

Reframing the Nation-State: Rethinking the Australian Dream from the Local to the Global

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Abstract

Movement across the borders of the nation-state has always been uneven, but over the past few decades the unfettered movement of goods and images has been defended under the ideology of freedom and openness. At the same time, the movement of people, including refugees, has become increasingly administered and restricted in the name of 'the national interest'. This article argues that Australia has been part of this development. The Australian dream was once for all to own a quarter-acre housing block, protected from the machinations of the world. Across the turn of the twentieth century into the present an invidious version of this dream has intensified, shorn of its egalitarian spirit. The nation-state itself has been made over in this image. The Australian state now acts on behalf of the nation to keep unwanted strangers out, while facilitating the open globalization of the Australian economy. In this context, older ethical pronouncements about freedom, equality openness and fairness no longer work. This article develops an alternative approach based upon a layering of ethical considerations. The new Australian dream it suggests will entail a complete renegotiation of how we are to live within and across the boundaries of identity, culture and economy.

Keywords

Nation-state, Australia, place, ethics, refugees, trade, globalization, borders, land-rights, sustainability, equality, freedom, reciprocity, community

Introduction

In the utopian tracts of a century ago the dreams of alternative futures were made as never-ending possible realities. Utopias explored alternative worlds that wrapped around people with convincing totality [1]. Those exploratory utopias have largely given way to a range of bleak dystopias, counterposed by empty vision-statements about freedom and justice and bringing democracy to the world. Alongside both of these, the vision thing is dominated by discussions of the mechanisms for pragmatic adjustments. Perhaps the transitional moment was Martin Luther King's 'I have a Dream' speech. It sounded so dramatic, and yet it proclaimed nothing more than hopes for the possibility of different races living alongside each other. It was a good speech, but in retrospect we can see that it projected nothing more than the incorporation of African Americans in the American dream of consumer capitalism.

Now in the global North we live with a criss-crossing of hope and despair expressed alternatively in grindingly-optimistic political speeches and bleak news reports about wars in distant places. In popular culture there are now no extended utopias, though we probably need them more than ever. Rather, George Orwell's *1984* and George Bush's 2001 hang over us. The future is either portrayed in bleak romanticism such as in films like *Pleasantville* and *The Truman Show*,¹ or, more blackly, shown in cybernetic films and novels from *Gattica* to *Snow Crash* and *Virtual Light* [2,3,4]² as going forward to a world of mega-corporations acting as neo-imperial states. In this future, cyborg outsiders live on the edge and the centre cannot hold except by massive surveillance systems, heavy militarization and lots of reassuring speeches—not too far from the present reality of the Patriot Act, except that the present is mostly much more banal than science fiction could ever successfully portray.

There is one prominent mode of expression that continues to carry clichéd versions of our hopes for the future. Unfortunately it comes in thirty-second grabs and carries a single perverted message—'consumption is good'. Advertising stories give us bite-sized packages of no-where land—images of worlds that will never be so clean and beautiful as the camera shows. Energex's naked baby sits on corporate cloudy-blue earth and reaches towards a blue heaven. Lockheed

1 *Back to the Future*, 1985, directed by Robert Zemeckis; *Pleasantville*, 1998, directed by Gary Ross; and *The Truman Show*, 1998, directed by Peter Weir. *Back to the Future* is one of the twenty highest grossing films of all time. It spawned two sequels, an animated television series, and become the stock-in-trade title for dozens of books, some with dubious claim to using it.

2 Richard Rorty [4] uses *Snowcrash* [2] as paradigmatic of a 'rueful acquiescence' about the end of good old-fashioned national pride.

Martin presents a globe that is broken into a thousand facets of localized colour or globalized significance. And NEC, under the slogan 'C&C for Human Potential' uses a peacenik-style water-colour-rendered globe around which floating people—all Western, all white—link their bodies to form a kind of global garland. Such advertisements act as distorting representations within a dominant matrix of representations that proclaims that the globe is getting smaller and the people becoming more interconnected.

The concept of the 'global village' is another expression where we appear to transcend the limitations on projecting an alternative future. However, it too is largely an empty signifier. In the same way that Disney World's Tomorrow Land has been recast as an historical artefact, the concept of 'global village' is now the romantic version of the newer cyberspace term, 'virtual village'. Maybe that is why dystopias from *Blade Runner* to *Terminator* always seem paradoxically comforting in the context of a place like Australia. Dystopias always occur somewhere else. By comparison with the worlds that confront Harrison Ford and Arnold Swartznegger, life in Australia is sort-of-OK for most people. Kabul, Baghdad and the Gaza Strip seem a long way away, and television series such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* carry images of quirkily sustainable Australian neighbourhoods. Despite personal dramas these places never seem to break apart—*Neighbours* has now run for well over 4,000 episodes and is screened in 57 countries. Most people get enough to eat in Australia, and apart from the occasional rampaging mass-murderer or rapist, it is mostly safe to walk the streets. Life may be prosaic and sometimes ugly, but the worst of things are 'over there', and we are 'here'. People are personally generous in relative terms when compared globally, however, under the pressure of neo-liberal capitalism, personal generosity has become a way of otherwise withdrawing and acquiescing under the protective umbrella of rationalizing and pragmatically-minded governments. Over the last few decades the Australian dream has been reduced to finding a home with a low mortgage, a lovely backyard and a good security system—a place to withdraw into and wrap around one's self.

In social terms, the Australian nation-state has taken the same course as the Australian iconic neighbourhood. Across the course of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, Australian governments—both Liberal-National and Labor, both hard-line Right and technocratic Centre-of-the-road—have been progressively remaking the boundary around the continent and reinforcing the 'security' of the nation. Australian governments conduct a policy of forward military intervention 'elsewhere', and except in relation to economic considerations, has

withdrawn into protecting our backyard from strangers and intruders. Successive governments have contributed to making a nation-state with instrumentally-managed boundaries driven by a narrow conception of the ‘good life’ that is encapsulated in the phrase ‘the national interest’. It was reduced to a whispered phrase during the 1990s, but appears to be making a loud comeback under Western neo-liberalism. In this essay I want to both describe that framework of ‘the national interest’ and attempt to get beyond it without turning to its ugly sister, ‘the borderless world’. The essay begins with a brief description of how Australia came to be the personally generous, governmentally heartless nation-state that it currently is. The first part of the narrative tracks two issues relevant to understanding the nature of the national polity—firstly, the increasing de-regulation of movement of capital across the national border, and secondly the increasing re-regulation of movement of people. This will be used as a backdrop to later discussion that attempts to set up some general principles relevant to where I think that we should go from here.

There is no easy utopia that can be imagined against the ugliness of the present. Nevertheless, discussing principles about how we should live has become pressingly necessary in the context of a grey politics that presents itself as the only way forward.

1. Changing movements across borders

Across the course of the late twentieth century Australia followed most other nation-states in opening up state boundaries to international capital and trade, and, across that same period, it led the rest of the world in hardening its borders to the movement of refugees.

Globalizing the national economy involved four dimensions: deregulation, corporatization, privatization, and micro-economic reform. While many commentators attribute this to the economic rationalism of the current Howard government, it has a longer-term history going back to the Labor years of the 1980s. Massive structural changes occurred over the period of the 1980s, in particular responding to the pressures of globalization. Across the West we saw an ideological change away from Keynesianism to the neo-liberalism of Reagan and Thatcher. In Australia in 1983, the Australian federal treasurer Paul Keating announced the deregulation or ‘floating’ of the Australian dollar; and across the period of 1984-87 financial deregulation brought firstly foreign banks into trading in Australia, and, secondly, saw reduction of controls on foreign investment. In 1988 the government embarked upon a four-year programme to reduce tariffs to

10-15 per cent—a complete turnaround on 1983 policy. This was extended in 1991 to a five-year plan to reduce tariffs to 5 per cent (excluding clothing, textiles and footwear). In 1990 after five years of bitter debate the Hawke government pushed through the ALP conference approval to privatize a number of state enterprises including Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank, knowing that most of those enterprises would come to be predominantly owned by global corporations. These policy shifts added up to a program of globalizing of the Australian economy. In enacting this program, both sides of politics drew upon the ideology of openness.

By the beginning of the next century, all was in place for proclaiming that opening the Australian economy to the global market was both necessary to avoid Third World status and to set the directions for a glorious if tricky path to the future. For example, in 2001 a government publication called *Globalisation and Poverty: Turning the Corner*, concluded that ‘Faster and broader progress can be made in eradicating extreme poverty and further reducing inequality if policies for economic openness and reform ... are sustained, taken up by more developing countries, and supported by industrialised economies through development assistance and trade reform’.[5, p. 26] The conclusion is clear even if a little tentative—globalization is good. By 2003 any restraint upon the claim had all but dropped away. A Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade publication felt comfortable to change the subtitle from *Turning the Corner* to *Keeping the Gains*. The document begins with the sentence ‘The experience of Australia and many of its successful East Asian neighbours shows globalising economies, those that are open to international trade and investment, deliver their populations higher growth in per capita incomes and better standards of living than those that remain closed to the world’. [6, p. xi] Economic globalization had become our new utopia. The writers of neither documents seemed to be reading the numerous United Nations annual reports that documented increasingly division of wealth and poverty across the world, with crises developing in sub-Saharan Africa. Across the decade to which they so proudly pointed, thirteen-million children were killed by diarrhoea, a number that exceeds the count of all the people killed in armed combat since World War II. Each day, around the world, 30-thousand children were still dying of preventable diseases. However, for the writers of these documents, ‘Australia’ was doing well out of the globalization process and therefore it must be good for all.

Over the same period, we saw a significant hardening of the nation-state’s boundaries to refugees. This process was handled quietly at first—it contradicted the belief in openness and was therefore at this stage better left buried in the policy documents. The hardening began at a

time when according to a 1989 world survey by the US Committee for Refugees, 15-million persons were squatting in refugee camps across the Third World. Australia then contributed only Aus \$0.75 per capita to refugee agencies,³ and in 1989/90 had dropped its refugee intake to 9.6 per cent of its total migrant intake.⁴ Alongside this closure, migration continued to be defended as in the national interest. The policy direction confirmed the treatment of Australia as a de-cultured space able to be sold as attractive to a 'better class' of migrant (read 'human capital'). The plight of refugees was increasingly seen as something that could be cross-subsidized out of enhanced economic growth. Without any prominent announcement, the Australian Labor governments began the policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers, and by the time it was carried forward into the new century by thin-lipped Liberal-National politicians it had become part of a bipartisan policy continuum. The Right began to talk of the refugees as 'illegals'. Distinctions began to be drawn between 'genuine' refugees and 'queue jumpers', that is, people who arrived on the Australian shore in need of asylum. Displaced human beings were turned simultaneously into figures of banality and fear. In other words, refugees at once became banal figures of our own annoyance—pushy types with intrusive bodies who want to take advantage of our generosity—and also threatening figures of statistical abstraction enumerated within a state-defined quota of whom and how many should cross our border.

The state thus stepped in and politicized what had started to become a debated question of how Australia should deal with the increasing number of refugees in the world. The citizenry were asked to rest comfortable in the knowledge that a system of statistical experts had calculated how many of those 'illegals' that Australians would have to face in their streets and in their workplaces. In an extraordinary election campaign in 2001 the Howard government was re-elected after a campaign that centred on turning Australia into a fortress against the needy of the world. A few months earlier a ship carrying refugees, the Tampa, had been turned back into international waters, and Prime Minister John Howard had introduced a new bill to confirm the legality of this action. 'It is in the national interest', he said, 'that we have the power to prevent, beyond any argument, people infringing on the sovereignty of this country'.⁵ Australia had thus arrived at the point of treating itself as a suburban security zone. The outside world was allowed in only if it contributed to our economic well-being.

3 *Sunday Age*, 29 April 1990.

4 Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, *Statistics Monthly on Settler Arrivals 1988-89*. This compares with 21 per cent in 1983/84 and 19 per cent in 1984/85.

5 *The Australian*, 30 August 2001.

2. Movement and the regulation of persons

Thinking about the future always entails going back to the past to understand the generalities of how we got to the present situation. People have always moved across the political landscape. However, during the twentieth century, movement became both increasingly state-managed and increasingly individualized. In general, the cross-cutting of migration and nation-state consolidation was resolved in the worst possible way. Going back to the time when America's Statue of Liberty was completed in 1886 and inscribed with its heart-warming welcome to Europe's tired and poor 'huddled masses yearning to be free', such sentiments were becoming pious hypocrisy. Nation-states increasingly only wanted the right kind of 'huddled' individuals yearning to be entrepreneurs—huddled masses were a problem. From the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries to the present a double process has operated. The right to migrate has continued to be held up as a simple basic right, while the right to reject the wrong kind of immigrants or refugees has become increasingly complicated and now seems always to override the first right. Without exception across the Northern states, the flow of arrivals came to be carefully administered in the national interest. Despite the continuing existence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a 'temporary organization' formed in 1951 to deal with the remaining post-war refugees in Europe, the issue of movement of people across borders remained a nationally-organized issue rather than a globally-negotiated one. Immigrants and refugees came to be assessed by a growing army of state-sponsored statisticians and political scientists who simultaneously monitor the nation's labour requirements and cultural limits. Entry was, and is, regulated by laws of alien entry which tighten and loosen in the national economic interest. By comparison the movement of commodities saw global bodies such as the World Trade Organization develop to negotiate (notwithstanding all its ideological biases) at a level beyond the national interest.

Over the twentieth century, migration became what might be called contractual immigration. Most migrants in the post-war period were offered either short-term entry and were known in countries such as West Germany and Switzerland by the savage euphemism of 'guest workers' (John Berger's tale of the *Seventh Man*); or, in a direction that Australia tended to follow, they were accepted for indefinite entry and naturalized into the working class. For this, migrants gave up all but the most attenuated sense of continuity with their past. Although, from the Whitlam government (1972-75) onwards, 'family reunion' became part of the creed of official immigration

policy, and although OTC (the Overseas Telecommunications Commission) advertised mind-warming messages about how migrants might ‘keep in touch’ with their homeland, humanitarianism was little more than an adjunction (whether heart-felt or cynical). Behind all the debates from the 1970s to the present, there continued to be one set of narrow economic question—what level of migrant intake best serves the national interest; what level of refugee intake can we afford. Migration became contractual immigration in the sense that emigrants were contracted to become part of the nation largely on the basis of what they had to offer. They became human capital to which, in our apparent largesse, we could offer more material rewards than we did to the unskilled migrants of an earlier generation.

The regulation of people coincided with the regulation of territory. It would be oversimplifying history to suggest there has been a dichotomous transition from treating ‘place’ to ‘space’. Both subdividing the rainforest regions such as the Daintree or the Otways into house-blocks for pleasurable living and, less obviously, arguing for saving rainforest-cum-gene-banks as an investment in the future, have some continuities back to Wakefield’s parcelling up of the open spaces of New South Wales and South Australia in the nineteenth century. Similarly, continuities can be traced back from the present to the beginning of European occupation when ‘settlers’ (a term rife with unintended pathos) battled the inconsonance of place and space, finding partial solace in filling the empty spaces of their Australia with meaning transferred from ‘the mother country’. Nevertheless in the period since colonization, and particularly in the contemporary period, the dominant sense of place has been substantially reduced to the control and regulation of space. The changing relation to land provides a good example of this global though uneven process. Overlaying and in contradiction with a reconstituted and continually-weakened conception of land as a specific place for reproducing life, as a source of meaning and as a link to the past, there has developed into dominance a sense of land as commodity—fetishized no doubt, but nevertheless a commodity. Throughout this period, land rights for Aboriginal people became a major issue, but when the court rulings such as the Mabo decision to accept a version of native title came down even these were based on modernist notions of proven property-like relations to place.

This in sum is the present that we face: questions of how we are to live framed by a narrow emphasis on social interest, social relations turned into considerations of optimal return and the landscape turned into individually-owned or leased sections of land that carry what is still called ‘the Australian dream’. There are simple things that should be enacted straightaway: ending mandatory detention of asylum seekers; recognizing the equal worth of different regimes of land

tenure; instituting tax concessions and other financial incentives for reciprocal arrangements between local communities and municipalities across the nation and the globe; and increasing the global aid budget of the federal Australian government while rejecting the idea of aid as an instrument of self-interested foreign policy. However, to list and discuss these kinds of issues is not even to get close to the heart of the problems.

3. Towards an alternative

The neoliberal vision of the future holds that the commodity should be free to move across boundaries while the movement of people needs to be highly regulated. By contrast, one strand of the anti-corporate globalization movement argues that people should be free to go where they want and commodities should be more regulated. It is a bankrupt debate. Rather than arguing for the end of boundaries and the beginning of a borderless world in either case, I want to change the terms of the debate. Our thinking about the future on the basis that social relations, I suggest, should be founded ethically, and practically, on positive principles of inter-relationship, including relations across national and regional boundaries.⁶

The discussion begins by setting up four basic kinds of principles, presented in terms of levels of increasing ontological depth: an ethic of agonism, an ethic of rights, an ethic of care, and an ethic of foundations. Presenting ethics in this layered way is not intended to privilege depth, but it is an argument against those who, in fear of a foundational ethic, turn to liberal or neo-liberal pragmatics. I am thinking here of Richard Rorty when he says that ideally a new ethics should ‘culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings’. [7, p. 45] My response is ‘maybe, however...’ The ‘however’ says that if we care to look at the ontological meaning of finitude and mortality in human inter-relationship (however historically contingent and variable this has been in practice) we are already in the realms of a foundational ethics that take us far

6 As will become apparent I want to treat these principles as positively contradictory. As principles-in-tension they can only be worked out thoroughly in reflexive practice, rather than left exclusively in the hands of philosophers and critics to be passed down for occasional trials. Nevertheless, there is a place for discussion in the abstract. In this spirit, the principles will be presented here schematically with no great claims being made for the terms of the schema, only for the indicative nature of the approach. The principles and their lived meaning it is suggested need to be argued about, negotiated, and worked through over various modes of practice, and over varying levels of space-time extension and social integration. It appears dangerous to begin by listing a possible set principles and leaving them loosely defined, but that is part of the point. The following discussion can only be contingent and introductory. It faces the dilemma that ethics is dependent upon lived enactment and dialogue, of which writing can only be one small part.

deeper than any liberal pragmatics. It follows writers such as Bryan Turner and Chris Rojek in arguing for a foundational basis to discussions of human rights [8]. Principles such as the importance of reciprocity in co-operation or an emphasis upon equality are thus treated not as discrete liberal rights but as interwoven into a tapestry of contingent rights founded in relation to deeper ‘ways of being’. Personally agonizing over relativized private fragments of what you, as a single individual, think is right and good (the level of an ‘ethics of agonism’) even if it is institutionalized in an ethic of rights is not sufficient. Worse than that, in the individualizing of questions of what should be done we are all left personally agonizing over how much money to give to this or that charity, which party to vote for, and who to leave our wealth to when we die. The agony of deciding ‘what feels right today’ is hardly a satisfactory way of reimagining the future.

I begin with the level of an ethic of rights not only because it is the most familiar to us, but also because despite my qualms about its one-dimensional predominance in contemporary social relations and discourse it is important for any alternative politics.

3.1 An ethic of rights

These are principles conceived at the level of disembodied rights and procedures including the following: democracy, rule of law, civility and justice. This list is not exhaustive. It is used as a short-hand for a clustering of *procedural* principles commonly referred in the literature as *rights*, and draws across the traditions of liberal-participatory and socialist democracy. This is the level at which modern law works. Even when black letter law refers to such apparently particularistic entities as ‘the person in the street’ or ‘the asylum seeker’ it sets up that person as the abstract indicative person, not as the actual person-in-the-flesh. Commentators invoking the universalistic language of human rights may refer to more ontologically-basic issues as the right to food and shelter or refuge from political persecution, but the framing of such rights-based discussion is usually conducted at the level of either prosaic taken-for-granted needs or through vague conceptions of fairness. We need this level—it is crucial to enacting a politics—but the ethic of rights is very thin, and has been for a long time. For example, Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox in their book *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* record that although at the end of the nineteenth century the right of refugees to asylum was ‘writ in characters of fire on the tablets of our Constitution’ this was quickly challenged by a series of Alien Acts in the twentieth century such that asylum became a privilege granted by the state [9, p. 397].

Returning to an acceptance of the unassailable right of external asylum seekers to be granted a potential alternative home is the first crucial step in rethinking the closure of the nation-state, however simply reasserting the importance of that right is meaningless in the absence of an operable regime of global negotiation for determining a nation-states' share of the responsibility for the needs of refugees. There is nothing to stop a particular government from saying that 'there is no room in this particular place. We agree with your right to refuge, but think that it should be offered somewhere else.' A thorough-going alternative to the current practice of empty rights talk—with each nation-state around the world regulating its own 'queue' and taking in more or less asylum seekers depending upon the fluctuations of national interest, national guilt and national negotiating skills—thus requires a complete rethinking of the global governance of the movement of people. It requires the institution of a global body, a forum for negotiating and adjudicating on decisions about refugee support and intake. Dislocated peoples are a local-national-global problem and can only be handled across those realms within the auspices of a global forum where debates about support are conducted openly. Similarly, the Australian legal notion of land rights for Aboriginal people is empty procedure in the context of a world that reduces the relationship to place to a property relation. Saying that we will offer you land rights as long as, firstly, it does not impinge upon the existing dominant legal relations such as leasehold or private property, and, secondly, that you can show a property-like continuous relation to that place means that successful land rights cases in Australia are rare. This requires a rewriting of modern international law to qualify property rights by other cultural regimes, including customary land tenure. Again this requires a global forum for conducting open debate about the transnational meaning of such cross-cutting land tenure regimes and for adjudicating under circumstances of an impasse, but more importantly it requires a slow cultural revolution in this way in which think about land.

Rights usually draw upon the next level of ethics without making that connection explicit and usually in politically thin ways. For example, implicitly, and in theory, the ideal of democracy draws upon notions of equality and participation where authority is invested in the demos. In practice the grounding assumptions of democracy are too embarrassingly unfulfilled for them to be part of everyday public debate. In practice we tend to retreat to the thin idea that regularized voting doth a democracy make. This leads to the next step in my argument—without a deeper sense of ethical engagement, rights and procedures mean very little. They either become easy sugar-words or time-consuming empty activities.

3.2 *An ethic of care*

The ethics of care is an ontologically deeper form of ethics than the ethic of rights. In the alternative framework that I want to develop it includes the following principles: reciprocity-co-operation, freedom-autonomy, equality-empathy, solidarity-authority, identity-difference. Grouping these couplets together under the nomination *ethic of care* is perhaps too restrictive, but it gets closer to providing a general description than any other I can think of among the terms in current use. The present discussion is intended to give more structural specificity to the work done by feminist and other writers including Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto [10]. The dual concepts presented here, alongside the others that could also be added to the list, put *social relational* concepts together—as opposed to universalistic procedural concepts—with the definitions of each concept drawing broadly from existing traditions of ethics from socialism to liberalism, and from Confucianism to Christianity. Why have I chosen these particular concepts? They are chosen precisely because they are embedded in existing debates and derive from social forms across human history. However, rather than being a pastiche of all that has been historically human, they are chosen as most simply expressing the ethical range of human inter-relations in practice.

The principles are in tension with each other, but more than that, the dual concepts used to describe each principle are intended to resonate against each other. For example, reciprocity and co-operation are not synonyms: the concept of ‘co-operation’ qualifies the form of reciprocity, particularly what is referred to in the anthropological literature as antagonistic reciprocity. This qualifying of reciprocity by co-operation, identity by difference, and so on, is intended to mitigate the tendency to drag such concepts back to the level of procedures without ongoing reflection on their meaning. Modern reciprocity can very easily become an exercise in counting the cost-benefit. Australia accompanies the United States into Iraq as part of the Coalition of the Willing: the United States offers Australia a free trade agreement. This point is not to suggest that this manifold of principles should not be operationalized, but it is to stop accounting methods being used to measure the ‘implementation’ of each principle as a disembodied singularity. In relation to the movement of people and things, an ethic of care requires consideration of all people in the transaction, including those who live in the places that are receiving people in need into their midst. In relation to Aboriginal land rights, an ethic of care requires that we examine the nature of the claim to a relationship to the land, not just its legal standing. The old Marxist dictum comes closest to encapsulating the kind of ethics conceived at this level: ‘from each according to their capacity and to each according to their

need'. What an ethic of care entails is thinking about how someone might be supported rather than immediately counting the cost. This again is an argument for a cultural revolution in the way that we imagine the future.

3.3 *An ethic of foundations*

This level refers to ethics conceived at the level of categorical relations: ecology, ontology. It is a short-hand way of referring to a clustering of principles relevant to our relationship to nature and place, and to others similarly bound up in finitude and embodied life-mortality. This is the level at which questions of the sacred are often raised, deontological questions about the meaning of life itself. While this dimension is pressing for some, I want to simply suggest that at this level it is possible to argue that social relations should be conditionally founded upon and therefore qualified by our cultural embeddedness within nature and the categorical limitations of having social bodies. It is 'foundational' in the sense that our various ethical houses cannot stand up in the long-term without such a basis; not in the sense that foundations determine more than a couple of dimensions of the shape of the house, let alone how it is made or what its aesthetics might be. It is '*conditionally* foundational' in the sense that categorical imperatives are always cultural rather than based on human nature as immutable essence. Related to Max Weber's injunction that 'we must create our ideals from within our chests in the very age of subjectivist culture', it suggests that ethics must be reflexively negotiated rather than treated as being delivered from on high as absolutist edict.

Thus, two ideals are emphasized here: first, the importance of treating nature as ecologically limited and therefore economically limiting;⁷ and secondly, the importance of treating nature-culture as ontologically foundational and therefore potentially culturally limiting. Importantly, this last principle has the effect of decentring the primacy of 'the cultural' in the so-called culture/nature divide, or 'the intellect' in the so-called mind/body divide. For present purposes it has the effect of questioning the easy mobility of one's social arrangements as valorized by the postmodernists or neo-liberals. The environment does limit the potential movement of people, and needs to be a consideration in all discussions about the relocation of refugees, but that does not mean that this level can be dipped into by environmental fascists as an excuse for keeping people out of protected enclaves. Nature-culture also curtails the movement of things—free trade has consequences both for the environment and for cultural meaning. It does not

7 See for example, Robyn Eckersley [11] for a brilliant exposition of how this foundational principle should make a difference at the level of institutional politics.

mean that long-distance trade across all cultural eco-regional boundaries should be banned, but it does mean that ‘freedom’ in this sense needs to be considered as a potentially destructive practice. Imagining an alternative future would entail institutions of governance from the local to the global addressing these basic issues, including considering the boundaries or the at least the responsibilities of municipal councils and states being renegotiated in relation to eco-regions. Simple decisions could be made, such as ending the clear-felling of old-growth forests, but this would also entail thinking differently about economic production in general.

4. Elaborating the ethical complications

Individual principles in this four-level matrix have a long history of being embedded within various traditions, Western and Eastern, recent and old—tribal, traditional and modern. However, these principles are usually set negatively against each other within discursive formations such as socialism and liberalism as they battle it out for the ascendant moral ground. In short, what is being argued here is that social practices should be set within the social context of negotiated principles-in-tension. They should be given some procedural meaning and consistency, but conducted across intersecting levels of social relations qualified by ecological-cultural limits that are constantly negotiated.

In setting up this approach to ethics a number of complications need to be noted. The first major complication, already hinted at, is that each of these principles is contradictory to or at least in productive tension with each of the others. The second complication, to be discussed in a moment, is that each principle needs not only to be discussed in relation to other principles, but across the range of human inter-relations from embodied relations of face-to-face community through to thoroughly-mediated relations of abstracted sociality. The third issue is that this process is necessarily difficult. Rethinking the Australian Dream is not as simple as working out a few precepts for living with one’s neighbours and then institutionalizing them.

Beginning with the first point—namely, the importance of maintaining a productive tension between principles—it is imperative, for example, that the principle of equality goes significantly deeper than the liberal notion of equality of opportunity. For too long that notion has been used as an excuse for increasing divisions of wealth: the current United Nations’ *Annual Human Development Report* records that the wealth of the three richest people in the world is greater than the combined GNP of forty-eight of the world’s poorest countries. It is clear that in the

contemporary world, projecting the social-democratic ideal of distribution of wealth, as it might be expressed at the level of procedural rights, does not take us much beyond the nationally-framed welfare liberalism. On the other hand, giving depth to ‘equality’ should not mean turning that principle into an ontological absolute.

Proclaiming equality for indigenous tribal peoples in settings where they are dominated by integrative modernisms should not, for example, involve over-riding the identity-difference principle. This unfortunately is what is happening in countries as diverse as Australia, the United States and Indonesia. When Australia’s One Nation or Liberal-National parties argue that Aboriginal people should be treated no differently from other Australians, the in-effect thrust of that position is to argue against land rights. Those rights are based upon a different cultural relationship to place, defensible only if we acknowledge that ethical questions can be conceived at the level of ontological foundations. It is through the identity-difference principle at the level of an ethic of care in conjunction with claims about difference at the level of an ethic of ontological foundation, that we can defend the possibility of different forms of living, and therefore of layered forms of governance and law being constituted into all postcolonial settings (and thus, instituted as an ethic of rights). For example, the Inuit have been granted relatively-autonomous governmental status in one of the Canadian territories without this involving completely separate nation-statehood. This should be done in certain cultural regions of Australia and tied into the federal system (just as eco-regions, discussed earlier, might also be institutionalized). In organizational terms then, particularly relating to the nation-state, it means that different peoples might have different and overlapping forms of citizenship in different settings (eco-regional, cultural-regional, political-regional), thus breaking up the singularity of one-loyalty citizenship. Rather than formal political equality with everybody competing with each other in dog-eat-dog competition—the neo-liberal vision of the productive society—this kind of society would encourage negotiated difference across overlapping political, cultural and ecological realms.

Terry Eagleton expresses this complication, with an elegant swipe at the postmodern position on the way through:

Equality, then, is a deeply paradoxical notion. It means that everyone must non-particularly have their particularity attended to—‘non-particularity’ here meaning without privilege or exception or exclusion ... A genuine concept of equality thus

deconstructs the notions of identity and non-identity, sameness and difference, the individual and the universal, in contrast to the more rigidly binary theorists of postmodernism who would line up difference on one side of the ontological fence and abstract universality on the other [12, p. 50].

The principle of equality has to work across the philosophical tensions between particularity and universality. Moreover, the tensions have to be worked out in practice between people across the various levels of association—local community, region, nation, world—rather than through setting up *a priori* formulations which tend to privilege the particularized local or the global-universal. In advocating an alternative politics of layered community, including national community, we need not aim to annul these tensions, but instead aim productively to open them up to transparent and self-reflexive regimes of negotiation. Instead, for example, of arguing for the abstract market as a means of limiting the obligatory implications of reciprocal community [13], and thus supposedly enhancing autonomy,⁸ the principles of reciprocity and autonomy (expressed superficially in liberal terms as contractual obligation and liberty) are considered here to pertain to all realms of social life, including the market and the state. In this, the market and the state are not treated as spheres of autonomous activity. The nature of the abstract market and the abstract state themselves need to be fundamentally qualified by practical and more embodied expressions of reciprocity across the various levels of extension from the local to the global. In practical terms, this means allowing local regions to make decisions about restricting the global flow of commodities and investment, limiting the impact of extractive industries for the global market, or alternatively opening up particularized trading relationships with other communities across the globe.

This brings us to the second complication: the need to consider how principles are lived across various levels of abstraction. ‘Reciprocity’ as one of the principles-in-tension to be negotiated in the broad canvas of human relations readily lends itself to the discussion.⁹ However, without some sense of the levels of abstraction across which reciprocity can be lived (and given the contemporary pressures of globalization), we too-easily find ourselves taking the more comfortable path of institutionally-abstracted forms of reciprocity and solidarity. It is much easier to give money to the Asian tsunami appeal and let someone else take care of the

8 A term discussed at length by Geoff Sharp [14]. The irony here is that under the rubric of the ‘ideology of autonomy’, market relations in fact set up unacknowledged structures of authority (power) which limit the *de facto* freedoms of people in ways that close-knit communities could not sustain.

9 Within the *Arena Journal* circle of writers it is Nonie Sharp [15] who has done most to elaborate the concept of reciprocity - mostly in relation to tribal society.

problem, rather than think and act through what a long-term involvement with an actual community in need might entail.

Just as tribal-modern peoples give us principles through which to think through identity-difference dialectic—the Yolgnu extension of the child-mother relation to all of nature and culture, for example—the practice of reciprocity has a much longer history than the modern concept of contract relations or charity at a distance. We allow institutionalized exchange relations conducted by nation-states, corporations, aid agencies and the like to mediate our relations to others, all in the name of contractual fairness. It thus reduces the layered possibilities of public reciprocity to national tax redistribution regimes, regional balance-of-trade agreements and global aid programs. There is nothing wrong with these kinds of abstract reciprocity as such: quite the opposite. Nevertheless, we do need to keep in mind the proviso that the way in which abstract reciprocity is handled is often instrumental, self-serving and oriented to the extension of institutional power. This is not to dismiss it as such. Abstract and universalizing reciprocity, especially if based upon a modified version of the old Marxist maxim, ‘between each according to their means ...’ would be integral to a manifold of levels of reciprocity. The problem comes when we rely exclusively on the institutions of the nation-state or quasi-governmental instrumentalities for managing this exchange.

The possibilities of abstract reciprocity range across the various levels of time-space extension, from local exchanges between acquaintances and strangers to global regimes of exchange, co-operation and support. The overriding issue is that in contemporary market-driven cultures, abstract rather than embodied reciprocity dominates the public sphere, while more concrete, embodied and particularized forms of reciprocity have retreated to the private realm of family and immediate friends. In the context of communications, the problem is that disembodied communication through the media and internet are more likely to be the source of sentimental solidarity with far-flung liberation movements than the much more demanding kinds of communication entailed in a relationship of embodied reciprocity.

The contrast being made here is not simply between instances of mediated and face-to-face communication, that is, communication as mere interaction. We are talking about the nature of the relationship in terms of how it is bound by deeper levels of integration. By contrast with abstract reciprocity, embodied reciprocity -- or reciprocity at the level of the face-to-face -- involves producing, exchanging and communicating with, and for, *known others* whether locally

or at a distance. It is where the act of co-operation is part of a long-term, relatively-unmediated relationship of mutuality and interdependence. For obvious reasons embodied reciprocity is more easily conducted the closer one gets to home, but in theory (and practice) it is possible across the reaches of social extension from the immediate locale to the other side of the globe. In the case of the current post-independence struggle in East Timor, for example, it means being more than part of a solidarity group that writes notes of support or puts pressure on politicians when they negotiate the Timor Gap Treaty. Here it would ideally entail working with particular East Timorese people both in Australia and in East Timor across a range of activities—political, cultural and economic. In the case of the situation in Bandah Aceh it means more than supporting World Vision and Red Cross through telethons and then leaving the Acehese to sort out their own political mess with the Indonesian military as it reasserts the integrity of the singular sovereign nation-state.

Thirdly, we have to acknowledge that the process will be uncomfortable and difficult. It entails, for example, living both within and across the boundaries of ontological difference, including finding ways of holding together formations of tribalism, traditionalism, modernism and postmodernism. This includes their symbolically important expressions and practices. One of the counter-indications of this possibility is shown in the intense, passionate, sometimes ugly, and sometimes bureaucratically-stupid ways that many people and governments have responded to basic questions about difference as part of the human condition. For example, in France, in response to increasing numbers of ethnically-motivated incidents, the Bernard Stasi commission (2003) recommended banning conspicuous traditional symbols of difference, such as Islamic headscarfs, yarmulkes and large crosses from public institutions. In the same month, the German state of Bavaria banned the headscarf for teachers. While laws on racial vilification may be useful, and legal state-enacted responses against identity-based violence are imperative, banning public symbolic expressions of difference is senselessly short-sighted and counter-productive. It will not, as we have seen recently, stave off the race riots that develop as communities experience structural inequalities and lack of reciprocal ties.

President Jacques Chirac recently gave a speech calling for French citizens to observe ‘the elementary rules of getting along’. He was responding to instances of Islamic men refusing to allow male doctors to minister to their hospitalized wives. ‘Nothing’, Chirac said, ‘can justify a patient’s refusing on principle to be treated by a doctor of the other sex’. As writers such as Christopher Caldwell have pointed out, there is a paradox here. When it comes to symbolic

practices, France, the Western symbol of a reluctance to engage in wars that could be interpreted as provoking a civilizational clash, is in other respects acting to curtail religious and cultural freedoms in ways that the United States, the leader of the new militarist pack, has not yet even entertained. The hardline modernism of the mainstream French intelligentsia blinds them to the fact that publicly suppressing cultural difference merely drives people to find other sometimes more absolutist or reactionary ways of asserting the boundaries of their culture.

Modern liberal pluralism, it seems is only tolerant of differences so long as they do not challenge the dominance of modernism. Modern liberals do not enjoy being uncomfortable. In the present argument for reflexive deep diversity, I am suggesting that confronting ontological otherness is and should be uncomfortable. Do we aim for 'difference', 'identity', 'sameness' or 'hybridity'? In the terms that I am presenting, this is not a useful question. There is no point in making a politics turn on any of these modalities, much less revering something like 'hybridity', as some postmodernists have recently done. Rather, we should be considering how to live with the dialectic of difference and identity in a way that enhances the complexity and cultural richness of the social life without descending into the hell of culturally-driven violence.

5. Conclusion

Expressed most generally, we have been describing a world of negotiated inter-relations where people choose to act in the world from the standpoint of the social whole rather than from the narrow perspective of their own families, neighbourhoods, communities, regions or nation-states. However, they do so knowing that there is no injunction to give up the layers of their world from home-life and neighbourhood to national community; only a concern that we take seriously an ethic of care rather than just an assertion of either universalistic or particularistic rights. In other words, this kind of alternative does not entail becoming a one-dimensional citizen of the world. Enriching the depth and range of such co-operative relations, on the one hand, entails individuals and communities *choosing* to make the activities of interconnected face-to-face groups more central to their rounds of everyday life (under the qualified and qualifying principle of autonomy-freedom). On the other hand, it involves setting up specific solidaristic relations for the interchange of goods and visitors with groups from other places, particular places in which people can be supported in working projects of participatory, mutual support. This kind of reciprocity, drawing lines of connection within the region or across the globe, all-too-obviously involves confronting the obscenity that the abstract state-system or the

capitalist market-system does little to alleviate the deaths by malnutrition and bad water of one-tenth of the children born on this planet. By contrast, when one's principles are based on the abstract notions of transnational sovereignty and 'humanitarian' intervention, billions of dollars can too easily be spent on a war over Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq. Currently, Iraq costs a billion dollars a week. The optimal alternative aim would be develop lines of co-operation based upon ongoing negotiation, reflexively conducted in awareness of the tensions between the principles of reciprocity, equality, solidarity and autonomy. Rather than facilitating autonomous hybrid individuals keeping in touch with others in moments of superficial reciprocity and solidarity, the kind of politics being advocated here embraces long-term solidarity with particular others, conducted as a way of life.

The last century, more than any before it, has been marked by the horrors of mass wars over territory and cultural integrity. The world faces a crisis of refugees, often caused by fractions, with the old nation-states attempting to hang onto power at all costs. It is understandable then that the postmodern response is to put the burden of blame upon attempts to stabilize relations to place and community. It is just as understandable that, in the new century, the avant-garde late-modernist response is to call for new forms of universalism based on non-exclusionary cosmopolitan citizenship.¹⁰ Advocating a discussion of the principles of community—reciprocity, freedom, equality, solidarity, and ecology—and critically assessing how they are lived across extensions of space from the local to the global, is intended to take us beyond those responses, linking the particularities and differences of place and identity to the generalities and universalities of ethical debate. We can no longer afford the Australian dream of retreating to a quarter-acre block and pulling up the national draw-bridge, while sending off small or even large packages of money to the needy who live in distant places. The problems that we face are global problems that impinge upon all localities, and the only way to respond is across all levels from the local to the global. There are no blueprints for change being suggested here; no set of decisions to be made that will set the world right (although possible practical alternatives have been drawn out throughout the discussion). The problems run much deeper than those that be handled by a few practical suggestions. What we actually need is a slow cultural revolution that will allow serious consideration of living differently.

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