the late nineteenth century, a number of reformers attempted to mold children’s play, and in particular the play of poor immigrant children. They saw in organized play and sport ways to ameliorate social ills associated with the effects of new immigration ... and industrialization ... One of the reformers’ strategies was to take children off the street and supervise their play in controlled spaces, including parks, playgrounds, and designated “play spaces”.5

It is not surprising that folklorists were prominent among those who defended children’s spontaneous, traditional play, in the face of adult-organised attempts to exert social and moral control. William Newell, one of the founders of America’s oldest scholarly society, the American Folklore Society, wrote in 1883 that:

There is something so agreeable in the idea of an inheritance of thought kept up by childhood itself, created for and adapted to its own needs, that it is hard to consent to part with it. The loss cannot be made good by the deliberate invention of older minds. Children’s amusement, directed and controlled by grown people, would be neither childish nor amusing ... 6

Children’s playground culture is one of the oldest and most fascinating aspects of tradition in our society and much of it has survived unchanged since ancient times. The painting which we know simply as Children’s Games, by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel, dates from 1560 and most of its almost ninety children’s games are still played today. Children’s traditional free play includes skipping games, clapping games, ball games, chants, rhymes, parodies, jokes, riddles, repartee, tricks, insults, autographs, superstitions and fortune-telling. It is transmitted almost entirely orally, from child to child in the school playground and other places where children are, less frequently today, able to interact in the absence of adults. Children’s folk play is both changeless and changing and adapts itself to the contemporary world of computers and commerce. In a study which I supervised in 1995, in Moe in Victoria’s La Trobe Valley, the folk traditions of the town were documented by a team of locally-based researchers. The playground culture of two primary schools, Moe Central Primary and Newborough East, was studied. Despite the undoubted power of commerce and the media, of the twenty-six identified varieties of chasey
(or *tiggy* as it is more commonly called, in Victoria at least), only two were based on television programs, namely *Gladiators* and *Power Rangers*. Furthermore, of the one hundred and sixty games documented in Moe, only seven involved commercially produced toys or equipment. These were *bounce ball* (*super ball*), *matchbox cars*, *stunt planes*, *walkie talkie*, *basketball*, *football*, and *POGS*. *POG* originally stood for *Pineapple Orange & Guava*, a fruit juice produced in Hawaii in packs with decorated round cardboard tops. The tops quickly became children’s collectibles in Hawaii in the 1990s, and the craze moved elsewhere in the world, with commercial manufacturers now producing *POGS*. The basic *POG* game involves throwing one *POG* into a group of others, a variation of much older games, using (for example) cigarette cards or round cardboard milk bottle tops.

Most children’s playground games are, however, part of the continuous and ancient tradition. String games, or cat’s cradle, for example, are not only of great antiquity but are widespread throughout the world, including among Australia’s indigenous people. The value of children’s traditional play is far greater than mere antiquarian curiosity or sentimentality would indicate. One of the most detailed studies of Australian children’s playground games was carried out in the 1970s by two Queensland lecturers in physical education. Lindsay and Palmer compared a proposed Queensland primary school physical education syllabus with children’s traditional games, and their results showed that in many respects traditional games catered better for children’s needs than the proposed syllabus games. Traditional games provided more opportunities for cardio-vascular endurance, strategy, rhythmical movement, touching, activities without equipment, and generally, more games for younger children. Lindsay and Palmer’s extensive research also showed the social value of traditional games. Although boys showed greater emphasis on ‘winning’ than girls, both gave most attention to the process of the game, even changing the rules to accommodate a good or weak player, so that everyone had a ‘good go’:

> Children learn to play with other children rather than against them if the game is to serve its purpose. Skill learning is an incidental outcome. It is the emphasis on process that ensures that co-operation
holds sway over competition in children’s games.9

In 1979 June Factor and I jointly founded the Australian Children’s Folklore Collection, one of the world’s largest collections of children’s folklore, which is housed in the University of Melbourne Archives. In August 1998 we were invited by the Anthropology Department at the University of Queensland to speak to undergraduate students enrolled in a subject called Play and Pretence and we are hopeful that some of the fieldwork being undertaken by these students will include some up-dating of Lindsay and Palmer’s classic Brisbane study.

Some games are competitive, such as marbles, and can lead to fights! It is regrettable that some schools have banned this traditional pastime. Sorting out such fights is valuable learning for children in the adult arts of negotiation and compromise. The American folklorists Mary and Herbert Knapp described children’s games as legislatures and courts of law. They wrote:

The distinguishing characteristic of a traditional folk game is that although it has rules, they are not written down. Nobody knows exactly what they are. The players have a tradition to guide them, but most settle among themselves the details of how to play a particular game.

As they argue about rules, add new ones, agree to exceptions, and censure a playmate who is cheating, they are exploring how necessary rules are, how they are made, and what degree of consensus is needed to make them effective. They are also learning something about the relationship of personality to power and of fairness to order.

Perhaps even more important, while playing a folk game, children are also learning to play with roles, with feelings, with the rules of the game itself.10

Proscription is one form of adult intervention in children’s traditional play, so too, are various forms of ‘taking over’ or annexation. Adult annexation can take the form of a traditional game competition, sometimes commercially sponsored (such as Coca Cola yo yos), in the interests of a worthy cause, or a Jump Rope for Heart cam-
campaign with prizes for the best skipping. Such competitions distort the traditional play which in its original form is more oriented to the process itself rather than to winning. Yet commerce and tradition are not always enemies; for many years children have relied on manufactured marbles, tops and knucklebones or ‘jacks’, even though the games themselves are as old as history and learned without the benefit of commerce.

Annexation of children’s games and some other kinds of adult intervention are sometimes, paradoxically, the result of a benign interest in children’s play and a confused recognition of its value. Schools which paint permanent hopscotch grids on the asphalt might be hurt by the suggestion to keep their hands off the hopscotch! Yet they would be of more assistance by providing chalk (chunks of builders’ plaster is ideal) for children to draw their own. There are dozens of different traditional designs for hopscotch and a playground can have its own traditional favorites, as well as different sizes for players of different ages. Sometimes adult intervention can assume ludicrous proportions. At the 1998 Sheffield conference, the well-known Scottish folklorist Alistair Roberts gave a paper entitled ‘Danish Games and Scottish Playgrounds: a Peaverish Postscript’ Peaverish does not mean ‘peevish’! Peavers is the term used for hopscotch in southern Scotland. Roberts’ main paper discussed the similarities between schoolground games in Denmark and Scotland, and his ‘postscript’ dealt with peavers, or hopscotch. The abstract for his paper reads as follows:

Adult interference in children’s lives has recently reached remarkable heights in connection with the traditional glass stones [or taws] which are sold in Denmark. They were banned as dangerous by an EC ruling of 1996. It was implemented by the Danish government in a series of bureaucratic decisions which included the licensing of an unbreakable plastic stone. A humorous Folk Movement for the Preservation of the Glass Stone came into being, and the whole affair (still unresolved) cries out for the newspaper headline “Hopping Mad at Brussels”.11

Roberts’ hilarious (and rueful) paper was only one of many cross-cultural studies presented at Sheffield, and Australia (which was well-represented with four delegates) provides many opportunities for
analysis of the multicultural playground. Kathryn Marsh, from the University of Sydney Music Department, spoke of the influence of the media, the classroom and immigrant groups on contemporary children's playground singing games in Australia. Marsh's research was carried out in a Sydney inner-urban primary school where 40% of pupils came from non-English-speaking backgrounds. She provided a detailed analysis of factors influencing inter-ethnic transmission of singing games, including classroom practices, multi-ethnic membership of friendship groups, and the confidence and popularity of game performers.

The 'confidence and popularity of game performers' has a great deal to do, I believe, with the installation of a new game, probably from South-East Asia, in school playgrounds since the 1950s, namely what we call elastics. Here is the fascinating exception to the general rule about the ancient connections of children's folkloric games. Elastics is popular today in Australia, America, Britain and Europe, and in South-East Asia. In the United States it is sometimes called Chinese jump rope or Indian jump rope. We have no evidence from any of the countries I have mentioned of the game being played before the 1950s, even though elastic is a much older commodity. Some folklorists, including myself, have speculated that it may have spread in the aftermath of the Vietnam War but we have no direct evidence. Certainly it is widely played in South-East Asia and immigrant girls coming to Australia have brought some spectacular high jumps and tricks which have encouraged the popularity of the game in the school playground.

Elastics is the only new game I know of which has achieved widespread international popularity in recent years. But there are games which have disappeared from the school playground or which have undergone significant changes. Many circle games, such as 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' and 'Drop the handkerchief' have shifted their 'locus of control' to the adult-run schoolroom or children's party. Yet they were once firmly within the Australian children's playground tradition. Mrs Ethel Beed was eighty years of age in 1983 when she wrote in issue number five of the Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter about the games she played in Sydney before the first world war. She described several ring games played by girls in the school playground, including Green Gravel, which is also described by Lady
Gomme in numerous regional variations in her 1894 compilation. Ethel Beed's Sydney version from around 1912 went as follows:

Green gravel, green gravel, the grass is so green,
The fairest young lady that ever was seen.
We washed her in milk and dressed her in silk,
And wrote her name down with a gold pen and ink.
Dear Jennie (or Mary or Lily or Ethel) dear Jennie
Your true love is dead,
We've sent you a letter
To hang down your head.13

Skipping is usually thought of as a girl's activity today, with rare exceptions. Mr Bernie Johnston was interviewed for the New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection. His interview is preserved in the National Library of Australia's Oral History Section. Mr Johnston was born in 1906, and he spoke of doing 'a lot of skipping' during his childhood in the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills:

We'd cross a long rope across the street and I used to have a dozen kids skipping down there. Even Mrs Munro came out — seventeen stone, and she had no shoes on. She'd come out and skip.14

Hoops are one of the few games shown in Bruegel's 1560 painting which are missing from today's repertoire of children's games, although according to Gladys Reardon (Timbs) they were popular in the years before the first world war. Mrs Timbs was born in 1905, and was also interviewed for the NSW Bicentennial Project. Her childhood was spent in Woollahra:

In the winter time we had to get out and bowl the hoop if you were cold. Well you'd bowl the hoop round Holdworth Street and up around Ocean Street and down into Jersey Road and up — up Holdworth Street, you'd be hot as Hades because that would warm you up. Every winter you had to go up to this newsagent, at the corner of Queen Street and Holdworth Street, and hold your arm out and they'd measure the hoop - it had to come up to your armpits — well by that time next winter, you'd need a size larger, see, because you'd been growing so much.15
Children’s playground games are one of the most important aspects of the children’s culture and the children’s tradition. Yet it is only one of what I identify as four dimensions of children’s folklore. Playground lore represents what might be called folklore of children, since it is transmitted from child to child and is truly their own property. There is also folklore for children, where a huge array of nursery rhymes, baby games, tricks, teases and special language are transmitted by adults, usually parents, to children. There is a third dimension, namely folklore about children, which includes old wives’ tales like if you tickle the baby’s feet you’ll make him stutter or proverbs like spare the rod and spoil the child. Not as popular today as once upon a time! The fourth dimension of children’s folklore isn’t so easily described and refers to situations where children are in fact apprenticed into the adult folkways of their community. Examples can be fairly trivial, such as learning adult-approved ways of lighting a fire, or hanging washing on the line (or perhaps today, sorting washing for the washing machine). They can be more complex such as table manners, or rules about behavioural contexts or ‘time and place’, for example no swearing in front of grandma or what’s suitable ‘table talk’ and what isn’t — definitely no lavatory jokes! The apprenticeship can also be of great seriousness and symbolic significance, such as circumcision, or first communion, or the bar-mitzvah.

I have had a long-standing interest in folklore for children, the lore which adults transmit to children. My interest began with a year-long project in 1975 for the Australian Government Interim Children’s Commission to produce cassette tapes for young immigrant children in eight community languages, namely Italian, Greek, Turkish, Spanish, Serbian/Croatian, Macedonian, Arabic and English. During extensive field recording in Melbourne I found that parents of seemingly all nationalities used nursery rhymes, often of a nonsensical nature, with infants and very young children. The English cow that jumped over the moon was matched by the Italian ‘Little Miss Potato’ or ‘The House With No Roof’, and the Macedonian mouse who wanted to build a marble monastery for her children, so that the fleas wouldn’t eat them.

There is a huge field for scholarly analysis and comment with regard to nursery rhymes. In 1954 the American anthropologist and folklorist William Bascom wrote what has become a classic statement on ‘Four Functions of Folklore’ 16 His four functions referred
to reflecting culture, validating culture, enhancing conformity, and having an educational function, and all can be seen in operation in nursery rhymes, of many language and ethnic origins. I found that whereas almost all rhymes in the core English-language repertoire are secular, religious sentiment is common in Italian and Spanish rhymes, such as the Spanish ‘St Mark, please send us water’. This phenomenon might be said to both reflect and validate culture. The educational function of nursery rhymes is clear in counting rhymes such as ‘One two three four five, once I caught a fish alive’, and the rhymes ‘Baa baa black sheep’ and ‘This little piggy went to market’ may well provide some of the first words spoken by a child, as well as their first introduction to poetry, rhythm and rhyme. In addition, the nonsense rhyme can be argued to play a significant part in the intellectual development of very young children.

Why do parents of so many nationalities love to use nonsense rhymes like ‘This little piggy went to market’ with their children? It is a type of humour which the encyclopaedic Motif Index of Folk Literature, designates as ‘humour of lies and exaggerations’. The Spanish nursery rhyme ‘Vamos a cantar mentires’ literally says ‘let’s go out and tell (sing about) lies’:

Now we are going out,
And we’re going to tell lies.
The first lie is that the rabbits are in the sea
And the sardines are in the mountains ...

Why do parents use so many ‘lies and exaggerations’ to their children, given that adults place so much emphasis in their child-rearing practices on children’s telling the truth (‘tell the truth and shame the devil’). The issue is not simply one of morality, since one of the basic rules of conversational discourse is the assumption that the partners in the exchange will tell the truth, that you say what you believe to be true. Yet the deliberate violation of this discourse rule is a source of humour for both children and adults. Children may misname others (‘you’re a crocodile’), parents employ nonsense rhymes (‘simple Simon fishing in his mother’s pail’), and adults engage in tall stories, such as fishermen’s tales.

In his 1925 classic From Two to Five, Kornei Chukovsky discussed ‘the tendency to violate the established order of things’ which is found in folklore told to young children. He gave as a Russian example:
Listen my children,
And I’ll sing you a fiddle-faddle;
‘The cow sat on a birch tree
And nibbled on a pea.'

Chukovsky emphasised particularly the reality-testing function of nonsense rhymes, the pereviortyshi or ‘topsy-turvies’. In order for the child to realise that humour is involved in the performance, he or she must have a knowledge of the real order of things. Nonsense rhymes play with notions of causality, with the functions and relations of objects, and with the classification and ordering of things in the world, all processes which aid the child’s developing ‘construction of reality’, as Piaget called it.

The nonsense rhyme demonstrates power over reality, a reality which can be manipulated and turned topsy-turvy, because the knowledge is there which can turn it right again.

The great English canon of nursery rhymes is alive and well in Australia, mostly passed on orally but helped by the enormous volume of published nursery rhyme collections which are almost as old as printing itself. Is there an Australian nursery rhyme? In 1917 the Bulletin, as a part of its nationalistic fervor, ran a competition with a prize of one guinea for the best ‘Australian nursery rhyme’. More than one thousand entries were received which addressed such ‘Australian’ topics as rabbits, bandicoots, wallabies, bears and kangaroos, and a selection was published as Australian Nursery Rimes with illustrations by well-known artists such as Norman Lindsay and David Low. Ten thousand copies were printed, for the price of one shilling, and all proceeds went to the Children’s Hospital in Sydney. Despite the Bulletin’s valiant attempt, most of these poems are long forgotten. The only item from the 1917 competition which is still known to be in admittedly tenuous circulation is Little Jika Jika (all the darkies like her), a rhyme which is, sadly, at worst racist and at best patronising. At the very least, the Bulletin exercise shows that folklore cannot be produced to order!

My own research into Australian usage of nursery rhymes shows that many adults use Waltzing Matilda as a nursery rhyme, together with some old music-hall and popular songs such as Daisy Daisy (on a bicycle built for two) and How much is that doggie in the window. Kookaburra sits in an old gum tree is increasingly part of the family
reertoire for very young children, together with old English favorites such as Little Jack Horner and See Saw Margery Daw. As a song which belongs more exclusively to children than Waltzing Matilda, Kookaburra has perhaps a better claim to be regarded as 'the' Australian nursery rhyme.

Kookaburra is not anonymous, contrary to popular belief, but was written by Miss Marion Sinclair in the 1920s. Miss Sinclair wrote out the words and music for Dr Keith McKenry, a member of the Australian Government’s Committee of Inquiry into Folklife in Australia, and it is published in facsimile in the Committee’s Report Folklife: Our Living Heritage. Since we also know that Banjo Paterson wrote the words to Waltzing Matilda, this means we can identify the authors of two significant Australian folk songs, demolishing the myth that folklore is always anonymous in origin. Much more important than alleged anonymity is continuous transmission. If 'the folk' take something to their hearts, its origin is of little significance.

A particularly interesting aspect of folklore for children concerns the traditional family sayings, reprimands and evasions such as the time-honoured wigwam for a goose's bridle (a common adult retort to children who ask annoying or inconvenient questions such as 'what are you making, Mum?'). I have compiled two Australian collections of these family sayings, which include some examples from non-English sources. There is a surprising similarity in the jocular and sometimes sharp parental retorts to children's persistent questions such as 'What's for dinner, Mum?' A Greek mother might say 'My liver and kidneys' and a Croatian mother 'Cakes with honey.' Traditional English retorts include 'Duck under the table' and 'Bread and scrape.'

There has been little scholarly attention to this interesting dimension of children's folklore, with the notable exception of Widdowson's 1977 study from Canada, If You Don't Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland. Widdowson's work concerns mainly threats such as 'If the wind changes [while you're pulling that face, etc] you'll stay that way.' This threat is also common in Australia, as also are warning rhymes such as:

Don't care was made to care,
Don't care was hung;
Don't care was put in a pot
And made to hold his tongue.

Traditional family sayings, however, have many other functions besides threats and warnings. In addition to sheer amusement and enjoyment of verbal display, other identifiable functions include evasion (‘how old are you, Gran? As old as my tongue and as young as my teeth’), maintaining adult mystique (‘little pitchers have big spouts’), tension reduction (‘what do you think this is, bush week?’) and training in etiquette (‘all joints on the table will be carved’). The discussion of children’s folklore could go on and on. The examples discussed here are only a small sampling of the rich heritage which is the children’s culture, the children’s tradition.

Endnotes

3 ibid.
5 A Dargan and S Zeitlin, City Play, with photographs by Martha Cooper, Arthur Leipzig and other great photographers of urban play, and an afterword by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New Brunswick and London, 1990, p 155.
8 ibid., pp 8-9.
9 ibid., p 12.
12 Now known as Play and Folklore, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Melbourne.
17 S Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature, revised and enlarged edition, Copenhagen, 1955.
18 ibid.
‘And don’t bet odds-on’: The Heroics and the Ruin of the Leviathan Punter

Chris McConville

When Frank Duval died in Hobart in 1980, Australia lost its last Leviathan punter. For Duval, while not the last big bettor on the racetrack, was probably the last of the popularly-acclaimed ‘Leviathans’, those punters whose wagers in the parlance of the time — ‘Shook the Ring’. Duval had made his fortune through steel investments in Japan (his Japanese businesses didn’t stop the racing press from dubbing him the ‘Hong Kong Tiger’). He died a bankrupt, with one million dollars in debts, proof it seemed, of an old adage, that you just can’t beat the races.

Yet for more than half a century before his death, Duval, Eric Connolly, Billy Tindall, Rufe Naylor and other big-betting punters stood as folk heroes, champions to the millions who followed Australia’s most popular inter-war sport, thoroughbred horse-racing. Through the sporting press, Smith’s Weekly, The Sporting Globe, Truth and journals with lesser credentials, they and their betting plunges became familiar to battling punters, who dreamt of fortune secured at the racetrack, and who, in reality, lost their money, week after week, year after year. The Leviathans seemed proof that, despite the odds, punters could win.

In an era when racetrack attendances have plummeted, when holdings of bookmakers are collapsing (on all but the major carnivals), and casinos have taken the gambling mugs away from the track, these Leviathans seem quaint and irrelevant. They share little with high rollers or problem gamblers, the only two characteristic figures to emerge from the contemporary debate about casinos. While they may no longer command wide popular respect as cultural heroes, the great
Bettors of the recent past still inspire the crowds to whom casinos and poker-machine gambling are advertised. Their heroics, impossible in an age of off-course totalised wagers and house percentages on poker machines, still sustain a popular fascination with gambling. Each night, at the tables of casinos or in the poker machine rooms of licensed clubs, it is that dream of becoming a ‘pro’, of beating the system and living from betting profits, which sustains gamblers through losing one bet after another.

Casinos, the poker machine venues and instant lotteries have expanded a recreation close to the heart of Australian popular culture. Interactive television seems bound to further broaden our gambling opportunities. Gambling is now, much more so than in the days of the Leviathans, a recreation shared by both men and women. How can the activities of male professional gamblers from the first half of the twentieth century assist us in responding to our contemporary gambling expansion? This paper explores the creation and the decline of the Leviathan punter as folk hero. How did the punter come to public attention, how was the mythic figure of the ‘Great Turfite’ refined through the press, and what explains the Leviathan’s ultimate fading from the racetrack scene, if not from the memories of the gambling community of the 1990s?

The Leviathan’s Rise

Much of the gambling action on nineteenth-century horse-racing stemmed from wealthy owners wanting to back their own horses, or from stable ‘connections’ aware of hidden qualities in a horse which they had set for a particular race. The common racegoer, with little information about horses, or about betting markets, simply followed the favouritism created by the wealthy grazier-owner.

By the time crowds returned to metropolitan tracks after the Great War, a new band of professional punters had begun to shape betting markets. Sometimes these men were owner-, sometimes, trainer-gamblers. Unlike the graziers, who raced for prestige and prizemoney, and bet on horses for a hobby, these urban-based gamblers had no income apart from returns from racing, and so they needed to land winning bets to go on racing horses. Other professional punters began as commission agents, putting on bets for a stable or owner. Some, like Eric Connolly, had grown up in racing families and saw that
betting meant greater returns and less pre-dawn rises than training or an apprenticeship with a stable. By the mid-1920s, the popular press had isolated several of these professional bettors. Columns like *Truth*’s ‘Prads and Ponies’ identified and refined the popular personae of these men, so that their heroics sustained even the most inept and undercapitalised of small punters.

The initial mark of such Leviathans was the swiftly and quietly executed coup. For months before a major race, the astute gambler like Eric Connolly prepared for the event, monitoring odds, tracing trackwork, checking with stables and following the horses to their hidden gallops on the flats outside cities. Connolly was reputed to be able to identify scores of racehorses from a hundred yards. Once he had assessed true form, the intentions of connections, and likely market moves (would the horse shorten or lengthen in price as the race approached?) the Leviathan assembled a team of commissioners to put on bets at the right time and in the right place, sometimes throughout Australia. Favourite targets for the professional punter were the pre-race Caulfield Cup-Melbourne Cup doubles, on which, if bets were placed meticulously in the weeks leading up to the big races, successful gamblers stood to win handsomely.

Eric Connolly, the doyen of inter-war bettors, seemed to have a hand in the major plunges on Cups Doubles in Depression-era Australia. Connolly co-ordinated betting against the mighty Phar Lap in the 1929 Melbourne Cup, backing Nightmarch. The horse’s owners had listed Nightmarch for the Sydney Epsom and Connolly persuaded them to chase the Sydney Metropolitan-Melbourne Cup double instead, backing the horse’s Metropolitan price in from 20/1 to 3/1.3 Connolly then organised betting in the 1930 Caulfield Cup-Melbourne Cup double, leading the charge for an Amounis-Phar Lap combination. When the bet landed, several leading Australian bookmakers were unable to pay and handed in their licenses.4 Again in 1931 Connolly was astute enough to back against Phar Lap in the Melbourne Cup, when the great champion ran under a massive weight, and could only struggle into eighth place.

Equally renowned were the bets of Rufe Naylor. Naylor had bet on Nightmarch in the 1929 Epsom, not knowing that Connolly had already persuaded owners to run the horse in the Metropolitan. He had sporting interests far beyond the racetrack, in professional (and bettable) foot-running and cycling, preparing a stable of athletes for
contests in Australia, North America and South Africa, where he owned the Johannesburg Stadium. Naylor also took foot-runners and the good horses, Winooka and Trevallion to race in the United States, where he secured some massive betting plunges. Connolly and Naylor were constantly competing to corner the best odds in big races each Spring and Autumn, so that, by the 1930s, their betting contests had become a cyclical and pleasantly-anticipated undercurrent to the Melbourne and Sydney carnivals, with crowds anxiously watching the drift of odds and money and attempting to identify key players. With the punting crowd and the newspaper readership mesmerised by the bets and the result of the race, the small punters never stopped to realise that the money won by the successful professional was ultimately drawn from the pockets of the vast mass of small and losing punters, more than from the bookmaker himself.

The Leviathan at Centre Stage

Over the years, sporting and popular newspapers managed to present these punters as the true masterminds of the turf. For the inside information, carefully clocked training times, understanding of jockey's technique and assessment of a horse's condition, all of which shaped placement and size of bets, were beyond the reach or interest of the casual punter. Needless to say most racegoers had no grasp of the percentages which underlay gambling markets and which the professional like Rufe Naylor understood intuitively. Rufe Naylor, besides his library of racebooks and records of every horse running in Australia, also employed a cameraman to film every race run at Randwick. Naylor's great gift, so it was claimed, lay in his ability to size up instantly the percentage margin which was represented by any bookmaker's set of odds, these percentages allowing him to predict whether or not horses would lengthen or shorten in price.

The press speedily compiled a standard list of personal qualities in which all of these great punters shared and to which the ordinary racetrack bettor aspired. In announcing that "Big Betting" Billy Tindall is back' in 1933, Truth welcomed Tindall back to the track after:

the Sydney body [Australian Jockey Club] had decided to withhold his trainer's license and ... he was left high and dry with a huge team
of horses on his hands and the prospect of losing many thousands of pounds. But did that dampen the ardour of William Tindall? No sir! Famed throughout the Commonwealth for his spectacular betting plunges, his great love of horses and his indomitable courage, Tindall is recognised as a died-in-the-wool battler when he has his back to the wall ... he did not offer his horses up for sale. Instead he carried on courageously against big odds and prepared his team for the forthcoming Melbourne meetings as though nothing was wrong.

Thus was shaped the press identity of Billy Tindall, sometimes 'Battling' and always 'Big Betting'. Billy's bets, like those of the other Leviathans, were huge. And, noted *Truth*, Billy loved his horses, he wasn't just in racing for the money. He didn't mind having his back to the wall or facing up to the struggle to bet his way out of financial ruin. Most of all he provided a spectacle in the ring, his wagers giving concrete expression to the almost unimaginable scale of the bets casually placed by the Leviathans, but never by the ordinary punter. Moreover, Tindall had been warned off the track by race clubs, and, without inquiring too closely into the reasons for his banning, *Truth* was able to portray Big Betting Billy as an anti-authoritarian hero to the racetrack crowd. Even if his misdemeanours may have caused punters to place wasted bets, Billy had provoked the well-dressed men in the Members Stand.

Most commonly the press concentrated on the great courage of the professionals. If they lost they went on betting their way out of trouble, possible for the professional with a huge capital reserve, but disaster for the small punter who sought to emulate the Leviathan. The great punters were all disciplined and courageous, as assumed in Perce Galea's punting advice 'have a big bank, have a go — if you are winning slap it on — and don't bet mid-week — why take 6/4 on a mongrel when you can get 6/4 on a champion on Saturday?'

For all their glamour, these pros inhabited a tough, harsh, masculine world. A place for men moreover, who could act out a distinctive and exaggerated repertoire of male traits. During the life of the 'flats' on the inner part of urban racetracks, less centralised and ordered betting had allowed women to place small wagers as easily as could men. In the more intense wagering of the ring and rails, bookmakers generally found common ground with anti-gambling crusaders and preferred to deal with men only. Neither the big book-
ies nor the sporting press ever welcomed women to the betting ring, even though journalists were eventually to acknowledge the skills of a few successful female punters. On-course totalisators, with their orderly lines in place of the pandemonic crush of the ring, were acceptable to race clubs, male punters and the bookies, as suitable environs for female betting.

Racegoers themselves could recall women who were able to take the bookmakers on, and win. Maude Vandenburg remained one of the better judges of betting opportunities, a woman who had shared in major coups on Cups doubles in the 1920s and who was estimated to have won the equivalent of more than one million dollars in bets over her lifetime (she died in 1940). To journalists she had become ‘Sydney’s dashing lady punter’.

Women like Vandenburg were deliberately metaphorised as mysterious and wraithlike, so as not to confuse their successes with the strategic betting of male Leviathans. The Sporting Globe at the end of the Melbourne Spring Carnival in 1940 mused that ‘women have an uncanny knack of spotting winners … form to them is an enigma, but they get hunches and follow them with, apparently, as much success as the form students have’ Mrs Vandenburg was occasionally referred to as ‘Madame X’. The Estonian-born woman who backed Bemborough at most of his great wins was known on the track as simply, ‘The Lady in Black’. While on the one hand acknowledging skill, such sobriquets gave license to the sporting journalist wanting to put female success down to random chance. Hence the many gambling stories which revolved around dreaming winners and which invariably took a female dreamer as the central figure.

Characteristically too, when male gamblers won, they were generous in the public eye; female winners were often depicted as scurrying off with their money. The open-handed Leviathan was typified by Perce Galea showering the crowd at Rosehill with banknotes after his horse, Eskimo Prince, won the 1964 Golden Slipper. Perce also ran an annual charity picnic for crippled children, Sol Green, punter and bookie, began the Herald Blanket Appeal. Ozzie Porter, who turned over £250,000 a year in betting, shared his winnings with the track gatekeepers and workers in his Fitzroy boot factory. Frank Duval lost £100,000 at Randwick one Saturday and with the insouciance and open-handedness of the Leviathan, donated £100,000 to the Australian National University two days later. Even the ever crafty
Rufe Naylor, who had no money to give to anyone later in life, did will his corpse to medical science and Sydney University.\footnote{19}

Over the years, as the big bettors became more familiar to the racetrack public, their personal biographies were shaped. First came the classic rise from humble beginnings, to a place alongside Premiers and Royalty, but never too far from the masses. Eric Connolly took a pony from his father’s Balaclava Road stables, sold it to a local butcher and went off to Flemington as a sixteen-year-old. He returned several hundred pounds richer, failed in his efforts to buy back the pony, and set out building a fortune in gambling, never too remote to put on bets for his paper boy or for trainers down on their luck.\footnote{20}

The professional punter’s rise was typically begun with the one lucky break, so that any reader of Truth or Smith’s Weekly could imagine the same luck coming his or her way. No matter how many Saturdays they went out to the track and lost, the small punters could look forward to one great win, when the drudgery of a day job and penny-pinching would be over. Such a turning point sustained the dreams of millions. Punters knew intimately the details of the rise of Perce Galea, from a suburban milk round in inner Sydney to selling newspapers at a Sydney railway station, to his winning £12,000 in the Sydney Opera House lottery, Perce’s big break, from which he never looked back.\footnote{21} In a legendary moment still reflected on by the racing radio and press, Billy Tindall, when he was Battling not Big Betting Billy, lost all but his racebook on the first couple of races. He sold the racebook for a shilling which he promptly bet on the next race, and at the end of the day walked off the track with several hundred pounds in his pocket.\footnote{22}

Even the huge, for the time, figures, in which these men bet, had a magical quality to them. In a sport obsessed with numbers, fractions and single figures, their bets in thousands and winnings in hundreds of thousands of pounds would seem huge in the 1990s but were beyond rational assessment in the 1930s. Perce Galea, after a heart attack and a stint in hospital, during which his doctor advised him to retire from betting, promptly wagered $5000 on his horse Sticks and Stones. From there he built up to his regular $50,000 or $20,000 on a horse and remarked, ‘I have tried to have $5000 or $6000 on horses but it didn’t seem like a bet or a challenge.’ \footnote{23}
'Melbourne Mick' Bartley, when appearing before an Australian Jockey Club hearing into betting, was asked about one $6000 bet, and retorted with the Leviathan’s bravado, demonstrating, simultaneously, his huge betting and his contempt for racing authority by snapping out:

I invest five million dollars a year on the TAB ... that’s $100,000 a week ... I had $72,000 on the daily double the other day, do you know that? You’re asking me to remember a $6000 bet — you know what $6000 is to me? It’s toilet paper. Toilet paper.24

In their later years, the Leviathans, especially those who survived into the 1950s, were pictured leading romantic lavish lives, quite at odds with the cramped character of post-war suburbanism. The racing set gathered at one of Galea’s Sydney casinos or at the restaurant owned by ‘Azzlin the Dazzlin’ Romero, reputed to have been a great gambler himself, and who was, for a time, owner of Bernborough. Ozzie Porter drove around in a Packard number-plated OP 999. Sol Green motored in, from Brighton to Flemington, in a silver-plated Rolls Royce or alternatively, a gold-plated Humber.25 The Great Turfites patronised the best of Melbourne’s apparel-makers. With their bespoke suits and measured cuff lengths, the big bettors strode into Winter Racing Carnivals in pedestrian Brisbane or Adelaide as if they were Hollywood stars. The local press welcomed them with the familiarity of sobriquets matching their genius: Filippé ‘Fireball’ Ishmael, ‘Battling’ or ‘Big Betting’ Billy Tindall, The ‘Great EAC’ Eric Connolly, The ‘Baron’ Skelton and Perce ‘Prince of Punters’ Galea.

The heroes were, in the long run, distinguishable from the film stars and later television celebrities with whom they were often compared. They were not simply remote and known through the media. Racecrowds could rub shoulders with them in the betting ring, cheer them when their horses won, share, so they thought, their victories by following their market leads and backing the same horses. The bets of Connolly were followed avidly as he went around the ring, as were those of Naylor and Tindall, even though, in reality, the true extent of their wagering was seen only in private bets off-course or in the ante-post betting on major race doubles. They were, in their bat-
ties with racing authority, their later appearances as racecallers or radio tipsters, and in their taking of wealth from even more wealthy owners, the people’s heroes.

The Fall of the Leviathan

Despite news articles, carried on into the 1970s and 1980s, and regardless of the many attempts by journalists to unearth a new generation of betting heroes, the age of the Leviathan was drawing to a close by 1960. Long before Duval’s death, and in spite of the renewed betting unleashed by taxation laws and inflation in the 1980s, the sporting press was unable to revive the cultural centrality of the big bettor. The press itself contracted, with iconographic publications such as the ‘Pink Comic’ — The Sporting Globe — amalgamating with a rival and Truth altering the methodology of its sports analysis. The restructured racing press could never quite sustain a popular interest in new gambling heroes — Greek-born ‘Mister Hundred Grand’ — whose techniques were discussed in the Sporting Globe in the 1960s, but whom the paper was unable to popularise in the same fashion as Eric Connolly or Perce Galea.26

Their fall can be explained in a number of ways. After 1956, the arrival of television allowed the popular press to dwell on new heroes. The argot of betting and of the racing press now sounded, and was read as, impenetrably old-fashioned. ‘Track Talk’ failed to excite, in an age of Americanised and televised dialogue. As much as in their conversational patter, those few big punters who did survive into the 1960s began to appear more eccentric rather than glamorous in dress. Jean Shrimpton’s stockingless and mini-skirted appearance at the 1965 Melbourne Cup Carnival seemed final proof that racetrack fashion was some pre-war hangover, a little embarrassing in the decade of Pop. Fur coats, extravagant hats, snappy ties and flash accessories, typed the punting set generally, as survivors from a dowdy past.

The big punters had moreover made their strategies too transparent in running tipping services. In selecting winners on radio they were unable, or unwilling, to reveal the expertise, the knowledge of odds and the privileged information on form, by which they had bet successfully. Despite all the wealth they were assumed to have acquired, the Great Turfites, as they progressed from placing bets to
tipping winners, were shown to be more crafty and cautious, than courageous. They bet systematically for a marginal profit rather than in the spectacular plunge. So Eric Connolly advised punters to take out place bets when there was a short-priced favourite. Rufe Naylor had publicised a staking plan which required the bettor to place weighted bets, with the wager rising on the place until a winner was struck.27

Heavy gamblers in the 1980s, were, in contrast, too easily linked to questionable coups perpetrated by 'colourful racing identities'. These same colourful figures began to appear before inquiries into corruption and narcotics. The brutal murder of a Sydney trainer, the supposed link between gambling and drug money, and the apparent ties between disgraced New South Wales political figures and such aforementioned 'colourful racing identitites', did more harm to the heroics and popular acclaim of gambling than could any number of attacks from anti-gambling church leaders.

Heart attacks, despite Naylor's largesse towards medical research, and Connolly's aphorism, 'to avoid heart attacks, don't bet odds on and don't run upstairs', took away many of the big punters. With each death, and knowledge of debts left behind, it became clear that the Leviathans had little to show for a lifetime of careful and spectacular plunging. Eric Connolly died at home in a Toorak mansion, but with assets of little more than £5000.28 In his heyday five thousand was not enough for a decent day's betting. Rufe Naylor died broke and issued his last advice to aspiring punters, 'don't go racing if you haven't already done so' 29 His warning didn't stop him betting on greyhounds from his deathbed. Duval died a bankrupt, though more through business debts than gambling, and while Ozzie Porter and Baron Skelton survived as wealthy men, they were at pains to explain that they did so more through good fortune rather than by systematic betting.

There were other more obvious transitions. The creation of a massive off-course betting market in state TABs, the decline in racetrack crowds and thus betting pools, the eventual diffusion of knowledge about 'form' to surviving small punters, so that the Leviathan could no longer be assured of overlay bets, all conspired to make the task of the betting-ring professional almost impossible. As a result, the privilege of their superior knowledge and skill was diminishing long before the arrival of the computer on the racetrack. A few Leviathans,
like Mick Bartley, continued by exploiting multiple bets on interstate races. Others did pick up computing skills and traded the excitement of the betting ring for the commission room in the stands, where they searched for minute overlay prices on the various state TAB pools.30

Female Gamblers and Addiction

Perhaps of equal significance, the popular press began to carry stories which painted the gambler as not so much a daring adventurer but as prisoner to a destructive addiction. Racetrack betting was linked, by the end of the 1950s, to a new medico-psychological understanding of the gambler. Instead of the cool professional punter, psychologists were discovering the irrational and pathological addict. And whereas the portraiture of the professional was always masculine, women were now regularly cast as typical pathological gamblers.

The era of the exclusively male and heroic gambler was at an end when Truth warned about research at the University of New South Wales which demonstrated that gambling was a more dangerous addiction than drink and that housewives were betting away money set aside for groceries and meat.31 In an inversion shared in other psychological analysis, and reinforced by fears about the new off-course TAB betting networks, betting might remain heroic when men were the bettors, and destructive when linked to female addicts.32 ‘Certify chronic gamblers’ demanded a Melbourne ‘expert’; ‘You bet through deep-seated guilt’, warned a US professor; ‘all gamblers sick” says US doctor’ so warned the Sun-Herald.33 There were no Leviathans in the new psychological disparaging of gambling.

In the constantly altering labels applied to gambling — the very uncertainty of the terminology indicating an inadequacy in theorising — from ‘addictive’ to ‘compulsive’ to ‘problem’ to ‘pathological’ until finally ‘heavy’ — the classic subject has remained male.34 The psychologists it seemed, knew no more how to talk about the rationality of female gamblers than did the popular press. And while Smith’s Weekly or Truth circulated in an era when women were routinely excluded from key roles on the racetrack, legal off-course betting, state-sanctioned casinos and licensed slot-machine clubs have, since 1961 and the opening of the first TAB agencies in Victoria, allowed women a central role in the culture of gambling.35 So, one
recent newspaper survey of gambling opened with the headline ‘Women at the Mercy of the One-Armed Bandit’, and traced the decline of an ‘addicted ... Gloria’, who played pokies at Adelaide suburban clubs until 4 am, losing $70,000 in eighteen months.36 The metaphorical use of addiction to explain gambling has, despite recurrent criticism, been applied almost automatically to women who bet on poker machines and in casinos.37 At the same time, gender segregation at racetracks has given way to an increasingly, but not predominantly, feminised gambling scene in clubs, some racetracks and casinos, so that the illusions of control and professionalism in gambling can be shared by women as much as by men.

The ‘Great Turfites’, those Leviathans of inter-war gambling, survived long enough to shape the language of the racetrack and the memories of the generation first targeted in casino advertising and poker-machine give-aways. As punters look at the logos of racetrack sponsors, and as they hear about mysterious high rollers and their own supposed pathologies and weaknesses, they often revisit, in imagination, the great gambling coups of the past. While the racetrack may no longer be the most popular stage for performing the heroism of the punt, the casino and poker machine now offer a new theatre of risk and illusion.

Distinguished from both the high roller and the psychologist’s ‘compulsive’, pathological’ or just plain ‘heavy’ gambler, are the mass of small punters. On the racetrack they share in information to which only the select were traditionally privy. They are sophisticated in their analysis of odds, fortified by recollection of great coups in the past and hence, as a broad and now knowledgeable mass, they are unable to individually secure advantage in the betting ring. So they resort to other forms of gambling. And while neither the casino nor the poker machine can provide them with the market inefficiencies exploited by the Leviathans, a night in the casino can still be one in which the glamour of Azzlin the Dazzlin’s restaurant is momentarily revived. The performative art of nerveless punting fellows remains, intrinsically, a poor guide to action in the feminised gambling world of the casino. And yet, so long as the media and psychological inquiry remain uncertain about how to deal with female gamblers, and unwilling to come to terms with the rationality, as much as the illusions of their gambling, the gamblers themselves will continue to return to the heroics of the past. The possibility, however remote, of
a pay-out like that on the Amounis-Phar Lap double and the opportunity to throw money around with the same glee as Perce Galea after the 1964 Slipper, urge gamblers on, to that one more pull of the pokie or throw of the dice. The Leviathan is still with us, inhabiting, however unglamorously and ruinously, those everyday dreams from which gambling losses are shaped.

Endnotes

1 Melbourne Herald, 8 October 1982. I was aided in research on newspaper references by Damien Wright, with the assistance of an Internal Research Grant from Sunshine Coast University College.

2 Australians may never have been the enthusiastic gamblers as understood in popular memory. Yet, when compared to American popular culture, the Australian gambler seems a more communal figure, especially when set alongside the isolated card players central to American gambling tradition. In American sporting tradition, the racetrack gambler has never quite won the popular acclaim of card players like ‘Amarillo Slim’ or Doyle Brunson. See James F Smith ‘When Its Bad It’s Better: Conflicting Images of Gambling in American Culture’ in Jan McMillen (ed.), Gambling Cultures: Studies in History and Interpretation, London and New York, 1996, pp 101-15, and J Rosencrance, ‘The Invisible Horsemen: the Social World of the Backstretch’, Qualitative Sociology, vol 8, no 3, pp 301-12. Gamblers like the legendary Pittsburgh Phil and more recently Andrew Beyer, have brought some attention to the American racetrack as a scene of heroics, but by and large the image of popular hero as gambler is more readily attached to the casino or the pool hall. See Andrew Beyer, Picking Winners, Boston, 1975. On professional gambling in Britain see John Mort Green, Come Fly with ‘The Butterfly’, Hungerford UK, 1995. See also ‘The Professional’ in O Neuman, Gambling: Hazard and Reward, London, 1972, pp 176-181. The best general reference on leading gamblers in Australia remains David Hickie, Gentlemen of the Australian Turf, Sydney, 1986.


4 ibid., p 205 ff.

5 Melbourne Sporting Globe, 12 November 1930.


8 Melbourne Truth, 9 September 1933.

9 ibid.


13 Truth, 9 November 1929.

14 Sporting Globe, 27 November 1940.


17 Smith’s Weekly, 18 March 1950.
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20 Anecdote related to the author on talkback radio 3UZ Melbourne [927-Sports], ‘Raceday’ program with Keith Hillier.
21 *Melbourne Age*, 16 August 1977.
22 In its constant retelling, of course, Billy’s winnings have grown from several hundred pounds to several thousands.
27 Hudson, op. cit.
28 *Truth*, 30 September 1939; *Smith’s Weekly*, 30 September 1939.
29 ibid.
32 The interest in housewives as gamblers in Australia followed soon after Bergler’s critique of women gamblers. He distinguished female gamblers through their instrumentalist use of both gambling and males. See E Bergler, *The Psychology of Gambling*, New York, 1957.
34 Sigmund Freud wrote about gambling in his reflections on Dostoevsky’s *The Gambler*, [first published 1866], in which the male gambler’s hopelessly addictive relationship with the card table is paralleled by his disastrous sexual liaisons. Freud, as have others who reviewed this classic portrayal of destructive gambling, concentrated on the gambling of the male protagonist, hence his focus on the neurotic nature of the gambler, the repressed wish to kill the father and the link between money spent on gambling and masturbatory desire. A closer reading of Dostoevsky’s tale indicates that it is in one of the female characters, the Grandmother, where an addicted individual falls prey to the gambling table and so loses her fortune. Chris McConville, ‘Dostoevsky Goes Punting’, paper delivered at Australian Historical Association Conference, University of Sydney 1998, unpublished.
Bush and Bushido: Australians Face Japan

David Walker

The Australian author, Hal Porter, tells us that Japan stole into his life through wind-chimes and other manifestations of his mother’s ‘Austral-japonoiserie’ domestic tastes. Then, when his grandfather died in 1920, young Hal was given his books on Japan, including Charles MacFarlane’s Japan, published in 1852, A B Mitford’s Tales of Old Japan, published in 1871, and Isabella Bird’s Unbeaten Tracks in Japan, published in 1880. His grandfather, Porter recalled, had lived for years on ‘little more than reading, port wine, cigar smoke and imperial behaviour’. His gift to his grandson revealed that he had also ‘loved Japan’. Porter’s intriguing comments unfortunately reveal little about the cultural tastes and intellectual interests that nourished Grandfather Porter’s fascination with Japan, though we can see he was a gentleman of taste, something of a connoisseur. His love of Japan was identified with a firmly British-imperial outlook.

From Charles MacFarlane’s Japan: An Account, Geographical and Historical, Grandfather Porter learnt of a ‘social, pleasure-seeking’ people with a taste for theatre, music and dance. Theirs was a world of festivals and feasting. MacFarlane saw the Japanese as a people blessed with an Elizabethan capacity for enjoyment. Though he found no evidence of Mr Punch, he was in no doubt that his counterpart would be frightening and entertaining audiences somewhere in Japan. When the Japanese were not attending public theatres, they improvised ‘plays and farces’ in their homes. ‘Mummers and mountebanks’ roamed the streets, along with storytellers and jugglers. Wherever street performers appeared they drew large and appreciative crowds of common people. This was a society that had retained a vigorous popular culture and while there were rich and
poor to be found in Japan, there did not appear to be the dreadful emiseration and grinding, joyless poverty that so afflicted the labouring classes of industrial Britain. This was England as it had once been, a society in which even the beggars were 'merry rogues' with an inventive wit and a trick or two up their ragged sleeves. MacFarlane’s Japan was a richly peopled and lively civilisation with a talent for ‘fun and drollery’.

Prominent among early Australian visitors to Japan was James Hingston whose wonderful book, *The Australian Abroad*, was first published in 1880. Like Grandfather Porter, Hingston was a convinced imperialist who saw Britain as a great civilising force. Hingston advised Australians wanting to return home from San Francisco to visit Japan rather than travel via Honolulu and Fiji. While many Australians had looked to the Pacific islands as a tourist destination, Hingston was confident that Japan had much more to offer. Visitors would see an astonishing country, newly opened to the world, with three prosperous and well-established European settlements where there were already many Australians. ‘Scarcely an Australian but can remember some one from some part of Australasia’, Hingston noted, ‘who has made Japan a home’.

Japan was the only country in the East which Hingston believed Australians might consider calling home.

The conviction that Japan remained unspoilt by industrial civilisation was central to Hingston’s travel narrative. He felt that they had not yet been corrupted by the commercial spirit. For all its macadamised streets and signs of modernity, there was every sign of a rich traditional culture. Wherever he travelled, Hingston was fascinated by the range of popular entertainments available to the people and the pleasure they derived from them. Though he didn’t speak a word of Japanese, Hingston loved the itinerant story tellers and the laughing crowds they invariably gathered around them. Whenever the hat came round, Hingston was there with a contribution. A late nineteenth century literary man, as proud of his Britishness as Hingston was, could hardly pay a more generous compliment than to compare Japan to Elizabethan England:

> If one would know how the people of Britain lived in the days of old, when there were maypoles and morris-dancers, and caps with bells to them ... when folks were educated to excel in sports and manli-
ness ... to tilt at the quintain, and go hawking and hunting and fish-
ing, as the chief occupation of a Joyous Life, we may go to Japan,
look at the Japanese, and learn all.5

These sentiments suggest that for Hingston, the Elizabethan
achievement was culturally, not racially determined. Hingston nomi-
nated ‘the Joyous Life’ as the highest ideal to which a nation could
aspire, an ideal he had observed in ‘Elizabethan’ Japan. The Japa-
nese appeared to be a people who had not allowed themselves to be
dominated by religion, least of all the moral severity and gloom that
Hingston attributed to Christianity. He admired the fact that the Japa-
nese had kept on dancing and took that to be a sure sign of a country
in which religion served the interests of the people, not one in which
religion had crushed their spirit. Moreover, in Hingston’s view, in-
dustrialisation had not yet cast its dark pall over the Japanese.

When the Australian scientist, Julian Tenison Woods, set out for
Japan in the mid-1880s he was pleased to find that there was a good
deal of ‘new and valuable information’ available to the traveller, al-
though he was unimpressed by one of these ‘authorities’ (clearly
Hingston) who had ‘boasted of having ... read nothing about the coun-
try, so as to be unbiased!’ Hingston’s wily ironies had obviously gone
unappreciated. Tenison Woods claimed that he could not agree with
Hingston’s flattering account of Japan as a country of ‘Arcadian sim-
plicity’, especially in matters relating to diet. He was unimpressed
by raw foods and believed they gave the Japanese dyspepsia. Yet, as
much as he seemed to disagree with Hingston’s enthusiasm for Ja-
pain, Tenison Woods was hardly less enthusiastic. Delayed in Kobe,
he found himself living very well in a traditional house of paper and
wood. Though deep snow lay all around him, he was snug and con-
tented: ‘I could not be more comfortably lodged or better taken care
of in any country in the world’, he wrote to his sister-in-law. To his
brother, he wrote from Hong Kong that ‘he was quite disenchanted
about China and liked the people less and less’. But Japan was an-
other matter: ‘I never liked any country so much as I liked Japan,
and would go there tomorrow if I could’ 6 The contrast with China
was a commonplace of the period. Hingston felt similarly and so did
Rudyard Kipling, that most influential commentator on the East.7
Kipling loved the scenery of Japan, the elegant houses and the glimpses
they offered of ‘perfect cleanliness, rare taste, and perfect subordina-
tion of the thing made to the needs of the maker', but he loathed China and disliked the Chinese.

Hingston's trip to Japan coincided with the 1879 International Exhibition in Sydney, which introduced its many visitors to Japanese arts and manufactures. The Japanese Court at the Exhibition carried an impressive range of exhibits from industrial and agricultural products to the art works and delicately wrought crafts for which Japan had become famous. Sydney audiences clearly responded warmly to the Japanese Exhibition, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* declaring after the first day that the Japanese Court was the most popular of all the international displays. Japanese exhibits featured prominently among the prize-winning entries: porcelain, china, cloisonné ware, earthenware, silk garments, fans and 'fancy articles', paper products and photography along with bronze, iron and copper castings all won first prizes. The 'Ladies Court', featuring folding screens, lacquer ware and wooden furniture, was a particular success with the judges, winning three first and two second prizes. In a gracious gesture, the Japanese government bequeathed the entire exhibition to the people of New South Wales.

One of the most successful popularisers of Japan from the 1890s to the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war was Douglas Sladen, a graduate of Oxford and Melbourne universities, who came to Victoria in 1879. In 1880 he married a squatter's daughter from the prosperous western district of Victoria. Sladen moved comfortably in Anglo-Australian circles, where interest in Japan was particularly apparent. After graduating in law from the University of Melbourne, he immersed himself in the local literary world. He had a brief period as a lecturer in modern history at Sydney University, then left Australia in 1884, although he maintained his Australian connections. Sladen produced three anthologies of Australian poetry in 1888 and continued until the 1930s to bring out books on Australia. While attracting some favourable comment, they hardly set the world alight. By 1890, Sladen had discovered a much more promising enthusiasm: Japan.

It is hardly conceivable that Sladen, a regular in Melbourne literary circles in the early 1880s, did not know Victoria's celebrated traveller, James Hingston. Whether the triumphant reception of *The Australian Abroad* influenced Sladen is impossible to say, though writing in the late 1930s, Sladen confessed that the East had called him all his life. He had lit upon 'the shores of fanciful and mysteri-
ous’ Japan, brimming over with the highest expectations. The encounter changed his life. He had now come upon a really popular subject. He called his first book on Japan, *The Japs at Home* and claimed the dubious honour of being the first author to use the term ‘Japs’ in a book title. He shed his label as the ‘Australian poet’ and became known as an authority on Japan. When an American colleague commented that Sladen had developed into a more imposing literary figure, Sladen responded: ‘I am glad you’ve shifted me to the main division for I have gradually drifted away from Australia and am now always talked of in connexion with Japan’ The *Japs at Home* sold 150,000 copies ‘laying the foundation of my career as a travel-book writer’ In the preface to the fifth edition, published in 1895, Sladen recorded the recent Japanese victory over China. He now regretted that he hadn’t devoted his book ‘to an advocate’s presentation of the greatness of Japan instead of treating the country from the viewpoint of the pleasure-pilgrim’ Sladen wrote at least six more books about Japan, including *A Japanese Wedding* and *Japan in Pictures*, all of them effusive and laudatory.

For Sladen, Japan was a land of ‘fairy-tales’. In Tokyo’s Shiba Park he was overcome by the beauty of the temples and the courtyards with their stone lanterns, fountains and limpid streams stocked with leisurely golden carp. He gushed about fluttering geishas and elegant tea houses. He enthused over terraced mountain sides and shaded walks. He was dazzled by scarlet azaleas and groves of wild wisteria, their gnarled trunks deepening the air of profound antiquity which clothed so much of what he saw and admired. He considered Lake Biwa one of the most ‘exquisite’ lakes in the world and was enchanted by nearby Ishiyama-dera, a beautiful temple complex on a pine covered hillside overlooking the lake. It was hard not to be impressed. A thousand years before, Lady Murasaki had written *The Tale of Genji*, the world’s first novel, within the temple grounds. Sladen also loved Nikko with its ‘sky-blue river, running beneath the sacred scarlet bridge …’ By the turn of the century admiration of Japan and enthusiasm for its Elizabethan qualities was consistent with an expansively British view of the world. These sentiments seemed to be amply confirmed by the signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902. In Anglo-Australian circles, as Sladen had discovered to his profit, enchanting Japan had become something of a fashion. However, dark warnings
of a Japanese invasion of Australia soon began to emerge. 1903 saw the publication of R T Roydhouse’s *The Coloured Conquest*, a topical novel which capitalised on the recently signed Anglo-Japanese alliance and which incorporated some very up-to-the-minute references to the visit to Australia of a Japanese Training Squadron earlier that year. The book was published by the New South Wales Bookstall Company, which specialised in take-away fiction with large print runs and arresting covers, designed to catch the eye of suburban commuters wanting an engrossing story. Over the next decade Japanese invasion was a major theme in three other novels, A G Hales’ *The Little Blue Pigeon*, published in 1906, Ambrose Pratt’s *The Big Five*, serialised in the *Lone Hand* from December 1907 and C H Kirmess’s *The Commonwealth Crisis*, which appeared in the *Lone Hand* in 1908. Japanese invasion also featured in three plays; Randolph Bedford’s unpublished, indeed unpublishable, ‘White Australia, or The Empty North’, Frances Hopkins’s *Reaping the Whirlwind: An Australian Patriotic Drama of Australian People* and Jo Smith’s ‘The Girl of the Never Never’. There were also many articles and short stories.

In Britain, the flurry of invasion novels, spy scares and lurid warnings prompted P G Wodehouse’s irresistible parody, *The Swoop ... A Tale of the Great Invasion*, in which ‘Britain is overwhelmed by simultaneous onslaughts of Germans, Russians, Chinese, Young Turks, the Swiss Navy, Moroccan brigands, cannibals in war canoes, the Prince of Monaco, and the Mad Mullah’ until a brave boy scout saves the day. One of the few nations missing was the Japanese: The British invasion writers, perhaps due to Britain’s treaty arrangements and to geographical remoteness, did not appear to have the same anxious concern about Japanese intentions as the Australians. In 1907 R W Cole published *The Death Trap*, a story in which Britain, once again invaded by Germany, is saved when the Japanese allies land veterans of the Manchurian Campaign in Liverpool. Not a plot likely to appeal to Australian readers of that time.

Invasion was also a central theme in *Banzai!*, a novel by the German author Ferdinand H Grautoff, writing as ‘Parabellum’ The book was published in an English translation in America in 1908, no doubt to coincide with the interest generated by the Great White Fleet, *Banzai!* displayed intense distrust of the Japanese. Multitudes of spies were pictured at work in America, preparing the way for Japa-
nese invasion. Meticulous intelligence work ensures that Tokyo possesses precise details of all American fortifications. Once the war begins, Europe is complacent, but Australia at once recognises the appalling danger to America. Australians staged tremendous public demonstrations and mass-meetings when they hear the terrible news of the destruction of America’s Pacific Fleet. In Sydney, the windows of the Japanese Consulate are smashed and Japanese settlers are forced to leave the country along with remaining Chinese; ‘the yellow man’s day in Australia was ended’ Meanwhile England offers the hand of friendship to the Japanese. She is more concerned with her commercial interests than in Japanese actions in the distant Pacific. Perfidious Albion even tried to prevent Australian volunteers fighting for ‘their big brother’, America. It was a story that could well have been serialised in the Lone Hand.

Parabellum expressed an obvious appreciation of the fighting characteristics of those ‘splendid fellows of the Australian bush’, a nice touch in a German author. Within Australia the sturdy bushman was widely presented as the figure on whom Australia would have to rely in the event of attack. For Frank Fox, editor of the Lone Hand, the bushman or yeoman farmer was ‘the backbone of the resistance which the White Man will make to any Flow of Asia along the Pacific littoral’ In sharp contrast, urban manhood, supposedly unfit and hedonistic, was thought to present a vulnerable target. By 1900 the American social scientist Adna Weber had identified Australia as exemplifying the modern trend towards urbanisation with almost a third of its population living in or near the capital cities. The implications of urbanisation for national character were a common preoccupation. The city, with its increasingly mixed populations, its varied transactions with the world at large, its more flexible approach to questions of gender, its spirit of cultural and commercial experiment, was depicted as a corrosive force. The more complex, commercially oriented and progressive the city became, the more removed it seemed from the iron laws of national survival in the competitive world of invasion literature and racial struggle. The application of these laws in the Australian context brought competition down to the raw levels of military threat and territorial conquest. This was the big battle looming over the horizon, a contest that might well push the softened, modern city-dweller to the wall. But the bush would hold firm.
Cities were seen as breeding grounds for decadent cultures and effeminate manhood. By their very weakness they were thought to provide an obvious incitement to invasion. Professor Macmillan Brown, the distinguished anthropologist and Pacific historian, was convinced that decadence was a powerful force eating away at western civilisation. In a series of articles to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1913 he warned that ‘leisure and pleasure’ had already eroded the stabilising disciplines underpinning British civilisation in Australia. He condemned ‘the sluicing of Western populations into city life’, describing the city as ‘the yawning abyss into which nations and races vanish’. The notion of the vanishing race was central to the invasion narrative, just as it was a recurrent discourse in late nineteenth century accounts of the rise and decline of nations. Brown urged Australians wanting to avoid decay from within and external attack to ‘de-urbanise’ This, he reasoned, would prove to be Australia’s best defence against militant Japan. According to Brown’s logic, the bush and its disciplines would be the making of Australia and the only force capable of withstanding Japan’s bushido.

The developing hostility to urban manhood was articulated by Arthur Adams in a short story first published in the *Bulletin* and then reprinted in 1909 in *The Call*, a journal with a direct interest in strengthening Australian defences. The main character is a despicable and timorous clerk, the employee of a large Sydney importing firm. His anti-Labor views and low opinions of Australian naval, military and manufacturing capacities show him as the very model of an Anglophile and suburbanised masculinity. The clerk turns out to be no match for the clever, disciplined Japanese, bent on invasion. The story ends with the clerk lying dead, ‘half of his bowels trailing on the lawn in front of him’, a much more loathsome object than his tough Japanese assailant who quickly sheds his identity as a businessman at the first signal to invade. The Japanese businessman/spy, unlike the Australian clerk, is depicted as a considerable patriot and a figure to be admired. The clerk, tending his tiny patch of lawn, is another reminder of the suspect masculinities supposedly proliferating in Australian cities. With Japan as a possible enemy, the Australian male was reminded that he might need to be a bigger, more assertive man than the average city clerk. In this encounter, the Japanese invader was clearly portrayed as a finer specimen of manhood.
than the clerk. Was Japanese manhood stronger and finer than Australian manhood?

Fear of racial betrayal by frivolous white women is a prominent theme in *The Coloured Conquest*. At the start of this novel, the world looks very rosy. The narrator, Frank Danton, a fine Australian, is newly engaged to Mabel Graham. They make a splendid couple; handsome, healthy, optimistic about their future. It is no coincidence that we first meet them as they visit the Japanese Training Squadron docked in Sydney Harbour. Danton is alarmed by the effusive welcome given the Japanese as ‘the youth and beauty’ of Sydney flock to see the warships. He is particularly troubled by the ‘attentions of foolish girls’ whose admiration for the Asian visitors is, he feels, quite unbecoming. Mabel is no better than the rest. She too admires the handsome bearing and fine uniforms of the Japanese naval officers.

At one of Sydney’s best suburban addresses, Danton meets the Japanese officer, Taksuma Moto, who speaks quite unguardedly and in the best Oxford English about Japanese plans to conquer the white races. His complacent North Shore audience laughs in a good-humoured way at such boastful talk, unable to see the danger lying ahead. The fashionable society of urbanised Australia is pictured as a corrupt world of excess which has lost control of the lives of the rising generation of young women. In her flirtatious dealings with the Japanese, Mabel and the other ‘foolish girls’ are being permitted to enter the dangerous territory of inter-racial sexuality risking, Roydhouse warns, the dangers of violation and enslavement.

How close to reality was the mood of fraternity when the Training Squadrons dropped anchor? It is difficult now to interpret the sexual dynamics in meetings between young Australian women and Japanese officers, but it certainly struck the writer of the ‘Women’s Page’ in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the behaviour of the girls was uninhibited. ‘Australian girls’, she wrote, ‘show a want of reserve with the Japanese that they would never dream of exhibiting with English-speaking officers’. For their part, she felt that a number of the Japanese exhibited more of an eye for female beauty than she had expected to find in such gatherings. There was something intoxicating in the mix of the accomplished, magnificently uniformed Japanese and the exuberant young women of the sunny south.
The theme of inter-racial sex recurs throughout *The Coloured Conquest*. Few whites realise the potent threat until a civic reception is held for the Japanese in the polished surroundings of Sydney’s Australia Hotel. Sydney’s best people attend. There is pleasant chatter, with expensive drinks and much good humour. Then a Japanese naval officer presents Mabel Graham with a red rose. Guests pause. In a scene so tense that several Australian men allow their cigars to go out, the officer predicts that she will soon be his. This is not a marriage proposal. Danton knocks the foul rogue to the floor. He swears he will shoot Mabel rather than allow a Japanese to lay a finger upon her. Roydhouse implies that a Japanese conquest will lead directly to the violation of white women. Yet, in characterising Mabel Graham, he also suggests there may be some Australian women who would prefer Japanese men.

In Roydhouse’s novel, the clever Japanese outwit their opponents, dispose of the British Fleet and invade Sydney. They now want fifty million settlers to occupy Australia and New Zealand within fifty years, so they set to work immediately on a population program. ‘Fair Lily Colonies’ are established where the loveliest women are forced to breed with the most handsome men. The children of these unions are moved to the state crèche, the boys will work on farms and the best-looking girls will be assigned to serve Japanese men. Only Danton remains free, literally ‘the last of a dishonoured race’. By this outcome, Roydhouse emphasised how the fate of the weak white population after a Japanese invasion would parallel the fate of Australian Aborigines at the hands of the British. By their weakness white Australians had lost their right to hold the continent.

The misogynist idea that women would readily betray the Australian national interest informed the *Bulletin*’s attempt to explain the reception accorded to the Japanese Training Squadron in 1906. When the *Bulletin* eventually acknowledged the visiting Fleet, it was forced to concede that the public response was both enthusiastic and sustained.32 Disliking this evidence of approval, the *Bulletin* drew upon mass psychology for an explanation. Crowd behaviour had attracted a good deal of attention in the late nineteenth century, notably from the novelist Emile Zola and the sociologist Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon in *The Crowd*, drew direct parallels between the behaviour of the modern urban crowd and the behaviour of women. Both went to ‘extremes’ 33 Another contemporary theorist insisted that ‘the crowd
is woman, even when it is composed, as almost always happens, of masculine elements’ 34 On this basis, the Bulletin had no difficulty in characterising the crowds welcoming the Japanese as both urban and essentially feminine in nature.

For the Bulletin, the conduct of the urban crowd triggered deeply held fears. The journal identified a condition it called ‘love of freakishness’ which it knew to be ‘a trait of city character’ What might appear to be affection and genuine interest in the Japanese was nothing of the kind; it was a manifestation of a perverted city taste for the freakish and the abnormal. These were a people seeking the kinds of distraction provided by the circus. Their impulses were intensified by what the Bulletin called ‘feminine gush’ The Bulletin maintained that city character was primarily a female phenomenon. As it explained to its readers: ‘woman, in the mass, is still very little guided by reason, and prone to pursue what is new’ 35 What was ‘new’ was dubious and certainly included Britain’s apparent love affair with enchanting Japan. The fascination with Japan which had been so prominent in Anglo-Australian circles by the 1890s, was now diagnosed by the Bulletin to be both feminine and feminising. The Bulletin felt that the welcome accorded to the Japanese squadrons was as unguarded as it was unthinking. It was another worrying sign of how decadent urban Australia had become.

In the face of this ‘feminine and semi-feminine fuss over Japanese visitors’, the Bulletin saw it as a clear male prerogative to resist the Japanese and oppose the forces of mass psychology, firmly identified with women and the city. It believed that manly resistance, at once taciturn and undemonstrative, was a prerequisite for the survival of a white Australia. In the race conflict the Bulletin believed was sure to come, women would recognise that silent white men with backbone would be their saviours and masters. In these characterisations, rural manhood had firmly drawn attributes and fixed boundaries, whereas the ‘feminine’ was mixed, formless and unstable and certainly not to be relied upon in the crucial business of separating Australia from Asia.

As Juliet Peers has noted, the Bulletin was intellectually up to date with late nineteenth century forms of misogyny. 36 Many of its ideas on the differences between men and women are also found in the writings of European theorists on sex and race at that time such Otto Weininger, Viennese author of the influential, Sex and Character. In
Sex and Character, Weininger argued that man was evolving from an early brutish, bisexual state to a higher plane. At this more evolved level there was a sharp dichotomy between the 'truly male' man who was both highly intelligent and deeply spiritual and the 'completely feminine' woman who was very beautiful but 'materialistic and brainless'. Any assertiveness from the 'new woman' and the emerging feminist movement was taken as a sign of evolutionary reversion; these were masculinised women 'sinking back to the hermaphroditism' of the 'indeterminate primal state'. Similar reversion and degeneracy occurred when a man began 'to show himself effeminate'. These ideas became profoundly entangled with racial identities since Weininger further insisted that 'Jews, blacks and orientals had, through inbreeding or the inability to respond to evolutionary impulses, become effeminate and consequently degenerated'. Such degenerationist theories were widely disseminated. The American, Homer Lea, author of *The Valor of Ignorance* and *Day of the Saxon*, was one exponent. He warned that western lifestyles had produced a 'national effeminacy' bringing with it 'tribes of theorists' and 'feminists' and all the 'necrophagm of opulent decadence'. Feminism was read as a sure sign of a culture so decadent and commercial that it almost invited a cleansing invasion.

To the proponents of these degenerationist ideas, it seemed apparent that the more Australia allowed itself to become urbanised and feminised, the more vulnerable it would become to processes of merging, blending and mixing, to Asianisation. Women, were viewed with great suspicion. They were given many of the elusive properties of water. They were gushing, tidal, uncontrolled, all-engulfing. They were reputed to be prey to moral instability and at the mercy of powerful and dangerous biological drives. They bled. They were painted in attitudes of lassitude, floating through the air, collapsing 'hopelessly ecstatic' in the waves or among the leaves of the forest floor. Sydney Long, in 'Spirit of the Plains' painted in 1897, presented them as 'bush spirits', emanating from the uncivilized world.

Accounts of the awakening East drew heavily on similar metaphors of fluidity and tidal change. Asia was also seen as both oceanic and threatening. Flowing crowds swirled out of its cities and poured over the countryside. Waves of sibilant whisperings sped through its bazaars. The noisy, abundant market-places of Asia were overflowing with uncontrolled humanity. The tide was on the turn, the East
was finding its voice. This voice moreover, was often suave, clever and articulate, drawing on rich intellectual traditions. It was quite at home in the sinuous turns and back alleys of complex eastern philosophies. In this subtle, infinitely flexible and feminised world, a white man might easily become bewildered. The gathering forces of Asia represented the ultimate crowd, the greatest engulfing deluge to threaten the West. When West engaged East in the context of the invasion novels, this meeting often had attributes of a male-female encounter. For decades the manly West was seen as more than a match for the feminised, corrupt and ineffectual East. But as imperial powers declined and women at home became more assertive, something more began to emerge. There was a sense that the old order was changing and that roles could change between men and women and between the white and the coloured world. Calls for a more 'manly', stabilising nationalism to counteract these trends grew stronger, linking the promulgation of virile manhood with the project of race survival in vulnerable Australia.

Endnotes

2 ibid., pp 84; 87.
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5 ibid., p 87.
8 Kipling, op. cit., p 128.
12 ibid., pp 35-6.
13 Dougous Sladen to Edmund Stedman, 12 April 1895, E C Stedman Papers, Special Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University Libraries, Columbia University, New
York, NY, USA.


15 Sladen, Twenty Years of My Life, op. cit., p 40.

16 Rata [R T Roydhouse], The Coloured Conquest, Sydney, 1904.


20 Parabellum [Ferdinand H Grautoff], Banzai!, New York, 1908, p 193.

21 ibid., p 199.

22 ibid., p 286.

23 ibid., p 287.

24 ibid., p 293.

25 ibid., p 288.


30 Rata [R T Roydhouse], op. cit., p 1.


34 Gabriel Tarde cited in Daniel Pick, ibid., p 93.


38 For accounts of the development of the women's movement in Australia, see Audrey Oldfield, Woman Suffrage: A Gift or a Struggle, Melbourne, 1992; Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Anne McGrath and Marian Quatly, Creating a Nation, Ringwood, 1994.

39 Dijkstra, op. cit., p 213.


41 Homer Lea, The Valor of Ignorance, New York, 1909, p 59. Lea was also the author of The Day of The Saxon [1912], New York, reprinted 1942.


43 Bram Dijkstra, op. cit., pp 70; 87; 100. Male anxieties about floods and tides have been discussed by Klaus Theweleit in Stephen Conway, Eric Carter and Chris Turner (trans), Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History, vol 1, Minneapolis, 1987.
Recreating National Myth: the Intellectual Odyssey of a Chardonnay Socialist

James Jupp

None of my ancestors lived in Australia. Only my father had ever visited it — as a merchant seaman in the late 1930s. Yet half my life has been spent here. I cannot identify with an Australian childhood. I do not share the upbringing common to almost all Australian politicians, most journalists and the majority of academics. I do not have any ancestral guilt about the Aborigines nor did I know where Gallipoli was until I emigrated to Melbourne as a young adult to avoid military conscription. My English ancestors were agricultural labourers from Surrey. None ever emigrated further than South London, where the Jupps established themselves in a dreary working class district of Croydon in the 1860s. My Irish great-grandmother, Catherine Ryan, did not follow millions from her native Munster across the oceans to America or Australia. She got as far as South London too. My Ulster Protestant grandfather, likewise, got as far as Glasgow where he stayed, sailing short distances along the European coast in a small steamer which he owned and captained. The Jupps just stuck in Croydon, the suburb in which I was born like my father and grandfather. Some of them still live less than twenty miles from the East Surrey village where generations of Jupps worked for farmers if they were lucky or lived off the poor law if they were not. They were not an intellectual family. My grandmother’s parents were both illiterate when they married in the 1860s, as was my grandfather’s mother. They signed the marriage register with a cross. Like many of the post-war generation, I was the first in the family ever to attend a university. I am still the only one in the direct Jupp line to have done so.
So how did I end up as a ‘chardonnay socialist’, living in the plush suburbs of the nation’s capital, working at the prestigious Australian National University, and espousing such a politically correct cause as multiculturalism? The Beazley tax package had nothing for me because I am too well off — almost but not quite ‘rich’. If I had been economically rational I would have voted liberal. But voting has never been a problem for me. As I told my shocked students many times ‘I just go into the booth, vote labor and walk out — it saves thinking’ ‘But sir’, they said (this was some years ago when academics were respected), ‘don’t you look at the issues?’ Students are naive but lovable. My shocking answer has always been ‘I wouldn’t vote Tory even if they were right’. Fortunately that is not even a moral dilemma under John Howard. This year I marked up fifty years as a paid-up member of the labor movement — thirty years in the ALP, eighteen in the British Labour party and two in the Canadian New Democrats. Like my rural ancestors I stick by what I know.

The basic principles which have guided my public and intellectual life are very simple: educate, agitate, organise; never trust the bosses; all good and evil stems from human beings, who are equally good, bad or indifferent wherever they come from; money is a means not an end; theory is very well in its place but winning is better than being right; the world is an amazing place (to quote SBS); and nothing lasts for ever. This sounds as vacuous as the oft-repeated notion of a ‘fair go’ — and so it is. It’s pure ‘left populism’ rather than ‘scientific socialism’. But it’s better than being a Marxist, or a Christian, or an economic rationalist or a post-modernist. Apart from the usual casual student jobs, my entire working life has been spent in academic ivory towers. Intellectual life, especially within universities, is shaped and distorted by fads and fashions disguised as philosophies and ideologies. When I was still at school I tried to read the Marxist classics — being completely foxed by Rosa Luxemburg’s study of the accumulation of capital. Years later I had to teach all that stuff as an ‘expert’ on communism who had never been to the Soviet Union and could not understand either Russian or German (universities were less serious then). Later still I grappled with Talcott Parsons and then with Poulantzas and Althusser — learning all too late that both of the latter were clinically insane. I am fortunately too old to bother about Derrida or Lacan. I am sure that they, too, will end up on the second-hand book market, where I recently unloaded six
shelves of books on Marxism and the Soviet Union. Nothing lasts for ever indeed.

This is not to decry grand theory but simply to reassert the utility of vulgar English pragmatism. Politics without theory nowadays passes into the hands of the spin doctors who believe in nothing except satisfying their clients. But politics which is all theory ends up as tattered remainders in Bob Gould’s Newtown bookshop. As a graduate at the London School of Economics I wrote a thesis on *The British Left in the 1930s.* It stood the test of time so well that it was eventually published in London twenty-five years later. This argued that the radical left had two choices, even in the theoretically favourable circumstances of depression-struck Britain. It could remain outside the Labour Party, pure, frustrated and ineffectual. Or it could work within the party, compromised, corrupted but influential. This is a choice which many radical academics and intellectuals cannot make. They have either wasted a lifetime in the Communist Party (now defunct at last), lurked unhappily within the mainstream party passing resolutions, or gone off with the fairies to save the whales. Some of course, simply swing right over to the opposite extreme. There is no anti-socialist like an old socialist.

**A Labor Populist and a Multiculturalist?**

The defining influence on my life has been membership of the organised labor movement. This has been sustained by habit as much as by ideological commitment. The ‘cause’ to which I have devoted some of my waking hours for the past thirty years (since 1966 to be precise) is multiculturalism. Are labor populism and multiculturalism compatible and how do they fit together? Given that the Australian Labor Party was dedicated to white Australia from its foundation in the 1890s until the mid-1960s, this is not simply an academic question. Of the first ten years that I was an ALP member, the party leader for seven was Arthur Calwell. Arthur believed that ‘you can have a white Australia, or you can have a black Australia — but you can’t have a mongrel Australia’ White Australia was a ‘settled policy’ which nobody challenged. It was hard enough getting the party to accept the reality of Italian and Greek immigration without arguing about Asians. I lived for years in North Carlton (Melbourne) as the Anglo-Australians and the Jews were moving out and the Italians and
Greeks were moving in. The local party was just recovering from the split, when nearly all ALP members followed Bill Barry into the Democratic Labor Party (or Barry-Coleman party as it was locally known). John Button has wittily described his first experiences of the Carlton ALP before the split, when students were regarded with grave suspicion as ‘Comms’ 

After 1956 the most likely charge was of being a ‘grouper’ Anybody who was at all different from the gnarled proletarians who ran the branches was unwelcome. Although thousands of Italians and Greeks lived around the neighbourhood and were impec­cably working class, not a single one joined the party in the 1950s and early 1960s. Who could blame them when the local state Labor MP described them as ‘coming from the filthiest parts of Europe’

It was not immediately apparent thirty-five years ago that multiculturalism (a term yet to be invented) and Labor populism had anything to say to each other. Because most non-British immigrants were Catholics and many were refugees from Communism, they were regarded as natural allies of the DLP. That the eminence grise behind that party was Bartolomeo Santamaria, son of a Lipari Islands greengrocer, only reinforced this prejudice. And the DLP did try very hard to recruit support from migrants. Unfortunately most of its members were equally gnarled Irish-Australians and some of those it did recruit had been on the wrong side during the war. Most Labor activists were unaware that Italy had the free world’s largest Communist Party and that many Greek immigrants had been on the left side of their recently concluded civil war. The Communists and the DLP knew these basic facts but Labor did not. It was amazingly provincial and refreshingly uneducated. Only years later were poetry readings introduced to the North Carlton branch, thankfully long after I had left for elsewhere. The little Aussie battlers, romanticised by the North Shore solicitor John Howard, were still around. They espoused a world view which was narrow but very practical. They were not racist in any ideological sense but they lacked the skills and the incentives to have anything to do with people about whom they knew nothing and who they could not talk to. As most European migrants at this stage did not have the vote it did not matter very much anyway and Liberals were very thin on the ground for several miles around.

Under the more cosmopolitan influence of London-born state secretary Cyril Wyndham, the Victorian party began to make overtures
to this new constituency which was growing so rapidly. At one stage the party office in the Trades Hall was filled with enough pamphlets in Polish to keep the entire Polish population of Melbourne in reading matter for several years. Nobody knew how many Polish speakers there were anyway (perhaps 20,000 in Melbourne in 1966). There were no mechanisms for distributing the pamphlets. There were no Poles in the branches and the most active unions were controlled by Communists who looked on Poles with grave suspicion for not returning to their own workers paradise. But gradually things got better. Ethnic politics passed from the perpetually arguing European Jews to the more nuggetty and focussed Greeks. By 1975 Victorian Labor had started to create ‘ethnic branches’, which it still has. In the meantime Whitlam had swept through the party, grabbed Australia by the scruff of the neck and, along with Al Grassby, had officially described the once white British society as both multicultural and multiracial. Arthur Calwell, who never forgave Whitlam for anything, had passed on, physically and spiritually.

I missed most of this by returning for ten years to England, but to an England which was strange to me. Rural North Yorkshire was still lingering uncertainly between the Brontës and Thomas Hardy. What was not owned by the Howards (of Castle Howard aka Brideshead) was owned by the Earl of Halifax or the Worsleys (aka the Duchess of Kent). York was one of the least multicultural cities in the world, although it did have a carefully hidden Irish minority who lived in council houses below the city walls. Jews had been driven out by the pogrom of 1190. Some years later I was told in New York that York was a very bad place for Jews — folk memories can be remarkably long. The ponderous might of the Church of England was embodied in the bulk of York Minster, the largest gothic church in Europe. Of course there were Chinese and Indian takeaways but they had to bring all their ingredients in from Leeds or Bradford. These were multicultural cities. The Bradford Labor Party, one of the oldest in Britain, distinguished itself by electing the first Muslim mayor of a large British city.

Immigrants in Britain, unlike those in Australia, were mainly non-Europeans, apart from the subterranean Irish. In some Yorkshire and Lancashire textile towns they were mostly Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs. They were a different colour, wore different clothes, spoke different languages and worshipped different gods. Yet in contrast to the often
violent racism of London or Birmingham, they were no more isolated and despised than the Greeks and Italians of Melbourne at the time. They followed very similar paths — as workers on night shift, on the buses or in small shops and cafes. They bought their own homes, as did the southern Europeans in Melbourne. They left the locals alone and the locals (apart from a few hoons) left them alone. Eventually most of them voted Labor and some joined the party. Racist and fascist candidates did very poorly at elections and immigrants eventually were elected to local councils. In many ways their relationship with the Labor Party was more friendly and productive than for immigrants in Australia. British labor did not inherit a racist ideology, though the British working class was every bit as racist as the Australian and arguably more so. But I learnt in the 1960s that race need not be a barrier to relatively harmonious relations between immigrants and natives provided that politicians and ideologues did not try to stir things up. I was able to confirm, on a research trip back to northern England in 1983, that most of the problems faced by migrants in both countries were the same, as was the official response. Britain had its Enoch Powell and Australia, more recently, has Pauline Hanson. But if national political leaders isolated such stirrers most people got along fairly well.

Back to Multicultural Oz

In 1978 I returned to multicultural Australia by way of two years in even more multicultural Canada. There were already more Chinese in Toronto than in the whole of Australia. In Quebec there were millions who spoke French, including many who could not speak English at all as I found to my surprise on my first visit to Quebec City. Less than five miles down the road from our computer centred university, Old Order Amish drove around in horses and buggies, refusing to use electricity and speaking an obscure German dialect. Way out on the endless prairies there were more Ukrainians than anywhere else except the Ukraine. It is with some scepticism that I kept hearing that Australia was the most multicultural country in the world. I was already very familiar with India through my academic work on Sri Lanka, politics and the resulting book which I wrote in the long Canadian winters. While I had finally escaped from teaching about the Soviet Union I still knew that it was pretty multicultural
as well — a fact later underlined by its complete disintegration into fifteen different sovereign states. Australia was more multicultural than Yorkshire but not yet more multiracial. And as in Yorkshire, the cosmopolitan cities were surrounded by a very monocultural countryside.

I had already written about multicultural Melbourne in 1966. This was the first, and for many years the only, general book on European immigrants. Many Australians then (and some even now) had a very peculiar attitude towards immigrants. They knew that they were there and sometimes got quite agitated about them. Essentially they ignored them, just as an earlier generation ignored Aborigines. This was harder to do in Melbourne than in Canberra, to which I had returned. But 1978 was a defining year in the development of multiculturalism. The Galbally report on migrant programs and services was handed down and enthusiastically adopted by the Fraser government.

From then onwards Australian governments of both parties and at both levels became officially committed to multiculturalism and began to develop programs aimed at the growing Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) population. I became increasingly involved in this policy development, especially after the election of the Hawke government in 1983.

**Doing My Bit for Multicultural Australia (1978-1996)**

For most of the time between 1978 and 1996 I was increasingly engaged in developing and advocating multiculturalism. This role was enhanced by the election of the Hawke government. Among many activities were the editing of the bicentennial encyclopedia *The Australian People*, which cost the taxpayer $1 million and was worth it (much more so than many other bicentennial activities). This provided for the first time histories of immigration and of about one hundred ethnic groups, as well as overviews of public policy issues arising from Australian immigration and cultural variety. It did this in one million words written by 250 authors. It is now completely unobtainable and I am working on a second edition for the centenary of federation. I learned a lot from this project. The encyclopedia was not reviewed by a single Australian academic, which was interesting as most of its contributors were academics. I presume now that this was because nobody who was not included knew much about the sub-
ject, though it also reflected the bizarre marketing strategy of its publisher. It was treated by everyone as an ‘ethnic’ work, although it included over 100,000 words on Aborigines, 120,000 on the English and a similar number on the other British Isles settlers. It was reviewed twice in Hungarian!

This suggested to me that many Australians, including those who should know better, still think of immigrants as ethnic outsiders. Yet the entire history of Australia since 1788 has been one of immigration, as I pointed out in my book Immigration, published in 1991. The treatment of ethnic and immigration studies as marginal might be understandable in Britain or other European countries where only five to ten percent of the people were born overseas. But in Australia, where one quarter of adults were born elsewhere, it is weird. Something very important is being denied.

Building on the contacts made and material gathered between 1983 and 1988, I set up the Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies at the Australian National University. This was welcomed as it was expected to be self-funding, which it largely has been, and because this followed on logically from the huge bicentennial grant. However I had to fight hard to get the word ‘multicultural’ accepted, assisted by the newly formed Office of Multicultural Affairs in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. In the process the decision makers at the ANU deprived the new centre of $100,000 through the sort of Byzantine processes for which major universities are universally famous. Fortunately, among my patrons was Bob Hawke, who launched the encyclopedia and my later co-edited book The Politics of Australian Immigration. With friends like that you can ignore your academic critics! Hawke, for all that has been said against him since, was genuinely engaged with multiculturalism and represented one of the most ‘ethnic’ electorates in Australia. With his support I became a member of the National Multicultural Advisory Council, chaired by then Mr Justice Gobbo (now governor of Victoria). This developed the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, which was so good that even the Howard government endorsed it.

The period between 1986 and 1996 were golden years for multiculturalism and for me personally. In 1986 I chaired the Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services which reported as Don't Settle for Less. This title, reached after a long din-
ner by the committee members, was not, I suspect, wholly welcome by the economic rationalists who were becoming increasingly influential in the public service and upon the treasurer, Paul Keating. The government was faced by a balance of payments crisis in mid-1986 which led to severe cuts in public expenditure. As is often the case, expenditure on migrant welfare and services was high on the list for cuts, making many of our proposals unpalatable. Whatever the reasons (and they are just as Byzantine as those reached in universities) the government never officially responded to the report, which cost the taxpayer $250,000. Even today some public servants claim that this meant that it disappeared down a memory hole. However, it did not and one outcome was the foundation of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. An even better outcome, from the FitzGerald committee of 1988, was the setting up of a highly professional research agency, the Bureau of Immigration Research. This was every academic’s dream — a well funded agency of integrity, headed by a senior academic (Dr John Nieuwenhuysen) and committed to large public conferences as well as to researched projects. I served as chairman of its ACT advisory committee.

The Cold Winds Start to Blow (1996 and Beyond)

Most of the work which I did between 1983 and 1996 was creative and useful, which cannot be said of much political activity. Governments were responsive, including the ACT government which appointed me as first chair of its Multicultural Advisory Council. The ‘ethnic lobby’, through the Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils (FECCA) was co-operative and friendly. A well funded and well-informed network was created in which I took an important role along with many others. Most of this is now in ruins — something for which it is hard ever to forgive the Howard government though some glimmerings of the future disaster were already apparent under Keating’s prime ministership. The enemies of multiculturalism became legion — they included economic rationalists in the public service and the universities; ecologists, conservationists and other varieties of ‘green’; conservatives drawing many of their arguments from the United States; old-fashioned Aussie nationalists; and, most important of all, the Liberal-National coalition. It must be said that the defensive capacity of the ‘ethnic lobby’ was weakly deployed — a
point I started making in 1993 when it looked as though John Hewson would be elected on a program which specifically attacked official multiculturalism. Changes in the composition of the ethnic constituency were important. The east Europeans who had founded FECCA and pioneered multiculturalism, were ageing and many of them were hostile to Labor. The next generation, the southern Europeans, tended to look after their own affairs and to be less influential on FECCA than they might have been. A particular difficulty was the explosion of Balkan politics into the Australian scene, which many Australians resented and saw as evidence that ‘multiculturalism can never work’.

The third wave, mainly Asian, was more concerned with racism than with assimilationism. Many, especially from the Chinese communities, were natural Liberals and found it hard to respond to policies which were aimed at working class southern Europeans. Whatever the detail, the forces ranged against multiculturalism were stronger than those defending it. The key to unravelling all the work of the past two decades was, however, the victory of John Howard in 1996, now repeated for another three year term.

When did Australians start to turn against multiculturalism? Many, of course, never turned towards it and went on repeating the assimilationist wisdom of the 1950s or even the 1850s. Pauline Hanson is an outstanding example but she is also representative of a million or so others. That’s why they voted for her. For her and them — it never happened. She sees a ‘bizarre’ situation where the big cities are ‘Asian’ and the rest of the country is ‘traditional Australian’. But of course most big cities, other than Brisbane, have been multicultural since the 1960s, and apart from Sydney none could realistically be termed ‘Asian’ anyway. She is combining two incorrigible bits of folk wisdom — that the country is better than the city, and that some visible Asians change the whole character of a place even when they are a small minority. Even at the height of Chinese, Kanaka and other Asian settlement in the 1880s, Queensland was never more than five percent non-white in its makeup. But that was enough to make it the pioneer of white Australia.

Outside of Queensland most Australians accept the ethnic changes of the past thirty years although they may not be too happy about some aspects, such as the building of mosques or the Asian shops of Cabramatta or Springvale. However attacks on multiculturalism as a policy began to be launched from the early 1980s, not coincidentally
because that began a long period of Labor political domination. The foundations of multiculturalism were actually laid by the Liberals under Malcolm Fraser. But increasingly the public policies came to be seen as Labor-inspired and for the benefit of labor politicians. Such pioneers of multiculturalism as George Zubrzycki adopted this critique. The most influential attack came, however, from someone who had never been associated with Liberal multiculturalism. Professor Blainey. Blainey was, and is, an Australian nationalist in the mould of Manning Clark though more conservative. Other nationalists, such as Bob Birrell, John Howard, Les Murray and many others joined in. What was now expected was not assimilation to a ‘British’ model, as previously, but to an ‘Australian’ one. Three influences were at work: simple xenophobia, assertive nationalism and the echoing of American debates. Between them they were able to dismantle the creative and bipartisan work designed to make Australia a harmonious multicultural society. Institutions such as the office and the bureau were abolished within a few months of the 1996 victory. Terms like ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘social justice’ were removed from official pronouncements. Political correctness and black armband history was denounced, at the highest level. No doubt unintentionally a Pandora’s box was opened and out jumped Pauline Hanson, fully armed.

**We Are Australians Too!!**

Although thoroughly integrated into Australian society and speaking no other language than English, I have always retained a sense of being an ‘outsider’, and a degree of sympathy with those who are even further ‘outside’ than I am. I have rarely heard the word ‘pommy’ used, but when it is, it is always slightly hostile. It must be much worse to be a dago, or a reffo, or a slope or an Abo. Yet we are all Australians, certainly that great majority who have become citizens voluntarily or even enthusiastically. We were not brought up on Vegemite, did not fish for yabbies in the creek, did not barrack for the Magpies, had never heard of Ned Kelly — or Chesty Bond — or Dad and Dave, had never read *Seven Little Australians* or listened to *Blue Hills*. Many of us could not speak English, some of us were not Christians and a few were not even white. Put us all together and we make up nearly one-quarter of all Australians. Why do we need to justify ourselves?
The basic dilemma for immigrants is that the natives define themselves so narrowly and rigidly — in doing so they define others as illegitimate. There really is no need to search for the typical Australian any more. In the nineteenth century there was a sense in which native sons (daughters did not count) wanted to define themselves as different from their British or Irish ancestors. They were 'cornstalks' or 'currency lads'. In the early twentieth century post-war bitterness at such monumental cock-ups as Gallipoli or the Somme prompted many, understandably, to dislike 'pommies', even working class pommy immigrants as well as the upper classes who still adored the various government houses. And always the non-white and even the non-British were rejected as potential Australians — although Germans and Scandinavians were not except during the two wars. An Australian was not an Englishman and had to act, look and think differently. It was a very small society, narrowly based on a handful of cities which were very distant from each other and often looked upon each other with contempt and dislike. Xenophobic towards aliens and parochial towards other Australians, the typical Australian was grateful that he was not living in the Old Dart but fearful that the Old Dart might not be able to defend its distant outpost against the Asian hordes. There were few foreign tourists, it took over a month to sail to England and aliens were unwelcome and scarcely tolerated. It was also a society which suffered severe hardship in the 1930s and had previously seen its young men decimated in a war which seemed to have little point for Australians once it was over. It was not surprising that the national identity was fuelled by some bitterness against others. At the same time, though not always in the same classes or locations, many Australians were still imperial Britons. The two major cultural divisions in those years were between protestants and catholics and between Australians and Anglophiles, divisions which overlapped and which corresponded to the partisan divide between conservatives and Labor.

Such a lot of energy went into searching for the typical Australian between the 1880s and the 1940s that this increasingly futile task still runs on its own steam. Many have not yet abandoned the ideal of the typical Australian. What is being abandoned is the notion of Australia as a socially protective society based on concepts such as the 'fair go' and the 'fair wage'. What has already gone is the notion of Australia as a British society. American culture permeates everything, although it has been an influence from at least the 1850s.
American economic models, American electioneering techniques, the American media, American ideologies stretching from pro-guns to civil rights, American clothes and even some new sports such as basketball or gridiron (the most boring form of football in the world) are all eroding the concept of Australian uniqueness much faster than anything called multiculturalism. Very few seem to care about this, while talkback radio (another American phenomenon) steams with resentment at foreign languages on shop fronts.

The typical Australian now looks and increasingly thinks like the typical American. This may not matter too much, as in neither country is the 'typical' more than a minority. What really matters is that the model of a social democratic society in which everyone is secure and none are too rich has faded away in the heat of enthusiasm for the market. Australians have always been materialistic and pragmatic. But they were not greedy and they did not deify the market place. They were good trade unionists at heart and tolerated those who worked hard and looked after themselves and their families. Australia was just the sort of society that you would expect to be founded by assisted working class immigrants. Today unionism embraces fewer workers than in Britain and will soon be down to American levels. The rich are richer, the poor are poorer and some of the tolerance and decency has gone out of public life. And none of this is the fault of multiculturalism!

Twenty-five years of official consensus on multiculturalism has recently been shattered. The current situation is not simply one of 'fighting racism' but needs a broader understanding of what makes people resent each other and what can prevent them from actively hating each other. Second-hand arguments, largely derived from the different and less benign American experience, need to be rejected rather than given the blessing of political leaders, journalists and even academics. While the old vision of a conflict-free socialist world is now a chimera, it is still possible within the long Australian social-democratic tradition to envisage creative harmony. The equally long Australian populist tradition, with its racist undertones, needs to be rejected along with much of the 'colonial baggage' which underpins conventional ideas of the 'real Australia'. Most of that can be left in the care of One Nation. Immigrants, who come from outside that conventional tradition, have a major role in recreating a national myth. In doing so they must relocate their thinking within an Australian context. The native-born, who have
been raised with many social-democratic values whatever their current politics, also have a vital role in this recreation if they can free their thinking from the shackles of the past and from mass culture conformity. Australia is never likely to be a 'great' country — but it can be a 'good' country for those who live in it. That is worth struggling for and that is what much of Australia's history has been about.

Endnotes

An
Unbecoming Australian:
Romancing a Lost
Pre-1492 World

John Docker

Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19: 28)

For most of the 1990s I have been writing a book Adventures of Identity, its subtitle '1492 — The Poetics of Diaspora', a book that mixes cultural history with family history and autobiography. My chapter here will attempt to reprise a lost Levantine world as future possibility, as a utopia that never was, that will never be.¹

My choice of topic — the remarkable history of the medieval Middle East — may seem surprising in modern-day Australia. But I wish to talk about a society so distant in time and space precisely because of my feelings towards the contemporary society I live in and especially those aspects which concern me most as a public intellectual and writer and critic. I agree with the argument of Mark Davis's controversial book Gangland (1997), that throughout the 1990s we have been passive witnesses to a public sphere of argument and debate in Australia that is dominated by a generation — actually, my generation — most of whose media commentators have aged utterly gracelessly, terrified of an idea, incapable of responding to the new, striking out against anyone, especially the young whom they exclude, and anything, especially new cultural theory they are pathetically incapable of understanding. Almost every day in every week we have to read in our newspapers a generation of media pundits notable for
its insensitivity, lack of generosity, lack of any desire to encourage, lack of delight that the young might be different. I also rather strongly feel that Australia's contemporary literary culture is in a deplorable state of mediocrity and complacency, an almost inevitable result of a long history of writers and critics being too close, indeed enthusiastically inserting themselves into octopoid networks of chummy patronage, mutual puffery, and misused cultural power.\(^2\)

In my first book, *Australian Cultural Elites* (1974), I evoked a particular Sydney tradition of writing and cultural theory, in poets, artists and novelists like Christopher Brennan, Norman Lindsay, Kenneth Slessor, A D Hope, and Patrick White. While their art and writing was of course very different one from the others, I felt they belonged to a shared metaphysical tradition in relation to Australian society, a society in which they felt alienated and isolated in soul and being (which doesn't of course mean their actual daily lives were not busy, sociable, productive and cheerful), and where they desired to overcome that isolation by turning to a transcendental realm of nature and imagination, a kind of symbolic third realm. Yet in this life transcendence can only be momentary, it can never be complete, and soul and being are plunged again into the world that repels them, into ironic awareness of defeat and failure, futility and illusion, wandering and solipsism.\(^3\)

I suppose I now feel, as a kind of dyspeptic dystopian of the late 1990s, that my current project is contributing, if only as a footnote, to this distinctive Sydney literary and philosophical tradition. I too feel alienated from and not infrequently disgusted by this society that gives itself so freely to philistinism, anti-intellectualism, parochialism, and racism. I see around me a white society that feels keenly its own suffering, yet is loathe to acknowledge the suffering of others or the suffering it has caused others. I too feel an internal exile, as if a stranger amongst the nations. I too choose a third symbolic realm, the hope of transcendence, and I too have a sense that this way madness, or the cultivation of madness, lies, that perhaps I already inhabit a kind of post-mad hallucinatory state. In a famous essay the German sociologist Georg Simmel wrote that the stranger is the wanderer who comes today and stays tomorrow.\(^4\) I feel like the outsider who would like to leave, and is leaving, at least in imagination, fancy, and fantasy, creating baroque allegories as we drift on the tide to-
wards the new millennium, trying not to hear the fateful sound of Slessor’s five bells, foretelling dismal death by drowning.

Let us go now on a journey together, a journey into another world.

In the early 1920s a young German scholar, Shlomo Dov Goitein, took up a teaching appointment in Palestine. He made it his life's work to investigate and evoke the thousand-year-old interactions between Jews and Arabs and Indians in the mercantile world of North Africa, the Mediterranean, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean, an ethnically and religiously plural world that was assaulted by Europe over a very long period, in the medieval Crusades and the events of 1492 and subsequent European maritime expansion. After the second world war it was sharply disrupted by both Zionist and Arab nationalism.

In 1992 Amitav Ghosh, the Indian anthropologist and novelist, published *In an Antique Land*, an anguished conversation with history that pays homage to and draws on and supplements the work and research of S D Goitein.

In this chapter I will focus on the relationship between Goitein and Ghosh. I will also relate Goitein and Ghosh to my *Adventures of Identity*, and to certain personal events associated with it. I hired a research assistant to do a genealogy of my English Jewish family ancestry (my mother was a Levy). And I acquired in 1997, as the book was coming together, a quite large tattoo, in shades of grey, which sits on my right shoulder as I say these words, the representation of a figure I refer to puzzled acquaintances and concerned friends as the *veiled stranger*.

**Egypt**

Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* tells the story of a young Indian anthropologist, only twenty-two years old when in 1978 he arrives in England on a scholarship to begin a doctorate in social anthropology. He comes across *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, a book of translations edited by Professor Goitein. The material in Goitein’s *Letters* on medieval Jewish traders and their slaves catches the attention of the apprentice anthropologist, so that his doctoral research suddenly takes on for him a personal interest. He reads letters from merchants
in the Middle East written in the first part of the twelfth century to their partner and friend, a Jewish trader who lives in India, Abraham Ben Yiju, letters which at the end include greetings to Ben Yiju’s Indian slave, a man called Bomma.6

Ghosh feels that the past presence of Bomma the Indian slave should give him ‘a right to be there’ in that past Levantine world, ‘a sense of entitlement’ 7

The journey of his thesis takes shape. He arranges to go to an agricultural village in Egypt. He soon finds that the villagers do not see him as part of their extended world, as once an Indian surely would have been. At least, such is what he infers from the occasional references he follows up, and mysterious clues he as scholarly detective chases and puzzles over, that suggest images of the lost world of Abraham Ben Yiju and Bomma. But how can he find out about them?

These references and clues he will seek in the documents of the famous Cairo Geniza. The famous what?

The Cairo Geniza

In the introduction to his *A Mediterranean Society* Goitein explains that in medieval Hebrew geniza designated a repository of discarded writings bearing the name of God (Hebrew was regarded as God’s own language). Especially from the eleventh through to the thirteenth centuries, these writings, hailing from all over the Mediterranean countries and beyond, were kept in the Geniza in the synagogue in Fustat, in Old Cairo. They ranged from literature and philosophy and medicine to the interpretation of dreams and folktales, to court depositions of marriage contracts and bills of divorce and records of commercial transactions, to deeds of emancipating slaves and slave girls.

India

In *In an Antique Land* the narrator tells us that until that fateful day in 1978 sitting in a library reading Goitein’s *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* he himself had never heard of the Cairo Geniza. But he learnt of its history as quickly as he could, especially the traces of information concerning the Jews from North Africa, in particular Tunisia, who had migrated eastward to Egypt and were preeminent
in the medieval Indian Ocean trade, its most important ports Aden on one side, and Mangalore on the south-western coast of India on the other, exchanging pepper, cardamom, silk, bronze. He finds himself admiring the Fustat congregation in Cairo as 'a group of people whose travels and breadth of experience and education seem astonishing even today, on a planet thought to be newly-shrunken'. The great medieval Jewish physician and philosopher Maimonides, who had close family links to the India trade, belonged to this congregation.8

In search of clues in the Geniza collections in libraries around the world, the narrator finds that Abraham Ben Yiju, born sometime around the beginning of the twelfth century in Tunisia, highly educated, a poet, calligrapher, scholar, had moved to Aden as a young man to pursue the career of merchant, an honoured profession not only in that Judeo-Islamic world, but in the contemporaneous Indian world as well, especially amongst the Gujarati sea traders. From the letters he realizes that Ben Yiju has a gift for friendship and inspiring loyalty. Still a young man, Ben Yiju moves to the Malabar coast at some point before 1132. He becomes part of the large expatriate Middle Eastern Muslim Arab and Jewish community there, sharing its taste in fine food and gorgeous clothing, wearing turbans, speaking Arabic, leading a diasporic life, both Indian and Mediterranean. His friends send him sweets (raisins, nougat, dates) and crystallised sugar (in the Middle Ages it was Egypt that had pioneered large-scale production of cane-sugar) to assuage his yearning for Middle Eastern food.9

From fragments of documents, it appears that Ben Yiju, soon after arriving in Mangalore, obtained Ashu an Indian slave woman whom he then on 17 October 1132 publicly frees, and whom he also at some stage marries. At least, the narrator hastens to follow Goitein's speculation that they marry. Ashu (whom Goitein also guesses was 'probably beautiful') was, says the narrator, 'the woman who probably bore his children', a boy and girl. The narrator is also intrigued because Ben Yiju chose a wife of the Nair people of the southern part of the Malabar coast rather than a spouse from India's ancient Jewish community of Malabar, known for its devoutness and strictness (though Ashu would 'probably' have converted to Judaism for the marriage). The reason, the narrator feels and hopes, is that Ben Yiju married for
'love' though, he admits, the documents offer 'no certain proof' for this conjecture. After spending nearly two decades in Mangalore, Ben Yiju returned in 1149 with his two now teenage children to the Middle East, finally settling in Cairo. It would appear also that Bomma came with him.

**Bomma**

The narrator of *In an Antique Land* decides to travel to the west coast of India in search of traces of the life led there in the first part of the twelfth century by Ben Yiju and Bomma. From the Geniza documents he has learnt that, curiously for merchants at that time, Ben Yiju does not seem to have travelled back and forth between India and Aden or Egypt, but remained stationary in Mangalore. It was his slave Bomma he entrusted to travel and shop for him and, handling very large sums of money, transact business with the merchants in the Middle East. Certainly he appears to have become well-known to Ben Yiju's friends, for in their letters they frequently append a note adding 'plentiful greetings' to Bomma; sometimes they prefix Bomma's name with the title of Shaikh. In Mangalore the narrator works out that Bomma must have been from the Malabar region, belonging to the Tulunad people, who traditionally worshipped spirit-deities known as Bhutas before and then alongside the classical Hindu mythology of 'the high Sanskritic tradition'.

But Bomma was a slave. How can the narrator admire a life and times that assumed the natural existence and desirability of slavery?

**Slavery**

Goitein argues for the distinctiveness of medieval Judeo-Arab Mediterranean slavery. In this world and period slavery denoted a personal service, which could, especially if the master were of high rank or wealthy, carry with it economic advantage and social prestige. Slaves through the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries were, however, expensive and had to be imported from afar, from Nubia, Europe, India. Their high value protected them, and in addition the three monotheistic religions made humanitarian laws and urged various admonitions in their favour. The acquisition of a male slave was,
says Goitein, an affair of note, a man being congratulated almost as if a new son had been born. In general, male slaves belonged to the world of commerce and finance. The slave was deployed in a position of great trust, managing the affairs of his master, travelling with him or on his behalf; the slave who was a business agent was an important merchant in his own right, and could do business on his own account. The Geniza records indicate that male slaves were often freed, the act of manumission occurring before a Jewish court; it converted the slave into someone with all the religious duties of a Jew and he could also then marry a Jewish wife.

In every prosperous family, Goitein notes, slave girls were to be found as domestic help and nurses of children. A female slave had legal rights and according to the Geniza records made active use of them. There was often a strong attachment between the slave girl and the family. Slave girls were greeted in family letters and they sent greetings to the relatives of their masters.

In terms of eros, Christianity and Judaism disapproved of sexual relations outside marriage. Yet it did occur in the Classical Geniza world to the degree that Maimonides decided in several cases that a young Jewish man could emancipate the slave girl he loved and marry her. As Goitein says, Maimonides here relied on a daring maxim of the ancient sages — pay regard to god by disregarding his law.

The narrator of *In an Antique Land* writes of master-slave relations in the practical understanding spirit of Maimonides and Goitein. Abraham Ben Yiju was to the end of his life closely attached to his trusted business agent Bomma; and, paying heed to God by disregarding His law, he purchased and manumitted and married his female slave Ashu the beautiful Nair.

**My Tattoo**

As so often in history, that which was expelled or destroyed, returns as longing and sorrow. Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* enacts a utopian romance between the narrator, a diasporic Indian Western-trained anthropologist, writer and traveller, and the cosmopolitanism and plurality, the lack of exclusion, of Ben Yiju and Bomma’s world. But his utopian wish to recover that world, to imagine it as ‘in some tiny measure, still retrievable’, is shadowed by the dystopian fear it has been lost to him as an Indian and westerner forever.14
I share that romance and utopian hope and dystopian fear, that has also received expression in the last decade in what we might call an anti-Zionist, post-Zionist, critical literature.\textsuperscript{15}

*Adventures of Identity* is my quest for that Geniza world, exploring ‘1492’ — when Columbus sailed for the Americas, when the last of Moorish Spain was defeated in the fall of Granada, when the Jews were expelled from Spain — as a pivotal moment of world history, for Europe, for the Mediterranean, for India, for Jewish history, for Zionism and Israel, for modern societies influenced and shaped by European nationalism, for contemporary ethnic and cultural identities.

One way I geniza-quest is through genealogy. My mother’s family migrated from the East End of London to another port city, Sydney, in the 1920s. I grew up in ‘perpetually migrant’ Bondi, which has always had a significant Jewish population; my mother would tell stories that she thought the family was descended from Portuguese Jews. I hired a genealogist — actually my mother-in-law, Ann Curthoys’s mother — as my research assistant and asked her to investigate this family lore. My dream hope fantasy delusion is that my ancestry may reveal Sephardi as well as Ashkenazi descent, so that I can connect myself, at least in imagination and fancy, to the long Sephardic history that goes back through English and Dutch and Portuguese history to Moorish Spain to the medieval Judeo-Arab-Indian geniza world. I should say here that my genealogist’s searches have so far revealed that my English Jewish family is solidly Ashkenazi, at least going back to the early nineteenth century.

When I told a few people in the middle of 1997 that I was determined to acquire a tattoo, my friends were immediately concerned, mainly as to my sanity; they needed to be reassured, more than once, on the email. They demanded reasons. I asked the tattooist (in my view, Australia’s finest, a Canberra artist with the professional name of eX de Medici), to create an androgynous figure, of head and shoulders and drawn-back cloak. eX suggested that thinning the lips on the sculpted face would help it look androgynous. I also asked eX to make the tattoo appear vaguely oriental, to signify the phantasmal figure of my desire, a biblical ancestor, or a Sephardi-Spanish-Portuguese ancestor, or a Geniza ancestor. The tattoo is the fantastical illusory *doppelgänger* that corresponds to the patient work of my research assistant’s genealogy. It is the imaginary flight and site
(looking far too much like an extra in a Hollywood biblical movie) of that which is me and not me, an other on my skin; a bizarre attempt to connect to the Geniza world where identity, as with circumcision, was so much written on the body.

Of course, my fantasy’s one success has been to create considerable mirth. One friend locked me in her university office and demanded I take my shirt off immediately so she could see it. I fled. Others have looked and whispered amongst themselves that it’s not androgynous at all but obviously female. The implication is that, for all my fluent pro-feminism and anti-orientalism, I had banally repeated a common or garden male orientalist gesture.

They’re probably right. The veiled stranger on my shoulder is my absurd doubling of In an Antique Land’s vision of Abraham Ben Yiju’s twelfth-century Ashu.

I feel a strange affinity here with an anonymous French criminal in the nineteenth century (when in Europe the tattoo was considered a sign of the low, degenerate and pathological), who had tattooed on his body the following eloquent cry to history: ‘Le pass m’a tromp, le present me tourmente, l’avenir m’pouvante’ (The past has deceived me, the present torments me, the future terrifies me).

The Tattooed Cook

Yet another way I geniza-quest is via food. For decades now I have been an enthusiastic amateur cook, drawn to cuisines as distant as possible, so it has always turned out, from an inherited English food culture. I have absorbed myself in cooking Italian, Indian, Singaporean (my treasured copy of Wendy Hutton’s Singapore Food has telltale food stains all over favoured pages), Malaysian, Indonesian, and, more recently, Thai recipes, and searching for the spices and vegetables and condiments necessary: ground coriander, cumin, ginger, paprika, turmeric, cayenne pepper, cardomoms, cloves, cinnamon sticks, whole nutmeg; fresh ginger and coriander (including roots), galangal, tamarind, blachan, lime leaves, kaffir-limes, lemon grass; coconut milk, soy sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce, yoghurt; various long grain rices, also rice in noodle form. I love cooking with aubergine and okra. At some stage I realised I have become addicted to chillis, I’m a chillihead. In reading cookbooks and working on my cooking, what I feel has become clear is that Persian food, so subtle
and delicate, is a kind of ur-cuisine, that historically spread and enriched and interacted with cuisines from Moorish Spain and Morocco to Venice and the Eastern Mediterranean, to India and beyond in the East. In this vast cuisiny crescent, India and South-East Asia remain connected to the Mediterranean, past and present.\(^\text{17}\)

In the last few years I have increasingly absorbed myself in exploring the historical adventure that is Mediterranean cuisine. A great find has been Barbara Santich's *The Original Mediterranean Cuisine: Medieval Recipes for Today*, which sees the Mediterranean as an intricate continuum in space and time, that connects North Africa and southern Europe, from Morocco and Spain to the Levant; an always interrelated mutually influencing cuisiny area. I turn with delight the pages of Jeanette Nance Nordio's *Taste of Venice: Traditional Venetian Cooking*, where so many recipes blend Italian and Middle Eastern ingredients and styles. I try my hand at North African food, absorbing myself in Paula Wolfert's *Good Food from Morocco*. I've added to my kitchen stores pomegranate syrup, sumac, preserved lemons, rose water, orange water; I seek out high quality oranges in order to make Moroccan orange salads.\(^\text{18}\)

I acquire with great pleasure Claudia Roden's *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day*. I begin by reading her very interesting and moving introduction, concerning her upbringing in a Sephardi family in Egypt (via Aleppo and Istanbul), their having to leave in 1956, and, in London, their diasporic nostalgic continuous re-imagining of and yearning for their lost Cairene world: ‘At 16 Woodstock Road, it seemed that we had never left Cairo ... The smell of sizzling garlic and crushed coriander seeds in the kitchen, or of rose water in a pudding, and my mother’s daily meals, reinforced the feeling’ In London she would share passionate memories with her parents about their life in Egypt: ‘The Egypt I knew was a French-speaking cosmopolitan Mediterranean country’, where the ‘Jewish community had a happy and important place in the mosaic of minorities — which included Copts, Armenians, Syrian Christians, Maltese, Greeks and Italians, as well as British and French expatriates — living amongst the Muslim majority’ \(^\text{19}\)

Yet when later in her introduction I read that the cooking of the Jewish communities in India came as a ‘surprise’ to her, I feel a little surprised.\(^\text{20}\) It seems to confirm the narrator’s feeling in *In an An-
tique Land, that India had dropped out of Middle Eastern awareness as part of its intimately connected worlds.

Then I race to the Sephardi section, finding myself drawn to those recipes that share maximum spiciness with non-Jewish Middle Eastern and North African and Indian dishes. The first dish I try is ‘Kofta à la Sauce Tomate’ but as I prepare it I feel that the spices recommended — cinnamon and allspice — are not piquant enough. So I look at the regional variations *The Book of Jewish Food* lists, and enthusiastically add fresh coriander and garlic (Tunisian), ground ginger, turmeric, garam masala, and chilli powder (Indian Baghdadi), and also insert pine nuts into each meatball (Syrian). Roden notes that in Salonika they sometimes added honey instead of sugar to the tomato sauce, so I do this as well because it reminds me of Moroccan tagine sauces. I also hasten to the Sephardi vegetable section: ‘The Sephardim have a reputation as vegetable lovers even by Mediterranean standards ...’ I check out the aubergine and okra dishes, and come across Syrian recipes for both, cooked or dressed with pomegranate syrup and tamarind, and think, I must do these. I also make the wonderful sweet potatoes dish. Wandering around the book (which has a touch of geniza chaos in its presentation), I mark off other recipes I must soon try, like ‘Shoulder of Lamb with Rice Stuffing and Sour Cherry Sauce’, a Syrian Jewish dish that uses cherries rather than the more familiar apricots.21

I read with interest the section ‘Aleppo (Syria) was the Pearl of the Jewish Kitchen’, where Roden says that a large proportion of the recipes in her book are Syrian, and most particularly from Aleppo. She recalls the dozen or more Syrian dishes ‘we get when we visit our families in Los Angeles, Mexico and Columbia, Paris and Geneva’ 22

It soon also turns out that my favourite fruit and vegetables shop in Canberra now sells sundried cherries, that I hope are similar to those Claudia Roden mentions were used by Syrian Jews as an alternative to dried apricots. And these dried cherries, soaked and gently simmered in water and lemon juice, have become a new sensuous delight I try out as a sauce not only with lamb but with other dishes.

The cook is an obsessed figure, suffusing practicality with dreams. As of nights I cut and slice and put in the oil and stir and add and mix and nudge ingredients about, my tattoo looks on, concealing its thoughts. Is it sceptically thinking that every utopian desire is ac-
accompanied by its dystopian double, that Utopia and Dystopia are allegorical twins spinning through space and time, clasping and clawing at each other, creating and devouring amidst history’s ruins?23

Conclusion

In my present life and by the shaping of sensibility, in terms of bodily marking (my tattoo folly — actually, I’m thinking of asking eX de Medici to inscribe another tattoo on my other arm, of Paul Klee’s painting Angelus Novus, the angel of modernity as monstrous and demonic, the image that preoccupied my favourite thinker, Walter Benjamin) — and absorption in medieval and contemporary Mediterranean cuisine, I continue to try to reprise that lost Judeo-Islamic-Indian world, while knowing all the time that my efforts are shadowed by comedy, self-parody, sense of inevitable defeat, absurdity.

To focus on ‘1492’ is a call to re-orient the contemporary world’s awareness of time and space, to decentre ‘Australia’ in radical ways, to think of and imagine many world histories simultaneously.

Endnotes

1 A different version of this paper will appear as ‘His Slave, My Tattoo: Romancing a Lost World’ in Debjani Ganguly and Kavita Nandan (eds), Unfinished Journeys: India File from Canberra (forthcoming, 1999).
6 In Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders, Princeton, 1974, Goitein writes that Abraham Ben Yiju is the ‘single most important figure of the India papers presented in the Geniza’. Goitein refers to Ben Yiju’s Indian slave as Bama, pp 13; 186; 191.
7 Ghosh, op. cit., p.19.
9 Ghosh, op. cit., pp 18-19; 153-8; 158; 161; 267-9; 279. In Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders, p 190, n 14, Goitein notes that wheat was frequently sent to Ben Yiju for religious purposes: ‘Grace was said over bread, not over rice’ (in southern India the staple food was rice). Cf Arjun Appadurai, ‘How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India’, Comparative Studies of Society and History, vol 31, no 1, 1988, pp 10-14, for a brief overview of the question of cuisine in Indian history.
10 ibid., pp 227-30.
11 ibid., pp 349.
12 ibid., pp 16; 18; 159; 249-56; 266. Concerning greetings to Bomma, cf Goitein, op. cit., pp 13; 191.
20 ibid., p 12.
21 ibid., pp 336-7; 349-50: 436; 442: 446.
Northern Exposure

Tim Bowden

On Anzac Day 1998, the prime minister of Australia John Howard chose to travel to Thailand to a memorial service at Hellfire Pass on the Thai-Burma Railway where Australian prisoners-of-war had once toiled as slave labourers for the Imperial Japanese Army in 1943.

It was, said the prime minister, ‘a sacred place for Australians’. In his speech John Howard praised the Thais who he said had joined in an Australian and Asian experience together. He singled out small acts of kindness, like some Thais placing eggs buried in the sand near a creek where starving Australians washed, during their period of forced labour on the railway. Such a visit and declaration would have been unthinkable only a decade ago.

When Professor Hank Nelson, a historian at the Australian National University, and I collaborated in an oral history-based project on the experiences of Australian prisoners-of-war in Asia in the early 1980s, there was little public knowledge or understanding of the POW’s experiences. Military historians tend to fixate on campaigns and battles. Although, in round figures, 22,000 Australian servicemen (and 30 servicewomen) had become prisoners of the Japanese in 1941, only 14,000 survived to put on new loose-fitting uniforms to go home. In other words, more than one in three had died during three-and-a-half years of captivity.

To put it yet another way, nearly half of the deaths suffered by Australians in the war in the Pacific were among men and women who had surrendered. Yet in the official history of Australians fighting in Asia against ‘The Japanese Thrust’, the experiences of those in captivity is dealt with only in appendices.
In 1985 Professor Nelson wrote in the introduction to his book based on the ABC Radio series 'Prisoners-of-War: Australians Under Nippon':

By any quantitative measure the imprisonment of so many Australians is a major event in Australian history. For many soldiers it was living — and dying — in captivity which made the second world war different from that of the great war. But the prisoners have received no permanent place in Australian history. Their story is not immediately recalled on celebratory occasions.¹

As John Howard's pilgrimage to Hellfire Pass has indicated, that at least, has changed.

What the POW experience did was to place 22,000 Australians in Asia, not as colonial white masters of Asian races, but as refugees who had to summon up their 'Australianness' — as it were — to survive. And survive they did, more successfully than the British, or the Dutch, whose troops shared their captivity.

Many of the Eighth Division AIF were bush boys, the fittest and the best, recruited from country towns all around Australia. They knew how to light a fire and boil a billy in the rain, how to put up crude bush shelters, improvise — even butcher an equally starved yak (on the rare occasions one could be hijacked on the Thai-Burma Railway), have the carcase buried and the meat in with the rice on the cooking fires in a matter of minutes while the Japanese and Korean guards ran around impotently unable to find out what had happened.

And above all they had mateship — an Australian male ritual now often derided, but which was vital to basic survival as prisoners-of-war. Australians tended to band together in small groups of between three to five. If one of these close groups could not eat his meagre ration of rice because of a bout of malaria, one of his mates would eat it — and donate his own when he became ill. These small groups of friends helped pull each other through.

Prisoners from other nationalities noticed the strength of Australian groups, and the Australians themselves took a pride in their ability to keep each other alive by sharing, encouraging and if necessary abusing their mates to 'snap out of it' if they looked like giving up.
The writer Hugh Clarke (himself a POW) said that he never saw an Australian die alone — although he saw many English and Dutch prisoners die in isolation. Former Sergeant Stan Arneil emphasised this point when I interviewed him on tape many years later:

It's difficult for any person in Australia today to understand the depth of the bond. Difficult to understand death, for example. In Australia one dies in a sterile hospital bed. If the doctors are quick enough they might have the relatives there, but many times the patient is dead before the next of kin gets there. In Thailand when a man died, he died in an aura of love and brotherhood which is not available now possibly anywhere in the world. You died with your head in the lap of a mate, with somebody holding your hand, with somebody with a hand on your forehead saying a little prayer, and people actually sorry to see you die. That's a bond which you cannot obtain now. Many of the people who were there became closer to their friends than to their families.²

Although some POWs did die through acts of random brutality, like being bashed to death by an enraged Japanese or Korean guard — and there were examples of torture and summary execution — most Allied prisoners-of-war died of preventable or treatable diseases like dysentery, cholera, beri beri, malaria, or just malnutrition and overwork. Captain John Murphy, a former kiap (patrol officer) in Papua New Guinea, was one of seven survivors of a camp of Allied servicemen in Rabaul. Most of the other prisoners with him were American fliers, shot down over New Britain. Many reacted badly to the sudden rice diet and died relatively quickly. Murphy commented later that there were few instances of brutality by their guards:

They just allowed us to die from starvation, disease and things like that; they didn't hurry death with brutal kickings or bashings. They had no work for us, so they couldn't push a program like the Burma Railway. The guards were with us all the time and they would sort of get to know us. It was like having a herd of fowls. You know the fowls individually, but you don't worry about them. That seemed to be the guards attitude to us. It was their superiors who denied us the food and medical treatment that caused the death of 56 out of our group of 63.³
About half of the 61,000 Allied prisoners in Burma and Thailand were British. The next largest group of 18,000 were from the Dutch East Indies, and they included Dutch, Eurasians and Indonesians. The 13,000 Australians were the third largest group, and there were only 700 Americans.

Many of the British troops were raw recruits from the slums of Glasgow or Liverpool who had been given rudimentary training before being thrown into Malaya in the dying moments of the campaign. Many of them were undernourished when they arrived, and did not have the fitness and camaraderie of the Australians. The rigid British class system also created a bigger gap between officers and other ranks than the Australians. Their casualties, on the Thai-Burma Railway, were disproportionately high.

Captain Lloyd Cahill, an Australian medical officer, felt sorry for the British on the Thai-Burma Railway, because the men he saw were Londoners who had never been out in the bush or anywhere at all:

This was where the Australians were so lucky, because we had so many country coves with us ... I always remember one fellow, "Ringer" Edwards, who appeared in A Town Like Alice. He was one of the most amazing men I've ever met. We'd be marching at night in the rain, and fellows would be falling over and breaking their arms in the pouring monsoon. You'd stop, and the Ringer would have a little fire going within about five minutes, and how he did it in the wet jungle I don't know ...

But the poor old Brits had a tough time; they did it the hard way. They had no idea of how to set up a kitchen, or set up latrines. Even when they were cremating people they had no idea of what to do. There was certainly not the communication between the officers and the men as there was with the Australians, and I think the officers had no idea. If you were lucky enough to be with a good bunch of Australians, you could see it through.4

The white Dutch were not popular with either the British, or the Australians. 'Huns with their guts ripped out' was one of the milder epithets applied to them. Used to a life with servants, the colonial Dutch were perceived as arrogant and difficult.

With life reduced to essentials — food, clean water, and the prevention of disease — the Australians had another nick-name for the Dutch. 'Blot-washers' This related to the Dutch acceptance of the
Asian habit of using a small bottle of water rather than toilet paper. The Australians, on the other hand, became connoisseurs in the consistency and reliability of various jungle leaves as a substitute for toilet paper. The larger leaves tended to be brittle and subject to disastrous splitting, whereas some of the smaller leaves were more reliable.

Humour became an invaluable aid to survival. At one camp, hundreds of men had to make do with long pit latrines, balancing precariously on long wooden planks. One British officer, back to back with an Australian corporal, detected an unfamiliar movement, and turned around to find the Australian wiping his bum with the tail of the colonel’s shirt. Doubtless the tale (as it were) raised morale that night around an Australian camp fire under the jungle canopy.

In the early days at Changi on the Singapore Peninsula, Australians forced to work as dock labourers became expert thieves. The only problem was how to conceal stolen goods when wearing only a digger hat and a loin cloth, or shorts. The height of the smugglers art was reached by those who could conceal bulky goods while dressed only in a G-string. They were the experts in what became known as ‘crutching’. Lloyd Cahill swears that one man ‘distinguished himself by crutching a live chook back to camp’. Private Snow Peat’s achievement ranked with that, but the personal cost was higher:

I got this small-sized pineapple. I pushed right down into my crutch, in between my legs. Anyway we marched back home and I was bow-legged all the way, ripped raw and sore. I got me pineapple home, and six of us had a feed out of it, just added it to the rice. It was most delicious.

Snow endured the rough end, and triumphed. But not even humour, mateship, or toughness of spirit could withstand the relentless exploitation of starving, ill and emaciated workers day and night on massive works like the Thai Burma Railway.

Medical officer Colonel ‘Weary’ Dunlop believed that the many Australians who literally worked themselves to death to finish an impossible job, so that their mates would have a chance of survival, have not been sufficiently acknowledged by their countrymen: 
It was a matter of ultimate pride to me that the Australians outworked, out-suffered and outlived every other national group on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Now I think that is beyond question, and the Japanese recognised it. But the trouble was, that if you were sinewy, indestructible, if you were a good workman, you got sent back and back and back on these terrible tasks with utterly inadequate food. You could see these magnificently strong men with great hearts who slowly went to pieces and died.6

Hank Nelson later wrote:

Courage on the battlefield is measured by a scale of medals, but there are no awards and little popular acclaim for the men who swung a hammer against a rock drill all day, then turned to help others finish their set tasks. And kept doing it day after day, knowing that exhaustion was killing them. It was sustained, and calculated bravery.7

But it took more than fifty years after the end of the second world war, for the survival experiences of Australian prisoners-of-war of the Japanese in Asia to be properly recognised. This was symbolised by the Australian prime minister’s pilgrimage on Anzac Day 1998 to the infamous rock cutting Hellfire Pass on the Thai-Burma Railway.

It was a traumatic and pioneering experience, the sudden transplantation of 22,000 Australians of the Eighth Division to South East Asia in 1942, was the first mass movement of Australians to the region — our forgotten frontier.

Endnotes

2 ibid., p 56.
3 ibid., p 162.
4 ibid., p 66.
5 ibid., p 33.
6 ibid., p 67.
7 ibid.
The Australian Legend and its Discontents

Richard Nile

Somewhere near the centre of Australian storytelling — the Australian legend — is the Anzac myth, a story of great national mourning and commemoration. Anzac day has become more intense, or at least very much larger, since the 1970s when its observance appeared to be on the way out. Then it was fashionable to proclaim that when the last of the ‘diggers’ faded away, Anzac commemorations would reduce in significance. Despite the prediction, Anzac has rejuvenated and perhaps even changed as a consequence of the revitalisation. Each 25 April, the assembling crowds get bigger and bigger.

Within the throng, the tv cameras have picked out a child, a primary school aged girl, to explain the gathering: ‘It is a day to remember the soldiers who died and how they protected Australia’. The voice is confident in the first part but then becomes self-conscious and tapers off into a nervous uncertainty. The uncertainty may be no more than an insecurity about historical accuracy: ‘I think I am right. You are an adult. You know these things.’ An alternative possibility is that the child’s historical consciousness is well developed: ‘It is sad that so many young men died, but I am not sure why there was such a terrible war’

Recently, the respected Anzac scholar, Ken Inglis, has written about war memorials as sacred places. Inglis notes the absence of a warrior tradition in the four to five thousand memorials across Australia where the standard figure is that of a young man with a downcast expression. This figure is perhaps unusual but, Inglis tells us, hardly surprising, given that the first memorials were erected by stonemasons whose main work was in grave yards not public monuments in town and city centres.
Among other things, that downcast expression of the stonemason’s soldier enables Australians to mourn war loss without being inspired by the familiar tropes of action, courage, manliness, and victory. In this regard, it is significant, I believe, that a paramedic, a man with a donkey who would ferry the wounded to awaiting medical assistance, is one of the most revered and most remembered figures of Australia’s involvement in the first world war. We tend not to remember our commanders nor do we readily recall our most skilful and bravest soldiers in combat. In this chapter, I want to trace some of the origins of a paradoxical, but entirely understandable, sentiment in Australia — a sentiment that has a war at the centre of Australian storytelling but which does not aggrandise battle, which mourns loss but which does not big-note achievement.

Despite the calamity of battle, the overwhelming enlistments and outrageous casualties, Australia’s involvement in the 1914-1918 war, remained a sombre but far off affair for most Australians. Guns could not be heard through Sydney’s Heads, across the Gulf of St Vincent nor off Moreton Bay. Zeppelins did not hover within reach of Hobart, Perth or Melbourne, and ‘bestial Huns’ did not threaten Australian women and children. Europe was still six weeks away on the fastest troop carrier and the nearest the Australians came to actual war conditions at home was the Broken Hill incident of 1915, the changing of park, street and town names to English from German, the internment of ‘hostile’ aliens, the reporting of strange lights and the mistaking of whales for submarines and birds for aeroplanes. For society at large a greater fear resided in telegrams and reports of war rather than actual guns and explosives. Imagining the war from the distance was at the root of the Australian experience of war.

Of the 416,809 who enlisted between 1914-1918 around eighty percent went overseas, a figure which can translate as an appalling statistic in other contexts, but which represents less than seven percent of the overall population — the remainder did not see the front nor did they experience directly the fighting which was thousands of kilometres and several weeks away. For the overwhelming majority of Australians the conditions of war came second and third hand. Information concerning battles depended on communication networks, ranging from numerous oral sources including a good deal of rumour, speculation and false reporting, through to print culture, in particular, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, official notices,
personal letters and dispatches; and even at the site of the 'great battles', at Gallipoli for instance, the news was delayed by some days — contributing to a sense of removal, distance, unreality. War gave out a terrible shock but its centre of significance was always far away. Even the 'loss' of so many 'loved ones', a common euphemism, had an unreal ring, though the fact itself was terrible enough.

The recording of death became routine after only a short time as the newspapers which had once published accompanying biographies and available photographs of the ‘fallen’ very soon found they had only space enough to print lists which may partially explain why Australians in the aftermath constructed so many memorials to honour their dead — it was about all they had as the graves, like the battlefields where the young men fell, were rarely visited upon by Australian eyes.

The ritual of death then was publicly performed at rallies, on railway station platforms, piers and quays around the country long before the telegrams arrived; it was the one moment present in all goodbyes. Accepting actual death when it did come was a private affair enclosed within the family home and in the solitude of private grief; and while the public world could bung on a grand farewell it possessed no suitable ritual in the face of so many losses; and they were surely more accurately losses rather than death because there were no corpses, no funerals, no public occasions — making a reality out of the euphemism — though society as a whole carried a heavy and often undeclared burden. The void in consciousness became the burden to be borne by the literature:

‘Our loss was light,’ the paper said,
‘Compared with the damage to the Hun’:
She was a widow, and she read
One name upon the list of the dead
— Her son — her only son.²

Unsurprisingly then, it seems to me, Australian responses were not as a matter of course concerned with the location of the battles nor were they necessarily preoccupied with the tens of thousands of kilometres of trenches gouged into the European imagination; rather, Australians demonstrated a fairly consistent tendency to conceptualise the war as a war of absence, a war of removal.
That there were few soldier-writers, Leonard Mann, Leon Gellert, Martyn Boyd and Leslie Meller among them, who published is clear. What is less clear but perhaps more profound, an argument I would like to develop here, is that Australian literary responses to war was not overly concerned with conflict so much as about dislocation. Literary responses tended to focus on those at home who were left to cope with the absence but who had to brace themselves to pick up the pieces when their soldiers returned, who had no direct experience of the conditions of battle, who did not live in trenches, suffer the lice and the weather, or fire shots or be fired at in anger. There is sometimes bravery in this kind of literature, more often though there is endurance and pain. Australia's experience of war and the literature of war, I am saying, was different from participant countries closer to the action; it was devastating in terms of the numbers of dead and wounded but it was always situated somewhere else; always located in the 'other'; always someone else's war. This 'other', I maintain, is one key to understanding Australian responses to the war and helps explain why critics and historians have had difficulty decoding creative responses.

The war threw into turmoil many accepted intellectual and emotional assumptions of the day, including among the most important those which previously had privileged civilisation as a European achievement and those which wrote into its success the story of colonisation; of progress as a European directive in Africa, Asia, Australia, the sub-continent and even in America. Vance Palmer wrote his poem 'Europe' soon after the war:

> Europe is very old
> It has known wars and death,
> The live past stirs within its mould,
> Yet chill cometh its breath.

> Pensive, subtle, profound,
> It broods in secret prayer,
> While dreams of dead men underground
> Trouble the very air.

> Its very stones have speech;
> In dark towns, ivy hung,
The grey walls whispered each to each
Drown every living tongue.

And flames of ancient fires
Upon the wide hearths glow;
Like magic flowers the Gothic spires
Blossom out of the snow.

Here 'mid the wrecks of wars,
Dazed by battle-cries,
I watch the unfamiliar stars
Wheel heavily down the skies.

I will go south and south,
There Life has scarce begun,
And lightfoot, with a laugh on its mouth,
Plays butterfly in the sun.³

By any standard this is not riveting stuff just as Patrick White's descriptions in *Happy Valley* are over-strained:

When he got back from Europe he looked at them [the Australians] and there was nothing there ... but the country was old ... over everything there was a hot air of dormant passion of inner war, that nobody seemed conscious of.⁴

What is important here, it seems to me, is that Europe is questioned, perhaps for the first time in Australian literature. I don’t mean that the *Bulletin* never published republican-inspired work in the 1890s, or that there was never nationalism in Australian literature before Sarajevo; rather what I am getting at is that the centrality of European modes of thinking, cast now in the shadow of the war experience, called for a substantial and significant reassessment. It would take years, a depression and another war to work itself through properly — any cultural shift of the magnitude I am suggesting takes time and then there was the sheer weight of the war experience itself to contend with — but the beginnings are unmistakable.

In the post-war years literary moods swung sometimes frantically as Europe became conceptualised not simply as the site of great past civilisations but a modern world capable of unflinching barbarism.
Even during the war soldier poets seemed at times, particularly as the conflict wore on, to be writing less about the place they were at and more of their desire to go home — but where, post war writers asked, is home? In their quiet moments it was a place suspended from the regular movement of history, a place geographically isolated, a place to be invented, a place yet to be filled in and therefore a place of sometimes exaggerated public literary boasts. Under these conditions the barbarity of war could become a ghastly inheritance, trapped in the DNA of being Australian. The Australians were rootless, a nomadic tribe cast out from the home, a nation, only so recently formed, in permanent exile. Creative writers looked just beyond the conflict to observe civilisation as an illusion; and yet many had staked so much on Europe. They had once toiled to remake it in the new land. For these writers, the ‘nervous generation’, the war had not been simply a condition of impasse in European politics and history it represented the failure of the European and therefore Australian cultures, in which they had once placed so much hope.

‘Waves of uncertainty sweep over us’, wrote Nettie Palmer in 1932, ‘Is this continent really our home, or are we just migrants from another civilisation’ 5 Looking back at the war from 1958, Vance Palmer reflected: ‘It is hard to suggest now how that first shot ... affected people who came to think of the conflict in terms of ideas’:

how it made their minds turn over, forced them back onto fundamental beliefs and loyalties, broke up old relationships. I can still remember, still wanting to regard the war as a European affair, I was affected by three lean, uniformed figures, in leggins and Australian hats, sauntering down Charing Cross Road.6

Palmer’s memory here bears a striking resemblance to some of the opening section in Leonard Mann’s Flesh in Armour: ‘Through the chill blur of an afternoon in August, 1917, the figures of two men in long, tawny greatcoats, lurched wearily out of the London throng’.7

In London the Australians stand out as aliens. They may have left Australia as proud sons of empire, as athletes and skilled horsemen but for both Mann and Palmer, in this strange setting — the place of so much of their learning — they are displaced. In the opening sequence of Flesh in Armour, troops on recreation leave wait out their time to go to the trenches:
Their hats distinguished them as Australians. The traffic reeled this way and that without cease about them, beating towards and sheering off and throwing up now and then such odd bits of human flotsam ... the deep dull roar of murky London, the hoarse honking of motor cars and sharp crackling of motor bus tyres on the wet pavements and hasting to and fro of ant-like people in the bemused dimmed lamplights ... And while London reeled and swayed around them, a phantasmagoria of crackling, poster decked buses, disdainful cars, so disdainful that their expensive occupants were not even likely to notice those statuesque or gargoyleisque figures leaning humped forward with protuberant chins. The pedestrians, too, passed by with hardly a glance or only a hurried one at the foreign immobile figures ... Outside, the question of what to do became clamant. To one alone in that strange city there comes not so much a sense of isolation, but because of the absence of all connections with the environment, a sense of almost nothingness.8

Like so many of their contemporaries Mann and Palmer would have been satisfied to regard the war as purely a European affair but history, Australia's status as a settler society, dictated otherwise. Moreover, if the Australian attachment to the soil was tenuous, if the Australians wondered about their exile, there was no place for them in Europe.

There was some talk in London about the more positive aspects of peace in which Australia's pre-war potential might be realised. In this mood, Palmer wrote 'Homecoming':

There's a warm wind blowing out of the burnished West,
There's a smell of musk in the air at the day's decline,
And I return once more to your gleaming breast,
Brown, passionate land of mine! ...

I have gone lonely and friendless because of you,
Before your veil was raised and your triumph came,
I was your secret lover; your voice I knew,
Bright land with a deathless name.

And now I know my fate is fixed to the end,
Though the far-off light may lure or the loud drum call;
One star alone will I follow, one cause defend,
Loved mother, who gave me all.8
From furtive lover to would-be loud proclaimer, Palmer nonetheless appeared less committed than he had once been — before the war. Back in Australia he turned to writing ‘pot boiling’ fiction under the perverse journalistic pseudonym ‘Rann Daly’; the reasons for which have not been satisfactorily explained but which may have had everything to do with the influence of the war which his novels at this time avoided entirely.

Upon his return Palmer may have concluded that ‘serious’ writing and the role of the ‘serious’ writer had been rendered absurd in the face of so much wastage. What was the point of literature and literary objectives in a world so bent on destruction? But if Palmer felt this way he was also self consciously sensitive to questions about nationalism and literary integrity. When E J Brady broached the subject, Palmer brushed him off by saying he had a family to support and that there was no money in serious writing. The deeper truth may be implied in Palmer’s 1920 poem ‘The Farmer Remembers the Somme’:

Will they never fade or pass!
The mud, and misty figures endlessly coming
In file through the foul morass,
And the grey flood-water lipping the reeds and grass
And the steel wings drumming

The hills are bright in the sun:
There’s nothing changed or marred in the well-known places;
When work for the day is done
There’s talk and quiet laughter, and gleams of fun
On the old folks’ faces

I have returned to these:
The farm, and the kindly Bush, and the young calves lowing;
But all that my mind sees
In a quaking bog in a mist — stark, snapped trees
And the dark Somme flowing.

Palmer did not actually see action but he witnessed the consequences of four years of relentless pounding; he saw the landscape which had been denuded of vegetation and fauna, and over which men were still
tripping off unexploded bombs in their attempts to retrieve decayed corpses; he saw the queues of men in hospitals in England; he saw, so soon after the event, all that he himself had missed. He may well have questioned, what was the point of writing?

Palmer continued to avoid the war until 1932 when he produced *Daybreak*, his most obviously war-inspired book which, like ‘The Farmer Remembers the Somme’, is about a soldier who is unable to adjust back to a previous life. Relating the events covered in *Daybreak*, Harry Heseltine wrote of the central character: ‘Something happened to Seivright during the war, one is to understand, but just what is never made sufficiently clear’. Heseltine further remarked: ‘A strong connection is made between Seivright’s experience in the war and his subsequent deterioration’ More importantly: ‘There are powerful hints that the ex-officer’s crack-up is not merely a personal affair but symbolic of the whole state of Australian civilisation’ 12 Like the farmer in ‘The Farmer Remembers the Somme’ the soldier in the man cannot return home because he believes he has touched on the darker side of civil society.

Seivright cannot settle for the idyll he has tried to create and then hang onto and in this he shares many characteristics with Katharine Prichard’s Greg Blackwood in *Intimate Strangers* who has come home: not permanently incapacitated the repatriation doctors said: only suffering from nervous strain, hardships of the campaign and so on. Astounded to find himself alive, when he had seen so many men blown to pieces, Greg felt it was indecent, somehow to survive them’ 13 Seivright cannot cope with the peace despite his own best intentions to do so. He had been a brilliant officer and leader of men but around him the remnants of his once loyal platoon remind him of the trauma of war and of the malady of the peace. In correspondence, Nettie Palmer wrote of *Daybreak* as Vance’s most important book. Her explanation was rather more subtle than complex. The war had happened to Harry Seivright. The war had happened to Vance Palmer. In different ways both were products of what had happened to Australia. On the one hand Seivright was an active participant in war, on the other Palmer was an observer from the distance.

English cultural historian Paul Fussell has argued that it is only in the wake of mass experience that individual understanding comprehends larger collective ‘realities’ The immediate reality of trenches is different from the overall picture which later emerges.14 For the
ordinary soldier, day to day life, not grand strategies are the stuff of war. For those at the front, individual war is played out in myriad ways but almost always expressive of the limitation of individual vision, it is immediate and often painful but can be boring and routine even when the fighting is at its most intense. Leonard Mann waited fourteen years to produce *Flesh in Armour* where Frank Jeffreys' fiancee writes: 'I looked in the papers to see if there had been any battle just before you wrote, but there did not seem to be anything important. Some day you might tell me about it';\(^\text{15}\) in Martin Boyd's *The Montforts* Raoul writes flippant letters home because the war and daily grind is too awful to either contemplate or communicate;\(^\text{16}\) in Leslie Meller’s *Leaf of Laurel* the questioning is inwardly directed but no less intense: ‘Who but a methodological simpleton will attempt to tell his or any other’s mind during those muddled days of war? — or a brooding warrior-journalist, trembling with words, watching from a hilltop [away] from the uproar’ There is always plenty of material for the warrior journalist in war-time but Meller's literary war breaks ‘into flame at intervals’ before dying down only to sneak into an ‘endless, soul destroying, garrison routine. Now the end of these days seemed beyond the order of natural events’\(^\text{17}\) In his poem ‘These Men’, Leon Gellert wrote of another reality:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Men moving in a trench, in the clear noon,} \\
\text{Whetting their steel within the crumbling earth;} \\
\text{Men, moving in a trench `neath the new moon} \\
\text{That smiles with a slit mouth that has no mirth;} \\
\text{Men moving in a trench in the grey morn,} \\
\text{Lifting bodies on their clotted frames;} \\
\text{Men with narrow mouths thin carved in scorn} \\
\text{That twist and fumble strangely at dead names.}
\end{align*}
\]

These men know life — know death a little more.
These men see paths and ends, and see
Beyond some swinging open door
Into eternity.\(^\text{18}\)

Fussell also distinguishes between memoir and fiction which is perhaps perilous in the case of Martin Boyd but in agreement Bruce Clunies Ross citing Frederic Manning’s *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) has argued: ‘Like many of the best books which came around
at the end of the 1920s, it approaches the borderline between memoir and fiction ».  

The events which are taken up in Manning’s novel occurred during the battle of the Somme, a sequence of engagements which went to five of the last six months of 1916’ This was the historical foreground in which the story of a single soldier’s experiences are fictionally rendered. Clunies Ross argued: ‘Manning’s understanding of fiction enabled him to make sense of his experience and order it, as memoir paradoxically may not’ 20 Imagination freed the writer from the constraints of memoir. In his ‘Prefatory Note’, Manning outlined:

While the following pages are a record of experience on the Somme and Anacre fronts, with an interval behind the lines ... the events described in it actually happened, the characters are fictitious. It is true that in the recording of the conversations of the men I seemed to hear voices of ghosts. Their judgements were necessarily partial and prejudiced; but their prejudices and partialities provide the power of life.21

Like Mann’s *Flesh in Armour*, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* was initially published in a limited edition. Printed privately, this edition allowed Manning a degree of freedom of expression which he knew would not be acceptable in a commercially published book. More successful than Mann, however, Manning published *Her Privates We* as ‘Private 19022’, a sanitised version of *The Middle Parts of Fortune*.

In his autobiography, *A Single Flame*, Martin Boyd detailed some of his remembered impressions of war:

I was immeasurably depressed. Everyone seemed to think that some glorious picnic had begun, and one which was made more enjoyable by the ingredient of moral indignation. My adolescent belief that I would go and fight if England were attacked by Germany had been overlain by my aesthetic preoccupations and all my optimism for the brave new world.22

Boyd’s seven week voyage to the front was quite uninterrupted by thoughts of actual fighting and when he arrived in England he felt
that, at last, he had arrived at a centre to achieve first hand acquaintance with all that which he had so long craved from the distance. Happiness, however, was short-lived to be replaced by a queer mixture of 'curiosity and depression' at the front; intensified by the exposure to the wreckage of countryside where civilisation had once stood firm. As an officer and censor of letters, Boyd discovered that many of his feelings were shared by other soldiers who were not artists but ordinary men caught in a situation beyond even the artist's most vivid imaginings.

Boyd became morose and sceptical of the war. 'I had no "spirit of the offensive" nor had any of the men', he remembered, 'Their courage was endurance' 23 In his first of many novels preoccupied with the cultural break which occurs as a consequence of war, The Montforts, channelled these sentiments into the strongly autobiographical character, Raoul, who recurs in different guises and under other names in subsequent works, especially the Langdon trilogy:

Raoul gave in and went. He felt that he would be perfectly useless, that he was incapable of killing anyone against whom he had no rancour, some wretched man as reluctant to fight as himself. He did not believe that every German was a sadist and a devil. He believed that peace would be made at the first opportunity, that everyday the war was prolonged, the greater would be the chaos afterward. He believed the 'war to end all war' was simply a recruiting stunt, but he did not have the moral courage to hold out any longer. He was too young to realise that it was no particular consequence what he believed.24

In his consciously autobiographical narratives Boyd similarly recorded growing pacifism and a loathing of violence: 'I felt ashamed of myself, that I was "curiously constituted" and could feel no hatred toward any one who had not intentionally done me a personal injury' 25 Into fiction the problematic Raoul is cast inwardly to lapse further into a private world racked by doubts. Even before the front he becomes a 'number' in a military file as he steps into the 'vast glowing canvas of England at war. There he was lost'. In this canvas the sequences connecting the present age with previous, perhaps more heroic and cultivated, times are broken into disjointed fragments — something the modernists attempted to emulate in the visual arts and
which Boyd criticised over and over during his lengthy lifetime in an attempt to get back, back, back.

From Melbourne, Raoul’s sister Mary watches the ‘men and boys’ disappear thought the ‘mists’ ‘only to return, if at all, with broken bodies’ She eventually sees her brother return, emasculated, depressed and alienated. He attempts to reconstruct his life in post-war Melbourne. ‘To-night reminds me of the golden age before Sarajevo’, he says to Mary, ‘when we had such brave and true things to say ... Everything has gone sour and silly since the war’ Raoul contemplates how he was before the war when he felt ‘at least alive’; he may have been ‘absurd’ and ‘probably irritating’ but there was the basic material ‘from which a man might have developed’. Now there was little to suggest that he could ever once have had the potential to be more than ‘a respectable dog ... a lap-dog, a beastly Pekingese’ Raoul is cut off from his glorious past, adrift in the post-war, modernist, twentieth century, world.26

Boyd’s Raoul, Palmer’s Seivright, Prichard’s Blackwood, White’s Halliday, Manning’s Bourne, Mann’s Jeffreys, are realised concretely enough as the realist tradition of the day dictated but each also acts as a pointer towards metaphorical meaning: of the relationship between peace and war, between Australia and Europe, to also be found running through so much Australian literature after the 1918: like Matthew Dias and Hughie Stair in Leonard Mann’s A Murder in Sydney (1936), like Jimmy Rolf, Old Duncan and Curly Thompson in Kylie Tennant’s Foveaux (1939), like Robert Watson in Chester Cobb’s Days of Disillusion (1926), like Michael Bagenault in Christina Stead’s Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934), like Nigel Hendon in Eleanor Dark’s Prelude to Christopher (1933), like Robin Stewart in Eric Lowe’s Salute to Freedom (1938) and so on. These war worn characters exist as misfits whose inability to accommodate wartime experiences into the peace results in depression, madness and suicide.

The degree of depression and madness but especially suicide in these and other novels is indicative of the war’s legacy in a literature quite unaccustomed to self murder: Hughie Stair suicides in A Murder in Sydney, Barney Case suicides in Salute to Freedom, Seivright suicides in Daybreak, Michael Bagenault suicides in Seven Poor Men of Sydney and Greg Blackwood tries to do himself in in Intimate Strangers, in the original unpublished version of the novel he suc-
ceeds — the ending was changed after the novelist’s soldier-husband suicided in 1933. Frank Jeffreys’ suicide in *Flesh in Armour* occurs just after the peace is announced. Having been a ‘walking-case’ for some months before the signing of the armistice he cannot face the thought of returning to civilian life. His last days are played out in a mental wilderness where he is haunted by images of the dead. He loses all ‘connection with the environment’ which is replaced by a ‘sense of nothingness, of non humanity’. Jeffreys endures the ‘terror and drudgery of his service’; ‘the semi automatic endurance required by duty’; he is impotent in the face of the futility of life and death, the drudgery and stench of the trenches, disease, the dying and the dead: humanity wasted and scattered between the two lines of trenches: ‘images of the wounded in pain and the dead stinking to rottenness and disillusion’; he craves to have at least some say over his destiny and to be ‘something active and forceful’ but is driven to the conclusion that his life matters little more than an ‘atom’ in an ‘immense mass’. Where he had once craved the ‘subtle connection of the passion of sex’, he now wants no more than annihilation.27

Sentiments such as these did not often endear writers to an audience who wished to conceptualise the war as having some positive outcomes, who did not want to see it as a wholly negative thing. Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher* states openly: ‘They did not want to see [their dead] as man-power wasted, as genius flung away, as potential fatherhood most tragically sacrificed. They did not want to probe too deeply into causes, and still less to ultimate effects. Leave them their coverings’.28 Around the same time Helen Simpson (1932) wrote:

They talked as if before 1914 everyone had been healthy and we all loved each other. No disease. No sweating. No swindling. All a land of brothers. Why civilisation was stinking already when the war blew it to pieces; just like a shell landing at last on a corpse you’ve been watching and getting the wind of for weeks.29

That is, the world was not spoiled because of the war, it was already — fatally — done for. Technology had merely given men the means to kill one another on a vast scale and there was no relief to be had reinventing the past as Boyd had tried and failed. The covers had to be taken off: ‘He had taken away the flags and those uniforms and
medals, he had silenced the marching songs and stilled the drums. And what was left they dared not look at'.

But in public culture the flags and drums were a necessary palliative. In Lowe’s *Salute to Freedom*, they have their own way while knowledge of the war runs deeper:

Cigarettes and flags! Flags high over buildings; flags — ridiculous little stiff squares on short sticks — in people’s hands; flags in windows. Flags and cigarettes. Cigarettes! His pockets were bulging with them, and still people were crowding in to push more into his hands. Cigarettes, flags and wattle. Where the hell did the wattle come from this time of year? Some one thrust a spray of yellow blossom into his bandolier, crushing against his arm so that he was suddenly sick with the feel of it; the feel that did not stimulate like sharp pain, but was cold and shuddery and nauseating.

Lowe’s novel actively questions the very basis of public support for war: ‘This business of kill or be killed — it was without reason’.

These problematic types were to become increasingly familiar to the literature, their articulation provoked negative criticism from some quarters in some cases leading to censure and outright suppression of texts. Lesbia Harford’s *The Invaluable Mystery*, the novels of Cobb, Meller, Stead and Dark and even Mann’s *Flesh in Armour* were all condemned by critics whose efforts may have silenced others. In this assemblage the most extreme case is Lesbia Harford who remained unpublished for sixty years after her novel was written, though some of her poems were published in the 1940s; Cobb and Meller were ignored while Dark and Stead were reprimanded. Very like Angus and Robertson’s reader’s report rejecting Leonard Mann’s *Flesh in Armour* in 1933, a published letter to the editor of *All About Books* derided the unhappy picture:

I found it very disappointing and unpleasant reading, and I am disgusted with the view Mr Mann presents of our Australian Infantry ... he does not hesitate to give his readers the unpleasant and lurid details of his tragedy ... I think Mr Mann could far better have portrayed the spirit of the Australian infantry by giving us a picture of the wonderful comradeship which, in so many cases, remains unbroken to this day ... Mr Mann’s book may conform to all the rules
(which literary people so love to discuss) for the forming of a novel; the measuring rod may pass the size and shape of the frame, but surely higher instincts cannot condone the unsavoury contents.  

The external pressure to keep the war within manageable literary limits was strong and even the ‘classics’ *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *A Farewell to Arms* were for a time banned from sale in Australia.

In *Prelude to Christopher*, there is ironic hope expressed that ‘Now, perhaps, in these more enlightened days when the War, diminished into the past, could be seen more clearly in perspective’ 33 Much closer in time to the actual conditions war, Frank Wilmott’s *To God: From Weary Nations* (1917) also aroused a good deal of negative comment:

We have been dead, our shroud enfolds the sea,
Honour’s a rag tossed out for winds to rend,
And Virtue is most shamed and Lust goes free:
And trembling Wisdom vainly seeks a friend.
Our Heroes lost in trenches or the sea
Are dust or rag but no more clay than we.  

Issues of public propriety and consideration of the role of publisher as the guardian of morality may have dampened enthusiasm for war fiction while also acting as a powerful agent in determining what authors wrote about. It is probable that many books concerning Australia’s involvement in the first European conflict were written and never published. ‘Many a manuscript is undoubtedly birth strangled’ wrote Nettie Palmer in 1933.

‘The Great War put an end to many things and many ideas’, Vance Palmer maintained in 192635 and not simply because of ideological coercion, though there was plenty of coercion going on in the background by government, by public figures, by the Returned Sailors and Soldiers League, by historians and so on, nor as part of the political manipulation to make heroes out of soldiers but, plainly as a reflection of a public feeling of uncertainty as great as that of any of the writers — the war, after-all, left hardly an Australian household untouched. This uncertainty gathered slowly together in a single powerful direction which the literature also communicated: the fighting
was over and if Europe planned to go to war again then Australia should resist the temptation to join in. However, the dual seductions of predicament and the promise of history proved again irresistible even against such formidable sentiments and Australians entered a European fray once again, in 1939; but, even in a war where the lines between good and evil would be more clearly drawn, it must be added, without the same dedication which marked the early phases of the 1914-1918 war.

Endnotes

8 ibid., pp 1-8.
18 Leon Gell, Songs of a Campaign, Sydney, 1917.
19 Bruce Clunies Ross, 'Frederic Manning and the Tragedy of War', Overland, no 75, 1979, pp 43-73.
20 ibid.
21 Frederic Manning, 'Author's Note', The Middle Parts of Fortune, London, 1929.
25 Martin Boyd, Days of My Delight, op. cit.
26 ibid.
30 Eleanor Dark, op. cit., p 71.
32 'Flesh in Armour', All About Books, 13 April 1933.
33 Eleanor Dark, op. cit.
On 15 February 1965, a ragged line of some 30 students from the University of Sydney found themselves outside the Returned Servicemen’s League (RSL) Club in the tiny dusty town of Walgett, in central northern New South Wales. (I was one of them — oh, so long ago!) They were protesting against the refusal of the club to allow membership or entry to Aboriginal people (locally the Murris), including ex-servicemen. In the hot sun, from noon to 7 pm, the students, only one of them — Charles Perkins — Aboriginal though not from that part of the country, held up placards saying ‘Acceptance, Not Segregation’, ‘End Colour Bar’, ‘Bullets did not Discriminate’, ‘Walgett — Australia’s Disgrace’, ‘Why Whites Only?’, ‘Educate the Whites’, and ‘Good enough for Tobruk — why not Walgett RSL?’ Local townspeople, black and white, soon gathered, remarking on this strange event, some jeering, many just watching. Never before, almost certainly, had people held up placards of protest in Walgett, and definitely not outside the RSL club. From time to time heated three-cornered discussions broke out, between Murris, white townsfolk, and students. The atmosphere was very excited, the levels of hostility high. Later that evening, when the students left town, the bus was forced off the road by a truck driven by some angry young white men. This violence brought the student protest to national media attention the next day, attention which stayed focused on it for the rest of its two week tour against racial discrimination in country towns.¹
This incident is a rich one for historical ethnography and detailed textual and cultural analysis. Here we see articulated several conflicts, first between indigenous Australians and a segregationist white settler community, and then between that community and a relatively new post-war urban internationalist desire for racial equality. The site of protest is significant, taking place as it did outside an RSL Club, one of hundreds around the country providing a social centre for ex-servicemen, a space for a drink, a meal, and entertainment. Later protests would be held outside swimming pools and picture theatres, also significant sites of segregation in these small country towns where black and white lived close to, but rarely with, one another. But this protest was the first and it raises many questions. Why was it outside an ex-servicemen’s club? Why were indigenous ex-servicemen excluded? Why did the excluded men care?

In this chapter, taking Australia as an example of wider phenomena in the histories of colonial-settler societies, I use this incident to examine the ways in which racial difference, segregation, and conflict continually threaten the nation. Like so many others, white Australians yearn for an inclusive national narrative, while at the same time practising exclusions on the basis of race. Such racial exclusions shadow and undermine national narratives of harmony, unity, and common purpose, revealing their fragility and provisionality. Such narratives emerge not from a secure centre but from a majority formation and collectivity (to which I myself belong) far from its European origins, whose own sense of relation to place, nation, and history is deeply fractured and constantly contested. Racial exclusion, that is to say, illuminates the contradictions and otherness within white Anglo-Celtic Australian culture, a restless anxious complex culture of white nomads who claim to be settlers in and on an antipodean land not their own.

The Anzac Legend: Australians Honour Their War Dead

This otherness, this unsettlement over questions of race and identity, is revealed most clearly in war commemoration. For it is in the commemoration of war that Australian popular culture finds its most profound sense of nationhood. War is commemorated in a distinctive way, through the observance of a national holiday, Anzac Day, on 25 April each year. Anzac Day remembers neither the end of war nor a
major victory, but rather the unsuccessful landing in 1915, quite early in the first world war, of Australian, along with British, New Zealand, French and other troops on the Dardanelles peninsular, in an ill-fated attempt to open the way for an attack on Constantinople. The Australian and New Zealand soldiers came to be known as the ANZACs, though in Australian usages of the term the New Zealand part tends to be elided and half-forgotten. This landing began a military engagement which lasted for months, with much loss of life, before the troops withdrew. It is now held, in Australian official and popular discourse alike, to symbolise courage and sacrifice, and the emergence of the Australian nation, formed only fourteen years earlier, as an independent entity on the world stage. The narrative of Anzac is powerful as a story of innocence betrayed, a story in which the fittest young men of the young nation gave their all for their country and Empire, only to be shot down cruelly, the fault not so much of their Turkish enemy as of the brutal idiocy, the criminal foolishness, of the British command who sent them there. The innocent young white men of the new nation proved themselves in heroism in the face of forces outside their control, in courage amidst pain, death, and suffering.

The importance of this story to the Australian imaginary cannot be over-estimated, resting as it does on the collective memory of the trauma of the Australian experience of the first world war, marked by long absences of soldiers far away in Europe and North Africa, and extremely high casualty rates directly affecting the majority of families. What is interesting, as some have noted, about this Australian narrative of nation is that it is based on the commemoration of a massive defeat, though that defeat, to be sure, resides within a larger narrative of ultimate allied victory. The Anzac archive of story and legend, allegory and myth, started with Charles Bean, a wartime journalist whose eyewitness reports provided the basis, the original story, on which all subsequent and multiplying narratives have been based. Anzac stood, he wrote, ‘for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship, and endurance that will never own defeat’ Since Bean wrote his first newspaper reports from the front, the Anzac story has been endlessly retold, changing its inflections over the years. One of the best known is historian Bill Gammage’s eloquent 1974 evocation, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*. Gammage makes the important point that
the Australians who landed at Gallipoli felt both a traditional loyalty to the British empire and a newfound Australian nationalism, seeing the two as quite compatible: ‘They felt themselves to be not merely sons of the Empire, but Australians, owning no masters’ ⁵ Another influential narration is Peter Weir’s film *Gallipoli* (1981), starring Mel Gibson and Mark Lee, in which the tale of the pathos of innocence betrayed, and bravery in defeat, is inscribed again. Public memorialisation of the Gallipoli story multiplied in the wake of the service held at Gallipoli itself on its 75th anniversary in 1990, and in recent years there has been heightened interest in the last survivors of the Gallipoli campaign.

In the story of Anzac lies the emotional locus of Australian narratives of nation. Except for the bicentennial celebrations in 1988, Australia Day — held on 26 January to mark the anniversary of the first convict settlement at Sydney Cove — has far less meaning to most Australians than Anzac Day. Interestingly, there is no holiday commemorating the actual political formation of the Australian nation, through the federation on 1 January 1901 of the separate Australian colonies and thereby the acquisition of a national constitution. Where federation, an event which might at first glance seem a more appropriate occasion for the celebration of nationhood, is seen as a rather boring and technical event, the carnage at Gallipoli is still remembered. Nationally, the process of memorialisation is fostered both officially, by prime ministers, and unofficially, by the many thousands who march, pray, and watch on Anzac Day, and by the thousands of young backpackers who now visit the site of Australian graves at Gallipoli each year. Since the 1920s the innumerable war memorials found in practically every country town, and the major war memorials in the capital cities, have become the focus of Anzac Day ceremonies all over the country. ⁶ In Walgett, where my story began and will shortly return, the war memorial is at the centre of the town, at the intersection of its two main streets. Location of practically everything in the town is marked by its relation to ‘the monument’.

In drawing on a sense of victimhood, of courage in defeat, the Gallipoli legend draws upon a more general Australian popular historical mythology. Beginning with their origins in a British colony of punishment and exile, and continuing with present-day economic restructuring and globalisation, white Australians have traditionally regarded themselves as victims of natural and political forces outside
their control, whether it be a hostile nature and ecology, rapid economic change and crisis, or powerful nations overseas. This rhetoric of victimology has an almost biblical quality, recalling the story of Exodus. The Israelites went to Egypt to escape famine, subsequently grew to a great multitude and were enslaved by a later, unsympathetic, pharoah. Under the leadership of Moses they fled from their oppressors; after wandering through the desert, they came to the promised land, the land of Canaan, which they conquered and occupied. Settler societies like Australia, it seems, all develop their own versions of the Exodus story, in order to reposition themselves as toilers and victims, rather than invaders or oppressors. Several scholars have already noted the way reworkings of the story of Exodus provide the foundations for both American and Israeli national historical narratives. In the American version, the pilgrims left Britain for America, a new promised land reserved by God for his new chosen people, liberating themselves from the tyranny of the British pharoah. Identifying New England as the New Canaan, the Puritans saw the worldly enterprise of colonisation as a mission to restore mankind, an idea which became the foundation of an enduring American dream.

In the Australian version, there is also a story of leaving the old world to make good in the new, the migrant’s chance to find salvation, redemption, and to start anew. But here it is accompanied and shadowed by another biblical story, the story of the fall and expulsion from Eden, the leaving of Britain at Britain’s will, and the finding in the colonies a hell on earth. Australian victimological narratives and sensibility rest on the one hand on notions of expulsion and exile from mother England, and on the other on the optimism of a new society free from the oppressions of the old world. These national narratives begin with the convicts, the men and women expelled from their homeland, and forced to live and labour in a hostile distant place, and continue in narratives of subsequent settlement and pioneering, of white settlers locked in a harsh and bitter struggle to farm the often dry and hostile land. They reach their pinnacle in the narrative of Gallipoli, the sending of young men as expendable fodder for the empire.

These stories of adversity and struggle have profound allegorical consequences for Australian race relations, both past and present. In the biblical story, the original Exodus, the necessity to flee bondage under the pharoah becomes the moral justification for the later con-
The earlier victimhood warrants the later aggression. And so it is in white Australian historical mythology. The convicts who were forced and the immigrants who chose to flee their economically disrupted home in Europe deserve our admiration for their struggles and suffering, not our criticism for their acts of colonisation. Indeed, in earlier forms of white historical mythology, the conflicts between settlers and indigenes scarcely happened at all — the indigenous peoples simply faded away, the result of some mysterious force of colonisation, a process which happened everywhere, so the settlers in Australia can hardly be held particularly or specifically responsible. In the history of many particular localities, the indigenous people are often thought to have simply disappeared at the moment of white settlement, or even before. These ideas of an impersonal colonising process have been replaced in recent years by some acknowledgment of settler agency and the brutality of the settlement process. Yet such acknowledgments continue to sit uneasily alongside older ideas of Aboriginal people having simply somewhat magically disappeared.

**Aboriginal Servicemen**

Australian colonial and later national identity was thus in its deepest sense built on the exclusion of indigenous peoples from foundational historical narratives. In a political sense, the Australian nation was founded on their exclusion from the national sphere of government. Even with the processes of inclusion that have accelerated since the referendum of 1967 which gave the federal government powers to legislate in relation to Aboriginal people and also meant they were included for the first time in the national population census, popular white historical mythology remains a story of a process of white settlement, in which it is the white settlers rather than the indigenous peoples they displaced who are both the heroes, and the victims, in the story.

These white national narratives are, however, not altogether straightforward. Like such narratives everywhere, they have their shadow, their dangerous supplement, which lie inside the story, threatening to undo them. The danger comes from the existence of Aboriginal servicemen in both world wars. For the association of white Australia with the Anzac legend to retain its narrative and symbolic
power, those who fought in the first world war ought to be white Australians, and this is in fact how they are largely now remembered. Aboriginal people at this time were considered to be outside the nation, and were governed by the various states, with a range of techniques of surveillance, 'protection', economic exploitation, and control. There were restrictions on voting, marriage, drinking, movement, employment, education, and freedom of religion. Segregation was a commonplace in many parts of the country. Yet, despite their lack of the most basic legal, civic, political, and human rights, at least 300 hundred Aboriginal people enlisted. There was probably a mixture of motives: the promise of a steady income; a desire to better themselves through contribution to the war effort; a pride in their masculinity (most were men) and skills; perhaps, a belief shared with white Australians that the country's future depended on British victory and a German defeat.

If Aboriginal servicemen hoped for a better deal after the war, they were soon disappointed. When they returned in 1919, they found they were excluded from the soldier settlement scheme, designed to help returned soldiers settle on the land, and indeed, the scheme accelerated the revocation of existing Aboriginal reserve lands for soldier settlers. Aboriginal returned servicemen in northern NSW protested against the conditions they faced, such as their continued exclusion from the facilities of the town, and petitioned for civic rights, supported by the local branches of the Returned Soldier's and Seamen's League, the forerunner of the RSL. Ex-servicemen might be granted exemption certificates from the various restrictive acts then governing Aboriginal people in the various states, but this was not automatic.

This same pattern was repeated, but on a much larger scale, during and after the second world war. Governments again wanted an all-European fighting force, the Defence Act specifically exempting persons who were 'not substantially of European origin or descent' from call-up for war service and from compulsory training, and Service Regulations also barred them from serving voluntarily. Yet this policy was soon reviewed, and recruitment officers were allowed discretion in dealing with Aboriginal applicants. As the threat from Japan and therefore the need for servicemen and women increased after December 1941, the regulations were interpreted ever more liberally to allow Aboriginal recruitment. The approach to Aboriginal
recruitment remained for the rest of the war inconsistent and changeable, indicating a deep uncertainty as to whether Aboriginal people were properly Australian or were akin to enemy aliens. There were occasional fears that Aboriginal people might side with the Japanese, given Japanese appeals to anti-colonial sentiment. And indeed white Australians had very good reason to fear that they might not hold or deserve the allegiance of Aboriginal people. Amongst Aboriginal people, there was some hesitancy about enlisting in defence of a country which had served them so ill. When the question of Aboriginal eligibility to enlist arose in the early months of the war, some organisations such as the Australian Aborigines’ League wanted, as a precondition, the removal of all legal and other disabilities. Yet Aboriginal people were not sufficiently numerous and therefore critical to the war effort for them to be able to bargain for such benefits. Such political activism did not inhibit recruitment, and some leaders such as Jack Patten enlisted in the army to prove their patriotism and to help prevent the Aboriginal political movement from being discredited. Many simply hoped that war service itself would strengthen their case, individually and collectively, for full citizenship after the war.

Despite the discriminatory laws and regulations, almost 3000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders did serve, both in units based in northern Australia, and in ordinary army units on a variety of fronts overseas. Though Aboriginal soldiers were mainly men, some Aboriginal women also served in the armed forces and in the Women’s Land Army. Furthermore, the strategic location of many mission stations in the north led to their Aboriginal residents, perhaps as many as 3000, supporting the war effort in various ways.

The war did destabilise the existing pattern of race relations to some extent. The high demand for labour during the war, for example, meant many could walk away from the protectionist and regulatory protection and welfare boards and live back in their own country where work was available. It also brought white soldiers from the urban south and Aboriginal people in the isolated north into contact for the first time. Robert Hall, the historian of Aboriginal involvement in the second world war, suggests that these white soldiers, having no long term stake in their own economic survival in the Northern Territory, and therefore little direct concern with land issues or longer-term labour exploitation, had no particular reason to
fear and control Aborigines in the way their predecessors in the territory had, and were thus more egalitarian in their approach. The war also brought to North Queensland numbers of African-American troops. The intermixing between Aboriginal women and African-American men, who were well educated and enjoyed equal pay with white US soldiers, had the potential to unsettle the existing patterns of segregation in the Australian countryside.

Aboriginal Servicemen and the Anzac Legend

After the war, Aboriginal war service was to pose awkward challenges to the established racial order. Aboriginal soldiers returned with an expectation of reward in the form of full citizenship, not only for themselves but also their communities. They wanted and expected recognition in the form of an end to well-established practices of ‘protection’, surveillance, and segregation, and increased employment and other opportunities.

These expectations, however, were not to be realised, at least not in the decades immediately after the war. In so far as any recognition was given, it was to ex-servicemen individually, and not to their families and communities. In March 1949, for example, the labor government granted Aboriginal ex-servicemen the right to vote in federal elections but this right continued to be denied the vast majority of Aboriginal people, who were still declared wards of the state, that is, without adult legal rights, under the acts operating in the various states. In 1961, sixteen years after the war’s end, Aboriginal rights remained extremely limited everywhere, with restrictions on freedom of movement, control of property and freedom of association with Europeans. Only if one had an exemption certificate could equal rights be granted. In Queensland and Western Australia there were government controls over marriage and Aboriginal people did not have the right to vote. There were restrictions on the right to drink alcohol in all states other than Victoria. The existence of Aboriginal ex-servicemen highlighted this particular form of discrimination very clearly. On Thursday Island, it was reported by a trade union delegation in the late 1950s:

An Islander, in uniform, may drink beer, and is bound by the same laws regarding his actions as a free man. Should he take his uniform
off however, he can be arrested and put "under the Act". In uniform, he may enter a hotel, but his own brother may not. Islanders who served in the last war were free to enter hotels then. Now they are not.

In New South Wales, the focus of my story, though there were fewer controls over marriage, and a formal right to vote, surveillance and control of Aboriginal people were sustained through the post-war years. Aboriginal people were barred by law from drinking alcohol, unless they had an exemption certificate; this did not actually prevent drinking, but it did make it more clandestine and expensive, and it especially served to exclude Aboriginal people from white public bars, clubs, and other forms of sociality. As mobility rose, with Aboriginal employment increasing on road construction and the railways, and men travelling on vast seasonal agricultural harvesting and pastoral circuits, the Aborigines Welfare Board created a network of district welfare officers to supervise and maintain surveillance over Aboriginal people wherever they went. In the name of the new policy of assimilation, it also encouraged the destruction of Aboriginal communities by tempting individuals to cut themselves off from family, culture, and land: those with exemption certificates could gain better access for children to schools and eligibility for a house — one without Aboriginal neighbours — in town.

Or at least that was the Welfare Board’s plan. It was undermined partly by the decline in rural employment with the effects of mechanisation, but especially by the fact that white townsfolk consistently refused to accept Aboriginal people into the towns. They opposed Aboriginal access to housing, schools, and town facilities including picture theatres and swimming pools, when these were erected from the second half of the 1950s in the wake of the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956.

None of this went uncontested. There had been for some years an active Aboriginal protest movement and white support movement, and a variety of local and international political pressures pushing Australian governments closer towards granting formal equal rights. These protest groups usually had strong connections with either the churches or the political Left. The RSL, known for its political conservatism, sought full citizenship rights for Aboriginal ex-service-
men, but remained aloof from campaigns for full citizenship rights for Aboriginal people generally. In the late 1940s it pressed for ex-servicemen to be given the right to vote, and later pressed for the exemption of ex-servicemen from restrictions on the right to drink alcohol. From time to time local RSL clubs assisted Aboriginal ex-servicemen and their families, for example building a cottage on the Brungle Aboriginal Reserve in southern New South Wales for the widow of an Aboriginal ex-serviceman. Yet these calls for particular rights for ex-servicemen did not lead to an opposition to racial policies generally. In a letter to the prime minister in December 1961, the national secretary put the RSL position clearly:

It is the firmly expressed opinion of the Returned Servicemen’s League that service abroad in the armed forces of the Commonwealth in time of war should entitle any Aborigine to special consideration. It is quite clear that the Aboriginal problem is not nearly as simple as many people would have us believe, having regard for the fact that many of them are ill-equipped to cope with conditions of modern day society. However, our application here is made on the basis of a very small number who have served their country to an outstanding degree. Our simple belief is that as they were advanced enough to share the dangers of active service they are, by the same token, sufficiently advanced to cope with the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship.

The internal and external pressures for change were, however, beginning to have some effect. In the early 1960s most of the discriminatory legislation was removed. The commonwealth government in 1962 extended the franchise to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and both Queensland and Western Australia followed suit. The restriction on alcohol was finally withdrawn in New South Wales in March 1963, removing the final function of the exemption certificate, and the hated exemption certificate was itself removed soon afterwards.15

By the mid 1960s, then, racial discrimination was the result not so much of state or commonwealth legislation as of continuing practice and convention, sometimes embodied in local council ordinances. The right to drink in hotels and to belong to clubs fell into this category, of rights now allowed in legislation but still denied in practice.
In such a situation, Aboriginal ex-servicemen could be excluded from some of the RSL clubs dotted around the country.

**Protest in the Australian Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s**

And so I have returned to the story of the protest in Walgett. A Labor Council visit to the town in July 1964, primarily to investigate the gaoling of two Aboriginal children for minor theft, was widely covered in the press. The council’s report noted the segregation of drinkers at the Oasis Hotel Motel, and the exclusion of returned Aboriginal Diggers from the RSL Club, except sometimes on Anzac Day. In the words of the Labor Council report, the RSL officials ‘denied that this was racial discrimination and said that they were only following past practices’.

Charles Perkins and his freedom riders took up the Walgett RSL example, then, because they knew it was particularly hard to defend. In a society where ex-servicemen were held in high esteem, and seen as embodying nationhood and national identity, racial discrimination against an ex-serviceman, even an Aboriginal one, was easily ridiculed and attacked. Perkins and the freedom riders quickly realised that the exclusion of Aboriginal people from a Returned Servicemen’s League clubs had major symbolic significance for both white and black Australians, and was thus an excellent focus for an attack on racism. For Aboriginal people, their exclusion, sometimes even on Anzac Day, symbolised social discrimination and denial of political rights in a particularly stark and offensive way. Instead of the inclusion they had expected on their return, Aboriginal ex-servicemen and their communities had been met with a deep symbolic exclusion. When retracing the freedom ride in 1991, I spoke to Lyall Munro Senior, a respected Aboriginal leader in Moree, he spoke extensively of the feelings of Aboriginal returned servicemen in the north central west, of whom there were hundreds. Lyall said he sometimes used to join the Aboriginal returned soldiers down on the river bank, and listen to their stories. They felt, he said, their exclusion from the RSL very keenly. They had been at Changi, Gallipoli, everything, and now they were excluded. The first Aboriginal pilot in the second world war lived at Toomelah, near Boggabilla. There was Private Gunner Sooey at Walgett who had been a POW after the fall of Singapore. Some had been Rats of Tobruk, like Herb Leslie, and
then were refused service in the pub at Moree. After the war, Munro said, they found they couldn't get returned servicemen's loans at the bank. Many of them had quite conservative politics, voted Liberal Country Party.17

Not all the ex-servicemen, however, were politically conservative, by any means. For many their war service had raised their expectations and broadened their knowledge of the world. Many of the leaders in the Aboriginal political movement of the 1950s and 1960s had served in the war — Bert Groves, Joe McGinness, Kath Walker (later known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal), Ted Loban, and from the Women's Land Army, Faith Bandler.18 Their war experiences had given them, it seems, both the desire and the confidence to seek lasting political change.

And so it was that the freedom riders chose the RSL at Walgett as their first target for a demonstration. It was actually very quiet for most of the day. As one of the freedom riders, Aidan Foy, remembers it, 'I think the locals were just absolutely shocked. They were stunned. There was no opposition really. There wasn't the sort of scene that occurred later. After we'd been there for a little while, the employees of the RSL came out and offered us soft drinks, which of course we all refused to take. There were some speeches made. Charlie made a speech, I'm sure Harry Hall made a speech and George Rose made a speech, I'm fairly sure, just talking about the segregation of the Club'.19 Pat Healy remembers that 'Charlie spoke, very well I thought, contrasting the treatment of the black servicemen who weren't allowed to use or be members of the Walgett RSL. I guess there's just a sort of feeling, it's an emotional thing about remembering these white, highly emotional males, really'. Charlie Perkins remembers it this way:

Walgett was the start of it all — that was the beginning. That was the jewel in the crown in terms of where things really began in recreating and re-establishing relationships in the context of race in this country I think. That's where it all began. The demonstration in the street outside the RSL, the mass of Aboriginal people that were watching and were involved, young people that were participating in our demonstrations, who are now grown up men and women around NSW and throughout Australia they've got prominent roles. And that sort of crystallised our thinking on what we should do and we set about it then. The first one of course was to demonstrate outside the RSL,
the great sacred cow at that time, you know, nobody criticises the RSL, they can do whatever they like. They thought they were 'God’s gift’ to not only Australia but everybody else. And so we decided that that would be the prime objective ... to fly in the face of the most cherished institution in Australia, because they were very racist, and they were not only that they were arrogant, and they were self-centred and very discriminating and opinionated and everything else.

The demonstration outside the RSL Club did have an effect, though it took some time. The immediate response of local clubs was to place guards on the premises to prevent trouble from the freedom riders, and to insist that there was no discrimination in their own club. The national secretary of the RSL said it was a matter for the local clubs, but also denied there was any colour discrimination in the clubs.

Four years later, three ex-servicemen — Tom Lake, Smythe Morgan and Eric Thorn — were still trying to join the Walgett RSL. The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, a highly active peak body coordinating a multitude of local pro-Aboriginal organisations which had been at the forefront of the successful referendum campaign of 1967, took up their case, resolving at its annual conference in April 1969 to condemn RSL branches refusing membership, and urging that this matter be discussed and made public at the RSL congress. A group of law students from the University of Sydney reported that their survey of the issue in May 1969 found no Aboriginal people had yet been admitted as members of Walgett RSL. Reginald Saunders, an Aboriginal ex-serviceman who had become the first Aboriginal commissioned officer in the army, and who was now acting as the liaison officer for the newly formed government advisory body, the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, also put pressure on the RSL on the men’s behalf. Although a relatively conservative man, Saunders had been appalled when the national president, Brigadier Alf Garland, called for blood-testing of Aboriginal people as a way to determine an individual’s entitlement to benefits. Pressure mounted when the National Aborigines Day Organising Committee arranged a march and wreath-laying ceremony by Aboriginal ex-servicemen at the Cenotaph in Sydney on National Aborigines Day on 11 July 1969. Support for the event was especially strong from the northern towns — Dubbo, Armidale, Kempsey,
Lismore, and Newcastle. Unable to do anything else, the RSL supported the event, asking its sub-branches to support the ceremony, its state president participating by laying a wreath.

In the face of such renewed attention to the fact that Aboriginal people had served in war, the Walgett branch was finally brought into line around this time. Mrs Gladys Lake told me in Walgett in 1991 that her husband Eugene George ('Tom') Lake, who had served with the army in the 39/52nd unit in New Guinea, was the first Aboriginal person to be admitted to the Walgett RSL. Mrs Lake herself was the second member. Her father, she told me, was also a returned soldier, who had fought in the first world war in France. He used to march on Anzac Day, but had never tried to join the RSL.

Afterword

A great deal has changed since the demonstration outside the Walgett RSL in 1965. Government policies have resulted in the formation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to institute Aboriginal management of government funding for Aboriginal people. Land rights of varying kinds have been acknowledged, and there has been substantial return of land in the Northern Territory. Aboriginal access to education has increased significantly, though is still far less than that of non-Aboriginal people. While complaints of discrimination and segregation in pubs and clubs continue, it is against the law, and there are strong bureaucratic means in place to redress such grievances. And there are signs of inclusion of Aboriginal people into national narratives in a multitude of ways. Notably, Aboriginal people have been increasingly incorporated into the Anzac legend, in ceremony and exhibitions. As part of the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People in 1995, the Australian War Memorial developed a travelling exhibition called Too Dark for the Light Horse, on the role Aboriginal and Islander peoples played in the defence of the nation. A gallery version is touring regional centres during 1998 and 1999, and a modified version went to remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in July 1997. This version has since toured through south western Queensland and western new South Wales. Everywhere it has attracted attention; along with many others, I saw it in a shopping centre in Canberra in mid 1998. This is a truly popular exhibition, with an emotional impact
deriving from its contrast between Aboriginal war service on the one hand and practices of discrimination and exclusion on the other.

Yet if there have been some profound changes in policy and practice, white settler hostility to Aboriginal people remains strong. Now, instead of exclusion from schools, hospitals, swimming pools, picture theatres, and RSL clubs, we see in the rapid growth in support for conservative populist parties like One Nation, virulent opposition to native title, Aboriginal management of welfare provision through ATSIC, and any notion of a national apology for the child removal policies of the past. For its part, the RSL has become one of the most vigorous opponents of land rights and recognition of native title, agreeing at its National Congress in 1993 that ‘Thousands of Australians, both Aboriginal and white, died in the field of service to preserve this nation for all Australians’, by which it meant that there should be no recognition of special indigenous rights to land. Instead of an advocacy of racial separation and segregation, we see now a language of equal rights, taken to mean treating everyone the same without reference to relevant differences, and especially to claims to land on the basis of prior occupation. In this way, the discourse of equality so strongly fought for in the two decades after the second world war has transmogrified into a discourse of refusing to acknowledge the past and its effects and in refusing strategies to redress those effects. In this refusal of a history of colonisation, we see some continuities between then and now. We see the same difficulty in acknowledging the legacy of brutal land-taking and subjugation which underlies our present polity, which provides the foundation of the nation itself. Because of the powerful Exodus-related victimological narrative which underlies so much white Australian identity — the focus on white hardship, suffering and victimhood — popular acknowledgment of the violence and exploitation on which the nation is built is still extremely difficult, still in process, a project incomplete and unfinished. Just as a combination of local and international pressures forced changes to formal legal and civil rights in the 1960s, so, we might hope, may they do so in our current crisis, our current discontents.
Endnotes

1 For a fuller description, see Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: a Biography*, (Ringwood, 1990). I am currently completing a book on the Freedom Ride, and this essay arises from that research. For assistance with research for this essay I thank Lani Russell, Inara Walden, and Ann Genovese, and the Australian Research Council for its financial support; Mr Derek Robson, National Secretary of the Returned and Services League of Australia Limited, for permission to peruse the RSL papers in the National Library of Australia; and John Docker, with whom I have extensively discussed the ideas in this essay.


3 See K S Inglis, *Anzac Remembered: Selected Writings of K S Inglis*, John Lack (ed.), Melbourne, 1998. The commemoration of the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign can be contrasted with the emerging commemoration of Australian military involvement in Vietnam, which focuses increasingly on the battle of Long Tan, a qualified victory within a larger military defeat.


5 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, Canberra, 1974, p 94.

6 Inglis, op. cit.


10 In addition to the work of historians such as Henry Reynolds and many others, Prime Minister Paul Keating advanced this idea publicly in his now famous ‘Redfern speech’ in December 1992.


12 Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Sydney, 1996, p 124. Only one Aboriginal soldier received a soldier settler’s block in New South Wales: George Kennedy drew a 17,000 acre block outside the town of Ivanhoe, but like many others left it after five years. D Huggonson, ‘Aborigines and the Aftermath of the Great War’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no 1, 1993, p 7.

13 Huggonson, ibid., p 7; Goodall, op. cit., p 149.

14 Huggonson, ibid., p 3.

15 Goodall, op. cit., p 106.


19 Aidan Foy, interview in Newcastle, 7 April 1994, interviewed by Inara Walden. George Rose and Harry Hall were both leading Aboriginal activists in Walgett.

20 *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 16 February 1965.

21 Letter from A G W Keys, RSL National Secretary to Miss S H Mahomet, Auckland, New Zealand, 23 February 1965, responding to her letter of 17 February, RSL papers, MS 6609, Series 2, Box 314, NLA.

22 Letter A J Russell, Acting National Secretary to Mr R Saunders, Liaison Officer, Council for Aboriginal Affairs, 21 May 1969, RSL papers, MS 6609, Outward Correspondence, Box 7, NLA.

23 Rights and Advancement (FCAATSI Newsletter), May 1969, no 19, p 15.


25 Letter A J Russell, Acting National Secretary to Mr R Saunders, Liaison Officer, Council for Aboriginal Affairs, 21 May 1969, RSL papers, MS 6609, Outward Correspondence, Box 7, NLA. Reg Saunders later participated in the campaign for Aboriginal land rights, and tried to change the RSL's hard line stance against such rights, *Age*, Melbourne, 2 August 1984.


27 *Reveille*, 1 June 1969, 1 July 1969, 1 August 1969. A report entitled ‘Walgett — Then and Now’, in *New Dawn*, August 1971, mentioned that there were now Aboriginal members in the Walgett RSL.


30 Reported in *Queensland Times*, Ipswich, 23 June 1993.
Phillip Adams is a prolific and sometimes controversial broadcaster, writer and film-maker. Phillip has produced many ground-breaking films including the Adventures of Barry McKenzie, The Getting of Wisdom, and Don's Party. In 1982 he received the film's highest accolade, the Longford Award for his outstanding services to Australian film.

Tim Bowden is a Sydney broadcaster, radio and television documentary maker, oral historian and author of The Silence Calling: Australians in Antarctica 1947-97, a jubilee history of the Australian Antarctic Division. During 1980s he produced two major radio documentary series for the ABC: 'Taim Bilong Masta: the Australian Involvement with Papua New Guinea', and 'Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon' He received an Order of Australia for services to public broadcasting in June 1994.

David Carter was born in Melbourne and has lived in Brisbane since 1987 where he teaches Australian Studies and literature at Griffith University. He is widely published as a reviewer and has written many essays on Australian cultural history. He is the author of A Career in Writing, a study of the Jewish-Australian communist novelist Judah Waten which was recently awarded the Walter McCrae Russian Award. He has edited Images of Australia, The Republicanism Debate, Celebration of a Nation and Judah Waten.

Ann Curthoys is Manning Clark Professor of History at the Australian National University. She teaches undergraduate courses on history and theory, Australian Aboriginal history, national identity and Australian history. She has written widely on many aspects of Australian history and the representation of history in museums. She is currently writing a book on the freedom ride in New South Wales in 1965, and is working with Susan Magarey and Marilyn Lake on a history of Women's Liberation in Australia.

Gwenda Davey AM is the co-editor of the Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore (1993) and the compiler of several folklore collections for children including Duck Under the Table: More Scenes From Family Life (1991) and Jack and Jill: A Book of Nursery Rhymes (1992, 1997). In 1998 Gwenda Davey was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to the preservation and protection of Australian folklore and folklife.

John Docker is a literary and cultural critic who has always seen himself as a writer as well as independent scholar and public intellectual. John Docker's last book was Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History(1994).
Presently he is writing a book called *Adventures of Identity*, that mixes family history, autobiography, and cultural history as it reflects on the importance for world history of the events of 1492 in Spain. John Docker is currently Adjunct Senior Fellow in the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra.


Ros Kidd’s book, *The Way We Civilise*, is an expose of Queensland’s Aboriginal department. Ros’s evidence was crucial to the Palm Island wage case and her work was widely quoted in the report of the Stolen Generation inquiry. A freelance writer and historian, Ros is currently researching official mismanagement of Aboriginal wages and trust funds.

Chris McConville has written widely in Australian history (with a special interest in urban history) and in sports history. He most recently co-authored *A History of the Footscray Football Club* (1996).

Richard Nile is the director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland, general editor of Issues in Australian Studies Series and the editor of the *Journal of Australian Studies*. A graduate in history from the University of Western Australia, he completed his doctorate at the University of New South Wales. Richard Nile has held academic appointments in Australia and Europe. He has published many books on Australia and Australian cultural identities.

Michael Peterson is the film, talks, debates and forum coordinator for the Woodford Folk Festival. He holds a Diploma in Education (Science/Science Studies) from the Queensland University of Technology and a Bachelor of Arts (Philosophy) from the University of Queensland where he is currently completing a Master of Arts in Australian Studies. Michael enjoys making music and attending festivals, and his academic interests include the dynamic presence of tradition in contemporary culture.
Peter Read is a historian at the Urban Research Program, The Australian National University. He is particularly interested in the meaning and significance of place to Australians. His most recent book is *Returning to Nothing: the Meaning of Lost Places* (1996).

Henry Reynolds is one of Australia’s most influential and widely-read historians. His research has played a major part in the political and legal milestones, the Mabo and the Wik judgements. He was also the historical consultant for the ABC’s acclaimed TV documentary series *Frontier*.

Deborah Bird Rose is a Senior Fellow in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University, where her research focuses on systems of ecological knowledge. She has worked with Aboriginal claimants on land claims and in land disputes, and has worked with the Aboriginal Land Commissioner as consulting anthropologist. She writes on social and ecological justice, most recently concentrating on frontier culture and indigenous and settler ecologies.

David Walker is Professor of Australian Studies and Director of the Centre for Australian Studies at Deakin University. In 1997/98 he held the Monash Chair of Australian Studies at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. He has published extensively on Australian social and cultural history and is editor of *Australian Cultural History*. His new book, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850 to 1939* will be published by University of Queensland Press in April 1999.
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