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Web:
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Tel: (03) 9416 0232
Fax: (03) 9416 0684

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Afghanistan:

Gift or Grand Conceit?

Many tend to think of the war in Afghanistan as a war in one country. It could be any country. Thinking this way is only possible if the country is seen to have no cultural history or broader cultural and political associations of significance. Julia Gillard's and Tony Abbott's recent parliamentary speeches in defence of Australia's participation in Afghanistan are good examples of this. Similar claims concerning Australian interests have been made about Iraq and even, with difficulty, the endless and ever-growing strife in Israel.

On reflection many will realise that this overall orientation masks a deep-seated ambiguity. To grasp how this works requires an appreciation of the role played by cultural blindness in the way people usually think about social conflicts.

In Afghanistan (and Iraq before it) Australians have exhibited a blindness not dissimilar to that involved in the interventions by Australia and other Western colonial countries in the Middle East after the break-up of the Ottoman empire (Gallipoli included). Today, though, there is something new: the culture we take for granted and wish others to adopt is now far more clearly a poisoned chalice (if left unexamined its assumptions will lead to consequences far beyond the legacy of colonialism).

Typically, the role of social, ethnic and religious bonding grounded in the deep history of other cultures is absent in the thinking of the West and its agents. The people being opposed can then be regarded as no more than troublesome social atoms or alien evil gangs who need to be 'dealt with'. They are beyond being understood. Often they are thought to be sub-human and not *worth* being understood, unless, that is, they agree with us. Even then those who do accept our ways are usually regarded as the flotsam of war and conquest, grist for the mill of Western cultural superiority. These populations may even be considered ungrateful, not appreciating our helping them to enter the democratic world. Certainly it is beyond most Westerners to understand today how offers of democracy are really much more than this: there is a widespread incapacity to grasp the social assumptions that are embedded in our 'gifts'.

With this in mind, the debate in the Australian parliament has been morbidly interesting. With the Greens' welcome insistence that this debate be held, we can now see why there was no earlier one. Rather than dig into the meanings of the cultures we are seeking to transform, or clarify our strategies and consider opposing ones, our parliamentary leaders and their supporters think debate requires no more than a presentation, a performance that dazzles. In this they reflect other expressions of a widespread incapacity to genuinely reflect on our actions and values.

Media debates and media celebrity are key examples of this incapacity. Even more disturbingly, media-style performance resonates with changes in the academy, where the process of listening, thinking and mutual exchange around core assumptions that may be interrogated and defended at face-to-face conferences has been displaced by personal performances, which are the end of the story. The assumption that ideas need to be challenged and worked out in social interchange is now in default. University media campaigns like Melbourne University's, to 'Dream Large' within the spirit of entrenched assumptions, stands in place of philosophically searching inquiry concerning the changing institutional arrangements of social life.

Increasingly, parliamentary discussion is marked by narrow, self-referential thinking. At the heart of this crisis of debate, speakers and listeners seem to have nothing to learn from each other. This is a self-defeating approach for any culture and polity seeking to renew itself while confronting a deep-seated crisis.

> **The West will assist Islam to modernise on our terms. This is the grand strategy not merely to fight terrorism but to re-make Islam in our image.**

Instead of a searching discussion of Australia's forces in Afghanistan, we circulate and re-circulate narratives that simply drive the 'need' to be there. The primary rationale, which framed both leaders' and just about everyone else's speeches, is the need to defeat terrorism, even though it does not take much thought to understand that terror is never defeated head on. After all, terror usually has an underlying context. And if the same background issues that generate terror remain, terror will return in one form or another. The Western strategy to transform that background is to promote democracy and other Western institutions, including the neo-liberal market.

Yet it is clear enough that in Afghanistan and other places in the Middle East the West is the background issue for many people. As a few commentators have pointed out, far from providing security in Afghanistan the presence of Western forces ensures its absence, as was the case in Iraq and the emergence of the insurgency, and with decades of uncritical US support for the state of Israel, giving rise to the intifada. Given the history of Western relations with Arab and Muslim peoples for the last half-century, and of course for much longer, such attitudes are not going to change for at least a generation. For any prudent Western leader this should in itself be enough to lead them to look for ways other than warfare to achieve their ends, or to reassess the ends themselves.

Instead we soldier on; we do not give up easily; resilience is the name of the game. Of course resilience is to be valued, but without the capacity to take on board how others see their place in the world and then make in-depth judgements, it can become a tragic flaw and be utterly counter-productive.

It does not say much to observe that the West's grand conceit is beginning to falter. Even commentators from the Right such as Greg Sheridan in *The Australian* are now realising that it will not work; that the West should pull back (in his argument, to preserve some possibility of the United States staying in Asia to balance the rise of China). For Sheridan it is Pakistan that has made Afghanistan unworkable. There is no doubt that even before the recent floods Pakistan was a powder keg, but that is only one element in the West's failed strategy. These issues, however, do not seem to have an impact on the political warriors in Canberra: they will corral their vision to focus on 'terrorism in one country', as if the West has nothing to do with the insecurity besetting the world.

To penetrate this closed circle of ideas it is necessary to dig into the core project of the United States in the Middle East. This is no longer spoken of directly, not since the demise of the Iraq occupation, but it remains an underlying preoccupation. The aim is to create 'jewels' of freedom and democratic process throughout the Middle East, with the view of transforming Islam into a member and supporter of the West. We—Australia accepts its role in this massive campaign—will assist Islam to modernise on our terms. This is the grand strategy—not merely to fight terrorism but to re-make Islam in our image. Afghanistan cannot be understood outside this broader range of reference points, points no one wants to discuss any more. Why talk when ingrained assumptions provide the answers?

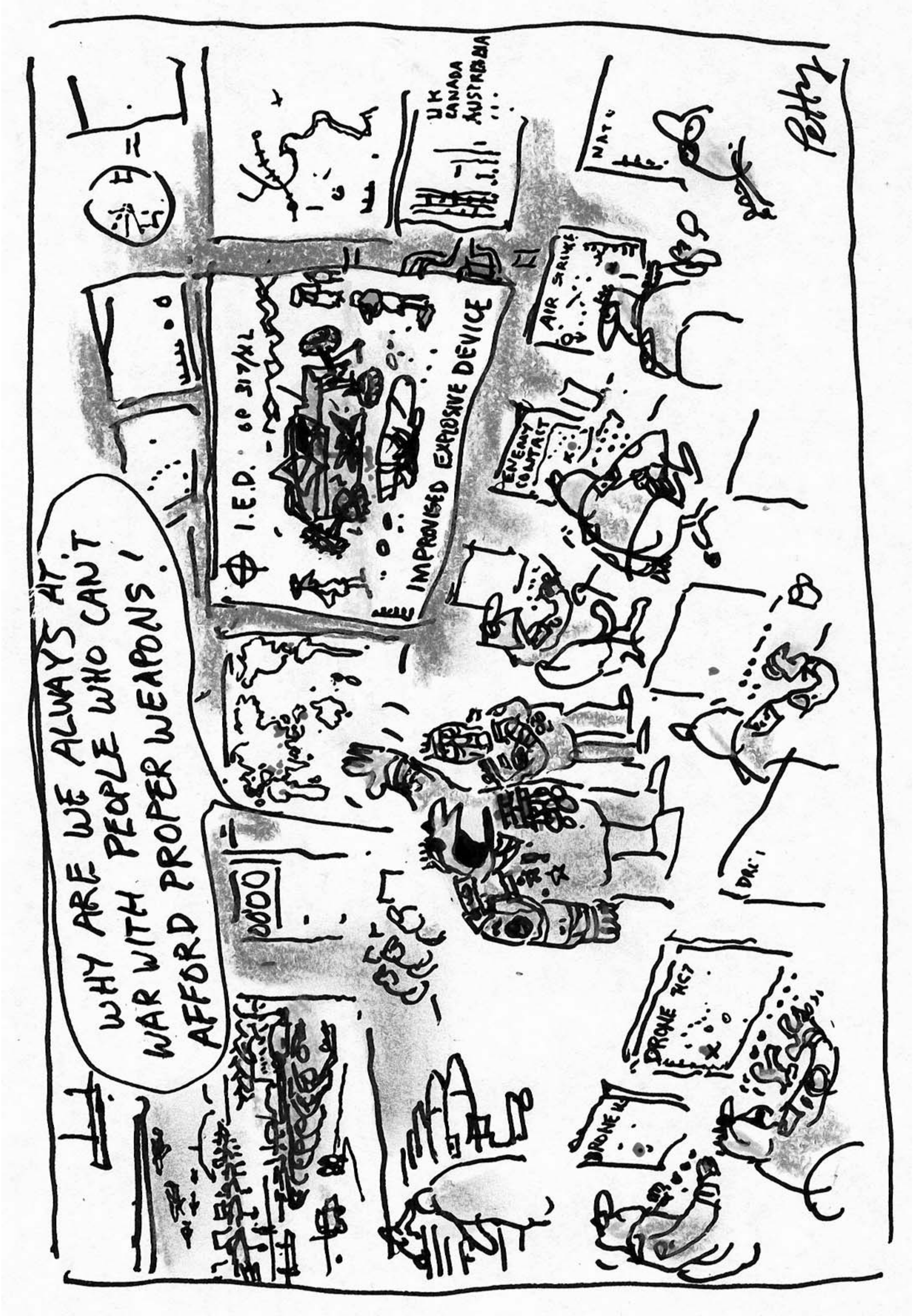
Above all, this mindset ignores the main forces producing world insecurity. The West carries gifts of a more gentle culture and democratic interchange in social affairs, which key thinkers like Adam Smith associated with the rise of the market. But whatever the truth of that in Smith's own time, today cultural assumptions largely left unquestioned in his day contribute to an emerging, worldwide crisis. When things go wrong that shock us—be it to do with war, as in Afghanistan, or the economy, as in the GFC—we tend to attribute such events to individuals and surface forces. We find it hard to see that they are a consequence of institutional change. And not being able to see allows us our aura of 'innocence'.

Our way of living has radically moved on from the world of Adam Smith. If his was the world of capitalism, ours is of a different order. It is capitalism radically enhanced by a revolution in technology, set in train by the techno-sciences in the new academy. This revolution makes possible a whole range of developments that seem unrelated: a new individuality, radically distanced from family and community; the rise of global markets; an assault on the limits of nature; the genius of the pilot-less weapon now striking Pakistan and Afghanistan and producing such contradictory results. In this more abstracted world, community no longer requires face-to-face interaction, bank loans are no longer sourced to knowable people, biotechnology celebrates the possibilities of an endlessly malleable self, warfare is universalised with the prospect of displacing face-to-face combat.

This is a radical culture that takes nothing for granted except the means of its own techno-transformation. This is the true background to 'democratisation' and it is not only blind to cultures constituted in very different social relationships, where the face to face remains a primary cultural form, it is actively hostile towards them.

It is here, in this change, that we can source the true core of the insecurity that typifies our world. It is this gift, with its attendant social assumptions, that we carry in 'innocence' to the peoples of the non-Western world, and we are shocked when they do not take the opportunity to accept it. Rather than persisting with this futile quest the West needs to turn its attention to the reconstruction of its own way of living before it overwhelms us all.

John Hinkson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→→→
What's in a Name?
Rod Beecham

Rod Beecham is an independent education advisor <www.rodbeecham.com.au>.

Some important distinctions between 'education' and 'training'

Readers will recall that immediately after the election the Commonwealth government department responsible for secondary and tertiary education was to be re-named the Department of Jobs, Skills and Workplace Relations. Consequent on some fuss in the university sector, the Prime Minister amended the title to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The attempted substitution of 'jobs' and 'skills' for 'education' and 'employment' is revealing. Our national policy-makers, it would appear, do not see any real distinction between education and training. This is not surprising: the whole point of the re-structuring of Australia's tertiary sector in the late 1980s was to collapse such distinctions so that all types of tertiary education could be tethered to the national government's perception of Australia's economic interests.

This is an approach to education deriving from human capital theory—in its developed form a very recent phenomenon. Human capital theory is generally agreed to have its origins in some remarks by Sir William Petty in his *Verbum Sapienti* (1664), *Political Arithmetick* (1676) and *A Treatise of Ireland* (1687). Two mighty men of economic history, Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall, subsequently glanced at the notion, but not until Dublin, Lotka and Spiegelman's *The Money Value of a Man* (1930) was it given any extended treatment.

A gradual acceleration of scholarly interest then began, with articles in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1935), *The Journal of Political Economy* (1944 and 1958) and *The American Economic Review* (1960 and 1961). With *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1964), Gary S. Becker quite literally wrote the book on human capital theory in relation to education and, although an enormous amount of work has been done on the subject since, almost all of it has remained within the conceptual framework he devised.

Becker's analysis stemmed from his view 'that the growth of physical capital, at least as conventionally measured, explains a relatively small part of the growth of income in most countries'. Seeking to explain at least some of the remaining part of this growth in terms of 'investments in human capital', which he defined as 'activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people', Becker examined such things as 'schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, migration, and searching for information about prices and incomes'.

Proponents of human capital theory regard expenditure on education and training as an investment, which both implies and assumes that a return is sought—that something should be gained to justify the investment. Investment, therefore, is biased towards obviously vocational forms of education and away from areas in which the return on the investment is less apparent. The Australian VET sector, accordingly, is quite healthy, as are faculties of Law, Business and Medicine in the universities. Arts and Science faculties, by contrast, are struggling.

But something is wrong. Australian employers have been complaining for years about a lack of basic abilities—reading, writing, arithmetical, investigative—in their graduate recruits, suggesting that our economically focused education sector is failing to deliver the promised results. I think their concerns are soundly based, and I attribute the problem to the reductive absurdities of a purely functional education policy. You cannot be taught literacy or numeracy *for* something: you can only become literate or numerate, infinitely variable and individual processes that are inhibited, not enhanced, by arbitrarily imposed national standards.

Education is the expansion of your awareness of human possibility. Training is the expansion of individual capacity. The two are not mutually exclusive; indeed, it is probably most accurate to think of them as parts of a continuum. For example, a person undergoing training as a barista may well have an educational experience: s/he may begin to consider what the difference between 'fair trade coffee' and other coffee is, or to ask why so much coffee seems to be packaged in Italy. Conversely, someone studying philosophy may well acquire the skill of writing in an organised and incisive fashion.

The emphasis in education is on the process of learning, of drawing from what is already present in the student. Training, on the other hand, emphasises the process of teaching, of giving the student something s/he does not already possess. One might say that education begins with the learner while training begins with the material.

A simplistic economic view, focused on maximising the return on human capital, excludes education altogether and significantly constrains training, turning it into a matter of 'knowledge transfer', apparently conceived as analogous to moving data from one computer to another. Its inevitable consequence is the draining of nuance and interest from what is taught, an active discouragement of curiosity and any new or surprising thought or insight, and the alienation of the learner; in other words, the exile of authentic intelligence from the whole instructional enterprise.

Mathematics is probably the best subject to illustrate the point. Is one educated in mathematics or trained? Mathematics is a language: one must learn a range of symbols. The mathematician thinks in those symbols, once learned. The mathematician uses algebra, which helps in finding the value of unknown quantities by using known quantities. Mathematics is the essential foundation of numerous other disciplines, from structural engineering to economics and accountancy.

Described in this way, mathematics sounds like a tool, or set of tools, that makes other jobs easier. One learns it as one would learn to use a hammer or a screwdriver. But the matter is not nearly so simple.

Consider, for example, a famous problem of geometry: that of squaring the circle. The problem arose as mathematicians sought to discover whether specified axioms of Euclidean geometry concerning the existence of lines and circles entail the existence of such a square. In 1882 the German mathematician Lindemann proved that the circle could not be squared by demonstrating that π—the number used to calculate the circumference and area of a circle—is a transcendental number (that is, it is not a zero of any polynomial with rational coefficients). However, some mathematicians were not satisfied with Euclid's fifth postulate, also known as the parallel postulate, which led to the development of hyperbolic geometry, in which it is possible to square the circle.

The history of the problem of squaring the circle reminds us that theory is open-ended and that assumptions must always be tested. No proposition is unassailable. Whether Euclidean or hyperbolic geometry is 'true' is, clearly, meaningless. All we can say is that one set of assumptions means you cannot square the circle, an alternative set of assumptions means that you can. Mathematics, then, for all its appearance of precision and certainty, is highly contingent and elusive. Like a foreign language, its acquisition opens doors to unexplored regions as well as solving problems. Education and training are involved equally in the teaching and learning of mathematics: any attempt solely to 'train' a student in mathematics will leave that student as helpless as someone who has been taught to repeat phrases in a foreign language without knowing what they mean.

Education is vitally concerned with exploring the unknown, and the unknown features necessarily in training as well. Human capital theory, however, conceives of education and training as investments, and investment is all about managing risk. The unknown, by definition, is fraught with risk. Therefore education, as far as possible, is eliminated under the human capital regime while training is circumscribed and arid. Where this leaves the Australian government's 'key priority' of developing 'a national innovation system that drives knowledge creation, cutting edge science and research, international competitiveness and greater productivity' is pretty obvious. It is a reductive absurdity.

Matters would be far less serious if the university-sector fuss over the name of the responsible Commonwealth government department had stemmed from the sorts of concerns I have raised. Valuable teaching and research can still be done while ticking the relevant boxes.

But university management (one cannot use the word 'leadership' because it is manifestly inaccurate) has never demonstrated such concerns. Again and again, as the once open but now carefully guarded minutes of academic board meetings over the past two decades show, university management has capitulated to the government's agenda, imposing an increasingly centralised (and vastly more expensive) system of bureaucratic control over an increasingly beleaguered and casualised academic workforce.

The universities could have united against Dawkins in 1987 and resisted his destructive agenda. But that would have required courage, clear-sightedness and a genuine commitment to the cause of education. Only a few junior academics displayed that. Those at the top of the tree sat tight, valuing their positions and their salaries above all else. Therein lies the cause of Australia's educational tragedy, and the cause of the fuss over the name of a Commonwealth government department. Chairs, vice-chancellors and executive directors take themselves very seriously and are extremely sensitive to perceived slights. a

SCHOLARS AND ENTREPRENEURS
The Universities in Crisis

Edited by Simon Cooper, John Hinkson and Geoff Sharp

'At first it seems ironical that the further we progress towards a "knowledge society" the harder it is for universities to sustain themselves ... It is no coincidence, however, that the crisis facing universities corresponds with the expansion and increasing importance of knowledge to governments and economies.'

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←←←
What's in a Name?
Rod Beecham

The Trouble with
Tasers

Emma Ryan

→→→
The Trouble with Tasers
Emma Ryan

Emma Ryan is an Assistant Lecturer in Criminology at Monash University. She is currently completing a doctoral thesis on sublethal weapons use by police in Australia.

The time is ripe for more informed inquiry into taser use in Australia

Disturbing footage from Western Australia of a handcuffed Indigenous man being tasered thirteen times while in custody emerged just a day before a man died in New South Wales, tasered in the chest after allegedly running at police holding two knives. Another man was left in a coma after falling down a flight of stairs at a holiday resort on the New South Wales central coast. He allegedly confronted police with a broken wine glass, and was capsicum sprayed and tasered prior to the fall. Police were also injured during the incident.

While these events represent extreme worst case scenarios, they also bring to bear important questions stemming from taser use. What should the thresholds for use be? Can tasers reduce the use of lethal force, and is this their primary function? How can we ensure police are made accountable for taser use? Do tasers really help keep police safe? The answers are far from simple and it seems the time is ripe for more informed inquiry into taser (or other stun gun) use in Australia.

Tasers are handheld weapons that shoot two small barbs into clothing or skin. The barbs are attached to electrical wires that emit a patented waveform, causing the person to lose control of their muscles and fall to the ground. Tasers can also be used in 'drive stun' mode, involving direct application of electrodes to the skin, causing severe pain and often burns, but no muscular incapacitation.

In the decade tasers have been used in Australia, they have worked their way from carriage by special response police only to general duties police in four states—Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales. Victoria is currently conducting a trial; South Australia is in the midst of rolling the weapons out (for carriage in cars only); and Tasmania, after conducting a trial, has recently decided not to deploy the weapons beyond specialists but does use them in prisons, as does Western Australia.

Taser use has been the focus of several official inquiries in Australia, and also internationally. The Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission, New South Wales Ombudsman, Northern Territory Police, Western Australia Police, the Western Australian Crime and Corruption Commission and the Victorian Office of Police Integrity have all compiled reports on Australia's experience so far. There is general consensus that while tasers do have a role in policing, they also have a significant tendency to be used for 'compliance' or 'control' purposes, in the absence of grave bodily threat to officers (as was demonstrated in the WA footage). The Victorian OPI report stands out, reflecting a relatively low level of taser use in five years of carriage by special response units. Trends suggest that it is when tasers move beyond specialist squads to becoming a general issue weapon they are most likely to be used in a manner disproportionate to the threat faced.

> **The role played by tasers in sudden in-custody deaths is hotly debated: the type of electricity emitted by these weapons leaves very little forensic markers on a body, and we do not know enough about why people have died following taser use in Australia.**

Recommendations across Australia have resulted in tightening of policies across the country indicating that initial police procedures and directives were manifestly inadequate. Arguably, this was a product of the prominent (and highly inappropriate) role played by the taser manufacturer in supplying information to police about the weapons' safety. Police are slowly learning that although tasers might offer a tool for gaining compliance, as a society we remain wedded to the principle of minimum force in policing and proportionality in cases of self defence.

The current debate is flavoured strongly by the view that tasers are a necessary tool for patrolling the dangerous streets. But both empirical and anecdotal evidence shows that police do not routinely face life threatening scenarios, and when they do it is only rarely a random event. The high frequency of taser usage (particularly from Western Australia where tasers were drawn 1013 times in 2009) suggest that either police have lost sight of the principle of proportionality and are using their electric weapons to gain compliance, regardless of the presence of serious threat; police are facing serious injury more often in Western Australia; or the taser has greater utility than its 'less lethal' tag suggests. The figures far exceed the number of times a firearm would be drawn or fired in a year.

Statistics are frequently cited as evidence of taser success, but clearly show that tasers are not being used solely against the armed and dangerous. For example, when tasers were pulled from the holster in Western Australia in 2009, they were only displayed (and not discharged) 443 times. In these cases, presumably, suspects have submitted before the need for deployment—tasers are frightening weapons. The 'display only' figures are even higher in New South Wales. In the two years since October 2008, of 973 taser uses, 69 per cent are reported to have been display only. Evidence has also emerged that during the trial period in New South Wales two-thirds of people presented with a taser were unarmed. Victorian police have displayed a taser only three times during the first three months of the current trial, with no firings so far. Admittedly, in the current milieu, its quite likely they are being extra cautious, but even specialist police in Victoria used them only eighty-three times between 2004 and 2009.

These statistics reflect the vastly different thresholds that have been established for taser use in the various states, some making the weapons available for general duties police and others restricting them to special response police (so far). The numbers also reveal the flaws in the argument that tasers are all about replacing lethal force, which is the basis on which much of the public accepted, and even demanded, their introduction.

Tasers are fundamentally limited in their capacity to replace firearms. This is because they sometimes fail (if barbs miss or don't make sufficient contact). This fact is poorly reflected in the public debate, although it is certainly present in police policies, which almost universally caution police that a taser used against an armed subject must be backed up by a firearm. This is what most likely occurred in the NSW fatality. So while the taser did replace the firearm in this instance, it is not correct to argue that it saved the officers' lives. Tasers, ideally, are intended to save suspects' lives, not officers'—that is the role of firearms.

And tasers have saved suspects lives: I have seen evidence of several cases where it's likely that firearms would have been used in the absence of a taser, often involving self-harm or suicide prevention (though I would note that there is no current knowledge on the psychological impact of taser use in such situations, or the long-term outcomes). But there have also been deaths following the use of tasers. This has happened four times (and some would say five) so far in Australia. In all of these cases tasers, arguably, were not the most appropriate tactical choice.

It is for the coroner to decide what role the taser played in the most recent death—but it should be noted that product warnings caution against deployment to the chest area, and research suggests that deployment across the heart is risky. The role played by tasers in sudden in-custody deaths is hotly debated: the type of electricity emitted by these weapons leaves very little forensic markers on a body, and at the end of the day we do not know enough about why people have died following taser use in Australia—with one important exception.

Andrew Bornen, a sixteen-year-old Queenslander, died after he lay on the road, responding to a taser being pointed at him. He was unarmed and not threatening police, and immediately complied with orders to get on the ground. A woman approaching in her car could not see Andrew on the road, or the police waving for her to stop. She ran him over, killing him almost instantly. In this tragic example, the mere presentation of the taser culminated in death.

In the context of the over-policing of Indigenous Australians and other minorities, this 'fear factor' is an alarming aspect of taser use. It will come as no surprise to police observers that Indigenous people represent 30 per cent of those targeted with tasers in Western Australia since 2007. Complaints of misuse are emerging. Tasers were allegedly used during the Palm Island Riots/Resistance following Mulrunji Doomadgee's death in custody in 2004. We ought to seriously consider the impact of taser use on police and Indigenous community relations into the future.

Tasers need to be better understood, by police and the public. There are plenty of cautionary tales from overseas to inform us as we move into a whole new era of policing with technology. There have been calls for national guidelines, which is a step in the right direction. We must, however, keep pushing for transparency and strict accountability processes. No matter how strict the guidelines, it seems they will always be flouted. This is a sad reality of policing, and one that should certainly be borne in mind when endorsing the general carriage of tasers.

←←←
The Trouble
with Tasers

Emma Ryan

Growing Up
on Nero Street

Mark Furlong

→→→
Growing Up on
Nero Street

Mark Furlong

Mark Furlong lectures in Social Work at La Trobe University.

On the destruction of childhood

A neighbour works as a health professional and passed on the following story. One of her patients had attended an appointment with her four- or five-year-old son. During this consultation, and with his back towards the adults, the boy removed something from his mother's handbag and hid this item in his pocket. The practitioner noticed this and, assuming a consensus on parenting policy, a little later asked the boy's mother, 'Did you notice your boy taking something out of your bag and hiding it in his pocket?'

'Yes, I saw Tom do that,' the mother replied. 'It was a chocolate bar, but I am not going to say anything.' Somewhat taken aback, the chiropractor replied, 'Really, I don't understand. Why not say something?' The mother then calmly said, 'It is a jungle out there, a dog-against-dog fight. As early as possible in life, it's much better he learns to recognise his opportunities.' My neighbour, also a mother, saw the boy's action and even more so the mother's response as horrifying. 'I'm not going to say anything, but I reckon it's likely this kid is going to end up as some kind of psychopath.'

That two educated, motivated parents could take positions which diverge so sharply brings into focus how parenting, like childhood itself, has become a hot zone, an intensely fractious arena. In this uncertain place many parents are struggling to navigate their way through the key 'policy' questions that have to be plotted: *Do I offer my kids the kind of unconditional back-up* (as if this is equated with love) *that I never had, or is it better to hold the line and be positive about saying no, to keep some distance and take care not to be too affirming?*

> **The young women—girls?—who have sailed their yachts to public prominence, albeit with different outcomes, have been termed 'extreme kids'. These high achieving, high risk minors have been encouraged, even hot-housed, by their parents to dare to do what is not only objectively dangerous but what until very recently has been culturally prohibited as inappropriate for children.**

Supporting the latter view are those, like Dr Carol Craig, CEO of the United States' Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing, who argue too much praise is creating a sense of entitlement and self-centredness that will create grown-ups who will be 'terrible relationship partners, parents and employees'. Marshalled to advance the cause of the opposing side are a suite of formidable experts, an aggregation that lists arguments from a diverse range of authorities. These sources include the Dalai Lama ('The most important thing you can give your children is love') and a phalanx of high-profile psychotherapists, such as Alice Miller, who argues there is a 'wounded child' within all those who have problems in their adult lives (and isn't that all of us?). Perhaps incited by the logic of Miller's view, the sense of indignant grievance many current parents have come to harbour about their own childhoods inclines them towards the view that sparing the praise spoils the child.

Yet, this account of there being only two sides to the argument is misleading. For example, the mum in the above vignette is not being sentimental, nor would she in any way see herself as indulging her children. On the contrary, her point is that her son has to learn to be competent—to be tough enough and opportunistic enough to survive in a free-trade zone.

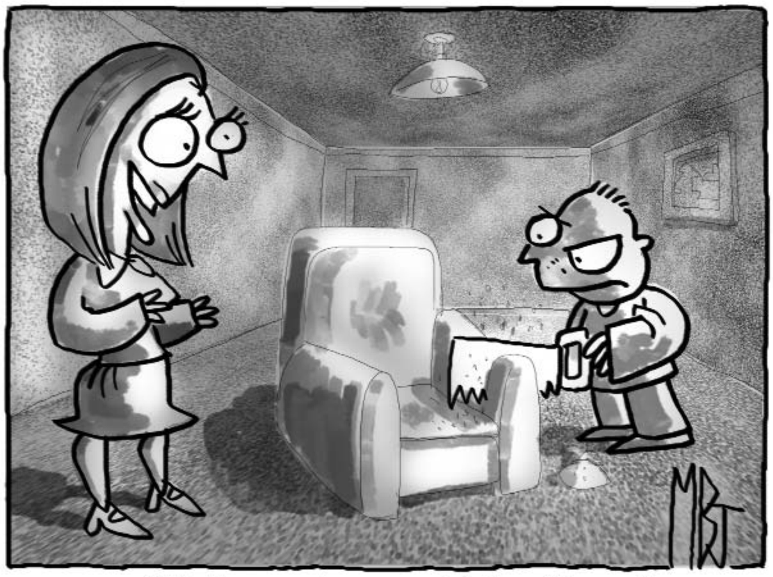
This logic is resonant; it chimes with the times in powerful ways, but it is not an attitude that is new. For example, parents living in rough neighbourhoods often believed that their children needed to grow up tough—if they didn't they would lack the wherewithal to be able take care of themselves. It was thought sensible to allow, perhaps even encourage, a degree of violence in the home for the same reason. Similarly, isn't it best to prepare children for the tough realities of an existence organised around the values of the marketplace? Robert Oppenheimer, the brilliant physicist and atom bomb pioneer, was reported to have said, 'My childhood did not prepare me for the fact that the world is full of cruel and bitter things. It gave me no normal, healthy way to be a bastard.' And that's where the policy issue sits: if a child is to end up well-adjusted, is it necessary to be socialised to be so hard-boiled as to be a kind of acceptable bastard?

In so far as this reality requires one to be a 'reflexive strategiser'—the term high-profile sociologist Lord Anthony Giddens uses to positively describe what might otherwise be labelled sneakily self-advancing—it follows that our kids have to learn this competence. A question then arises: at what age is it developmentally healthy to be a strategiser, a thoughtful arranger of opportunities?

Controversy recently broke out over the propriety of allowing sixteen-year-old Jessica Watson to sail around the world. On one side was Dr Simon Crisp, an expert psychologist from Monash University. After Jessica's arrival back in Australia Crisp wrote in *The Age* that the community 'should allow soon-to-be adult children to take risks' and that Jessica and her parents were modelling the importance of young people learning about ambition and risk-taking. Enveloped in the public euphoria occasioned by Jessica's success, Dr Crisp's tone was quietly, but clearly, triumphant.

The alternative position is to sceptically view such heroic success stories. Eulogising single winners masks the possibility that childhood as a period of play, of complex and ambiguous innocence, is being destroyed by the depiction of young people as 'busting-to-get-out mini-adult entrepreneurs', junior citizens who could be Richard Branson or Laurel Jackson success stories if only those who inhibit them would back off. As Valerie Krips noted in *Arena Magazine* 103, understandings of childhood are discourses with material effects. The emerging depiction of childhood as a site of entrepreneurship is a case in point.

More, the neo-liberal parading of the exceptional success story obscures the fact that the great majority of the children who dare to attempt what Jessica Watson did will fail. For example, Abby Sunderland, another sixteen-year-old solo round-the-world sailor, had her yacht disabled in mountainous seas in the middle of the Indian Ocean and had to be (expensively) rescued. Poignantly, Abby Sunderland's near death experience occurred just weeks after 'our Jessica' completed her mission. And it isn't hard to believe that Abby, like all the other 'failures', will forever feel less than a winner.



"..That's very entrepreneurial of you Timmy..."

The young women—girls?—who have sailed their yachts to public prominence, albeit with different outcomes, have been termed 'extreme kids'. Other members of this growing cadre include, as Lisa White recently discussed in *The Age*, pre-teenage matadors in Mexico and the thirteen-year-old boy from California who this year became the youngest ever person to climb Mt Everest. There is a new candidate for this club too, Dutch fourteen-year-old Laura Dekker. To the delight of her parents, in July this year a Dutch court overturned an earlier ruling that Laura could not attempt to become the youngest round-the-world sailor. These high achieving, high risk minors have been encouraged, even hot-housed, by their parents to dare to do what is not only objectively dangerous (climb high mountains, fight bulls) but what until very recently has been culturally prohibited as inappropriate for children.

At first glimpse the extreme kids phenomenon is startling. This shock tends to quickly fade as media familiarity leaches out this initial charge. For example, although it features squads of eight to twelve-year-old children performing advanced, graded culinary tasks in an intensely scrutinised environment, *Junior Master Chef* has rocketed up the TV ratings. Rather than being seen as exploitative, even ghoulish, in its apparent pro-social enthusiasm, *Junior Master Chef* is seen as 'inspiring'—which is the highest form of praise on a dying planet.

In the classic text *The History of Childhood* (1974) Philippe Ariès detailed the ways in which the construction of childhood has radically changed over the centuries. For example, as children in poor families were once understood to be part of an economic unit, it was not thought cruel to send young children to work. That is, these entities were not viewed as children in the way educated persons now understand young people to be. Due to the dissemination of the theories of infant development, particularly those of Jean Piaget and, to a lesser extent, John Bowlby and his associates, 'educated' people have come to know that children do not cognitively and emotionally process events as adults do. We now know children must progress through stages of development.

In the time when the child was considered an adult, albeit of a smaller scale, it was self-evident that there was inside the child a kind of homunculus, a rational puppet-master who pulled the strings and called the action. Although earlier figures like Rousseau and Locke disputed this view, in Western nations this view only gave way during the 20th century. The wholesale demise of the view that children are mini-adults opened the way for a

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Growing Up on Nero Street

Mark Furlong

range of different practices and theories—for example, that the role of play in children's development should be valorised and encouraged through non-instrumental activities; and that sociality, spontaneous reveries and non-goal directed games have a profound importance in children's development.

Yet right now children are being intensively encouraged to be aware of their actions and the consequences of their actions, and to be enthusiastic students of time-management as a value and a practice. Never has a generation been told so often and so loudly to make good sensible choices, to know what their 'priorities' are and that it is sensible to plan for, and stick to, the path that will lead to the achievement of their personal goals. In such ways we are inciting the adult within the child to be the master.

It is, of course, acknowledged that children are not mini-adults, that it is inappropriate to send them down the coalmines, or allow them to be exploited as chimney-sweeps (or carpet makers). Yet a new specification has been introduced: children have to be knowing subjects. Therefore, competent parents and good schools will hot-house the young so that they become adept at being aware of, and strategising about, their opportunities. Unfortunately, this idealised specification tends to lock in inadvertent consequences. At least one is the sexualisation of young females, another the commercialisation of childhood in general. Knowing consumers understand there is no free lunch: you must have something to trade to be able to get what you want. And, as everybody now knows, sex sells.

Even the words 'sex' and 'sexy' have become synonymous with what is catchy and attractive, what is seen to have value and currency. We all remember how critics said the British government had 'sexed-up' intelligence reports on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; and what is fashionable and fresh, like Apple's iPhone, is said to be 'sexy'. It is smart to look sexy. To be a knowing commodity is to be 'it with a bit'. But, of course, that is only part of the plot line of the larger critical story.

The larger story is the argument that children require an environment grounded in ethics and the importance of reciprocity, that it is developmentally sound to have a context with a good-enough quality of containment. Such a context conflicts with an emphasis on amoral choice, which is the value synonymous with the practice of opportunistic strategising. If this consistency is not maintained, if the prevailing conditions are such that the stipulation of strategising is set as a core attribute for developmental health, it can be expected there will be de-regulations across a spectrum of internal and inter-personal practices.

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Punishing the Most Disadvantaged

John Enticott

Punishing
the Most Disadvantaged

John Enticott

John Enticott has worked in a variety of community housing settings over the past thirty years.

Australia's social services demean those who are most reliant on them

Income policies of Australian governments over more than twenty years have been increasingly harsh on Social Security beneficiaries, particularly the long-term unemployed. In 1988 an unemployed single person with no children was paid $10,600 per year. In that same year pensioners were paid $11,250. The $650 annual difference represented a gap of approximately 6 per cent. Fast forward to 2010 and the Newstart Allowance for a single person with no children is $12,212 per year while an annual pension payment for a single person with no children is $17,118. The difference between the two payments is now 40 per cent.

Over the intervening twenty-two years there has been a bipartisan political approach, under the guise of improving the lot of pensioners but rather to punish and break the spirit of Australia's long-term unemployed. This approach has resulted in those on allowances being forced to live on a level of income that is well below the poverty line when housing costs are included. If the person is young or underemployed the impact can be even greater as income and asset tests for beneficiaries are harsher than for other income supports. As a result, some commentators are highlighting the plight of this new underclass on allowances and, increasingly, the growing numbers of 'working poor'.

Australia was once less sophisticated in openly punishing the most disadvantaged in the community but more recently euphemistic names like Welfare to Work, and Mutual Obligation have been devised by government to create an image of supporting the unemployed back into the workforce while in reality developing a community impression of the unemployed as less deserving. This is echoed by a society that, while seeing itself as protecting the 'fair go' culture, sees to it that those outside the workforce are punished for their non-participation. Throughout this process those on allowances have had their incomes cut by 40 per cent relative to the 'deserving poor' on pensions; sole parents are being forced into the workforce when their youngest child turns six, condemning hundreds of thousands of children to grow up returning from school to an empty house; one hour's employment a week is considered fully employed to manipulate statistics; and those with a disability, able to work fifteen hours per week, are being forced to take a 40 per cent drop in income as they are transferred from a pension to an allowance.

> **If the person is young or underemployed the impact can be even greater, as income and asset tests for beneficiaries are harsher than for other income supports.**

In February 2009 the Australia Institute, (AI) in a submission to the Henry Review, called for the 2009 budget to 'have, as one of its aims, an easing of conditions for the unemployed who are subject to sub-poverty-line payment rates and a stigmatising and onerous asset and income-test regime'. The argument was based on economic grounds, pointing out that to increase the income of this group would stimulate the economy.

Income shortage and the associated sub-poverty-line lifestyle is not the only impact that Australians on benefits are forced to endure by current and past governments. Today the single allowance for beneficiaries is 58 per cent ($235) of the weekly poverty line for a single person ($402).

Across Australia the number of households with little or no access to affordable rental housing is growing at an alarming rate. According to the National Housing Supply Council (NHSC), 'some 445,000 lower income households renting privately were in "housing stress" (paying more than 30 per cent of their gross income on rent) ... around 170,000 paid more than half their gross household income in rent'. While not all these renters are unemployed, for many of those who are, access to any housing is an almost unattainable goal.

The NHSC goes on to point out the effect the number of higher income earners unable to purchase a home but remaining in rental accommodation is having on affordable rental access for those on lower incomes. It estimates that there is a shortfall of almost 500,000 affordable rental properties for those in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution, meaning access for unemployed households is extremely difficult.

The private rental market can be likened to a river system. If those able to access ownership do not leave the system the river backs up and flow stops. In private rental, when higher income earners continue to occupy affordable rental housing, lower income households must pay a higher proportion of their income in rent to compete. For many of the unemployed, private rental has become unaffordable and unattainable and public or community housing is the only alternative to homelessness.

Increasingly, though, access to public housing is restricted to those with more complex needs than merely requiring a home and being unable to obtain rental in the private market. State housing authorities have sold down their assets to a point where these authorities' market share has almost halved as a proportion of the rental market over the past twenty-five years. Unless an individual on an allowance can demonstrate to the satisfaction of a state housing authority that their needs go beyond the need for shelter, state housing authorities across Australia are refusing to house people who are on benefits. Although many unemployed are experiencing unemployment for longer periods, unemployment is regarded by governments to be a transition, and waiting periods for public housing are extending out to ten or more years for most. Having abrogated responsibility for state-provided housing, governments are increasingly relying on community housing organisations to provide housing outcomes for those on allowances.

Community housing organisations (CHOs) are increasingly expected by government to fund the construction of affordable housing, where they are expected to borrow up to 30 per cent of the cost of housing. Meeting the cost of borrowings as a rent payment (adding up to $150 per week onto rent) is all too often beyond the means of those on allowances. As a result, the cost of financing these housing projects effectively excludes tenants on incomes below the poverty line.

We live in a country that has swallowed the division of the deserving and non-deserving poor, even when many of the poor have been excluded from the workforce due to restructuring over the past three decades, which has obliterated millions of jobs. In other words, those who find themselves unemployed are vilified by politicians and the community for not accessing employment when we have systematically removed employment opportunities from the market.

Upon securing the position of prime minister in June 2010, Julia Gillard was widely reported as believing in government that rewards those who work the hardest, not those who complain the loudest. Well no one works harder than those forced by our country to survive well below the poverty line. None complain less than this group. They do not demand water for themselves that is needed for the environment. They are the true battlers in this country and we continue to beat them down, cut their incomes and starve their children of the opportunities we demand for ourselves. It is hard to see a time when Australia will live up to the image it has of itself as a country of the fair go and as the Prime Minister would have us believe, a country of citizens that 'stands by their neighbours'.

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Punishing the Most Disadvantaged

John Enticott

Brumby's Quarry Vision

Taegen Edwards

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Brumby's Quarry Vision

Taegen Edwards

Taegen Edwards is a member of Yarra Climate Action Now, an independent community group based in the inner Melbourne suburbs of the City of Yarra. She works as a Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

Brumby's green marketing strategy belies the substance of his politics

John Brumby stands looking upwards into the distance, squinting and baring his nice straight teeth. Behind him is a giant octagonal configuration of mirrors reflecting the sun's rays against a backdrop of perfect blue sky. They call this greenie porn: pictures of big shiny solutions for the energy dilemmas of our time, like this one taken at a large-scale solar power plant.

Cashing in on this appeal is an advertisement in an inner-Melbourne local paper: 'John Brumby and Labor—Leading Australia on Climate Change'. There are some dot points about making Victoria the 'Solar State'; about spending $650 million on climate change and renewable energy programs; $10 billion towards unspecified new investment and jobs; a target for emissions cuts of 20 per cent by 2020 on 2000 levels; and a staged closure of Hazelwood power station. Interesting for a state government that has overseen steady increases in greenhouse gas emissions over the eleven years it has held power.

There is no questioning the motivation here. Following the 2010 federal election (in which Julia Gillard's strategy on climate policy was to duck and deflect), the large swing to the Greens across the country, and especially in Victoria, resulted in that party gaining the balance of power in the Senate and claiming the lower house seat of Melbourne. Facing an election of his own on 27 November, with four seats at risk of being lost to the Greens, Brumby has made no secret that he has a different strategy in mind. On 26 July, as Abbott's and Gillard's campaigns were already in full swing, he released his Climate Change White Paper.

This long-awaited statement of Victoria's climate policy agenda looked fresh: first, because it was in radical contrast with the federal climate change policy vacuum; second, because it actually did reflect a new approach from the Brumby government. Previous drafts focusing almost exclusively on 'adaptation' had had to be pulped as carbon prices went on and off the national agenda, and Brumby finally decided emissions reductions could not be left to higher forces.

Unfortunately, Brumby's apparent climate policy stance has very little to do with the substance of his policies. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence of politics-as-usual, which continues to fall distressingly short of the task of altering our progress along a path to ecological disaster. It boils down to the question of how we might assess leadership on climate change. If it were a question of relativity we might have reason to congratulate the Brumby government for taking some steps forward. The problem is that they are baby steps, and can be explained more easily by a fear of losing votes to the Greens than any real comprehension of climate change science.

The capacity of politics-as-usual to live up to the task of avoiding dangerous climate change has been questioned before and found wanting. In their 2008 assessment of the dramatic, widening gap between the response that climate science demands and the response actually offered, David Spratt and Philip Sutton in *Climate Code Red* pointed to the short-term, adversarial and incremental mode of politics conventional in Western nations like ours. This mode is 'steeped in a culture of compromise that is fearful of deep, quick change—which suggests it is incapable of managing the transition [to a safe-climate economy] at the necessary speed'. Nothing has changed except the amount of evidence in support of this statement.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Australian approach to coal, with politics-as-usual meaning a refusal to deviate from the 'quarry vision' so aptly described by Guy Pearse in his 2009 Quarterly Essay, *Quarry Vision: Coal, Climate Change and the End of the Resources Boom*. This is an ingrained mentality, shared by the vast majority of politicians, the business sector and many citizens: that Australia is a nation dependent both for domestic electricity and export income on digging up, shipping out and burning coal.

While the imperative to break with this mentality could not be stronger, for reasons ranging from the moral to the pragmatic, there is no indication that this is occurring where it matters most. Witness QR National proudly boasting their coal freight activities and asking that Australians invest in the idea that this will continue indefinitely. Witness federal Energy Minister Martin Ferguson feigning ignorance when presented with the prospect of the need to draw up transition plans for coal workers. Meanwhile ABARE proudly reports that Australian coal exports reached record levels in the December quarter 2009 and projects that exports will rise by 88 per cent between 2004/2005 and 2029/2030.

But what of Premier Brumby and his latest advertisements? Should we be grateful that he did not pose next to a big pile of coal and some smokestacks? Unfortunately there is nothing to suggest that Brumby's own quarry vision is wavering, beyond his apparent recognition that it may not be the best thing to emphasise in an election context.

They call this greenie porn: pictures of big shiny solutions for the energy dilemmas of our time.

A key element of Brumby's climate policy platform is a commitment to shutting down a quarter of production at Hazelwood—Australia's most polluting coal-fired power station—over the next four years. Considering it was due to close in 2009 but had its life extended in 2005 by then Labor Premier Steve Bracks for an extra few decades, this is hardly a position worth celebrating. It should have gone completely off-line by now. With Victoria's potential for baseload solar thermal power it is possible to replace *all* of Hazelwood's generating capacity with renewable energy within the same four year timeframe. However, as it stands under Brumby's plan, a quarter of Hazelwood's current output will probably be replaced with coal power from another source.

Even worse than this, and certainly not a lead item on Brumby's climate policy agenda, is the proposal currently waiting for approval from EPA Victoria to build a brand new 600 megawatt coal-fired power station near Morwell in Victoria's Latrobe Valley. The HRL Dual Gas proposal has the support of both the Brumby government, which has committed $50 million, and the Commonwealth Government ($100 million). They claim that the use of synthetic gas (from the drying and gasification of brown coal) and natural gas at the new plant will ensure the emissions intensity is lower than any other coal plants operating in Victoria.

Again, this is nothing to get excited about. While the HRL Dual Gas plant would indeed help to bring Victoria into line with other coal plants in Australia by producing emissions slightly below the level of a typical black coal power station, the emissions intensity of the plant would still be almost double the OECD average. One wonders why the Brumby government would make their own target to reduce 20 per cent of emissions by 2020 that much harder by committing to a new coal power development that will increase emissions and lock in reliance on coal for years to come.

Further evidence that the Brumby government has expansion rather than curtailment in mind for Victoria's coal industry emerged in September 2009. At that time Victorian Energy Minister Peter Batchelor was reported to be championing a proposal by Australian-based company Exergen to mine, dry and export 12 million tonnes of brown coal annually to India. Confidential cabinet documents obtained the next month by *The Age* showed that this was only the tip of the iceberg, with the Brumby government considering a competitive tender process to sell off billions of tonnes of Latrobe Valley brown coal reserves to companies looking to open up new coal export markets overseas. Premier Brumby himself said that given Australia exports oil, gas, black coal and uranium, he saw no reason why Victoria should not export brown coal. Yet by December 2009 the export deals had been shelved, seemingly because the run in the media and backlash from environment groups had ignited fears of broader voter disapproval. However, this has not been ruled out, and one should ask whether the plan to expand coal exports might emerge again after a Labor election victory.

Premier Brumby may not be all he is cracking himself up to be on climate change, but how much does it matter to Victorian voters? The gamble is that green message will beat the substance, which is probably a safe bet in this age of marketing supremacy. The strategy is clever enough to sway people without the time or inclination to consider the details.

Brumby's approach is likely to mean that NGOs, community groups and individuals concerned about climate change will have to work harder than they did during the recent federal election campaign where it was easy to show that Gillard had nothing to offer on climate issues. The task is to build public understanding so that Brumby and others in positions of power can be judged on just how far their policies are really intended to secure a safe climate future. a

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Brumby's Quarry Vision
Taegen Edwards

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Response to Lattas and Morris' 'Blinkered Anthropology'
Francesca Merlan

Francesca Merlan is Professor of Anthropology at the Australian National University. She has over thirty years' familiarity with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, and wider Australian Indigenous issues and policy.

debate

Response to Lattas and Morris' 'Blinkered Anthropology'

Francesca Merlan

In *Arena Magazine* no. 107, Andrew Lattas and Barry Morris attribute to me the view that the current situation of Indigenous people, however one interprets it, is due to their 'culture'. Nowhere have I said anything vaguely similar to this. One of my concerns has been precisely to show how totalising, bounded and fixed notions of 'culture' fail to help us understand the relations and outcomes of Indigenous Australians with others. Another has been to argue (for example, in my book *Caging the Rainbow*) that to hold Indigenous people to imagined standards of 'authenticity' is to impose double jeopardy upon them: to colonise them and radically alter the conditions of their existence, then also demand that they remain as they were.

Concerning the NT Intervention, my experience in remote, as well as not so remote, Aboriginal social settings is that certain unwelcome conditions are widespread. These include alcohol and substance abuse, and related violence; and their consequences for child and youth welfare. Health conditions are notorious. In many remote communities very few people survive to old age, while younger ones have multiple bypasses, complex operations, ongoing dialysis, and batteries of pills to swallow every day. There are other kinds of problems that do not lend themselves to such clear-cut description, including social involution and disoccupation in the face of what are often overwhelmingly difficult social conditions. None of these problems can be simplistically attributed to Indigenous 'culture'. But there is a question, once one has had experience of these concentrated forms of neglect, problems and special vulnerabilities, whether one thinks that action should be taken. Many Indigenous people do. And so, in my own way, do I.

While advocating such action, I am fully aware of the limitations and difficulties that always attend such efforts. I can accept that others may regard those as prohibitive, or oppose such efforts in principle. I find it harder to accept that Lattas and Morris should be so intolerant of other views than their own on this question.

In thinking as I do, I am not 'hiding' behind any 'leading Aboriginal intellectual brokers'. Do I refer to Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson, not because they have particular opinions and concerns, but just because they are Indigenous? If that is the suggestion, it seems insulting all round.

Let me also be clear that there are many aspects of the NT Intervention that I do not condone. I am not a supporter of the Intervention as launched, but of the idea that considered long-term intervention is needed. I have in mind something less flamboyant, much longer-term, much less geared to political cycles and impression management, much more collaborative and Indigenously-directed, and more attuned to existing social patterns and dispositions than we have yet had.

Yet, even with its flaws, I have seen evidence of some results of the existing Intervention that seem positive; for example, many Top End Aboriginal women with whom I have discussed the introduction of Basicscards do have positive views of this 'income management', while disapproving of the government's non-consultative launching of the Intervention. Nor do people simply succumb, even with such developments as income management, to being policed into 'mainstream models' of family life: they lend Basicscards to their sisters and beyond, so that sometimes it is an interesting question where any particular person's Basicscard actually is.

But these are variations on the main question: whether one thinks that some action is warranted to try to address social issues and problems, or whether one thinks that this is, and must necessarily always be, an extension and expansion of the 'carceral state' with its 'systems of surveillance, discipline and pastoral care'. Can good come from the state? What terms of evaluation might be applied to state involvement? Lattas and Morris have never been clear about whether they think any explicit steps should be taken about any of the kinds of things I mention above, or how—with what combinations of state, Indigenous, and other agency—they think this might take place.

Aboriginal people had already become increasingly and thoroughly enmeshed in state apparatus even before the current Intervention. Many basic things about the resourcing of their lives—money transfers, health care provision, housing and so on—tie them, like the rest of us, to regulations and provisions of the state. There is, I agree, no call to enmesh them further in it. But anything we can call Indigenous 'self-determination' will develop under conditions of inter-relationship of Aboriginal people with other Australian people and institutions, not in complete isolation from them.

I also would agree that many of the Intervention provisions constitute a more thorough-going reach into the innards of domestic life than is true for most of the rest of us. The very school meals program that Lattas and Morris cite as an example from my discussion paper 'More Than Rights' (accessible online at ‹www.inside.org.au/more-than-rights›) represents just such an inroad into domestic organisation. Yet Lattas and Morris defend that program unconditionally, and rebuke me for suggesting that it would best be temporally limited. Why do I say it should be? Consider that such programs were a staple of the assimilation era, in most of the very communities where the meals programs now once again operate under the Intervention. Such programs were then, in the 1960s, conducted with exactly the primary purpose Lattas and Morris attribute to the current Intervention—to instill mainstream cultural dispositions and habits. They appear to have been only partly successful in that, but also to have created conditions which did not foster, and maybe even suppressed, the emergence of domestic regimes involving regular meal preparation.

Finally, Lattas and Morris are 'scandalised' by what they see as the use of anthropology's familiarity with Indigenous cultures to legitimise the 'legal alterity' of Indigenous people. This refers to my statement that 'universalist understandings of rights can be problematic in their application to people whose social lives differ from the mainstream'. I should have gone further and said that the application of universal human rights is often contentious with respect to the mainstream as well—but perhaps particularly contentious with respect to people, like many Indigenous Australians, who do not themselves think in terms of universal human rights, and who may act and propose kinds of solutions to concerns in their lives that do not conform to universalist principles.

This is not to say that we should not have and value human rights; and it is certainly not to advocate relegation of Aboriginal people outside their reach. However, there are often complex questions around the realisation of rights, and the reconciliation of certain rights with others. For example, how, in practice, is equality of right to life, liberty and security of person (as per Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) to be realised? There are regulations in mainstream communities to support and prioritise certain kinds of value and activity over others; so, for example, the rights of children to be tended may have to be prioritised over the rights of parents to do as they want. This is familiar territory: we all recognise obligations to protect the vulnerable. But my point is that ways in which Indigenous people may choose to identify and realise norms may differ from those in wider Australian society.

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Response to Lattas and Morris' 'Blinkered Anthropology'
Francesca Merlan

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A New Political Geometry
Lorenzo Veracini

Lorenzo Veracini is a QEII Fellow at the Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.

election forum

A New Political Geometry

Lorenzo Veracini

New governmental lines were drawn by the 2010 election outcome, even as the results seemed static

We were told that this was a boring campaign contested by unremarkable rivals who could not or would not concentrate on real political issues. We were also told that this was an election characterised by substantial convergence on policy and stances. It was true, of course. And yet this was also an election fought by two resilient rivals over essentially incompatible visions for Australia: one envisages a country primarily based on mineral extraction; the other aims to diversify its productive capacities. Taxing resource extraction *promotes* high added value production; not taxing it *depresses* high added value production. We could call them the Norway and Saudi Arabia models—both rely on resource extraction but tax profits differently. This contradiction has both geographical and generational elements: geographically, it is a contradiction between peripheries and industrial cores; generationally, it pits those who rely primarily on their investments against those who rely on their salary. I find the contradiction between rent and production compelling, not boring.

The majority of the votes went to the Left; the seats went to the Right (when last checked the AEC it was 50.12 per cent against 49.88 per cent; in first preferences it was 49.75 per cent against 43.31 per cent). Considering the electoral system and the allocation of electoral boundaries, this is not an impossible outcome. Even a hung parliament is not unprecedented. Analysis focused on this specific outcome and on the role that a number of independents now play in providing stability to the government but this makes things tricky not inconceivable. What *is* unprecedented, however, is that the outcome for the House of Representatives and for the Senate are fundamentally incompatible, and that a hung parliament is matched by a split result: the independents who hold the balance of power in one house are not the Greens who hold the balance of power in the other. It's not a hung parliament, it's a hung parliamentary system (like many schizoid phenomena, there is a delayed onset and the new Senate will be instated in July 2011). That the Senate result has not been the subject of analysis is uncanny—come on, people, we were given two ballot papers.

Moreover, a permanently triangular system is not a bilateral one. A third, conservative/reformist party situated somewhere between Left and Right is not a new phenomenon in a Westminster system. Hybrid Left–Right third parties, however, routinely confirm rather than supersede the system's fundamental binarism. The Greens, on the other hand, cannot be considered a hybrid conservative/reformist political formation and are positioned to the Left of the political spectrum. *This* is unprecedented, and it is a novel political geometry that must be accounted for. The Greens' result should be actually seen as a double achievement: they have reached the tipping point that ensures meaningful parliamentary representation—a vote for the Greens is no longer 'wasted'—and they now hold the balance of power in one of the houses. Each of these in its own right would have been a remarkable shift, but it is their combination that radically transforms political scenarios.

The Labor Party got hammered. It lost votes to the Left, to the Right, and to informal/invalid voting; it lost votes for not doing things (for example, not introducing the ETS) and for doing them (such as introducing the mining tax). It was in the complicated situation of having to simultaneously prevent votes from returning to the Liberals and from going to the Greens. Action in one direction would compromise the other. Despite this unfavourable predicament, Julia Gillard proved to be a resourceful campaigner. She was able to reverse what had at one point consolidated into a clearly detectable adverse momentum—a major electoral achievement. (Ironically, her strategists had opted for a short campaign hoping to minimise the damage but in the end they wished she had a little bit longer.) She managed to compete effectively against opponents to her left, to her right, and from *within* Labor. (Of course, highlighting someone's professionalism does not mean that one agrees with her politics—I don't.)

And yet, even if it makes it vulnerable to substantial electoral raiding, the new political geometry paradoxically reconfigures Labor as the only possible provider of stable governance. If previously Labor was *one of two* mainstream political parties, now it is in practical terms the only one. A deal with a number of independents is a necessary but not sufficient condition for stability, and only Labor is in a position to cut a deal with some in one house and with others in the other. As far as the new political geometry goes, it's not one side and the other and someone in between, it's one side and the other and Labor in between. (Those who voted for the conservative Coalition to prevent an ETS have contributed to creating a situation in which a new ETS has now become *one condition of possibility* for the country's governance.)

Tony Abbott could have constituted a minority government against the primary vote, against the two party preferred vote, against time, against Treasury advice and, eventually (July 2011), against one of the houses (the last time someone tried to govern against the Senate, Australia witnessed its greatest constitutional crisis). Abbott was keen but it did not sound promising. He got tantalisingly close, and it must be frustrating (yet again, frustration is probably the defining feature of his political persona—those who thought that this would prove a liability did not realise that, on the contrary, it could constitute a powerful asset and enable a closer identification with his electorate). He rode a peripheral revolt against an alternative way of redistributing the revenue flowing from the mining boom. He consolidated his constituency by radicalising his message. On the other hand, it is this radicalisation that now, *in the specific conditions of the new political geometry*, makes him an extremist. In many ways he always was, of course; the point is that now, despite a near majority, he is cut off from the mainstream (Malcolm Turnbull would probably have not been as electorally effective but would have had a better chance to sway the independents and talk to the Greens).

More generally, beside the need to acknowledge a new political reality, the conservative side of politics now needs to face a more strategic problem because *in its current configuration* it is unlikely that it could ever get a mandate in both houses. The more proportional way Senate seats are allocated makes its reliance on the periphery and on a favourable partitioning of electoral districts insufficient. The Coalition thus faces a serious conundrum: abandoning a radical form of conservatism may produce political fragmentation; not doing so may condemn it to irrelevance. In other words, as Labor moves decisively to the right and becomes the party of 'national responsibility' and the Greens represent a left alternative the Coalition risks becoming the party of a dangerously substantial resentful margin. After the 2007 election, the electoral alliance we could define as the 'Howard ensemble' did not have the numbers. After the 2010 election, despite recovering the ground it had lost, it does not constitute a viable project. The independents, among others, knew it.

The 2007 election was considered the first climate change election. But so was this one: one leader argued that there is no urgent need to act, one leader represented those who do not believe there is a need to act at all, and one leader represented those who believe acting urgently is essential. It is actually more complicated: Abbott replaced a leader who thought a compromise on this issue possible, Gillard replaced a leader whose fall from grace coincided with a decision to postpone action on this issue, and the Greens' political cohesion is primarily premised on convergence on this issue. That the uniquely Australian role of climate change fears in shaping political scenarios has not been the subject of extensive debate is also uncanny. (This role can only be accounted for if we realise that the possibility that the land would turn against its settlers is deeply entrenched in the Australian collective psyche and that climate change interacts with a widespread and long-lasting Australian structure of feeling.) Within this continuity, the epitomising moment in the 2007 election night was when Bennelong was declared: Howard had lost. This time it was Melbourne and the Liberals were not even in the picture. When even winning is not enough, you are in trouble. This election marks the true end of the Howard years.

election forum

Opportunity or Unravelling?

John Hinkson

The neo-liberal contradictions at the core of Australia's hung parliament

Hung parliaments aren't necessarily signs of crisis. Sometimes they are opportunities to explore new possibilities. While they always entail difficulties, they can quite validly be viewed positively. Arguably this was the case with the first Bracks government in Victoria, which displaced the degraded and barely concealed thuggery that had come to typify the Kennett years. But it is not a good idea to cling to that example in evaluating Canberra 2010.

The comparative situation does bear some consideration. In 1999 the Bracks Labor government came to power vowing to soften the impact of government and reasserting the importance of common decency in political affairs. The backdrop was the hardline expression of the neo-liberal agenda adopted by Kennett, which included a closed mind to regional Victoria. The Bracks government was not a real challenge to neo-liberal policy. Indeed state Labor has sustained it—most recently in the privatisation of water, as evidenced in John Brumby's desalination strategies. But a softer glove made neo-liberalism more acceptable in the short term. And the hung parliament worked effectively, with widespread community support.

A decade later in Canberra a different set of circumstances is revealed. In the most general sense, neo-liberalism has demonstrated that it is unsustainable and is carrying global society down a road that can only end in ruin. It not only threatens ruling parties but the polity itself, as well as the general social settings essential as the authentic bases of any polity. There are many aspects to this that can't be discussed here but it can be noted that the hung parliament in Canberra is one of many parliamentary crises around the world. It is an illustration of a much more general situation of grave uncertainty.

There is an obvious and immediate economic element to this: the upheavals that followed the GFC. Uncertainties that are related to levels of debt and worries about whether the levels of growth needed to service that debt can be quickly re-established is one aspect of this. Budget cuts and how these are unequally spread across social groupings is another. This economic aspect alone illustrates that the hung parliament of 2010 differs greatly from the Victorian political crisis of 1999.

But this is to speak only of a political-economic crisis. Canberra 2010 actually conceals undercurrents of much greater significance, undercurrents that bear on the prospect of Australia's survival in the 21st century. And these are now generating ideological divisions,

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A New Kind of Politics

David McKnight

David McKnight lectures in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales.

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Opportunity or Unravelling?

John Hinkson

John Hinkson is an Arena Publications editor.

some of which emerged in the 2010 campaign. The population debate is a case in point. It was hardly a major emphasis in the campaign, addressed as it was to minimise its significance. But the issue has already begun to call out strong resistance from those, like business and trade unions, who assume that population and economic growth are the only way to prosperity. It goes without saying that immigration assumptions lie behind most of narratives about Australia's future since white settlement. That this does and should flow into the absolutely major debates about global over-population and related stress over arable land will predictably wedge a 'minor' political issue into a central one, re-framing how we think of ourselves in the world.

Or to take another related example: the crisis in policy as it bears on climate change is now a dagger in the heart of conventional politics and is generating growing divisions in the community. The attempt to manage the climate question via an ETS, which amounts to a complex of market-based adjustments that then allow business as usual, has failed. This indicates a need to see the issues differently. Contemporary ways of life merely adjusted in this way or that way are not consistent with a serious response to climate change. Gillard's citizen assemblies and Abbott's 'direct action' are examples of fiddling while Rome burns. Even essentials like carbon pricing will be categorised this way unless they become an aspect of a more basic change in how we live.

This question of ways of life also stands behind the emerging foreign policy and military failure in Afghanistan. No one is really addressing the fact that we (including the United States and Europe) are trying to tame Afghanistan by imposing a way of life there that is failing everywhere else around the globe. All the stated divisions between West and East or West and Islam assume that the Western way will and should prevail. It is no defence of the East or of Islam to say that the West has come to stand for ways of living that assume conceptions of the self that have little regard for others. The West also stands for levels of resource use and consumption that are simply impossible to sustain for many people.

Much of the discussion of the hung parliament has been around the need to change parliamentary process, to make it more democratic. This is a perfectly valid concern but strategies to fix this problem are already failing. Little attention has been given to the possibility that the poor behaviour of the previous parliament emerged out of growing ideological disarray because old assumptions no longer hold. In other words the emphasis on process—valid when taken alone—can also be way of ignoring the larger picture: the situation Australia now faces in the world together with the rest of the Western world.

There are, as yet, no signs of an understanding of the underlying currents behind the sorts of examples discussed above. Even the term 'neo-liberal' is taken to be simply an orientation towards the market rather than an emergent way of life—the highly mobile, distanced-from-others-and-nature, high-tech way based, as it is, in capitalism's embrace of the university (or, more particularly, the techno-scientific revolution). Indeed the full sense of the contradictory nature of our situation—needing growth to handle debt while needing to prevent growth to preserve a viable place in the natural world—only comes into view when our way-of-life growth assumptions, fuelled by high technology, are brought into proper focus.

One hardly expects our politicians to discuss such matters—the crisis of the hung parliament can be argued to be also a crisis of the integrity of intellectual debate and the failure of the media. Parliament will descend into disarray unless these issues can be addressed. This crisis is one that will not be resolved quickly because at this point there is no basis for agreement or even of a beginning of a debate. We have entered a process of political unravelling that will in time no doubt have a solution—but no quick solution.

election forum

A New Kind of Politics

David McKnight

Labor's near demise suggests a strategic repositioning is needed

The most remarkable feature of the 2010 was the rapid collapse of Labor's strong public support gained at the 2007 election and the resurgence of conservatism to come within a hair's breadth of office. This throws three features of Australian politics into sharp relief.

The first is the strength and tenacity of conservatism in Australia. Historically, Australia has deep wellsprings which nurture conservatism. On top of this has been the rise of free-market values and individualism as the hegemonic 'new common sense'. There are many progressive responses to this but the worst kind of response routinely and reflexively blames the media and over-estimates its ability to prevent or shape political developments. This ignores the fact that vast social changes of the 1970s, for example, took place in the face of a media whose hostility was far more overt than today.

It is true that we live in a mediatised world but political struggles are ultimately not won within the media and its discourse. The illusion that they can be won solely within the media was also one of the faults of Rudd's Labor leadership. By adopting a media-centric view, progressives appear to have forgotten that the real battle is only tangentially related to the media. The crucial battle is to mobilise people, often on the streets, as a demonstration of public feeling. The most recent demonstration of this truth was the Your Rights at Work Campaign. For many this was a return to an 'old-fashioned' kind of politics. Yet this kind of politics deeply penetrated suburbia and demonstrated the simple truth that there is no substitute for grassroots mobilisation and on-the-streets campaigning. No modern social change has occurred without such mobilisation. (More recently, this lesson has also been learnt by rural communities on the Murray River basin who want to resist cuts to their water allocation.)

All of this is relevant to the crucial tipping point of the Rudd government when it ditched action on climate change. From then on Labor's support fell, culminating in the 2010 electoral debacle. But while the decision led to widespread shock and dismay, there was no grassroots mobilisation, no demonstrations in the streets. True, there was a remarkable boost to the Green vote some months later. But this is scarcely a victory since the price of a Green boost was an even bigger Labor loss of support.

The public passivity in the face of Labor's ditching of climate action says a lot about the strategic failure of the environmental wing of progressive activity. Because so much of environmental politics is pitched to win the daily media battle, the ability of the movement to call on its own genuinely widespread social and political base is hamstrung. Indeed, the absence of an active, widely supported movement on climate is one of the paradoxes of Australian politics, allowing governments and energy companies to obfuscate and do nothing in spite of strong (but passive) public opinion in support for climate action.

The second issue arising from the 2010 election concerns the fate of the government's plan to introduce a mining tax. Many in government assumed that this classic policy of taxing the rich to give back to ordinary Australians would have been self-evidently popular. Yet it did not play out that way. The mining tax led to a mobilisation but it was a mobilisation of conservatives, backed by some of the wealthiest corporations in the world. Labor's inability to lead a campaign to defend the tax demonstrated the rhetorical poverty of Labor's parliamentary leadership. Their usual strategic play of seizing the middle ground and acting 'responsibly' meant that Labor was incapable of the simplest defence of itself when under threat. When the obscenely wealthy launch a campaign of lies, there is no option but to fight back in forthright and populist terms. Easy to say, not easy to do, but absolutely necessary.

The third striking issue from the 2010 election concerns the post-election Greens—Labor agreement. The strengthening of the Greens vote was more than a by-product of Labor's incompetence. It is part of a trend which is unlikely to stop until it reaches its natural limit. Socio-politically, it is a sign of a long-term split in the coalition on which Labor was built over the last fifty years. Labor was once a coalition of the progressive middle class, plus much of the blue collar working class, plus a 'class' of poor and pension recipients. The progressive middle class component is now peeling away, probably never to return to Labor. It is likely that the Greens will win further inner-city seats at both federal and state level in the coming years. This will be a wrenching time for many of the remaining progressives within the Labor Party. Ultimately it will pose the need for a more long-term, formal coalition of the two parties, resembling the Liberal—National coalition, in which, among other things, there would be agreements not to contest certain seats.

Being Arab: Arabism and the Politics of Recognition

Edited by Christopher Wise and Paul James

Being Arab appears at a time of unprecedented historical crisis for non-sectarian Arabist thought and social movements. Events of the last decade, especially the US-led occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, have drawn many analysts to conclude that the era of Arab identity politics has passed. Some even assert that the 'defunct' category of 'the Arab' was little more than an ideological tool of Western imperial powers, one that never served the interests of the peoples of the Middle East and Africa.

This volume rejects the assumption that the dream of a strong, unified Arab world was never more than a fantasy of out-of-touch academics, nor little more than a crude instrument of Arab elites and Western imperialists. It is clear that the embattled concept of 'the Arab' urgently requires investigation, analysis and rethinking. Some commentators even suggest that the resurrection of 'the Arab' and political Arabism is the pre-eminent issue.

The theme of the historical meaning of Arab identity is pursued in this book in the hope of making a modest contribution towards strengthening viable, non-sectarian and democratic alternatives to Islamist fundamentalism in the Arab world. The question of what it means 'to be Arab' is deliberately oriented towards the future, while remaining attentive to the setbacks of the past.

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A New Kind of Politics

David McKnight

Water in a Geo-political Context

Lindsay Fitzclarence

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Water in a Geo-political Context

Lindsay Fitzclarence

Lindsay Fitzclarence is a former academic and currently an independent writer. His contact details are <lindsayjfitz@hotmail.com>.

On the need for alternative perspectives about water policies and the Murray—Darling Basin Plan

In early 2008 the Australian federal government passed legislation, the *Water Act 2007*, concerning national water quality, distribution mechanisms and the coordination of inter-governmental management processes and the outcome of over a decade of effort to reform water policy. One part of the Act was a directive for a long-term reform strategy for the Murray—Darling Basin. In early October 2010 this statement was released to the public and therefore to the communities that had been waiting with trepidation and latent hostility.

A central feature of the Basin Plan is the introduction of a practice known as sustainable diversion limits (SDLs). This mechanism is designed to enforce limits on the amount of water that can be taken out of the Basin's surface and groundwater supplies. Checks and balances designed to manage water quality and salinity levels also feature in the Basin master plan. In the longer-term the plan is designed to return between 27—37 per cent of surface water to the system. At the more specific level this will mean some regions face extensive reductions to current levels of water taken from the rivers.

Release of the long awaited Basin Plan has produced predictable responses generating strongly polarised reaction based on long-standing social divisions. Wide-ranging tensions feed into, and are sustained by, an increasingly dysfunctional political framework that is conflictual, divided and parochial and perpetuated by a compromised, biased and corporatised mass media. This article acknowledges the coexistence of a number of narratives from different times, which have now become interwoven into the neo-liberal discourse about the rationalising powers of the marketplace. The analysis highlights the links between the colonial heritage of the production of export materials; the key role of irrigation schemes in the process of 'nation building'; the nexus between water control and public policy; and, finally, global trade and water use.

Background

> The Murray—Darling Basin covers 1,061,469 square kilometres or approximately one-seventh (14 per cent) of the total area of Australia (7,692,024 square kilometres).
>
> It contains over 40 per cent of all Australian farms, which produce wool, cotton, wheat, sheep, cattle, dairy produce, rice, oil-seed, wine, fruit and vegetables for both domestic and overseas markets. As Australia's most important agricultural region, the Basin produces one third of Australia's food supply and supports over a third of Australia's total gross value of agricultural production.

Assumptions about land, agricultural production, economic development and security, and water are fused in this statement (sourced from the Murray River tourism website). It is an example of a sustained narrative about social economic and political priorities, a meta-discourse that frames thinking about water flow and use in this large area of the nation.

In only two hundred years the Murray—Darling Basin has become a centrepiece of integrated economic development and cross-sector management practices. Within the post-colonial history of this region there are many examples of trendsetting policy development and technically advanced and large-scale forms of development. A good deal of the political impetus and economic investments of these changes has been the drive towards 'nation building'. Water management has been a central feature of these processes.

Viewed historically there are three major phases in this narrative of social change. Before sketching each in a little detail a caveat is required. Within the landmass and waterways associated with what is now codified as the Murray—Darling Basin the doctrine of *terra nullius* cannot apply. The Basin has a long history as a demographic centre of Indigenous life. Australia's oldest known skeleton was found in this area, at Lake Mungo in southwest New South Wales, and anthropological records show that before colonisation the region contained the highest density of Indigenous groups anywhere on the continent. The rich bio-diversity of the area existing within the confluence of a large number of rivers and streams

After the rain—Balonne River, Jack Taylor Weir, southeast Queensland

provided a wide range of food sources. These river systems also acted as meeting places of people from many different groups. Consequently a large number of important cultural sites are located throughout the region. Many Aboriginal people died as a result of diseases brought into the country by colonists; however, a significant number of Indigenous Australians representing many different groups continue to live in the region.

Developments through the 19th Century

Through the 19th century the Murray—Darling Basin was settled and maintained within a field of tension between two opposing forces. The region became a provider of wool for the burgeoning fabric industries of northern England; at the same time large areas of the region were taken up in pastoral leases by settlers intent on forging a new way of life away from direct British influence. This phase of social change was a time of regional settlement that involved establishing maps and territorial boundaries, naming areas and features, including the rivers, and thereby establishing legislative control over the land and an increasing number of socio-economic activities.

By the end of the century the political leaders of the different colonies, or proto-states, were engaged in prolonged negotiations designed to establish a post-colonial federation. Inside these discussions and political work were also moves to create a modern economy. For this to take place there was an urgent need for stable and reliable water supplies. Such sources were understood to be a fundamental requirement of inland population growth and the development of strong and economically viable agricultural and pastoral industries.

Politicians in Sydney and Melbourne were the most powerful in shaping an early form of regional water policy. This fact is reflected in the development of a number of key government policies which marked the beginning of a post-colonial water reform that would bring major water flow and storage under statutory legislation. The first of these occurred in Victoria when the government introduced the *Irrigation Act 1886*. In New South Wales, similar legislation was passed in the *Water Rights Act 1896*.

During this phase, bureaucratic and legislative infrastructure to govern water courses and adjacent public land was put in place. This necessitated breaking the nexus between private property and water ownership. In moving away from the legacy of European riparian thinking there was a shift towards an ethos of public ownership and control of water as a common property.

Despite such development, the cultural legacy of riverfront ownership lives on. Some properties in strategic locations with direct river access have been handed down through several generations. The history of riparian times remains within the restricted narratives of such groups.

Developments through the 20th Century

By the beginning of the 20th century this early form of water reform set the scene for the next major phase of change: large-scale water storage facilitating major irrigation developments. Three major developments stand out as key exemplars of this phase of change.

The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme is located in the Griffith-Leeton region of south-central New South Wales. While the area was understood to contain fertile soil, the larger and longer-term problem was the marginal and erratic rainfall. Using a variety of advanced engineering techniques, water was channeled into the area via a number of storages, locks and diversion canals.

By the beginning of World War II, the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) was an important source of agriculture for the nation. The MIA developed through the employment of technical expertise, large-scale funding and, eventually, the arrival of skilled farmers. As a result a diversified economy was developed in which new export crops, including rice, became key products of the region. All of this was made possible through the entrapment and diversion of water into an area that did not have a history of consistent water flow.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme is a process involving water storage, re-direction and power generation. Water from the Snowy and Eucumbene rivers is diverted to the west, or inland, across the mountains where it is released into the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. This diversion and controlled release of water has provided a wide range of agricultural developments using irrigated water. In what could now be labeled as 'value adding' this process of entrapment and storage of water has provided the opportunity for the generation of electricity.

The Menindee Lakes Scheme is situated on the Darling River in the far south-west of NSW. The scheme is a third example of a major development designed to capture and store a significant volume of water. Under normal conditions the Darling River flows unevenly, often running at a very low level via a long chain of waterholes and natural depressions that form lake systems.

In 1949 work commenced on creating a storage system comprised of dams, weirs, canals and flow regulators designed to control the flow of water. In 1968 work was completed leaving an integrated system that allowed water to be captured and stored in four linked lakes. From here water is diverted west to the mining centre of Broken Hill and also released back into the lower Darling River.

Communities including Broken Hill and Griffith have developed and sustain rich narratives about the benefits of water supplies directed into their locations. Such accounts acknowledge that there are many local beneficiaries of the water systems that sustain their communities.

Water Reform through Policy and Market Forces

In the early 1980s, fuelled by monetarist ideology, a politics of increasing economic stringency emerged. However, reformed water policy required an added input. Dating back to the 1960s a global discourse of environmental alarm, or crisis, had developed. Because this trend occurred on many different social, cultural and political fronts it impacted in many forms and a large number of locations. During this time 'sustainability' emerged as meta-environmental theme and merged with economic rationalist thinking, appearing in a wide suite of 'environmentally friendly' policies. A key example occurred in 1980 with the announcement of the World Conservation Strategy-ICUN 1980 which, in turn, was followed by the UN Brundtland Report of 1987. This document was, in effect, an argument for the need for all nations to undertake 'sustainable development' programs. Viewed holistically, it is a classic example of the fusion of economic management/environmental concern emerging 'naturally' in a discourse of sustainability.

> **Within the post-colonial history of the Murray– Darling region there are many examples of trendsetting policy development and technically advanced and large-scale forms of development. A good deal of the political impetus and economic investments of these changes has been the drive towards 'nation building'.**

Policy makers and politicians in Australia responded actively to this call for change through policy development and closer government management. The first change occurred at the governmental level. In 1992 Australia's political leaders, the prime minister, state premiers and chief ministers constituted the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). COAG's purpose was to streamline cross institutional communication and produce relevant generic policy. COAG first met in December that year where it produced a statement called the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development. This document detailed a number of guidelines that fused economic, environmental and equity issues against a backdrop of global awareness and sensitivities. Ecologically Sustainable Development became the banner for a new approach to water reform.

The most recent suite of policy reforms, as indicated in the following policy directive, includes a national water strategy, which involves the following foci:

- The Murray Darling Basin: The Government is working to restore the Murray Darling Basin to a sustainable footing by modernising irrigation and addressing the over allocation of resources. This will put the Murray Darling Basin back on a sustainable track, significantly improve the health of rivers and wetlands and will bring substantial benefits to irrigators and the community;
- Purchasing water for the environment;
- Improving water use efficiency in rural Australia; and
- Urban water security projects ‹www.pm.gov.au/Policy_Priorities/Future/Priorities#Climate›.

What we find here is an amalgam of the key water policy initiatives of the previous one hundred years. The theme of 'irrigation' continues to be central, although it now involves new technologies and more stringent methods of management. In this latter sense this suggests more 'rational' measurement and monitoring of water allocation and the employment of more 'effective' water trading schemes.

Current Water Use Trends in the Murray–Darling Basin

While agriculture is no longer the major source of national wealth, this sector still accounts for use of approximately 65 per cent of stored water and over 50 per cent of the national land area. Embedded within these figures is the fact that just over 90 per cent of water in agricultural practice is used for irrigation, which includes 'surface' irrigation as the main method. Production of cotton, rice and grapevines mainly involves water through irrigation. Moreover, these crops are high water uses, with cotton farming using 16 per cent and rice 11 per cent of total agricultural water. The following information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reinforces understanding of the tight nexus between overall water use, irrigation practices and the production of rice and cotton:

> Approximately 89 per cent of Australia's cotton growers were located in the Murray–Darling Basin in 2008–09, irrigating 75 thousand hectares more land than in 2007–08 (up 141 per cent). The large increase in volume of irrigation water used was due to improved water allocations in the region. Similarly, Australia's rice producers, all located in the Basin, used an increased volume of irrigation water in 2008–09.
>
> In 2008–09, cotton accounted for the highest proportion of irrigation water used in the Murray–Darling Basin (23 per cent), followed by cereal crops for grain or seed (20 per cent) and pasture for grazing (15 per cent).

In this latter phase of change of water politics in the Murray–Darling Basin, cotton has emerged as the cash crop for current times. While other parts of the agriculture sector have been struggling, cotton farming has continued to develop for a number of reasons. Within a global context, cotton is grown within a latitude range of 45 degrees north through to 35 degrees south. The Murray–Darling Basin is thus securely located within this growth zone. Cotton is a crop that is planted and grown in an annual cycle. In the Australian growing season the growth cycle begins in September–November (planting) and ends in March–May (harvesting). As a broad-acre crop it is conducive to the use of large-scale/mechanised equipment in the planting, growth management (especially pest control) and harvesting stages. While the average sized farm in Australia is just over 300 hectares, cotton farming is an industry that lends itself to larger scale industrial development, including larger sized properties.

Over 90 per cent of water in agricultural practice is used for irrigation which includes 'surface' irrigation as the main method. Production of cotton, rice and grapevines mainly involves water through irrigation, with cotton farming using 16 per cent and rice 11 per cent of total agricultural water use.

A key element in the production cycle is the availability of water. In this case the water trading policy and long-term irrigation infrastructure in the Murray–Darling Basin have helped encourage cotton production as an annual and broad-acre crop.

Cotton produced in Australia, and therefore in the Murray–Darling Basin, is an export crop. It is produced for the global market where the demand for cotton products is very high and thus the price or return on the commodity remains stable. According to cotton industry sources, 98 per cent of Australia's cotton is exported. While overall production is low by world standards (only 3 per cent of world production) Australia contributes between 5–10 per cent of the world's cotton exports. As an export industry this level of production generates a return of around $1.5 billion per annum.

Cotton is a quintessential global product. It has a very long history of use and has evolved to provide a wide range of commodities including clothing, multi-use commercial fibre, and as a food product for humans and animals. Moreover, cotton markets exist all over the globe. The increasing production of cotton in Australia, implying the growing use of water reserves, increasingly ties Australian production resources

After the harvest—Dirranbandi cotton gin, southeast Queensland

into the competitive global market. The export of cotton amounts to the export of large quantities of water.

Longer-term and Larger-scale Considerations

Modernist nation-building strategies have put in place large-scale water schemes designed to provide water for wide-ranging industrial and domestic purposes. While promoting demographic and economic growth, these practices have also resulted in over-production issues and helped create serious environmental problems. Current political strategies have been designed to address these concerns and have turned towards the logics of the marketplace. This is an approach designed to rationalise excessive demands for scarce water resources through the forces of competition.

In his essay 'The Tragedy of the Commons', Garrett Hardin made a number of observations that remain useful on population growth, resource management and political action. Hardin's concern was about the tendency for leaders and strategists to turn to technical solutions to the problem of population growth in a finite environment:

> An implicit and almost universal assumption of discussions published in professional and semi-popular scientific journals is that the problem under discussion has a technical solution. A technical solution may be defined as one that requires a change only in the techniques of the natural sciences, demanding little or nothing in the way of change in human values or ideas of morality.

It is now over forty years since Hardin's essay was published; however, the themes he explored remain topical. Inevitably faith in a technical fix has turned general public attention to processes such as desalinisation as a method for tapping into the vast stores of sea water. No doubt as desalinisation plants come on-line they will reinforce the existing belief in technical and instrumental reasoning. In order for such issues to be debated more widely, there will need to be a different discourse about these connections. In particular, there will need to be a changed discourse about water as a vital feature of everyday life. In relatively recent times water has become defined, understood and experienced as commercial commodity; the strong sense in which it is a common cultural good is increasingly lost from view. On this score there is an opening to a very different form of cultural politics, including new forms of public education. Water is a common life element. For this reason it is a material property that exists at the very core of sustaining life. On this basis water as a generic topic has the potential for discussions, debates and dialogues across the ever-increasing range of interdependent sub-populations. In short, a new form of 'water politics' is needed as a corrective, or alternative, to the ever increasing forces of cultural commodification that act to separate, create difference and stimulate competition and conflict.

Aceh after the Deluge

Stephen Minas

A post-tsunami recovery that has also been a peace process

Like all great upheavals, the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami had ripple effects far beyond the places it hit hardest. In Australia, it swamped the widespread antipathy towards Indonesia borne of East Timor and the Bali bombings. Thousands of Australians felt the basic human response and gave generously. Internationally, the tsunami's aftermath called for solidarity with the stricken of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and elsewhere. Nowhere was it better expressed than at the fund-raising one-dayer between an Asian XI and the rest of the world which was played at the MCG early in the new year.

What's more, the tsunami allowed John Howard—much improved at regional diplomacy three terms in—to respond generously and repair much of the damage Australia's relationship with Indonesia had suffered. It confirmed that Mark Latham—who couldn't be bothered even to comment on the disaster—wasn't prime minister material. And for many, the fact that Kevin Rudd went in January to see the relief effort first-hand showed a certain dynamism, as well as a penchant for image management.

But at the epicentre the devastation was total. The underwater quake which triggered the tsunami struck just off the coast of Aceh, at the northern tip of the tropical island of Sumatra. Some 170,000 people in Aceh died—the bulk of an estimated total of at least 210,000 lives claimed by the tsunami. Communities along the coast were completely wiped out. In Banda Aceh, the provincial capital, whole neighbourhoods were flattened. The PLTD Apung I, a 2600-tonne floating power station of a ship, scythed its way through the city, driven five kilometres from the coast by the tsunami. Surrounded by rebuilt homes and parkland, the Apung I still stands where it came to rest, a striking reminder of the force of the wave. Elsewhere, a fishing vessel thirty metres long remains lodged in the roof of a house.

Devastation on this scale would have been tough to recover from wherever it had occurred. In the case of Aceh there was a major complication: A thirty-year conflict between Aceh's separatist movement and the Indonesian state which had intensified in 2003. When the tsunami struck, armed revolt was not a historical legacy but a fact of life. In the half-decade since, Aceh has been a society recovering from two disasters: one natural, the other man-made.

The conflict had deep roots. The sultanate of Aceh had successfully resisted colonisation by the Dutch. It had a proud history of independence and importance—its role as an *entrepot* for Islam in Southeast Asia earning it the epithet of 'Verandah of Mecca'. After Indonesia won its independence as a single, unitary state, Acehnese insurrectionists staged a rebellion. Jakarta ceded Aceh 'special region' status in 1959 and the Dar'ul Islam rebellion with which the Acehnese fighters were linked was defeated in 1962.

In 1976, amid claims that Jakarta was exploiting Aceh's rich natural resources, a new insurgency flared into life. The Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) was founded. Its leader, Hasan di Tiro, declared Aceh 'free and independent from all political control of the foreign regime of Jakarta and the alien people of the island of Java'. GAM grew stronger in response to military repression, and in 1989 launched a wave of attacks on military and police targets. The next decade of conflict was characterised by sustained violence, civilian deaths and reports of torture and 'disappearances'. The fighting stopped for peace talks after Indonesia's long-serving leader President Suharto lost power in 1998. The talks failed, and Indonesian security forces launched a new offensive against GAM in 2003.

The final period of conflict was particularly intense. An NGO worker who first came to Banda Aceh more than a decade ago remembers what it was like before the post-tsunami peace settlement: 'We used to have this enormous long drive around the edge of the city to avoid the rebel-held areas to come to our office … It was very militaristic, [with] bunkers and the whole thing'. Gunnar Stange and

Continued on page 31

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Aceh after the Deluge

Stephen Minas

Stephen Minas is a journalist who was recently in Aceh on assignment. Twitter: @StephenMinas.

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Lake Nookamka

Nici Cumpston

Nici Cumpston was born in Adelaide in 1963 and is of Aboriginal, Afghan, English and Irish descent. She has been exhibiting for twelve years, and has in that time been included in many prestigious awards, including the NATSIA Award on seven occasions. She was a finalist in the 2009 Western Australian Indigenous Art Award at AGWA and was also included in Power and Beauty at Heide MoMA in 2008. Her work is currently on exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Stormy Weather (until March 2011). Nici Cumpston's work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria, Artbank, the Commonwealth Law Courts in Adelaide, Flinders University Art Collection, the Adelaide Festival Centre Foundation and the South Australia Museum among others.

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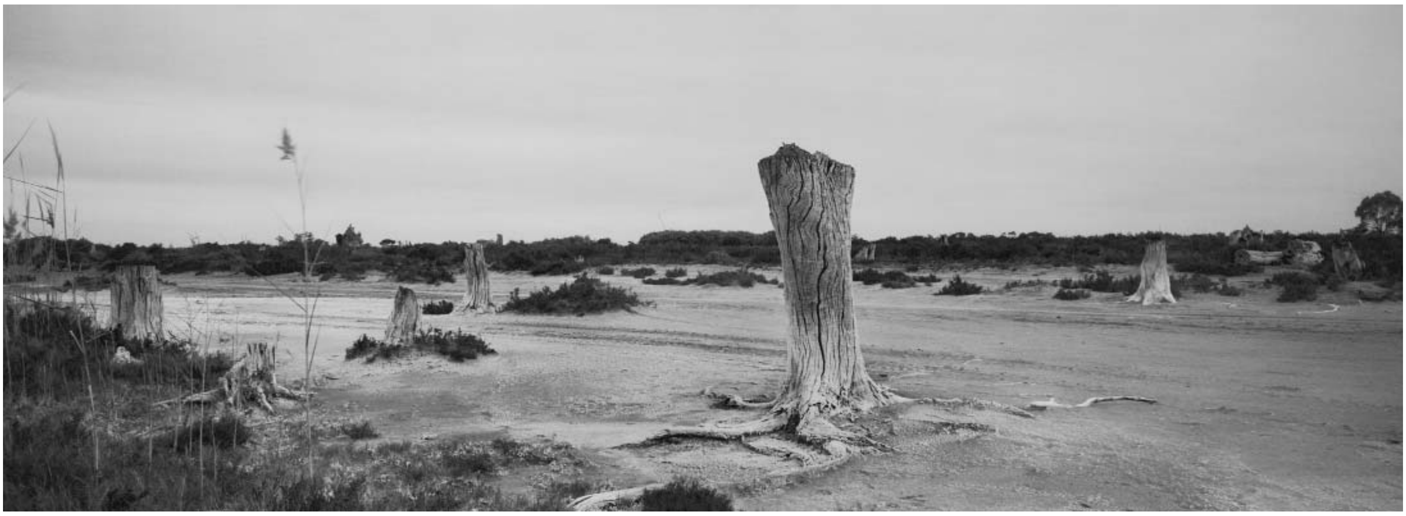

Tree Stumps

In September 2007 the federal government stopped the flow of water from the River Murray into Lake Bonney in the Riverland of South Australia. Aboriginal people called this lake Nookamka prior to European settlement in the region.

I am connected to this river system through my Barkindji family and I am compelled to document the ongoing demise of this once abundant area. The trees have all been dead since the lake was flooded in the 1930s due to the locks that were put in to control the flow of water in the Murray. I am fortunate to have been shown the different signs that reveal past occupation; wherever I go I am constantly looking and observing these 'signs'. In every group of trees along this side of the lake there are scar trees, ring trees, birthing and shelter trees which provide evidence.

Artefacts and the bones of our ancestors are being exposed as the drying lake recedes. I can feel the presence of our ancestors and I listen to my feelings as I spend time in these sites. There are vast areas that reveal ancient cooking grounds with remnants of shells and burnt debris scattered along with artefacts and ancestral bones in the shifting sands.

Aboriginal heritage protection laws have recently been established, which gives us all great hope for the protection of our ancestors but it doesn't allow for the future of this mighty river system. A lot more needs to be done by environmental experts in consultation with Aboriginal elders.

I create these images to raise awareness and also to portray the beauty along with the tragedy that is happening to this environment. I find time spent in this area allows for reflection and I have found it a great source of inspiration for my art practice.

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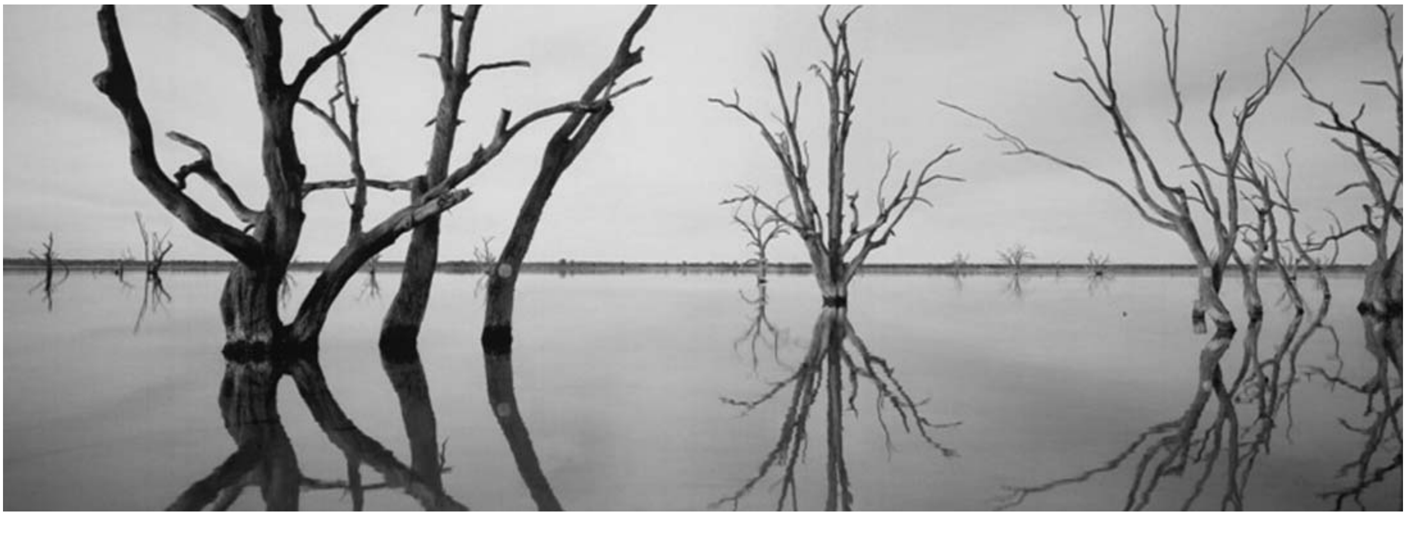
All works are 2008 inkjet prints on canvas, hand-coloured with watercolour and pencil, 75 x 205 cm, courtesy of the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne.



Nookamka Lake

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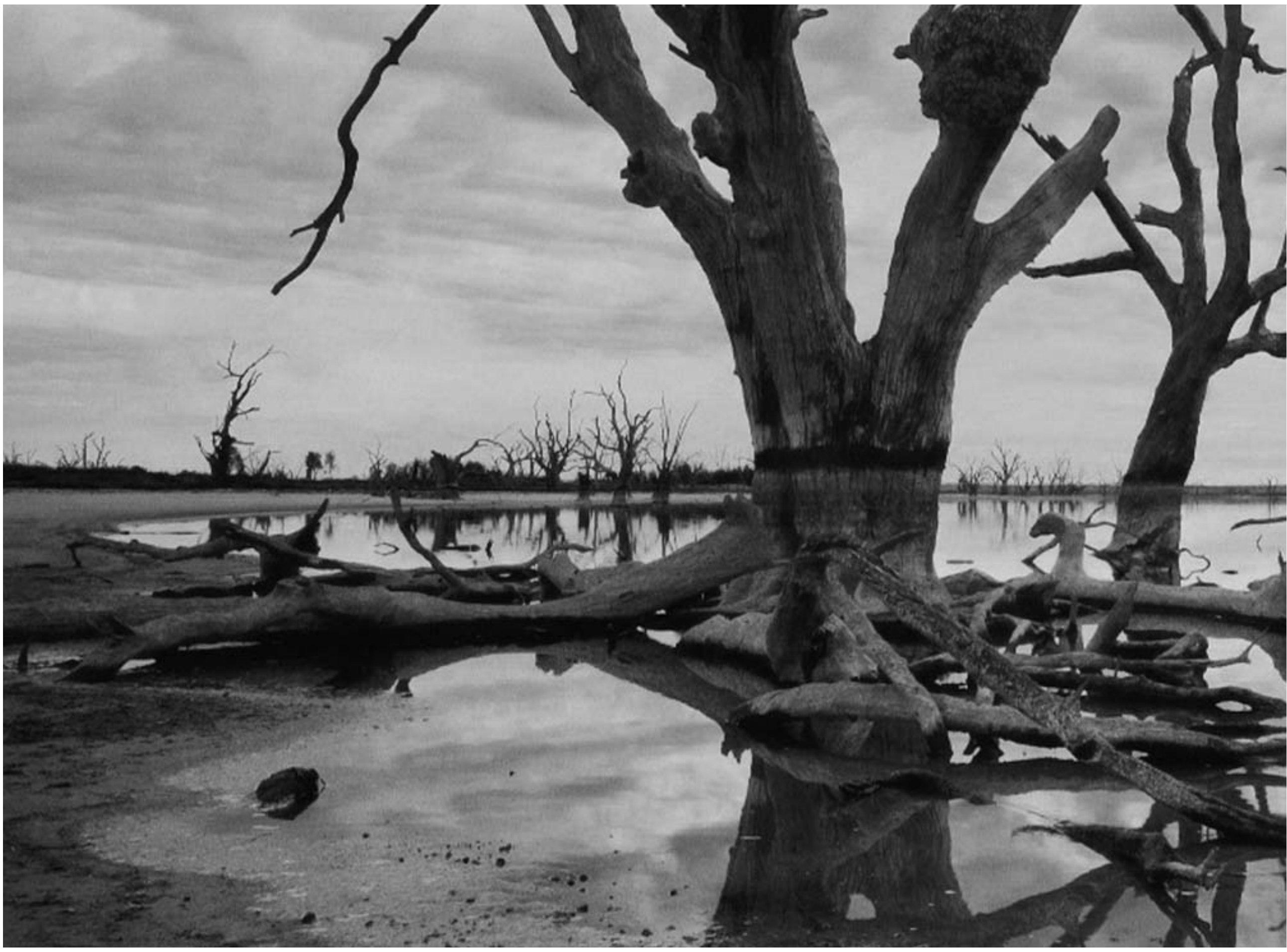
Campsite,
Nookamka Lake II



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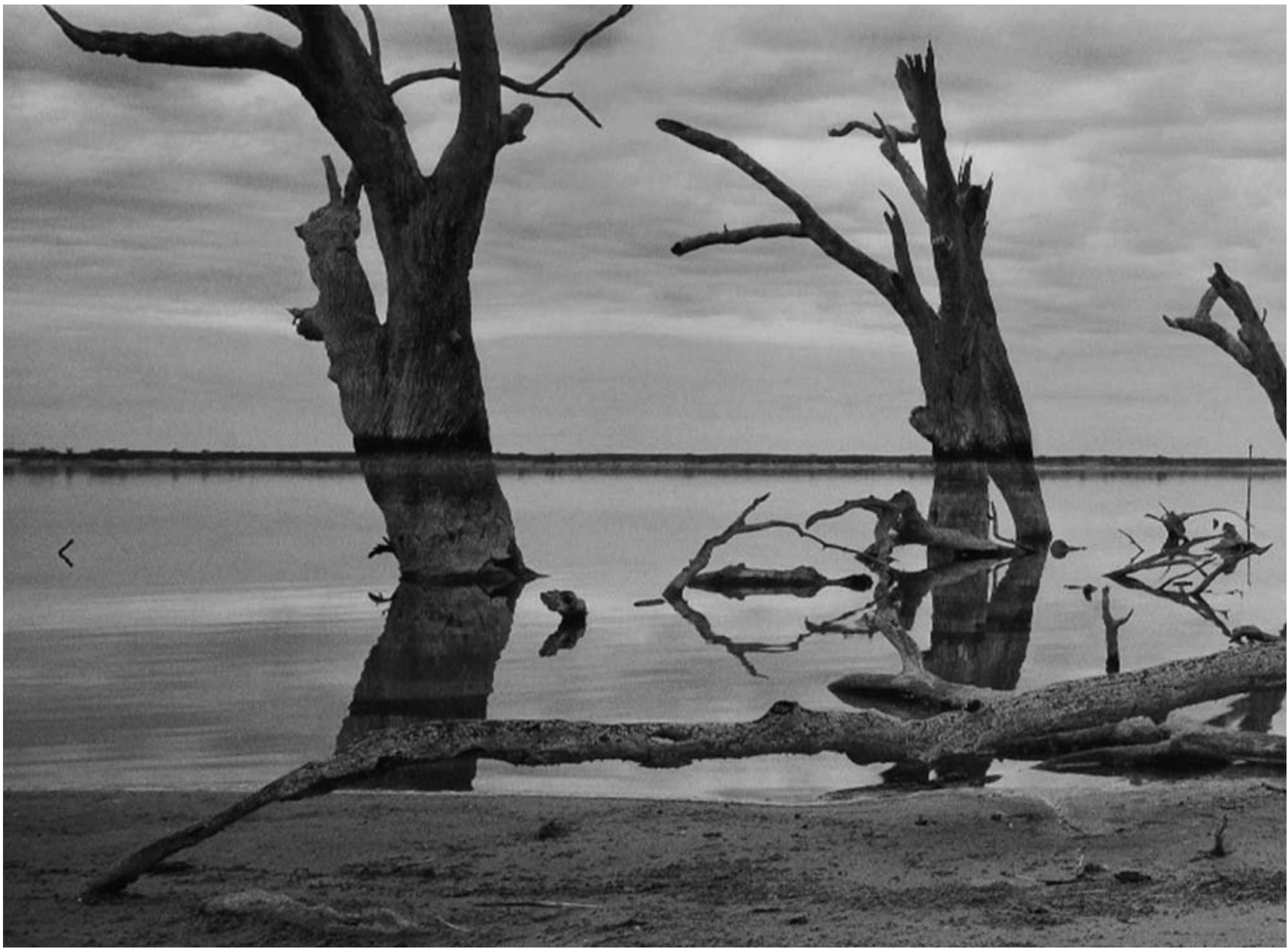
Campsite,
Nookamka Lake III



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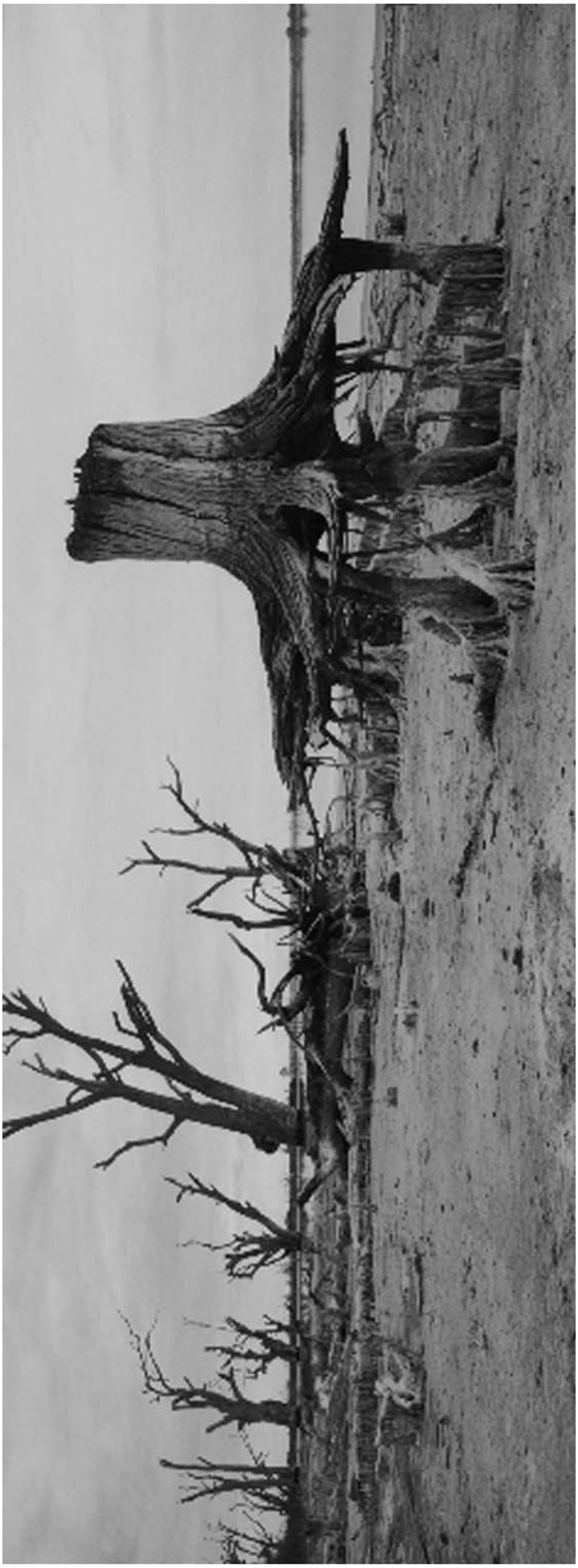
Nookamka Lake

Nici Cumpston



Ringbarked II,
Nookamka Lake

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Aceh after the
Deluge

Stephen Minas

From page 26

Roman Patock, researchers at Goethe-University Frankfurt, wrote of this period in a recent article in the *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Studies*: 'the benefits of Aceh's "war economy" for both conflicting parties such as illegal logging, piracy, the arms trade, extortion and smuggling were detrimental to ending the conflict'.

This sentiment changed when the tsunami struck. The international community provided US$7 billion to rebuild Aceh. Hundreds of NGOs and foreign and international agencies descended on the province, with their efforts co-ordinated by the Indonesian government. For both sides in the conflict, the situation had changed radically. Stange and Patock now say that 'the tsunami calamity and the subsequent emergence of the "disaster economy" ... have been vital to both bringing about the peace agreement as well as maintaining the peace process'. What's more, they argue that the 'calamity as a window of opportunity helped the conflicting parties to find a common "higher reason" to finally put the conflict to an end'.

> **When the tsunami struck, armed revolt was not a historical legacy but a fact of life. In the half-decade since, Aceh has been a society recovering from two disasters: one natural, the other man-made.**

The Indonesian government and GAM signed a memorandum of understanding in Helsinki in August 2005. GAM agreed to end its insurgency while Jakarta promised Aceh unique autonomy within the Indonesian state. In subsequent elections, GAM cadres reorganised as the Partai Aceh and took power democratically, winning the governorship, the largest share of seats in the provincial legislature and a raft of district and municipal positions. Within the space of two years, Aceh had been transformed from a heavily garrisoned conflict zone under emergency rule to an autonomous region run by former rebels, awash in foreign funds (and foreign program officers) and facing a daunting recovery challenge.

The peace process is a big part of that challenge. Safriza Sofyan is the Deputy for Aceh and Nias of the World Bank's Multi Donor Fund, a body that was set up to co-ordinate over US$700 million in foreign aid from fifteen different donors. According to Sofyan, 'sometimes it's difficult to separate the post-conflict and post-disaster programs.'

The program to prevent deforestation is a case in point. G.V. Reddy is Ecosystem Manager of the Leuser International Foundation, which monitors deforestation in the massive Leuser ecosystem as part of the Aceh Forest and Environment Project. Reddy says that before the tsunami, 'because of conflict, the forests were safe'. Many forest areas were used as battlefields and GAM strongholds, which meant logging was a hazardous business for non-combatants. Aceh was spared the extraordinary rates of deforestation which other parts of Sumatra endured. According to Reddy, the peace accord and the billions pledged to rebuild Aceh changed the incentives and 'initiated the deforestation', by making the forests safe and massively increasing the demand for timber.

To counter these effects, former GAM combatants—as well as former loggers and poachers—have been recruited to patrol the Ulu Masen forest ecosystem. Their job is to look out for illegal logging and to prevent the disastrous 'elephant raids' that can destroy communities' crops. Most rangers are under the control of the provincial government, while a smaller cadre of 'community rangers' has been trained by the international NGO Flora and Fauna International. The goal is to protect the forests at the same time as employing ex-fighters with few prospects and giving them a new mission and a new position of responsibility in their communities. Matthew Linkie, Programme Manager for Flora and Fauna International in Aceh, says the work of the FFI-trained rangers has resulted in the arrest of some 145 illegal loggers.

Former combatants have also been involved the work of raising crops themselves. Sofyan says the involvement of former GAM combatants in planting nurseries in forest project land in Aceh Jaya—'a conflict-affected area'—is not just about sustainability. It's also 'to ensure they have [an] income'. The creation of productive work for former combatants has been a key part of the program of Irwandi Yusuf, Aceh's first governor under the autonomy deal. Ilarius Wibisono, a senior advisor to Governor Irwandi, says the 'Aceh Green' sustainability program—which includes forest protection—is designed to simultaneously address 'environmental, social and peace concerns'. Stange and Patock say that the governor is known for having 'a sympathetic ear for the needs of former rank and file combatants'.

It is easy to see why. Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, remains high, as does the poverty rate. Hundreds of violent crime incidents in the years since the tsunami tell of continuing frustration with the lack of work. And as a former GAM sub-commander told Stange and Patock last year, violence can never be ruled out in what, not long ago, was a mobilised society:

> It is not so much the weapons still buried and rotting in secret caches all over Aceh which, in the course of time, mostly have been rendered unusable that concerns me. It's the knowledge that every Acehnese knows how to use them, one in two knows where to purchase them, one in three knows how to make unconventional weapons and one in five knows how to build a bomb.

In other quarters, frustration has been simply with the pace of change. In a few short years, a hotly contested multiparty democracy has replaced the old politics of separatist movement versus central government and local collaborators. A Partai Aceh candidate in last year's elections wondered aloud:

> Why do we need so many local parties? Why don't the people understand that PA [Partai Aceh] is their best representative? If parliamentary politics is like debating over food, why do we need parties advocating meat and fish when everybody knows Acehnese like rice best? PA will provide rice. I am afraid that with all the debate, in the end, we will not even have rice.

There remain concerns about the process of government. A foreign program officer points to 'capacity weaknesses' and says, by way of example, that a logjam of implementing regulations has built up in the provincial parliament. 'The parliament is trying to come to grips with their basic administrative functions—what's their role, what's their responsibility … That really slows things down.'

Clearly, such frustrations should be expected after an upheaval which caused such devastation and threw open the most basic of questions. Lesley Wright, a Capacity Building Officer with the UN Development Programme, says that 'one of the things … that was a huge issue for everyone, for every effort that was going on after the tsunami was "who owns the land?" A lot of people died, a lot of people left, there's no paperwork'.

Moreover, an NGO officer points to the devastating effect that the tsunami had on Aceh's knowledge base. Key academics from every university faculty were lost: 'They've lost a really important technical layer of society that makes everything difficult'. He adds: 'There was a lot of chaos in [the] post-tsunami environment. The global community have learnt from it, from what I understand. Haiti looks a lot more streamlined'. In fact, a delegation from Haiti has visited Aceh to (in Sofyan's words) 'learn from the reconstruction'. So have representatives from other parts of Indonesia.

These visitors have come to see real successes. Banda Aceh in 2010 has been transformed from the disaster zone which, as Colin Powell remarked soon after the Boxing Day tsunami, looked like it had 'just been hit by a nuclear weapon'. Trees have re-grown and new roads—'much better', according to Sofyan, than the roads in neighbouring North Sumatra—have been built. The new houses that surround the Apung I are just some of over 150,000 that have been built in Aceh and Nias since the tsunami. The UNDP's Waste Management Livelihoods project helped create 140 small businesses focused on recycling. A recent survey found that 60 per cent or more are still open. According to the UNDP's Wright, co-operation between the various local authorities and international agencies has been largely successful, with territorial battles a rarity: 'Especially after an emergency situation, everyone's just trying to get by'.

A senior foreign academic much involved in the reconstruction effort says that, as a result of the recovery period, Aceh's professionals, academics and students have 'reconnected with the outside world'. Whereas prior to the tsunami Aceh was 'a closed military zone', in the years since Aceh's researchers have forged links with top institutions in Singapore, Australia and elsewhere and have 'rejoined the mainstream'.

With the sharp exodus of foreign aid organisations, Aceh's recovery has entered a new stage. Most projects with international participation have been completed or will wind up soon. The Multi Donor Fund will complete the final phase of its mandate in 2012. The hectic scramble of the initial disaster response ('thousands of players … Very, very difficult' to co-ordinate, recalls Sofyan) has long since passed.

Jane Dunlop, a program officer with Flora and Fauna International who has spent four years in Aceh, says 'it's changed a lot … in terms of the expats that are here, the amount of money that's flowing into the place, the number of international organisations. In some ways that's helped; I think there was too much going on at one stage, so many workshops and pressure on government, in particular for their time … The place has really developed'.

G.V. Reddy, who has also been in Aceh for four years, describes another 'positive change': while some envisage a return to conflict once the World Bank concludes its mandate, most people say 'enough of it, we are happy with the peace'. Evenings in Banda Aceh now see markets and cafes packed with people. It must be a world away from the curfews and danger of life during the conflict. Children have been born during the peace (your correspondent met one particularly charming young local child). A renewed insurgency must be the farthest thing from their parents' minds.

Certainly, daunting challenges remain. The capacity constraints which everyone mentions still prevent the provincial government from spending a significant part of its budget. Authorities are divided on how strictly the province's Sharia law should be enforced, and the 'Sharia police' are, for many, a retrograde nuisance (though they have their supporters). And while peace and political stability can never be guaranteed, chronic unemployment and insufficient private investment are far more pressing concerns.

But after Aceh's last thirty years, these are good problems to have. And the Acehnese, according to the World Bank's Sofyan, 'have a unique characteristic'. It's also the not-so-secret weapon of a people who fought off colonisation by the Dutch until the early twentieth century and who resisted the perceived foreign rule of Jakarta until the tsunami changed everything. They're 'very tough', says Sofyan. 'They can easily forget their sadness.' a

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How Social is Web 2.0?

Sebastian Kubitschko

Sebastian Kubitschko has recently graduated from the University of Melbourne (MA Global Journalism) and is now a PhD candidate in the Media and Communications Department at Goldsmiths, University of London.

How social is Web 2.0?

Sebastian Kubitschko

Autonomy, or slaves in a neo-liberal online culture?

We live in a media-saturated world. That much is clear; indeed that much is exceedingly apparent. 'We', that is, a steadily growing number of people around the globe; 'people', as in both the constitutive political subject and the class excluded from politics. The media has become the space where technology, communication and power converge. In this networked society, if that is what we have to call it, it is the internet above all that acts as a hub for global flows of information and ideas and hence increasingly influences social groups and cultural categories. Computers and the rapid increase in mobile information and communication technologies (ICTs) that connect people to and from the internet makes this network of networks almost omnipresent.

Scholars and practitioners of course continue to argue whether (new) media is offering individuals the opportunity to gain a voice and engage with a diversity of political views, or whether inequalities in access and participation, state surveillance and censorship predominate. Overall, however, network culture has been hailed as an open, decentralised, 'horizontal' environment. For some time now the celebration of these infrastructural characteristics has found its new idol in the so-called participatory and social media. The micro-blogging site Twitter almost caused another Iranian revolution, Wikileaks more than just embarrassed the US Army by releasing the Iraq airstrike footage and thousands of secret military documents, and Barack Obama not only became the 44th but also the first Afro-American president of the United States thanks to his engagement on Facebook and dozens of other social media websites.

We are moving towards a late-modern social formation in which person-centred social networks, distributed organisations and participatory culture are increasingly important. At the centre of the hype is the conviction that the internet finally has liberated us from the burden of being exploited consumers, allowing us to be emancipated producers of our own (social) world. Optimistic voices no longer regard this trend just as a new form of user-led content production, but as a process for the continuous creation and extension of discourse by collaborative communities, which in the political sphere may influence policy developments and other democratic procedures.

Yet the celebration of networked participatory culture all too easily forgets the political and economic factors underlying and designating these developments. Various sceptical analysts of civil society see the 21st century's ever more self-expressive digital media culture leading to societal fragmentation or multiple micro-publics who are no longer able to connect sufficiently to form a shared public world. These voices claim that new forms of online debate are liable to problems such as erroneous information cascades and balkanisation of different groups into separate universes of discourse. Examples of such individualising mechanisms are services that take the concept of the 'daily me' to extremes: user settings and bookmarks, reading and interacting on sites that support 'personal' views, (inter)linking to similar sites and customising news. Some even go further by asserting that the internet not only leads to social fragmentation, but also to moral fragmentation and moral anarchy. As a result, critics of contemporary media constellations see civic culture as deteriorating.

The internet is not only a network of networks but also a 'multi-polar' environment: practices of deliberation and disparity, fragmentation and amalgamation occur simultaneously, just as do decentralisation and integration. And it is a milieu—in particular the social media and user-generated sector—that due to its popularity involves major commercial and political interests. Just to get an idea of the dimensions we are talking about: three years after Google bought YouTube for $1.65 billion the video sharing domain announced it was serving one billion video views a day, doubling this by May 2010; 50 million tweets a day are made across the world; within four years Facebook's community has developed from a small circle of elite US students to around half a billion users and has a current market value of somewhere between $2 billion and $10 billion.

While the founders of sites like MySpace initially constructed a narrative of it being an 'organic' site, these sites have grown as calculated marketing endeavours, with its effects everywhere the bane of people's everyday internet experience: spamware, pop-up ads, spyware and adware. User-generated content is the very dynamic driving new revenue streams. The tastes, preferences and social narratives found in user entries were until lately inaccessible terrain for information-seeking corporations. It is the innovative ability to 'micro-target' individuals in an unprecedented manner that has excited media conglomerates like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp to pay $580 million to gain access to MySpace's youth culture database goldmine.

These are all splendid examples of the fact that the 'good old' million seems to have disappeared as a measuring unit somewhere during the first decade of the 21st century; but that's another anecdote. There is no doubt that we—at least in those societies most touched by digital media—are living in a time where economy cannot be conceived any longer exclusively within the time and space of factories and offices. Today the (mostly immaterial) production of information and its distribution through the network is a prevailing organisational principle of the global economy and we are increasingly part of it. Social relationships enabled via ICTs are a major focus for capital today. As our cultural, social and political practices are ever more characterised by mediated interaction, these habits have become embedded in the informational infrastructure of commodification.

Relationships with others through ICTs have surpassed accessory status and have become an essential, driving element for production in publicly organised space. Such publicly organised spaces vary from social network sites to citizen journalism and micro-blogging sites. As Simon Cooper pointed out in *Arena Magazine* 105, web 2.0 participants who create content do not so much initiate a democratisation of digital media as a commodification of the acts of creativity and participation. Whereas orthodox conceptions do not recognise many ordinary activities within web 2.0 as work, from a more critical perspective it is evident that individuals are often performing 'free labour' as they give away private data, produce and upload content and modify games for giant multinational corporations. Some might think this overstated, but today the groundwork for productivity no longer rests in the capitalistic asset but in the investment of the social brain. We are witnessing the general dissolution of the borders between the economic and the political, the spheres of life and politics that Michel Foucault has called bio-power. Based on the exercise of generic human faculties—language, memory, sociability, ethical and aesthetic inclinations—labour and non-labour develop an identical form of productivity. The line between production and consumption and with it also the boundaries between deliberation and exploitation have blurred in a way that makes it almost impossible to classify any longer whether individuals are being exploited or whether they are being 'autonomous'. It is exactly this indistinguishability that makes user-generated websites a crucial element of socio-cultural and socio-political structures of societies around the globe.

While capital relations are, of course, always-already social relations, social networks enable an exponential explosion of the interlocking of social and economic relations. In other words, today's networked publics allow the production of new markets and even the construction of a new paradigm of capitalist market relations. Hence social network sites can be seen as a prime example of the idea that the mediated globalisation we are currently living is putting life to work. Beyond the well-known procedure of selling private data to advertisers, the new film project 'Life in a Day' is a useful example. The endeavour promises a 'historic cinematic experiment' by creating 'a user-generated documentary film shot in a single day'. On 24 July, users were given twenty-four hours to capture their life on camera and submit it to YouTube. The most compelling footage will be edited into a documentary film, directed by Kevin Macdonald, produced by Ridley Scott and scheduled to premiere at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. Hollywood mainstream cinema on a shoestring. And Google's video platform representing the social centre of the world.

Defining and designing the spaces and means of communication is extremely significant. Not only because language and the means of communication are the tools in common in every productive act but also, as Manuell Castells has argued recently, because 'power in the network society is communication power'. In today's environment, at the moment groups, organisations or individuals seek to gain a voice—that is, have the possibility of speaking while someone is listening—they are more or less 'forced' to adapt to the internet's predominant intra-structures. This is an especially precarious situation for those social actors who perceive themselves as outside or even opposed to the mainstream, like alternative media or counter-publics. One might say that initiating a counter-discourse, or even conceptualising an alternative social centre, is hardly possible without partaking in structures marked by neo-liberalism. All the signs indicate that the so-called participatory media are becoming increasingly embedded with, rather than critical of or in conflict with economic liberalism; including the constraints of format, language and content that these media impose. This is not to say that they have or will become the mouthpieces of neo-liberalism exactly, but that they are very likely to undergo a process of assimilation, thus being shaped by the discursive environment in which their expressions of subjectivity and issues of interest are discussed, understood and acted upon.

At the centre of today's internet culture are contradictions which go to the heart of the experience of everyday life. On the one hand, the interactive capacity of the new communication system multiplies and diversifies the entry points in the communication process, giving rise to unparalleled autonomy for communicative subjects. On the other hand, this potential sovereignty is shaped, guarded and shortened by the increasing concentration and interlocking of corporate media, global network operators and politics. Kevin Rudd's heritage, the 'Great Firewall Reef', which Julia Gillard has seemed happy to implement, reflects this confining entanglement. In light of the fact that media and those who aim to gain a voice are embedded in dominant discourses, infected by power, we need to seek further for some more objective ground. In addition to critiquing singularities like Facebook's managing of privacy information, we have to ask ourselves: Just how multifaceted is our world? Under what conditions do we unite online? How dependent are alternative voices and counter-publics on commercial and commodifying structures? How can we avoid serving ends we are strongly opposed to?

To return to the fragmentation thesis, which has been opposed by a number of media and communications scholars, some, like Ernesto Laclau, do not necessarily see fragmentation as a deficit for the functioning of civil society. He suggests that 'the fragmentation of social identities and proliferation—in a computerised civilisation—of new forms of social mediation, gives democracy its specific fragility, but also its inherent political possibilities'.

So rather than fragmentation being merely a 'negative' formation, it also provides democracy with inherent political possibilities. Perhaps the most significant feature of ICTs is the possibility of expanded decentralisation and simultaneous integration. This 'flexibility' enables a multiplication of non-formalised or only partly formalised political dynamics and actors. While existing within the mixed environment of digital networks, platforms and transactions, such assemblages can function politically; for example, in the additional political weight electronic activists can derive from the assemblages of networks they constitute. Political success thus strongly depends upon linking 'fragmented' issue publics together. Issue publics are best understood as non-formalised or only partly formalised assemblages that gather around issues that affect and influence their day-to-day existences and identities. In that sense issue publics, of course, form more or less fragmented publics, as they are more concerned with one issue than with others. Nonetheless, 'fragmentation' into issue publics is not a barrier to enhancing democracy, as long as these fragmented components constitute a networked assemblage.

There exist already applied methods to create such issue-focused assemblages. One of them is the 'issuecrawler,' a tool—developed by Richard Rogers and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam—that acts as a server-side internet crawler, co-link machine and graph visualiser. The issuecrawler locates issue networks from densely interlinked clutches of NGOs, governmental agencies, and lone individuals or scientific groups, interested or working in the same issue area. It is thus an effective tool to (inter)connect individuals to form assemblies of issue publics. Another approach is applied by the research collaboration called Mapping Controversies. Following the slogan 'Democracy is the possibility to disagree' the group aims to equip citizens with tools to explore and visualise the complexities of scientific and technical debates; hence counteracting the view that due to an ever-growing complexity, getting involved in public life is becoming more and more difficult. A positive side effect of both endeavours could also be that they lead to more mutual discourse structures by contesting what has been termed 'Googlisation'.

To paraphrase Foucault again, life does not become the object of power without it also becoming at the same time the basis for new forms of resistance. While it appears to be increasingly difficult to find such new forms of resistance this is exactly our task at present. Which means nothing less than making new spaces of narrative exchange possible and creating new social practices. As Alirio Gonzales, the founder of community station Radio Andaqui in a region of armed conflict in Colombia, states: 'What we need is for this territory to re-think itself as a subject, as an actor. The people here need to re-think their identities, their goals, and who they want to be'.

Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia

Edited by Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson

On 21 June 2007 a national emergency was declared to combat child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. In an unprecedented action the Commonwealth government would take direct control of communities, overriding the authority of both the NT government and local community organisations. In this book, prominent Aboriginal leaders, academics and social commentators provide a devastating critique of the Howard government's draconian intervention from the perspective of human rights, alcohol and health policy, welfare and land rights reforms, Indigenous representation and reconciliation, and the recognition of cultural diversity.

Contributors: **Jon Altman** Ian Anderson **Judy Atkinson** **Larissa Behrendt** Kay Boulden **Maggie Brady** Tom Calma **David Dalrymple** Megan Davis **Michael Dillion** Michael Dodson **Patrick Dodson** Bill Fogarty **Raimond Gaita** John Hinkson **Melinda Hinkson** Ernest Hunter **Melissa Johns** Michael Mansell **Joe Morrison** John Morton **Gregory Phillips** Tristian Ray **David Ross** Tim Rowse **Guy Rundle** Mathew Ryan **Will Sanders** John Sanderson **John Taylor** William Tilmouth **Pat Turner** Nicole Watson **Rex Wild**

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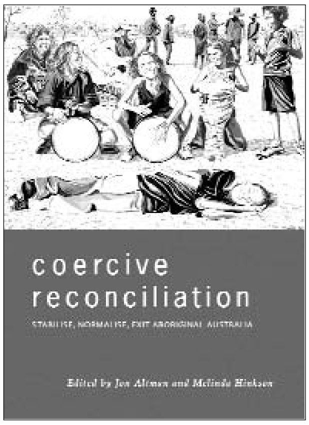
Inq: glenise@arena.org.au
Ph: 61 (03) 9416 0232
Fx: (03) 9416 0684


coercive
reconciliation
STABILISE, NORMALISE, EXIT ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA
Edited by Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson

Ways to Claim a Country

Gillian Cowlishaw

Identifying the Past

This essay began in a cobbled street in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

> *As I gaze uncomprehendingly down into an open archaeology dig, roped off and with informative plaques, I become aware of a strident voice proclaiming the meaning of the damaged columns and beams of an earlier structure to an audience of what appear to be American college students. Jews loom large in the guide's interpretation. He passionately proclaims the meaning of this place as personal and his, and he wants to make it theirs. I see that they are also Jewish, as some of the boys are wearing kippas. I am led to wonder whether tourist guides in Australia link their personal sense of national belonging to accounts of the country's history.*

That thought remains. I know there are brochures in which the Bluff Rock massacre of Aboriginal people is made into a tourist attraction, but it is not a site of triumphal or righteous assertion. On the contrary, Australians are more likely to be found apologetically, even shamefully, acknowledging Aboriginal history and the injustices therein.

And yet, in a purely formal sense, the Zionist claim that Israel is a Jewish state has much in common with Australia's assumption, or perhaps acceptance, that it is predominantly the Anglo citizens and traditions that define Australia's character. In both cases 'a people' with a specific cultural persona has established and legitimised its presence in a particular space or country. In each case the newcomers assumed dominion over the people who had resided there before. It took over a century for the English in Australia to establish effective control, often with violence, over the whole land and its Indigenous population, and now virtually no one challenges 'Western' or 'European' hegemony. It thus appears that the question that Israel is constantly and aggressively engaged in answering—who belongs here—has been settled in Australia by time. Is it simply the passage of the years that legitimises cultural belonging?

The constant and comprehensive, violent and discursive, disputation about Israel's legitimacy, in particular as a *Jewish* state, has many manifestations, and the effort to claim the past seems a relatively benign one, and common to many nations. But the intensity and emotion of Israel's assertions betray their provisional nature. Sporadic, ineffective physical resistance by long-term residents to the Judaising of this land, and the persistent and vigorous attempts to silence, remove and disempower the Arab presence, ensures continuing conflict in many parts of Israel/Palestine. In Australia, by way of contrast, colonisation began and succeeded long ago, so that the cultural self of white Australia is quite comfortable, facing no apparent violent conflict or serious challenge to its presence. I say apparent because I believe the efforts of Indigenous writers and artists to disrupt the complacency of the white presence does create a certain psychic anxiety; more of this below.

Despite emotional and even violent moments of resistance, Israelis' authority over Israeli territory—that within the 1967 green line—faces no more immediate threat than white Australia's authority over this continent. Yet Israel's constant assertion of an exclusive Jewish sovereignty over the land hints at an unadmitted fragility in the nation's moral claims. The frequent, confident complaint that Israel's very existence is still rejected by its Arab residents and neighbours becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, independent of its facticity. However, there may be a long-term threat to the Jewish nature of Israel stemming from the fact that Israel's population is static and deeply divided along ethno-racial and religious lines, while the Arab population is more unified and growing. Aggressive assertions that Eretz Israel is a *Jewish* land with a *Jewish* history and should be a *Jewish* state, and the Judaisation process that is apparent on even a brief visit to Israel, may indicate a lack of confidence about Israel's own legitimacy.

The comparison with Australia is not intended to lead to history lessons—there are immense differences between the two situations—but to explore the explanations, justifications and subjective orientations that accompany the sovereignty claims of a particular people when they make their home in a place already occupied by other people with whom the newcomers do not want to identify. There are many examples of course, but I want to pursue these two a little further. Those in Australia who righteously berate and condemn Israelis for trying to make the land they claim into exclusively Jewish land are beneficiaries of an equivalent cultural hegemony. Thus it seems appropriate to

Gillian Cowlishaw is a Research Fellow at the University of Sydney. Recent publications include **Blackfellas, Whitefellas and the Hidden Injuries of Race** (Blackwell, 2004) and **The City's Outback** (UNSW Press, 2009), the latter an adventurous ethnography set in western Sydney.

ask why the desire of many Jews to have a state of their own, stamped with a religio-cultural identity, seems so unforgivably *colonial*. Time has allowed Australia to become *post*-colonial and able to write new history, recognise Native Title, and apologise for past violence without endangering its sovereignty and cultural dominance. The people the Jews are still displacing are alive, present and objecting, whereas by and large Aboriginal people only object to the conditions under which they currently live—which the nation officially regrets.

> **There is little evidence that Anglo-Australians' sense of belonging in their own cultural space has been disturbed. There is certainly no equivalence to the ongoing painful sense of shame that some Israelis and many Jews feel about the continuing attempts to dispossess the Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem and the West Bank.**

The other reason Australians can complacently criticise Israel's Jewish exclusivity is that it flouts modern egalitarian principles that had not taken hold when Australia was claimed by Captain Cook and subsequently colonised. Modern nation-states insist that all citizens have equal rights, irrespective of race, religion or national origin, let alone gender or sexual preference. Rafts of anti-discrimination law and international charters are based on such principles; indeed Australians are scandalised at the suggestion that the selection of immigrants is based on race. Israel's practice of accepting *only* and *all* Jews as entitled to full citizenship is popularly viewed as unacceptably discriminatory. The inferior form of citizenship available to Arabs and other non-Jews is well-documented, though deniable due to the complexity of the legislative and administrative practices. The vigorous denial itself constitutes an admission that such discrimination is wrong. There are peculiar consequences of the entitlement of all Jews, from anywhere in the world, to a place in Israel. For instance, someone whose family has been Australian for generations is entitled to become a citizen of Israel if she or he has female Jewish forebears, whereas a non-Jew whose ancestors have lived in Israel for as long as they remember is not entitled to full and equal citizenship. Perhaps there is a faint echo in the entitlement of family members to enter Australia on the basis of family reunion provisions in the immigration laws—albeit very faint as this is a purely genealogical question, and applies independent of race and religion.

National Belonging

Human beings everywhere probably prefer conditions where the strangeness of the world is muted, where common language and others' ways of relating present no challenge to an everyday sense of legitimacy. Nationalism can be seen as the attempt to remove the discomfort or insecurity that otherness poses. Yet elements of otherness are also, and always, inside a nation. Some 'difference' escapes control and remains a potential threat that nations must be vigilant in defining, containing, domesticating. Indeed it may be that some form of otherness helps, and may even be created as the enemy within, to identify the national self. We must be able to distinguish 'our' ways from the ways of some alien 'others'.

The extent to which Anglo-Australians have established their homeliness here is illustrated in the limited hospitality afforded to non-English speaking immigrants who make up a substantial proportion of the population, and by the fact that Indigenous people find themselves made 'other' in their own land. A more interesting contrast with Israel is in the element of discomfort that was inserted into Australians' consciousness when the injustices of the colonial past were brought to public attention and received extensive recognition in the 1980s. Historians and others now insist that the British heritage of this country includes not only the triumphs but also the destruction and oppression that accompanied white supremacy over the Indigenous population. A sense of shame in relation to the descendents of dispossessed Aboriginal people is now evident; but however deeply felt by some, these responses are, I believe, mainly intellectual ones. That is, while there have been extensive, sometimes extravagant, gestures towards righting the wrongs of the past, there is little evidence that Anglo-Australians' sense of belonging in their own cultural space has been disturbed. There is certainly no equivalence to the ongoing painful sense of shame that some Israelis and many Jews feel about the continuing attempts to dispossess the Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem and the West Bank. One Israeli friend spoke of 'our wretched country'. The area left for a potential Palestinian state has been shrinking ever since the occupation began. Before examining some of the current ways Jewishness is being implanted in memories and maps and in the very earth, let us compare the explicit reasoning that the British and the Jews used to assert their rights in these two cases.

Rational Nationalism

The ostensible justification of British settlement in Australia was the popular evolutionary theory of human social development. It was then simply common sense that more advanced peoples were entitled to displace those who were socially and technically, if not biologically, backward. God blesses those who produce from the land, as against those who merely harvest its bounty. Similar arguments surfaced to justify the Jewish claim to the land once known as Palestine, land where some Jews had lived for centuries as one ethno/religious group among other Semitic peoples. But from the earliest Zionist movement to create a Jewish homeland, three other themes keep emerging—biblical authority, historical connection and need. Old Testament words may be disputed by biblical scholars and are ancient superstition to many non-religious Jews, but these proclamations nonetheless carry a cultural weight of some magnitude. The strident enunciation that 'God gave this land to the Jews', supplemented by later historical claims, has continually inspired the settlers to take possession of more land, and even secular Jews may find it hard to disown those who claim to be living out the founding myths of the Jewish people. Perhaps an admiration for Australia's pioneers is not radically different, though we now sharply differentiate the murderous brutes involved in massacres from those who treated the Aborigines they were displacing humanely.

The *need* of Jews for a homeland is the most widely acknowledged, historically important and internationally accepted justification, and perhaps it has a faint echo in the British need for somewhere to put their criminals in the 1770s, and later the needs of an expanding population. Perhaps 'desire' or 'opportunity' are more appropriate terms. The Jewish need was of a different order, based originally on their chronically oppressed conditions in many parts of Europe. This need was articulated by the early 19th-century Zionists who systematically bought land and established communities in the then Palestine long before they were offered a recognised place there. When, after World War II, the extent and hideousness of Nazi anti-Semitic genocide became known, European nations accepted some responsibility for the extreme suffering of Jews, and they accepted the need for a Jewish homeland. The British, and later the United Nations, solved the problem by offering them a substantial part of what had become the Mandated Territory of Palestine. There is no doubt that the insult and injury to the Palestinians was recognised by those responsible, but the land was eventually handed over to the Jews for their own state despite vigorous protests from the incumbents and other Arab countries.

The early settlers of Australia did not need to consciously promote a specifically British state. Establishing 'facts on the ground' was taken to be a virtuous, progressive and brave endeavour, and only occasionally was there a need to preach the virtues of our cultural heritage. Aborigines who disputed 'the white man's' right to be here were overwhelmed by the numbers, the guns and the technological power, against which their moral claims only allowed for a rear guard action that continues in a different form today.

Cultural Claims

Putting biblical justifications aside, for who in the modern secular world takes them to have serious political force, how are the cultural claims of each of the dominant groups—Anglo-Australians in the one case and Jewish Israelis on the other—actualised? Australia is saturated with cultural mores that came from Britain in the late 18th and the 19th centuries. The English language, the built environment, the legal system, and so on and on, stem from the colonisers who gradually and unevenly re-formed the whole continent that was named Australia in 1824. The Jewish settlers of the country that became Israel likewise reshaped the land, and sought to conceal evidence of its Palestinian past. After the Nakba of 1948, when over 700,000 Palestinians were driven or fled from their homes and were not allowed to return, their villages and other traces of their existence were systematically destroyed. However, what is startlingly apparent when visiting Israel is that this reshaping is not complete but is being advanced at every turn against imagined and real denials and contestation. Even in areas that are unambiguously and internationally known and accepted as Israel, there is a sense of unfinished identity, and Judaisation is being actively pursued, not least in the attempt to change the character of East Jerusalem. It is evident in museums, in the naming and renaming of villages and settlements in Hebrew, in tourist brochures, in historical accounts of all kinds of events in the past. For instance. in a small local museum in Petach Tikva, the history of an early Jewish settlement is told in graphic and heroic detail with little mention of other, earlier peoples in the district. The erasure of evidence of earlier Palestinian villages, named memoricide by Ilan Pappe, is being protested vigorously by some Jewish groups within Israel. Ted Swedenburg details the way various sites and episodes from the past are memorialised to privilege some events and erase others.

Archaeology and Owning the Past

The moment in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem that started this train of thought was one of a series of observations of the vociferous assertion of the primacy significance of Jews in the region's history. These narratives position others who built and rebuilt cities and villages and occupied them for generations as temporary interlopers, sometimes helpful but often destructive of Jews. The work of archaeologists makes crucial contributions to this process. Nadia Abu El Haj has shown that there is no simple archaeology in Israel. Rather, Israeli archaeology is inextricably tied to establishing the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state.

It is the public face of archaeology in Israel and in Australia that most clearly illustrates the difference between the two forms of national belonging. There is no more secrecy about the efforts being put into Judaising Israel's past than there was about Australia's earlier white triumphalist history. The contrast is evident when archaeologists who uncover evidence of an ancient human past in Australia dutifully, even gleefully, name it Aboriginal. There is virtue and redemption attached to acknowledging Aboriginal claims to ancient habitation, ancient spiritual connections, ancient knowledge of the country. Intellectuals readily confess that settler Australians have shallow connections with the land and cling to the edges of the continent as if afraid of its interior power. The lack is even claimed as a feature of Australian identity. Unlike Israel, where Jewish settlers (in the widest sense) are aiming to legitimise the continuity of their ownership over three millennia, we Australian settler descendents are so confident in our ownership that we readily admit the limits of our historical connections. Indeed, our ability to *recognise* the deep spiritual connections of Aboriginal people with the land confirms our benign intentions and our legitimacy here. Acknowledging the depth and power of Indigenous spiritual connections with the land enhances our virtue while posing no threat to our mundane political and legal ownership.

Thus, all kinds of meetings are regularly opened with a formal acknowledgment of the traditional owners of the land on which the meeting is being held, or a 'welcome to country'. Human remains dating from before European settlement are routinely named *Aboriginal* remains and contemporary Aboriginal people are accepted as the descendents with rights over their disposal. Dissenters exist among museologists and archaeologists who argue that remains from the deep past should be considered as simply human, and held in the custody of museums for the sake of science and human knowledge. But such an argument has not carried much weight in the face of our national desire to recognise Aborigines as the spiritual and symbolic, if former, owners of the continent.

Emplaced Nationality

All nations try to build a definitive character, fashioned out of particular historical events that become the national story, often a complex, morally fraught one that changes emphasis over time to fit changing moral and philosophical demands. Nations imagine themselves as one, as unified, as sharing some essential national identity, despite being internally complex and disparate. The process of forming 'a people' with a distinctive identity is primarily an imaginative process, but one that can flourish when that people and its leaders command a place or space. This is equally well illustrated in the formation of Australian and Israeli national identity.

The majority of Australians have had little immediate connection with either the early or later stages of the process of Indigenous dispossession, although there were always authors and intellectuals who explained and rationalised the necessity, inevitability—or the tragic injustice—of asserting their exclusive ownership of the country. While Australian innocence has been challenged and modified in recent years from immigrant and Indigenous quarters, and the nation's culture is far more open and diverse, this is still a predominantly 'white nation'.

The active Judaisation apparent in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem's Old City involves the resident Israelis today. The Jewish quarter has been refurbished. Houses with shining doorknobs and stylish window boxes enhance the attractively clean and well-preserved cobblestone streets. Stalls and old-style shops are overshadowed by expensive boutiques and wonderful displays of old treasures. As in other quarters, places of worship abound. A troupe of school children goes by one day, some boys wearing ringlets and little kippas, charming and innocent of what we are hearing about on the news: the aggressive dispossession of the Arabs of East Jerusalem. It is this news, along with the vast and ugly wall, the IDF soldiers and the armed settlers, that gives a chilling edge to assertions that Jewishness lies deep in the city's soil.

We Australians plead guilty but *feel* innocent of the dispossession our forebears perpetrated. When a Jew asks us about oppressed Aborigines today, we are nonplussed; we are building houses for them, not tearing them down! We are expressing admiration and care for 'our Aborigines'. But the question leads me to wonder, were our white place in our Australia threatened by millions of Aborigines refusing us legitimacy in the land, would ugly emotions arise and overwhelm our desire to recognise their equality and their cultural rights? The answer must be yes, as evident in the secreted seam of fear and hostility that emerged when the High Court of Australia pronounced that Native Title still exists and must be recognised in Australia.

What we cannot abide is the unflinching claims the Jews are making *now* against the resident Arabs whose houses are regularly demolished. The stories of particular acts of violence—house demolitions, settlers' attacks on West Bank villages, the walls and electrified fences that constitute the Security Barrier—outrage us. If our grandparents did such gross things in this country they were wrong. Don't the Jews understand such blatant dispossession by force is now unacceptable, that the legitimacy once attached to colonial dispossession has eroded?

I have not intended a moral, or even a political treatise, although there are both moral and political implications here. My aim has been to set out some parallels and contrasts in Australian and Israeli colonising processes so that we in Australia know from what position we are speaking when we try to understand and solve the problems of the claims of Jews and Arabs to the places we now call Israel and Palestine. a

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Observations on a remarkable occurrence, as well public as private

Valerie Krips

Mary McKillop and the Australian social imaginary

The Australian social imaginary, the way that 'people imagine their social existence … and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie … [their] expectations', to use Charles Taylor's definition, might well be in the process of some adjustment. By the time these words are in print, Mary McKillop, born in Fitzroy, Victoria, will have joined the company of those whose virtue has been proved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. She will then join the litany of those in whose name the church will seek intercession. Sadly, the litany no longer includes St Christopher, who, as it turns out, is an unlucky saint after all: he has been found to be entirely imaginary. In spite of this fall from grace, his statue, bearing the infant Christ on his shoulder, still adorns many a home, and no doubt many churches too. If this all sounds rather medieval, that's because in many ways it is. In some aspects it is even older.

Saints, it seems, have existed almost as long as the Christian church itself. Originally mostly martyrs, they were venerated by local groups and canonised by equally local bishops. It wasn't until 1634 that a Papal Bull set out a reformed process: from henceforth only those who passed the Vatican's stringent set of requirements were accepted as candidates for sanctification. In the process more than canonisation was reformed; a certain unruliness in the church in some outlying quarters was also brought under strict control (several 'saints' venerated locally before 1634 turned out to be precedents for St Christopher).

Taylor argues that the processes of bringing the church into conformity were rationalising in ways that played their part in producing the great changes to the social imaginary which had their eventual outcome in modernity. In this he reprises to some extent arguments that Weber made when he talked of the disenchantment of the modern secular world. It's that disenchantment, and that rationalising and secularising process, that the canonisation of Mary McKillop challenges, and within which it has to find its place.

Finding a place in the disenchanted world may not be quite as difficult as it seems at first glance. There are many different ways of imagining the social, ways that can quite well exist within the overarching frameworks of a modern Western nation. That there are challenges to the hegemony of secularism is clear enough from the array of current work that proclaims again the gospel of disbelief. As much as books like Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* or Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great* take the arguments of the 1960s about the death of God to a new audience, they underline the fact that, in spite of everything, the argument is not quite made. Or if is made, it is not quite taken.

The old enchantment dies hard. Carried into modernity by legend and song, reignited by television programs about apparitions and witches, it takes up some of the imaginative space left in the homogenous, empty time that Walter Benjamin told us was the outcome of modernity. That time implies a linear spatiality, a space peculiarly earth-bound but also capable of ushering in an imagination that does away with hierarchies, with a sense that a higher time and place exists, and from which everything else depends. This is, of course, the time of secularism.

According to Benedict Anderson, it was precisely the new secular sense of time that allowed us to feel that we belonged to the imagined community of the nation. For this to work, the nation had to become part of the social imaginary, had to become part of the background of our lives, to be one of our 'normative notions' as Taylor has it. Yet in spite of the undoubted power of the various imaginary communities to which we belong, the contemporary interest in memory and the past in all its forms suggests a pervasive sense of loss, and a desire to reconnect to something we can scarcely name.

> **Finding a place in the disenchanted world may not be quite as difficult as it seems at first glance. There are many different ways of imagining the social, ways that can quite well exist within the overarching frameworks of a modern Western nation.**

In Australia the day of Mary McKillop's canonisation will be met by celebrations of many kinds. In Melbourne, at the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, the canonisation ceremony at St Peter's in Rome will be broadcast live on large screens: the ubiquitous advertising for the event has invited people to be 'part of history'. Pilgrims have, as I write, begun making their way to Rome to be present at the moment of canonisation while *Compass*, ABC television's faith and religion program, will broadcast live from the Vatican with specialists who will analyse the ceremony's 'significance and impact'.

What that impact will be within a social imaginary which is slowly embracing multiculturalism and many faiths, as well as Aboriginal life and spirituality (and perhaps you need to be an Aboriginal or immigrant to test the extent of the slowness or otherwise of that embrace), is uncertain. Will it reignite something of the old enchantment, enliven the church so that its place within secularism can be ensured? To imagine that the canonisation of Mary McKillop will reverse those elements of the social imaginary that ensure the slow creep of secularism so deplored by the Pope on his recent visit to England is surely to live in the land of real make-believe. We shall have to wait and see what the impact will be. And in the meantime, within the greater social imaginary that operates to make us all Australian, some will greatly rejoice.

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Observations on a remarkable occurrence, as well public as private

Valerie Krips

Valerie Krips is an Arena Magazine editor and an Honorary Fellow in the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne.

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Portraying Roller Derby

Genevieve D. Berrick

Genevieve D. Berrick is infatuated with Roller Derby in all its incarnations, and has managed to also 'officially' write and talk about it in many locations, usually under her derby name, The Notorious E.V.E. The further she strays intellectually and physically from areas that are 'technically' her arena, the more she realises that the visceral possibilities that bodily boundaries present remains her main fascination and motivation.

Portraying Roller Derby

Genevieve D. Berrick

Why is the media so constrained in its depictions of derby?

As I watch to the end of the news clip, an ambivalent ball grows within: enthusiastic triumph that 'we' have made it, the women I know and love finally being represented in mainstream news reporting, coupled with a growing sense of trepidation that the reporter seems once again to be employing the 'superhero' approach to roller derby women—'mild-mannered reporter by day, hard-hitting derby girl by night'.

Some years before, when I walked into Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, with the anticipation of pleasure that comes with a show of the collected works of Tracey Moffatt—an artist with an ambivalent relationship with critics' tendency to label her an 'Indigenous artist'—I had little idea of what lay ahead of me. One room in particular contained a wonderful surprise—a series of sepia-tinted shots of women in surprising combinations, all wearing roller skates. What a sense of my childhood glimpsed through these images!

I had the fortune to be accompanied by a good friend whose usual locale is New York City and who was able to tell me that what we were seeing was roller derby. Roller derby, dormant since the late seventies, had been spreading across the United States in a way that was totally different from its earlier incarnations—the maxim 'by the skaters, for the skaters' seems to be the best summary and best-practice ethos of derby across the world today. A run-through of the bare-bones rules and purpose of the game set me straight: a contact sport defined around women's bodies! On roller skates! I was quickly convinced that this vital, spectacular, woman-centric, full-contact sport was something I would be keeping my eye out for in Australia.

Fast forward a few years, and at least one location change, to Melbourne in 2007, and a fortuitous stumble across the burgeoning Victorian Roller Derby League (VRDL). It was one

ROLLER GIRLS ATE MY MASCULINITY!
WORDS
Andrew McClelland
PHOTOS
Ben
Loveridge

of the first leagues in Australia, though there are close to forty these days, at different levels of growth and development. (Each league helps to skill-share and encourage the new, even across Australia's vast distances.) I joined up. The sport is rough and ready, the women ranging from confirmed jocks to those who have never once played a team sport. Tattoos and brightly coloured hair, fishnets and short shorts or tiny skirts seem to be part of the territory.

It might seem to the outsider like barely organised chaos. But it is very much a sport, with simultaneous offensive and defensive tactics played at high speed and intensity for an entire hour-long bout. It works by one member (the jammer) of each five-person team on the track (all skating anti-clockwise) attempting to score points in each two-minute jam by passing each member of the opposing team. There are strictly abided-by rules—the ones my league play by were created and are regularly updated, by a conglomeration of leagues, which established an overseeing body, the US-based Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). Teams of dedicated refs oversee these rules, and every one of the women involved is a dedicated, fiercely competitive and skilled sportswoman. These women are happily obsessed with their sport, and its grassroots appeal tends to take over every spare minute of their lives. Roller derby's women (and occasionally men, though male leagues are new and usually quite dispersed) are incredibly diverse—PhD students and mums, crafters and printmakers, graphic designers and scientists. But, for some reason, in the many media articles depicting them the same formula emerges—'superhero derby girls revealed'!

> **These women do incredible things in the world; their diverse bodies and physicalities in contact are shifting life as we know it!**

In some ways the reporters can't be entirely blamed—the women's use of invented names and numbers (Nicotina, 14mg; Cherry Rockette, 36-24-36) feeds into that portrayal. And it's true that some derby women use their personae to escape from the daily grind, using sport's much examined ability to suspend the regular rules of the everyday. The VRDL's first president, Betty Bamalam, can be found in at least one interview saying exactly that.

But this idea of escape and emergence of the superhero, like many of the labels roller derby players find attached to them, is just a little too easy: it can't express more than a small fraction of the multiplicity of identities and embodiment that the women associated with derby represent. Do not be distracted by the fishnets and booty shorts. These women do incredible things in the world; their diverse bodies and physicalities in contact are shifting life as we know it! Even the fishnets help with that.

The superhero narrative could be seen in the terms of a classic 'backlash' response—*à la* Susan Faludi: part of a media-sponsored attack on women sectioning off the empowering experience of violence and aggression from the 'real' world into a nice, safe, anaesthetised and no longer challenging time and space. In this view, a women-centric sport, (re-)made for women's bodies, by women's bodies, is stripped of its potential for challenge by removing the 'real' of these women's everyday lives from how the sport is represented. Or perhaps it can be seen in terms of a different mythology, illustrated by the accompanying image on the previous page: in which the fear of emasculation is manifested in the devouring vulva which takes over: the classic *vagina dentata*, this time on rollerskates!

While this type of news story jams the reader into making similar assumptions, the real question for those who write about derby is how to encompass complexity and diversity, a problem by no means exclusive to this sport. My writing and thinking around derby attempts to work complexity and ambiguity into its being. It was with this is mind that I approached the premiere screening of Drew Barrymore's directorial debut *Whip It* with the VRDL (who had helped promote the film). It's a blockbuster of a movie, with spectacularity, toughness, and sassy starring ladies with a line of critically acclaimed movies tucked neatly into their hot-pants and Reidells (generally accepted to be *the* derby rollerskate). It was a hell of a lot of fun, and to me conveyed perfectly the white-hot passion and love that goes into the game, into the living around the game, and the life changes it makes. But Barrymore, despite her many other credits, clearly didn't quite grasp the fundamental respect that derby girls (with very few exceptions, in my experience) have for the rules of the game.

The basic problem for depictions of derby is that what looks good for the camera isn't really how derby girls know their sport is played. This has been a particularly interesting conundrum that my own league has encountered. As players become more skilled and more tactically engaged, the game slows down; it becomes more defensive, with lower scoring, and the hits become less spectacular, though they are more strategic ... and the punters who come entirely for the visualarity, the thrills and spills, feel a little deflated, even as those who know the game best get ever more entranced. I can't help but ponder the consequences of such portrayals as *Whip It*, or the upcoming feature-length Australian documentary on roller derby, for the new players ('fresh meat') who sign up, the parents who act as responsible guardians and the partners who rapidly become derby 'widows', the punters who show up at a bout, and the way that derby girls feel like they need to play. Ambivalence, certainly. Superheroes beware!

←←←
Portraying Roller Derby
Genevieve D. Berrick

The Voice of the Bank

Mia Moriarty

→→→
The Voice of the Bank
Mia Moriarty

Mia Moriarty is a writer based in Melbourne. All names within this story have been changed.

What price morality? Parrying racism in a Melbourne recruitment centre

The day I knew I would leave the recruitment centre was the day Lauren started. It was in late summer; I arrived blooming with sweat from the ride in. In the toilets I plucked my shirt off my damp skin, pulled down the cinched skirt that made me mince. I had time for a coffee, I thought, a small moment of transition. But Jacqualynne, the Client Relations Manager, was in the kitchen area already. Her voice filled up the room. With her was a young woman I hadn't met before.

'*Here* she is,' said Jacqualynne. 'Mia, this is Lauren, our newest part-timer. I'll get you to take her through the phone-screening today. Mia is our expert and long-serving assessor and she'll tell you all there is to know about the centre.'

Lauren beamed at me and thrust out her hand. She had an open face, merry and sweet; I thought she must be just over twenty. She was Indian, I was certain, or part-Indian at least. From the breezy way Jacqualynne departed, I suspected she might not be aware of this.

'I'll have a coffee first,' I said. 'Do you want one? Not that you'd think I would in this heat but it's an addiction to be fed, you know, ha ha …' I kept up a bright stream of prattle as the water boiled. Anything, really, to delay the moment when we would sit down together at the desk and I would impart my distilled knowledge of the centre.

> **To the centre's staff the sheer number of Indian applicants was an irritant, a rising force to be thwarted … The bank's desirable candidates (Young! Perky! White Australian!) had to be siphoned carefully out of a surge of undesirables.**

I had cringed at the appellation 'expert' because it was fulsome, but also at 'long-serving', because it was true. I'd started at the recruitment centre three years before, in 2007, during the preliminary rumbles of the GFC. Still, the centre, which supplied certain departments of one of Australia's 'big four banks' with entry-level call centre staff, was thriving. Jobs, both at the centre and the bank, were in demand. As I measured the granules I considered, then discarded, various opening sallies. 'It's all about communication …' was one thing I could say. That's how it had been explained to me.

* * *

My recruitment career had begun, as these often do, with an induction. A manual, a brief from human resources, a list of criteria and obligations. Jacqualynne had presided with a laptop, a whiteboard and a large white smile.

'Your role as recruitment consultants, as telephone screeners and assessors, is to uphold the values of the bank. You are to maintain the ethos of the bank's hiring policy and comply with the expected standards. *Cultural fit* is what sets this centre apart from the others. If the employees are a good cultural fit—if they are congruent with the team—it improves job satisfaction and productivity. An applicant's *communication* is paramount. Applicants to the centre who do not display the bank's required levels of interpersonal communication will not be successful. We are responsible for staffing *the customer service voice of the bank.*'

Charts were indicated, photocopied tables passed around, forms signed. We were to exhibit certain 'behaviours' by performing certain 'competencies'. The other inductees had worked in offices before; this language didn't seem as opaque and alienating to them as it did to me, nor did they seem to mind the lack of practical instruction. What were we to do in the role precisely? More tangible advice was to follow.

On my first day I was sent to the back office, the windowless centre of the building, to be mentored by expert and long-serving assessor Helena, who was conducting preliminary interviews over the phone. If applicants were successful at the end of the twenty-minute interview, Helena would invite them into the centre for a four-hour assessment. If unsuccessful, they were given 'the spiel'. Helena's elongated vowels slid over the spiel while she rattled her paperwork and rolled her eyes at me.

'… and if you *don't* hear back from us by the *end* of the week you can *assume* your application has *not* been a success—not that it's up to me … That's right, nooooo we do *not* give feedback to unsuccessful candidates but if you are successful you will hear back from us in a week that's right thank you OK thank you yup OK good*byyyye*.' She ended the call with a stab of her tapered nail.

'Shocker,' she said. 'I scored 'im a one outta five for communication.' She slapped an Excel spreadsheet on the desk between us and indicated the list of names. 'You see there—Krishna-babble, Singha-whatsisface. I call these names the *dodgies*. Don't even bother calling the dodgies. Start with the good Aussie names. There. Sarah Thompson. Call her.'

Sarah Thompson didn't answer her phone. Mitchell Maloney didn't either, and he had a novelty voicemail recording which I decided was best not to respond to. Jessie Bello didn't remember applying for a bank job and, um, just wanted to have a, you know, a job that was easy and wouldn't get her dirty. Aden Lehman asked me to take him off whatever list I had him on and became aggressive when I tried to explain I was calling regarding a job application he'd made online. I told Helena I'd finished calling the European names.

'Oh fine,' she said. 'Sometimes you can get some good ones in the dodgies—give em a go, why not.'

I called Maduma Krishnananthan, whose student visa didn't permit her to work more than twenty hours a week (and it was a full-time job); Ravi Singh, who was on a bridging visa (candidates had to have permanent residency); and Priya Mehmet, who didn't answer her phone.

'The dodgies are *useless*,' said Helena.

The visa issue did come up repeatedly, and I had to emphasise the bank's absolutist stance on student visas and shift requirements. To save time, I led by asking if they were residents. Still, a few interviews in, I spoke to Kuldeep Shah, who had finished his degree, obtained his permanent residency and was working at a service station while he searched for an entry level role in banking.

'It is very competitive these days,' he said, 'but I don't mind. I was working as an accountant back in India, so this is a bit of a step down, but I know this is how it is when you come to a new country. I can tell you I will be giving my all for this job, ma'am.'

We completed the interview and I booked him in for an appointment at the centre. 'I got one!' I gestured to Helena. She made an oo with her mouth while the spiel rolled on by itself.

By the end of my first day I had booked only four more candidates in. There was a language barrier I came up against repeatedly: second-language speakers who may have been able to communicate well enough face-to-face—when visual cues are involved—foundered over the phone. (I supposed this was the communication issue Jacqualynne had been emphasising.) The scattergun nature of online job applications accounted for part of the low strike rate too—many people were ready to click a button to apply, but insufficiently enthused about minimum-wage call centre work to give their time to a phone interview in which they had to express continued enthusiasm for the role.

All the same, I felt that the candidates I put through were of the high calibre that Jacqualynne had emphasised in the induction. Helena, less certain, winced visibly at my list of names.

'A few dodgies there,' she said. 'How was their communication?'

'Fine,' I said. 'Lovely phone manner, all of them. Very well-spoken. Lots of experience too.'

At the end of my first month I was called into Jacqualynne's office for a performance review. 'So. Mia. How are you liking it all? Are you having any trouble picking candidates? Are you finding it easy enough *judging the communication of candidates*?'

'It seems to make sense,' I said. 'It can be difficult for some people to express themselves on the phone, so it's a competitive style of interview, but then the job itself is phone-based so this seems apt …' I trailed off as it became clear she was nodding briskly, waiting for me to finish.

She held my call transcripts in her hands. 'It's just that we've had some of your candidates come through the centre so far and the feeling is that their *communication* is just … not quite there.'

'… Oh. They seemed … fine,' I finished limply.

'It's just that the bank expects a certain *level* of communication, especially in the areas of the bank we're looking after, and when a candidate has such a strong accent that we can't understand them …'

I nodded slowly. Things were clear. They would become clearer.

To the centre's staff the sheer number of Indian applicants was an irritant, a rising force to be thwarted, constrained and all the while despaired at. The bank's desirable candidates (Young! Perky! White Australian!) had to be siphoned carefully out of a surge of undesirables. The role of the telephone screener seemed to be that siphon.

It's true that overwhelming numbers of the Indian applicants had visa situations that precluded them from applying. It did occur to me that the bank could have tapped into a ready workforce by creating more part-time low-level jobs that international students would have been willing to work in for the duration of their studies (the maximum length of time the desirable 'Aussie' candidates were expected to stay in their roles was six months, hence the need for the recruitment centre's machinery) but this wasn't something to be negotiated. And, yes, the number of phone calls that had to be terminated early because of visa issues or lack of clarity was a time waster; I could see that. But irritation had spilled over into something more: an aural barrier erected in response to *any* Indian voice, that turned the clear yet accented tones of a fluent English speaker into something baffling and enraging. The formal, and to Australians excessive, good manners that the Indian candidates displayed were seen as cloying and ingratiating. 'Just *yes* will do,' I overheard a long-time assessor say tersely to a candidate who answered her questions with the courteous yet less concise: 'Yes please, ma'am.'

Jacqualynne tried to hasten things along by giving me spreadsheets with only European names highlighted. I must have blanched because she gave a tinkling laugh and touched my arm. 'No matter what we think of this,' she said, 'we have to look after our client. Our supply has to meet our client's demands. And the bank has to look after their customers.' She laughed again. 'They can't have people thinking they've called India!'

> **'Is it just Indians who are barred from applying or would an Australian of Indian heritage be rejected too? What about an Australian of Chinese or Vietnamese descent?'**

And well they might too. Given the number of Western multinationals that have so profitably outsourced their customer service departments to India, global helpdesks are likely to be staffed by Indians. By the twenty-first century the Indian accent has become synonymous with a voice over the phone, often an intrusion like a sales pitch, at least a suggestion that local jobs have been outsourced. The bank, firmly planted on Australian soil, was reluctant to have its customers establish irritation so early in a call, especially with the bulk of banking done away from physical branches. And yet in several months the GFC would hit and the bank would close departments, even whole buildings, and send its jobs off-shore to India.

By late 2007, applications to the centre were rolling in in waves. It was a profitable time to recruit because, as Helena so delightedly exclaimed, 'We've got Aussie names on the lists now!' I preferred face-to-face assessing rather than telephone screening, as it exposed me to less futility, misery and raw desperation (screening tended to make me dramatic) although, even in the throes of the GFC, candidates were likely not to show up at the centre. This made the senior consultants despair ('Don't people *want* to work these days?') but it made perfect sense to the part-timers. For most job-seekers, especially the ones with the biddable, pert qualities sought after by the bank, undergoing this process for a minimum-wage call centre role with no promised security or advancement just wasn't worth it. And to recently graduated Indian students, confident that they would swiftly prove their worth in an entry-level role and rise through the bank's hierarchy, it was.

For Indians, I learned, call centre work, rather than a low-level role grudgingly performed by students, is a position of esteem, for many a prideful entry point into the middle class and, later, a Western career. Those whose work in Western-owned call centres had provided them with prestige and upward mobility anticipated that these credentials would be recognised when they applied for work in Australia. Recently graduated students with a business, finance or IT background, whose families had invested heavily in Australian universities, were in peak numbers during my time at the centre. A modern phenomenon in migration, the first in history not expecting to start in unskilled labour, they came armoured with a degree and often experience in their field; for some their Australian qualification was a post-grad supplement, for others an ornamental, expensive but mandatory gateway to residency. They expected the benefits from their tuition would reflect the price they paid for it, that a country that had courted them as a student would reward them as a graduate. They didn't expect to receive 'a less than benchmark score for communication'.

This knowledge, grimly circular, added layers of cultural guilt to my role as a recruitment consultant.

And of course the sheer existential uselessness of the job filled me at times with gloom, at times wry amusement, at being part of the mechanism responsible for installing call centre operators, one of capitalism's more irksome by-products. Who is more pathetic, the finance graduate who applies for a call centre role, or the writer who appraises their four-hour assessment process? The other part-time staff at the centre—either students or underemployed artists—were in a similar situation to me, financially, ethically and emotionally. We commiserated. We traded in small kindnesses, to the candidates and to each other. It was so difficult in these times, we agreed, to find a job this flexible, this well-paid. What price morality? Small ironies too—these were helpful.

And so I stayed, as many did. I became invaluable, a fixture—intuitive, adept, with a reputation for efficiency that stemmed from crisply worded candidate write-ups and a brisk walk in killer heels. When screening, I pared down lists for survival, only calling applicants after a thorough perusal of their CV—better that way than to waste someone's time inviting them in for an assessment they had little hope of surpassing. Like the centre, like the bank, I let supply anticipate demand. When I was put in charge of training the new girls, this was the approach I advocated.

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I was careful when explaining all this to Lauren. My phrasing faltered; eventually I stuttered into silence. When we looked at each other we laughed ruefully; we both had tears in our eyes.

'Do you smoke?' she said. 'I think I need a cigarette.'

'I don't, actually,' I said. 'But me too.'

We sat in the alleyway on two upturned milk crates. The smoke cut through the thick reek from the bins.

'It's just that my boyfriend is an international student,' she said. 'We worked together at Safeway. The racism he'd get from customers. And staff. It was horrible to watch.'

'I know.'

'I don't find it happens to me. Well, I'm Aussie. My dad's Aussie. People say, "Are you Egyptian? Are you Italian?" Most don't think I look Indian.' She mashed her cigarette into the concrete. 'Has anyone said anything?' she asked.

I told her that when I started I had complained to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission but, not being the one discriminated against, and not even having enough evidence to mount a claim, I didn't have a case. If a job is based on customer service and specifically audibility over the phone, then an assessment—subjective as it might be—that 'communication is inadequate' or that the candidate is 'difficult to understand' suffices as reason for refusal. And the requirements shifted from team to team, even team-leader to team-leader—a brief might come through for one particular job to have no Indian candidates, and another that allowed them provided they were only subtly accented. (These latter roles were described by management as 'diversity friendly'.)

I'd found out that a large proportion of the bank's staff weren't white Australian, or even Australian-born; many in fact were Indian—a ratio, according to my sources, that was roughly proportionate to the number of Indian finance graduates. It's difficult to make a case that only certain departments are discriminatory, especially when the jobs on offer are hardly the most contested or prestigious. It was sobering to note that I worked for the recruitment centre that catered to the bank's racist element.

I attempted to compile enough incriminating evidence myself by avoiding euphemism in the phone interview transcripts or centre write-ups. Under 'reason if unsuccessful', instead of 'communication insufficient', I'd write 'candidate speaks excellent English but has an accent that would be deemed too strong by the bank's hiring policy'. When sending instructional emails to colleagues: 'They don't allow any Indians in this role, or accented people generally. Check everyone's CV: if they have been born overseas, it is not worth calling them, *irrespective of how capable they may be in the job*, as the bank says there's no way they're going to be considered.' I had sent an email to a senior consultant asking for a specific breakdown of races who could work in the fraud department, one of the more prestigious and competitive (and racially pure) areas: 'Is it just Indians who are barred from applying or would an Australian of Indian heritage be rejected too? What about an Australian of Chinese or Vietnamese descent? They don't have a problem with European accents, do they? Just Asian ones?'

For Indians, I learned, call centre work, rather than a low-level role grudgingly performed by students, is a position of esteem, for many a prideful entry point into the middle class and, later, a Western career.

My email wasn't answered, although the consultant intercepted me in the kitchen: 'There are no unacceptable *races* per se; it's just that they just want people who are very *clean*.' As I rode home various replies raged in my head but at the time I looked at her in mute disbelief. 'And you shouldn't send that kind of email, you know,' she added. 'That would be compromising if we were audited.'

'Oh silly me,' I bleated. I'd hoped to forward a reply email on to my own address, but this conversation left nothing tangible.

Explaining this to Lauren made me realise how feeble, how easily dismissed, my protests had been.

I gave notice later that week. They were all sorry to see me go. I got the usual carefully worded card and an exuberant bunch of flowers, and also a book voucher (because, as the receptionist said, it seemed like the kind of thing I might be into). I was told how much they'd appreciated me and how welcome I would be to return. False to the last, I said I'd keep it in mind.

Lauren thanked me sweetly and blandly for training her. She would stay on; I last heard she was doing well, and had moved (as I never had) to a more senior role. When I did let myself think about the place I would fantasise that this was the sluggish beginnings of change. Lauren's presence would make institutionalised racism harder to enforce so casually; more justification would be required around not hiring someone, more accountability. It's some sort of progression. The same would happen, would already be happening, in the bank too.

Later I would feel a mild sinking whenever I thought of the place, a dislocation, a shame at having been there for so long—and this would be followed by a lightening of spirit, and a sense of distance, as if I'd been much younger at the time.

But at that point, riding home in peak hour, with the lavish spikes of my bouquet stabbing my chin, I would try only to keep my mind on the traffic, moving in a slow surge through the low gauzy haze; the sudden almost-nudges from cars, and the swooping freedom when the lights changed. ■

←←←
The Voice of
the Bank
Mia Moriarty

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Guardian
2 Tonnes
Sam Langer

Born in February 1983, Sam Langer graduated with a B.A. in 2007. He works for Spotless Services, and has also published as Samuel Langer.

Guardian

Snot of continents, black jam of summits
earring retains head
smoke at the crossroads
the crossroads at the crossroads
kneepads round your ankles

pipes craze the rich lungs' continent
look out, the bronze perineum!
black bays hold the head together
jetlagged four-eyes
I love being elected, and his wife
keep up, said the fence

red hounds-tooth writing retains head
two minutes later they shot the grass
the grey streak hanging on for dear life

two teeth, two eyes, two years old
we can only get younger
hand-made head
returning from the plank, coming apart
patting a chassis better
evicted cardboard then papers and bags
bus delays head at the crossroads
busted earth, fish in sky
|inverse proportion to head of state
dancing the harvest in
happiness is oxygen

2 Tonnes

1.
70 members of the opposition
had been killed when she spiked dramatically.
A massive range of
            reduced exciting news --- enough to
dissolve nerves mind. I began to think

the universe my speech pathologist.
The newspaper had a glowing head. I began to assess
the lip common to a stone
and my best friend: Marty.
'Is the Starting Point optional?' he asked. 'Then whence
this deep repugnance?' She
was always v. upbeat. Stringent underwear
but only affordable. You
are the modest upbeat binge,
neither a tenured fight for life.

2.
we were the wrong environment I decided
to take newspaper for my hot clue
the day's tank of colour.
The cull on the proviso
whimpered 14 hospitalised children
walking off its contracts.

Her face pink with 2 blue &
white patches. Believed there were
only 3 flourishes to politician.
            cheats targeted, both parents
dry, precise & plain the 2
left private operators working late

and time for the broken hearted
face their necks' horrible swelling

book **Singing Saltwater Country**

review by Nonie Sharp

John Bradley and Yanyuwa Families, *Journey to the Songlines of Carpentaria*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2010

From time to time one makes a journey into another social world that illuminates life there in a profound way. And that can go to the very heart of the traveller's own sense of being, and even beam back a light in which we may see ourselves afresh. John Bradley's epic journey into Yanyuwa country over the past thirty years is one such illuminating quest; an exquisite one it so happens. Yet it is one also overlaid with elements of sorrow. As the journey proceeds, it breathes and lives the Yanyuwa soul and body.

'Old man, sing for him: he is your son!' A woman's injunction to her husband, Old Pyro Dirdiyalma, holds a firm note. Despite John Bradley's 'whitefella brains and his ignorance', the Yanyuwa have made a positive judgement about him. 'You got a tape machine?' asks Old Pyro. And so begins the recording of a sacred song of the Yanyuwa.

It is 1980, John's first year with the Yanyuwa. He is twenty years old and he's teaching their children at the township of Borroloola, Northern Territory. And they've decided to teach *him*. 'I was on a steep learning curve but only just beginning to know.' John was speaking Yanyuwa language, making 'dreadful mistakes' at times; yet they were most determined teachers. 'Sometimes', he reflects today, 'they were dreadfully unforgiving'.

With the blessing of Old Pyro, that 'majestic man', John began recording the sacred songs the Yanyuwa call *kujika*. He also 'drew' the songs because this world was one that writing by itself could diminish. These drawings became part of a beautifully coloured Yanyuwa atlas titled *Forget about Flinders*, produced in 2003 in conjunction with artist Nona Cameron. Some of these paths or maps are now threaded through *Singing Saltwater Country*.

Over those early years of the 1980s the whitefellas' 'outback'—the Gulf country—receded for Bradley. Soon the air around the campfire resonated with the old man's singing of *kujika*. His song travelled from the fireside and as John turned on the light it was gone, leaving him, he says, with 'another kind of loneliness'.

At this moment he began to understand something of total significance to the singer and his people: 'that coiled in kujika was the power of knowledge which had always sustained his people on their country'. In a moment of illumination the map of Australia blanked out: as 'outback' dissolved, in its place there appeared ways of knowing that related to all who dwelt in this part of the Gulf country.

Today he writes of Yanyuwa sacred song or *kujika* as a matrix of invisible threads that form the web of their knowledge. (A full-length *kujika* of twenty pages appears towards the end of the book.) Each of these song lines is like a keyhole through which one may glimpse other ways of knowing. Gently woven complexity is the keynote: the verses have inside as well as outside meanings that anyone can know, but whose inside meanings rest with those 'whose spirits remain warm in their country'.

Early in August 2010 John Bradley spoke to Australia and the world on radio: the spoken word is just right for the Yanyuwa sacred songs, songs that carry all that's in the country. *Kujika* are the conduit of meaning, the whole essence of who people are, the biota, everything. They are like the DNA of the land implanted by the ancestors. These sacred songs of the Yanyuwa are embedded in a whole ecological ribbon of coastal land facing the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Of course the Yanyuwa have everyday songs and stories about their sea and land hunting prowess. Today they continue to sing a song, composed in the mid-1920s, about their way of life. 'Our hair is strong, tightly coiled and heavily oiled/For we are inhabitants of the sea country/We are dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence.' Yet the ultimate way in which Yanyuwa know the country is through *kujika*. Other people may have to learn how to listen and that may not be easy. That's because you are listening to the original libretto of Australia from deep within the earth, to songs that are intimately interconnected with one another and with all living things. And that is why *kujika* call forth the very deepest emotional responses of those who sing them or would do so. Why? Because they are very precious and very powerful. And the first song is the title to the land. Today some Yanyuwa persons know even one thousand verses of their *kujika*.

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The existence of Aboriginal sacred songs has long been widely known. A.P. Elkin referred to song cycles as roads associated with particular notions of time and space. Ronald and Catherine Berndt wrote of song celebrating the movement of ancestors over country. All three scholars emphasised the sacred nature of many of these songs. Bill Harney, not an anthropologist, provided personal knowledge of these Yanyuwa songs as those of 'Dreamtime heroes'. Importantly, more than a century ago, ethnographer A.W. Howitt noted that Aboriginal songs travelled long distances and that these songs included 'all kinds of Aboriginal poetry' composed by the bards among them.

Barry Hill concludes in Broken Song, his biography of T.G.H. (Ted) Strehlow, that the latter had a very clear sense of the sacred songs of the desert and their lines. Hill's seminal work stands in contrast to Bruce Chatwin's 1987 book *Songlines*, which sought to capture something of the role of song lines without knowing what that might be.

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It was a day in the late 1990s. I was in the library of the Northern Land Council in Darwin. Resting on a chair lay a pile of documents; the top one caught my attention: 'Holding the Land by Song', an unpublished essay written for the Council by John Bradley in 1984—only three years after he came to live alongside or among the Yanyuwa. More than a decade after he wrote it, this essay began to take me on his journey to the song lines.

Sacred songs re-enact the journeys of creator Beings. To follow a song path created by the Dreaming figures—the map makers—is to know. In that 1984 essay John Bradley explained the way in which the singers place themselves in the song path. Fortunately today he addresses the question of how he came to know, how he was taken into the Yanyuwa people's confidence, even of the teachings of a particular day in Yanyuwa country when he made a qualitative leap in his ways of seeing.

> **Sacred songs re-enact the journeys of creator Beings. To follow a song path created by the Dreaming figures—the map makers—is to know.**

What he learnt on that day equipped him for the long journey that has culminated in *Singing Saltwater Country*. Offering to show him where the Marrinybul sacred songs spring from, Dinny McDinny, his brother Isaac and Annie Karrakayn decided to take John to the source of the *kujika*: to the rock holes belonging to the Wedge-tailed Eagle and the Crow. There the two old men sang the sacred rock-hole, putting down the two songs into the depths of the water; asking the place to remember them, bringing themselves back into relationship with this place after a long absence. There as John sat with them under a shady tree, Annie clapping her cupped hands, the two men 'circled spirals in the air with their boomerangs', indicating that the *kujika* was descending into the depths of its rock-pool home.

This was the time of a new beginning for John Bradley, the moment of a transition in his knowledge: of the way in which Dreamings become one with the land. Here came a new concept with its own word: the essence of a thing, human or vegetable; the quality of a thing that exists independently of human awareness.

The teaching of that day went on and on, encircling John through the power of its layerings. Through that core persons are tied to important places—to stretches of water, lagoons, rock-holes where the Dreamings had left behind the life-potential of the Yanyuwa in the form of spirit children who enter the mother's womb at conception, linking them to the wells and rock-holes from whence they came. And on that afternoon, having made this fantastic leap in the quality of his understanding, there came a moment when shining poetry broke through like a reflection in pure, clear water. He writes: 'I saw a gleam of understanding, like the light that shone in the water there'. On that day he awakened to a truth for Yanyuwa people: how their substances are buried in the country by the Dreamings. Here then is the beginning of knowing Yanyuwa law, the beginning of understanding the threads that hold all people, all things and all country in interrelationship with one another.

Singing Saltwater Country is also about loss. Where all that's in the country is in *kujika*, broken songs—that is lost or partly remembered *kujika*—the country becomes silent. Yanyuwa refer to these as torn songs, those that are partly lost to them. Sometimes they may just remember, without the song. How did so many of their sacred songs become broken? Important among the many reasons for this is that in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s so many Yanyuwa men went to work with cattle across the Queensland border. Yet while the Yanyuwa bear the imprint of loss, their journey over the past thirty years can be a journey of renaissance that reaches beyond themselves. Suddenly those who had fallen into silence were singing *kujika*. Among them were those who 'lived for kujika': a process was in train where remembering was breaking forth like pieces of lost time from within the dark sea of forgetting. In the year 2000, Annie Karrakayn, a wise Yanyuwa woman, was to sing a *kujika* in support of her land claim before the Land Commissioner in a Darwin court.

I reflected upon the waves of memory that I had seen twenty years ago among many other saltwater peoples of the northern coasts: there too remembering had come forth like pearls shimmering in the sunlight out of the dark recesses of memory.

The very strength, the passion, the vibrancy, the variegated originality of *Singing Saltwater Country* with the Yanyuwa carries with it the sadness of loss, of a poignancy that written words cannot encompass fully. Not by accident is this book many-dimensional: poetic, artistic, musical, heavenly, down to earth. From his early days with the Yanyuwa, John Bradley found himself singing to himself, drawing and animating their songs and their *lives*. After all, as he says, *kujika* are sacred songs saturated with everyday humanity. It is they that constantly maintain the numinous in country. And they are its heartbeat, one that descends into the earth as we have seen. That is why they accompany their singing of *kujika* by hitting the ground. In Yanyuwa law, after a *kujika* is sung it is driven back into the land with a special chant, with open hands rhythmically hitting the ground. This makes the country tremble—with joy. When Yanyuwa people dance (Torres Strait Islanders do this too) they hit the ground hard with their feet, an ecstatic experience for the earth—and for the dancer ...

It is easy, even fashionable, to dwell upon loss—and to look to salvaging. This is not what this journey is about. Neither is another journey—one which I took. When I first visited the Torres Strait Islands towards the end of 1978, I was told authoritatively that their past was another country. When the young Eddie Koiki Mabo left Mer for the south in 1957 to find out what white culture had to offer him, nobody dreamed of the outcome, on 3 June 1992, of the case that bears his name, a native title case that finished at high water mark. Nor that in June 2010 all the Torres Strait Islands would share in the sea rights judgement recognising their right to a very extensive area of sea.

book **The Life of the Righteous**

review by Grazyna Zajdow

Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, *Righteous Dopefiend*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2010

> The Edgewater homeless embrace the popular terminology of addiction and, with ambivalent pride, refer to themselves as 'righteous dopefiends.' They have subordinated everything in their lives—shelter, sustenance, and family—to injecting heroin. They endure the chronic pain and anxiety of hunger, exposure, infectious disease, and social ostracism because of their commitment to heroin.

So American anthropologists Bourgois and Schonberg describe the meaning of the title of their truly remarkable book. The righteous dopefiend is the person who has spent most of his or her adult life dedicating their very existence to the pursuit of drugs, particularly heroin. The life of the righteous dopefiend is not like other lives, but there are norms and values that mean they do constitute a community. The righteous dopefiend has a code of sorts that supports his habit and helps others support theirs, even against the most difficult of circumstances that often undermines the community's very existence.

This is a book of humanity, commitment and activism, and one that is so rare in academic social sciences that I feel compelled to shout about it from the rooftops. Philippe Bourgois is a well-known anthropologist who has written previously about crack cocaine users and dealers in New York in his book *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, and his fellow author, and photographer, is his graduate student Jeff Schonberg. This is a photographic ethnography as well as a written one, and the photos are sometimes so confronting that I was repelled and attracted to them at the same time.

For twelve years Bourgois and Schonberg watched, photographed, interviewed and (sometimes) slept among a community of homeless middle-aged heroin addicts under a series of freeway overpasses in San Francisco. The pictures they present in words and photographs illustrate everything that is problematic with the American 'war on drugs', but also much more. In their close, and thick, descriptions of this world, we can understand how even this ostracised community is imbued with the raced and gendered world that exists outside it. Everything these people do in relation to their drugs is permeated by race and gender, absolutely nothing is exempt.

The people in this community live in a moral economy based around hustling for the means to buy the heroin. As the authors write: 'Begging, working, scavenging, and stealing, the Edgewater homeless balance on a tightrope of mutual solidarity and betrayal as they scramble for their next shot of heroin, their next meal, their next place to sleep, and their sense of dignity.'

Bourgois and Schonberg argue that the impact of neo-liberal public policies began under Ronald Reagan in the 1970s impacted this group of people in terrible ways. Rehabilitation, health and welfare programs were all cut to enable the introduction of tax cuts for the middle classes. These policies further entrenched race and class-based inequalities that turned these people's faces further and further from the sun.

This is mostly a male world of about ten men and only two women. Most were from San Francisco, and from working-class families. The communities that existed when they were growing up disappeared with the deindustrialisation of the Californian economy, along with the hope many were brought up to expect.

The authors time and again emphasise how race and gender are so important in the daily life of a homeless heroin addict. For example they explain how the white addicts were not averse to begging but, because of the history of slavery, begging was completely out of the question for African-Americans. African-Americans also seemed to care more for their personal appearance, and thus for the impact they made on the world. These were examples of what Bourgois and Schonberg call 'drug consumption as racialized habitus', to use term 'habitus' as Bourdieu would. Racialised habitus included what

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Singing Saltwater Country

Nonie Sharp

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The Life of the Righteous

Grazyna Zajdow

Grazyna Zajdow is an editor of **Arena Magazine**.

Hank and Petey muscling in the foyer of their compound. © Jeff Schonberg 2010

one wears, how one acts and what drugs one puts in one's body. While everyone owned up to using heroin, the whites would try to deny habitual crack cocaine use. They would often refer to crack as a 'nigger' drug. The African-Americans would use spare money to buy crack, whereas the whites would spend theirs on cheap wine or extra heroin. The whites were generally isolated from their families, ashamed of their habits and what it did to them. The African-Americans were often still part of their families, even when they were homeless.

This is a gendered world where the women who lived in it were also mothers. Most of the men were fathers, but they had abandoned their families relatively early in their heroin careers. Most of the women were much more engaged with their children, but ultimately they too abandoned their children, with more regret, however.

The lack of a welfare system, inadequate public housing, or any form of a national health system all conspire in the degradation and discomfort that comes not from addiction to heroin, but from the way that heroin addicts are forced to confront the merciless world they live in.

Love exists in the addict world among both genders. While only one man admitted to being gay, many of the men had very close, dyadic relationships, called 'homosocial romance' by the authors. They write:

> Many of the men hugged and spooned for warmth and comfort at night. They would sometimes publicly engage in intimate mutual grooming, such as pimple popping, nursing wounds in the groin area, or cleaning soiled underwear. At the same time, almost all were explicitly homophobic. They levied the term 'homosexual bitch' only at their worst enemies.

If the men did not live alone, neither did the women; women were always hooked up to a male protector even as they often suffered the protector's violence. The men hustled in various ways but, even if they had ever been inclined to do so in the past, were too old to hustle sexual favours for money. The women often prostituted themselves; this was something they could do into decrepitude.

We also see here how other institutions intersect to produce this world. The lack of a welfare system, inadequate public housing, or any form of a national health system all conspire in the degradation and discomfort that comes not from addiction to heroin, but from the way that heroin addicts are forced to confront the merciless world they live in.

Bourgois and Schonberg describe the way that injecting is thoroughly raced, using the term 'techniques of the body', again from Pierre Bourdieu. For those people who do not know about chronic needle use, after a certain amount of time injecting heroin, most people run out of easily traced veins. First the veins in the inner arms collapse, then the ones in the ankle, the neck, and then the groin also disappear. For many seasoned injectors, it takes forty, sometimes many more minutes to produce a vein capable of taking the needle. For African-American injectors (particularly men) it is a sign of masculinity to take as long as is necessary to find the vein and get that high that comes only from a direct hit to the blood. White injectors are not nearly so devoted to this marker of masculinity and give up the search very quickly. What they then do is called 'skin-popping' where they sink their syringes into their fatty tissue, thus missing the high associated with finding a working vein but still getting the relief from the ever-present fear of withdrawal. Skin-popping is considered an individual failure for African-Americans. 'Rejecting the aura of failure and depression associated with the whites, even the oldest African-Americans continued to pursue this kind of exhilarating high. They also expressed their pleasure openly in public sessions of deep nodding ... collapsing into full-bodied relaxation and moaning with pleasure or jumping hyperenergetically to their feet.'

This form of 'inscription on the body' of race and addiction, as the authors put it, has a very real health effect as well. HIV and Hepatitis C are much more likely to be transmitted through the blood than in the fatty tissue. On the other hand, impurities picked up from dirty fingers, clothes or impure water are more likely to be trapped under the skin than in veins since the impurities tend to be filtered out through the vascular system. The whites were then more likely to get abscesses that sometimes developed into life-threatening infections. It is here that we can understand how race intersects with the virtually non-existent public health system. Since primary healthcare is not available to the indigent, the addicts can only get seen in the overwhelmed emergency room of the hospital. If they are not genuinely close to death, they are driven away by the security guards as malingerers and trouble makers. So those with infected sores wait until they are close to death before they make their presence known to the ER. Then they are hooked up to a wall of high-tech gadgets and undergo sophisticated and expensive procedures to bring them back to life, only to be thrown out, well before they are completely better, to the life of the streets. One of the most poignant and disturbing photographs in the book is of Max, with a hole in his upper arm that is so large his bones and muscles can be clearly seen, waiting for a skin graft. The stupidity of a system that provides no basic healthcare to prevent infections but is willing to give a skin graft when it is too late is there to see. But the understanding of the way that race pervades everyone institution, personal habit and social relationship finally hits the reader—HIV and Hepatitis C do discriminate on racial lines; they are inscribed on the 'racialized' body since they are more likely to be transmitted by the habits of African-American injectors.

The authors of this book make a justified claim to a 'critically applied public anthropology'. They cogently argue how this particular group of people would benefit from a legal heroin injecting program and other harm minimisation programs. They are not blind to the problems and ethical concerns relating to many aspects of harm minimisation, but they show how the most humane programs would recognise the righteous dopefiend as a particular individual who has made choices, and needs to be given dignified outlets for them. The success of the Sydney medically supervised injecting centre in providing a place for many interventions that benefit those people who use it is one such example. But what becomes crystal clear is the importance of good health and welfare systems for the whole community, and the disaster that the neo-liberal bent in Anglo economies was for the most powerless. In Australia we must be careful not to lose sight of this aspect; we must remind ourselves of the importance of our harm minimisations programs, but also of a public health system that makes primary healthcare available to everyone.

book: **The Art of Resistance**

review by Roger Nelson

Everfresh Studio, *Everfresh: Blackbook*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2010

'A taxpayer-backed publishing house has produced an $80 glossy coffee-table book that glorifies graffiti vandals who have defaced Melbourne',' screamed the infamously reactionary *Herald Sun* newspaper. Tabloid hysteria is unsurprising: there is a powerful politics of resistance inherent in street art that *Everfresh: Blackbook* documents and celebrates.

Everfresh is a collective of nine artists who share a studio in a secret location in Melbourne's inner-city Collingwood. Sync, Rone, Reka, Wonderlust, Phibs, Meggs, Prizm, Makatron and The Tooth each have a distinct individual style and have held solo exhibitions in commercial galleries, as well as putting up their own work in public spaces all around Melbourne (and indeed internationally). But despite their individual successes, it's as a collective that the Everfresh artists have made the biggest impact on the streets of inner Melbourne and contribution to the culture of street art in this country.

As academic Alison Young notes in the foreword, 'Everfresh is one of the best examples in the world of a group of artists

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The Life of the Righteous
Grazyna Zajdow

Roger Nelson is a freelance writer, and curator and founding director of No No Gallery in North Melbourne.

working both separately and collaboratively'. Their warehouse studio is centred around an immense communal worktable. The hundreds of images documenting the group's creative practice supports Young's assertion that in 'moving away from the conventional studio format in which artists have their own separate spaces, Everfresh have put the principle of collaboration at the heart of their everyday practice'. Members encourage and critique each other, host an array of visiting artists, and share tools and techniques.

Despite the lack of overt political content in most graffiti, it constitutes a powerful act of reclaiming public space from private owners, of surrendering artistic expression to collectivity and collaboration, and of challenging perceptions of youth culture and creative labour.

Their largest commissioned work to date, 2009's 'Welcome To Sunny Fitzroy' mural outside the Night Cat nightclub, pays tribute to the individual artists' styles in each of the large block letters: Sync's newspaper headline collages; Phibs' intricate linework; Reka's animalistic characters; and Rone's iconic female faces, melancholy and menacing and maddeningly familiar. *Everfresh: Blackbook* is helpfully structured around individual profiles of each of the nine artists, followed by chapters on their main modes of mark-making: stencils, stickers, paste and paint. It's a structure that is accessibly logical to a layperson and to a graffiti initiate alike. The book is able to share fly-on-the-wall insights in a way that other more historical accounts of graffiti recently published perhaps could not.

The text draws heavily on quotes from the artists, but the volume is comprised primarily of images (mostly photographs by Josh Robenstone) printed in rich colour on quality stock. The layout by Everfresh member Meggs, while true to the chaotic spirit of graffiti culture, is elegant and clearly legible. Irregularly shaped plates mimic the clippings and stickers that the artists collect, and foldout spreads showcase the impressive scale of many works.

The contributors deal particularly well with the hypocrisy of the legal system. On the one hand, Melbourne's street art is an increasingly appealing drawcard for tourism and associated industry: upmarket bars and restaurants regularly commission murals, private companies offer tours of laneways, and the City of Melbourne features graffiti (some of it produced illegally) extensively in its slick promotional materials. Yet concurrent with this mainstreaming of street art culture, laws are getting tougher. Everfresh artists report having been banned from the city centre for 48-hour periods, as well as subjected to hefty fines. Under *Victoria's Graffiti Prevention Act 2007*, anyone caught carrying an aerosol can—or even just the cap for one—can be fined thousands on the spot, with the onus on the 'offender' to prove that s/he is not committing an act of vandalism. Being caught doing graffiti can lead to up to two years of jail time.

It's a pity the book doesn't include more detail about the specificities of the laws, but its explication of the hypocrisy of the authorities—and the spirit of defiance among the artists—is a real strength. The contributors make no apologies for being on an 'unrelenting quest to leave their mark on the city', and explain that a surprising number of large-scale Everfresh works are made illegally because 'having the nerve to turn up to a spot at high noon, laden with crates of paint and ladders, gives the impression that you have permission to be there'. This is crucial to the importance of street art as a site of resistance. Despite the lack of overt political content in most graffiti, it constitutes a powerful act of reclaiming public space from private owners, of surrendering artistic expression to collectivity and collaboration, and of challenging perceptions of youth culture and creative labour. It should be embraced and defended by those on the Left.

Street art—arguably more accessible, visible, and commercially viable than the rarefied cliques of the gallery-based fine art world—also represents an escape from the drudgery of wage slavery and repressed creativity. Time and again the Everfresh artists demonstrate their hard-won sense of freedom. 'My typical day is not conforming to nine-to-five!' insists Meggs; in contrast Wonderlust (one of the only members to hold a 'day job') laments that his 'typical day is twelve hours on the computer making other people rich'—after which he will spend all forty-eight hours of a weekend painting in the studio and surrounding streets. Reka perhaps puts it most forcefully, warning that 'If I wasn't painting I would be doing some soul-destroying desk job in a jungle of office cubicles. It's my greatest fear'.

Street artists like Everfresh represent the possibility of freedom, the importance of resistance, and the power of creativity. And travelling to work at 'some soul-destroying desk job' is that little bit less dull when there's something to look at out the train windows. a

Will Broadband Make Us Stupid?

Simon Cooper

Despite, or perhaps because of, the persistence of global warming, the precarious state of global finance and a protracted war in Afghanistan, national broadband policy remains at the forefront of political debate. So far the Labor Party continues to outflank the opposition on the issue, largely by mixing technical detail with technological utopianism so that the Coalition appears either ignorant or anti-progress. Malcolm Turnbull has been installed to try and deflate the National Broadband Network (NBN), but with little success so far. Unlike other Coalition ministers, Turnbull has been selected because he appears to know something about the internet. Yet he has been put in an invidious position. He cannot be against broadband, merely how to pay for it, and appealing to the vagaries of the private sector for funding makes Coalition policy look feeble compared to the idea of a national digital infrastructure—especially with the comparisons made to the Snowy Mountain scheme that have rather uncritically become attached to it. Indeed Turnbull looks uncomfortable in his new role; as if he shares journalists' and almost everyone else's assumption that high-speed broadband is essential for the future.

Perhaps they are right. But there has been little scrutiny of Labor's claims, especially in terms of how broadband will solve problems in health and education, particularly in regional Australia. Naturally one wouldn't expect any examination from inside the Party, given it can barely locate 'education' within the ministry, but one might have thought the near-utopian claims about broadband might have gotten a closer look elsewhere. The link between improved education and greater broadband speed is tenuous—the much vaunted 'virtual classroom' already exists at current speeds, and no significant qualitative change occurs with greater download capacity. So what kinds of activities require fast broadband? The answer is basically video games, TV and movies. In other words the main function of superfast broadband may be to simply provide 'entertainment on demand' for the household.

Little has been said about the extent to which education and health could be 'virtualised', or that superfast broadband might be a panacea that masks the decline of infrastructure in the regions. Would the NBN allow more classes to be rationalised, more resources cut, with high-tech classrooms standing in their place? Already in rural and regional schools, subjects such as specialist maths and English literature are only offered if students travel to other schools or hook up to their classes at a distance. Similarly with health: will the NBN merely legitimise a process of infrastructural atrophy, with regional hospitals and medical staff gradually disappearing? Furthermore, what of kind of a subject inhabits this techno-health regime, the subject required to monitor themselves, the elderly person expected to master all manner of new skills so as to maintain their health? How is this progress?

It is easy enough to see how hyped claims for broadband might mask the loss of social infrastructure, especially in disadvantaged areas. There's also a question of how we balance other losses against any gains made by access to vast quantities of information and entertainment. How we are 'connected' as a nation requires more scrutiny. Beyond any squabbling about technology policy lie other questions. How will social life be organised in a world reliant upon the speed and quantity of information processing? What will human subjects come to find meaningful, and what will they discard or find obsolete? These are social and cultural questions, and while so far they have had little presence in any discussion of the NBN, they are beginning to emerge in other places.

Nicholas Carr received a lot of media space when he recently came to Australia to promote his latest book. In *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Carr argues that the internet is reducing our capacity for focus and concentration. Using the latest findings in neuroscience as well as a dash of cultural criticism and his own experience, Carr claims that the internet is changing the structure of our brains. As a 'technology of interruption', the hyper-linked, multitasked, multi-screened and constantly shifting world of the internet robs us of our ability to sustain patterns of thought. The cognitive research Carr draws upon also claims that constantly distracted minds cannot make the transfer from short- to long-term memory. In the same way that the move from oral cultures to cultures of the printed word substantially altered individuals and societies, Carr argues that the internet might be altering our brains in ways not seen since the rise of the written word, and that this change is less than progressive.

The Shallows has mostly been met with critical praise, perhaps because Carr mixes these large claims with fairly measured accounts of his own experience. He writes 'I'm not thinking the way I used to think … over the last few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that something has been tinkering with my brain'. Carr writes how his mind now has difficulty focusing upon a single subject. Instead his 'brain was hungry … demanding to be fed the way the Net fed it'. Unlike the objections to web 2.0 by writers like Jaron Lanier and Andrew Keen, Carr's work explores the *form* of the internet rather than any particular content. If his use of cognitive science is selective and at times problematic, his analysis of the internet as a culture of distraction resonates widely.

Most internet users would register in a general sense what Carr is talking about. Who hasn't started off googling one subject only to find themselves an hour or two later on something entirely different, with the original subject remaining unexplored? Or worse, feeling an irrational need to keep connected even when there's nothing you really want to see. Recent media theory has explored the psychoanalytic concept of the 'drive' to explain our investment in this culture of distraction. Unlike desire, which strives after an object only to never really possess it, the goal of the drive is *loss itself*. The drive is a compulsion to enact loss, to jump, to interrupt; it is a process where a strange enjoyment comes from the repeated staging of disconnection. The theory of the drive resonates with what Carr describes as the contemporary phenomenon of 'craving interruption', whether on the internet, texting while watching TV, or a host of other mediated ways to stay distracted.

Simon Cooper

Simon Cooper is an Arena Publications editor.

When asked how he managed to write his book in such a hyper-distracted state, Carr naturally had an answer. It was only when he moved to the Colorado Mountains, with the region's low-tech infrastructure, that he was able to concentrate again. And therein lies the rub. While many feel Carr is on to something, it would take a brave politician to declare that broadband ought to be rejected for cultural reasons and that the nation would raise better thinkers if we kept citizens on slow telephone lines for internet access.

If a politics of information is to be developed, we have to broaden the discussion beyond the technology itself, powerful as it is, and reach beyond the simple assumptions underpinning the current broadband debate. Carr's *The Shallows* is an extension of the influential piece he wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled 'Is Google Making Us Stupid?' Yet he never pauses to ask what now predisposes us towards a culture of distraction; what, for example, makes us reject novels for the pleasures of information bites and cognitive distraction. Is there not a larger formation outside of the internet that privileges these modes of information and media use—that fosters this 'stupidity'?

A more intriguing title might have been 'Is Capitalism Making Us Stupid?'—a question almost impossible to pose today. Digital technologies may create the capacity to connect, to know, even to 'be' at a distance, but this more abstract way of engaging with the world does not by itself create the decline in attention spans, deep thinking and memory. Contemporary capitalism, entwined as it is with the information revolution, creates the capacity for almost ceaseless consumption. The dominance of consumer culture changes our relation to time. The abundant availability of things makes us forget the time taken to produce them, or that 'experience' itself can be a more collective process based around the structures of family, friends or community—structures made and maintained over time. Contemporary capitalism also shifts our understanding of what is worth valuing—why struggle for some underdetermined intellectual payoff when consumer culture can deliver easier satisfactions, perhaps even the satisfaction derived from jumping from one thing to the next. Neither capitalism as traditionally understood, nor the internet, can stand as the source of cultural problems: it is their complex relation that needs to be considered.

Whether Carr's opposition between novels and deep thinking versus Google and shallow thinking ultimately holds up is one thing, but the fact is that the internet is too easy to blame for the decline of attention. The entrenchment of market values into all spheres of activity is at least as much of a culprit. This is why the discussion of broadband policy ought to go beyond the issue of service delivery and global competitiveness because it frames online culture entirely in market terms. To do so is to foreclose how we might harness the potential of an even more powerful digital culture in ways that won't simply further propel us towards a nihilism of consumer pleasures.

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