

# Fear and Loathing in Ipswich: Exploring Mainstream and Anabranh in the Race Debate

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## **Introduction**

In the early 1980s Poland was a society in turmoil. Marshal law held sway, and revolt was in the air. The hitherto unspeakable was being voiced and the social order was being rocked. In June 1983, along the back roads around Bialystok, close to the Russian border, banners hung across the pavement, inscribed with messages such as “Welcome Mother”. The altars by the roadside were covered with the flowers of late Spring, in expectation of the visitation of the Black Madonna of Czestechowa, Poland’s most powerful Catholic icon. A year before, the Catholic Church had turned up the heat on the military government, demanding the right to travel the image of the Virgin around the countryside, triggering what both the Church and the government knew would be an emotional avalanche of passionate denunciation of the old order. The regime refused permission - so the Church said it would tour the empty frame. We now face a similar empty frame, the face of the woman who is never named, the face of the woman who voices the deepest fears and psychic traumas of Australian society.

The media fascination with the Hanson phenomenon reflects an unstated recognition of the Howard/Hanson relationship, a metaphorical brother/sister incest in which he cannot name her nor face her, while she voices his deepest and most repressed feelings, and knows, oh how she knows, that she says out loud what his nightmares offer him, “inflamed

by me (Hanson) and condoned by him” (Hansard 4 November 1996). In this seduction, this tortured and unconsummated desire, she is the absence filling the empty frame, she is the iconic and black madonna of another time and place and people. One only has to view the headlines of October 31 1996 in the Sydney press, the day after the Parliamentary “vow of unity” condemning race discrimination (but not affirming either multiculturalism or Indigenous land rights) to see the powerful presence of her absence - “But where was Pauline Hanson?” (*Daily Telegraph*), “Hanson leaves Campbell to stand alone” (*Australian*) or “Hanson absent as MPs join to deplore racism” (*Sydney Morning Herald*).

We have seen the recent emergence of a populist racism into the “mainstream” of Australian popular discourse articulated by independent and related politicians, the content of which is extraordinary enough. We have then seen the Prime Minister apparently incapable of grasping the import of the situation, declaring it to be an exercise in free speech and the funeral pyre of political correctness. The front pages of the daily press scream the outrage that his inaction has prompted among the Asian press in the region. We then have a ground swell of conservative leaders trying to find safe ways of expressing their sense of astonishment and disbelief at his display, only to have the whole thing capped off by a remarkable desire by the Prime Minister to wish away the history of the colonial/settler society we are and replace it with a warm, fuzzy glow reminiscent of Milo and Arrowroot bikkies.

At the heart of this scenario lies a shifting centre of what it means to be human in our society, what rights one can claim, and how the public sphere can act to either erode or promote those

rights. By public sphere, I mean that realm of interaction of ideas, the proponents of which may be politicians, academics, journalists and media commentators, and the general public through the media-controlled device of polling, letters, and talkback radio. Many of us are interested in the way in which the media have worked up the Pauline Hanson phenomenon, seeing in the process a case study for exploring how the media provide a key arena for the operationalisation of the public sphere. Perhaps also we are fascinated by this terrier-like creature, snapping at the groin of the most powerful leader in recent Australian history, a man overwhelmingly endorsed as prime minister, a man who has stood up to those extraordinary machos, the gun lobby, and apparently won out.

Australian society is undergoing a significant transformation - the politico-cultural consensus of the past generation or more is being challenged and is facing a major transformation under a sustained ideological program of privatisation - of the economic realm, quite clearly, but also of the socio-cultural realm. For it is the re-conceptualisation of human rights from a social or group perspective to an individualised or privatised perspective that underpins the social agenda of the new Federal government, and with that shift, the delegitimation of the "social" as a realm for state intervention and action on behalf of the socially marginalised. For the media, which in a very important sense represent the space of the social, this shift creates significant challenges.

### ***Political Correctness, Racism and the Media***

John Howard's celebration of the end of political correctness, made on the night of his election in March 1996, and now, his exhilaration at the return of his perception of freedom of speech, reflect a deep angst at the heart of the old Australian culture - a desire that its racist, sexist, homophobic and misogynist history should be disinterred and vindicated as morally righteous. A few days after the election, John Hyde, a Western Australia senior Liberal,

echoed Howard's words when he identified (on ABC TV's *Lateline* with Maxine McKew as the interrogator) the eradication of political correctness as a primary goal of Coalition strategy in the realm of social and cultural policy.

John Howard had been badly hurt when he lost the leadership of the Liberal Party to Andrew Peacock in 1989. He believed that his own career and his chance of being Prime Minister at that time were both seriously injured by the charge of racism made by his critics. He had said that the mix of Australia's immigration intake should be changed if necessary in the name of "social cohesion". When questioned by the media on what he meant, it became clear that he was concerned that immigration from Asia might lead to social unrest and conflict (an argument that historian Geoffrey Blainey had also made in 1984) - and the way to avoid this was to limit the number of Asians in the country.

Howard felt that his comments were not racist, but were a legitimate contribution to the debate on population. His vision of "One Australia" had no place for those who could not integrate into his conception of Australian "mainstream" values. Howard blamed the multicultural lobby and the advocates of political correctness for his defeat - and he vowed to have his revenge on winning government. Since March 1996 we have seen that revenge in practice. The Howard dissembling and the Hanson histrionics are not momentary aberrations, not random fragments of disturbed individuals, but rather echoes of the monstrous perversions of humanity that are embedded in the very creation of the Australian Commonwealth - a nation in which the Indigenous people were classed with the indigenous fauna, where non-whites were non-human, where Colonial Premiers and then the first Prime Ministers raged against the moral decadence and intellectual decrepitude of Asiatics, and where it was believed that only white Europeans could possibly understand and operate a modern democracy.

From the outset of the Australian nation,

human rights issues have been central - the nation was concerned with democracy and equality - but it was equally as concerned to define the non-human and the extra-national and constitute them as outside the acceptable, and thus without rights. Pauline Hanson's mother, so wonderfully played by herself in the *Sixty Minutes* production of "Pauline Hanson, This is Your Life" (Channel 9, 20 October 1996), provided an archetypal model for someone imbued with the spirit of Federation and the struggle for national identity. She noted, that from her childhood she had been warned about the Yellow Races, and how they would come in and take over everything if given half a chance: for Mum Hanson, the eroticised imaginary of the Mongol octopus raping the virginal body of the young Australia (as in the Phil May cartoons from *The Bulletin* in the 1880s and 1890s) haunted her nightmares/fantasies, and saturated the domestic world in which the young Pauline learnt of the perils of the real world, and the dangers of picking pennies from the pavement.

The current furore about racism demonstrates the way in which the media offer a space for the exploration of not only the formal, public debates within the discourses of political civility, but also those drawn from the more subterranean and sleazy half-world of emotion and sado-masochistic fantasy. It allows us to understand the way in which public culture is a construct, constituted in struggle between ideologies and social forces, in which group interests become focussed through the activities of individual players, whose star status embodies the social network they are sensed to represent. Thus the media call up John Howard and Kim Beazley to represent the public interest - the majority - while Graeme Campbell, Pauline Hanson, and her "de-wogged" (qua Bob Katter originally) Svengali John Pasquarelli - are painted as minorities and, as well, the spokespeople for the "majority" which has been denied access to the public sphere.

## **The Public Sphere**

One of the most important indications of the

capacity of a society to deliver effective human rights can be found in the strength and depth of the public sphere. In the process of attacking political correctness what is in fact under attack is the public culture of Australian society, a fragile and momentary resolution of conflicts between economic, cultural and social values. The role of the media in this process is instructive as it has been an active participant in eroding the public sphere which it ostensibly is concerned to defend.

The calling-up of the public sphere as the arena for appropriate public debate, (reflected in the claim that political correctness had stifled debate under the Labor government) indicates a widespread belief (from at least John Howard across to Hanson and beyond), that the public sphere had been hijacked by a minority sentiment focussed in a particular Left intellectual network, located in key social and cultural institutions. The Bureaucracy (especially key PC minders such as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and its "special interest" offices - Aboriginal and Torres Island Affairs, Status of Women (and the network of feminists supporting it), and Multicultural Affairs, the universities and the now middle-aged academics who were part of the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, the "serious press" whose journalists and editors were created by that university system, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a sheltered workshop for the old New Left, are the major such institutions - though the state education Departments are also suspect locations for such dangerous practices as the new literacy.

While there are suggestions that the serious press (in particular *The Australian*) have attempted to provide deeper analysis of the issues for the elite, the popular media have found the racism debate a major source of excitement and heat. Yet this does not only work in one direction. Hanson has decided to avoid the ABC altogether - and also, as it turns out, Ray Martin's *A Current Affair* (Channel 9). Her boycott of the ABC is partly based on a claim, denied hotly by the ABC journalists involved, that the words "White trash" directed

at her by Aboriginal women during an early televised visit to an Aboriginal community, were edited out of the material that went to air. Martin has been banned because of his antagonistic views on her public statements, and his “bias” as a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The opening up of agendas to the right of Australian politics and the indulgence by the media, particularly the electronic media, in populist racism as a source of entertainment, suggest an important transformation is occurring in Australian popular culture. Whereas the social democratic terrain offered by Labor under Keating and Hawke located key media processes (e.g. talkback radio, popular current affairs television) on the edge of the political field, the attack on political correctness has moved these media practices into the centre ground, to the point where they almost seem to define the “public sphere” for the media (e.g. Alan Jones and the “phone-in” on Pauline Hanson; *Sixty Minutes* and the Hanson safari to Palm Island).

The careful targeting by proponents of racist views of specific media outlets and their “banning” of others, indicates a well-researched and effectively designed strategy of political niche marketing. In the context of a long history of the Australian media’s difficulty with and implication in the discursive practices of racist ideologies, the current situation offers a powerful insight to the relation between social power, agenda setting, the media and social inequality in Australia. It is worth examining a number of recent press and TV adventures with Pauline to get some sense of the media’s relationship with her, but more importantly, the sense(s) the media have of themselves as players in the re-constitution of Australian public culture. This is particularly relevant given the position taken both by Howard and Ruddock that the media are to blame for the destruction of community cohesion that Hanson’s views have riven (Howard in *The Australian*, 2 November 1996; Ruddock at the opening of the conference No longer Black and White, Melbourne University, 1 November 1996).

## **Mainstream and anabran**

There is now a considerable body of work on the way in which the media relate to Indigenous Australia and to cultural diversity more widely. One of the central tropes within which these relationships are constituted is that of “mainstream”. The cultural significance of this term cannot be underestimated, as it conveys enormous power to those political forces which can appropriate it, and claim to represent it. The mainstream is that part of the river which moves most unswervingly towards its end, the part that is cleaner, crisper, clearer and stronger. It is the heart of the river, un-deterred by the hanging roots of the willows, distanced from the muddied beaches cut up with cattle hooves, yet also the part that carries the bodies of dead animals along in flood, at once irresistible and potentially deadly if opposed. One cannot swim against the mainstream; the mainstream rolls forward over waterfalls and through ravines, until it finally empties out into the larger ocean and then loses its own identity.

On the other hand, if one is not “part of the mainstream”, what is one to be? Howard would have all outside the mainstream as special interests - I would refer to them rather more usefully as anabranes - those wonderful, evocative, seductive side trips, full of small stories and great heroisms, scattered with whirlpools and debris, hidden in lowering bush, the water crackling and sparkling in the midday sun, yet cool and shaded. Anabranes leave the mainstream for their own experiences, joining back up when time, tide and geography allow. Anabranes allow one to feel individual rather than mob-like and spun along in the roar of the mainstream, from which there is no turning back, only the threat of submergence and a choking death by drowning in the torrent. This is not to suggest that anabranes are safe, while the mainstream is not. Anabranes require skill, and flexibility, and a sense of awe in the face of small beauties and dramatic terrors; their whirlpools can take you down just as surely as the tumbling rapids of the mainstream can smash you open. But you have rather more

control over the scene, even if the warnings of danger come far too late, or require an almost transcendental prescience. But enough analogical meanderings...

The claim for the mainstream, for the ordinary battler, for the taxpayer, resonates in the rhetoric of the Howard speeches. Note though, that by casting himself with the mainstream, he allows legitimation of all mainstream prejudices - be they based on gender or race or sexual preference or disability status - simply by claiming the moral supremacy of the mainstream as a social location: its values are not open to criticism.

## **Multiculturalism and its discontents**

How have the media responded to this project of recasting the cultural landscape? If we take the multiculturalism question, we can see the process through which the decomposition of the consensus has begun to take place. Prior to the March 1996 Federal election, the Liberal and National Coalition policy on Multicultural Affairs and Settlement claimed a strong commitment to the principles of multiculturalism. It endorsed the 1989 principles of the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, including its three planks of cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. It made no mention of what was indeed to happen, under the guise of the Budget Black Hole, once the Coalition came to power.

Just prior to the election the Coalition indicated it would get rid of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Following the election Philip Ruddock was appointed the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Moreover the functions of the Office were transferred from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to his portfolio but no resources followed them and effectively they died. There was little if any press commentary on this move. Ruddock is not a close colleague of Howard: giving him the Ministry and the multiculturalism job - outside Cabinet, and without Howard's political

commitment - meant that Ruddock had to move very carefully and do nothing that might upset Howard. Importantly, Ruddock had been one of the Liberal members to cross the floor on a crucial vote in 1984 during the Blainey debate, and a person who represented that small part of political correctness still left in the Liberal Party. The August Budget closed the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research - media comment reported some outrage by academics such as ANU's Jim Jupp, but for the most part it accepted the spin placed on these decisions by Ruddock's office - e.g. sour grapes by a spoilt group of government-funded academics upset to lose their milch cow.

It is interesting that by the beginning of November Ruddock had not issued a single media release on multiculturalism, other than an early one in May 1996 in which he defended the move of OMA to his Department - without making any comment that he had no resources to implement that part of his portfolio. Despite all the opportunities presented to him, Ruddock has not defended the policies of multiculturalism, limiting himself to condemning racism and defending a non-discriminatory immigration policy. In this he has echoed Howard's own refusal to defend multiculturalism - and the minimum position taken by Labor's Duncan Kerr, or indeed, Kim Beazley. Gareth Evans questioned the Prime Minister's difficulty in uttering the "m" word - multiculturalism. The media have totally failed to pursue this question, as they do not understand the implications of the silence that has consumed the former discourse of respect for difference.

The sustained erosion of the practice of multiculturalism as social policy did not come up for air until the Hanson maiden speech in September. Hanson argued that:

Immigration and multiculturalism are issues that this government is trying to address, but for far too long ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties. I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and

that of multiculturalism abolished. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40 per cent of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate. Of course, I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country. A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united. The world is full of failed and tragic examples, ranging from Ireland to Bosnia to Africa and, closer to home, Papua New Guinea. America and Great Britain are currently paying the price.

She went on to say:

Abolishing the policy of multiculturalism will save billions of dollars and allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia, paving the way to a strong, united country. Immigration must be halted in the short-term so that our dole queues are not added to by, in many cases, unskilled migrants not fluent in the English language. This would be one positive step to rescue many young and older Australians from a predicament which has become a national disgrace and crisis. I must stress at this stage that I do not consider those people from ethnic backgrounds currently living in Australia anything but first-class citizens, provided of course that they give this country their full, undivided loyalty.

She concluded by saying: "...everything I have said is relevant to my electorate of Oxley, which is typical of mainstream Australia". She has not yet been questioned on her claim about multiculturalism and its consumption of "billions of dollars".

### ***The media and mainstream Hanson***

Hanson's claim to speak for the mainstream has raised some interesting problems for the media. After her appearance on the *Middy Show* on Channel 9 where she was attacked by Indigenous activist Charles Perkins, her stocks seemed to have soared, with the Channel claiming a huge phone-in of support for her

position:

Kerri-Anne Kennerley: Well it was not only that audience there. Last week Pauline Hanson was on the day after her maiden speech. We ran a poll following that and we had something like 55,000 telephone calls on the 0055 number.

Agnes Warren: That's extraordinary, isn't it?

Kerri-Anne Kennerley: It was. And that was within two hours. National calls: 94% - and those figures we gave the next day - 94% agreed with Pauline Hanson.

(The Media Report, ABC Radio National, 19 September 1996).

On Alan Jones, she again advanced these views and was supposedly overwhelmingly supported in her position by a massive 90% plus majority of phone-ins on a polling line. This response at the very least reflects the nature of the audience available and interested in Jones and similar spirits of the populist right, and is no surprise - though it does show the depth of alienation that the conservative working class and petty bourgeoisie, and female, populations have from the heartland of the old bourgeois elite consensus. It also reflects a gender issue - the delight that women in particular take when they see a "feisty" woman, as Hanson has often been described, serving it up to the men - be they "honest John" Howard or the Labor boys associated with the Keating regime.

Kerri-Anne Kennerley commented to the ABC's Agnes Warren, that:

When she (Pauline Hanson) warms up, she is a very fiery, very, very strong woman, and she presents her case in very simple language. And it is tapping into something in the Australian community. So she doesn't get abusive. Whether or not what she says everybody agrees with, is beside the point. I think she's tapping in to a lot of Australians who say, 'What about me?' She is tapping in to Australia going 'Excuse me, I've got a mortgage; I've got 2.3 children, I work hard. What about me?'

(The Media Report, ABC Radio National, 19 September 1996).

The Hanson story has moved through a number of stages. In each case the media orientation has been somewhere between “this is a marginal phenomenon” to “she represents the voice of the silenced majority/people” to “her voice is very dangerous for Australia”. Overall the editorialising has followed a logic which appears something like this: “We disagree with what she says but defend her right to say it”. It then picked up the secondary theme of the government’s silence on Hanson, and increasingly queried the Prime Minister on his reluctance to enter the debate. Howard’s spin, that Prime Ministers were too important to comment on independent backbenchers’ speeches, held the line for a short while. However the Sydney Institute’s Gerard Henderson touched off the next “story”, which became a pursuit of Howard to refute Hanson. Along the way a number of minor stories flared - the impact in Asia, the problem for exports, the danger to universities from the decline in interest from Asian students, etc.

The press attention acted to push Howard to public statements, criticising Hanson. However his critique - that she was wrong but her outspoken views were proof that he had created a climate in which political correctness no longer held sway - was read by many commentators as something less than a strong condemnation. He was reluctant to go further than to reiterate his belief in a non-discriminatory immigration policy, to voice an admiration for the contribution of Asian Australians to the Australian economy, and to indicate he believed in tolerance of difference. The media sensed that Howard was backing away from the central ground of the multicultural consensus - and sought to pursue the government to sketch in the boundaries of the new middle ground.

Nationally networked talkback radio provided the arena in which this ground was to be constructed. There is a long tradition of organised right-wing groups working particular

talkback radio programs where they have willing if not always conscious collaborators in the hosts. Since the mid 1980s racism has been a staple gimmick, and racist arguments, of the more heat than light variety, have become a central feature of the programming tactics of talkback stars such as John Laws, Brian Wilshire, Ron Casey, Stan Zemanek, etc. Casey and Laws have each been charged in the past before the (now abolished) Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. In each case the charges themselves became causes celebres on their programs, and were used to boost audience interest. On the Hanson question however, Laws has actually been rather critical, seeking to create a sense of the mainstream which is pro-Howard rather than pro-Hanson.

Laws had taken up the line that Howard should come on air and state his position in relation to Hanson. In one of the longest one-on-one interviews since Howard’s election, and the first on the race question, Laws (24 October 1996) was able to push him into a number of statements which significantly shifted the space of the public “consensus” that Howard sought to espouse, towards the Hansonite position, in fact going far beyond Hanson in relation to the nature of Australian history. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the Laws conversation as its lead story (25 October 1996), under the headline “PM rejects talk of our racist past”, in which Howard was quoted as saying “I sympathise fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told we have a racist, bigoted past”. Laws was clearly troubled by Howard’s position, which even he apparently recognised was the equivalent of licensing racist views and undermining the whole thrust of claims to Indigenous rights.

The role of talkback radio in this debate has already been identified - the Laws intervention has moved its role dramatically to centre stage, where Laws constitutes himself as the centre point, the voice of social justice and human reason, against which Howard, the Prime Minister, was forced to frame the debate and offer what he saw as the moral position. The choice Howard made was to address not the

arguments about race per se, but offer two elements which he appeared to think would reduce the pressure on him to condemn Hanson's position, while leaving him secure with his "mainstream" populace. On the one hand he said that he sympathised with (i.e. could emotionally relate to the sense of fear and loathing expressed in the community by) those angry about challenges created by Aborigines and non-Anglo immigrants, while also arguing that the present generation had no responsibility for anything done in the past - a very post-modern reinterpretation of historic time and its meaning for society.

The creation of Hanson as the idol in the niche of the new conservative altar, has given birth to some extraordinary and wondrous stories - perhaps the most impressive in its baroque incongruity being the front page story in the *Sydney Telegraph* built around a photo of Hanson receiving a painting of herself as Joan of Arc on the pyre, being harangued by a devilish cleric wearing robes adorned with the double sine curve emblem of the ABC. Here the artist perceives the ostensible protector of the public sphere - the ABC - as in fact the torturer of the heroic maid of Ipswich - the whole package presented as a PR hack's fantasy by the populist Murdoch newspaper. Who indeed was using whom for what? We have a symbiotic relationship of mutual exploitation in which the Hanson/Pasquarelli duo provide continuing fuel for the conflagration that erupts as the popular press carries out its unending quest for heat rather than light.

### ***The media and ethnic conflict***

The range of media involvement in the arena of ethnic and racial conflict in Australia cannot be separated from the fundamental dilemmas of the settler society elites which control them, and the intellectual workers who generate their content. In a society for which categories of race difference are embedded in the underlying structures of thought and social practice, and in which the maintenance of racial hierarchies has been a significant part of the social order, the policy changes of the past generation have

barely begun to affect the deep patterns of the ideologies of inclusion and exclusion that give meaning to the very idea of Australian society. The Prime Minister's continuing exposition of the idea that the current generation has no responsibility for the past, nor even for understanding the past, provides a clear example of this - even though some of the media have been careful to offer countervailing interpretations of the "new optimism" view put forward by Howard.

The media's traditional role in the reproduction of dominant ideologies is tempered by their awareness that these ideologies are no longer as monolithic as once they were. The internal conflict between fractions of the elite over the most effective way of maintaining social cohesion through a period of major social and economic restructuring in a culturally differentiated and racially marked society finds clear expression in the varieties of media reactions to the race debate. Suddenly, nothing is "verboten" - anything can be said and anything can be reported. We are seeing a real eruption of the public sphere, and a contested centre ground that has become far more marshy - the arguments of a year ago about what was acceptable and what was moral have multiplied into ever more debauched versions of the earlier positions (a bit like clone 4 in Michael Keaton's Hollywood film "Multiplicity"). The media reflect the wider public awe at what has been released, the underbelly of an Australia that many had believed two generations of mass tertiary education and bipartisan policy would have eroded. Though Mick Young, chair of the Advisory Council for A Multicultural Australia and once Minister for Immigration under a version of the ancien regime, commenting in an interview with the UTS *Making Multicultural Australia* project just before his death, noted that the thing to be recognised about the acceptance of cultural diversity in Australia was the necessity that Government keep its foot on the accelerator of progressive change - without that sustained pressure, the whole charabanc would not merely halt, but slip backwards down the slope with increasing speed.



Some media defenders argue that it is the role of the media to lift rocks, and allow whatever creepy creatures that lurk beneath them to have their moments in the sun, after which they will shrivel and turn to dust. Others suggest the media have a responsibility to the overall social order, that they cannot simply stand back and gasp at the lurid scaly things they have let loose, and that they have to argue the case for mutual tolerance and intercultural respect. Still others, myself included, are less interested in maintaining structures of hegemonic racism under the (dis)guise of tolerance, and more interested in a media which probes, exposes and critiques the forces which are advancing agendas of race hatred and social inequality - be they in the "community" or in government.

We are at a quite extraordinary moment at so many levels, as we watch the Australian cultural landscape turn itself inside out. The media are both the arena and the provocateurs for this process, at once revelling in and recoiling from what the deep angst of a racist society looks like when the civility of tolerance is washed off the surface. The question now is to ask whether the civility, as Eva Cox calls it, can be re-engaged, while dealing with the deeper question of the racism which lies beneath. The human rights at stake here are nothing less than the heartland of Australian democracy, and the belief that the population holds in its capacity to allow ideas to meet without destroying the recipients - or indeed the senders. Rather than celebrating Australia's mainstream with all its foibles, flotsam, and residua of the past, we should be actively exploring the anabranches of the cultural diversity we have created, and repairing the damage to the frail craft called society on which we ride the torrent.

## **Further reading:**

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