Kunapipi 19(2) Editorial, Contents

Anna Rutherford

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Cover: 'Refugee' by Jim Jarman. Photo by Sue Moore

IN MEMORY OF SIGNE FRITS
1946-1997

*Kunapipi* refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
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Photo montage by Peter Lyssiotis
EDITORIAL: THE LOSS OF OUR HUMANITY

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with destruction by our own discovery. Suddenly, it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others. Paul Ricoeur, History and Truth

No-one is different without they have something wrong with them. Patrick White, Clay

It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weakness. Epigraph to Doris Lessing’s The Grass is Singing

The ultimate test of our worth as a democratic nation is how we treat our most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Sir William Deane, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

It is not often I write an editorial for Kunapipi. That is not because of laziness or lack of concern, though I have to admit that both the time factor (to get the journal to press) and the space factor (more pages mean higher printing costs), do play a role. Sometimes I feel constrained like Mrs Touchett in Henry James’ novel The Portrait of a Lady, when she said, ‘I never know what I mean in my telegrams – especially those I send from America. Clearness is too expensive’. In the case of this editorial I’ve decided that the issues are too important to lack clarity and so I’m hoping to win the lottery to cover the cost!

On this occasion I am breaking with my usual convention because I feel that the issues to be dealt with are too important not to warrant an editorial. Most of them, with the exception of the aboriginal issue, are relevant not only to Australia but to the world in general, and the Western world in particular, and in accordance with the policy of Kunapipi many voices from many countries are included to discuss these issues – aboriginal rights and the stolen generation, Hansonism, racism, migration, in particular Asian migration, refugees, multi-culturalism, the continued rapid and insidious growth of what Jim McClelland calls the new world religion, Globalized Economic Rationalism, whose main function seems to transfer the manufacturing industry, that is jobs, from countries that have a high standard of living to low-wage countries. Nike’s sweat shops in the Asian countries were exposed in the Australian papers but it didn’t stop an Australian youth being murdered for his new Nike shoes.

It is my intention to start with globalization, economic rationalism and dehumanization. This is not because I find the question of racism and treatment of our indigenous population secondary to the other issues. On the contrary. My reason is that I believe that the root cause of all the other evils we are faced with lie within the first group mentioned. To find a solution we must find a cause, and having found the cause try, by some
means, to eradicate it. Impossible – no – nothing’s impossible. I personally had a great deal of respect for Mother Teresa and her work but not for her blind adherence to the teachings of the present Pope. You see the question I would ask is, ‘Why were they poor?’ As Zillah Eisenstein said, ‘Since life activity in this society is always in process, in process through power relationships, we must try to understand the process. To understand the process is to understand the way the process may be changed’. The aim of this editorial is to try to provide some reasons why Australia is in the position it is in today.

In her 1997 NSW Premier’s Literary Award address, Drusilla Modjeska said, ‘a time of upheaval and conflict in ways of thinking, and perhaps even of writing, are being challenged and changed in the most painful of ways. I am sure I am not the only one to have had the sensation of waking up to find myself in an Australia I barely recognise. Or rather more to the point, an Australia I would rather not recognise’. Drusilla Modjeska is not alone in these thoughts. Because of illness I was unable to attend my mother’s funeral. I did however write the eulogy which was read by a friend of mine at the Requiem Mass. Somehow or other I must have felt the winds of change that were soon to affect Australia so violently for I concluded by reminding those present, of the Mayfield of old, that Mayfield of my childhood and of the well-known characters including my mother who had been so much a part of it. ‘It was’ I said ‘a harder world than the one we live in today, but in terms of love, caring and community spirit one could not have found a richer world’. Some readers might say ‘she’s just growing old (which I am) and sentimentalizing the past’. No I’m not. I am not adverse to change; on the contrary I am a firm believer in John Cardinal Henry Newman’s dictum, ‘To live is to change’. It’s not change that bothers me. It’s the changes that have and are continuing to take place that cause me not only great anger but great anguish and shame.

I left Australia when I was twenty-one, not because I didn’t like it but because I was curious and wanted to see what the rest of the world was like – if it really was like what for us were the almost mythical pictures we had seen in our history books. I had a fair idea of where each country was because I was taught to swim at a very early age by my father in a pool adjacent to Newcastle beach. The pool had a raised concrete map of the world in it, appropriately coloured, and my father would say, ‘Now swim from Africa to India’. A swim across the Indian Ocean was quite a swim for a five year old and I’d be pleased when I reached the shore – Bombay I suppose. Getting from India to Sri Lanka (Ceylon in those days) was much easier and the swim home to Australia no trouble at all. Actually I think that was the first time I questioned the term ‘the Far East’. Why far? England was a lot further and required another swimming season before I could struggle to reach its shores.

In 1955 I left for Europe, this time by boat, and apart from another short
period in Australia plus many visits I have literally wandered around the world, curious about other peoples, their cultures and their countries, finding out the realities of what lay behind those blocks of concrete in that pool. It is little wonder that an academic career led me into post-colonial studies, an area in which I taught for thirty years at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Teaching post-colonial literature meant that I also taught Australian literature and I did my best to teach it warts and all, pointing out all the negative features as well as the positive. I discussed the White Australia Policy, the treatment of the aborigines using texts like Glenys Ward’s *Wandering Girl*, showing Tracey Moffat’s film *Nice Coloured Girls*, and using text by non Anglo-Saxon/Celtic writers such as Judah Waten’s *Alien Son* and Ania Walwicz ‘Wogs’. As I believe that colonization and feminism are linked, I used Henry Lawson’s ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ to show the hypocrisy behind Russell Ward’s Australian legend; Kate Grenville’s *Lilian’s Story* was a wonderful example of the fate of a person who was not only female but ‘different’ and there could be no better text than Thea Astley’s *It’s Raining in Mango* to put a lie to the old myths just as David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* and Alex Miller’s *The Ancestor Game* revealed all the flaws behind so-called historical ‘truth’ as found in the official text books. I was not ‘knocking’ my own country, for though by the time you read this I will have spent two thirds of my life in other countries, and I’m off to Chile, Peru and Easter Island in November and fly to England and Europe via Sri Lanka in January, however I am still a firm believer in a quotation from Horace much used by many post-colonial writers: ‘They change their skies but not their souls who sail across the sea’. Where I live and where I die will not change that. In the rather jingoistic last line of Dorothy Mackellar’s poem, *Australia*, a poem we all learnt at school, when the time does come to die, ‘I know to what brown country my homing thoughts will fly’.

When I taught Australian literature, in spite of presenting the ‘warts’ I was always careful to point out that in spite of everything else, I believed that we had created in a very short time the best ‘multi’-cultural society that existed. I also believed that the Mabo¹ and Wik² decisions had gone a long way towards reconciliation with Australia’s original population.

When I reached Australia in 1997 a great shock hit me and I was forced to ask myself the same question that Dr Lois O’Donoghue had asked; namely what had happened to that ‘moment of idealism’ manifested by 90% of the Australian population in that referendum of 1967? This was a referendum that decided that aborigines could be Australian citizens. There are indeed disturbing echoes today ‘of the black and coloured issues’ that were around when the nation’s framework was established. What had gone wrong?

Noel Pearson’s article explains very clearly what happened in the last Federal election and his opening paragraphs dealing with the Great
Mainstream of Australia are of course written with deep irony. Initially the massive coalition victory was perceived as an assertion of mainstream values – the triumph of ‘ordinary people’ over policies which had been perceived as favouring minority or even elite groups, a term bandied around to describe supporters of reforms in relation to women, ethnic groups and aborigines, to denigrate promoters of social reforms particularly with reference to gender, race and ethnicity. Such groups were accused of having, with the support of the previous governments, enforced a rigid regime of political correctness. The so-called ‘chardonnay socialists’ included of course the supporters of the arts, intellectuals, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, socialists and supporters of the Republican movement. The day after Paul Keating, Australia’s former Labor Prime Minister, announced his support for an Australian republic he was lampooned in a cartoon in one of Australia’s national newspapers as an IRA terrorist and underneath was written Irish Catholic Working Class.

Minority groups, being given too much support and encouragement were regarded as the privileged, whilst the Great Mainstream, ‘all of us’ was being victimized and deprived of its fair share of the goodies. According to Ms Hanson, multiculturalism is ‘discredited and meanspirited’. Robert Menzies, former Prime Minister of Australia, was attacked over our White Australia immigration policy. His answer was, ‘We don’t import problems’. I wonder how Ms Hanson got in! I am sure that much of the racism that exists in Europe today stems from the same source as Betty Thøgersen mentioned. (Hence Mrs Thatcher’s demolition of the London County Council and her making sure that Ken Livingstone was no longer in power.) In whatever way it was perceived, it was promoted and fanned to fever pitch by Pauline Hanson who set about to put the ‘facts’ right and speak for ‘All of Us’. This is an issue which I would like to take up later.

In a splendid article in The Weekend Australian called ‘The Business of Being Human’ Richard Neville wrote among other things, ‘The point of business is to provide profit. The point of culture is to provide meaning’. Later in this editorial I mention David Putnam’s film The Mission. Earlier this year a debate took place between Peter Guber, the former chairman of Sony Pictures, a power in Hollywood, and the British film producer, Sir David Putnam, whose films include Chariots of Fire, The Killing Fields and The Mission. The event was a debate attended by 700 students at Boston University. The issue: ‘Do social values figure on Hollywood’s balance sheet?’

Mr Guber claimed they did. ‘Films are a worldwide industry, America’s second export ... This is show-business, not show-show.’

David Putnam replied: ‘The medium is too powerful and too important an influence on the way we live, the way we see ourselves, to be left solely to the tyranny of the box-office or reduced to the sum of the lowest common denominator of public taste.’
Mr Guber replied: ‘If you want religion, go to church.’

Sir David’s argument was that cinema is the church, that ‘to an almost alarming degree’ films shape people’s thinking and define social health.

Each of the film makers had foot-soldiers on hand to support their arguments. Guber’s was William Roth. His argument was: ‘As we know, Hollywood’s only goal is to make money ... The audiences define and control the product ... The product was neutral, utterly bereft of moral content, responsible only to market forces, like a Teflon pan. Not art for art’s sake, but art for money’s sake.’

Putnam’s supporter was Tom Danon. After describing Hollywood as a cultural ghetto with a tremendous effect on world society he continued: ‘Films should do what great literature and art do: make us and elevate us and remind us that we are not alone.’

When the time came to vote it turned out to be a crushing vote for the Putnam camp. It is, as the article concludes, ‘ludicrous to say in 1997 that films don’t have an impact. But Hollywood’s failure to grasp the power the movies have on culture and thought, not only in America but worldwide, is not deliberate. It is ignorant and uncaring’.

I have dealt with this issue at length because I am able to see the direct effect of the lowest common denominator on the Australian population. As Richard Neville said in his article, ‘We recognize more labels and logos than we do birds and trees. We’ve come to equate our self-worth with our net worth’.

In most cases I am afraid he is correct. The power of films and commercial television, owned incidentally by Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer, who have just joined Vanity Fair’s sixty-four richest and most powerful people in the world, is enormous. As Barbara Drury reports in her article ‘Toys “R” Hell’, ‘the world’s toy markets and fast food empires have set their sights on your money and they are using your children to get it. This will be achieved by the wave of movies and marketing [films] that is about to break on Australia’. As she said, ‘It is a rare parent who can tough out their offspring’s relentless demands for Star War’s paraphernalia or the latest Barbie’.

Richard Neville also quoted the figures released by the United Nations in 1996 which revealed that the net worth of the world’s 358 richest billionaires is equal to the combined income of the poorest 45% of the world’s population. ‘After the first billion’, Neville asks, ‘how about the rest going into a global kitty for the super poor?’ This idea of course would seem preposterous to those who owned that first billion and whose aim was to own not only two or three but many more. Other figures of interest are that in Australia in 1993 the top 10% of households controlled 40% of Australia’s wealth, while the top 50% controlled 95% of Australia’s wealth. I’m sure the present day figures would reveal an even more depressing outlook. And whilst we’re on the subject of figures, 50% of the world’s refugees are children and an estimated 97% of refugees remain in Third World countries. Peter Nobel, Ombudsman for Refugees, Sweden, said, ‘The World needs change, new thinking and new people. Migration is change because it brings the new. What is good in the old will survive the change. What is bad I hope will not. In the meantime we
must continue our work for Human Rights and respect for all human beings'. Remember what John Donne said, 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind' (Meditation 15). Richard Neville's question reminded me of one raised by the former leader of Tanzania, Sir Julius Nyerere. I was fortunate enough to be present at an address he made at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London. Here was a humble man, making a plea for help and sacrifice for his poverty-stricken country and the equally poverty-stricken inhabitants, to a group, most of whom would have been regarded amongst the rich and elite of Britain. When he concluded questions were asked for and one woman stood up and said, 'Sir Julius, are you really asking me to sell my country home?' Sir Julius, a very gentle man, smiled wryly and replied, a reply I will never forget, 'Madam, isn't one home enough for you?' His plea I am afraid fell on deaf ears.

A group of British coalminers pointed out that God had been replaced by Mammon. 'The owners don't believe in God because they've got their heaven here on earth'. This new world religion finds one of its firmest believers in the present Australian government, and it is with their blessing that the multinationals seek to introduce individual contracts and do away with collective bargaining; the old divide and rule principle is applied, and in spite of the defiant stand by the unions, 'United we stand/Divided we beg', one feels that they have little chance against such odds. With the gradual demise of the unions and with the subsequent loss of jobs there is an increasing social insecurity; human beings were described recently, by the leader of one big multinational, bidding for yet another state owned asset as 'controllable market labour', labour which can be dumped on a rubbish heap when no longer deemed of any use. Along with all of this one sees a whittling away of the welfare state, a high increase in jobless, particularly amongst the youth, an alarming suicide rate which not only includes the young but also the old, who no longer feel there is anyone or any institution to take care of them. In a 'user pays' society what happens when the user can't pay?

'Unemployment', as Sir William Deane said, 'presents a loser with the stark face of poverty – material poverty in the form of homelessness, inadequate clothing, sustenance, care or help. And so often the grim companion of disadvantage is the poverty of spirit'.

When you take away a people's right to work you take not so much their money, though this of course is important, but even more important is the removal of their self-esteem and loss of confidence.

Our leaders have failed us. With full intent to destroy union power, to downsize the work field, a shift to casual labour and job insecurity, deregulated hours and the attempt to introduce a twelve hour day, the government had very successfully succeeded in dividing us along economic, life style, age and career lines. We have indeed become
Disraeli's two nations. But where the leaders have failed us even more is that, as Helen Trinca stated, 'they have also failed to fill the intellectual and policy vacuum left when Australia jettisoned the right to work. In her Larry Adler lecture given at the Sydney Institute on 13 August 1997 Australia's distinguished novelist Shirley Hazzard remarked, 'Years ago, in America, an elderly maverick in public life asked: "Does the economy exist for us, or we for the economy?" Who would be foolhardy enough to ask that question now? Humanism is being thrown over as yet another piece of outmoded baggage, without consideration of what is being given up, or fear of what this conversion will make of us'.

Shirley Hazzard's is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Her sentiments were echoed by another distinguished novelist, David Ireland, whose latest book The Chosen has just been published. 'Westerners have stripped the world of the sacred, the transcendent, and now have no centre, no stable place to stand, no point where the inside that makes us what we are can view the world about us and the world behind that. Behind bitumen and bricks, glass and concrete, rubber tyres, airports, McDonald's ... we are restoring the sacred to those who value it, from whom we wrenched it away, yet we count nothing sacred ourselves. We live spiritually centreless lives with few meanings beyond food and family, comfort and career path. We have lost that central seriousness around which the rest orbits and to which it refers'.

And don't think that economic rationalism dies with you. On the contrary even the dead are not free of it. Here I am referring to what is euphemistically called the 'Revitalization of Sandgate'. In discussing the Sandgate issue I would stress that I have no desire to give offence to people whose relatives are buried there. Sandgate, I should explain, is the second largest cemetery in the State of NSW and there is no doubt that there are many historic aspects related to it which we are told that the Trust plans to capitalize on. The headlines tell it all. 'New life for Sandgate Cemetery'. No need to wait for the day of judgement eh! No, Sandgate is going to be revamped and if the Sandgate Cemetery Trust has its way Sandgate is not only going to be 'revitalized' (facelifts are also provided) so that it becomes not only a major tourist attraction but also a place of 'passive recreation'. Given the nature of its inhabitants I would suggest it will indeed be a place of 'passive recreation'. But that's not all. Oh no! Not for those who are going to flock to it as it is turned into a major tourist attraction. We have been assured that no existing graves will be recycled - think of the blood and bone potential - but more 'income producing measures' have to be introduced to make it a viable project. These include 'a lawn cemetery' (placed I might add on one of the busiest and noisiest corners in Newcastle - not much chance for 'passive recreation' there - 'a commercial nursery, an annual open garden day, a columbarium, encouraging double use of single graves for couples, public tours, a computerised data base with a fee for people
compiling family trees, a service on Mother’s Day and a Friends of Sandgate group’. 

Then of course there is the question of tenure. I know many think of that term only in relationship to academics but the dead have now joined the academics. The draft plans of the Trust are full of references to ‘the idea of limited tenure for grave plots’, but so far the NSW Government has rejected this idea. You can be sure that the Trust will persevere in its demands and it will come as no surprise to you that the Chairman of the Sandgate Cemetery Trust is an undertaker.

All of this must provide good news for those who worried about ageing. There’s no longer any need to worry. Just leave it up to the market forces and if you feel like being revitalized I’m sure that for a fee the Sandgate Cemetery Trust will be happy to oblige.

By the way, if you think that the Sandgate Cemetery Trust has got the game sewn up, forget it. The papers have just informed us in an article entitled ‘Foreign Bodies’, that ‘almost one in three Australian bodies will be laid to rest by an American-owned company’. Two multi-nationals head the list and one we are told would make it Australia’s ninth largest, not far behind Rio Tinto. The president of the Australian-owned company is rather angry about it.

‘There is absolutely no way we should be allowing the Americans to dominate our funeral industry,’ he says. ‘There is no export advantage – you can’t export bodies and there is no technology transfer – all you need is a back hoe. They have nothing to bring to the industry apart from their marketing techniques. They are adding to our foreign debt and looking to take advantage of Australians in their bereavement’. But then the Americans have always had the edge on dealing with ‘The Loved One[s]’, haven’t they?

In the following section I would like to discuss racism, Pauline Hanson and in particular the plight of Australian Aborigines.

The catchcry for the last election was for ‘all of us’. But who were ‘all of us’ or who are ‘all of us’?

There is a particularly obnoxious game being played at the moment, especially by Australian youths. It’s called ‘Pick the Aussie’ as if there is such a national identity. I happened to be party to a conversation between two women whom I knew to be of Irish Catholic descent. They were discussing the terrible state of affairs in Australia. The conversation ran something like this. ‘It’s terrible all this violence isn’t it? You know there wasn’t any before “they” came!’ I refrained from pointing out that violence had been an integral part of Australia’s history since the first white settlement. The conversation continued. ‘They should bring back the death penalty don’t you think?’ I said, ‘No, I do not think so’. Then came the reply, ‘Well they should be sent back to where they came from’. My question to that was, ‘But what if they are Australian citizens?’ ‘Ah’ back came the answer, ‘but they’re not real Australian like us are they?’ I was tempted to point out to them that the surgeon to the Port Phillip Association, Dr Alexander Thomson, claimed that the Irish were ‘utterly
useless ... intellectually inferior even to the aborigines’, and Governor Arthur begged the Colonial office not to send Irish convicts to Australia, as they would lead to the impoverishment of the colony’s intellectual and spiritual life’, but I felt those pieces of information would have fallen on deaf ears and my suggestion that the ‘real Australians’ were the aborigines would only bring forth more ignorance and intolerance than I felt up to fighting. I decided to leave them ‘as ignorant as Paddy’s pigs’ (a common derogatory term about the Irish), blissful in that ignorance.

I am well aware that racism is not confined to Australia. Other countries have their Pauline Hansons, their Le Pens, their Ian Paisleys, their Enoch Powells, their Ku Klux Klans, to say nothing of the neo-Nazi groups that have arisen all over Europe. By mentioning these bodies I am not excusing Hanson. I am simply pointing out that Australia is not unique. Nor is it unique in its barbaric behaviour towards the indigenous population. Where Australia is unique I believe is in the continuation of that policy towards the aborigines today.

We all know that racism played a central role in Australia’s Federation (1901) with White Australia firmly nailed to its masthead. When Dr Lois O’Donoghue launched 1901 – Our Future’s Past she pointed out that ‘the Fathers of Federation had put indigenous people in the Constitution only to exclude us’, in any census taken aborigines were not to be ‘counted as
part of Australia’s population’. Aborigines were considered an inferior race which under the laws of Social Darwinism would eventually die out. It was not until the referendum of 1967 thirty years ago when 90% of Australians voted to make aborigines Australian citizens.

I quote from Alfred Deakin, one of the founding fathers of Australian Federation, an intelligent, cultured, widely read man. (Compare Thomas Carlyle and his essay on ‘The Nigger Question’.) Deakin objected not only to the Chinese but to all who could not become ‘Anglicized without delay’. This included ‘Southern Europeans of the lower Latin type’. What is perhaps most fascinating is his fear of the civilized ‘alien races’ with the Japanese singled out.

I contend that the Japanese require to be excluded because of their high abilities. I quite agree ... that the Japanese are the most dangerous because they most nearly approach us, and would, therefore, be our most formidable competitors. It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors ... the faculties that make them dangerous to us are those which make their labour so cheap and their wants too few. The effect of the contact of two people, such as our own, and those constituting the alien races, is not to lift them up to our standard, but to drag our labouring population down to theirs. It is the business qualities, the business aptitude, and general capacity of these people that make them dangerous, and the fact that while they remain an element in our population, they are incapable of being assimilated.

Already the economic fears and racism were inextricably linked. In a time of recession and unemployment racism is quick to raise its ugly head as the outgoing chairwoman of the NSW Ethnic Communities Council, Ms Angela Chan pointed out just recently. We forget very quickly that when we needed labour we very rapidly obtained it from any source we could, as was the rest of the Western world (see Peter Lyssiotis’s montages, pp. vi, 22). When we no longer need it we try to throw it back. Malcolm Fraser, himself a Liberal, pointed out to John Howard on the ABC television programme, Prime Ministers on Prime Ministers, ‘Now people say immigration takes jobs, but as immigration has been reduced unemployment becomes more entrenched’.

The other scapegoats were the Asians, particularly the Chinese, many of whom had been brought as miners during the gold rushes of the 1850s, just as migrants from Europe and eventually Asia were brought in after the Second World War to supply much needed labour for the great industrial boom that followed that war. Peter Lyssiotis’s montage reminds us, ‘To those lands which have machines labourers shall be given’.

The policy of ‘White Australia’ was firmly nailed to Australia’s masthead and the Bulletin had as its motto until December 1960, ‘Australia for the Whiteman’. Known popularly as ‘the bushman’s Bible’ the Bulletin supposedly represented the ideals celebrated in the legend of the 90s, (the 1890s), the bushman’s legend, namely egalitarianism and a fair go for all. The only catch to it was ‘for all’. Like Pauline Hanson’s ‘For All of
Us’ the ‘all’ was far from being inclusive. ‘All’ meant being male, white and anti-intellectual and its values are perhaps best summed up by Harry in Thea Astley’s *It’s Raining in Mango*.

*I’m part of the established Australian social structure, he would say, and I can’t help it.*

mate
horse
dog
missus
wog
poof
boong
that’s
the
pecking order.

*See, he would say, a poem, a kind of poem of structure. And as many girls as you can get on the side.*

*Do they count? someone might ask.*

*You’re kidding, he would say.*

The idea of Australian and mateship was taken to ridiculous limits when T. Inglis Moore, an arch-nationalist stated in his book *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*, that Patrick White’s novel, *The Tree of Man*, was both undemocratic and un-Australian (for Inglis Moore the two were synonymous). The reason for his judgement? Stan Parker, the hero of the novel, didn’t have a mate!

We are told that John Howard takes with him to each office to which he moves, three pictures, Winston Churchill, Mrs Thatcher and Russell Drysdale’s painting ‘The Cricketers’. The first two I can easily understand, the third is no doubt attributable to Mr Howard’s declared love of cricket. But let me say to you Mr Howard, what you are doing to the indigenous people of Australia and to many other ‘ordinary Australians’ is ‘just not cricket’. While the positive features of family life have long been recognized, white Australians have actively promoted the fragmentation of black families. No doubt you would adhere to the dictum, ‘The family that prays together stays together’. Tell that to the stolen generation. Or are one culture’s prayers superior to another’s?

Is it true, as Pauline Hanson insists, that we are a Christian country (I wonder if she knows the etymology of Christian) and that the prayers of the heathens, pagans etc. go unanswered! By the way back to the Catholics again. When South Australia advertised for new settlers it assured them that it was a state free from pagans and popery!

You are on record, Mr Howard, as saying, ‘Personally I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under past generations towards indigenous people. (He is referring to the stolen generation, see p. 14). [But] Australians should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions. But is it so hard to say ‘I’m sorry’ Mr Howard? I worked in Nigeria for some time and one custom struck me in
particular – namely, when any misfortune befell anyone the Nigerians, even though they had nothing whatsoever to do with what had happened, would always, and with genuine concern, say ‘Sorry’.

When it comes to Pauline Hanson, John Howard declares she is exercising her right to free speech. When it comes to the Australian actress Ruth Cracknell, who made the accusation that ‘this country [Australia] is being presented as racist, callous, and uncaring to our indigenous people’, John Howard’s reply was ‘Now, I find that offensive’. This is not to say that John Howard is not worried about the racist issue. He is. But not for the reasons we would hope for. His worry is that it will affect our trade and deter tourists and fee-paying students from coming to Australia. Recently a young Japanese tourist was murdered in Queensland. The Government worry was that this would have an adverse effect on our Asian tourist market. Not all Australians are so heartless. I quote from a letter from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 October 1997.

It is a sad day for this country when a Japanese citizen is murdered on our soil and our greatest concern is its effect on tourist. Where is our compassion?  

Sophie J. Kunze

Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, on his recent visit to Australia after condemning Hanson’s policies stated he believed ‘that any modern nation has got to come to terms with minorities and allow them their place in society’. Continuing he said there was no point in trying to preserve a ‘pure Australian identity, whatever that is’.

Father Frank Brennan, a Jesuit human rights activist believes thirteen frustrating years of Opposition actually managed to blindfold Howard and his colleagues to fundamental changes that were being wrought on Australian society. Brennan is convinced Howard persuaded himself that the voices that came to the fore in Australian society during those years were aberrations, symptomatic of a trendy, Labor-induced political correctness. The more strident tones of feminism, the human rights movement, the High Court decision on land-title rights for Aborigines, the gay movement, the ‘Asianization’ of Australia ... these and other uncomfortable incursions into a better-understood Australian culture could be explained away as periphery to the mainstream. Once the Coalition got back into Government ‘political correctness’ would be sidelined and the Australian mainstream would reassert itself.

Of course there are many who say like Hanson and her followers, ‘Well you might think we’re racist but look at those other countries who are far more racist’. And even if they agree (which Hanson doesn’t) that we committed acts of genocide against the aborigines they point to all those other countries that have done the same and are still doing it. But they’re not really white are they. It was therefore almost I feel with a great deal of smugness and glee that Sweden’s forced sterilization program, was reported in the Australian press. The heading of one major article was ‘Swedish by Design’ with the subtitle ‘We thought of Sweden as the
perfect state – caring, fair and at the forefront of the international battle in
defence of human rights’. And what have we found out? That over a
period of forty years the Swedes forcefully sterilized people, not because
of race or colour, but according to Majia Runcis, who has examined this
state authorized programme as part of her doctoral thesis: ‘You [had] to
behave yourself and act like a “typical Swede”. Judgements were based
on “social behaviour that was deemed threatening because people were
difficult or unusual … the victims were misfits in a collective society that
cherished uniformity above all”’. (Remember nobody’s different unless
they’ve got something wrong with them.) Like the massacres of the
aboriginal people no mention of these sterilizations have, according to
Dagens Nyheter, a major Swedish newspaper, appeared in Swedish text
books or Swedish encyclopaedias. Incidentally, the victim featured in the
article on Sweden was a woman called Maria Nordin. She had fallen
hopelessly behind in her school studies and the doctor classified her as
‘feeble-minded’. No-one had bothered to check her eyes and Nordin,
who had no glasses, could not see the blackboard.

‘See’, say the smug Australians, ‘what a so-called perfect social welfare
state can do. Look what Howard and Pauline Hanson are saving us from’.

Japan too, like Sweden, has refused to acknowledge in its textbooks its
dark history nor will it say ‘I’m sorry’. As the leader in The Sydney
Morning Herald, 5 September 1997 wrote:
The case of the poisoned textbooks remains a constant proof that Japan, unlike
Germany, continues to resist facing the truth about its war history. This resistance,
along with the Government’s refusal to fully apologise for wartime atrocities
between 1942 and 1945, must raise questions about Japan’s capacity to play a role
in regional security arrangements. It should also be a warning to those who sneer
at the so-called ‘black-armband’ interpretation of Australia’s history. Australia
must also be prepared to confront ugly aspects of its own past.

I can’t agree more with the last statement. The notoriously racist former
Minister for Australian Immigration, Arthur Calwell, defended the
deporation of a Chinese refugee who, he claimed, was not eligible to
become a permanent resident of Australia

There are many Wongs in the Australian community, but I have to say – and I’m
sure that the Honourable Member for Balclava will not mind me doing so – that
“two Wongs don’t make a white”.

No, two Wongs do not make a white. Neither do many wrongs make it
right for Australia to ignore its shameful past. As David Ross, Chairman
of the Indigenous Land Corporation, Canberra, ACT, wrote in his letter
to The Weekend Australian, 26-27 April 1997.

We are about to enter a new age of squatting. The beneficiaries will not be
struggling farmers on small holdings, but the pastoral companies and international
corporations which have already benefited from a massive land theft and a
century of exploiting Aboriginal labour.

The real history is a violent land grab by squatters whose killings or reprisal
raids were tolerated or even actively supported by colonial authorities ... The
Commonwealth is poised to implement “effective extinguishment” to give
pastoralists the “certainty and predictability” the Prime Minister says they deserve.
It is not just our intellectuals and 'chardonnay socialists' who are leading the fight for justice. I am on record as saying – and meaning – that it has always given me pleasure to beat the establishment. When it comes to the present situation in Australia I am forced to eat my words. And I'm forced to do so because some of the most outspoken opponents of the injustices to so many Australians today could not be called anything but establishment. They include amongst others Alec Shand QC; Michael Kirby QC; Malcolm Fraser, former Liberal Prime Minister of Australia; Archbishop Hollingsworth; Sir William Deane, Governor-General of Australia; Jesuit Frank Brennan and Sir Ronald Wilson. All of these men have been close to power, prestige and privilege in their lifetime and inside the door of the 'establishment'. Some, indeed, have even been vilified as 'Capitalist Pigs! The Patriarchy!' But now they represent the radical fringe. All of them, in one way or another, providing a voice for the voiceless.

The New Zealand novelist, Janet Frame, once said, 'They reduced us to nothingness, then scorn us for the nothingness'. There could be no better application of these words than towards Australia’s indigenous population. This next section will take up the question of the stolen generation.

Sir Ronald Wilson was appointed by the former Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating to look into the question of 'the Stolen Generation', the title given to the Aboriginal children who had been forcibly removed from their parents and put into institutions or foster homes. Some were never
to see their parents again. Many were brutalized and treated as slaves. The council set up was known as HREOC, conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Community. The Inquiry took the form of interviewing and gaining evidence in public and private sittings from indigenous people, government and church representatives, former mission staff, foster and adoptive parents, doctors and health professionals, academics, police and others. People also made written submissions. Most hearings were conducted by Sir Ronald Wilson, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson. The Inquiry was not ‘raking over the past’ for its own sake. The truth is the past is very much with us today, and the continuing devastation of the lives of indigenous Australians. The results do not make for pretty reading.

Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia.

In that time, not one indigenous family has escaped the effects. Most families have been affected in one or more generations by the removal of one or more children. Nationally, the Inquiry concludes that between one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.

Perhaps the last words should be left to the Aborigines.

We may go home, but we cannot relive our childhoods. We may reunite with our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunties, uncles, communities, but we cannot relive the 20, 30, 40 years that we spent without their love and care, and they cannot undo the grief and mourning they felt when we were separated from them. We can go home to ourselves as Aboriginals, but this does not erase the
attacks inflicted on our hearts, minds, bodies and souls, by caretakers who thought their mission was to eliminate us as Aboriginals.

The report called Bringing Them Home was submitted to the Federal Attorney in April 1997, and needless to say it did not please Australia’s present Prime Minister. Nor would he have been pleased when the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr Ramos-Horta, called Australia’s Aborigines one of the ‘most victimised and dispossessed people in the world’. Seemingly impervious to such criticism, John Howard says he wants Australians to feel ‘comfortable and relaxed about their past’. Hence his refusal to say ‘I’m sorry’. The man who wants Australia to introduce a national Sorry Day which would stop the nation for a few minutes like the Melbourne Cup (a horse race) does, has not been reappointed. Sir Julius Nyere would have approved of the sticker Sir Wilson once had on the bumper bar of his car. ‘Live simply so others may simply live’. He has just been elected unopposed to the presidency of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. We can be certain he will carry on the battle for the disadvantaged and dispossessed. Political correctness has been invoked as a term of abuse for those people who have thought to bring marginalized people into the framework of a unified nation. Sir Ronald Wilson’s reply to that is, ‘I’m happy to be seen as politically correct if that means being sensitive to the problems of the disadvantaged’.

Not only has the Howard government tried to introduce its 10-point plan, it has also planned to reduce a support system for aboriginal children known as Abstudy. This reduction will come into effect on 1 January 1998. Abstudy’s aim was/is to give the underprivileged a chance to obtain a better education which will enable them to fight for their own rights. There are some Aborigines already in this position but they are very few and far between. It is not that the Aborigines fighting for their rights do not appreciate the support of the other Australians; Ron Wilson spoke of the bond that had been made with Mick Dodson, a bond he said that ‘cannot be severed’. But like all people when it comes to fighting for one’s rights, one always feels more secure if the person fighting for you comes from your own background. Whilst writing this I am reminded of the tragedy at a football match in Belgium where a surge of British supporters caused a wall separating them from rival Italian supporters to collapse. Many of the latter fans were killed and it was decided that the trial would take place in Belgium where the incident occurred. A hue and cry went up from the British because they said they could not expect the same sort of justice from the Belgian court as they would get from the British courts. I wonder how many of these British fans saw the film In the Name of the Father?

I have mentioned the intellectuals, the radical upper class – yes Australia does have a class system – the writers, artists and aboriginal leaders fighting for their rights and a better world. In Sydney on 10 August 1997 a Reconciliation concert was held as the first fundraiser for a people’s movement, Australians for Native Title (ANT) with the stated
aim of ensuring that the 10-point plan of John Howard does not become law. Speakers included indigenous leader, Professor Marcia Langton, who said that if the bill became law, it would ‘render Australia’s first people as propertyless relics of the frontier wars’. Further, the ‘modern squattocracy’ would win land for themselves in which other Australians – not only Aborigines – have underlying rights, because it is Crown land. Needless to say, Noel Pearson was also one of the speakers. He said, ‘I always, even in moments of despair, find myself being reminded that we must not be gloomy about the Australian people. There are sparks of goodwill, and empathy and decency lies in the hearts of most Australians I have come across’.

Should Noel Pearson look for them he is sure to find such people in a town called Newcastle. This is not just hometown patriotism speaking. It is also a truth acknowledged by the aboriginal groups working in this area who regard the town most sympathetic to their causes. Perhaps it is because one group of battlers recognizes another. In an article written by Milton Cockburn he described it as ‘a city of myths, but the one great truth is its vibrant tribalism and indomitable spirit’. There are indeed many myths about Newcastle, a dirty, bolshi, anti-intellectual town that would go on strike at the drop of a hat. Some of it true, some not. But there is one truth about it, it is a city that doesn’t know how to give up. It, more than any other city in Australia, represents the colonial syndrome. And as the Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, said just recently, ‘Newcastle is a resilient symbol of the state of the nation and its residents are the embodiment of the Australian spirit’. That’s what a politician has to say, might be your response. But I would remind you that Newcastle is Labor’s Blue Ribbon seat. Today it is embroiled in a major dispute between the coal miners and the multinational company, Rio Tinto. The government support for Rio Tinto is a potent symbol in its attempts to use its legislation to ‘facilitate’ companies’ efforts to rein in union power. The landlords – the owners and managers of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company – were of course ‘absentee’ landlords, the smoke-drowned town was not for them. At that time a great part of the wealth of Australia was being produced by the industrial workers, The Unknown Industrial Prisoner as David Ireland described them in his novel, but little if any of that wealth was returned to the workers. The wealth created by the multinationals goes mainly to the multinationals. I have a friend, Felix Mnthali, who is professor at the University of Lesoto. He told me once that should he ever teach Jane Austen’s novels, especially Mansfield Park, the first question he asked his students was, ‘Why doesn’t anyone work?’ Now BHP has announced its withdrawal from Newcastle to go offshore to a cheaper labour force which means the loss of 10,000 jobs in all. What was to rub salt into the wound was on the day the BHP announced its decision the executive of BHP held a party for its manager. It seems that Nero still fiddles while Rome burns. The
average unemployment figures for Australia have just been announced at 7.3%; in Newcastle they are 13.8% and more than half the population live below the poverty line. Surprisingly enough, given the circumstances, the Aboriginal resistance movements have found greater support in Newcastle than any other town or city.

Finally to the question of history. And what a vexed question that is. Pauline Hanson wants us 'to start the fight to regain our history, our heritage, our land, our pride, our patriotism, and all “that has been taken from us by successive governments’’. ‘History’, Salman Rushdie reminded us, ‘is the story of the winners’. Does Pauline Hanson really believe that ‘the aborigines were cannibals [who] killed and ate their own women and children’? (Pauline Hanson: The Truth). Do we want to return to that sanitized history of the past, what the novelist Shirley Hazzard has called the ‘toy-box’ of history? Do we wish to remain ignorant and hence unable to understand what injustices were really perpetrated against Australia’s original inhabitants? It would appear that that is John Howard’s desire. Speaking in the Sir Robert Menzies Lecture on 18 November 1996, Mr Howard said:

This black armband view of our past reflects the belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.

It is little wonder that Salman Rushdie wrote, ‘History has been the story of the winners’. And so it has been in Australia. I have asked over 100 young Australians what they learnt about the Aborigines. The reply of everyone was ‘Nothing’. The truth has been hidden by a veil of silence. If Australians ‘had known about this history’, as NSW Premier Bob Carr said, ‘they would have known about the stolen generation. This knowledge might have led to a greater understanding of the dysfunctional lifestyles forced on aboriginal families by government policies over many decades’.

I must admit that this editorial has cost me much effort and research and if I’m honest, anguish and sometimes despair, and I have to admit to times when I felt like saying, ‘Well what the hell. What can I do...
about it? Why don’t I, like so many others, just sit back and say – well that’s how it is’. But when I thought like that I was reminded of a conversation at the end of David Putnam’s film The Mission. For the benefit of those who have not seen what I consider to be a brilliant film, it is set in the time of the Holy Roman Empire when the Pope dictated who owned and ruled the world. A cardinal was sent to South America to adjudicate between Spain and Portugal over land controlled by Spain which Portugal wanted. In this jungle there existed a Spanish mission run by Jesuits, who for once had a good press, and gave haven to the indigenous people who were at the mercy of slave traders, both Spanish and Portuguese, though the Spanish denied they were slave traders. Against his will and conscience the cardinal agreed to the destruction of the mission. When the destruction was over he turned to the courtier who was his advisor and asked the question, ‘Was such destruction necessary?’ The courtier replied, ‘We must work in the world – the world is thus’. I have always remembered the cardinal’s reply, ‘No, thus we have made the world’. The cardinal then writes to the Pope. ‘So Your Holiness, your priests are dead and I am left alive. But in truth, it is I who am dead and they who live. For as always Your Holiness, the Spirit of the Dead will survive in the memory of the living’. I was reminded of these words by a statement made by the indigenous leader, Lois O’Donoghue, ‘We can and will forgive but we cannot forget’.

No, I am not personally responsible for the massacre and genocide of the aborigines, any more than my English relatives were responsible for the treatment of my mother’s Irish ancestors. BUT I feel I would be not just heartless but lacking in humanity if I did not do my best to help to rectify the wrongs of the past and to provide equal rights for all human beings. In a recent protest march in Newcastle against Hanson, Howard’s 10-point plan and racism, I carried a placard which read, ‘Tolerance is not enough. We must fight’. Remember, ‘Silence is the ancient language of the defeated’.

Being born and bred in Newcastle and fed during the long strikes by the unions, and having ancestors called Brady of whom it was said, ‘if any of them drown in the river don’t bother to look downstream for the body as it is sure to have gone upstream’, it is no wonder I am what I am. Defeat is a word alien to my vocabulary. It was only the other day that my lifelong friend, Sonia Walkom, reminded me that in squash, even if the final hung on the results I would, when it got to 8-8, always call 9. I can well understand why Sir Ronald Wilson carries Dostjoveski with him, quoting Katerina Marmeladov, who is turned out of her home with her three children on the day of her husband’s funeral: ‘O Lord, is there no justice in the world? Who should you protect if not us orphans? All right, we shall see! There is law and justice on earth. There is, there is! I’ll find it!’

And we will.
I would like to leave the final words to the children of Australia for it is in their hands our future lies. In a letter to The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 July 1997, a Gareth Kimberley commented about ‘Aussie kids ... at Canterbury Boys High School being relegated to the status of a minority group’. On July 19th there was a reply to his letter. I quote:

As past and present students of Canterbury Girls High School, we would like to reply to Gareth Kimberly in defence of the multicultural nature of an increasing number of Sydney high schools.

Our school does not consist of an arbitrary division between 8 per cent 'run of the mill' Aussie kids and 92 per cent non-English-speaking background kids. We were under the peculiar assumption that we are all Australian and that coming from a non-English-speaking background does not exclude you.

While those from Anglo backgrounds are a numerical minority, their views and beliefs are by no means relegated due to this fact.

Our experiences at Canterbury Girls have affirmed our view that the policy of multiculturalism is indeed 'wonderful'. If Mr Kimberley believes that a tolerant, open and bilingual student body will lead to support for Pauline Hanson, may we suggest that this is why we're struggling to become the clever country.

class

A present day representation of a happy Australian Multicultural class. Courtesy of My Macquarie Picture Dictionary, 1990

Housing Race Bias: So What’s New?

One Birmingham (UK) letting agent, himself an Asian, had a special coding system for people seeking accommodation. The letter G on the client’s card meant West Indian or Asian, while the letters OYS stood for Irish, Chinese and students respectively. Reported in The Guardian, 16 September 1980.

An advertisement, on plain paper with no letterhead, described a house [in Sydney] as ‘highly desirable’ ... with a ‘lavish’ gas kitchen and ‘immaculate’ presentation throughout. And one more thing: it was in a street with ‘... no boarding houses or Kooris’. (Koori is an aborigine.) Reported in The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September 1997.
The Mabo case - Eddie Mabo and Others versus the State of Queensland - was a decision of the High Court which found that Aboriginal Native Title was not extinguished - or wiped out - by the British invasion and that Australia was not *terra nullius*, Latin for 'empty land'. It was the first major step in the restoration of Aboriginal traditional land rights and was finally settled in the High Court of Australia on 3 June 1992.

2. Wik is the name of an Aboriginal group which live in North Queensland. The Wik people's land had been granted to a grazier as a 'pastoral lease' but for many years the land had not been used. The Wik people took the case to the High Court of Australia to find out if their Native Title still existed there. The High Court decided that the Wik people's Native Title Rights were not extinguished and that the Aborigines have a right to use Wik land for traditional purposes, and to have a say in its future. This right co-exists with the pastoralists' right to use the land for pastoral purposes. Under pressure from the pastoralists, rich individuals, Foreign Companies, Mining Companies and Land Speculators, John Howard has introduced a 10-point plan amendment challenging the High Court's Wik decision. The winners - those just mentioned; the losers, not only the Aboriginal and Torres Strain Islander Peoples but all Australians concerned with our environment and even more so with reconciliation with Australia's original inhabitants. Numerous instances have shown that Aboriginals and pastoralists and mining companies can work in harmony with one another. Wik and Mabo can and will work, and all groups can live in harmony given the willingness to try. John Howard, in his determination to push through his 10-point plan is willing to defy the Australian Law Reform Commission which has stated that Howard's planned amendments will effectively extinguish native title on pastoral leases and is unconstitutional. If Howard succeeds he will make Australia a pariah.

On Australia Day Mr Bob Burgess, National Party candidate for the seat of Leichhardt in North Queensland described a naturalization ceremony as a 'dewoggming' ceremony. The word WOG of course derives from the pejorative term applied ironically by the British to Western Oriental Gentlemen. In Australia the word 'wog' is a pejorative term used to describe Australians of Mediterranean background. When Mr Burgess applied the term 'Dewogging' he implied 'that candidates for citizenship are contaminated by and must be purged of their previous cultural and national identity, as if naturalisation ceremonies resemble the quarantine procedure whereby plane travellers arriving in Australia are sprayed with insecticide before being allowed to disembark - an idea reinforced by another meaning of wog as both a minor illness and the organism which causes it'. Mr Burgess thought he was being funny. Most Australians didn't. Mr Katter, who holds the adjoining National Party seat to Mr Burgess attacked Mr Burgess's critics as 'little slanty-eyed ideologues'. As Dorothy Jones remarks, 'substitute "degooking" [a gook is a pejorative term for an Asian] for "dewogging"' and the latent hostility in Mr Burgess's remark becomes more obvious.
Photo montage by Peter Lyssiotis