The 'white worrier' in South Australia

Attitudes to multiculturalism, immigration and reconciliation

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Abstract

In his analysis of 'paranoid nationalism', Hage (2003: xii, 2) coins the figure of the 'white worrier' to identify how white Australians marginalized by the inequalities of economic rationalism and globalization displace their anxieties onto even weaker 'others', Aboriginal people and migrants, particularly refugees. Hage's ideas are applied to the discourses used by young South Australians when they discuss Australian multiculturalism, immigration and reconciliation. Hage's suggestion that white worrying is the response of the white working class male to his economic and ideological marginalization is only partially supported in this sample of young people. While those from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds are much less likely to be 'paranoid nationalists', fear and loathing of the other are expressed across the socio-economic spectrum of young 'white' Australians, with exposure to a university education, either on the part of respondents or their parents, being the main antidote to hostile attitudes to the 'other'.

Keywords: citizenship, immigration, multiculturalism, national identity, racism, reconciliation

> You ask me the big difference in Australian politics. The Howard government campaigns on fear. We campaign on opportunity. (Labor leader, Mark Latham, speech to the ALP National Conference in January 2004, in Starick, 2004: 19)

Ghassan Hage's (2003: 2) figure of the 'white worrier' refers to white Australians, particularly working-class men, who have been marginalized in recent decades by both economics and ideology. The working class Australian male was once at the centre of both the Australian economy and

Australian identity: applauded for his 'mateship' and 'egalitarianism', supported by the tripartite policy introduced a century ago, which Paul Kelly (1992) calls the Australian settlement: White Australia, tariff protection and the family wage. The Australian settlement was under threat from a changing global economy from at least the 1970s, threatening to unseat Australia from the sheep's back (e.g. see Schedvin, 1987). However, it was not until 1983 that a national government, the Hawke-Keating Labor government, embraced globalization and economic rationalism, attempting to combine it with an extension of symbolic citizenship to previously marginalized groups such as women, Asian-Australians and Indigenous people (Johnson, 2000: 59). This bold initiative imagined a multicultural Australia whose orientation was to Asia and in which gender equity was compatible with a deregulated domestic economy exposed to global competition. Keating's 'Big Picture' national story of Aboriginal dispossession, environmentalism, republicanism, gender equity and multiculturalism in fact constituted an 'ethical overreach' which was 'simply hand(ed)' down with no attempt to consult with the community, or to explain how these lofty plans would be experienced in daily life (Walter, 1996: 65).

Keating's 'ethical overreach' elicited white paranoia (Hage, 2003: 60; Schech and Haggis, 2000: 234) and electoral defeat in 1996. Paranoia particularly strong among those who suffered economically or ideologically, for example, blue-collar men and women whose factories closed down in the face of competition from Asia or family farmers whose incomes were no longer supported by government pricing policies. The rising tide of insecurity and racism was exploited by Pauline Hanson, who, ousted from Liberal endorsement, won the seat of Ipswich (Queensland) in the 1996 federal election, on a platform against the Aboriginal and migrant 'industries' that she claimed were oppressing ordinary white Australians. Indicative of the rising tide of illiberalism in Australia is that Hanson was spurned by the Liberal Party in 1996, but the incoming (conservative) coalition Prime Minister, John Howard, gradually adopted her racist policies (Johnson, 2000: 58, 64–5).

Hage suggests that today Australian citizens live in a new ideological climate, not one that pits the left against the right. Rather, a small-l-liberal, largely middle class population supported by churches and human rights organizations has become 'the outraged defender, the last bastion of an ethical and decent society' (Hage, 2003: 7, 3, 2). Against this high ground taken by the 'moral minority', laps the 'moral majority', the 'paranoid nationalists', the 'white-and-very-worried-about-the-nation-subjects' (Hage, 1998: 10). Howard hailed the 'white worrier' by identifying an opposition between 'ordinary Australians' and the 'elites', usually defined as left-wing intellectuals and beneficiaries of various 'industries', like the Aboriginal industry: 'ordinary Australians are not Aboriginal, Asian, homosexual, lesbian, feminist or migrant' (Johnson, 2000: 64–5). Although

he may find comfort in the Prime Minister's rhetoric, Hage (2003: 3) claims that the paranoid nationalist speaks from a position of discursive weakness, expressing an 'insecure attachment to a nation that is no longer capable of nurturing its citizens'. 'The defensive society, such as the one we have in Australia today … creates citizens who see threats everywhere'.

Furthermore, Howard might echo the white worrier's ideological position, but his government is doing little to assuage his economic insecurity. The combined impact of globalization and economic rationalism (see Pusey, 1991) has created widening inequality of incomes. From arguably the most equally distributed income in the 'developed' world of the 1950s and 1960s, between 1976 and 1991 the gap between the bottom and top five per cent of households almost doubled (Pusey, 1999: 217–18). By the end of the century, 2.4 million Australians, or 13.3 per cent of the population, did not have enough money for basic, everyday needs such as housing, clothing and food (Yencken and Porter, 2001: 39). Instead of a strong welfare safety net and income redistribution through a progressive taxation system, a populist rhetoric encourages 'taxpayers' and 'decent Australians' to attack 'dole-bludgers' and others who receive social security as recipients of 'government hand-outs', neglecting the government handouts given to private schools or farmers experiencing drought assistance.

As Bauman (2003: 115) says, 'More than anything else, mixophobic sentiments are prompted and fed by an overwhelming feeling of insecurity'. The white worrier transforms his economic and emotional insecurity into a loathing of others. Worrying about the nation is really worrying about oneself. Hage's 'white worrier' is, then, of European background, working class and male. Hage's 'white worrier' is applied to research carried out in South Australia.

Methods

The Australian Research Council funded research explores, *inter alia*, whether or not Australian society is increasingly divided, not only in terms of income, information and opportunities, but also in terms of our moral maps of the nation (Hage, 2003: 4). To what extent do attitudes to a range of social issues, covering gender relations, ethnic relations, social security, environmentalism and so on, vary according to the socio-economic background of respondents; for example, their gender, ethnicity, education and occupation? A particular focus of the research was the attitudes of young people.

I used a combination of convenience and stratified sampling to secure samples of young South Australians who were university students (a first year social sciences class), high school students (11 schools, students in years 11 or 12) and clients of youth services (three services: for Aboriginal youth; an inner city service for mostly young white people; and a youth

service focusing on sexuality issues). In relation to the high schools, my plan was to secure at least one high school in each of the following categories: elite Protestant private (female, male and co-educational); middling socio-economic status Catholic (male, female and co-educational); government (representing both middle class and underprivileged areas; representing both rural and city students). While I secured a school in each of these categories, personal contacts proved crucial in gaining entry and networks usually determined the actual school sampled within each category. Most of the youth service clients had left high school before completing their high school certificate. The sample was stratified along the lines of social class and gender, while also oversampling ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander) respondents.

Between 2000 and 2003, questionnaires were distributed to respondents, most of whom completed the questionnaire during a class period or on-site (some youth service clients and school students completed their questionnaires at home). School students were asked to take home a similar questionnaire for their parents to complete and return to me in a self-addressed envelope. The parents of university student and youth service clients were not sampled.

The total data set consists of 575 respondents, of which the 32 respondents, or 3.6 per cent, born in an overseas English-speaking country have been excluded from the analysis (explaining why percentages do not always sum to 100 in Table 1). The sample considered in this article contains 427 young people, of whom the bulk are school students (336), followed by clients of the three youth services (53) and university students (38) (see Table 1). Of the 82 per cent who were Australian born, 7 per cent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. Fourteen per cent were born in a non-English speaking country. While some of the sub-samples are small and stratified sampling does not seek to produce a truly representative sample, the strength of this data set lies in its deliberate skewing to over-represent two marginalized groups: Aboriginal youth and those who have left school before completing high school. The research design allows comparison of these groups' attitudes with those of a wider sample of young people. The views of the 116 parents of school students (a response rate of 34.5%) are discussed briefly for comparative purposes, the focus being on the views of young people at the centre of the study.

Attitudes to Indigenous and immigration issues were operationalized in the four statements/questions listed below. The manager of Inner City Youth Service, the first youth service sampled, required a change in some of the statements, as she felt that her clients would not understand the wording developed for the school-based questionnaire:

1. The Prime Minister should say 'sorry' to Aboriginal people because of the stolen generations.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by source and ethnicity

	Born Australia			Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (N)			Born NES (Europe, Asia, South America, other)			Total of this sample*		
	female	male	total	female	male	total	female	male	total	female	male	total
Client youth service	27	22	49	10	14	24	3	1	4	30	23	53
			92.5			45.2			7.5			
School student	182	114	296	8	5	13	27	13	40	209	127	336
			86.8			3.9			11.7			
University student	26	7	33	0	0	0	3	2	5	29	9	38
Parent	64	22	86	0	2	2	14	16	30	78	38	116
			66.7			1.7			23.3			
Total	299	165	464	18	21	39	47	32	79	346	197	543
575*			79.7			6.7			14.0			
Of whom are ATSI	18	21	39									
	6.0	12.8	8.4									

Notes: Percentages are of respondent type = Australian born, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, NES background.
* The ATSI group are included within the Australian-born group and percentages in the table do not sum to 100% as those born overseas in an English-speaking country are excluded from the sample.

For youth services this statement was 'Do you think the Prime Minister should say 'sorry' to Aboriginal people because of the stolen generations?'[1]

2. Aboriginal people who have lost their land should have access to land rights or to compensation.

For youth services this statement was rephrased as the question: 'Do you think Aboriginal people are treated fairly?' (The numerical responses for this question were reversed in the analysis.)

3. It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation.

This statement was omitted from the youth service sample, on advice that clients would not understand the issue.

4. Immigrants should have access to the same welfare benefits as people born in Australia.

For youth services this statement was rephrased as: 'Do you think that people who come to Australia should have the same stuff as everyone else?' Thus the results are only strictly comparable across the different samples for the first question. Respondents were asked to say whether they 'agree strongly', 'agree more than disagree', 'disagree more than agree' or 'disagree strongly', with the option also of ticking 'no opinion/don't know'. There was space to make any comments should the respondents wish.

Discussion of results

The data in Tables 2 to 6 show the whole sample of respondents stratified in terms of the variables identified in each table. Father's and mother's occupational status and educational achievement are based on self-reporting by the respondent, the occupational description coded into ABS occupational categories in the case of occupation and tick boxes securing data on education.

As can be seen from Tables 2 to 6, there is much more support for multiculturalism than the other three issues, with least support for the Prime Minister saying sorry. Females are more supportive of all the social issues than males (Table 2). The social science university class is much more supportive than the other samples across all the issues (Table 3), suggesting that tertiary education in the humanities and social sciences is correlated with the humane 'moral minority' position identified by Hage. The high support for the two Aboriginal issues among the youth service clients sample might seem to contradict the results for the university students. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents constitute about one-third of this sample, influencing the results.

The Australian-born are truly divided over land rights/compensation and an apology from the Prime Minister, only half supporting either of these

Table 2: Percentage of respondents who agree with each statement by gender: 'Agree strongly' and 'Agree more than disagree' combined

GENDER	Total (N=543)	Female (N=346)	Male (N=197)
It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation	92.5	94.8	88.1
Immigrants should have access to same welfare benefits as people born in Australia	62.3	66.1	56.1
The Prime Minister should say sorry	54.6	55.6	52.9
Aboriginal land rights/ are they treated fairly	58.4	61.0	54.1

Table 3: Percentage of respondents who agree with each statement by respondent type, ethnicity and socio-economic status: 'Agree strongly' and 'Agree more than disagree' combined

RESPONDENT TYPE	Total (N=543)	School student (N=336)	Clients of youth services (N=55)	Uni student (N=38)	Parents (N=116)
It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation	92.5	93.5	n.a.	100	87.8
Immigrants should have access to same welfare benefits as people born in Australia	61.9	62.4	50.0	78.4	59.0
The Prime Minister should say sorry	54.6	53.6	69.9	80.0	44.8
Aboriginal land rights/ are they treated fairly	58.6	59.2	75.0	79.4	44.7

Table 4: Percentage of respondents who agree with each statement by ethnicity: 'Agree strongly' and 'Agree more than disagree' combined

ETHNIC BACKGROUND: birthplace of respondent, whether identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Total (N=543)	ATSI (N=39)	Australian born (N=336)	NESB born (N=79)
It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation	92.9	93.3	91.5	98.6
Immigrants should have access to same welfare benefits as people born in Australia	62.5	52.9	57.7	87.1
The Prime Minister should say sorry	53.7	83.8	50.2	69.8
Aboriginal land rights/are they treated fairly	53.0	82.4	49.3	70.5

propositions, even to the limited extent of 'agree more than disagree' (Table 4). Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that those excluded from the 'field of whiteness' (Hage, 1998: 55) have distinctly different attitudes from the 'mainstream' 'white worrier'. In comparison with the evenly divided Australian-born respondents, over 80 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and about two-thirds of the non-English speaking background (NESB) respondents support these two aspects of Indigenous reconciliation. Similarly 90 to 100 per cent of the NESB respondents support the multicultural and immigration issues, although the ATSI respondents are slightly more supportive than the Australian-born only of multiculturalism and not of welfare benefits for migrants.

Hage (2003: 20) suggests that, suffering hope scarcity, white worriers become vindictive, bigoted, self-centred and jealous, especially of others who seem to be doing increasingly better than the white worriers. One would thus expect that liberal attitudes would be positively correlated with higher socio-economic status, the better-off being less fearful of others' successes. Tables 5 and 6 show the results for father's and mother's education and occupational status. The lower response rate for these tables reveals young people's uncertainty concerning, or unwillingness to disclose, their parents' education and occupation. While the differences in response rates are quite small for some questions, only in the case of land rights/Aboriginal people being treated fairly do the children of professional and managerial respondents evince a more liberal attitude than the children of those in other occupations (Table 5). One explanation for this surprising finding might be found in the relationship between ethnicity and socio-economic status. However, those from non-English speaking backgrounds tended to have a slightly higher occupational status than the Australian-born: 45 per cent of the NESB-born had fathers who were professional or managerial workers compared with 38 per cent of the Australian-born, while only 30 per cent of the ATSI respondents had fathers in this group, all being professional. But these results would lead one to expect that the professional and managerial respondents would be less sympathetic to the Indigenous issues and more sympathetic to the multicultural issues, rather than the reverse. A more likely explanation is that, while university education increases the likelihood of 'liberal' attitudes to race and ethnic issues, this relationship does not hold for those whose parents are in managerial positions.

The pattern for education is more in line with Hage's prediction. Respondents whose father or mother has a university degree are more likely to approve these statements, except for the small difference for father's education and multiculturalism. But there is also a body of liberal-minded respondents among those whose parents do not have a high school certificate (Table 6).

Table 5: Percentage of respondents who agree with each statement by occupation of parent as described by child: 'Agree strongly' and 'Agree more than disagree' combined

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Father's occupation (N=384)		Mother's occupation (N=297)	
	Prof or admin (N=198)	*White or blue collar* (N=186)	*Prof or admin* (N=146)	*White or blue collar* (N=151)
It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation	89.4	94.1	88.8	95.0
Immigrants should have access to same welfare benefits as people born in Australia	59.6	62.5	59.8	58.0
The Prime Minister should say sorry	47.8	54.3	52.1	52.6
Aboriginal land rights/are Aboriginal people treated fairly	57.1	55.3	63.2	52.4

One explanation of these results concerns the issue of how accurately young respondents report their parents' education and occupation, as suggested by some of the unusual combinations of education and occupation identified by respondents whose comments are discussed below, such as professionals who have not completed high school. Unfortunately, parents' self-reporting of their education and occupation could not be checked against children's reporting as the research was not conducted in such a way as to allow matching of parents with their children (parents' questionnaires being posted to me and students' usually collected in class). Despite the possibility of some errors in recording, these data suggest that 'white worriers' are identified more on the basis of ethnicity than on socio-economic status. In terms of income, being white is clearly more important than being economically disadvantaged in determining race-based attitudes. By contrast, education does have a significant impact, the white small-l liberal moral minority either being formed through or committed to tertiary education.

Let me turn now to an examination of the comments made by the 'white worriers', focusing on those who oppose multiculturalism or reconciliation rather than the majority, as they were in many cases, who support these policies. Some of these comments reveal the depth of fear and loathing among some respondents, that pure percentages do not capture. I coded respondents' comments, offered in relation to their answers, into 'social vocabularies', adapting Pilcher's (1998) notion of 'gender vocabularies'. Vocabularies are like discourses: 'From the point of view of discourses, the world offers us positions to occupy, which we are interpellated into. From

Table 6: Percentage of respondents who agree with each statement by education of parent as described by child: 'Agree strongly' and 'Agree more than disagree' combined

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Father's education (N=495)			Mother's education (N=515)		
	Uni degree (N=133)	HSC or TAFE (N=132)	<HSC (N=228)	Uni degree (N=121)	HSC or TAFE (N=188)	<HSC (N=236)
It is good that Australia is a multicultural nation	92.9	90.6	93.3	95.5	88.3	93.5
Immigrants should have access to same welfare benefits as people born in Australia	72.4	58.1	60.2	73.1	57.9	59.9
The Prime Minister should say sorry	50.7	50.4	43.2	59.8	50.0	53.9
Aboriginal land rights/are Aboriginal people treated fairly	64.0	58.2	54.8	74.8	51.2	52.5

these positions, individuals see the world and it "sees" us' (Hobson, 2000: 240). Many respondents displayed familiarity with media and political commentary, which often formed a dominant rationale for an item. For example half the comments made in relation to welfare benefits for migrants suggested that such benefits should only be provided to 'deserving' migrants (and not to 'illegals' and so on). Similarly, that the Prime Minister should not say sorry because the stolen generation was not his 'fault' was used by one-third of the non-Indigenous respondents to oppose saying sorry, although only 14 per cent of the Indigenous respondents considered this to be significant (see Table 7).

To many non-indigenous respondents, the stolen generation is an issue of the past, which does not touch present generations, not even Aboriginal people: 'the Aboriginals today had nothing to do with the stolen generation, except that it might be one of their ancestors' (rural public high school, female, Australian-born, mother has TAFE qualification and is a professional, father left school before completing high school and is unemployed). Those non-Aboriginal respondents who endorsed an apology tended to see it as a gesture for Aboriginal people rather than an aspect of reconciliation: 'It wasn't us who did it, it was [our] ancestors, … but a sorry would be nice on their behalf' (youth services, female, Australian born, both parents left school before completing high school, mother is a labourer, father is an unemployed tradesman). Where so many non-Aboriginal respondents saw this issue as in the past, it was not a matter of history for two Aboriginal respondents:

> He should support our people, our land and he continues to destroy our families, our future. They still take us from our families, the governments do. (youth service, male, Aboriginal, mother a university-educated professional, father left school before completing high school, occupation not stated)

> Yes, because it is still hurting the Aboriginals. (youth service, Aboriginal female, mother has TAFE qualification and father completed high school, both occupied with home duties)

Some of the discourses have no resonance beyond a particular item. Thus 'saying sorry' is about the national good to at least some respondents, but land rights is not; multiculturalism is about tolerance and celebrating diversity for half those making comments, but welfare for migrants is not. The notion of one Australia or a sense of inclusiveness was used by the ATSI respondents in relation to saying sorry, but few of the other respondents understood the impact on reconciliation that this gesture is intended to have.

Very few respondents understood any of these issues in terms of structural inequality, that some groups in society are systematically disadvantaged in relation to other groups, on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity or race, for example (particularly distressing when some of them were social

Table 7: Discourses used for the various questions (percentages do not sum to 100 as not all categories are included)

SAYING SORRY	Australian-born (N=212)	NESB (N=23)	ATSI (N=22)
Equality	.5	4.3	0
Fairness, fair go	2.4	4.3	4.5
Structural inequality	0	0	0
National good, one Australia	8	4.3	18.2
Seeks balance between competing values/interests	3.3	0	0
Not PM's fault	33.5	34.8	13.6
Other	48.1	47.8	63.6

LAND RIGHTS	Australian-born (N=156)	NESB (N=15)	ATSI (N=21)
Equality	10.3	13.3	14.3
Fairness, fair go	9.0	20	9.5
Structural inequality	2.6	0	9.5
National good, one Australia	0	0	0
Seeks balance between competing values/interests	9.6	13.3	0
Other	52.6	40	66.7

MULTICULTURALISM	Australian-born (N=116)	NESB (N=9)	ATSI (N=2)
Equality	2.6	0	0
Fairness, fair go	0	0	0
Structural inequality	0	0	0
National good, one Australia	4.3	0	0
Seeks balance between competing values/interests	6.9	0	0
Tolerance/celebration of difference/diversity	52.6	66.7	50
Other	30.2	33.3	50

WELFARE FOR MIGRANTS	Australian-born (N=116)	NESB (N=9)	ATSI (N=18)
Equality	13.9	28.6	22.2
Fairness, fair go	1.3	7.1	11.1
Structural inequality	0	0	0
National good, one Australia	0	0	0
If deserving, e.g. 'legal', work hard etc.	49.4	21.4	16.7
Seeks balance between competing values/interests	7.6	0	16.7
Tolerance/celebration of difference/diversity	1.3	0	0
Other	26.6	42.9	33.3

sciences students in a class I was teaching!). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were most likely to use the structural inequality justification in relation to unfair treatment of Aboriginal people, such as 'no, it's even shown through statistics that aboriginal people are not as healthy as the non indigenous communities for example' (youth service, male, Aboriginal, mother left school before completing high school, home duties, no data given for father).

Equality or fairness, invoked more so by the NESB respondents, supported extending welfare to migrants. But respondents were much more likely to oppose such extension unless the migrants were 'deserving', e.g. were not 'illegals' or they worked hard. Similarly, while equality and fairness were the most common vocabularies used in relation to land rights, the concepts were used as often to oppose as to endorse land rights or compensation. A study of the race-related discourses produced by eight university students studying psychology found that even university students will blame inequality on Aboriginal people, because of their 'very very primitive' culture which does not 'fit' with the Anglo-Australian culture (Augoustinos et al., 1999: 359), a situation not helped by the government 'throwing money' at the problem (Augoustinos et al., 1999: 362–3). In endorsing 'one Australia – nationalism as unifying theme' (Augoustinos et al., 1999: 369), these students, like my respondents, opposed what they saw as the 'special treatment' of land rights and so on. Instead, 'we should just share' (rural high school, male, Australian-born, mother high school certificate and home duties, father TAFE qualified tradesman): 'isn't Australia based on equality?' (public high school, male, Australian-born, father Asian-born, parents completed high school, no occupations given: note parents' ethnic background only indicated when not Australian-born).

By contrast, the Aboriginal youth service clients, in answer to the question concerning fair treatment for Aboriginal people, painted a picture of racist stereotyping and unfairness in 'just about everything':

> If a person of a different culture sees an Aboriginal drunk he assumes every member of our race is the same. This is different with white kids. (youth service, male, Aboriginal, both parents left school before completing high school and mother unemployed, no occupation given for father)

> There is fairness in the eyes of the law but not all people. (youth service, male, Aboriginal, both parents university educated professionals)

Such understandings were not confined to Aboriginal respondents, although they were less common among the non-Indigenous respondents:

> Invisible, insidious prejudices still exist for Aborigines (i.e. when applying for a job, or a house) and the fact that we don't admit it makes it worse. Also, some third world diseases exist in outback aboriginal communities which could be prevented with a bit of funding for adequate health services. (youth service, female,

> Australian-born, mother high school educated managerial worker, father university-educated and unemployed)

Even 'equality of opportunity', captured in the vernacular of the 'fair go', was rarely used to justify liberal social attitudes. Indeed egalitarianism was invoked to deny land rights because they were construed as 'special measures' given to continually complaining Aboriginal people who already receive more than a fair share of welfare. These comments echo the premise of popular reality television shows like *Big Brother, Survivor* and *The Weakest Link*, that 'Life is a hard game for hard people' and people are disposable (Bauman, 2003: 88). Similar is the discourse constructed by largely male contributors to 'aus.politics'. The 'other' – Aborigines or Asians – demand special deals, thus demonstrating they are anti-egalitarian, unlike 'true' Australians (Lattas, 2001: 121). Andrew Lattas argues that 'The suffering of others is presented as a brutal reality that we have to live with in a world full of suffering and so why should we discriminate between sufferers' (Lattas, 2001: 117,110). This is a variant of Hage's 'worried-about-the-nation' (= me) citizen.

One respondent explicitly said that 'The government has done a few disservices to me too, now when will they say sorry to me?' (Catholic school, mother, Australian-born, both parents left school before completing HSC, mother home duties and father a tradesman). Another complained:

> My father was involved as a soldier fighting the Japanese – does this mean that they should apologise to me? Or I should scorn them? Of course not! The current generation had nothing to do with the decisions taken 40–80 years ago. (rural high school, father, Australian-born, mother university-educated and doing home duties, father left school before completing high school and has managerial job)

Similarly:

> I am from Port Augusta which is a largely Aboriginal community. These people are given everything by the Government – housing, money to go to school etc. and they abuse this.… They also have free rein of our land that is not forbidden to them due to anti-discrimination laws. They would be discriminating against us if they were to have access to land rights. (Protestant school, female, Australian-born, mother TAFE-educated clerical worker, father university educated professional)

As commentators have noted, Australia's immigration policy has been developed against the expressed opinions of all but the tertiary educated (and recent arrivals) (Hage, 1998: 241; Betts, 1999: 116, 336). Prime Minister Fraser rebuked public opinion when he welcomed, not only the 2000 Vietnamese boat people who reached Australia between 1976 and 1981, but implemented a resettlement scheme for over 15,000 Indo-Chinese asylum seekers. The Howard government was less generous when 11,000 people arrived before the imposition of the 'Pacific solution', although

mandatory detention had already been introduced by the Hawke-Keating Labor government (MacCallum, 2002: 21, 60).

Populist media commentary and public discussion generally eschew the term 'boat people' as it suggests that refugees are indeed human (MacCallum, 2002: 42–3). 'Queue jumpers' has become a popular term, as such people offend against the Australian notion of a 'fair go' (MacCallum, 2002: 42). As one of my respondents said, 'legal immigrants, not boat people. Those who have waited their turn and come in through the right process' (university student, female, Australian-born, mother completed high school and father left school before completing high school). In fact the term used most often in respondents' comments was 'illegal', which equates the refugees with criminals (MacCallum, 2002: 43). One-fifth of the respondents commented on 'illegal immigrants', even though the question did not ask them to do so:

> If they have come to Australia legally and through the right channels then yes they should. However, if they jump the queue and come illegally, then no, they should be sent back home. (middle class public high school, female, Australian-born, father UK-born, both parents left school before completing high school and have clerical jobs)

> But not if they are boat people, as they rip money off Australians and they mysteriously don't have any identification and no proof that they aren't criminals. (Protestant high school, male, Australian-born, mother has TAFE qualification and is a clerical worker, father university educated professional)

The 2001 election was fought and won on the basis of law and order, something that had never happened in an election before, according to two commentators. Howard retrieved the 7.5 per cent of voters lost to One Nation and ignited 'the rest of relatively civilized Australia, to feel a sense of solidarity about this preservation of the borders' (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003: 92–3). Hugh McKay's polling forecast in July 2001 found 'some of the most ugly and vicious outpourings of hatred occurred in discussion of boat people/illegal immigrants … passions aroused by fear of illegal immigrants and of Australia being "swamped by Asians"' (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003: 92). Paranoid nationalists fear 'ant-like' immigrants who overwhelm Australians, concerns that belie Australia's low immigration rates: 12,000 humanitarian and refugee places each year (Mares, 2001: 19). Thus, said my respondents: 'everyone would want to come to Australia' (Protestant private high school, female, Australian-born, mother a university-educated professional, father left school before completing high school and managerial worker):

> The Asian boat people think they can just come to our country and live here like it's theirs; it makes me very angry. (Protestant high school, male, mother born southern-Europe, other data not provided)

As Hage (1998: 44) notes, the solution is to 'send "the Arabs" "back" to where they were perceived really to belong':

Immigrant[s] can go get fucked and stay in their own fucking country. (public high school, male, Aboriginal, mother has TAFE qualification and is a professional, father left school before completing high school and is a tradesperson)

But, as Ang (2001: 189) points out, Australian whiteness is fragile: this insult, 'Why don't you go back to your own country!', is precarious out of the mouths of all but Aboriginal Australians.

Supporting Hage's claim that economic insecurity drives paranoid nationalism as much as ideological marginalization is a thread running through the comments that worry about the incapacity of Australia's already stretched welfare system to support migrants or Aborigines. As one respondent tartly commented: 'illegals' just 'sap the country' (Catholic high school, male, Australian-born, both parents completed high school and have professional jobs). Aboriginal compensation demands amount to 'taking money from the innocent public' (Protestant high school, male, Australian-born, both parents completed high school, mother is a professional and father has managerial position); 'the Abos would all sue Australia. The stolen generation is over!' (Protestant high school, male, Australian-born, mother has a TAFE qualification and is a professional, father is university-educated manager). Compensation would be wasted on 'drunk and violent' Aboriginal people who already received 'too much' assistance, failed to develop their land (Protestant high school, male, Australian-born, mother TAFE-qualified professional, father university qualified managerial worker) or would make fabricated claims against 'us' (Catholic high school, male, Australian-born, parents Asian-born, father university qualified, no other data given).

Most respondents were not 'white worriers' on the issue of multiculturalism. This was endorsed as representing 'one nation' in which all Australians can be enfolded in the definition of 'us'. The most popular justification for multiculturalism among my respondents was 'tolerance and celebration of difference or diversity', a vocabulary not used in relation to the other items. Even so, Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis found in their interviews with young Anglo-Australians a 'persistent incoherence' in their sense of self, passionately endorsing a multicultural Australia in which everyone 'could be themselves', but also 'unable to articulate this beyond the repetitive, and somewhat anxious', sentiment that 'we should be one country' (Schech and Haggis, 2000: 230; Ang, 2001: 197). Whiteness emerges as lack – 'Anglo-Australians have nothing to dress up as on multicultural days at school' (Schech and Haggis, 2000: 234). Little wonder, then, that for my respondents 'more cultures means more fun' (public high school, male, Australian-born, father born northern Europe, both parents left school before completing high school, mother home duties and father a labourer), rather than anything that seriously challenges Anglo-Australian dominance in law and culture. For

some, multiculturalism was a constituent part of Australian national identity, making us 'unique', 'special', 'welcoming, laid back, relaxed': 'a good example to other countries that there are so many nations living here in peace'. For those who practise tolerance, the 'homely feeling, what makes Australia such a nice place, is generated by the presence of diversity' (Hage, 1998: 98).

However, as the responses to migration suggest, multicultural tolerance sets limits, if not of numbers, of the kinds of migrants 'we' want (Hage, 1998: 91). Ien Ang (2001: 198) suggests the limits are Asian migrants, while Hage (2003: 67) claims that the object of White Paranoia has moved from the swamping Asians that plagued Pauline Hanson to 'Muslims' and 'Islam'. My respondents expressed fears concerning 'violent ethnic gangs running our streets' (private school student, male, South American-born, mother and father have high school certificate, mother professional and father managerial); 'Asian, Vietnamese, Italian, Greek gangs' (private school student, male, Australian-born, mother a TAFE qualified professional, father a university educated manager); 'too many wogs, Chinese here and none of our own people' (open access college, female, Australian-born, both parents left school before completing high school and work in labouring jobs). Many drew a distinction between the nice 'creative multiculturals' as compared with the refugees and the boat people, who should be 'sent straight home': 'legal, English speaking immigrants – yes. Illegal or non-English speaking – no' (public high school, female, Aboriginal, mother TAFE qualified and father university qualified, both clerical workers).

Multiculturalism suggests neither 'special treatment' nor any drain on the public purse, and reflects bi-partisan government policy. But even in their comments on this widely supported Australian attribute, there was still a discourse of 'us' versus a 'them'. 'We' are usually white, long-suffering, but also suffering our own economic problems. 'They' are claiming special privileges or not playing fair. Nevertheless, the positive endorsement of multiculturalism does hint at the power of political leaders in relation to paranoid nationalism, particularly when they play wedge politics.

Conclusion: who is the 'white worrier'?

> I do not believe that Aboriginal people receive the same things and are treated as equals. They have also always been and still to this day are treated like they are outsiders and do not belong within society and each community, which is wrong!! (youth service, female, Australian-born, mother high-school certificate and clerical worker, father high school certificate and tradesperson)

The 'white worrier' is indeed white and is more likely to be male than female. However, as the female youth service client quoted above reveals,

discourses of caring and inclusion are not confined to Aboriginal people. Contrariwise, some Aboriginal respondents expressed brutal opinions on a number of issues, for example the young man who said that immigrants should stay in 'their own fucking country'. By contrast, one young Aboriginal woman noted that Howard should say sorry as the 'representative of Australia', that 'land should be equally shared throughout Australia', that multiculturalism makes our 'strong' country more 'interesting', and that life should be 'fair' for everyone (working class girls high school student, female, Aboriginal, mother university-educated professional, father left school before completing university and a production worker).

As can also be seen from the discussion of respondents' comments, loathing and resentment are expressed across the socio-economic scale. The white worrier may live on a farm up against the drought, in a lower middle class family struggling to send him to a private school, or a privileged family where individualism and economic rationalism have eradicated any sense of community obligation. Indeed, hardship, or at least relative deprivation, is no longer confined to the unemployed or working poor but is also the experience of the broad middle 70 per cent of Australians researched by Pusey (1999). Retrenchments through a reduction in government spending, casualization of the workforce, job insecurity, declining levels of home ownership, deferment of marriage and the birth of the first child, increased mortgage indebtedness and credit card borrowing have marred these families' sense of well-being (Pusey, 1999: 216–20), so that 62 per cent believe that 'incomes and job prospects for middle Australians are falling' (Pusey, 1999: 216).

Furthermore, perhaps the discourse of fear and loathing is articulated but not always practised by those denied a university education:

> I think we can distinguish this combination of concrete tolerance and abstract intolerance from another version of multiculturalism, in which abstract tolerance – such as temporarily enjoying someone else's culture and cuisine – exists alongside a very concrete intolerance. (Peel, 2003: 152)

Mark Peel (2003: 150), in his ethnography of three working class/poor suburbs in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, notes that most people worked well together across ethnic differences, agreeing that the real problems were 'poverty, unemployment, police targeting, especially of young men, feelings of uselessness drowned in grog or allayed in heroin, and people who were disconnected from their communities'. As Peel (2003: 151) suggests, in these suburbs 'people who spoke different languages and came from different backgrounds had the opportunity to practise real tolerance'.

In a recent speech, Mark Latham has reinforced his call to the white worrier with Labor's message of 'opportunity' as opposed to the government's

message of 'fear'. Latham draws on Keating's Big Picture, mixes in a dose of populism by celebrating Australia's sporting success, history of mateship, egalitarianism and the fair go, and pits these against individualism and commercialization. Latham proposes to extend mateship, this 'endearing part of the Australian character', to 'all Australians', a situation he suggests is 'already happening among younger generations, breaking down the barriers of gender and race'. Latham is claiming an economic as well as ideological alternative to Howard: 'Responsibility from all; opportunity for all, that's … what I want for Australia' (Latham, 2004). Table 3 indicates that young people are more liberal than their parents. The results also suggest that almost two-thirds of Australians are willing to extend equality of treatment to migrants, and over half are willing to engage in aspects of reconciliation indicated by a national apology and land rights. The persistent theme of downward envy in the comments offers further hope that, by attending to some of the economic insecurities confronting middle and disadvantaged Australia, an Australian government may indeed assist in displacing fear and loathing for a wider compassion and generosity of spirit, even among the 'white worriers'.

Notes

1 The 'stolen generations' is a term used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families. This was discussed in 'Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families' published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in 1997.

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