ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AUSTRALIA

Dialogue

Volume 23   1/2004

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The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia was established in 1971. Previously, some of the functions were carried out through the Social Science Research Council of Australia, established in 1942. Elected to the Academy for distinguished contributions to the social sciences, the 396 Fellows of the Academy offer expertise in the fields of *accounting, anthropology, demography, economics, economic history, education, geography, history, law, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, social medicine, sociology and statistics.*

The Academy's objectives are:

- to promote excellence in and encourage the advancement of the social sciences in Australia;
- to act as a coordinating group for the promotion of research and teaching in the social sciences;
- to foster excellence in research and to subsidise the publication of studies in the social sciences;
- to encourage and assist in the formation of other national associations or institutions for the promotion of the social sciences or any branch of them;
- to promote international scholarly cooperation and to act as an Australian national member of international organisations concerned with the social sciences;
- to act as consultant and adviser in regard to the social sciences; and,
- to comment where appropriate on national needs and priorities in the area of the social sciences.

These objectives are fulfilled through a program of activities, research projects, independent advice to government and the community, publication and cooperation with fellow institutions both within Australia and internationally.

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President's column

Since my last report, the Commonwealth Government has announced its final version of the National Research Priorities. Readers of this column will be aware, from Leon Mann's reports, that the Academy was actively involved in working to have the social sciences more fully inserted into the wording of the National Research Priorities (NRP), even as we sought to have an additional priority added. In this we were actively assisted by the Academy of the Humanities.

I can now report on the (modest) success of these efforts. In the Government's words, 'This process has resulted in some editorial enhancements to the original goals and the identification of four new goals.' The four new goals are:

1. *Increasing our understanding of the impact of climate change and variability at the regional level across Australia, and addressing the consequences of these factors on the environment and on communities.*

2. *Understanding and strengthening key elements of Australia's social and economic fabric to help families and individuals live healthy, productive and fulfilling lives.*

3. *Maximising Australia's creative and technological capability by understanding the factors conducive to innovation and its acceptance.*

4. *Enhancing Australia's capacity to interpret and engage with its regional and global environment through a greater understanding of languages, societies, politics and culture.*

The 'editorial enhancements' include a few key words.

The summary for the first goal (An environmentally sustainable Australia) has had the word 'human' added to the phrase 'Transforming the way we utilise our land, water, mineral and energy resources through a better understanding of **human** and environmental systems and the use of new technologies.' This is a small change with the potential to make a very large difference to the sort of environmental research that can gather under the NRP umbrella: The whole field of understanding and managing the impact of human activity on the environment now becomes part of the national research priorities. In addition, managing and protecting Australia's biodiversity has been recognised as having an intrinsic as well as a commercial value.

The goal of 'Promoting and maintaining good health' has been usefully modified to take on a less disease-oriented perspective. Promoting wellbeing has been substituted for preventing disease. **Ageing well** will now be promoted by 'developing better strategies to improve the mental and physical capacities of older people', rather than by 'reducing mental and physical degeneration based on greater knowledge and understanding of the causes of disease and degeneration of mind and body.'

Safeguarding Australia is now recognised to require 'strengthening our understanding of Australia's place in the region and the world', rather than just being a matter of fending off terrorism, crime, invasive diseases and pests with clever technologies.

These are useful changes, and they do matter. It is clear that a strong effort is being made to ensure that the NRPs do actually alter the shape of research and research funding. The changes, for which the Academies of Humanities and Social Sciences fought so hard, increase the openings for our disciplines to sit comfortably under the NRP umbrella, and hence to claim a share of NRP research dollars. More importantly, they improve the prospect that these major issues confronting Australia are tackled with the full range of insights that can come from the human as well as natural sciences. The Academy (as all social scientists should be) is grateful for the major effort and skill that Leon Mann, John Beaton and a number of other Fellows put into causing this shift in the NRPs. At times it seemed to be a hopeless task.

For the full list of national research priorities and the associated sets of goals, see www.dest.gov.au/priorities.

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In February, the Academy held its second Indigenous Postgraduate Summer School. This was jointly convened by two Fellows, Marcia Langton and Leon Mann, and was attended by 17 Indigenous higher degree students over the course of a week. I had the pleasure of joining the students and staff at the dinner that was held as part of the program. In my conversations with many of the students, it became clear that the week had been an extraordinarily positive one for them. At the same time I was struck by the size of the challenge that many of the students had taken on. Most were employed, many had children and grandchildren who needed their care and had major community obligations. They had to manage a work/study/family/community balancing act that would overwhelm most people. The support and skills offered by the Summer School was clearly valued highly, and morale among the students was high. The Summer School is the most important act of outreach that the Academy undertakes, and one of which we should be proud (see further details under Academy News).

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At the first meeting of the Executive for the year, we spent considerable time discussing a new issue for the Academy. The Academy has been approached by the Australian Mobile Telephone Association (AMTA), to see if we would join them in a study of the impact of the mobile phone. They are aware that the social sciences (and humanities) are likely to have important insights into this new phenomenon, and would like our assistance in encouraging social science research on the topic, which they would fund. The issue that we debated was what should be the proper relation between the Academy and a commercial interest group that sought our assistance. There is no question that in any work that we do with other parties (including our main source of funds, the Commonwealth government), we must be free of pressures to promote a particular view or to remain silent in order to comply with the preferences of the other party. The Academy has no interest in participating in partnerships that might compromise our integrity or independence. But that said, there remain other issues to resolve.

There are several arguments in favour of responding positively to approaches such as that from AMTA. One of the main purposes of the Academy is to promote the value and usefulness of the social sciences. It is appropriate, therefore, to welcome initiatives from other groups that reflect an appreciation of the social sciences, and seek our assistance in drawing on the insights of our disciplines. For this reason, I think that our first reaction to any reasonable approach for collaboration should be

encouraging rather than suspicious. The Academy should also, I believe, provide opportunities for its Fellows to do new and interesting research where it has the chance to do so. A third consideration is that co-operation with other groups can contribute to our income. This has two benefits. It is impossible to do fine things without resources. So the extra income can expand the range of fine things that we can do. Importantly, relations with a range of groups would also diversify the sources of our income. This would make us less reliant on the government grant and in this way would enhance our capacity for independence.

But there are also major grounds for caution. The Academy has a strong reputation for independence and for the distinction of its scholarship. Other parties may seek to gain unwarranted credibility through an association with us. Further, even if the work that we did was actually independent, it is difficult to ensure that we are not tainted with the perception of being influenced by the funding source. This would be especially the case if the research was genuinely supportive of the interests of the other party. Thirdly, we must be aware that private commercial groups are not usually concerned to promote scholarship in the public interest, and they may have intended uses of the work that would sit uncomfortably with the proper role of the Academy.

After extensive discussion that canvassed these arguments and more, the Executive decided to proceed, albeit cautiously, with a modest collaboration with AMTA. In essence, the Academy will run two workshops and assist in the production of a discussion paper on the topic of a research agenda for investigating the social and economic affects of the mobile phone. The discussion paper will not be badged as an Academy product, and the contents will be explicitly attributed to the authors alone. If the research agenda setting is successful, AMTA expects to commit substantial funds to further research and would seek additional funds from the Commonwealth.

In the current environment in which academics are being actively encouraged to collaborate with partners outside the universities, there may well be future occasions on which the Academy has to determine its proper relation with commercial and other interests. I would very much welcome hearing the views of Fellows on this matter.

Sue Richardson

The Case for Increased Taxation
By *Michael Keating*

Occasional Paper 1/2004 (Policy Paper #1)

The Case for Increased Taxation is the first in a series of Policy Papers, commissioned by the Academy, to encourage public debate on issues of national concern.

For further information on the Policy Paper Series, please contact Mark Pinoli (mpinoli@assa.edu.au)

The Land: Ways of Seeing

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Learning the Language of Leaves
Martin Mulligan

Judith Wright was uncommonly aware of the need to challenge the illusion that European settlers had fetched up in a *terra nullius* – an 'empty' land with no human residents 'above the rank of monkeys'[1] and no 'useful' plants or animals. Her capacity for empathetic engagement with otherness was reflected in her poetry, as well as her commitment to nature conservation and for a reconciliation with indigenous Australians. Perhaps she learnt some of this from an aunt and uncle she wrote about in a 1973 poem called 'Falls Country' because she said that they:[2]

> … spoke the tongue of the falls-country
> sidelong, reluctant as leaves.
> Trees were their thoughts;
> peppermint-gum, black-sally,
> white tea-tree hung over creeks,
> rustle of bracken.

When you read this poem the aunt and uncle begin to sound like a pair of 'country hicks'; 'social cripples' unable to deal with the world of people. But then Wright ended with a powerful thought:

> Listen. Listen,
> latecomer to my country,
> sharer in what I know
> eater of wild manna
> > There is
> > there was
> > a country
> that spoke in the language of leaves.

We realise that there is a world of experience that most of us have ignored because we have lacked the appropriate literacy. Our attention has been elsewhere; we may not even know what we have missed.

Judith Wright grew up on the tablelands of northern NSW – so inappropriately called 'New England'. It was 'clean, lean, hungry country' where a gentle whoosh of the silver-grey gum leaves might answer the 'rustle of the bracken'; where an illiterate visitor could not understand the 'written track of a life' displayed on the trunk of a scribbly gum[3]. The language we might glimpse, but not understand, in this country is not the same as the language spoken in other parts of this 'wide brown land'. I am now contemplating a series of images conjured up by Russell Drysdale in 1953 when he tried to penetrate the challenging silence of some Aboriginal faces gazing at him. In the early 1970s one of these images was put out on release by Rupert Murdoch's then-new *Australian* newspaper as it tried to associate itself with the kind of mood change that soon led to the election of the Whitlam government. This was the image - called *Mullaloona Tank* - of a group of four Aboriginal people (two men, two women) standing in front of a rather flimsy canvas shelter, made to look surreal by a strikingly

arid landscape and a blood-red sky. At first glance it might seem a depiction of poverty, but there is an obvious resilience in the faces that reflect the colour of the land and sky and the people really look as though they 'belong'. In a series of similar images from the same year, it becomes obvious that none of the Aboriginal people wear shoes, even when they are dressed in their Sunday best for a shopping trip to Cairns, and we are left thinking that the colonisation of the indigenous people may have started with their heads but it didn't manage to disrupt their connection to the land; constantly renewed through the intimate connection of bare feet to earth.

Whether it be listening to the language of the leaves or feeling the touch of the earth on bare skin the message is clear: we rarely use all the communication channels that are open to us. And we lose sight of the fact that we became human through an intimate dialogue with the rest of 'nature' – our bodies, our culture, our language all the product of this dialogical evolution. As the environmental writer David Abram[4] put it:

> As technological civilization diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth, language itself is diminished. As there are fewer and fewer songbirds in the air, due to the destruction of their forests and wetlands, human speech loses more and more of its evocative power. For we no longer hear the voices of warbler and wren, our own speaking can no longer be nourished by their cadences. As the splashing speech of the rivers is silenced by more and more dams, as we drive more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own languages become increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance.

The problem has been made even worse in Australia by the fact that European settlers arrived here with such dismissive attitudes towards the existing lifeworld. A unique land, with all its unusual and remarkable diversity of life, was treated as a *tabula rasa* on which the grand stories of 'civilisation' would be inscribed. It was a bad start, yet Stuart Hill and I have argued[5] that the illusion was so profound that it would be constantly shattered by the reality of lived experience and many significant Australians – prominent among them artists and writers like Russell Drysdale and Judith Wright – would point to those failings and suggest ways to build a land-sensitive culture. Fundamental to this endeavour is a late recognition that the indigenous Australians (for want of a better term) had built an incredibly enduring land-sensitive culture and that there is so much we can still learn from them about living in this land.

A fundamental clash of cultures

As a science student at Sydney University in the late 1960s I was very moved by the dignity of the Gurindji people who walked away from the tin shacks 'provided' for them by the absentee owner of the gigantic Wave Hill cattle station to 'squat' on land that had been theirs for millennia. However, Those of us who are excited by the early signs of a cultural revolution that is seeded by some ancient, but neglected, wisdoms, should not have any illusions about what we are trying to displace. I think the singer/songwriter Neil Murray put it well in a recent interview on ABC radio[6] when he said that there are some positive signs of the emergence of an 'earth culture' in Australia that grows out of a respectful relationship with the land, but what it confronts is a far-reaching 'corporate culture' that sees the land as an economic resource.

To find a voice for himself as a songwriter, Murray went from his home in western Victoria to the Papunya Aboriginal settlement northwest of Alice Springs in the early 1980s to see another perspective on people-land relationships. He quickly learnt to move beyond romantic perceptions of Aboriginal culture and philosophy because the

experience was far from comfortable. However, he came away with a more pragmatic understanding of what it means to be more attuned to the land and when he rose to prominence as a member of the Papunya-based Warumpi Band, he realised that there is a hunger for that kind of pragmatic knowledge. But, of course, 'corporate culture' has a habit of colonising the very things that can question its validity. So the innovative Aboriginal art movement that also began in Papunya in the late 1970s has been blunted by its very popularity with consumers who rarely try to grasp its meaning. Murray thinks that the earlier interest in the 'new' Aboriginal music of bands like Warumpi Band and Yothu Yindi, has now faded because Aboriginal music tends to be 'hard-edged and incisive' and not very 'comfortable'.

Asked by the interviewer if he thought the emerging 'earth culture' is able to challenge the 'corporate culture', Murray said: 'I'd like to think so, but I'm not sure. It's certainly out there but the corporate culture is very strong.'

Germaine Greer's contribution[7]

Responses to Germaine Greer's recent *Quarterly Essay*, 'Whitefella Jump Up', were very interesting. In this essay, Greer writes in a provocative way, which is, of course, her *modus operandi.* By doing so she generates media interest in what she has to say and I imagine that particular edition of *Quarterly Essay* attracted much more media attention than any other in the short history of that excellent publication. A lot of people will have gained some sense of what Greer was proposing from the discussion in the media. However, reviews in the major newspapers were predictably hostile, probably because it has become fashionable to think of Greer as a 'loose cannon' who has probably lost her 'right' to tell us what to do because she has lived so long in England. Reviews of the essay in the next edition of *Quarterly Essay* (# 12) were mixed, but more negative than positive. It was interesting that one Aboriginal academic at the University of Melbourne, Lillian Holt, described a feeling of great relief when she heard Greer outline the main ideas of the essay in a speech while another, Professor Marcia Langton, felt Greer had dangerously simplified a complex problem and had offered an illusion in suggesting a 'short-cut' to a new and more enduring Australian identity.

While I have sympathy for Langton's position, I also *felt* good when I first heard of what Greer had written. Greer is one of those very public intellectuals who play an important role in 'stirring the pot' occasionally. I believe her essay was far more reasoned and eloquent than most of the critics allowed and her main conclusion was not that we should appropriate an Aboriginal identity but that we should sit down together – bums to the earth perhaps – and start talking about what we can take from the land's Aboriginal heritage.

The controversy over Greer's essay reminded me that the anthropologist William Stanner stirred up a similar controversy in the late 1960s when he reported in his ABC Boyer lectures that a respected Aboriginal man had told him the problem is that 'white man got no dreaming'.[8] From time to time, other people have suggested publicly that we white Australians really ought to start building our own mythology in a way that we might be able to call a whitefella dreaming.[9] However, people who say this run the risk of being accused of cultural appropriation because a land-sensitive culture that has evolved over thousands of years can hardly be replicated by a people who have lived in this land for little more than 200 years.

In his effort to avoid the charge of cultural appropriation, Peter Read[10] probably went too far in suggesting that white Australians should work separately from indigenous

Australians in building a deeper sense of belonging through story, song, etc. I agree with Plumwood's response[11] that this 'ignores all the more interesting options of interaction, including dialogue, learning, convergence and hybridisation, dynamically evolving and adaptive forms that are quite distinct from static cultural imitation'. The extent to which we can build on a land-sensitive mythology that has begun to emerge in the work of many non-indigenous writers, artists, film-makers, and others, while at the same time being willing and able to learn what we can from Aboriginal philosophy and culture, is no easy balance to achieve. But it is surely a task that is far more important than any one-off decision to change the way we elect the nominal head of state. It is a public conversation that must take place everywhere from schools to universities to the mass media. It can be an interesting and enduring topic for scholars, writers, artists, performers and anyone with a good story to tell. Perhaps where Greer went wrong was in suggesting that such a conversation needs to reach a speedy resolution -- perhaps it might, or should, become a conversation without end. Identity is something that must be continually forged, challenged, rethought and reinvented to keep it fresh and relevant.

The need for a new 'dreaming'

The desire to build a 'dreaming' that can manifest itself in a florescence of the 'earth culture' of which Neil Murray spoke, can be driven by the growing realisation that the dominant 'corporate culture' creates broken dreams and nightmares for many. Clive Hamilton[12], of the Australia Institute, has provided a good review of the failings of our decades-long dance with a fairly crude form of consumerism and, in a recent article titled 'Is life getting better or worse?', Richard Eckersley suggested that we are struggling for want of a 'guiding story'[13] that can embody values and goals worth striving for. He finished the article by saying:

> In the past, the quest for material progress and prosperity provided much of that 'guiding story' for Western nations, perhaps especially the newer nations such as Australia and the US. It seems it no longer does. Progress needs to be redefined, the story rewritten….

That sounds like a quest for a new 'dreaming' to me.

I have written elsewhere about what I think we can learn from a much more active engagement with Aboriginal philosophies, perspectives and practices.[14] One place to start is to think more deeply about the way in which Aboriginal people have taken some English words like 'country' and given them entirely different meanings[15]. More simply, I suggest we consider the extent to which we have cocooned ourselves from a sensorial connection with the earth. When you step onto a city footpath, try to imagine the layers of separation that begin with socks and shoe rubber and move down through layers of concrete poured over flattened earth. As Paul Carter has suggested:[16]

> We do not walk with the surface; we do not align our lives with its inclines, folds and pockets. We glide over it; and to do this, to render what is rough, smooth, passive, passable, we linearize it, conceptualizing the ground, indeed the civilized world, as an ideally flat space…

In a poem called 'Visit', Mark O'Connor[17] has described what can happen when you decide to step outside the bubble of a motor vehicle on a long-distance journey; if you 'stop here not because here seems special but because no place is real inside a car'. Stepping out onto grassland that appears 'monotonous' from the confines of the car,

you might discover a 'wallaby road' that leads you into an entirely unexpected world. Putting aside thoughts of other people and other places you slowly realise that:

> … for now you are in this place and of it
> and all its million years
> that will not last another decade.
> You go back to the car, turn a key
> And the dream land slides away.

I have written elsewhere that:[18]

> Wherever we go, we recreate the frontier between the settled and the wild, and when we travel we are cocooned by our technologies. Even in our most dedicated efforts to 'get back to nature', we carry backpacks loaded with the 'necessities' for survival and we encase our feet in robust hiking boots. I am not suggesting that, at a practical level, we need to abandon safety considerations or even comfort zones; but we need to keep in mind the degree of our separation if we want to become more attentive and empathetic with the non-human world….

One thing we might learn from Aboriginal people is that walking can be much more than a rather slow mode of transport or a recreational 'pursuit', in which the goal is most often to either complete the 'task' or reach a destination. For Aboriginal people, walking has been more like a 'dialogue between foot and ground'[19] than a passage to a destination.

Walking as a radical step

A circle of environmentalists in Melbourne is very actively engaging with the ecopolitics of walking. In 1999 a group of them set out to walk the Merri Creek from the point where it joins the Yarra River[20] to its source in the hills to the north of Melbourne. That journey been written up delightfully by Freya Mathews.[21] This was followed by an even more adventurous effort to follow the Yarra/Birrarung from sea to source – a journey that took months to plan and about three weeks to complete (in early 2003). One member of the broader circle, Zanni Waldstein, has interviewed members of the Merri Creek and Yarra River expeditions as well as a friend who has been walking the creeks and rivers of Melbourne as a primary mode of transport for 24 years and another friend who takes an annual pilgrimage once a year by walking from her home in Wangaratta to Melbourne. All these walkers say that they are constantly amazed by how much more you see when you travel at walking pace, even compared to riding a bicycle and even when you are walking in urban environments. Even in the city we can be reminded that waterways were once the major routes of transport and communication. As Waldstein writes:[22]

> Walking is something wondrous, overlooked, under-rated and full of treasures of connection and involvement in the world.

So the simple act of choosing to walk can be a radical step towards a different sense of belonging. Of course, there are many other ways in which we can slow down, 'downsize', smell the flowers, or plant the plants that are helping native birds to recolonise our cities. However, individual action is not enough to build a collective response to the power of the corporate culture. We need to celebrate our experiences and insights and find the ways to build a rich, alternative 'guiding story' that reflects values worth fighting for. A global 'clash of fundamentalisms'[23] has brought the world to a dangerous point and some readers may wonder if my proposals for reorienting our

society are little more than a dangerous indulgence. However, like the writer Barbara Kingsolver, I have to begin where I can. I think Kingsolver put it well at the end of an essay she wrote as a response to the horrifying events of 11 September 2001:[24]

> Political urgencies come and go, but it's a fair enough vocation to strike one match after another against the dark isolation, when spectacular arrogance rules the day and tries to force hope into hiding. It seems to me that there is still so much to say that I had better raise up a yell across the fence. I have stories of things I believe in: a persistent river, a forest on the edge of night, the religion in a seed, the startle of wingbeats when a spark of read life flies against all reason out of the darkness…. I'd like to speak of small wonders, and the possibility of taking heart.

To return to my starting point, it is not an indulgence to try to learn the language of leaves or kick off our shoes and once again caress the earth with our bare feet. Our lack of care-full attention to the 'nourishing terrains'[25] that support us has led us down the blind alleys of consumerism, individually tending our broken dreams. We have failed to develop the skills for an empathetic engagement with otherness that might lead us into much more sustainable relationships with people of other cultures and with the 'more-than-human' world. I am part of a group of people organising a Two Fires Festival of Arts and Activism that aims to both celebrate the legacy of Judith Wright's life and work and to explore its ongoing relevance to our evolving society. The festival will be held in Braidwood, NSW 18-21 March 2005, and I hope it can do justice to that brave poetic prophet.
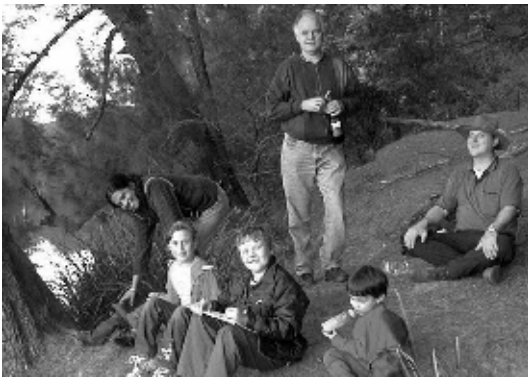
Dr Martin Mulligan is senior research fellow in the Globalism Institute, RMIT University, where his research is on sense of place and community resilience. He taught in the Social Ecology program at the University of Western Sydney and is author, with Stuart Hill, of Ecological Pioneers: A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action *(CUP) and editor, with William M Adams, of* Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era *(Earthscan London).*

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[1] As Joseph Banks put it after encountering Aboriginal people at Botany Bay on the journey of *The Endeavour*, as cited by Lines, William (1991). *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia*. Allen and Unwin: Sydney: 23.

[2] Wright, Judith (1994) *Collected Poems*. Angus and Robertson: Sydney. (1973). 'Falls Country': 328-329.

3   Quotations from the poems 'South of My Days' and 'Scribbly-gum' in Wright (1994) *ibid*: 20-21 and 131.

4   Abram, David (1996). *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. Vintage Books: New York: 86.

5   Mulligan, Martin and Hill, Stuart (2001). *Ecological Pioneers: A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action*. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne.

6   The interview took place on the *Summer All Over* program on Radio National on Sunday 18 January 2004.

7   Greer, Germaine (2003). 'Whitefella Jump Up: The Shortest Way to Nationhood.' *Quarterly Essay*, 11. Black Inc: Melbourne.

8   Stanner, William (1979)*. White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973*. Australian National University Press: Canberra.

9   See, for example, Borschmann. Greg (1999). *The People's Forest: A Living History of the Australian Bush*. The People's Forest Press: Blackheath NSW; Read, Peter (2000). *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne.

10   Read (2000) *ibid.*

11   Plumwood, Val (2000). 'Belonging, naming and decolonisation' in *Ecopolitics: Thought & Action*, 1, 1: 93.

12   Hamilton, Clive (2003). *Growth Fetish*. Allen and Unwin: Sydney.

13   Eckersley, Richard (2004). 'Is life getting better or worse?' *The Saturday Age*, The Age Review, January 31: 1-2. Eckersley borrowed this term from Hugh Mackay.

14   Mulligan, Martin (2003). 'Feet to the Ground in Storied Landscapes' in William M Adams and Martin Mulligan (eds) *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*. Earthscan: London.

15   Indeed it is encouraging to see how many non-Aboriginal people have some understanding of the way the word 'country' is used.

16   Carter, Paul (1996). *The Lie of the Land*. Faber and Faber: London: 2.

17   O'Connor, Mark (1999). 'Visit' in *Return to Poetry 1999: Ten Australians Choose Ten of Their Favourite Poems*. Duffy and Snellgrove: Sydney: 134-135.

18   Mulligan (2003) *op cit*: 284.

19   This phrase borrowed from Paul Carter (1996) *op cit*: 360.

20   Efforts are being made to popularise the Wurundjeri term for this river, which is Birrarung, river of mist.

21   Mathews, Freya (2003). *Journey to the Source of the Merri*. Ginninderra Press: Canberra.

22   Waldstein, Zanni (2004). 'Walking into place' in *Sense of Place* 5, Tasmanian Colloquium Papers, University of Tasmania: 231.

23   This term was introduced by UK-based social commentator Tariq Ali, 2002.

24   Kingsolver, Barbara (2002). *Small Wonder: Essays.* London: Faber and Faber: 21.

25   A term introduced by anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose. See Rose, Deborah Bird (1996). *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. Australian Heritage: Canberra.

Land Metaphysics
Freya Mathews

As Australians we are by now quite familiar with the idea of land spiritualities or spiritualities of place, since this is an idea which permeates the cultures of Aboriginal Australians. That this idea has captured the Australian imagination is evidenced by the fact that the word, 'country', as it is used in Aboriginal English, has now entered Australian English: 'country' denotes land that has a spiritual as well as a geographical dimension. Country is land which belongs to a people and to which a people belongs. As Deborah Bird Rose explains, country sees, hears, smells, feels, speaks – it is sentient and responsive to its people.[1] To accept this is to accept that such a thing as land-psyche or land-soul exists in addition to the psyche or soul of human and animal beings. Country is a communicative player in human affairs rather than a mere backdrop to the human drama.

But is there any way of making sense of this perception of land or place in Western terms of reference? Clearly such a perception cuts deeply against the metaphysical premises of Western civilisation, especially in its modern forms. The main metaphysical premise of the modern West is materialism: matter *per se* is seen as inert, as lacking any intrinsic animating principle; it is devoid of a psychic or mentalistic dimension of its own. Mentality enters the world only as a result of particular configurations of matter – the kind of configurations that occur in the central nervous systems of organisms, for instance. It therefore makes no sense, from this perspective, to attribute mind or psyche or soul or any kind of intrinsic animating principle to world at large, or to its local modalities, land and place.

If individuals in Western societies resonate with the idea of a spirituality of land or place, if we have experiences consonant with such a spirituality, how then are we to account for them? We can't just dismiss the materialist premise of modern civilisation with an airy postmodern wave of the hand. A hundred times a day we entrust our projects and our very lives to technologies that rest on this materialist premise. Whenever we board a plane or drive a car, send an email or submit to medical tests, we testify to our tacit faith in the deterministic, materialist worldview bequeathed to us by classical physics and other sciences. Our faith in these day-to-day technologies demonstrates our implicit conviction that the world lacks ends or meanings of its own that need to be taken into account in our dealings with it.

If we really want to credit the idea that land or place may be charged with a meaningful and purposeful presence of its own, a presence that can be rendered responsive to us, we are in fact faced with an immense challenge. We shall have to revise entirely our metaphysical foundations, yet this revision will have to be accomplished in a way that is consistent with the demonstrated verities of science.

Can this be done? Is it possible to see the physical world as innately present-to-itself, as endowed with a mentalistic dimension of its own, in some larger-than-usual sense of mentality? Is to suggest this to hark back to pre-theoretical animisms, according to which nature was filled with spirits and deities of various kinds? Presumably such animisms, understood literally, are today untenable. Any worldview a modern society adopts must be at least consistent with the basic categories of physics: space and time and mass, gravitational and electromagnetic fields and so on. Humanity has now travelled into space, negotiated gravitational fields, harnessed electromagnetic ones. There is no going back, in any literal way, to the cosmologies of mythology. But can the world conform to physics yet still not be reducible to it? Is there any rational

account of reality that 'saves the appearances' of physics, yet implicates mentality in reality at the most fundamental level?

Personally, being of a broadly panpsychist persuasion, I am confident that such an account can be given.[2] 'Pan' means everything; 'psyche' means soul, or, for our purposes, mentality. 'Panpsychism' then is an old philosophical term denoting the view that there is a 'psychic' or mentalistic dimension to everything; that mentality – whether in the form of spirit, soul, purpose, agency, subjectivity or intentionality – is as primitive an aspect of reality as physicality is. Although panpsychism has been very much a minority tradition in the history of western philosophy, serious accounts of it have been advanced from time to time. (Thinkers who have developed panpsychist views include Rationalists, Spinoza and Leibniz, several Romantic philosophers of the late eighteenth century and the process philosophers of the early twentieth century.) My own account of panpsychism - which space prevents me from detailing here - represents the manifest world, as described by physics, as the outward appearance of an inner field of 'subjectivity', in an expanded sense of subjectivity. Reality is, from this point of view, both a unity and a manifold of differentia, a One and a Many. Viewed from within it is a field of subjectivity, with ends and meanings and communicative capacities of its own; from the viewpoint of its finite modes, or those of them that are capable of acting as observers, it is an order of extension, as represented by physics. As a locus of subjectivity in its own right, the universe is capable of, and actively seeks, communicative engagement with its finite modes, the Many, or, again, those of them that are capable of such engagement. Wherever this communicative engagement is actualised, it is manifest in a poetic order – an order of poetic revelation - that unfolds alongside the causal order; this poetic order, or order of meaning, exceeds the causal order but is in no way in violation of it.

To inhabit a panpsychist universe is quite different from inhabiting a materialist one. To appreciate the contrast, let's perform a little thought experiment. Suppose we have not yet heard of panpsychism and we are looking at the world in the usual modern way - through our normal modern lenses. Then imagine stepping out into our garden late one evening. It's a clear night. The moon is not quite full. There are gum trees. We can hear the electric click of a few bats flitting about overhead. There is a strong perfume in the air – some night flower is shedding its scent. There are lots of stars. We look around us quietly, taking it all in.

What kind of world is it we imagine we are seeing in this thought experiment? For most of us who belong to modern Western societies it will be the familiar universe of space and time and celestial bodies such as stars, moons and planets. We are looking up at these celestial bodies from the surface of our own planet. We may feel that there are presences around us in the garden – the bats, for instance, perhaps even the trees and shrubs. But when we lift our eyes, we are gazing into a vast loneliness, an emptiness of indefinite space, a predominantly unpopulated expanse of galaxies that is pretty much the universe of physics. The way we imagine it may be more or less theoretically sophisticated – we may imagine it in simple Newtonian terms as a vast arrangement of particles in a void or we may imagine it in sophisticated Einsteinian terms as an elastic field of dynamic deformations. But either way it is empty, in the sense of being devoid of any informing presence. Some may think of it as the work of a Creator God who stands outside it and perhaps maintains it in existence. They might even think of that God as somehow available to his Creation. But still, that Creation remains in itself empty, uninformed with any animating principle of its own.

Now let's repeat the experiment after adopting a panpsychist perspective. We step out into the night garden again. The moon has climbed higher in the sky. Bats continue to flit about and the stillness is even deeper than before. We look up at the stars. What do we see this time? We are no longer gazing out into a vast chasm of emptiness and loneliness. The stars no longer shine down with cold indifference. True, this is deep space, and the stars are indeed celestial bonfires. But all this now has something of the aspect of the inside of someone's mind. It has the filled, fieldlike qualities of awareness, and it all feels nearer somehow – as if, at a certain level, distances have collapsed, or resolved into mere appearance, as they do within consciousness. The stars and bats and other figures in the field have a new poetic status, as potential elements of meaning in a communicative exchange between ourselves and this larger subject or field of subjectivity. This universe is alive and breathing. It is a spirit-thing. We are not alone. We have stepped into a different night.

So profound is this shift from a materialist world to a psychically activated one that it could not but be expected to transform our most basic modalities, our basic ways of being in the world. How little does the average modern Westerner drawn to a sense of the spirit of land or place seem to suspect the depth of transformation that such a spirituality will require! To be inducted into this spirituality is not a matter merely of closing the office door, hopping into the four wheel drive and haring out to some charged or brooding site. Truly to engage with the 'spirit' of land or place is surely to have one's metaphysical intuitions rearranged to such a degree that it will not be possible for the seeker simply to scuttle back to town and resume her place amongst the cogs and wheels of a civilisation that rests on an incompatible metaphysical premise. It is not a coincidence, after all, that traditional indigenous people who exhibit a reverential attitude to land also appear to comport themselves, personally and socially, in every department of life, in ways profoundly counter to the temper of modernity.

To step inside a panpsychist universe then is immediately to feel the necessity for existential modalities radically at variance with those we adopt unquestioningly, as second nature, in the materialist universe of modernity. One of these new modalities may be described as a modality of *encounter* as opposed to knowledge; another as the modality of *synergy* as opposed to domination-and-control.

Let's look at encounter first. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, knowledge has been regarded, in the West, as the proper and distinctive vocation of humanity: our special virtue has been to *know* the world, objectively and rationally, in a way that no other species can. But is knowledge really the unqualified good that it has invariably been considered to be in Western civilisation? Doesn't this view of knowledge presuppose that the world we seek to know is wide open for investigation, that it can and should have no say in the matter of its investigation, that permission for investigation cannot be sought from it because it is incapable of giving such permission? In other words, doesn't this view of knowledge as an end in itself presuppose that the world is a pure object, incapable of self-presence or self-possession, and hence infinitely open to our dissection and analysis? But if this presupposition is dropped, if it is conceded that the world is a subject in its own right, or a field of subjectivity, present to itself, in possession of an interiority exclusively its own, then the question might well be asked what business we have subjecting it to our indiscriminate probe in the name of 'knowledge'.

The appropriate response to a world conceived as subject seems rather to be to seek to *encounter* it. To encounter another is to approach them as one with whom it is possible to have a relationship and from whom one can expect a response. Since encounter involves contact with the subjectivity of the other, it can be said to have occurred only if the other has allowed us this glimpse into its interiority. Encounter is accordingly necessarily mutual; if we

impose our will on the other, or ignore the fact of its subjectivity in our dealings with it, then encounter cannot occur.

From the point of view of panpsychism then, the primary goal is not to theorise the world, but to encounter it. Every action we take, every posture we assume, now becomes an interaction with a responsive world. A mode of *address*, rather than of representation or explanation, is thenceforth required in our approach to reality, and our ability to orient ourselves will depend as much on our familiarity with the workings of the poetic order and its protocols as on our familiarity with the workings of the causal order. In order to actualise a culture of encounter, we need practices of invocation. Most human activities, at both collective and individual levels, can be transformed into an ongoing conversation with an increasingly animated world through practices of call and response.

However, when the world is regarded as a 'spirit-thing', with a subjectivity and ends and meanings of its own, then it behoves us not only to seek to encounter it but to *let it be* – to refrain from taking charge of it and allowing it instead to unfold in its own way. Because we are a part of it, it seems safe to assume that our own self-realisation will be a function of its. In letting it realise itself then, we shall also incidentally be furthering our own richest self realisation: we come into being, most fully and richly, in a world which is itself most fully and richly in process of self-realisation.

Letting things be means just that – not interfering unduly with the unfolding of the things around us, allowing natural cycles to take their course, letting the rivers run, the mountains mount and the beings be. At the ideal limit letting-be prescribes a scenario in which we gather our food from the wild and fashion our shelters and garments from materials at hand in such a way that these activities of ours feed back into and sustain the natural cycles that produce our livelihood. But what could letting-be mean in modern societies, in which such gathering practices have long since become impracticable?

It is true that in modern societies we can no longer just pluck food from the forests or run it to ground in ways that directly contribute to the self-realisation of the land. Some kind of proactivity on our part is generally going to be necessary if we are to meet our needs. But proactivity need not take the form of recutting the cloth of our world to suit ourselves. It need not mean manipulating and controlling that world, instrumentalising it and imposing our own designs on it. Rather, the kind of action that we cultivate, in the service of our needs, can follow lines of *synergy* rather than intervention or control or the imposition of self on other. By this I mean that we can learn to identify the patterns of energic flow already at play in the world for the purpose of then hitching a ride with them. Instead of cutting across these flows in order to arrive at premeditated ends of our own, we need, in the first place, to nominate our ends partly in response to what is possible in the world as it is, the world as it is already unfolding, and, in the second place, to make use of existing patterns of energic flow in order to arrive at these ends.

We shall find that much of our day-to-day praxis, at both personal and social levels, can be re-orchestrated along synergistic rather than impose-and-control lines. Instead of setting ourselves hard-to-achieve goals or harbouring exotic desires, then turning our world upside down to meet them, we can, at the personal level, work *with* the grain of the given instead of *against* it. So - to take a light-hearted example - when people seek adventure they normally do so by choosing some exotic tour package, like horse riding along the old Silk Road of China or picking wild apples with Kazakhstan nomads or having themselves lowered in a cage into the ocean to meet white sharks nose-to-nose. But we might equally well scrutinise our own immediate neighbourhood for the unknown, the offbeat, for the numinous and unpredictable elements that the neighbourhood might contain. We might

take a pilgrimage to the source of our local creek or river, for instance, or, like the 'cave clan', explore the half-forgotten labyrinth of the city's underground storm water system; or we might simply shoulder our pack and set off, without a premeditated plan. To operate in the synergistic mode requires flexibility, detachment from fixed ideas and overdetermined goals, and an eye for opportunities if and as they present. It might not get you to where you thought you wanted to be, but it *will* get you to a place that will be appropriate when it happens.

The praxis of societies as well as individuals can follow synergistic as opposed to impose-and-control lines. If economics is defined as the study of the economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs, as Peter Kropotkin ventured to suggest more than a century ago (though his definition has been ignored by the majority of subsequent economists)[3], and if the world is understood in energic terms, then it is through its economics that a society will demonstrate its basic relation to the world. In other words, the metaphysical commitments of a given society will be evident in its economics. The materialist societies of the modern West extract nonhuman energies and deploy them with scant regard for non-instrumental meanings or communicative potentials that might inhere in them. True, such societies have latterly begun to think about *conserving* energy, for the sake of human posterity or the long-term viability of the human environment. But from a panpsychist point of view it is not enough merely to conserve energy, unilaterally extracting and transforming it here and storing it there. One has to allow planetary energies to follow their own contours of flow, contours which reveal local and possibly global aspects of the world's own *telos*. In due course one conjoins one's own energies with these flows in order to create new patterns which satisfy one's material needs in ways that contribute to the further unfolding of this larger *telos*.

Contemporary Western societies have already discovered and begun to experiment with forms of praxis that appear to qualify, to some degree, as instances of synergy. These are those that fall under the rubric of sustainability. Under this rubric we are starting to explore an 'economy of energy' that is consistent with the integrity of the planetary processes that provide the energy. How are we to gain the power required to run our cities, for example? We can do so either by dynamiting and mining entire landscapes for fossil fuels and diverting and damming wild rivers for hydro-electricity, or we can gain the necessary power simply by receiving the sunlight that falls on our roofs, or inviting the wind to turn our mills: windflows and sunflows are not diminished or denatured by warming our solar panels or blowing our windmills; they can be tapped without basic meteorological and solar patterns being fractured.

However, sustainability understood in this contemporary sense is still basically materialist. It works physically with the grain of the given but eschews creative engagement with it. In order to count as fully synergistic, in the (broadly panpsychist) sense of synergy that is consistent with spiritualities of land or place, the praxis of sustainability needs to incorporate the poetics of communicative engagement. Sources of energy – sun, wind, tides and so on – need to be mythed, storied, personified for the purposes of invocation; sources of sustenance – plants and animals – need to be sung and thanked. The transactions with the world whereby we ensure our own self-maintenance need at the same time to be invitations to conversation, to poetic collaboration. In other words, praxis is always a matter of poetics as well as pragmatics: poetic engagement helps to prefigure new pragmatic constellations and pragmatic engagement helps to enlarge poetic horizons. In this way praxis becomes a primary locus of creativity in the panpsychist culture: new psychophysical formations are added to the world via the intercourse of humanity with reality.

A spirituality which takes world per se as its 'object' of devotion makes no sharp divide between the living and the non-living, 'nature' and the artefactual. As a psychophysical field of ever-changing, inter-flowing configurations, reality carries rocks, apartment blocks and factories along with forests and arid shrublands into the patterns of its unfolding. We synergise with this psychically activated world not by insisting on ecology after the event, erasing suburbs to restore lost woodlands or felling mature exotics to plant indigenous seedlings, but rather by taking the pulse of the world-as-it-is, then finding within that pulse the trajectory of the world's unfolding. To raze and rearrange things according to our own designs – even our ecological designs – is just to perpetuate the cycle of domination-and-control. To break this cycle, and so enable the world in time to recover its own course, we need only to acquiesce in the given, at least to the degree necessary to enable a larger *telos* to re-form and re-emerge. When the contours of that larger unfolding are clear, we can re-align with it, allowing its purposes and poetics to provide the parameters of ours while at the same time seeking to amplify those purposes and poetics with our own.

The scope of synergy then as an existential modality is cosmological rather than merely ecological. It enjoins an address to matter *per se* and not merely to living systems. Its outcomes are accordingly in the shorter term not coextensive with those of ecologism. But the environmentalist need not fear. When synergy is our basic modality, no further harm can come to the world and the scars of harms that have already been inflicted will gradually fade and disappear in the world's embrace. The environmentalist who declines to take this cosmological step, however, who refuses the re-animation of matter *per se*, will continue to treat *things* – our artefacts and buildings, for instance, and the inanimate ground beneath our feet – as *nothing*, in the sense of being amenable of erasure, replacement, disposal. This instrumental attitude, which is implicitly an attitude of violence, will then be the environmentalist's basic way of being in the world. Anyone who assumes the stance of instrumentalism with respect to matter will be obliged to switch back and forth between this basic modality and the different, indeed opposite, one that is required for transactions with those entities that form the small, privileged islands of moral considerability in the vast expanses of inconsiderable matter. To extend consideration to these entities will require a pause, a moment of readjustment, as one changes gear into the new mode. In the unreflective haste and confusion of everyday life one is likely to revert for the most part to one's habitual mode, the mode that is second nature to materialism, and even to the ecologistic offshoots of materialism, namely that of instrumentalisation. Once the cosmological step has been taken however, and the panpsychist outlook assumed, special modalities for our interactions with living things will no longer be required; such mutualistic modalities will already be reliably wired into us as our basic way of being in the world.

Truly to take seriously the spiritualities of land and place that have surfaced in the Western episteme in the last decade or two then would entail a metaphysical conversion that would cut deeper at the root of modernity than any of our current – ecologic - forms of environmentalism do. It is both the promise and the challenge of such spiritualities that they appear to entrain an existential modality, and correlative forms of praxis, that are so profoundly counter, at both personal and social levels, to the definitive tendencies of modernity.

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1   Rose, Deborah Bird (1996). *Nourishing Terrains*, Australian Heritage Commission: Canberra: Chapter 1.

2   The present paper offers (highly abbreviated) introductions to various ideas – specifically those of panpsychism, encounter, and synergy - that are fully developed in two recent books of mine: Mathews, Freya (2003) *For Love of Matter: a Contemporary Panpsychism*, SUNY Press: Albany NY; and its as yet untitled sequel, also published by SUNY Press and forthcoming later in 2004. See also Mathews, Freya (1999). 'Letting the World Grow Old: an Ethos of Countermodernity', *Worldviews: Environment Culture Religion* 3, 2: 119-138.

3   See Peter Kropotkin (1974). *Fields Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, George Allen and Unwin: London: 17.

The Pebble

The pebble
is true to itself –
hard
smooth
completely inflexible

takes on new life
when wet
only to steadfastly refuse
ornamentation
when
plucked
from its bed –

retains its inherent
coldness,
its calm solidity,
against the warmth
of my hand.

Liat Kirby, in *Curving My Eyes to Almonds
(Papyrus Publishing, 2001).*

A Haunted Land No Longer?
Changing Relationships to a Spiritualised Australia
Peter Read

In 1989 DJ Mulvaney proposed that 'the greatest gift of Aboriginal society to multi-cultural Australia' was 'a spiritual concept of place'.[1] I argue here that, if Mulvaney was right, then non-Aboriginal Australians enunciated the most precise and passionate spiritual concepts of place in the two decades after 1980. 'Multicultural Australia', however, did not share the great gift. Nor did the gift come without cost to the Indigenous people themselves. Today, newer forms of belonging are sometimes not concerned with Australian-specific land at all. Mulvaney's observation, I conclude, is losing some of its force.

The starting point of the 'spiritual concept' was the dissemination of the revelations of the nineteen-sixties anthropologists. WEH Stanner, for example, wrote in 1962:

> Scholars familiar with the Aborigines have usually had one impressive experience in common: to be taken by Aboriginal friends to places in the wilds and there shown something - tree, rocky outcrop, cranny, pool - with formality, pride and love. Conversations follow rather like this: 'There is my Dreaming [place]. My father showed me this place when I was a little boy … What had his father said? 'He said: "Your Dreaming is there; you want to look after this place; you don't want to let it go; … it is from the first [totemist] man." '…What else did his father say? … He said this: 'My boy, look! Your Dreaming is there; it is a big thing; you never let it go … all Dreamings [totem entities] come from there; your spirit is there" '. … The mystical link – of belief, trust and faith in mysterious, powerful unknowns – has been proclaimed.[2]

What white Australians took from such revelations was, firstly, the localised *genius loci* specific to a certain site, secondly, a sense of a personal relationship with that spirit, thirdly, that such a relationship implied a reciprocal relationship of care and responsibility. And they began, I believe, to express their passionate place-specific spiritual needs in answer them. Here are three classic statements of Mulvaney's 'spiritual concept of place' of the 1980s and 1990s.

A Victorian mountain cattleman

> The mountains are almost like our church. – that's where we go to fulfil ourselves so that we can carry out our lives.[3]

The media personality Bill Peach

> Every time I go back to the Upper Murray, I feel that tie of blood, the intrinsic bond so important to our Aboriginal people. It's where you know your ancestors are buried.[4]

The singer-songwriter John Williamson's in 'My Oath to Australia'

> I believe in the ancient spirit of the Great South Land
> Her health is my responsibility,
> And her fruits will be mine only in return for my caring.[5]

Frequently coupled to these emotions was a consciousness that the irreversible consequences of the invasion had brought to White Australians profit but not forgiveness. Judith Wright wrote in 1981:

> The two strands – the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion – have become part of me. It is a haunted country. We owe it

repentance and such amends as we can make, and one last chance of making those amends is to keep as much of it as we can, in the closest state we can to its original beauty. [6]

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By the mid 1980s expressions of spiritual belonging, usually tied to a precise site, were often touched with anxiety. Manning Clark wrote in 1988

Sometimes when I stand in the Australian bush on a clear windless day, I am visited with strange thoughts. … I wonder whether I belong. I am not alone in such thoughts. I am ready, and so are others, to understand the Aboriginal view that no human being can ever know heart's ease in a foreign land, because in a foreign land there live foreign ancestral spirits. We white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien. We must either become assimilated or live the empty life of a people exiled from their source of spiritual strength.[7]

These two deep human emotions, a desire to assuage guilt and a desire for spiritual belonging, should be read as one of the cultural marker of Anglo-Celtic Australians in the last decades of the twentieth century. By what means, to follow Clark's image, could one legitimately become assimilated in the Aboriginal ancestral spirits of the land, and so in the land itself?

I wrote the book *Belonging* in 2000 in part to investigate my own feelings of how and where white Australians might belong, in country of which Aborigines had been dispossessed.[8] In the course of many interviews I found, not unexpectedly, impatience at the question among rural students at a Sydney boarding school, unreflective celebration in country music, cautious angst among poets. Not unexpectedly, Aboriginal readers also were impatient. The academic Sue Stanton, reviewing *Belonging,* wrote

It is time that non-Aborigines got past their highly privileged and immobilising guilt. Belonging should become for them an opportunity to forge respectful social, political and economic relationships with Aborigines about who belongs, what constitutes real belonging, and trying to invent some kind of primal coherence in regard to this belonging.[9]

Guilt is indeed immobilising. Some reviewers, evidently so immobilised, felt that even to raise the question of non-Aboriginal belonging was inappropriate or insulting to Aboriginal people. Julie Evans concluded:

In the end we are left with the uneasy feeling that was there from the beginning. … in Australia of 2001 any general settler musing on this issue remains discomfortingly premature and introspective.[10]

We return to Mulvaney's proposal but rather less positively than his words may have first appeared. It is now clear that the 'greatest gift of Aboriginal society', the discovery of Aboriginal spiritual place-belonging, brought many white Australians to imagine that they had to belong analogously to Aborigines. The connection seems to have been implanted so deeply since the late 1970s that it is, even today, easy to forget that spiritual belonging need not have any connection with the land at all.

How did Aborigines feel about such developments? A few lucky social scientists working with remote and self-confident Aboriginal elders, achieved almost an equal inheritance of the stories, the mythology and sense of belonging, almost as if they had

been born into that country themselves. Others spent shorter periods with spiritual elders like David Mowaljarri or Miriam Rose Ungumerr and were assured that Aboriginal spirituality may under certain circumstances be shared by others. But in southern Australia, where land, identity and the conditions of daily life are under enormous strain, very few Aborigines welcomed the advance of outsiders into their spiritual domain. I asked Colon Mullett, a Victorian Koori, if the White mountain cattleman Granville Crawford could ever really belong to the high country which Granville deeply loved:

> Not in the same context as the Aboriginal people. Australian European people have lost contact with their land over the last 2500-3000 years. … There's no comparison.

> I can understand non-Aboriginal people who maybe come from a farming background and have a relationship with the land, and they see a similarity to the land they're using with where they come from, and they become very attached and very spiritualised as well, I suppose, to that country, and feel they're protecting and looking after it; but in realistic terms they're destroying it.[11]

Pete Hay, an environmentalist teaching at the University of Tasmania, reported this arresting experience

> [L]ast year, in a postgraduate seminar on place, an Aboriginal student (a warm, witty and erudite man and a valued personal friend) looked at me in the eye and, entirely unprompted, said that he does not want descendants of Europeans to develop a deep commitment to this place, because it is not their land to identify with.[12]

Hay concluded that Aboriginal claims to specialness are founded upon the assumption of a superior *and unshared* embeddedness, of a *more* authentic claim of being-at-home here, within the Australian landscape.[13] The same point was put more elegantly, but just as forcefully, by Archie Roach:

> So bow your heads you eucalypts and wattle trees
> Australia's bush is losing its identity
> For the trees and the parks that they have planned
> Look out of place because the spirit's in the land.
> …
> We cry, the native born.[14]

There was no doubt, in Roach's mind, as to who was, and who was not, native born, though I suspect many of his non-Aboriginal admirers did not understand the implied but comprehensive rejection of White Australians.

From the words of his student Pete Hay drew the critical though inevitable conclusion: that in developing their own sense of belonging, non-Aborigines need to find their own centres of power and deep significance. In this case 'confrontation with Indigenous Australian in the project of creating an empathetic sense of place may be unavoidable'. Unpalatable though it may be for the thousands of non-Aborigines working side by side with Aboriginal Australians in a common cause of legal, social or terrestrial rights, sooner or later they will have serious differences with their friends about the meaning of spiritual Australia and their own place in it. I reached the same conclusion in *Belonging:*

> Leave the spirits to the people who made them or were made by them. Let the rest of us find the confidence in our own physical and spiritual belonging in this

land, respectful of Aboriginality but not necessarily close to it. Let's intuit our own attachments to country independently of Aboriginals. We can belong in the landscape, on the landscape, or irrelevantly to the landscape. We don't all have to belong to each other. To understand that is a step to of belonging.[15]

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'Non-Aborigines' are not, of course, a single amorphous mass. At least a dozen Chinese-speaking Australian communities identify themselves as born in a country other than China, yet they are often referred to here as Chinese Australians. Of the eighty communities or individuals now calling themselves Australian more than half are of neither Aboriginal nor Anglo-Celtic descent.

We have seen that what seems to make southern Aboriginals uncomfortable, or angry, is White Australian spiritual acknowledgement of a *genius loci* of a precise site (or in mountains or deserts, or a single spirit of the whole landmass) which they hold in a dialogic relationship of mutual care. Yet non Anglo-Celtic Australians do not, as yet, express their senses of belonging to Australia in these terms. Indeed, this huge group of others, the non Anglo-Celtic Australians, have in discussions on belonging, been very largely ignored by both Aborigines and whites. Taken together, even though their senses of spiritual belonging are still to a point based in Australian land, they seem to offer a much lesser challenge to Aboriginal sensitivities.

How do they, then, express sentiments of Australian belonging? Partly in terms of relief simply of being here. A young Sydney Vietnamese wrote:

> Saturday morning I went to the poll
> Could not make up my mind who to vote for
> And the [candidate] voted for will be happy
> And the not voted for will be upset…
> The night came
> The winner had a big smile
> And the loser left the country power
> Somewhere on the stage
> Sported a big smile
> Waved to the nation and exited
>
> I just love Australian politics.[16]

A deep affection for Australia, then, can be political rather than spiritual. It can also be emotional. Cuban born Marivic Wyndham maintained

> [In Cuba] one spills one's blood for the land, wrestles with it, buries one's dead in this very active and central part of your life. But you don't make it sacred.[17]

Belonging can be intellectual. Indian born Manik Datar felt bonds to Australia: because she had consciously grafted herself to Australia, because she liked the look of the land, because it gave her space as a non Anglo-Celtic Australian; because she felt accepted by its people; because she held a commitment to its democracy; because of her memories, and because occasionally she felt an ache for the land.[18]

We might expect a subjective migrant connection with the sacred lands of Australia to appear first among those who have been here longest: the Chinese, already an established community within a generation of the first fleet's arrival. But the pictorial scroll Bicentennial Chinese history of Australia 'Harvest of Endurance' dwelt more upon the misery of early Chinese grieving for a lost homeland, and in later generations, on their pleasure at working within an enclosed but outwardly accepted

Chinese-Australian society.[19] The biographer of the celebrated Chinese Australian William Liu (1893-1983) rejoiced in his 'inspiring more and more Chinese migrants and Australians of Chinese origin to follow his fine example to devote their efforts to the nation they have settled in', and in persuading other Australians to accept them.[20] It is interesting to speculate on why this is so. Possibly the attention of both social scientists and the non-Anglo-Celts themselves have been turned, in hundreds of studies of exiles, refugees, and repatriations, to the emotional relationship between the old land and the new. What would Immigration Studies do without such preoccupations?

Another reason is that certain cultures now established here regard the whole earth as equally and potentially enspirited. A *feng-shui* master will recognise *any* mountain, hill, headland, or flat plain to have certain energies of which the geomancer must be aware, and work with. The spiritual energies of, say, Wilpena Pound will be specific to that region; but the practitioner can recognise equally well, the energies of any other region of the earth. Not so to the Indigenous elder of that country who may not be able to find a connection with any site overseas; and not so (though less certainly) the white Australians who feel themselves in touch with the 'genius loci' of Wilpena Pound. Equally, Muslim Australians recognise no spiritual places in Australia at all, because no sufficiently well known spiritual leader has died or practised here.[21] To Hindus, God may reside in any object here – or overseas. An Australian site may become spiritualised or haunted if the spirit of a deceased person becomes entrapped there. A priest may be called to carry out the ceremony of *haven,* to encourage the spirit to begin its rightful journey towards the godhead. If successful, the site may revert to a state of spiritual inertia.[22]

We can begin to understand why such philosophies of enspiritedness may offer little challenge to Aboriginal sensitivities, even though a Hindu priest may find himself or herself working with the soul of an Aboriginal entrapped at the same site for perhaps three centuries. A new Chinese temple will be usually be inspirited by a formal process which may involve bringing lighted joss sticks from another temple already enspirited, possibly from overseas; and the sacredness of the temple does not extend far outside the structure. Buddhists recognise no sacred places in Australia except the temples, or, possibly, where a holy person has meditated for a long period. Southern European Christians may recognize sacredness outside the church, but usually it will be a single site made sacred by a miraculous apparition.

Finally, in this too-brief excursion into some major spiritual understandings of the Australian land, we should recognise the political/emotional /spiritual responses which perhaps inevitably follow as a natural consequence of *being* in any place. Pino Bosi, born in 1933 in a town ceded to Yugoslavia in 1945, wrote a powerful short story about the death of the Italian migrant Pietro, accidentally killed while building a dam in Australia. Returning by train from the funeral, a man shouts at Pietra's grieving widow and her uncle for speaking Italian. Her uncle retorts,

> What we speak not interest you but I tell you we not want thanks for our work because we do for ourself, but leave in peace the men who die in a dam that brings water to this country! This is your country, it is your land, but the grave where today they put this woman's husband, he pay with blood and she pay with tears. This is her land, not yours!

The story is called 'One's land'.[23]

***

My argument, then, is that which threatens Aboriginal spiritual land-connectedness most intimately, as Pete Hay's Aboriginal student perceived, are those feelings of spiritual belonging which Anglo-Celtic Australians began to express in the later 1970s. They claimed, and believed, that they shared specific Australian site-energies at least parallel to those of Aborigines.

I'm reinforced in this opinion by contrasting the 'John Williamson' sense of reciprocal responsibility with those of the *pakeha* of New Zealand, who, living in a nation analogously challenged by the Maori, might be expected to articulate analogous expressions. Is the principal theme of pakeha belonging their spiritual bonds with the land? No. New Zealand farmers of the 1970s argued before the Waitangi Tribunal that they, not Maori, were the true inheritors of the land because they, not the Maori, had loved and cherished it for 200 years.[24] The most articulate spokesperson of Pakeha belonging, Michael King, believes that, finally, he belongs because

> [t]o be Pakeha on the cusp of the twenty-first century is not to be European; it is not to be an alien or a stranger in my own country. It is to be a non-Maori New Zealander who is aware of and proud of my antecedents, but who identifies as intimately with this land, as intensively and as strongly, as anybody Maori. It is to be…another kind of indigenous New Zealander.[25]

The spiritual challenge to Aborigines, then, clearly emanates from Anglo-Celtic Australia. There was in the 1990s not much difference between John Williamson's 'ancient spirit of the great south land' at Uluru and the Aboriginal singer Bruce McKenzie's appeal to the spirit creators of Wilpena Pound;

> Big mountain, you mean so much to me…
> The old Adnymathana people told me stories about you,
> That's why I always feel so glad when I see you so misty blue.[26]

Where to from here? One can proceed in the way anticipated by Pete Hay: an assertion of spiritual belonging offered in the hope that one's Aboriginal friends will understand, but if they do not: too bad. This is the informed, constructive but finally non-negotiable position of the white Australian singer Neil Murray. Murray asserts that, while Aborigines may be Indigenous, then he is native born. He claims this right not only by acknowledging the chilling history of landscapes now empty of Aborigines. He claims it not only by supporting reconciliation, nor by having lots of Aboriginal friends, nor by being the driving force of the Aboriginal Warumpi Band. In the end Murray's own belonging derives from the accident of his birth and from his continuing responsibility to the environment:

> Australia, where have your caretakers gone?'
> I am just one who has been battered
> By the damage within your shores,
> Australia, I would not sell you for a price,
> I would not strip you of your forests
> Or pollute your clear blue skies,
> I would not desecrate your sacred lands
> I would not plunder on your shores
> I would not foul your precious waters
> For I am your native born.[27]

Such a connection between belonging and environmental care perhaps is a less difficult, because less symbiotic, version of Aboriginal spiritual inter-connectedness with country. Yet

part of Murray's position surely flows from that whole-earth ecology which in the 1990s began to challenge senses of Australian-specific enspiritedness. Much, of course, derives directly or indirectly from the networks of thinking which produced James Lovelock's 'Gaia Hypothesis' in 1979.[28]

A recent series of essays edited by the Australian ecologist John Cameron demonstrates the influence of this more generalised sense of the earth as a living and *connected* organism, less insistence on the specifically Australian. Cameron himself finds that he is now more sympathetic to his European migrant neighbours who created European-style gardens in the bush of the Blue Mountains:

> As this picture emerged I felt a softening of my judgement towards people who construct European gardens in Australia. It was clearly a life-affirming activity for them than I could only begin to appreciate…'[29].

John Seed, director of the Rainforest Information Centre, described the opposite process whereby his deep attachment to the Terania Creek rainforest came ultimately to release him to other forests:

> At first I would return from these overseas tours and immerse myself in the Nightcap forests, running naked up the creeks and covering myself in leaves, feeling the healing and empowerment. But then my relationship with the forests where this began became less straightforward. The rainforests that were connecting me, rooting me in *that* place later released me, almost shooing me away to defend their cousins in far flung lands.[30]

Meanwhile young people can put an altruistic globalism more prosaically but just as pointedly:

> I think I'm a world citizen first, not an Australian. That's my ultimate responsibility.[31]

The revival of European animist philosophy in the wiccan movement has parallelled the shift away from the subjective energies of specific sites. 'Keziah' is a wiccan and remarkable healer of injured birds living in south coastal New South Wales, whom I interviewed for *Haunted Earth.* Healing, say, an injured tawny frog-mouth, Keziah described how she summons and focuses deep energies – not Australian-specific energies - to flow from the earth, through her body to the injured bird.[32] Indeed, practising wicca in the southern hemisphere carries in train geographic and temporal difficulties not easy to resolve. It's a northern hemisphere philosophy of life. Old rituals call for northern plants like willow wands, oak leaves, rosemary or thyme which may be difficult to acquire and, more significantly, are not native. Other rituals call for the ceremonial identification of Earth, Fire, Wind and Water at the cardinal points. Some covens here have determined that the element Earth should not be symbolically located in the south, as it is in Europe, because to East Coast Australians the bulk of our landmass is to the west. By this argument people in Darwin would place Earth in the south, Western Australians in the east. Wiccans are by no means agreed on what, if anything, should be altered in the rituals and sacred texts. Wiccan teachings cannot easily be place-specific in the Australian Indigenous sense. To practitioners of many imported religions, then, Judith Wright's cry from the heart (the guilt of the invasion, one last chance of making amends, keeping the land as close as possible in its closest state to its original beauty) will be less relevant than it was in 1981 when she wrote those words.

It's possible, therefore, that what seemed to be the greatest emotional and spiritual challenge to Aboriginal people is already resolving itself. I suspect that non-Aborigines are now less concerned than they were two decades ago to parallel or appropriate Aboriginal

spiritual place-belonging. Most the eminent Australians referred to by Mark McKenna in his article in this volume referred in 2003 to Australian *land* in their suggested Constitutional Preamble, not to *spiritual* land.[33] Even passionate proponents of Aborigine-style spirituality like David Tacey now write with rather more caution and wisdom than they once did. Tacey wrote in 2003:

> The Aboriginal sacred experience becomes, whether we like it or not, our own cultural heritage as soon as we send cultural tap-roots down into Aboriginal soil. This is a dangerous and controversial thing to say, and it must be immediately qualified. I do not mean to say that we European Australians [sic] must 'acquire' the Aboriginal Dreaming like a material appendage or consumer item. If we grasp greedily for the Dreaming, then we may rightly be accused of performing the last, the most fatal act of imperial appropriation in our tragic history of dispossession. … It is not that, in our desperation and emptiness, we reach out for the Dreaming, but rather that the Dreaming, with the wisdom of the ages comes gradually and subtly towards us. …
>
> If we are attentive to the land, and receptive to our own souls in the land and drawing from the land, then we may find that we are, as it were, Aboriginalised by dwelling in the spirit of the place.[34]

Pete Hay's Aboriginal interlocutor may find his wish being steadily granted. More positively, to return to the Aboriginal critic Sue Stanton,

> The true measure of belonging will only come when non-Aboriginal Australians have confidence in their own identity, and celebrate it.[35]

Among Anglo-Celtic Australians the land, little by little, is becoming unhaunted. To most non Anglo-Celts, in the Aboriginal sense, it never was. Judith Wright's words have just recently begun to sound a little 'eighties'.

And yet that same period 1975-1995 was the most productive period of the twentieth century in terms of reconciliation, land rights, the recognition of the historical past and in measures of social and economic alleviation. Was that a coincidence? If not - and I don't think it was - then it may be that the declining quest for Australian-specific place-belonging is linked to the era of political denial or uninterest in Aboriginal advancement in which we now find ourselves. Have non-Aborigines done enough, in Noel Pearson's words, to acknowledge present-day infidelities?[36] Have they the right to conclude that the land is no longer haunted because their own need for spiritual belonging has been in part assuaged?

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The Poetics of Place:
Land, Constitution and Republic
Mark McKenna

No society can make a perpetual constitution or even a perpetual law.
The earth belongs always to the living generation.

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 6 September 1789[1]

Australians live under a constitution that speaks only to the dead. Since its inception in 1901, the federal constitution has not figured greatly in explaining our identity or character.

We are a nation forged through remembering the human sacrifice and horror of war, a people whose most profound political instincts lie outside the words of our constitution. While we live under a written constitution, the values and principles of our democracy remain largely unwritten – truths embedded in the practice of daily life – truths we have yet to distil. If Australians can be said to have a constitution in any real sense, it is an imaginary constitution. One comprised of scraps of myth and wishful thinking that bears little relation to the text of the document itself.

We might comfort ourselves with the thought that our traditional scepticism makes us too suspicious of grand and noble language to write a new constitution. Alternatively, we could see the quest to make the constitution more reflective of our democracy and society as one suited more to the late 18th century than the early years of the 21st century, as if now, in an age of information overload, we no longer have faith in the promise words can hold.

Yet to think in this way would not only be too simplistic, it would also overlook some of the fundamental changes in Australia's political culture in the 1990s. Since 1998, there has been considerable public interest in a new constitutional preamble. And it is here, in the first words of our constitution, that Australians have shown a willingness to embrace a more poetic expression of identity, particularly in relation to the land.

In June 2003 I was invited to speak on ABC Radio National's breakfast program, hosted by Peter Thompson. There was to be a half-hour discussion on the content of six new constitutional preambles sponsored and launched by the Australian Republican Movement (ARM). When I read the six draft preambles I was surprised. Each was written by a prominent Australian author – Peter Carey, Richard Flanagan, James Bradley, Delia Falconer, Dorothy Porter and Leah Purcell.[2] But the authors were not the cause of my surprise. The association between Australian literary figures and writing a new preamble was not new. Together with other members of the Constitutional Commission's Advisory Committee on Individual and Democratic Rights, Thomas Keneally had tried as early as 1987 with these words: 'Australia is a continent of immense extent, and unique in the world, demanding as our homeland our respect, devotion and wise management.' Les Murray had also assisted another great wordsmith, the Prime Minister, John Howard, in penning a draft preamble in 1999. In each of the ARM preambles I could see evidence of something significant: explicit and poetic reference to the land. Each had tried to explain the depth of his or her attachment to Australia as country – as earth, sky, sea and light.

Peter Carey's speaks of our 'fierce love of this land', hoping for an Australia 'indivisible beneath the Southern Cross'. Leah Purcell asks that Australians 'respect and acknowledge the land and its first peoples'. Purcell's sentiments are echoed by Delia

Falconer who writes of Australians 'affirming our duty of care toward this ancient landscape and its creatures … accepting our special status as an island continent, generous in expanse and heart, linked and looking outward to the ocean'. Poet Dorothy Porter begins her preamble by reminding Australians of their good fortune:

> We are fortunate to live and prosper in the expansive light of a unique and ancient continent. It is our duty and privilege as a people to nurture and protect this natural landscape as has been done for millennia by the indigenous Australians.

Two writers go to great lengths to evoke the spirit of place that they find so unique to Australia. Novelist James Bradley writes:

> First and forever there is the land, the sea, the sky. It is from them that we are born, to them we shall return. It is to them that we pledge our allegiance first, and foremost, and in this allegiance assume the trust to care for them as they care for us.
>
> In this same land, this same sea, this same sky that for countless generations were sacred to the Aboriginal peoples, who learned their rhythms, shaped them with fire and story, and drew from them their laws and customs …

Tasmanian novelist Richard Flanagan attempts the same task, writing a creation story:

> Yet leavened by the glory of this world cast as earth and sea, we came to see our own image as wind and light and dust, as tree and spinifex and coral, as animal and bird and fish …
>
> From the ancient painted gorges of the Fitzroy River to the ever-new rainbow of the Great Barrier Reef, from a Manly ferry at dusk to Uluru at dawn, from the many dreamings and many nightmares, from the rainbow serpent to the Burma Railway to Kuta Beach, we strove to make a nation of free and generous people united by a belief in liberty and truth.

When I read these words my first instinct was to see only their flaws. I laughed when my co-discussant on Radio National, Gerard Henderson, pointed out that it might be unwise to make reference to the Manly ferry in the constitution – what if it stopped running? Flanagan's Old Testament prose was also cinematic in its depiction of the land – language akin to a tourist brochure or a television advertisement to entice Europeans or Americans to Australia. While I admired Bradley's preamble as a piece of creative writing, my training in political science had me wondering how the High Court might find his attempt to emulate the Book of Genesis useful in interpreting the constitution.

As the first words of a constitution, the preamble explains the intention and rationale of the founders and lays down the fundamental principles on which the constitution is based. In almost every constitutional preamble these principles, grounded in the history of a particular nation state, are political or legal. Occasionally they stray into social and economic aspirations and rights. I wondered whether Bradley realised what he was doing. Writing that we are born from the land, sea and sky and that it is to them that we will return may well be a poetic exposition of our existential predicament – but what were these words doing in a preamble?

Equally, Dorothy Porter's reference to Australia's 'expansive light' was affecting but what was the point of a constitutional preamble beginning by speaking of the light? At first blush, I found the six preambles moving, highly personal, even intimate, especially

when read by the authors as they were that morning on Radio National. Yet while they were inspiring, I also found them fanciful. Then again, I thought, Australia could do with more fancy.

The more I thought about these preambles over the next few weeks, I came to see their fanciful nature as positive. I also came to understand that they reflected something original about Australian thinking on the constitution that has been evident since the late 1990s. They were not the first draft preambles to include reference to Australia's land and environment. When I trawled through the preambles written since 1998 (and there are many) I saw that the land was a constant theme – land as place, land as history ('ancient' and 'timeless'), land as the source of spirituality, land as something sacred, land as home.

At the Constitutional Convention in 1998, republican Janet Holmes à Court, in a passionate address, insisted that Australians needed the 'smell of eucalyptus' in the constitution, 'the feel of red dust' and 'swimming in the Australian sea'. To which Geoff Gallop, now the Labor Premier of Western Australia, replied, 'What about eating beef?' One week earlier, Democrat Senator Natasha Stott Despoja told fellow delegates at the convention that 'we must put into our preamble the fact that we cherish, that we love, the great sky and land and sea of this great nation'. Moira Rayner, a member of one of the subgroups that had worked on the text of a new preamble at the convention, said her group insisted on expanding the reference to 'our unique and diverse land' 'because we wanted to emphasise the environmental aspects of our care for the land – those responsibilities and trusts towards the land which the Aboriginal owners of the land had, for so many thousands of years, exercised until we came and changed things so much'.[3]

Delegates read preambles written by others that spoke of Australians being owned in spirit by the land. The more prosaic was represented by the convention's final recommendations, which suggested that 'affirmation of respect for our unique land and the environment' be included. Yet throughout the convention debates and in so many other forums during the lead-up to the 1999 referendum on the republic – ATSIC, Women's Constitutional Conventions, the Constitutional Centenary Foundation's Preamble Quest in 1999 and the many newspaper features on the preamble that included preambles from prominent Australians and schoolchildren – reference to Australia's unique land and environment was the abiding theme.[4]

No other nation has a constitutional preamble that seeks to explain its people's love of the land. No other nation has sought to distil the spirituality of country in constitutional language. Only the Russian preamble comes close with its reference to 'honouring the memory of our ancestors, who have passed on to us love of and respect for our homeland'. Many employ phrases such as 'our land' or 'our country' but they often do so in the context of explaining a struggle for independence or, in the case of the South African constitution, to 'respect those who have worked to build and develop our country'.

In this light Australians, without knowing, have been engaged in something quite extraordinary and novel. We may well become the first nation to adopt a constitutional preamble that expresses the uniqueness of its land, the poetics of place, as a source and inspiration for national unity.

Such is the sensibility of the draft preambles written since 1998. They concern themselves with the land as an animate and spiritual force, drawing on indigenous notions of caring for country, expressing love of the 'ancient' and 'unique' land and the

duty of trust and responsibility we bear for future generations. Repeatedly, the need to 'respect' and 'protect' the environment comes through. The imagined preamble becomes a 'moral charter' grounded in a sense of place – the very same place that is the site of the greatest moral dilemma in Australian history – the land that was taken without negotiation, treaty or consent from Aboriginal people.

This new constitutional language is not the sole property of the left-leaning 'elite'. It is interesting, for example, to look at the transcript of John Howard's press conference at Parliament House on 23 March1999, the day he released his first draft preamble for public comment:

> Journalist: 'What were the influences on you as one of the prime authors of the preamble?'

> Howard: 'Well, my own feeling about this country, the history, the contribution of the original Australians, the contribution of immigration, the sense of space that I've always felt about Australia and the impact that that has had and continues to have.'

Howard's preamble included recognition of the prior occupation of Australia by Aborigines as well as the statement: 'Our vast island continent has helped to shape the destiny of our commonwealth and the spirit of its people.' By August 1999, with the release of the preamble that went to a national referendum in 1999, these words had disappeared. They were replaced with the need for Australians to be 'mindful of our responsibility to protect our unique natural environment'.

Howard might have used different words to those of Richard Flanagan or James Bradley but he was undertaking the same task. The desire to find the words that might express Australians' relationship with their land is felt across the political spectrum. What then are the origins of this newfound desire, this constitutional dreaming?

To lay the explanation at the feet of the traditional role of bush mythology and the popular perception of the outback as the 'real heart' of Australia would be too easy. Politics has played its role, particularly the politics of Aboriginal protest since the 1960s. The struggle for land rights, the High Court's Mabo decision in 1992, which exposed the lie of *terra nullius*, and the movement for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians begun in 1991, have all contributed.

The reconciliation process was built in part on the need for greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures. Through decades of Aboriginal political resistance, Australians have listened to the stories of Aborigines caring for their country since 'time immemorial'. We have come to understand Aboriginal cultures as those in which flesh, earth, sky and language are one, where everything is connected. These cultures are 'timeless' not because they lie outside time but because they speak of the oneness of time. Their land is 'homeland' and 'belonging place' – a synthesis of ancestral history, spirituality and dreaming, a source of sustenance and ritual, law and ceremony – a land that is both life itself and life-giving. This is land that can never be 'sold' because to do so would be to deny the sense of custodianship and obligation that is such an integral part of Aboriginal culture.

By emphasising the centrality of the land to any new constitutional preamble, perhaps non-Aboriginal Australians are also wishing to end the sense of alienation and exile that is embedded within their colonial experience. Home is no longer elsewhere. The mother country is here. Through Aboriginal people we have come to see the spiritual nature of the land and accept more openly the traditions of environmental sensitivity

and protection that have always existed in European culture. This is an understanding unique to Australia and one we should strive to articulate in a new preamble. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's 'Declaration Towards Reconciliation', released in May 2000, attempted to do so in language that was also constitutional in tone:

> Through understanding the spiritual relationship between the land and its first peoples, we share our future and live in harmony … our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

The politics of reconciliation, however, is not the only catalyst of a new constitutional language in Australia. At the heart of the movement for a republic, there is also an implicit but nonetheless deep psychological need to address the issue of land.

The gradual dispossession of Aboriginal Australia occurred under the imprimatur of the Crown. Aboriginal land became Crown land. Aboriginal sovereignty was usurped by the sovereignty of the Crown, at least in the eyes of the invaders. While the sovereignty of the Crown allegedly afforded Aborigines protection, the description of all lands not under freehold title as 'Crown land' was the most powerful reminder that those lands had been seized unlawfully, without treaty or negotiation.

To this day, the very words 'Crown land' help to conceal the fact that the lands and waters of Australia belonged to Aborigines. Like an illusion created by a conjuror, Crown land denies the Aboriginality of this country, yet another reason that the declaration of an Australian republic must acknowledge that which the Crown has served to obscure. Speaking at the 1998 Constitutional Convention, the then chair of ATSIC, Gatjil Djerrkura, reminded Australians that it was for this reason that the republic and reconciliation were linked. A new republican preamble, he said, could become a powerful 'symbol of reconciliation'.

With the experience of the past five years in mind, how might we best express our 'love of this unique and ancient land' in a new preamble? Over the past decade there has been a flowering of environmental history in Australia and much of this new work carries profound insights into the way we have come to view the land and our place in it. I want to draw briefly on the work of three authors in particular as a means of understanding some of the pitfalls we might avoid when making reference to the land in a new preamble.

The work of Tom Griffiths has shown how 'the writing of Australian history has always been suffused with a sense of the land and its difference'. But it also reminds us that we should be wary of describing the land as if nature lies 'outside culture'. In other words, we should not make the mistake of imagining the land in such a way that it becomes a 'landscape without humans'.[5]

To borrow a phrase from Aboriginal English[6], I have often thought of Australians as 'saltwater people', people who cling to the sea for their livelihood. Yet despite the fact that almost 90 per cent of Australians live on the coastal fringe, 'the descriptive metaphors' used to imagine the land, as Tom Griffiths writes, are 'about hearts and backs, but never heads and fronts'. The land of the heart is so often imagined as non-urban, as if belonging to land could only mean belonging to 'natural' landscape rather than to a street corner in our suburb or city. On an everyday level, Australians' deepest sense of the land is expressed through the national obsession with home ownership. How does this 'dream' sit with our desire to care for the land?

If we are to include our desire to care for the land in a new preamble then we must find the words to make it clear that the land to which we refer is all our land – urban,

suburban, rural and wilderness. Caring for land cannot be gazetted. There is little point in caring for the red centre if we fail to care for our backyards, our streets and our cities. Our environmental aesthetic must be holistic.

One of the groundbreaking works of Australian history in recent years is Tim Bonyhady's *The Colonial Earth.*[7] Bonyhady's work demonstrates that European culture in Australia has always carried traditions of environmental sensitivity and understanding. Since the second half of the 19th century, certain settlers increasingly referred to their new environment as a 'heritage if not national estate'. The 'environmental aesthetic', says Bonyhady, is 'deeply embedded in [our] culture'. The popular stereotype of an avaricious European culture bent on nothing more than rape and pillage of the environment is not one that we would want to entrench, even if only by implication, in the preamble. Making reference to indigenous custodianship and caring for land should be linked with the responsibility and duty that all Australians now share.

Since Europeans first arrived in Australia they have found it difficult to find the words to describe their new environment. As exiles, they often remembered an idealised vision of their homeland, something akin to William Blake's vision of England in *Jerusalem* – a 'green and pleasant land'. Australia was a land that constantly failed to equal this vision, 'the Default Country', in the words of lexicologist JM Arthur.[8] Arthur reveals the way in which so much of the settler's language perceived Australia as a 'dysfunctional continent', a land that was 'incomplete' 'unusual' or 'defective', a land against which the settler had to struggle. 'What if the Default Country were finally banished from the language?' she asks. 'Would this make a difference to the way Australians live in Australia?'

Perhaps a new preamble could answer Arthur's question by employing language that entailed a sense of acceptance of the land. Rather than forever trying to subdue the land, we might finally be able to show that we have learned to listen to the land.

Over the coming years, Australians have the opportunity to create a uniquely Australian constitutional language, one that is culturally specific to our own place and time. The failure of Howard's proposed preamble at the 1999 referendum should be seen as a failure of political negotiation and consultation rather than an indication that the electorate will not support a new preamble in the future.

Finding the right words to express the uniqueness of this land and the depth of our relationship with it could serve to promote a sense of popular ownership of the constitution. If the constitution touches ordinary Australians, if it speaks to the living and not to the dead, then the people are more likely to vote for it.

The desire of so many Australians to include reference to the land in a new preamble has been a means of taking the constitution beyond the material, the practical and the everyday. Perhaps this new constitutional language will supply the sense of mystery that monarchy once possessed. Perhaps it will also express something about our nature that can't be bought or traded.

The words we use will be both poetic and pragmatic, without hubris or sentimentality. That they will remain mere words - and that we will always fall short of the promise they hold - is true, but that is no reason to resile from the task of writing them.

This article was first published in *Griffith REVIEW: Dreams of Land* (ABC Books), www.griffith.edu.au/griffithreview.

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1 Joyce Appleby & Terence Ball (eds) (1999). *Jefferson: Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press: 596.

2 The six preambles written by Peter Carey, Richard Flanagan, James Bradley, Delia Falconer, Dorothy Porter and Leah Purcell can be found on the website of the Australian Republican Movement: www.republic.org.au.

3 Communique of the 1998 Constitutional Convention issued February 13, 1998, reproduced in John Uhr (ed) (1999). *The Australian Republic: The Case for Yes,* The Federation Press: Sydney. The appendix includes other draft preambles. Also see George Winterton (1997). 'A New Constitutional Preamble', *Public Law Review* 8, September, 3: 186-194. His appendix includes draft preambles. The results of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation's Preamble quest can be found in Constitutional Centenary Foundation (1999). *We the People of Australia: Ideas for a new Preamble to the Australian Constitution*, Melbourne. For other preambles see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1999, *The Weekend Australian,* 27-28 March 1999, *The Sunday Age*, 7 March 1999, *The Australian*, 25 February 1999.

4 For debate on the preamble see the transcripts of the Constitutional Convention debates, especially 6, 9 and 13 February 1998. Further discussion of the preamble, including the legal issues involved, can be found in Larissa Behrendt (2003). *Achieving Social Justice,* The Federation Press: Sydney; Mark McKenna, Amelia Simpson and George Williams (2001a). 'First Words: The Preamble to the Australian Constitution', *The University of New South Wales Law Journal,* 24, 2: 382-400; Mark McKenna, Amelia Simpson and George Williams (2001b). 'With Hope in God, the Prime Minister and the Poet: Lessons from the 1999 Referendum on the Preamble', *The University of New South Wales Law Journal,* 24, 2: 401-420.

5 Griffiths, Tom (2003). 'The Nature of Culture and the Culture of Nature', in Hsu-Ming Teo & R White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia*, UNSW Press: Sydney: 67-80; Griffiths, Tom (2002). 'The Outside Country', in *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, UNSW Press: Sydney: 223-244.

6 Arthur, JM (1996). *Aboriginal English*, Oxford University Press.

7 Bonyhady, Tim (2000). *The Colonial Earth*, Miegunyah Press: Melbourne.

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The Fight for the Forests **Revisited**
Val Plumwood

Background and motivation

T*he Fight for the Forests* (FFF) was written over a period of about 2 years between 1971 and 1973, by me and the late Richard Sylvan (under the names Richard and Val Routley). FFF was one of a number of scholarly and life projects on which Richard Sylvan and I collaborated between 1965 and 1980.

Our immediate initial motivation for writing on forest issues was our outrage at the huge pine plantation project which was already devastating higher altitude public forests in SE Australia. On the plan, almost everywhere in the SE public forest estate deemed suitable for exotic softwoods, the incumbent native forest would be flattened, windrowed, and burnt; the ecological effects of this were never considered. Higher altitude native forests would be replaced by 'more productive' pinus radiata or douglas fir. This was land clearing on a massive scale: not for agriculture on private property, but in the public forest estate, and carried out not by 'greedy farmers', but by the very people who claimed to have saved the forests from them – the foresters. Endorsed by the Institute of Foresters, and strongly promoted in the federal bureaucracy by the Forestry and Timber Bureau, the original planting program aiming at 3 million acres of pine (some spoke of 5 million acres) was implemented by state forestry departments and funded from 1967 at the federal level. At that time, very little (2 per cent) forested land was in national parks, and a whole forest type – cooler mountain forests - was being targeted for replacement. The project was already underway in some forests around Canberra, where we could see its devastating effects.

Delving into the justifications, we found that the crudity of the original pine project's ecological understanding was matched by the crudity of its economic planning. Most of the key economic planning papers were the work of a botanist (Dr MR Jacobs), who had specialised in the seeding of eucalypts, and based the case on highly inflated forecasts of 'future needs' for self-sufficiency in wood. If botanists could write economic planning papers, we could see no reason why, as a couple of cheeky philosophers, we could not do the same. We felt people had to know about these threats to the native forests we loved. Since there were many aspects where philosophy was just as relevant to the issue as the disciplines conventionally involved, we decided to write a paper.

Before we plunged in with the FFF we tested the water on the forestry issue with a paper published in 1971 which challenged the planning basis of this inadequately considered program. Our paper, published in the Current Affairs Bulletin in 1971, outlined some likely impacts of the program and criticised it on both economic and ecological grounds. (This paper was later expanded and incorporated into FFF as chapters 1-7 on pines). We were impressed by the immediate political impact this paper had, an impact that gave us a very optimistic (and as it turned out, quite misleading) impression of how easy it was to get government to reconsider a project that had been shown to be misconceived. In the hands of Tom Uren, one of the more radical members of the newly-elected Whitlam Labor government, the paper was used to defeat the bill to renew federal funding for pines at its first reading in 1971, and although the bill later passed, a useful warning shot had been fired.

FFF helped to create the atmosphere in which it was possible to set up the inquiry that eventually limited federal funding to supporting pine planting only on already-cleared

land. Mainland states officially stopped felling native forests for pine in 1976, and only Tasmania (officially) continues to clear native forest for pines, using its own state funds.

It is important to make a clear distinction at this point, between the original pine program, which aimed to supply exotic softwood from the existing public forest estate of native forest by felling and replacing native forests, and the later modified pine program which planted pines only on already cleared land, usually purchased expressly for the purpose. That is, it aimed to expand the public forest estate to produce softwoods, rather than producing them at the expense of native forest. It was not pines or exotic flora as such we opposed, but the massive destruction of native forests entailed by the original pine program. I would not deny exotic, immigrant species a role in Australian landscapes, but I believe we must ensure that the indigenous species do not thereby suffer. Ethical considerations like these must inform our plant introductions, and our agricultural, forestry and garden consumption, practices and projects.

The effectiveness of and interest in this first paper encouraged us to produce a larger work, with the assistance of the resources of Research School of Social Sciences (Australian National University). Two excellent research assistants, David Dumaresq and later Jean Norman, unearthed much of the mass of material we read and used for the book. This larger work reflected our reaction to the level of destruction of native forests already underway for pines, and our growing alarm at plans to develop woodchip projects all around Australia like one eating the SE forests near Eden. Once such projects started they could be very hard to brake. These were early days in environmental critique, and while radicals like Milo Dunphy were becoming very critical of forestry,[1] some more cautious parts of the movement still accepted the claims of foresters to be the true conservationists, protecting forests from the menace of agriculture.

We had tapped into a major development and environment conflict created by intensification of wood production in Australian forests. Environmental critiques like ours (and others in NZ and the USA) did not of course cause or create the conflict between forestry and the environment movement: both the critiques and the conflict were a response to technological and other developments making it 'economic' to intensively exploit the last major semi-protected native vegetation communities for cellulose. The push for intensification itself can be analysed as originating in the vulnerability of forests as commodities, to economic variables such as the cost-price squeeze.[2] Intensification meant that a much greater proportion of the forests would be used for wood production. No longer could non-wood values such as biodiversity get along on benign neglect; unless such values got real consideration and significantly constrained forestry planning and practice, they simply would not survive intensification. The time had come for forestry to come to terms with ecology and make the transition to a self-conscious consideration of ecological values and constraints. As it turned out, this it was ill-equipped to do because it was dominated by state forest services which had a culture of empire building, repressing critical debate and threatening and punishing non-conformists who questioned the planners' grand projects.

At the professional forestry level, the push towards intensification was embraced by professional foresters eager to display their agro-sylvicultural growth skills. The president of the Australian Institute of Foresters, praised the woodchip industry as realising 'the dream of all foresters - complete utilisation'.[3] The moment of ecological

truth had come for the profession. We wrote: 'To the extent that forestry is committed to principles of total utilisation and production of maximum quantities of wood, it is on an inevitable collision course with conservation and with other forest values, and therefore also with multiple use properly conceived'.

The wood production ideology

The main concern of FFF was, as seems obvious now, the importance of non-wood values and the dominance of wood production over other forest 'values' in the education, ideology and practice of Australian forestry. In the earlier days of Australian forestry, this domination of wood production may not have made so much difference to forest outcomes, because the practice of 'creaming' native forests for good sawlogs and leaving the forest to regenerate usually meant that only a proportion of standing forest was suitable for and affected by forestry use. Now that much more intensive methods, practices and ideals were being promoted and adopted, resolving the conflict between forestry ideals of maximising wood production and the value of forests for biodiversity, watersheds and ecology was critical for the Australian environment. Multiple use conflicts, such as the destruction of animals like Greater Gliders through felling mountain forests for pines, had to be clearly admitted and addressed for ecological survival. The original pine program and its devastation of the original forest illustrated that at the extreme end, but so to an only slightly lesser degree did other intensive forestry projects such as woodchipping and so-called 'integrated' or 'residue' operations. Unthinking, crude wood-volume maximising intensive forestry would be every bit as much an ecological disaster for the forests as agriculture.

FFF was also concerned to further the appreciation of the non-wood values of forests and of the conflict with intensive forest use. So another major concern was to educate about these values and what was happening to them as intensification proceeded. We consulted with various experts working in these areas, such as Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe on wildlife and Alec Costin on soils and water quality, and were able to produce a well-referenced account which presented the latest research at the time. There is of course much more work available now, most of it showing that concern about the effect of woodchipping and intensified harvesting is well justified.

The original pine program also illustrated a crude volume orientation[4] that was often in conflict with economic as well as ecological good sense, as agricultural cropping approaches and maximising ideals were taken over uncritically for 'the forest crop'. We argued that multiple use conflicts had to be addressed and good decisions made about priorities – and since these were public forests, made democratically. But foresters evaded admitting conflict and had already decided what the weighting would be: the professional objective was maximising wood production and promoting maximum wood use. Early planning papers for the pine program concentrated on projecting future needs and guarding against potential shortfalls – erring on the 'safe side' of producing too much wood was the methodology. The job of foresters was to produce maximum wood and promote wood use and growth, including development of forest industries.

Forestry tradition had given no value to the native community as such, royalties and stumpage rates being set to reflect only extraction, and not replacement costs.[5] What was of value was not the forest community itself but its wood or cellulose-producing potential. An equally productive forest of exotics would be just as good, and an exotic forest with more capacity was even better. The concept of 'multiple use', although potentially helpful, was largely propaganda designed to contain the demand for more national parks, and did not correspond to real practice.[6] Instead, forests were 'managed with the dominant use as

wood production, with other values tolerated or promoted only insofar as they do not adversely affect wood production'. If multiple use *was* a real practice, we argued, research, funding, and attention ought to be evenly spread over the various uses or values of forests – but a search of forestry journals showed that their articles were overwhelmingly concerned with wood production efficiency (mostly as volume production). We found less than two per cent of articles to be concerned with ecological matters at the time we wrote.

Because it was in conflict with alleged ideals of multiple use and the public nature of forests, the privileging of wood production – the Wood Production Ideology (WPI) as we called it – was rarely stated explicitly but was implicit, operating as a set of unstated but powerful assumptions embedded in professional arguments, ideals and practices. The work of concepts like 'overmature' (to describe trees too old for logging but at their peak for wildlife and other non-wood values), is all the more powerful because their assumptions are unstated, and most people don't have the critical skills to unpack them. The forestry conceptual framework could be described as 'wood-centred', and like other centric frameworks did much of its work without anyone being aware of it. This was where our critical and argumentative skills as philosophers were often particularly useful – in drawing out these assumptions. We examined the way standard arguments forest services used to justify intensive forest-using projects and allay environmental concern covertly assumed that non-wood values were of no real importance, or that there was no conflict. I think this was one of the most useful parts of the book since it gave environmental activists conceptual tools they could use in public argument over forestry.

For example, in the 'renewable resource' argument,[7] it is assumed that provided forest cover is maintained, the forest is renewed when trees are harvested, and nothing is essentially lost. Wood is a renewable resource, the argument runs, and therefore environmentally sound, no matter how obtained. But the fact that the wood-producing capacity is renewed does not mean that other values are renewed after harvesting. '…[T]he argument … fails to consider the impact of use on important values other than wood production values, and attempts to persuade us that as long as the wood-producing capacity of a forest is retained nothing is lost … [It] is simply a subtle way of imposing the notion that the only real value of a forest is for wood production and the view of the forest as a cellulose factory'.[8]

In the 'productivity' argument for pines, we have to ask: in what sense are exotic pine plantations 'more productive' than the native forests they replaced? Only in wood production, because if one looked at a wider range of forest products or values, including ecosystem services, they are usually much less productive, and there are grave problems in areas of wildlife and watershed protection, soils and sustainability. So the claim that they are 'more productive' assumes a model in which only wood counts in assessing productivity. The case is similar for many other arguments. Jacobs' forecasting methodology of erring on the side of producing too much wood privileges wood production over other values, because it assumes there is no conflict with and opportunity cost for non-wood values. If there is, it's just bad methodology.

And of course privileging wood production is also an assumption of the currently popular 'residue' or 'wastewood' argument: trees that are not among the 10 per cent deemed useful for sawlogging are described as 'wastewood' or 'residue', although they are being used by other species and supply other crucial ecosystem services.[9] The misleading use by NSW State Forests of the 'forest residue' concept plays a major role in disguising and promoting unnecessary and socially unacceptable projects (like the recent charcoal industry), that depend upon cutting vast volumes of new trees. What misleads is the assimilation to mill or forest floor waste and the false impression that cutting of the further (90 per cent) 'residue'

trees would have happened anyway pursuant to cutting 10 per cent of sawlogs. There is a fine line between manipulating conceptual frameworks in favour of wood production like this and outright dishonesty, and forest services cross it when they describe such operations as 'recycling', as has happened recently on the NSW south coast. The presentation in the WPI of trees that other species are using, and we are not, as 'waste' or 'residue' is both unacceptably wood-centred and unacceptably human-centred. It violates all ideals of sharing the earth with other species.

The critique of the WPI remains quite relevant to much contemporary forestry, and also to the NSW Regional Forestry Agreement. A slightly modified version of the WPI is in vogue today, which makes some minimal and quite inadequate provision for non-wood values, for wildlife and ecosystem services through leaving habitat trees, filter strips, buffer zones and the like, but *then* regarding what forest remains as available for total use and yield maximisation. This sort of maximising-within-minor-constraints methodology has been behind the destruction and decline of scientifically managed fisheries in recent decades and it will do the same thing eventually to the forests, although maybe take longer. It does not learn the real lesson of what is wrong with WPI and wood-centred world views.

The use made of the residue concept points up a major area where FFF was mistaken. We argued in FFF that some careful low intensity logging could take place in native production forests without too much damage. I have always believed that developing careful and respectful forms of use is better than dividing the world into areas completely protected from use and other areas given over to completely productivist ideals which can lead to over-exploitation.[10] But I now see that in the current political context the ideal of low volume respectful use cannot be realised, because the domination of the industry, together with the forest-service abuse of the residue concept, and only slightly modified aims of maximisation, refuse to let us uncouple acceptable and unacceptable forest uses. In these circumstances I see no option but to work to evict forestry entirely from the native forests. As Judy Clark suggests, we now do not need to log native forests *at all* to meet our needs or have forest-based industries.[11]

Another major theme of FFF was the scandal of forest economics. That the ideology of privileging and maximising wood production placed its schemes, at least in their cruder forms, in conflict with conventional economics proved eventually to be their Achilles heel.[12] Supplying cheap wood and supplying future needs were sacred tasks, but the low value accorded native forest wood did not support a budget that even covered public administrative and extraction costs. As Neil Byron put it, 'there was no economic rationale to how forestry was actually being practised. It didn't have any sort of economic logic to it ... Forests [were] there … just to produce as much wood as possible "to help develop the nation"'.[13]

As we said at the time, 'The ideals of complete utilisation and maximum wood production – together with the empire-building aspirations of forestry organisations and the pressures…. from associated private industries explain the otherwise puzzling fact that forestry services are eager to persist with uneconomic projects which degrade the environment'.[14]

This scandal was really what was to prove the undoing of the grand projects. If it was pointed out that these projects were ecologically destructive, many people would shrug and say that it was a pity but it had to be done, to supply needs or to make a profit. But if you could also show that the grand project lost money for the public and wasn't essential, they would have to think harder. So entrenched were the projects though, that demonstrations of poor economics tended to be disregarded by those in power in forestry, and reports showing poor economic returns attacked or suppressed, as in the case of the 1976

Forestry and Timber Bureau Report on the economics of the pine program, that was never released.

WPI was implicit in the whole economic relationship of the public and private structure, the bigger picture of socialising the loss-making production part, and the privileging of the highly profitable private part. It was no coincidence that the neglected non-wood values were mostly public and the privileged wood values mostly private. This economic structure, along with the secrecy and lack of accountability of forest services, really called into question the whole concept of these being 'public' forests, since they were actually run as a resource for the benefit of a few big private forest industries at the expense of the public interest represented by the public agency budget and the non-wood values of the forests. WPI was also implicit in the social relationships of certain forest services – for instance in determinedly promoting wood use projects even where they were opposed by the communities involved, and would provide few or negative social benefits. Most especially it is implicit in the alliance of forest services with industry against environmentalists – by no means a foregone conclusion in a forest management system which is genuinely 'public' and democratic, and does not privilege industry welfare in determining values and projects for the forests.

Reception of *The Fight for the Forests*: transgressive cross-disciplinarity

FFF's repeated publication (1973, 1974, 1975) reflects its extraordinary reception, but it was almost completely polarised. The trouble began about two weeks before publication when the bold title *The Fight for the Forests* came to me. To that point, the book had survived what little academic oversight it had received under a provisional title that betrayed little of its radical content. High level attempts were made to censor the text. What happened is recorded in Brian Martin's 1986 book *Intellectual Suppression* under the title 'The Fight for the Forests Affair'. Professor Geoff Sawer (then head of the Research School), a noted civil libertarian and legal expert, resisted this censorship proposal and kindly checked the book for vulnerability to legal action. A note to the 1973 first edition (inserted very late in the printing process) read: 'The views expressed here have not been considered by the Forestry Department of the University and must not be taken as necessarily representing the views of members of that Department, or indeed of anyone but the authors.' The note flagged the book's transgressive status in academic and forestry eyes.

The book was well-received by environmentalists who were eager to get copies, and the first edition of 1000 copies sold out within a few months. On the whole, it was unfavourably received by people aligned with forestry. Two further editions sold out shortly after reprinting in 1974 and 1975, making it one of the best-selling books ever distributed by ANU Press. Nevertheless in 1974, Richard Routley and Jean Norman were banned from using the Forestry Library, which made preparations for any further editions difficult. Forestry Department objections to the book played a role in the withdrawal of support and funding for revised editions post 1975.

The sexism of the book's reception was one of the educational aspects of the experience for me. I found many people automatically attributed the book and everything in it to Richard Routley. The experience of being accorded less than full credit for my collaborative work with a senior male academic, apparently because I was female, was quite galling. This experience helped me later to theorise the parallels between androcentric culture's failure to recognise the creative and collaborative agency of women and its parallel blindness in human-centred contexts to the creative agency of non-human nature, traditionally feminised in the west.[15]

What happened to us was fairly mild compared to the treatment of other critics over the years. Many cases are documented in Brian Martin's 1997 book *Suppression Stories.*[16] For example in 1977 the chairman of the Victorian Forests Commission, Dr FR Moulds, wrote ten letters to La Trobe University urging dismissal or other disciplinary action against Peter Rawlinson, then a senior La Trobe University zoologist and spokesperson for the Conservation Council of Victoria, for speaking out on a forest issue. Similar letters were written about Philip Keane of the Botany Department. The university, to its credit, took no action.

Things were no better in NSW. Neil Byron, a member of the ANU forestry Fortech team that helped save the Washpool rainforests in 1982, records that 'Wal Gentle, then the rather imposing chief of the NSW Forestry Commission, wrote to my boss at ANU, the Professor of Forestry David Griffin, demanding that I be sacked'.[17] In 1987 NSWFC made a similar suppression attempt against Jim Burgess of ADFA, then doing work on the effect of woodchipping on water quality. An entire ABC Science Show was devoted to covering this case on 2 May 1987.

In my article in Martin's volume I wrote 'A combination of indoctrination and intimidation, plus well-developed professional loyalty, ensures that significant criticism does not originate from *inside* the profession or discipline itself… at the same time the professionalism mystique and the discipline system was invoked, as it was in our case, to ensure that no one outside the profession can make such criticism in a way that needs to be treated seriously …. or silenced altogether. The fragmentation of knowledge, like the fragmentation of work, is thus used as a method of control. It's a neat system which nicely protects a particular set of doctrines and interests'.[18]

Obviously in these circumstances challenge can only come transgressively, from outside, from defiance of disciplinary barriers. In these circumstances transgressive cross-disciplinarity is the only route to creative change. I commend it to you.

Limitations of *The Fight for the Forests*: wider social analysis

Of course the datedness of FFF strikes you right on the first page. We have much more forest in national parks than we had in 1973 and agricultural land clearing has turned out to be a much more persistent menace to Australian ecosystems than it then looked to be. This kind of dating is more or less inevitable, although embarrassing. What I find it a bit frustrating now is how far the argument of FFF is deliberately limited in what it takes up – in that sense FFF is not a deeply radical book. The book did not explicitly question the wider background systems like capitalism, human-centredness, and Graeco-Christian forest phobia. For example the use of disparaging concepts like 'overmature' and 'wastewood' to describe trees not suited for logs but extremely valuable for wildlife is part of a framework for thinking about the forest that is not only extremely wood-centred but also extremely human-centred. But FFF did not directly challenge the human-centred aspects of the framework, which from my perspective now is a serious omission. I can say in extenuation that some of these aspects were taken up in later work, for example my own extensive work on human-centredness in Plumwood 1993 and 2002. The book's advocacy role also limited its depth; I now see a certain lack of intellectual penetration and connection.

A more satisfying and rounded analysis than FFF would try to set the problems it discerns in the forestry profession and ideology into a larger social and ideological context. For there *is* much more to the problem than the state forest services and the forestry profession itself involved here. It is also a problem about the distortion and

corruption of the public sphere and 'public forests' under neo-liberal capitalism. Recent evidence from Tasmania showing extensive corruption of forest service regulators (as recorded in Hansard), especially on environmental standards, by the forest industries, adds to the sad evidence confirming the *Fight for the Forests*' analysis of forest services as captured bureaucracies. They are captured by and hostage to private enterprise in the dominant models of economic rationalism which make public agencies either an imitation of, or a servant to private corporations. The 'good corporate servant' model of public service pioneered by forestry now seems to be the norm, and I think this is the real crux of the scandal exposed by FFF, and one we should not have come to terms with so easily.

The Fight for the Forests and the present: has it all changed for the better?

When one looks at the progress made on eliminating rainforest logging, there is no doubt that there has been much progress in the forestry arena. There is pleasing news from RFAs negotiated in some states, notably Qld and WA, about the phasing out of native forest logging and woodchipping.[19] But progress has been very patchy; in WA, the Karri has been spared, but Jarrah forests are still under pressure. There is shameful news from Tasmania, where rainforest logging continues, vast volumes of forest are exported as woodchips, corruption is rampant, and the two major political parties have conspired together to defeat democracy and block choice and change in forest policy. Just recently we heard news of the destruction by careless burning of Australia's and probably the world's tallest tree, a Mountain Ash in a forestry concession area in the Styx Valley in Tasmania.

NSW State Forests' extraordinary pursuit and promotion of the charcoal industry, based first on the Pilliga Scrub and later on supposed 'residues' in South Coast forests, has persisted in the face of enormous public opposition, especially in the affected communities. Is this really the way we want a public agency in charge of an immensely important and sensitive ecological reservoir to behave? I fear the wood production ideology still rules unchallenged in NSW and Tasmania, and that a modified but still unacceptable volume-maximising rationality still informs the RFA deals for those states (supplemented by less than minimum necessary protection of habitat for other species). One of the worst things the NSW RFAs did was to remove the right the public enjoyed prior to the RFA of taking independent legal action to enforce environmental standards through the Land and Environment Court. This measure would provide some of the accountability to the public necessary to make talk of 'public' forests meaningful, and also provide some check on the corruption of regulation and environmental standards outlined in evidence from Tasmania. If forestry really has the high standards of environmental practice it claims it should have nothing to fear from being asked to meet the same standards of practice and accountability as other activities.

And what about the forestry profession itself? Does St Martin of Tours, the saint who cut down the sacred groves of the Germanic tribes to demonstrate to these pagans the power of his Christian god, retain his post as the patron saint of forestry? Before we can conclude that the problems FFF identifies in the profession are confined to the bad old days, we need more evidence that the profession is becoming more self-reflective and self-critical, as well as more tolerant of and responsive to public criticism generally, and less oriented to promoting 'total use' schemes.

Challenge to the Institute of Foresters

The wood-centred conceptual framework developed to such an extent in the professional ideology of forestry also draws on support from the larger society. The tradition of Australian forestry shares in the original, '*terra nullius*' conception of other Australian colonial knowledges, which is, in the tradition of St Martin, to discern no prior presences to acknowledge - whether as indigenous others, ancestral forces, forest spirits or land partners. We see the nullifying effects of this failure not only in the forests but also in our traditions of land clearance and land degradation. In forestry this lack of reverence and recognition was reflected in the notorious stumpage rates set low to provide the cheapest wood, 'royalty' reflecting only *extraction*, and not *replacement* costs for the original forest.[20] We have let this tradition of nullification inform the woodchip or 'residue' industry that still rampages through our forests, now making up about 90 per cent of the forest cut.

WPI is a wood-centred knowledge system and professional ideology (not found just in foresters but in surrounding professions like resource economics) that is part of a larger 'resource' worldview which affects much more than forestry and trees. Transcending WPI is a special case of challenge to the instrumental 'resource' view of nature in the larger culture of the west, to re-conceive the ecological other that provides the basis for all life – that is, in terms of a partnership ethic.[21] As a western-based society, we must make the transition from Graeco-Christian forest-phobia amplified by the sado-dispassionate rationality of capitalism into a commodity-resource reduction of forests, to one in which the forest is an ecological partner and mutual provider who, like the land, cares for us as we care for it.

This is an edited version of an address given at 'Win, lose or draw: the fight for the forests', a symposium held at the Australian National University on 14 October 2003 to mark the 30th anniversary of the publication of *The Fight for the Forests.* See cres.anu.edu.au/fffweb.

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1   Milo had seen the opening phases of clearance of forests around Bathurst and Oberon for pines.

2   Clark, Judy (2003). 'A new forest and wood industry policy framework for Australia' in D Lindenmayer and J Franklin (eds) *Towards Forest Sustainability.* CSIRO Publishing: Canberra: 189-203.

[3]   This is why saying 'We've logged the forests for hundreds of years and they are still there' fails as an argument, in the same way that the claim 'We've fished the Grand Banks for 400 years and the fish are still there' has failed in reality.

[4]   Documented in Plumwood, Val and Sylvan, Richard (1975) *The Fight for the Forests* Third edition, 407 pages. (Second edition 1974, 348 pages. First edition, 1973, 290 pages). RSSS, Australian National University: 18 and elsewhere.

[5]   Byron, Neil (1999). 'Forestry as if economics mattered' in Gregg Borchmann (ed) *The People's Forest*, People's Forest Press: Blackheath: 49-60.

[6]   Plumwood and Sylvan *op cit*: 7, 8.

[7]   *Ibid*: 13.

[8]   *Ibid*.

[9]   Mackey, Brendan (2003). 'What we now know about forests and ecosystem services'. Paper presented at Symposium 'Win, lose or draw: the fight for the forests', Australian National University, 14 October.

[10] I argued for this in my last book, Plumwood, Val (2002). *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge: London.

[11] Clark (2003) *op cit*, and Clark, Judy 'Planting the softwood competition', Symposium 'Win, lose or draw: the fight for the forests' *op cit*. Available at cres.anu.edu.au/fffweb/clark.pdf.

[12] Of course forestry soon began to realise the promotional value of some economic analyses, such as multiplier effects, and these aspects were rapidly adopted. The conflict of the grand projects with an ecological economics that values ecosystem services is more obvious.

[13] Byron (1999), *op cit*: 52.

[14] Plumwood and Sylvan (1975) *op cit*: 19.

[15] Plumwood, Val (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.* Routledge: London and New York. Reprinted 1997.

[16] Martin, Brian (1997). *Suppression Stories.* Fund for Intellectual Dissent: Wollongong.

[17] Byron (1999), *op cit*: 55.

[18] Plumwood, Val (1986). 'The '*Fight for the Forests*' Affair', in B Martin *et al* (eds) *Intellectual Suppression.* Angus and Robertson: Sydney: 73.

[19] Although notably both these negotiated outcomes depended on avoiding the RFA process and the states concerned drew fire from the relevant minister at the time, Wilson Tuckey.

[20] Byron (1999) *op cit*.

[21] Plumwood (2002) *op cit*.

Academy News

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ASSA Indigenous Postgraduate Summer School 2004

Seventeen students attended the Academy of Social Sciences' Summer School for Indigenous postgraduate research students held at Ormond College, 9-13 February 2004. Directed by Academy Fellows, Professors Marcia Langton and Leon Mann of the University of Melbourne, the Summer School was voted a great success by students.

Scholarships to attend the Summer School were awarded in the name of the Pratt Foundation to Virginia Falk (University of NSW), Shannon Faulkhead (Monash) and Barry Judd (Monash); the Hecht Foundation to Reuben Bolt (University of Sydney), Heidi Norman (Wollongong) and Leah Lui-Chiovize (University of Sydney); Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation to Bronwyn Lumby (Wollongong) and Jacinta Walsh (Monash); CSIRO to Peter Radoll (Australian National University), Steve Larkin (University of Canberra), and Debbie Wray (Western Sydney); Newmont Australia to Leanne King (Macquarie) and Fred Maher (Newcastle); and the University of Melbourne to Helen (Ulli) Corbett (University of Western Australia), Tjanara Goreng Goreng (ANU/Tasmania) and Sue Stanton (Wollongong).

Professor Leon Mann,, students Leah Lui-Chivizhe and Reuben Bolt, and Professor Marcia Langton.

In addition to the grant provided by DEST – Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program and the Scholarship sponsors, support for the Summer school was also provided through donations by Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, Sir Gustav and Lady Nossal, Sir Zelman and Lady Cowen, Australian Catholic University, Bardas Foundation, HTT Associates, Fleur and Victor Spitzer, Professor Joseph and Golda Isaac, Michael Robinson, and the Hindal Corporation.

The students participated in an intensive five day residential program which focused on sharpening the research questions for their theses, discussing research methodology, examining issues of research ethics and etiquette, honing their writing skills and preparing for the transition to new careers. In addition to Professors Langton and Mann, ASSA Fellows who participated as Summer School faculty included Professors Doreen Rosenthal and Bob Tonkinson. The Academy President, Professor Sue Richardson, was welcomed at the Summer School Dinner.

The first Summer School was held at Ormond College in February 2002. With support from the DEST-Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, donations from benefactors, and scholarships to attend the school from major donors, the Summer School is now an annual event to assist early career Indigenous scholars toward

completion of their studies and successful careers in academe, the public service, industry, health and community work.

The Academy thanks all those who have supported this innovative and highly successful program.

Summer School Faculty, Professor Marcia Langton, Professor Leon Mann, Dr Zane Ma Rhea, Professor Martin Nakata, Professor Bob Tonkinson, Professor Lynette Russell, Dr Gordon Briscoe, Dr Michelle Duffy, with Academy President Professor Sue Richardson.

Research Program

ARC Linkage-Learned Academies Special Projects

Each year the Australian Research Council provides funding to the Academy of the Social Sciences as part of its Linkage-Learned Academies Special Projects budget.

ASSA has successfully bid for research funds over a number of years, and individual projects have on average attracted funding of $100,000. The Academy now welcomes applications from Fellows for research projects eligible for funding in **2005.**

Under guidelines established by the Academy's Research Committee, projects should:

- Capitalise on the unique capabilities of the Academy Fellowship;
- Undertake research on topics of significant importance to the social sciences or public life;
- Encourage multidisciplinary collaboration within the social sciences;
- Initiate new work and the generation of new ideas;
- Be a stand-alone project;
- Include plans for the dissemination of outcomes, eg, publication as a monograph or in some other form.

Applications for Special Projects are subject to a two-phase application process:

Expressions of Interest must be received by 21 May 2004 and following short listing, Full Applications by 16 July 2004.

Expressions of Interest should not exceed three A4 pages (12 point font) and must include:

- a clear summary of the purpose of the project and its planned outcomes;
- a summary of the ways in which the project supports Government objectives and the objectives of the Academy;
- a brief outline of the activities involved in the project and its planned milestones; and
- an indicative budget which estimates how Government funds will be spent. It should show any other sources of funding for the project and how those funds will be spent.

Proposals received will be considered by the Academy's Research Committee. It would be appreciated if you could have proposals to the Academy, attention John Robertson john.robertson@anu.edu.au by Tuesday 20 April.

Workshop Program

The Workshop Committee has approved two additional workshops, bringing the total number of workshops for the year to six. These are:

Australian Multiculturalism and Political Theory: Balancing Rights and Responsibilities in a Diverse Society. Convenor: Dr Geoffrey Brahm Levey (School of Politics and International Relations, University of NSW). Sydney, 8-9 July 2004.

Multiculturalism has been one of the dominant themes of research and reflection in political theory over the last decade. Among other issues, attention has focused on how multiculturalism relates to liberal principles of individual autonomy, toleration, equality, and justice; where, and on what basis, the limits of liberal toleration should be drawn; and the implications of multiculturalism for current and emerging conceptions of citizenship. For the most part, these debates have been conducted at a fairly abstract level or else have been informed by, or applied to, the Canadian, American and, increasingly, the European contexts. Political theorists (including Australian political theorists) have devoted scant attention to Australia's national policy of multiculturalism (in contrast to their recent attention on indigenous rights). The scholarly literature on Australian multiculturalism has tended rather to come from cultural studies and the empirical social sciences.

The workshop seeks to redress this lacuna and to initiate consideration of two understudied questions in the area of political theory and multiculturalism: (i) how current arguments and concerns about multiculturalism in political theory bear upon, or might be brought to bear upon, Australian multicultural policy, and (ii) how the Australian case might contribute to political thought on multiculturalism more generally.

Aborigines, Culture and Economy: The Past, Present, and Future of Rural and Remote Indigenous Lives. Professor Diane Austin-Broos and Dr Gaynor Macdonald (Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney). Sydney, December 2004.

Australia's indigenous citizens live in a wide variety of circumstances across both rural and urban Australia. Increasingly, their location is an urban or peri-urban one. Nonetheless, rural and remote Aborigines still comprise a sizable number, around

140,000 in an indigenous population of 460,000. Made 'remote' because their region's lack interest for the national economy, or because previous industries have waned with enduring rural recession, these Australian citizens are confronted with the possibilities but also the challenges of cultural difference and rapid change. For many young adults, the more conventional 'make work' and welfare policies have been unable to support desired levels of well-being. Moreover, this form of social-economic and cultural condition can obscure the relevance of literate education when the latter has limited impact in a failing labour market. Consequently, both children and parents struggle to make education a priority.

In this debate, effective responses are more difficult than critique. A striking feature of debate is the relative lack of information that most people have concerning remote Aborigines: their histories, and past and present engagements with the Australian economy along with the cultural commitments they retain.

The proposed workshop would examine, analyse and, through publication, broadcast this circumstance, including its implications for well-being and culture. Initiatives, including new perspectives on indigenous education, small business, regional integration and hybrid economies will be discussed. Moreover, current policy will be placed in the context of a discussion of the appropriate expectations of citizens, especially remote citizens, in the nation state.

Forthcoming Workshops

Evidence into Policy: What Works in Ageing. Convenor: Professor Helen Bartlett from the Australasian Centre on Ageing, University of Queensland. Brisbane, 22-23 April 2004.

Portrait of a Nation 2003: Reporting on the inaugural Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. Convenors: Dr Rachel Gibson, Dr Shaun Wilson, Dr Gabrielle Meagher (ACSPRI Centre for Social Research (ACSR), Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University; School of Economics and Political Science, University of Sydney). Canberra, 7-8 June 2004.

Australian Women Facing the Future: Is the Intergenerational Report Gender Neutral? Convenor: Professor Christina Lee (Schools of Psychology and Population Health, University of Queensland). Queensland, 1-2 July 2004.

Participation and Governance in Regional Development. Convenors: Dr John Martin and Dr Robyn Eversole (Centre for Regional and Rural Development, RMIT University). Hamilton, Victoria, 1-3 July 2004.

Workshop Publications

Litigation: Past and Present, Wilfrid Prest and Sharyn Roach Anleu (eds), UNSW Press, 2004.

International Program

Australia-France Joint Research

The Academy, in conjunction with the French Embassy, has approved six applications for funding in 2004 under the Australia-France Exchange program. Research topics successfully funded were:

Professor Joel Lebeaume, Director of the UMR STEF, Ecole Normale Superieure de Cachan, INRP, Cachan and *Dr Margarita Pavlova*, Centre for Learning Research,

Griffith University: 'Learning in technology education: concepts and practices in primary and junior high school (9-13 age)'.

Dr Sophie Thoyer, INRA, CEMAGREF, Universite de Montpellier and *Dr Atakelty Hailu*, School of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Western Australia: 'The benefits of market-based instruments for allocating water scarcity'.

Dr Christian Culas, CNRS Research Fellow, Institute of Research on South-East Asia, Maison Asie-Pacifique, Universite de Provence, Marseilles and *Dr Nicholas Tapp*, Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University: 'Ethnicity and historical ecology in the South-East Asian Massif (China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma)'.

Dr Christophe Sand, Head, Department of Archaeology, New Caledonia Museum, CNRS and *Associate Professor Ian Lilley*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland: 'French-Australian archaeological survey in the Loyalty Islands, New-Caledonia'.

Mr Pierrick Geerart, Universite de Paris and *Dr Kevin Dunn*, Geography Program, Faculty of the Built Environment, University of NSW: 'Social and spatial variations of racism in Paris and Sydney: a comparative analysis'.

Dr Barbara Glowczewski Barker, Director of Research, CNRS, College de France, LAS, Paris and *Professor Marcia Langton*, Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies, Australian Indigenous Studies Program, University of Melbourne: 'Indigenous strategies of communication : cultural festivals and new technologies'.

Australia-Britain Special Joint Project Funding

ASSA, together with the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the British Academy, have recently announced the results of applications for funding support in 2004-5 under its grants for Australian-British Joint Projects. *Dr Alison Bashford*, Department of History, University of Sydney and *Dr John Welshman*, Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University, UK, have received a total grant of £8,000 for the research project 'Health, "Race" and Migration: Tuberculosis Screening in Australia and Britain 1950-2000'*.*

Australia-China Exchange Program

Dr John Wong, FASSA, Reader in History, University of Sydney will be visiting China under the Australia-China Exchange in 2004 and is currently engaged in research on 'Sun Yatsen's Relations with the Powers'*.* While in China he will be meeting Chinese scholars to discuss current developments in China and in the international arena such as regional security, terrorism and Taiwan affairs.

Netherlands Exchange

Dr Peter Gesner, Senior Curator (Cultures and Histories), Museum of Tropical Queensland, has been awarded financial support to undertake research in the Netherlands in 2004 under the Australia-Netherlands Exchange Program.

Associate Professor Robert Aldrich (History, University of Sydney) has reported on his visit to the Netherlands in December 2003. This is an edited version of that report:

The purpose of the visit was to study museum collections in the Netherlands connected with Dutch overseas expansion, both the activities of the United East India Company (VOC) from 1602 until the end of the eighteenth century, and subsequent Dutch colonialism in the East Indies, Surinam and the West Indies. I also intended to

visit several monuments connected with Dutch imperialism. The aim was to expand my knowledge of Dutch colonial history and contemporary museology in the Netherlands, and to provide a comparative perspective for my forthcoming book on colonial 'sites of memory' in France.

My research included visits to and/or guided tours of the National War Memorial, Royal Palace, Beurs van Berlage, Multatuli Museum, National Slavery History Monument in Oosterpark, Tropenmuseum, Scheepvaart Museum (National Maritime Museum), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Wereld Museum, Rotterdam, Museum Nusantara and Legermuseum (Delft), Indisch Huis (The Hague), Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Moluks Historisch Museum, Utrecht, De Hortus Botanicus, Amsterdam, Museum Bronbeek, Arnhen, Louis Couperus Museum, Indisch Monument, The Hague, Van Heutsz Monument and NiNsee, Amsterdam. Interviews were conducted with curators and others such as Jos van Waterschott, Dr Susan Legêne, Jannecke van Dyk, Friedie Hellemons, Remmelt Daalder, Esther Captain, Wim Manuhutu, DW Staat, Pim Westerkamp and Wouter Hugenholts.

Visits to a large number of Dutch museums, extensive discussions with curators, acquisition of published and unpublished documentation and photographing of memorial sites provided me with a vast amount of material for my research. I anticipate using the material in the following ways: (i) research will be incorporated into a comparative chapter in my forthcoming book on colonial 'sites of memory' in France, allowing me to compare and contrast the French and Dutch cases; (ii) at least one scholarly article will be written on the way in which Dutch colonialism is exhibited in contemporary museums; (iii) material will be incorporated in my teaching of 'The History of European Overseas Expansion' and other courses, and used for a seminar presentation; and (iv) using contacts developed during my stay for further research on Dutch colonial history, and perhaps for Dutch contributions to publications in which I am involved (such as a special issue of *Outre-Mers*, now under discussion) and my continuing research and publication in the field of colonial history.

Studies of historical memory are of great importance in Australia, as both a colonised and a colonial country, and the way that the history of colonialism is presented has been a matter of great public concern, most recently with the debates about the National Museum. Museums are at the centre of the re-examination of colonial history and its legacy, as well as such issues as the restitution of artefacts obtained as part of colonial campaigns. The incorporation of colonised groups and their perspectives - whether Aborigines in Australia or Indonesians in the Netherlands - is a key issue in curatorial policy and, more generally, in national self-identification in multi-cultural societies. My research shows that the French are also grappling with these issues, and comparative perspectives on commemorative actions and exhibition practices provide much insight into colonial and post-colonial history.

I am currently involved in discussions with various other Australian scholars interested in 'sites of memory' and colonial heritage, and hope that this will lead to some collaborative activities. Although my own speciality is the history of French colonialism rather than Dutch colonialism, collaboration and comparative perspectives would be of great intellectual benefit in the field.

I hope that several of the Dutch specialists whom I met will be able to participate in any projects that eventuate. I also hope that there will be possibilities for some of them to come to Australia. Indeed, such 'return' visits would be of great interest, I think, to

Dutch scholars, giving museum curators an opportunity to see how Australia's colonial history is presented (for example, at the National Museum in Canberra) and to expand on already existing links (for instance, between Dutch and Australian maritime museums).

Dr Legêne and her staff at the Tropenmuseum provided a warm welcome. I was given documentation on the museum, including unpublished position papers, and provided with a list of institutions and names of curators, with whom I was able to make contact while in the Netherlands. The museum offered access to their own library and to the research library of the adjoining KIT (Royal Institute for the Tropics). The museum building itself - home of the former colonial museum, ancestor of the present Tropenmuseum - is one of the major colonial 'sites' in the Netherlands; its exhibitions cover the scope of the Dutch colonial empire (especially in Southeast Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the Antilles) and its new 'Oostwaarts!' exhibition provides an innovative and interesting portrayal of the Dutch in the East Indies. The museum, therefore, provided the perfect 'home' for my visit, and the staff were generous in aiding in my research.

I encountered no obstacles in my research, except for the time available. I would have liked to see various other museums and sites, and to make contact with Marieke Blombergen, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Ewald Vanvugt, who have written on colonial exhibitions and the colonial heritage of the Netherlands, and Gert Oostindië, who has written on the history of slavery and the slave monument. However, I did contact Professor Pieter Emmer, director of the Centre for the History of European Expansion at the University of Leiden, which had offered me an honorary affiliation during my stay. I have previously given a seminar at the Centre and published two articles on Pacific historiography in the Centre's journal, *Itinerario*.

I was also able to meet with two scholars concerning *A Gay History of the World*, a book that I have been commissioned to edit by Thames and Hudson, London, for publication in 2006. I was able to recruit Charles Hupperts (who will write the chapter on Antiquity) and Gert Hekma (who will write the chapter on the contemporary world), both of whom teach at the University of Amsterdam. Though not connected to the main object of my visit, these meetings provided a chance to organise this collaborative international project which will be translated into several languages. I also contacted another Dutch scholar, Omar Nahas, director of the Stichting Yoesuf, about writing the chapter on the Islamic world for the Thames and Hudson book. (Gert Hekma and several other Dutch scholars contributed to a two-volume *Who's Who* in gay and lesbian history, which I co-edited with Garry Wotherspoon, published in 2001.)

At least two publications will result from my research visit: *Vestiges of the Overseas Empire in France: Colonial Monuments, Colonial Memories* (to be published by Palgrave Macmillan, London, in 2005), with a comparative chapter on colonial 'sites of memory' outside of France, including the Netherlands; and a scholarly article on presentation of colonial history in Dutch museums.

The grant jointly offered by the Australian and Dutch academies provides an excellent opportunity for Australian scholars to carry out short-term research in the Netherlands. I hope that future visitors will also consider the enormous research potential presented by Dutch museums - their collections, documentation resources, and the wealth of expertise of the curatorial staff. Colonial history, ethnography and museology are three areas in which Australian researchers could find much material of interest and my experience shows that museums provide excellent host institutions with staff well

placed to support research. I am sure that in other areas as well, museums would also provide appropriate bases for visits and research by Australian scholars, and I am grateful for the support of the Australian Academy in my desire to work at museums in Holland. Contact Raldrich@compuserve.com.

2004 Applications for International Programs

Closing dates for funded projects in 2005: Australia-France Joint Program: 30 June 2004; Netherlands Exchange: 13 August, 2004; Australia-China Exchange Program: 30 July 2004; Australia-Britain Special Joint Project Funding, 30 September, 2004. Contact John Robertson in the Secretariat for further information.

Reports from Workshops

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Gender, Socialism and Globalisation in Contemporary Vietnam and China
Tamara Jacka

In the last two decades, the socialist regimes of both Vietnam and the People's Republic of China have undertaken major reorientations in their approaches to social and economic development and to governance. Termed 'reform' (*gaige*) in China and 'renovation' (*doi moi*) in Vietnam, these reorientations have involved the introduction of market mechanisms into the economy and the integration of the economy with the global world order. In both cases, this has both contributed to and been spurred on by profound shifts in social relations and state-society interactions.

The similarities of the changes that have occurred in the socio-cultural as well as economic and political arenas in the two states are striking, but to date they have rarely been analysed in any depth. Or rather, scholars of Vietnamese society have frequently turned to Chinese studies for reference and inspiration, but perhaps because of 'big brother' and 'big sister' chauvinism, the reverse has been rare.

The workshop on Gender, Socialism and Globalisation in Contemporary Vietnam and China, organised by the Gender Relations Centre, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University and held at the ANU in November 2003, sought to address this lacuna. It focused, in particular, on the crucial role that gender plays in each state's political, socio-cultural and economic reconfigurations under what is nowadays commonly referred to as 'postsocialism'. These reconfigurations were analysed and discussed both from a comparative perspective, and in relation to previous historical periods.

The workshop was sponsored by AusAID and the National Institute for Asia and the Pacific as well as by the Academy of the Social Sciences, and was opened by Professor Margaret Jolly, Head of the Gender Relations Centre, and Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences. Altogether it involved thirty participants, including

established researchers and leaders in their areas of expertise, early career scholars and students, development consultants and representatives of government from China, Vietnam, North America, the Netherlands, Thailand and Singapore as well as Australia. Sixteen papers were presented, organised into four panels as follows:

Gender in development cooperation programs, state policy and civil society

The first panel examined gender in development cooperation programs, state policy and civil society. The first paper by Zuo Jiping (Professor of Sociology at St Cloud State University, USA) put contemporary understandings of gender and the relationship between the women's movement and the state into perspective with a discussion of what state-orchestrated gender equality meant to women and men in China in the decade following communist revolution in 1949. Zuo argued that during this period both women and men were largely positive about the state's efforts at achieving gender equality, even though it made only limited achievements with respect to the individual emancipation of women. She suggested that we see this as a result, not of a compromise made between women and the state, but of the fact that women's liberation was viewed as essentially part of national and class liberation. Chinese women's and men's experiences of moves toward gender equality and women's liberation in the 1950s, Zuo argued, marked different state-society relations and a different trajectory for women's liberation from those that occurred in the capitalist West.

Also in this panel was Louise Edwards (Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University), who addressed issues relating to women's relatively low and declining rate of participation in formal politics in contemporary China. Edwards criticised the approach taken by the Chinese government and the All China Women's Federation (the state body representing women's interests) to this problem. Tokenism was a major concern for Edwards, as was the emphasis put on improving the 'quality' of women. Another argument made by Edwards was that separating women's liberation from the overall emancipation of the Chinese people was the best hope for advancing gender-specific causes.

Complementing Edward's paper were presentations by Du Jie and Zhang Yongying, both of whom work in the Women's Studies Institute of China, a research body run by the All China Women's Federation. These speakers were candid and critical about problems faced by the All China Women's Federation. Zhang Yongying outlined challenges to the Federation posed by marketisation and globalisation, and discussed the Federation's responses. The greatest challenges she identified related to how the Federation should deal with conflicts between the interests of the Party and the female population, and with the increase in differences and inequalities between women, and the subsequent multiplication in women's interests. With the growth of the market and declines in the resources provided by the state, the Federation also faced serious financial problems. A final challenge for the Federation was to find an appropriate and effective means of cooperating with newly emerging non-state women's organisations. Zhang argued that in meeting these challenges the Federation should make greater use of its ties with the Communist Party and the government in order to influence national laws and policies, but it should also seek resources from local non-government organisations and international funding agencies, and establish equal partnerships with new women's organisations.

Du Jie (International Women's Studies Division, Women's Studies Institute of China) followed with an examination of factors contributing to women's low rates of

participation in village elections in China. As Du noted, the introduction of direct elections of state representatives at the village level has neither altered the pattern of low numerical representation of women in governance structures nor enabled women's interests and concerns to become matters for public debate and decision-making at the local level. Du pointed to several barriers to improving women's participation in village elections, including higher rates of illiteracy among women than men, growing gender inequalities in access to and control over livelihood resources including land, and the prevalence of patrilineal, patrilocal marriage, which turns women into strangers in their husband's village.

This first panel finished with a paper by Troung Thi Kim Chuyen (Geography Department, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City) and Steffanie Scott (Department of Geography, University of Waterloo, Ontario). Truong and Scott presented an analysis of trends in Vietnamese research on gender issues, focusing specifically on development-related gender research. They noted that Vietnamese scholarly research tends to lack an analytical framework and theoretical innovation. On the other hand, much of the non-academic gender research conducted through consultancies for development agencies fails to take account of specifically Vietnamese understandings of gender. There is a need, they argued, for greater efforts to 'endogenise' approaches to gender analysis, and for Vietnamese and foreign researchers and development agencies to engage in a deeper reassessment of their respective assumptions and conceptual baggage.

Gender ideologies, concepts and representations

The second panel in the workshop addressed a fascinating set of issues relating to gender ideologies, concepts and representations. Catherine Earl (School of Social Sciences, Victoria University) gave a paper about the gender identities and subjectivities of educated, young, unmarried women who migrated from rural areas to the city of Hanoi. In contemporary Vietnam, Earl argued, the range of femininities that are socially recognised has been increasing, although so have the contradictions between them. Intersections between class, cultures and social worlds are evident in the negotiation of urbanite femininity. Young, rural women retain many of the habits and behaviours they learned as children in the village but incorporate adopted urban practices and values as they negotiate changing moral spaces.

Montira Rato (Vietnamese, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok) took a historical perspective in her paper about class, gender and the representation of peasant women in Vietnamese literature. She argued that the way in which peasant women are portrayed in Vietnam is closely related to the political agenda. In the period 1930-1945 the victimisation of peasant women was used as a tool to criticise the colonial administration. In the 1945-1975 period literature was used to mobilise peasant women in the building of a socialist nation. Post-1975 literature is critical of the failure of the Communist government to eradicate patriarchy in the countryside.

Jayne Werner (Professor of political science, Long Island University and Associate research scholar, Columbia University) looked at the relationship between the *doi moi* Vietnamese state and the construction of different kinds of womanhood in contemporary Vietnamese culture. Specifically, she focused on configurations of the subjects of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in *Me chong toi* (*My husband's mother*), a popular film recently made by a Vietnamese state film company, and on the ways in which these were received by women in a rural commune in the Red River Delta area of northern Vietnam. Werner found that older women, the mothers-in-law in her group of interlocutors, identified closely

with the idealised mother-in-law figure in the film and with the state-promoted values that she embodied. Younger daughters-in-law, on the other hand, were positive about the ideals that the mother-in-law in the film represented, but did not believe that her representation conformed to reality. They seemed able to put state ideals to one side in a way that older women did not, and draw on other, non-state discourses to understand the film and its relationship to their own lives.

In a sense, the last paper in this panel, by Mandy Thomas (Centre for Cross Cultural Research, ANU) and Nguyen Bich Thuan (Vietnamese Language and Culture, National University of Singapore), took up where Werner's paper left off, looking at the new plethora of non-state discourses through which the subject positions and subjectivities of young women in postsocialist Vietnamese cities are shaped. Thomas and Nguyen argued that recent economic changes are bringing opportunities for young, wealthy, urban women to break with socialist tradition and carve their own styles of Vietnamese womanhood. These women reject state-controlled media and turn instead to websites discussing love and sex, and dating chatlines where they search for partners from overseas. Thomas and Nguyen contended that in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and other big cities in Vietnam, participation in cyberculture and the consumption of other forms of popular culture has become a way of constituting young womanhoods against a regime the populace may wish to oppose.

Fertility, maternity and the household

Panel three discussed issues relating to fertility, maternity and the household. Kim Korinek (Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina) presented a paper comparing the relationship between the composition of households and household economic activities in China and Vietnam. Analysing data from a number of surveys, Korinek's paper demonstrated that in both China and Vietnam the addition of a newborn child, or children, usually generates shifts toward more market-oriented economic activity among household members – a finding that appears contrary to the logic of fertility limitation policies in these countries which maintain that high levels of fertility inhibit economic and social development.

Le Anh Pham Lobb (Research School of Social Sciences, ANU) then gave a paper that used a study of women's employment in the telecommunication and computer industries in Vietnam to explore the linkages between women's work in the workplace and at home and their career development. The paper argued that despite the Vietnamese state's long-standing socialist policies of gender equality, in practice women's career development in modern industries is stymied by traditional family responsibilities.

Lesley Barclay and Julia Byford (both from the Centre of Family Health and Midwifery, University of Technology, Sydney) presented preliminary discussion of a project that seeks to develop a model for evaluating maternity services and improving outcomes for birthing women in China. They argued that there is a need to counter the common assumption in China that high-technology, high-intervention birthing practices are necessarily more 'modern' and desirable than others and that midwifes are 'backward'.

Nguyen Thanh Giang (CIDSE, Vietnam) wound up this panel with an analysis of domestic violence in contemporary Vietnam. This paper sought to contribute to the as-yet very limited research that has been conducted in Vietnam into domestic violence in Vietnam with a discussion of findings from a case study based in one Vietnamese district.

Gender and labour migration

The final panel of the workshop addressed issues relating to labour migration, an important aspect of socio-economic change in globalising, post-socialist China and Vietnam. The paper presented by Pun Ngai (Division of Social Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) discussed the formation of a new identity in post-socialist China – that of the *dagongmei*, or migrant woman worker. Pun argued that the construction of the highly sexualised *dagongmei* subject is a project of global capital, underscoring the fact that the imbrication of the *dagongmei* subject with a sexualised consumer culture contributes to their subordination to a global division of labour bent on extracting maximum profit from cheap, willing female labour. At the same time, Pun argued that through a variety of practices, migrant women workers both collude in their own sexualisation and subjection to capital, and fight against it.

Thai Thi Ngoc Du (Women's Studies, Open University of Ho Chi Minh City) then presented a paper on female rural migrant workers in the informal sector in Ho Chi Minh City, summarising the findings of a recent survey on the characteristics of female migrants, their reasons for migrating and their experiences in the city. She concluded that, overall, women are positive about migration, the majority claiming that their present circumstances are better than they were in the countryside and that they wish to remain in the city permanently.

The final paper in the workshop was presented by Ngheim Lien Huong (Program in Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam). Ngheim discussed the experiences of migrant women garment workers, focusing on their agency in negotiating gender norms and social pressure relating to marriage, and arguing that their efforts to remain in the city and not to marry need to be seen both as a form of resistance to dominant gender norms, but also as resulting in a sense of alienation and self-sacrifice.

Three of the workshop papers, by Jayne Werner, Mandy Thomas and Nguyen Bich Thuan, and Pun Ngai, are to be published in 2004 in a special issue of the *Asian Studies Review* edited and introduced by Tamara Jacka, the workshop organiser. A fourth paper, by Montira Rato, has been accepted for publication in the journal *Manusya*. Other workshop papers are being prepared for publication in the Australian National University Gender Relations Centre *Working Paper Series*.

Books

Books
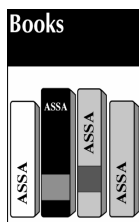
Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard. Judith Brett. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne, 2003.

The Ethical State: Social Liberalism in Australia. Marian Sawer. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 2003.

Judith Brett's *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class* is a brilliant analytical history of Australian party political thinking. Not primarily a history of liberalism, nor even of the way liberal ideas in Australia (though it advances our knowledge of both), it is a book 'about the stories Australia's Liberal Party, in its various manifestations since 1910, has told about the political world…about itself and about its chief political enemy, the Australian Labor Party'. It concentrates upon the party, its leaders, their uses of language and the way particular rhetorics both appealed to and consolidated a constituency: the moral middle class. It is an utterly persuasive account of how much ideas have mattered in explaining political success in a polity that is still, too often, regarded as pragmatic, utilitarian and *sans doctrines*.
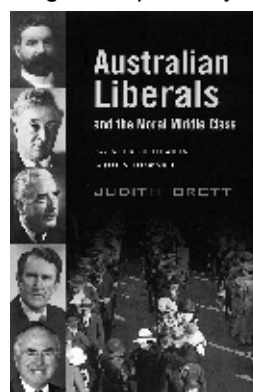
The transitions from Deakinite ameliorative liberalism (the socially responsible middle class), to the Keynesian interpretation of national interests (the professional middle class), to individual choice in a market economy (the self-interested, aspirational middle class) are carefully grounded in social history, social change and the manoeuvres impelled by the Labor challenge. It is in showing how various leaders have been more or less successful in explaining transitions, crystallising what the moral middle class already knows (but has not been able to articulate), that Brett shines.

The middle class is interpreted as a self-ascribed identity, incorporating particular values, not an economic category. Its belief in itself as the repository of virtue—and religious commitment as the assurance of virtue—is central to this story for most of the twentieth century. Brett's approach is distinguished by a compelling account of the significance of organised religion, and the Protestant ascendancy, in the self-conception of Australian Liberals and the political achievement of their Party. No-one has handled Protestant conceptions of individual conscience so deftly in explaining anti-Labor party formations.

The final chapters of the book deal with the alienation of the progressive middle class from the Liberal Party, and here paradox emerges. Brett wants to chart the disillusion of the middle class (so acutely captured in recent books by Fred Argy, Michael Pusey and Peter Saunders); to register the affront to its sense of service and public good that the Party's commitment to neo-liberalism has represented; and to explain why so many of the grandchildren of the mid-twentieth century moral middle class now vote Labor—and serve as the symbolic target for Howard's attack on 'elites'. At the same time she wants to laud Howard as the most creative Liberal leader since Menzies in his ability to forge a representative language of social unity. She is skilful in demonstrating what Howard does well, but resistant to acknowledging the extent to

which he has reversed the valencies of Liberal thinking, and the ruthlessness of his attacks on 'middle class' elites.

Brett's argument is that Howard 'has captured much Australian vernacular nationalism for the Liberals and in so doing created a workable language of national unity'. She is wonderfully persuasive, showing Howard's political savvy in deploying a plain man's rhetoric to wrong-foot more knowing critics. She establishes that unless the critics can imagine themselves in Howard's shoes, appreciate the skill with which he has used everyday language to create a political imaginary, and understand the appeal of that construct to a constituency, they will never lay a glove on him. Brett can do all of these things, and that is her gift to us.

But Howard does not simply appropriate the language of radical nationalism. He infuses it with the language of market populism, faithfully following the American model—and this is overlooked by Brett. The US right pioneered the technique of short-circuiting the gap between elites and citizens by targeting social liberals alone as 'the elite' and representing themselves as the defenders of the people's right to determine their circumstances through market choice. Howard has used this discourse to invert the post-war consensus, and to castigate his critics (and the ALP). He grounds it in local example and local experience, and uses it to name the enemies of self-realisation, but it a product of globalisation and promotes reform that favours cosmopolitan elites and a widening gap between rich and poor.

Howard wants to defeat those he depicts as noisy minorities. If the moral middle class finds itself relegated as one such minority, it may not matter to Howard. He is building coalitions between insecure battlers (who respond to populist rhetoric about meeting threats head-on), that section of the middle class most committed to personal choice and the cosmopolitan beneficiaries of the new economy. How much is this driven by belief, and how much by the ruthless pursuit of advantage? Brett provides a salutary reminder that we must recognise the former: to underplay the latter is generous to a fault.

Marian Sawer's *The Ethical State* engages with the intellectual history of the idea of a state committed to the common good and to equal opportunity, its origins in social liberalism, and its importance (and recent vicissitudes) in the Australasian context. This has not been the preserve of a single party, and in her historical, national and philosophical comparisons, Sawer ranges more widely than Brett. Where Brett attends to local statesmen and their stories, Sawer reminds us of the importance of the international migration of ideas in explaining colonial new liberalism. One cuts deep, one gives a general history: we need both.

Brett's spur is curiosity: why did none of her grandparents vote Labor while most of their grandchildren do? Sawer is a true believer in the politics of the 'fair go', arguing for a distinctive political tradition that appears to be disappearing 'before (it can) even be placed on the endangered list'.

Sawer's opening chapter concisely summarises the philosophical origins of new liberalism, its rejection of the atomistic individualism of earlier liberalisms and its stress
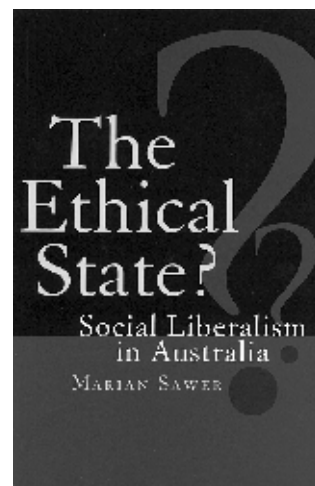
on the interdependence of individual and community. 'Equal opportunity for self-development, rather than freedom of contract, had become the paradigm of liberty'. The rest of her book deals with how such ideas were translated into the tasks of nation-building in Australia and New Zealand. Sawer challenges the utilitarian view that an active state was simply the proximate tool in developing economic infrastructure in these thinly populated settler societies: beliefs and the commitment to opportunity were integral to the institutions that evolved.

The heart of this book deals with the interplay between social liberalism and feminism. Sawer, on the one hand, defends liberalism against its feminist critics, demonstrating that social liberalism provided 'discursive opportunities' that allowed feminists to engage with state agencies in advancing women's interests. On the other hand, she makes the broader point that social liberalism encouraged openness to the moral claims of the disadvantaged in general. The instances drawn from feminist experience illuminate the utility of the belief in the positive duty of the state to provide equal access to the resources for self-development. This was at the heart of our nation-building enterprise and drove the public sector's engagement with equalising projects, especially in the post-war period. Attention to the cases Sawer describes reminds us of the achievements of that project.

Sawer successfully recovers the lineaments of what we may have lost over recent decades—all that has been sidelined by the rhetoric of individual freedom, consumer choice and contracting out. She is less successful in accounting for the ascendance of neo-liberal ideology and its disparaging assessment of 'the ethical state'. Her assertion that social liberalism is not yet dead and that the return of citizenship discourse offers an opportunity for its renascence does not provide a persuasive counter to Kelly's narrative of the end of the Australian settlement. Her call for 'the return of the partnership between social science and social reform' sounds like a manifesto for intellectuals. But if new liberal thinkers mattered, it was because their ideas were taken up by activists: Brett reminds us that political mobilisation requires, above all, creative leaders.

James Walter

Organisational Change for Corporate Sustainability. Dexter Dunphy, Andrew Griffiths and Suzanne Benn. Routledge: London, 2003.

This book takes as its central questions whether and how 'the current model of the corporation needs to be modified to contribute to the continuing health of the planet, the survival of humans and other species, the development of a just and humane society, and the creation of work that brings dignity and self-fulfilment to those undertaking it.' (p3). Corporations have had a hand in creating the ecological and social problems that threaten us. They must now contribute to a solution.

How is this to be done? Dunphy and colleagues are not opposed to the regulation of corporate excess, but that is not the focus of their book. Rather their aim is to influence what corporations choose to do. In fact the book is meant
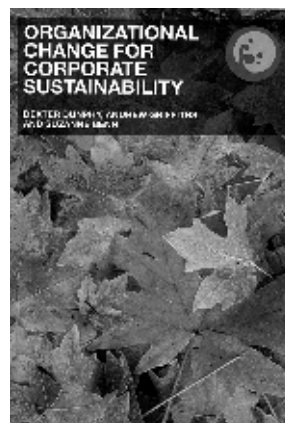
to serve as a manual or guidebook for change agents within corporations – those people who will lead corporations away from the 'profit at any cost' mentality by creating sustaining (or 'third wave') corporations. Today's change agents have already created 'second wave' corporations in which the rhetoric of sustainability has become 'the dominant business ideology in today's world' (p21). With the right plan and the right leadership, change leaders will build 'third wave' corporations combining an 'excellent return to investors' (p16) with ecological sustainability and equitable social values

These are noble ideals, but are they attainable? In their anxiety to propel corporate reform forward the authors refuse to consider the obstacles in its path. First they dispense with theoretical debate. 'The current crisis is too urgent to wait for consensus', they argue, 'the time to debate abstract theories is past' (p4). Consequently they fail to address the Marxist claim that unsustainable corporate behaviour stems from the inherent contradictions of capitalism. Is it true that to accumulate, grow, and succeed, corporations are forced by the logic of capitalism to plunder first and third world resources with catastrophic social and environmental consequences? Because the authors have no time to waste on such arguments doubts are left to breed. Are the efforts of change agents doomed to be futile? Will misplaced reliance on voluntary corporate change simply fool us into thinking we are attacking sustainability problems when we are not?

Also absent from this book is scepticism about the good news stories promoted in corporate publicity. What is the real value of corporate codes of ethics, the triple bottom line, occupational health and safety management systems, and all the other attributes of self-proclaimed sustainable corporations? There is a lot of evidence that corporations do not follow-up to make these things work. They want to look good, but not necessarily to be good. Too often this book neglects that empirical research choosing instead to present public relations as fact.

In the end, this is an un-satisfying book. Will corporations chose to make the jump from 'second wave' rhetoric to 'third wave' action? We don't know. Is it too much to ask for a realistic appraisal of the obstacles in the path?

Malcolm Rimmer

Remote Control: New Media, New Ethics. Elspeth Probyn and Catharine Lumby. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne, 2003.

Judging from the language and mode of address, this book is conceived as an introductory text for undergraduate students in media and cultural studies courses. By and large, it is not really about ethics as such, but about what moral and political attitudes students might consider when analysing contemporary popular culture in the media. The book includes transcripts of interviews with media practitioners from a range of occupations - journalists, advertisers, writers and broadcasters.

The editorial injunction is towards acknowledgement and acceptance of hybridity and difference, in media texts and thence society at large. The totemic diversity is in gender and sexuality. Despite the plea from Hage that non-Anglo audiences be talked 'to' rather than 'about' in the media, this book itself gives no suggestion that the audience is anything other than the more or less young, caucasian middle-class, familiar with metropolitan commercial media. Class analysis is particularly absent,

except in Kingston's references to her own epiphany in reporting the Pauline Hanson phenomenon.

The book manifests that irritating trope of Australian evangelists for cultural studies: a straw caricature of a putative orthodoxy, in rhetorical opposition to which the authors define their own position. For instance, the editors define 'conventional studies of media ethics' as based on 'universally desirable political and social goals and ideals', compared with their own approach of 'considering how emerging genres and technologies are re-shaping our public sphere, and how this might in turn cause us to rethink the assumptions grounding our ethical norms'. Socio-politically, this approach situates the editors with Daniel Bell in *The End of Ideology* (1962) and *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973, 1976 and 1999) in locating the dynamic of historical change outside social relations (although methodologically Bell would repudiate their textualism).

Even within cultural studies itself this position is now under critique, discreetly expressed by Graeme Turner in his chapter on the 'Cash for Comment' scandal. Turner's contribution, Probyn's on 'food journalism' (despite the rhetorical binary with 'objective journalism'), Kingston's reflection on the development of her *Sydney Morning Herald* Webdiary, and Jaivin on the coverage of refugees, are the strongest chapters in the book, perhaps because they reflect on ethics as such, and thoughtfully analyse the links with socio-economic power and politics. There are chapters by Hartley, Hage and Ivison signposting their own work elsewhere, and solid pieces by Dunn and Crawford indicative of interesting research.

The book doesn't address the ethical and political issues thrown up by media coverage of the justifications for the 'wars on terror' and in Iraq, the spiralling violence in Israel/Palestine, the 'Lebanese gang rapes' in Sydney, or the four million violent deaths in central Africa since 1997. Perhaps these contemporary obsessions (or not, in the case of Africa) of 'hard news' media sit in opposition to popular culture, though one suspects that popular culture is a whole lot harder in places outside the ken of this book, as Kingston and Jaivin declare.

Chris Nash

Opinion

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A Critical Appraisal of the New Higher Education Charges for Students
*Bruce Chapman**

Introduction and summary

The legislation concerning the financing of Australian higher education passed the Senate in the last Parliamentary sitting week of 2003. The changes introduced will begin in 2005, and after this time the system will start to move away from its current settings. It is argued in what follows that these reforms[1] have the strong potential to change radically the policy landscape with respect to student charges.

A premise of the paper is that the transformation of Australian higher education funding after 2005 is likely to be more profound than was the case with all other financing changes over the last 30 years or so. As background, the discussion offers a brief historic overview of university funding reforms: the abolition of fees by Labor in 1973; the introduction of the Higher Education Administration Charge in 1987; the major extension of user pays through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme which began in 1989; and the considerable changes to HECS implemented in 1997.

While some reforms are considered to have been fundamental with respect to the incidence and nature of higher education charges for students, it is argued that the new policy arrangements are very likely to have a much greater impact. To this end, the analysis includes an explanation of the critical role played by the indexation of government grants to Australian universities. While this might seem like a strange place to start given the lack of attention to the issue in public debate, it should become clear that the indexation rules in place since 1995 are a key to understanding the likely effects of the 2005 student financing policy transformations.

This analysis is followed with a description and evaluation of the two major 2005 policy changes to student financing, known as 'HECS-HELP' and 'FEE-HELP'. It is argued that the essence of HECS-HELP is sound economic and social reform, particularly given that there is to be a substantial increase in the first income threshold of repayment of students' debt. HECS-HELP has the potential to improve the functioning of Australian universities without harming access for the less well-off.

FEE-HELP, on the other hand, can be seen to be a poor reform. The policy offers income related loans for all domestic students charged full fees, and this is certainly an improvement over current arrangements allowing full fees to be charged without an income related loan system. Even so, it is argued that Australian universities should not be allowed this level of price discretion, given long histories of taxpayer subsidy and the considerable advantages for some institutions of their (rent-free) prime locations. By continuing to restrict the number of places that can be offered to domestic students, the price flexibility allowed through FEE-HELP will thus provide very substantial economic advantages to well placed institutions with no important benefits with respect to competition.

There are other problems with FEE-HELP: inequities associated with similarly qualified students incurring different charges, and the proposed capping of loans, which has the

real prospect of damaging the access of the poor. Overall, there are compelling reasons for the abolition of FEE-HELP and replacing it with greater flexibility with respect to universities deciding the number of places to be offered in the context of a continued capping of charges. This can be achieved without adding to government outlays.

In the context of both the indexation arrangements and the suggested changes to student charges, it is possible to offer some predictions of Australian university reactions with respect to their new capacity to influence student charges. For an economist to make forecasts of this nature might be considered courageous – indeed, it is sometimes suggested that economists have trouble predicting even the past – but all the current indicators strongly suggest what the future will look like in this area. In short, there will be rapid increases in charges through HECS-HELP, and eventually a significant increase in the take-up of FEE-HELP: the overall increase in the proportion of costs financed by students will be very large.

A preferred reform model for Australian higher education financing is then offered. The approach suggested should be seen to be an implicit endorsement of some aspects of the government's new arrangements, specifically those associated with HECS-HELP. In important other respects the promotion of the alternative outlined is consistent with two significant criticisms of current directions. One, the essence of FEE-HELP is misplaced; and two, arguments are offered for extensions of HECS in ways that are ultimately costless to the Budget but which could improve the economic circumstances of a large number of prospective tertiary students.

A brief history of Australian student charging

(a) Introduction

The financing of Australian higher education has undergone radical change since the early 1970s. At that time the Federal government provided practically all funding, and until the late 1980s there was little political support for change. However, over the last decade and a half there has been a very significant move towards greater private contributions, particularly with respect to student tuition charges. The current arrangements are unrecognisable compared with those in place under the Whitlam Government.

(b) Fees abolished in 1974

Up-front fees used to be paid by some students, but were abolished by the Federal Labor government, in 1974. The policy change had two key motives. First, fees were believed to erect barriers to participation in higher education by the poor. Thus their abolition was seen to be important in improving the access of the disadvantaged to better lifetime opportunities. Second, fee abolition was symbolically important as a reflection of the Labor Government's social democratic credentials.

The abolition of university fees at this time had no discernible effects on the socio-economic composition of higher education students[2], for two reasons. First, only a small proportion of students (25-30 per cent) paid fees, since the great majority had either Teachers' College or Commonwealth Scholarships. Second, because secondary schooling retention rates to the equivalent of Year 12 were very low at the time (less than 30 per cent), most prospective students from poor families had left the education system well before university entrance became an option.

(c) The Higher Education Administration Charge

The Coalition Government of 1975-83 made no important changes to university financing. In what was arguably a landmark decision, the Labor Government introduced the so-called Higher Education Administration Charge (HEAC) in 1986.

HEAC was a watershed since it introduced universal user-pays. The charge was small - $250 (in 1986 terms) - and did not vary with respect to course load. There is some evidence that it had a small negative effect on mature-aged part-time enrolments.[3]

HEAC was symbolically important in that 'user pays' had previously been rejected by different Australian governments, for over a decade. HEAC showed the intention of several Cabinet Ministers (notably Peter Walsh and John Dawkins) to address what they thought was a critical equity issue: not charging for higher education is regressive because the subsidy from all taxpayers – including the poor – goes mainly to those from advantaged families. The pejorative labelling of 'free education' as 'middle class welfare' was a major theme at the time.

(d) Higher Education Contribution Scheme

The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), recommended by the Wran Committee set up by John Dawkins in 1988[4], was adopted in 1989. This was a universal charge to undergraduate students of $1,800 (in 1989 terms), with a unique feature: students could defer payment until their future incomes reached a particular threshold, with no real rate of interest being charged on the debt. This was the world's first income-contingent charge for higher education[5], a policy arrangement that has since been adopted or recommended in many other countries[6].

HECS came about because the government wanted to increase higher education enrolments but was not prepared to pay for the increased expenditure through taxation. Most importantly, 'free education' was seen to be regressive and unfair[7].

While many critics of HECS alleged at the time that the new system would have major adverse consequences for the access of the disadvantaged, this has not been the case. Some part of HECS' success on this level relates to the significant advantages of the nature of income related repayment.[8]

(e) The 1996/97 Budget changes

In its first Budget the Coalition government announced four significant higher education financing modifications[9]:

  (i) all charges were increased, by around 40 per cent on average;
  (ii) the income thresholds for repayment of the debt were reduced considerably, from about $30,000 to about $21,000 (in 1996 terms);
  (iii) the uniform charge was replaced with three levels; and
  (iv) universities were allowed to set whatever level of fee they wanted for undergraduates not accepted under existing HECS quotas for up to 25 per cent of students covered by HECS.

The most significant direct change to HECS related to the repayment thresholds. Because the whole structure was moved down, all people repaying HECS – most of whom had graduated before 1997 – would now pay more in present value terms, because they would have less of the subsidy implicit in an interest-free loan. This meant an average increase in effective repayment obligations of about 10 per cent.[10]

The final 1997 reform, allowing universities price discretion for additional students was a radical departure from centralised fee control.[11] While there has been little student take-up, it has been argued to represent the beginnings of a very significant movement

towards institutional pricing autonomy. The 2005 reforms build very importantly on this notion.

(f) Summary

Since 1973 Australian higher education funding arrangements for undergraduates have undergone significant changes. The most obvious change is that student financial contributions have increased from around zero to about 40 per cent or more of course costs. As well, at least since 1997, there has been a clear move towards allowing some price flexibility for universities. What now follows considers the likely impact on student charges of the current reforms.

Understanding the 2005 reforms: the roles of indexation and enterprise bargaining

(a) Why enterprise bargaining matters

For the last decade or so of Australian higher education financing concerns, it is important to understand the rule used by government for the indexation of recurrent grants to universities. The arrangement was instituted in 1995, in the context of the practice of enterprise bargaining, the incidence of which was growing strongly in the university sector at the time.

Enterprise bargaining is now the most commonplace industrial arrangement in private firms, and has been a growing practice in Australia since the demise of centralised wage determination, which began in the early 1990s. However, enterprise bargaining is less well suited to public sector universities than it is to the private sector because of the absence of an instrument to adjust in response to wage bargaining outcomes. Universities, for example, have not had the capacity to vary their prices or output mix as can private firms in response to a bargaining outcome.

As might have been predicted, the movement to enterprise bargaining in universities has been associated with unions gaining wage increases roughly commensurate with wage increases typically experienced economy-wide; that is, around 4 to 5 per cent per annum, and sometimes more.

(b) The importance of the government's indexation rule

With wages and related benefits making up around two thirds of university costs it is clear that for the sector to maintain the quality and quantity of its output there would need to be a commensurate change in revenue when wages increase. The most important component continues to be government recurrent grants, including HECS revenues. Herein lies the essence of the issue: the indexation rule under which government grants are adjusted does not reflect wage increases in the sector or average wage increases in the community. The government's annual adjustment is made with a Cost Adjustment Factor (CAF). [12]

The CAF is not a measure of cost increases in universities: as the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) says, quite clearly, each year in the triennial report:

> The Higher Education Cost Adjustment Factor (CAF) is an index reflecting the contribution the Commonwealth makes towards increases in the operating costs of higher education institutions. The CAF does not measure actual price rises but the Commonwealth's contribution towards annual increases in salary and non-salary costs. [13]

This means that every year that a university's enterprise bargaining agreement delivers an increase in average remuneration roughly in line with professional or other earnings in the community is also a year that a university experiences an effective cut in real government support.

Burke and White have analysed the significance of the indexation arrangements, and have recalculated government grant levels on the basis of alternative hypothetical scenarios.[14] For example, under the assumption that the grants were indexed to changes in what is known as the Education Cost Index – which is indexed in part to wages, but still results in lower adjustments than changes in average weekly earnings - in 2002, universities would have had received around an additional $466 million more per annum, or about 9 per cent of the total DEST base operating grant[15].

Before the current reforms, universities had little scope to reduce the impact of the effective and on-going fall in government revenue[16]. One of the critical points concerning the likely consequences of HECS-HELP is that, effectively for the first time, the universities will in 2005 have a pricing instrument, explained below. In the context of the juxtaposition of the enterprise bargaining outcomes and the indexation rule explained above, these changes will necessarily mean significant increases in student contributions. The basis for this claim is revisited below.

HECS-HELP

(a) HECS-HELP described

The new instrument is that from 2005 universities will be able to set their own prices for all HECS students, up to a ceiling. With the exception of nursing and education (where no real changes will be allowed) the ceilings will be 25 per cent higher than the projected 'standard' HECS levels in that year. The revenue will flow directly to the universities, implying the beneficial prospect of some additional flexibility, which could take the form of salary top-ups in areas of shortage.

The second important feature of the new HECS arrangements is that the first income threshold of repayment has been raised, from about $26,000 in 2004 to just over $36,000 per annum in 2005 (and there are some additional steps, including higher repayment rates for incomes above $50,000). In combination the pricing and threshold reforms have the potential to change significantly the true HECS prices faced by students, but understanding this is a complex process.

(b) What the changes to HECS will mean for student demand and access

In public and political discussion over the last few months it has sometimes been argued that HECS-HELP will result in higher charges for students and thus has the potential to diminish the access of some prospective students. The reason typically offered for this prediction is that a significant number of institutions are likely to take advantage of their new capacity to raise the charge.

However, the (apparently) higher charges resulting from HECS-HELP do not necessarily mean that the effective prices faced by students after 2005 will also increase. The reason is that HECS-HELP will be instituted with a very different repayment regime of the associated debt; the first income repayment threshold of repayment is to be raised in 2005 to just over $36,000 per annum, almost $10,000 per annum higher than is the case in 2004. For some students this change in the first repayment threshold will significantly reduce the true cost of tuition, even given an apparent 25 per cent increase in the charge.

Basically, once a HECS debt is incurred, there is no real rate of interest with respect to on-going debt obligations: thus there is a subsidy for each period in which the debt remains (that is, the size of the subsidy depends on a student's future income).[17] This matters, since it is not possible to generalise what the suggested changes of HECS-HELP will mean for students, given that there are opposing forces at work: a higher charge on paper will be offset for some by a greater period of subsidy from the new higher repayment threshold.

In an analysis of the expected changes to the true cost of HECS-HELP, a large number of hypothetical graduate incomes were constructed, including for those earning in the bottom third of the distribution of graduates incomes by sex.[18] For low income graduates increases in HECS debts of 25 per cent were found to be associated with *lower* effective charges because of the much higher first income threshold of repayment. Specifically a striking example concerns female graduates who work full-time and experience low incomes, with the extent of the decrease in the true cost of the charge being of the order of 66 per cent.

We also explored the implications of HECS-HELP for graduates expecting to spend several years both out of the labour force, and working half time. For female graduates expecting this experience, the true cost of HECS-HELP decreases very substantially, even when the apparent charge goes up by 25 per cent. On the other hand, for graduates earning typical incomes and above, increases in the charge result in high additional tuition imposts.

(c) HECS-HELP in prospect

HECS-HELP arrangements have the prospect of increasing to some extent university autonomy, essentially because there will be less centralised control over the resources being delivered to particular universities. This aspect of change is consistent with decisions being made with reference to the needs of individual institutions, rather than the more centralised decisions that have so far characterised policy. It is important that the extent of charge flexibility has been limited through a cap on price discretion, a point explained in detail elsewhere.[19]

Since the introduction of HECS and the considerable 1997 HECS changes do not appear to have affected the socio-economic mix of enrolments[20], HECS-HELP is very unlikely to have adverse consequences with respect to either aggregate demand for places or the socio economic mix of enrolments. If universities understand that 25 per cent increases in HECS charges in the context og a much higher income threshold of repayment will not affect student access, in the continuing financial environment of the indexation rules, there are powerful forces at work which will ensure that HECS-HELP will result in widespread price increases, and quite soon after the end of 2004. At the time of writing this prediction seems very robust.

FEE-HELP

(a) FEE-HELP described

FEE-HELP has several dimensions. One, it represents an extension of student loans to cover full-fee paying undergraduate domestic courses, with repayments to be made according to the new HECS parameters. Two, universities will be allowed full-fee paying domestic student quotas of 35 per cent of enrolments per course. Three, loans of this type will be capped at a level of $50,000.

Analysing FEE-HELP needs policy context. As noted, the current government allowed universities to charge full fees for up to 25 per cent of domestic students in 1997. But

this policy reform showed no recognition of the importance of the need for student loans given up-front charges.[21] Without a loans system it was inevitable that the take-up of this option has been extremely low, and there are no surprises that currently only about 6,000 students per year are enrolled under this arrangement.

(b) Price discretion in the context of economic theory

It is important to stress that unfettered price discretion without an income contingent loan, the policy introduced in 1997, constitutes combinations of the worst that Australian higher education financing policy could offer.[22] Thus while making a HECS-type loan available to full-fee paying students in 2005 is an improvement over the reform of seven years ago, the change, in policy desirability terms, is only from very poor to poor.

The basic problem with allowing full price discretion is that such an approach gives no weight to substantial historic public sector subsidies to institutions, which have contributed considerably to the reputations of privileged universities. As well, universities do not pay rent, and this means that those in prime locations will be able to charge 'full fees' unrelated to competition.

In the circumstances of the government maintaining supply quotas on universities, it is particularly contentious to allow price-setting institutions to charge what they want, because the institutions are then able to take advantage of the supply restriction with respect to the price set. Consequently, the price asked of students cannot reflect the interaction of market forces (since these are not able to operate), but will instead deliver student charges that are necessarily higher than would be the case without quotas; there will then be considerable non-market rents delivered to the price setter, the universities. Thus it might well turn out to be that some universities are able to charge students far in excess of the costs of provision of the course, a situation a long way from the ideal of course charges reflecting course costs, student demand and government subsidies.

These arguments suggest a case made in Chapman (2003) for the government capping fees. Indeed, the force of this point seems to underlie the Government's decision to set the limit of 25 per cent on the extent to which universities are able to increase HECS-HELP charges. It is notable that the same understandings, apparently, have not influenced the policy approach to so-called 'full-fee paying' students.

There are several possible alternatives with respect to price capping. Perhaps the most persuasive has been argued by Phillips[23], in which the cap could be set at a level slightly higher than the maximum allowed with HECS-HELP. Then there is the major equity advantage involving the removal of price distinctions between students, since all domestic students in the same course would pay the same charge. In this model, the government subsidises a given number of places, but leaves the institutions to decide the number of offers with capped prices; this seems to be a feasible alternative to quota restrictions.

(c) The important problem of the capping of the loan

In 2005 universities will be able to charge full-fee paying undergraduate and postgraduate students whatever they choose, to a maximum of a total debt of $50,000. Presumably this arrangement has been chosen to minimise the likely costs to the Commonwealth of non-repayment of the debt, and also to limit the extent to which institutions choose to increase charges.

However, it is difficult to believe that universities will significantly limit charge increases because of the existence of a maximum student debt. For this to be the case those in

charge of setting course fees would need to have an informed view of the extent to which the charge for their particular course would limit student demand. However, the number of students likely to be faced with the prospect of non-enrolment due to a specific course charge won't be known with any certainty. For example, a course administrator in the area of post-graduate studies will not know how many prospective students already have a FEE-HELP debt, and what its level is. The response of the charge to the loan limit will necessarily be limited.

The critical issue for debt capping is the very real possibility that some students will have exhausted their loan limit before graduation. Then a proportion of unfinished students must face the possibility of paying for the completion of their course with up-front fees. Because the private capital market will not provide finance to cover this possibility, it could well mean that some - perhaps many - students will not easily be able to complete. This is a waste of resources, and is inequitable.[24]

(d) FEE-HELP in prospect

The introduction of a deferred, income-contingent loan facility for full fee paying domestic undergraduate students is likely to increase significantly the demand for such places, as was seen with postgraduates in the case of the Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme. The scale of the demand response is very difficult to predict, but it is possible to consider some plausible scenarios.

In 2002 there were 6,536 undergraduate full fee paying students, representing 1.6 per cent of the total domestic undergraduate load. In 2008, if the ratio of undergraduate fee-payers to funded load increased to only 2 per 100, there would be around 8,560 EFTSU of fee-paying students. While this doesn't seem to be very many, there are powerful reasons to believe that the numbers will be much greater:[25]

> (i)   There will be little growth in HECS-liable places, and could even be a net decline relative to 2002 if the reduction in marginally-funded places exceeds the growth in fully-subsidised places. So the competition for high demand courses will remain intense;
>
> (ii) The differential between full fees and HECS will be reduced as institutions choose to increase their HECS levels. Indeed in some courses it is conceivable that the difference could be very small indeed;
>
> (iii) The availability of income related loans will remove the up-front payment barrier;
>
> (iv) The availability of deferred, income-contingent loans will mean that potential students will tend to discount the size of the fee in their decision-making;
>
> (v)   Institutions may be more inclined to offer full fee places in a more de-regulated environment and because the availability of loans will diminish equity concerns; and
>
> (vi) The increase in the cap on the proportion of fee paying domestic students from 25 per cent to 35 per cent will increase the capacity of courses to enrol fee paying students.

An increase in the ratio of fee-paying to fully subsidised students to 5 per cent and more is therefore entirely credible. At this level, there would be around 21,400 full fee paying places (EFTSU) in 2008, which represents an increase of about 14,900 EFTSU over 2002. It would not be surprising if the increase turns out to be considerably higher than this.

Towards a preferred model

(a) Introduction

A constructive way to proceed is to offer a suggested preferred model of Australian higher education financing. Some desirable elements are now outlined.

(b) Price capping

Particularly in the light of continuing restrictions of the number of places, there is a case for the government imposing a cap on the fee allowed to be charged. In this respect a sensible design feature of HECS-HELP is the charge limit placed on institutions. FEE-HELP does not have this advantage.

There are several possible alternatives involving price capping. For example, as has been argued by Phillips[26] the cap on fees could be set at the same level as the maximum allowed under a modified HECS system, which could be interpreted to be HECS-HELP. In this instance the price distinction between full-fee and HECS-liable students would disappear so all domestic students in the same course would pay the same charge set by the institution, and there would be far less potential for unfair rent-seeking behaviour by institutions.

(c) Vocational Education and Training (VET) fees

The 2005 reform proposals do not include consideration of vocational education and training. From a policy and equity perspective this is an unfortunate omission, since VET up-front charges could be seen to be an impediment to access. The fact that these up-front fees have recently been increased considerably in NSW is pertinent food for thought in this area. There is nothing unique about students attending universities to suggest that income contingent loan coverage should stop there. After all, the capital market failure motivating policies such as HECS applies generally to all educational investments.

Some part of the reason for this omission lies with the State governments, which are responsible for VET, and which have opposed the introduction of income related mechanisms for VET students. The resulting anomalies and inequities are most clearly seen in those courses from which there are credit transfer arrangements to Bachelor degrees, but remain a significant issue across the board. A possible future step toward greater equity and policy consistency could be to extend HECS-type loans to all tertiary students who face substantial tuition fees.

Reform of financing VET towards consistency with higher education need not be radical. One way would be to apply a HECS-type option only to courses with strict accreditation to universities, under current fee regimes. Students could be allowed to pay the current charge up-front, or to take a HECS loan and repay through the tax system an additional 25 per cent. This is precisely how university HECS operates, and takes the form of a discount for up-front payments. Maintaining current VET charge levels can thus be achieved concurrently as the system is made fairer and more consistent with university financing.

(c) Assistance to remove all up-front costs

Income related loans such as HECS are designed to remove up-front financial barriers for the participation of students in post-compulsory education. But while the scheme removes compulsory up-front tuition costs, this doesn't mean that there are then no financial barriers. For example, undergraduate students currently have to find money for textbooks and other materials (for many these will be as high as $400-500), compulsory union fees, and small enrolment charges (currently around $100-200 per annum).

A very obvious response to this problem would be for the government to offer all students an annual sum of money, say $1,000, to defray these costs. This could be done in a way that is costless for the Budget over time, by requiring the student to repay the sum in the same way that HECS is currently handled (but with the new HECS-HELP parameters). That is, students choosing to take advantage of the offer would contract to have their HECS debt increased, but by more than the $1,000 borrowed in order to compensate the government for the real interest rate subsidy implicit in HECS arrangements. For consistency with the proposed 2005 arrangements this would mean that a student borrowing $1,000 would commit to repaying $1,250 in addition to other HECS debts.

Conclusion

The 2005 reforms to Australian higher education have the potential to change profoundly the university financing landscape. The main point is that there are fundamental forces at work implying that, over time, student contributions will increase very significantly. This will be the result of two forces: the government's indexation rule with respect to recurrent grants; and the combination of universities soon being allowed to both increase HECS charges by up to 25 per cent and the more generous arrangements associated with charging full fees for domestic students.

Some of the reforms have been argued to be propitious from the perspective of economic and social policy. For example, the increase in the first income threshold of repayment of HECS debts by students to around $36,000 per annum is consistent with the basic principles underlying the concept of income related loans. As well, having extra potential resources delivered directly to universities - instead of constituting an additional tax-type inflow to the Commonwealth budget - has some capacity to improve resource allocation in the sector. In summary, HECS-HELP should be seen to be a productive evolution of the original HECS arrangements,[27] particularly when considered in the light of the significant increase in the first threshold of repayment of the debt.

However, the above positive assessment of HECS-HELP is not true with respect to FEE-HELP, which is poorly designed. The first problem is that there is no case for allowing universities complete price flexibility; over time the policy will result in a significant minority of students accumulating large, and arguably inequitable, debts reflecting prices set in a way that is unrelated to the fostering of competition. Second, because a student's total debt level is to be restricted to $50,000, some individuals will very likely face the prospect of having to find money to pay up-front fees in order to complete their degrees. This must restrict the access of the poor and represents a major regressive step in Australian higher education financing policy.

The latter point comes to the heart of Australian higher education financing policy. The critical issue is that if students need to find resources to finance university participation by having to pay up-front fees, this will diminish the access of relatively poor prospective students. This was an important motivational factor behind the design of HECS, with the evidence suggesting that the policy has had no deleterious effects on the access of students from relatively poor backgrounds over the last 15 years. FEE-HELP has the important potential to undo this positive feature of current Australian policy.[28]

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1   However, a change in the Federal government in the 2004 election would very likely mean that the new higher education financing policies will not proceed.

2   See Wran, Neville (1988). *Report of the Committee on Higher Education Funding,* Department of Employment, Education and Training, AGPS: Canberra.

3   See National Institute for Labour Studies (1988). 'The Effect of HEAC on Higher Education Equity and Access', Flinders University of South Australia.

4   Wran (1988) *op cit.*.

5   For analysis of the background to HECS, see Edwards, Meredith (2001). *Social Policy, Public Policy,* Allen & Unwin: Sydney.

6   Income-contingent loan schemes for higher education are now in place in New Zealand, the UK, South Africa, Chile and the US, and have been recommended by the World Bank, or are currently being implemented, in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Hungary and Thailand.

7   For further analysis of the background to the policy, see Chapman, Bruce (2003). 'Submission to the *Crossroads* Inquiry', Australian Parliament, *Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper*. 456, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.

8   , An issue analysed in Chapman, Bruce and Ryan Chris (2002). 'Income-contingent Financing of Student Charges for Higher Education: Assessing the Australian Innovation', *The Welsh Journal of Education*, 11, 1: 64-81.

9   For analysis of the effects of these changes, see Chapman, Bruce and Salvage, Tony (1988). 'The Effects of the 1996/97 Budget Changes for Students', in *Australia's Future Universities,* University of New England Press.

10 Chapman and Salvage (1997) *ibid.*

11 Chapman and Salvage (1998) *op cit.*

12 Since 1995 the annual operating grants for universities have been adjusted by the Higher Education Cost Adjustment Factor (CAF). Salary costs were notionally seen by DEST to constitute 75 per cent of grants (the actual share is smaller than this). This component of the CAF is based on the Safety Net Adjustment (SNA) as determined by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Non-salary costs notionally constitute 25 per cent of grants and are indexed using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

13 Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) Higher Education Report for the 2004 to 2006 Triennium: 116.

14 Burke, Gerald and White, Paul (2003). 'Price Measures in Education and Training', *CEET Working Paper*, 53, Monash University and data from the AVCC.

15 Calculation based on analysis in Burke and White (2003) *ibid.*

16 However, some universities have been able to offset the consequences through expansions in full-fee paying international students.

17 For a lucid and accessible explanation of this issue, see Ross Gittens (2004). 'Time takes its toll on value of HECS discount', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March.

18 Beer, Gillian and Chapman, Bruce (2004 forthcoming). 'The Effects of the 2005 Changes in HECS on Students', *Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper*, 474, Australian National University.

19 In Chapman (2003) *op cit.*

20 Chapman and Ryan (2002) *op cit.*

21 Chapman (2003) *op cit.*

22 *ibid.*

23 David Phillips made public this suggestion on 13 December 2001.

24 Chapman (2003) *op cit.*

25 Phillips, David and Chapman, Bruce (2003). 'Our Universities: *Backing Australia's Future*. Issues and Analysis', mimeo, Australian National University, Canberra, July.

26 Phillips, David (2001). Proposal to the Go8 Board.

27 It is of interest to note that the proposed extensions were canvassed and, with qualifications, generally supported by the committee which recommended HECS in 1988. See Wran (1988) *op cit.*

28 For a summary of the research, see Chapman, Bruce and Ryan Chris (2002). 'Income-contingent Financing of Student Charges for Higher Education: Assessing the Australian Innovation', *The Welsh Journal of Education*, 11, 1: 64-81.

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