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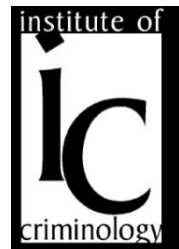
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Lines In The Sand

The Cronulla Riots, Multiculturalism and National Belonging

Gregory Noble

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Acknowledgements

I hope this work will make a critical but productive contribution to the ongoing debates about cultural diversity, social policy and Australian multiculturalism.

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Part two

'We grew here, you flew here':
nation, ethnicities and belonging

One of the most remarkable features of the Cronulla riots was how what was initially a localised, minor event quickly turned into event of great national significance. Fights between young men, sometimes fuelled by cultural differences, alcohol and territory, happen almost every weekend at Sydney's beaches; and that's usually where they end. As this section demonstrates, the lead-up to the riots, the protests themselves and the following revenge attacks managed to weave together complex perceptions about local and national belongings which entailed specific claims about inclusion and exclusion.

Kevin Dunn argues that the riots, and the media and political debates about them, represent contested performances of nationalism. He shows how the discussion of the initial conflict was rapidly framed as a fight about an Australian way of life, of which particular social actors – not just residents – felt very possessive. Icons of Anglo-Australian nationalism: lifesavers, flags, sporting paraphernalia and so on, were used on the day of the riots to express their investments in such a nationalism. Dunn emphasises the performative nature of this process – in contrast to a focus on the nation as an imagined community – to illustrate the constructed and fluid nature of nationalism; Australian nationalism tends to be relatively benign, but can become strongly normative and exclusionary in particular spatial and temporal contexts. In response, those who were subject to attack asserted, often aggressively, counter-nationalisms and local identities, but, in the end, Dunn claims, these only affirmed the dominant Anglo-nationalism.

Geoff Brahm Levey and Dirk Moses take this argument in a different direction by drawing a powerful and provocative parallel with anti-Semitism. They compare the 'Muslim question' in contemporary Australia with the 'Jewish question' in Nazi Germany, as the creation of a dangerous, unassimilable Other which needs to be dealt with. Levey and Moses remedy the ahistorical approach to the riots by providing a sweeping foray into the history of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and post-war Australia. They use this history to argue that the Cronulla riots were effectively a 'pogrom' directed at Muslim Australians, premised on a questionable claim about a core culture which, despite the Prime

Minister's protestations, reveals the persistent place of racism in Australian society.

The rapid and powerful reference to nationalist symbolism in the riots is examined carefully in Affrica Taylor's insightful discussion of the cultural significance of the beach in Australian national identity. She argues that the riots can be read as 'an ardent defence of the dream of quintessential Australian bodies and beaches', and explores this by stressing the territorial and corporeal dimensions of that dream. Taylor emphasises the need to take a 'relational' approach to questions of identity and thus question the rioters' perception of themselves as 'already essentially' Australian; their identity is performed primarily through its enmeshment with others – other cultures, other organisms, other things. This allows her to map the complex relations between local and national identity and what she sees as an act of 'proprietorial enclosure'.

The embodied aspects of belonging are also the centre of Amanda Wise's discussion of the riots. Wise, like Shaw, grew up in Cronulla and this personal perspective adds enormous depth to her analysis of the phenomenological experience of the locals' responses during the riots. She argues that grappling with questions of embodiment is necessary to explain how local 'discomfort' escalates into riotous behaviour, particularly amongst local males. Wise describes the contrasts between Anglo and Leb bodies on the beach, drawing on the notion of the habitus to draw out the differences in the uses, appearances and meanings of the bodies on the beach. Significantly, Wise demonstrates the long history of violence amongst Anglo youth in the Shire to counter simplistic assumptions about violence being a feature only of young men of Middle Eastern background. Wise also talks about the problems of civility in encounters between disparate bodies, forging an understanding of what she calls the 'interethnic habitus'.

Andrew Lattas develops a similar interest in questions of interethnic relations and etiquette, but from the unusual perspective of Greek migrants in the Shire. This group, he points out, has an ambivalent relationship with Lebanese migrants and he lists some of the jokes Greeks tell about the Lebanese. He draws on interviews and on postings on an internet site for Greeks. As in the

introduction, Lattas finds Elias' work on the 'civilising process' productive for understanding the relations to issues of national belonging and integration for competing migrant groups. He argues that 'Lebanese behaviour' is often taken by Greek migrants as a warning of 'the dangers of refusing assimilation'.

'The Muslims are our misfortune!'

Geoffrey Brahm Levey and A. Dirk Moses

The Cronulla Riots have been understood principally in terms of ethnic conflict and White Australian racism. In this chapter, we introduce a comparative dimension by briefly examining pre- and post-Nazi anti-Semitism in Europe and Australia. As non-Christians, the presence of Jewish minorities posed challenges for their Christian hosts that bear comparison in many respects with western Muslims today; we will argue that these comparisons help to reveal the deep societal and cultural dynamics at play in the Cronulla riot and its 'reception'.

We begin by examining the German nationalist reaction of historian Heinrich von Treitschke to Jewish emancipation in the late nineteenth century, and ask after the parallels with the Australian nationalist reaction to Muslim immigration. Secondly, we argue that 'pogrom' is a better term than 'riot' for the events of December 2005 by considering anti-Jewish violence in Imperial Russia as well as lynching of Black men in the United States. Then we turn to the question of Jewish immigration and assimilation in post-war Australia; was Australia in the 1950s so different to Germany in the 1880s in its ethnic self-understanding? Finally, we consider the reaction to suggestions of racism in the Cronulla riots, and how the invocation of 'core values' masks deep tensions in Australian norms and expectations.

'A word about our Jewry'

In 1880, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) wrote a much-discussed article entitled, in English: 'A word about our Jewry'. This article bears a remarkable resemblance to the conservative media commentariat's views about Muslims in Australia today. Striking the

pose of the neutral observer, Treitschke noted that the philo-Semitic public culture was changing and proposed to explain why. He did not oppose the new anti-Semitic tone emerging in Germany because, in his view it meant that finally, open discussion of a real problem had commenced: 'the instinct of the masses has in fact clearly recognized a great danger, a serious sore spot of the new German national life; the current expression of 'the German Jewish question' is more than an empty phrase' (Treitschke, 1880/1995: 343).

The framing of the 'Australian Muslim question' after Cronulla proceeded in the same way. For many newspaper columnists and media commentators, as we will see below, the Anglo-Australian violence expressed the righteous indignation of the Australian masses, and political correctness could no longer blind us to this fact. We were told that the events permitted us, finally, to talk openly, and without fear of being labelled a racist, about the problem of Muslims. Treitschke's answer was no different from the demand made of Australian Muslims:

> What we have to demand from our Jewish fellow-citizens is simple: that they become Germans, regard themselves simply and justly as Germans, without prejudice to their faith and their sacred past which all of us hold in reverence; for we do not want an era of German-Jewish mixed culture to follow after thousands of years of German civilization (Treitschke, 1880/1995: 343).

What was it about these Jews that offended Treitschke? Above all, it was their perceived sense of cultural superiority and their 'stubborn contempt for the German *goyim* [gentile]', which manifested itself in dishonest business dealings and domination of the press. The latter, he wrote, led to the perversion of public opinion, because Jewish journalists slandered the nation, writing 'without any reverence, like an outsider, as if mockery of Germany did not cut deeply into the heart of every individual German' (Treitschke, 1880/1995: 344).

No-one in Australia claims that Muslims or Arabs dominate journalism, but the feeling among conservatives that 'cultural elites' denigrate the nation and mock ordinary Australians echoes Treitschke's criticism of the media's alienation from the sentiments

of the vast majority of common people. These critics maintain that the press has been hijacked by a dangerous and culturally alien element that undermines the substance of the nation. What is more, from the conservative columnists' perspective, these Anglo cultural elites prevent open discussion of the 'Muslim problem' by mobilising political correctness; they are said to be pro-Muslim, the functional equivalent of Trietschke's 'Jewish press'.

Populist commentators here also share Treitschke's objection to immigrants' demand for equal treatment. For instance, he complained, Jews wanted Christian pictures removed (presumably from public buildings), and the Sabbath celebrated at mixed schools (Treitschke, 1880/1995: 345). The Australian outrage at Muslim requests such as short periods of gender segregated swimming in public pools expresses the same impatience.

Treitschke was no radical anti-Semite compared to some contemporaries who wanted to reverse Jewish emancipation (i.e., granting of legal equality). He was prepared to acknowledge the efforts of some Jews to assimilate, for instance, by campaigning against usury (money lending) among fellow Jews. This distinction between good and bad immigrants is repeated here in the separation between 'moderate' and 'radical' Muslims; what distinguishes the two categories is the perceived preparedness of the former to integrate.

But does this distinction obtain in reality? Resistance to full assimilation is the problem for Australia's nationalists, for them, any residue of cultural difference is interpreted as 'radical'; hence the hysteria about Muslim women wearing head coverings. Although such dress harms no-one, it is considered offensive, even 'confronting', as the former Prime Minister John Howard put it (*Age*, 2006). Treitschke expressed the political emotions of the issue in the following terms: the 'reason for the passionate anger in our days' was the immigrants' 'lack of respect' for the locals. That is why, he reported, that he heard men in even 'the best educated circles' say 'the Jews are our misfortune!' (Treitschke, 1880/1995: 345). Reading many Australian columnists, it is easy to detect the same message about Muslims and Arabs.

The Nazis made this phrase – 'the Jews are our misfortune' – notorious in their propaganda, but it is doubtful whether Treitschke would have supported their genocidal policies; he was a nationalist who wanted Jews to assimilate, not a totalitarian fanatic who advocated their expulsion or murder. His anti-Semitism thus omitted some of Adolf Hitler's lurid phantasms, such as the infamous passage in *Mein Kampf* where the author worries about Jewish men preying on fair German maidens: 'The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspicious girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people' (Hitler, 1940: 448).

Such primal anxieties about race and sex are common in all societies. Consider the ritualised sadism of lynching in the South of the United States, replete with castrations and other torture, which often attended rumours of Black men raping White women (Gilmore, 1998; Whites, 1998). The Nazis took these anxieties to the extreme, but was Australia immune from a moderate version of this when Lebanese-Australian gang rapists were sentenced to unprecedented jail terms, longer than for murder (Crichton, 2002: 1)? Were not these sentences redemptive punishments? Was the outrage at these terrible crimes *not only* an understandable expression of indignation at gang rape, *but also* symptomatic of the fear that, so to speak, 'black-haired Arab youths lie in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on unsuspicious Anglo girls'?

Pogroms

If Treitschke did not explicitly approve of violence or legitimise fears of racial defilement, his intellectual justification of anti-Semitism was of a piece with elite reactions to pogroms against Russian Jews and lynchings of African Americans during his lifetime. Government officials and newspaper editors in both these cases would consistently ascribe the violence of the majority against a hapless minority to an understandable, if extreme, reaction to 'Jewish domination and exploitation' or against some Black crime, criminalising the victims of mob violence rather than the mass of people who perpetrated it. Because the Australian media's reaction

to the Cronulla riots was the same, it is worth considering whether 'pogrom' is a more appropriate word for the violence.

The term derives from the Russian word for thunder (*grom*) and the verb *pogromit*, which means 'to smash' or 'to conquer'. The word became associated with attacks on Russian Jews during the nineteenth century, and more recently on Roma ('Gypsies') in contemporary Europe. Significantly, while Imperial Russian authorities themselves usually referred to these attacks as disturbances, disorders or riots, contemporary observers and later historians have used the term pogrom (Klier, 1992: 34f; Barany, 2002). If we also class American lynchings as pogroms, the scholarly literature on the topic concurs in listing the following generic, historical features:

- They customarily occur when established social and ethnic hierarchies are disturbed by economic change and immigration.
- Press campaigns against these developments are a prerequisite.
- Local frictions, different in circumstance, take place over the terms of civic inclusion and exclusion of immigrants and minorities.
- Contrary to popular opinion, they were not organised by state authorities.
- They are not caused by prejudice *per se*, and police inaction.
- Lower classes of the majority population are anxious that their ethnic status, which assigns them a higher rank than the minority, is threatened.
- Pogroms are not a constant feature of multi-ethnic societies, but occur in times of social stress. In Russia in 1881/82 and 1905/06, for instance, the authority of the state was weak, and many worried that Jews, who represented a new liberal order, would dominate. The question of 'who is in charge' or 'for whom does the state govern' becomes paramount (Rogger, 1992: 314-372; Hoffmann et al., 2002; Rohrbacher, 1993).
- The minority is seen as an aggressor against society, as a guest who abuses the hospitality of the host, who betrays the society by exploiting or abusing its members. Although the descendants of African slaves could not be described as guests

or immigrants, the notion of outsiders violating the ethnic hierarchy was evident when Whites in the American South complained about 'defiance by the Negroes', and express alarm at their supposed 'threatening attitude' (Vinikas, 1999: 536).

- The point of the pogrom is to put the subordinate minority group back in its place, the violence is not just instrumental (i.e., looting shops), it is also symbolic. The message is: 'This is our country. Don't behave as if you own the place. Stay in your (subordinate) place!'

- After the pogrom, elites justify the violence by defaming the character of the victims.

Significant differences can be discerned between the extent of violence in Russian and American pogroms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the Cronulla incident. The former often claimed hundreds of lives at a time, with significant property damage while no-one was killed or even seriously injured in Cronulla. Pogroms became routine in Russia and the United States because Christians had been allowed to get away with the violence on previous occasions; no pogroms occurred in Russia in places where authorities would not tolerate them. Happily, police intervened in the violence in Cronulla, and the courts prosecuted offenders afterwards; does this mean that the pogrom analogy is overdrawn?

We need to ask ourselves what would have happened had the police and later, the courts not intervened so forcefully; it is likely that some of the victims would have been very seriously injured if not killed. The passions aroused on Sydney beaches, and the other features of Cronulla, then, do bear a disturbing resemblance to a pogrom. Although Muslims and Arabs occupy a different space in the economic system to Jews in Imperial Russia and Blacks in the Southern states, they are nevertheless cast as social enemies by media commentators who routinely complain about their supposed welfare parasitism and anti-social behaviour. In addition, a crisis of consciousness was cultivated in Australia by a government that painted asylum seekers and local Muslims as terrorist security threats.

For their part, some Arab Australian youths violated conventional norms of behaviour at the beach prior to the riot; whatever the provocation though, did it warrant the extent of the wanton brutality of 11 December? After all, *anyone* with 'Mediterranean looks' was attacked, irrespective of whether they were members of gangs, including women wearing hijabs. This targeting was very discriminating in its indiscriminateness and for this reason the excess of violence and rhetoric cannot be explained by inter-gang rivalry or youthful machismo.

After the pogrom, the entire Arab Australian and Muslim Australian community was subject to a relentless campaign of vilification. By mid-January 2006, media and political hysteria about the gangs of south west Sydney and the supposed impotence of police was growing. However the tendency to denigrate Arab Australians had begun earlier (Sheehan, 2005a and 2005b); before Christmas 2005, News Limited and many Fairfax writers began decrying Lebanese-Australian men as members of 'gangs' while the youths of Anglo-Cronulla were described as merely 'beachgoers' (Norton, 2005). By identifying the Lebanese-Australian community's supposed inability to integrate, by focusing on the bad beach behaviour of youths 'of Middle Eastern appearance', they suggested that the denizens of Cronulla were unduly provoked. The editors of the Australian made this point plain when they argued 'there is a degree of racism' in all societies and people - that is apparently an anthropological constant - so that the efforts of many to end racism is 'an exercise in fanaticism'. The fanatics were not the neo-Nazis but those who opposed them, the anti-racist 'cultural elites'.

Moreover, according to the same commentary, the ethnic self-defence of the native born was said to be a natural and normal response which should not be pathologised by what that newspaper inanely called 'the multiculturalism industry' (*Australian* 2005a). The problem, we are led to conclude, was the supposed inability of Lebanese-Australian youths to assimilate.

An argument against the 'Cronulla pogrom' proposition may be that Russian and American pogroms were enforcing an explicitly racist hierarchy in which pogroms were supposed to keep subalterns in their place, whereas in multicultural Australia there is equality

before the law and a stated ethos of equal respect for all people. While this may be true on paper, the widespread incidence of Australian flags being wrapped like superman capes around the rioters suggests otherwise. The rioter's self-understanding needs to be taken more seriously if we are to appreciate the inner nature of national identity. They were not simply guarding their beach against unwelcome intruders, they were also defending the nation against its perceived colonisation by foreigners ('Lebs' and 'Wogs'). The infamous text message says it all: 'Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge. This Sunday every Aussie in the shire get down to North Cronulla to support the leb and wog bashing day'.

A word about Jewish immigration to Australia

Two years before the Jews of France first won their emancipation, up to a dozen Jews arrived in Australia on the First Fleet as convicts (Levi and Bergman, 2002). Most of the convicts were eventually emancipated and to their credit, no Australian colony, state, or territory has ever needed to emancipate its Jews. Jewish free settlers and emancipated convicts enjoyed all the rights and opportunities of their far more numerous Christian counterparts (Getzler, 1970). Like their French and German co-religionists, the small Jewish community in the Australian colonies and later in the new Commonwealth of Australia assiduously integrated and acculturated to the local way of life. One of them, John Monash – the son of German-Jewish immigrants – went on to become commander of the Australian Corps in World War I. Another, Isaac Isaacs, became the first Australian-born Governor-General (1931-36). Yet neither the Jews' presence in Australia since the beginning of European settlement, their successful integration, or their attainment of high state office mattered during the 1940s and early 1950s when the Australian government succumbed to popular prejudice and restricted the immigration of European Jewish refugees.

Immediately after the war, the new Department of Immigration under Minister Arthur Calwell introduced a humanitarian program by allowing some 2,000 Holocaust survivors to come to Australia as part of the family reunion program. Vigorous opposition to the program had developed by 1946, as

historian Suzanne Rutland (2001: 52) records: 'Alarmist headlines and anti-refugee articles and cartoons filled the press. It was claimed that Jewish migrants were enjoying preferential treatment in securing passage to Australia and were aggravating the housing shortage'. The concept of 'queue-jumping' evidently has a long lineage in the Australian imagination, but this was not the only concern. 'Yellow press' outlets like *Smith's Weekly* claimed that the Jews were disloyal, a claim largely based on apprehension about 'Jewish terrorism' in Palestine, where Great Britain was the Mandate power. Senior British officials had been assassinated by Zionist militants in Palestine, and the King David Hotel was bombed in July 1946, leading to violent anti-Jewish rhetoric in both Australia and Britain (Rubinstein, 1991: 387f.). A letter sent in 1946 to Prime Minister Chifley by an H. Osborne, who included a copy of an article claiming that Jews in Palestine refused to serve British troops in cafes and spat on British troops and civilians in the streets, captured the popular mood:

> In view of this cutting and recent outrage in Palestine will you issue instructions that no more Jews be allowed into Australia. It is public knowledge that the Minister for Immigration favours Jews and Jews in Melbourne boast that they can obtain any assistance from him. Alien Jews are nearly all Zionists and are against we British. (quoted in Rutland, 2003: 60).

Yet another complaint was about Jewish business acumen, echoing Treitschke's complaint about the business and professional acumen of German Jews. Jack Lang thundered in Federal Parliament: 'Although thousands of soldiers are unable to enter business in our country because of rationing and other controls, most of these aliens slip straight into business when they leave the ship'. Even respectable newspapers joined the chorus of disapproval: the *Canberra Times* complained about black market activities of Jews and their supposed ungovernability (Rubinstein, 1991: 385). In this vein, the traditional charge that Jews were unassimilable was raised; the Liberal Member for Henty in Victoria, H.B. Gullett, for instance, declared that 'We are not compelled to be a dumping ground for people whom Europe has not been able to absorb for 2000 years' (Rutland, 2001: 53) and similar sentiments were common in the RSL (Rubinstein, 1991: 386). Jews then, were

regarded in terms that were eerily similar to the attitudes towards Muslims in Australia today: as queue jumping refugees, economically parasitical, clannish, and associated with terrorism. 'Frequently the [Jewish] terrorist violence in Palestine', one historian noted, 'was linked, irrationally but potently, to the prospect of Jewish refugee migration to Australia' (Rubinstein, 1991: 388). The same could be said of Muslim refugees to Australia since the Tampa affair in 2001.

Calwell believed that Australia's need for increased immigration might founder on the backlash against Jewish immigration. He thus set a quota of no more than 25 percent of Jews being allowed to travel on any one vessel sailing to Australia, effectively stymieing Jewish arrivals. In his autobiography, he would later explain the need for a Jewish quota in terms now reminiscent of John Howard's 1988 statement on the need to slow Asian immigration. (Kelly, 1992:423). According to Calwell, allowing boatloads of Jews into Australia 'would have created a great wave of anti-Semitism and would have been electorally disastrous for the Labor Party' (quoted in Rutland, 2002: 163). Acquiescence obviously is one way of responding to popular prejudice, another of course is to combat it.

Racism, core values and the 'Muslim question'

For this reason, the central issue debated in the media about the Cronulla riots – that of whether they represented racism or a cultural clash – is at once wholly bogus and very revealing. The reluctance of Australians to acknowledge racism among themselves tends to be based or defended on three assumptions: one is the defensive assumption that 'we' – a tolerant, easy-going, and peace-loving people, as former Prime Minister John Howard liked to say – simply aren't capable of such dastardly prejudice. The historical record, as in the Australian response to Jewish immigration in the 1940s just canvassed, clearly shows otherwise.

A second assumption driving the denial of racism appears to be the common equation of racism with a specifically biologically-based prejudice; an equation doubtless informed by nineteenth century associations of race with bloodlines and physiognomy and

in the popular imagination, with their visitation on American Blacks and European Jews in the twentieth century. This narrow conception of 'racism' flies in the face of how the term has come to be legally and commonly used; the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW), for example, is not unusual in defining 'race' broadly, as including 'colour, nationality, descent and ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin'. Yet even using a biological conception of race, one would be hard-pressed to deny racism at work in the Cronulla conflagration: after all, from various quarters, people *were* targeted on the basis of their physical appearance, among other things.

The third assumption behind the denials of Australian racism relates to a misbegotten sense that racial prejudice is indelible. The *Australian* initially took this stance, insisting that racism had nothing to do with the Cronulla episode and, we were told, such talk showed only the contempt of 'Howard haters' for ordinary Australians. To make its case, the newspaper proposed a distinction be drawn between 'prejudice directed against migrants, which time heals, and racism, which festers for centuries' (*Australian* 2005b). The trouble with this distinction is that it simply ignores how the category of 'race' denotes the marking out of those deemed to be alien, unassimilable or beneath respect at any point in time, which is of course how racism works. Who is considered acceptable and who is considered unacceptable changes over time according to governmental and popular sentiment (de Lepervanche and Bottomley, 1988; Stratton, 2000: 195-219), one need only trace the history of the 'White Australia' policy, for example, and the shifting definitions of who is 'White' – or White enough – to see this.

Presumably, it was out of some realisation of these various points that not even the *Australian* could keep denying the obvious and in its 22 December *volte face* suddenly saw racism as ubiquitous and natural and as noted, tried arguing instead that the real problem lies with those who condemn these 'understandable' reactions of many Anglo-Australians. A year on though, there were again voices wishing above all else to preserve the nation's honour against the stain of racism (eg. Switzer, 2006).

To be sure, thuggery figured in the riots, which is a matter of law enforcement. Doubtless too, the riots contained elements of a

clash of cultural norms in Australian society and here, the appropriate solution is acculturation. The engine room of acculturation; especially for the second generation, has always been schools and it is appropriate to ask why our schools may be failing in the case of some section of migrant groups. But the Cronulla pogrom was much more than thuggery or a lack of acculturation, such characterisations miss the thick symbolism that was manifest throughout the episode, and the fact that so many of the culprits were 'clean skins' with no prior record of misdemeanour and who afterwards could barely understand or articulate what moved them to be involved. For example one of the apprehended, who kicked his victim to the ground and incited a screaming crowd to gather around the man, was a JP Morgan financial analyst and classical pianist who came from a family with 'strong Christian values' (*Sydney Morning Herald,* 2006: 1).

As the media reaction to the episode confirms, the underlying dynamic of the Cronulla riots goes to the heart of how Australian society frames its 'core culture' and who is admitted into it; and thus how it looks upon and treats its minorities. All this is very much despite the spirit and terms of Australian multiculturalism. Conservative commentators see the problem as one of minorities simply not respecting or heeding the core culture when in fact, the problem runs much deeper than this – in two ways.

First, as in other liberal democracies, there are deep tensions within the prevailing Australian self-understanding of its own core culture (Levey, 2008). On the one hand there are the liberal democratic norms frequently cited as part of Australia's political and cultural inheritance; such as liberty, equality, toleration, reciprocity and respect for democratic processes and institutions. On the other hand, there are the national-cultural or lifestyle norms having to do with the Australian way of life and captured by the sentiment 'This is how we do things here!' When members of the political community are steeped in the same national culture, it is easy to assume that liberty and equality also are being honoured since everyone wants to do much the same thing; but when some members observe different practices and traditions, as they do in culturally diverse democracies like Australia, then the attachments to

the 'national culture' and the commitment to liberal democratic values do not always coincide. Yet both dimensions are claimed to be part of the core culture. To the customary exhortation of our politicians and media commentators: 'If you choose to live here then observe our core values!' the appropriate response must be, '*Which* values?' The norms regarding how the Anglo-Celtic Christian majority look, speak, behave and lead their lives? Or the core values involving liberal democratic norms? And if the latter, then why doesn't the value on liberty and equality entitle citizens to live differently from the Anglo-Celtic Christian majority where there is no harm involved?

The tendency of national cultural majorities to conflate their own cultural and lifestyle norms with the expression of liberal (and universal) values has beset social relations in modern states. The problem was in evidence in the late eighteenth century during the European debates over the extension of civic equality to the Jews, when their fitness for citizenship was challenged on the grounds that they separated themselves from their fellows through their kosher dietary laws and by marrying their own, were unable to make good soldiers because they were too short and unable to fight on the Sabbath, or were disloyal (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995: sections II and III). Today, we see the same dynamic at work regarding Muslims. For example, the *Australian*, Liberal backbenchers Bronwyn Bishop and Sophie Panopoulos and endless letter writers to editors describe the veil, hijab, or burqa worn by some Muslim women as a 'mark of separation' and therefore unacceptable (e.g. *Australian,* 2006).

The second profound problem with the insistence on respect for the core culture is, perhaps, even more vexatious than the first. Even where cultural minorities or their members *do* assimilate and integrate, they are rejected or made to feel unwelcome. This was the experience of Jews in Treitschke's Germany and in Australia during the 1940s. In both cases, the main problem was precisely the fear that Jews were *too good* at integrating. The socioeconomic and cultural situation of Muslims may presently differ in this regard, but there is little reason to suppose that assimilation or integration will bring easy acceptance.

But perhaps the most telling sign of the depth of the problem of cultural exclusion and double standards is the inability of leaders and commentators from the dominant cultural majority even to see that it exists. Instead, they defensively interpret criticisms and frustrations of the way they relate to or treat minorities as a threat to their cultural dominance and values (Albrechtsen, 2005). In this respect, it is not surprising that the official website of The Knights Party, USA – the political wing of the Ku Klux Klan – featured these responses to the Cronulla riot in its 'international news affecting White Christians world wide' forum (Knights Party, 2005). In their eyes, such criticism requires virile reaffirmations of 'our core values' and reminding minorities of their 'place'. So the cycle continues and the problem festers.

Conclusion

What we witnessed in Cronulla evidences a complex of issues. It is clear to us, however, that deep and longstanding social and political dynamics were in play behind the pogrom and its treatment by the media. Unless and until our political leaders and nationalist opinion makers begin to appreciate this complexity and indeed, their own deep complicity in it, then inter-ethnic relations will continue to be a sore, and sometimes explosive, point in this country.

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