

‘Strange times’: Anti-elite discourse, the Bicentenary, and the *IPA Review*

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate anti-elite discourse in the leading Australian conservative journal the *Institute of Public Affairs Review (IPA Review)* in the context of Australia’s Bicentenary celebrations of 1988. To do this we undertook qualitative content analysis of all issues of the *IPA Review* from 1984 to 1989: the five-year lead up to Australia’s celebrations in 1988, and the year after. Our argument is that while much of the scholarship on anti-elite discourse in Australia focuses quite properly on the period after the election of the Liberal Party in 1996, led by unapologetic conservative John Howard, and the rise of far right populist anti-indigenous and anti-multiculturalist politician Pauline Hanson in the same period, the lead up to the Bicentenary represented a particularly rich, formative period for anti-elite discourse, when many of the concepts, themes and terms central to later debate and current political discourse were tested and refined.

Keywords: Australian politics, anti-elite discourse, Australian bicentenary

Introduction

In Australia at present a clandestine war is going on, because it is in the cultural arena, where real blood is not spilled, it is not recognized for its gravity. If this war is lost then the stability of our society and its institutions is going to be at risk. (Carroll 1986, p. 27)

How was Australia to celebrate its forthcoming Bicentenary? This question began to bubble up to the surface years before the 200th anniversary of Australia’s white settlement in 1988. This question was asked by conservatives such as John Carroll, who questioned challenges that were increasingly being made to traditional notions of Australian identity. They feared the Bicentenary celebrations would become captive to a left-wing ‘cultural elite’ who were out of touch with the interests and values of ‘mainstream’ Australia (2007, pp. 38–54), and who wanted to put issues such as multiculturalism and indigenous rights at the forefront of festivities, turning the Bicentenary into a denigration of the achievements of white settlement.

One of the premier sites for the conservative intellectual perspective on the debate was in the pages of the *IPA Review*. The *Review* then, as now, was a leading conservative publication in Australia. It functions as the organ of the Institute of Public Affairs, which since its founding in 1943 to advance policy discussion in the right-leaning Liberal Party, has been Australia’s leading conservative think tank. Since its inception the IPA has played a

pivotal role in advocating for a free-market economic reform agenda; a role that, given the impact of the IPA on the development of right wing cultural discourse in Australia, has remarkably not been the subject of a published comprehensive study (for consideration of aspects of the general impact of the IPA *see* D. Cahill 2002, 2004a, S. Cahill 2007, Mendes 2003; Smith and Marden 2008). During the 1980s the IPA, along with other Australian conservative think tanks, followed the example of US think tanks and began to turn its attention to cultural issues, as part of a more comprehensive attack on ‘left wing values’ and the so-called ‘new class’ of ‘cultural elites’ that promoted them (Cahill 2004b, Dymond 2004, Macintyre and Clarke 2003, Smith and Marden 2008). These struggles over values would coalesce through the late 1980s and into the 1990s into what Carol Johnson has described as a ‘revenge of the mainstream’, whereby government would respond to the challenges posed to state resources and ‘mainstream identities’ by social movements, the challenges posed to national identities by globalisation and economic reform, and the inclusive rhetoric of the Keating government, through appeals to the ‘battler’ who struggled under the impositions of left-wing ‘political correctness’ (2000, p. 38).

In this paper we investigate anti-elite discourse in the *IPA Review* in the context of the Bicentenary. To do this we undertook qualitative content analysis of all issues of the *IPA Review* from 1984 to 1989, that is the five-year lead-up period to Australia’s celebration of the Bicentenary in 1988, and the year that followed. Our argument is that while much of the scholarship on anti-elite discourse in Australia focuses quite properly on the emergence of ‘Howardism’ that followed the election of the Liberal Party in 1996 led by unapologetic conservative John Howard, and the rise of far right populist anti-indigenous and anti-multiculturalist politician Pauline Hanson in the 1990s (Greenfield 2007; Greenfield and Williams, 2001; Sawer and Hindess 2004; Sawer and Laycock 2009), the lead-up to the Bicentennial represented a particularly rich, formative period for anti-elite culture wars rhetoric. This was a time when themes that would become generic to populist media discourse on issues such as land rights, feminism and Australian history were rehearsed and promoted to the *Review*’s conservative audience and the wider media. The *Review* during this period functioned as a pivotal site for the emergence of conservative cultural discourse designed to steer Australia towards a traditional understanding of its white settler heritage and the value of its past, to counter the pluralist arguments proffered by a ‘left-wing elite’. The emergence of the debate around the celebration of the Bicentenary also represented a shift for the *Review*, which had hitherto focused primarily on issues of economic reform and a

free-market agenda, and signalled the emergence of a more general understanding among conservatives of the importance of cultural issues to the debate.

The dichotomies played out in the pages in the *Review*'s interventions in the Bicentenary debate, as well as in other conservative publications such as *Quadrant* and elsewhere. They rehearse at length a style of cultural debate that is different in structure to earlier forms of populism since their anti-elitism comes from inside power structures, and that has since become generic within Australian political discourse. They provided an adaptable discursive framework that could be readily used to speak to a variety of issues and that has since been used by conservative commentators to reframe even scientific issues such as global warming in terms of an 'elites versus ordinary people' struggle.

The Bicentenary emerges here as an important catalyst and historical moment in the development of anti-elite discourse, with the *Review* as a nursery for that discourse. This is not to suggest that the Bicentenary was an originary moment of this discourse. Rather, it can be understood as an important moment in its cohering into a recognisable form of 'commonsense' that could explain the social tensions of the day. The Bicentenary came, as David Goodman has said, 'at a particularly interesting time in Australian public life, as newer forms of representation partially replaced older ones' (1992, p. 196) and sharpened an ideological struggle that had been unfolding for some time. As Peter Cochrane and David Goodman have shown, as early as 1979 '... already there was a right and a left Bicentenary' (1992, p. 177), as seen in contrasting statements made in parliament by then Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser and leader of the Labor opposition Bill Hayden. Fraser anticipated the celebrations as being oriented around settler history and national cohesion, while Hayden saw them as an opportunity to celebrate and explore the distinctive Australian character. As Cochrane and Goodman argue:

Much was at stake, in that successfully established readings of the past entail strategies and attitudes in the present. But the initial conflict is always at the level of the symbolic, a fight over the possession of symbols, appropriateness of metaphors, veracity of images. . . . Rarely, it must be said, has so much attention in Australia been directed towards, or so much effort been expended on, a battle for symbolic authority in representing the past. (1992, p. 177)

Anti-elite discourse was central to this struggle. The responses of the *IPA Review* to the Bicentenary marked the early stages of a 'culture war' between two understandings of Australian history and culture, focused on the perception that unreasonable gains had been

made by economically and socially marginalised groups whose cause had been furthered by a ‘new class’ of self-interested educated elites, and that these gains were at the expense of the ‘mainstream’ of ‘ordinary Australians’. As Marian Sawer has argued, ‘new class’ anti-elite discourse entered popular parlance in Australia at the same time as the emergence of second wave feminism (Sawer 1990, p. xv). Another early source was Robert Manne’s edited collection *The New Conservatism In Australia*, in which lead contributor John Carroll reworked US neoconservative anti-‘new class’ rhetoric for Australia (Carroll 1982). Such discourse, as Damian Cahill has observed, helped foster an accommodation between ‘the conservative and the neo-liberal ideologies’ that then ‘dominated the Australian right’ by giving them a common enemy (2004b, p. 83). Played out against a backdrop of ‘economic reform’ and the deregulation of the economy, by the 1980s struggles over such issues as feminism, Aboriginal land rights, and immigration, were being reframed by conservatives in terms of an overall struggle between two different and irrecoverably opposed understandings of Australian culture that may be summed up in the following perceived dichotomies:

Free markets	Big ‘government’/meddling
Private enterprise	State handouts
Good for business/opportunity seeking	Elite interests/rent seeking
Equality of opportunity	Bias/favoritism/inequality
Traditional (white) ways of life	Decline of the West
British-European heritage	Multiculturalism
Parliamentary democracy/legal system	Chaos/crisis/lost moorings
Legality/legitimacy of Australian civilisation	Abdication/usurpers ‘take over’
Personal responsibility	Collectivism
Preservation	Decline
Fairness	Unfairness
Sameness	Difference
Innocence	Guilt
Uniformity/cohesion	Separatism
High standards (education etc)	Lax standards
Social harmony	Social divisiveness

The master dyad in this discourse, which functioned as a metaphor for other dyads, and which represented a fundamental cultural divide, was a gulf between

‘Ordinary people’ Elites

The stakes at play in these struggles were such that, as the mining magnate Hugh Morgan argued in the pages of the *Review*, the very character of the Australian people was in danger of being undermined by a ‘guilt industry’ that portrayed the nation’s history as cause for shame and defended the rights of minorities such as Aborigines against the interests of the nation’s founders: ‘The pioneers who built Australia had faith and confidence in the value of their pioneering endeavors. It was this faith and confidence, much more than the physical resources of this continent, which created the praiseworthy society which we have inherited’. (1988, p. 17)

Empire

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings from our survey is the strength of the references to Empire and the British Crown, given that such topics seem antiquated and are no longer so powerfully compelling to the majority of Australians. In the discourse these are closely tied to references to the sanctity and superiority of Western culture and its institutions. In particular, they are linked to the law and parliamentary government and the symbolic strength of the monarchy as a key part and stabilising force for Australian cultural identity. These references tie such institutions and their values closely to an imagined majority national consciousness. They are also understood as being consistent with the naturally civilising force of the market economy as well as the powerful significance of Australia’s Christian heritage and the history of Australia’s military sacrifice and the ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] legend. This celebrated Australia’s achievements in war and is a founding plank of Australian nationalist mythology. At the same time these sentiments express an implicit whiteness that is counterposed against a corrosive and divisive multiculturalism and threatening indigenous rights struggle. Both issues are understood as privileging special interests against what otherwise might be an idealised national equality.

These latter causes are identified as being championed by an elite that is out of touch with popular sentiment. A regular columnist on cultural and ethical issues related to Australian identity in the *Review* was Kenneth Baker, whose column ‘Strange times’ was a new addition to the *Review* in the 1980s after a feature article on the Bicentennial program he contributed to the *Review* attracted considerable media attention (Macintyre and Clark 2003, p. 100). As he wrote,

Family, the Federal constitution, the Monarchy, free enterprise and the legal system all receive overwhelming endorsement by Australians . . . The programme fails to mention

the shared institutional framework, British in origin which guarantees the right of all Australians. . . to equality before the law, participation in the political process, freedom of expression etc. (Baker 1985a, pp. 176–7)

According to Baker the proposed program failed to recognise the achievements and progress achieved by British settlement in so far as it: ‘fails to give due recognition to the British contribution to Australian heritage, it singles out history and contribution of Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for special attention.’ (1985a, p. 177)

The civilising power of British law is such that not only is multiculturalism antithetical to the principles of equality and Australian nationalism, but its imperatives are already anticipated by a British cultural tradition that is both universal and universalising: ‘What is often forgotten by supporters of radical multiculturalism [grants based on ethnic origin to promote diversity] is that the individualism, freedom and tolerance that generate a creative cultural diversity are characteristics of the British Heritage which they so disparage’. (Baker 1988g, p. 35)

Such multiculturalism is at the same time emblematic of a self-interested, separatist guilt-based understanding of Australian national identity that undermines the strength and resilience of a shared British ancestry. The proposed Bicentenary program is understood as a disloyal pretext for the undermining of a shared national identity and its handing over to an unrepresentative minority.

The language used is of both conspiracy and crisis. This language informs a significant part of the *Review*’s discourse about the Bicentenary and other corrupting aspects of the development of Australian culture in the 1980s: ‘Perhaps this is due to the pressure of multiculturalism and an emerging mentality of apology for the nation’s British ancestry. Whatever the case, values currently endorsed by State authorities suggest that large scale rewriting of social priorities is being attempted’. (Clarnette 1989, p. 11)

In another article Baker states: ‘Cultural issues arouse strong feelings; they test moral convictions; they strike at the most fundamental questions of politics — allegiance and identity’. (1989, p. 46)

A key component of this defense of the traditions of empire is reference to the stabilising force of the law as defined by its British heritage and traditions.

Law

A central function of the law in this context is to provide both a civilising bulwark against cultural incursions that seek to threaten and destabilise the very foundation of Australia's legal and political traditions:

The Economic opportunity, democratic rights and political liberty offered by Australia; the relative affluence, the system of equity and law and the social harmony which characterises this nation are exceptional in the world. These achievements will not survive unless they are appreciated. (*IPA Review*, author not cited, 1986, p. 65)

Should these traditions be unnecessarily diminished, then the alternative is takeover by more advanced societies with a stronger sense of national unity. Hugh Morgan clearly articulates this anxiety in one of the seminal articles representing this discourse, in which he laments the passing of Australia's unspoken commitment to the legitimacy of Australia's settlement history and raises the apocalyptic spectre of the alternative: 'We must . . . uphold and defend the legality and legitimacy of our Australian civilization. If we fail then others will occupy this continent and decisions concerning life here will not be made by us or by our descendants'. (1988, p. 20)

Government

Linked to the discourses of empire and law is a discourse of the superiority of Australia's inherited British systems of governance. These include Westminster-style parliamentary democracy and the judicial system, that are to some extent at odds with the general tenor of small government, pro-market discourse that infuses the debate in the *Review*. These institutions are also at odds with notions of individual accountability and responsibility that are also a significant part of the *Review's* agenda and its focus on anti-indigenous rights. As IPA Director Rod Kemp says, 'The sources of unity lie in our history and in our long-established institutions, many of which were *inherited from Britain* – our legal system, our language and culture and the principles of parliamentary government'. (Italics added) (1985, p. 60) Similarly, Carroll speaks of 'The Denigration of Australia's British links', arguing that

Australia is fortunate to have inherited from Britain the institutional and cultural foundations of a free, prosperous, democratic society. Yet paradoxically, during the same period in which thousands of migrants who have 'voted with their feet' and come to Australia to share in this inheritance, Australia's British links have come under persistent attack from some quarters. (1986, p. 27)

Separatism

At issue here are not just issues of national heritage and identity, but of national coherence and unity, underlined by the fear that Australia was becoming a divided nation. One key division is between active market participants and those who seek their livelihood by relying on the public purse: ‘Australia has been divided into two nations — those whose livelihood is guaranteed by governments, and those who rely on their own good efforts. The rapidly escalating costs of government guaranteed wages and pensions are an increasing drain on Australia’s faltering free enterprise system.’ (Copeman 1984, p. 152)

This anxiety, in turn, is mapped onto questions of indigenous inclusion, with Aborigines as an exemplar of dependency on government and yet at the same time chronically at odds with a ‘blighted’ mainstream Australian culture. As Morgan states: ‘In Aboriginal Affairs it [the guilt industry] is promoting a policy of separatism. The message of the guilt industry to Aborigines is that Australian society is too corrupt, too riddled with racism and economic exploitation, to be worth joining. Better to live apart.’ (1988, p. 20)

For Morgan racism and adverse past treatment of Aborigines are not national crimes but relatively small blots on the landscape of an otherwise to-be-celebrated Australian settlement history. The level of concern raised by the ‘guilt industry’ is unjustified and by exaggerating the problem the ‘industry’ has become a major source of cultural anxiety, leading unhelpfully to the separation of Aborigines from the mainstream at the expense of Aboriginal advancement:

The major obstacle within Australian society to improving the quality of life of Aborigines is not the pockets of racism that persist, but the guilt industry. Because of it Aborigines are preserved as an aggrieved and suffering minority, locked out of the job market and maintained on debilitating welfare as a permanent demonstration of the intrinsic unworthiness of Australian society. (1988, p. 20)

History, national achievement, modernity, cultural superiority

For the *Review* and its contributors these themes come together in the idea that the Bicentenary offered a basis for a thoroughgoing celebration of the achievement of British settlement of Australia and the subsequent building of a great pluralist, economically secure, stable and just liberal society. Yet a concern among *Review* contributors was that the Bicentenary celebrations were being hijacked and transformed into an opportunity for national mourning, to the point where it had become impossible to celebrate even something

so basic as the arrival of the first fleet at Botany Bay. Not only that, but this divisiveness is being sponsored by the Australian Bicentenary Authority (ABA) and its advisors and supporters. As Baker wrote: ‘Based on a belief that Australians have more cause for shame than pride in the past 200 years (the new cultural cringe), these advisers have set about using 1988 as a platform from which to impose a radically new identity on the nation.’ (1985b, p. 18)

The ABA General Manager responded to Baker’s initial criticism of the role of the ABA and its priorities, saying he would not want to be involved in a bicentenary ‘that does not address the running sore of black/white relations in this country. If it is to be a white wank...I want nothing to do with it’. (Baker 1985a, p. 181) Debate unfolded through subsequent issues of the *Review*. According to Tim Duncan writing in the *Review*: ‘When Australians seriously entertain the idea that the settlement of this country has been a regrettable mistake it is surely a sign that something quite perverse has been going on.’ (1986, p. 20)

It is notable that settlement, here, is defined as occurring with the arrival of white settlers in 1788, not the earlier arrival of Aborigines. For the *Review*, however, critics of white Australian settlement miss a signal fact: ‘A Bicentennial authority...ignores the harmonious facts of Australian history, the homogeneity of its people and their blessedly liberal approach to political and commercial life’. (Duncan 1986, p. 21) This neglect was of much concern to Baker, who lamented the treatment of the first fleet reenactors: ‘We were farewelled by Queen Elizabeth, entertained by the Governor-General of Mauritius...Yet our own country does not want to know about us, a first fleeter told the *Sydney Morning Herald*’. (Baker 1988c, p. 27) Baker’s response to this was, ‘The official policy seems to be to celebrate the Bicentenary but not what the Bicentenary signifies.’ (1988c, p. 27)

Baker cites the historian Geoffrey Blainey, who in 1984 shot to national fame for his opposition to Asian immigration, and for whom the Bicentenary involves the recognition of an ongoing Aboriginal presence and simultaneously a recognition of the failures of Aboriginal society with respect to the development of the land and the technological and economic progress that were achieved by white settlement. As Baker summarises:

Aborigines may well have been happier if they had been able to continue to live in isolation, insulated from the outside world. But such a proposition is unrealistic in the modern world and in many ways, as Blainey continues, ‘the European history of this land has been a remarkable achievement’. (1985a, p. 181)

Blainey would later write,

I respect a government which tries to see eye to eye with Aboriginal viewpoints. Most Aborigines, understandably, are not excited by celebrations that recall 1788. . . . At the same time, sense of sympathy towards Aborigines should not prevent a celebration of all the gains that have come since 1788. (p. 15)

As another *Review* contributor, Harry Gelber, writing on ‘Defending Australia’ under the heading ‘Falsification of history’ argues: ‘On the whole the record of Australia is much better than most and we are entitled to be reasonably relaxed about the mistakes, even crimes, of a past which cannot be changed’. (1987, p. 48)

Gelber makes clear his view that Aborigines’ primitive ways, their lack of industry in subduing the land, and their lack of ability to develop systems of law and order and government, prevented them from making the most of the opportunities available to them:

For all their very real shortcomings the founders of Australia were not wrong to think that, on the whole, they were bringing law and civilization into a heathen wilderness. It may be difficult if not impossible to define an agreed standard by which comparable ‘value’ of cultures could be measured. But then as the late Prime Minister of Britain, Clement Atlee, once remarked: you can’t define an elephant, but you know when you see it. (1987, p. 48)

Also in the firing line were cultural elites who supported Aboriginal understandings of the meaning of white settlement, such as Jocelyn Scutt, then a lawyer. In a ‘Strange times’ column Baker raised issues of a deeper disturbance of the cultural firmament due to Scutt’s feminism and advocacy for greater equality for women in marriage, yet her advocacy of indigenous rights, which for Baker are deeply antithetical given what he sees as Aboriginal society’s antiquated treatment of women. As he wrote: ‘She concludes with a ritualistic homage to Aboriginal culture: “Australia has the advantage of being young enough to introduce positive standards, while having a much older Aboriginal society that operates in an egalitarian way from which we can learn”’. (1988c, p. 27)

Baker adds a rejoinder: ‘Marriages in traditional Aboriginal society were generally polygamous — that is, husbands were allowed to take multiple wives; wives were not allowed multiple husbands. A strange model for sexual equality, but one certainly that I am prepared to consider’. (1988c, p. 27)

In another article in the same issue Baker makes clear his view that elites of the sort of which Scutt is a member are aligning themselves with a culture that is manifestly inferior, anachronistic, and not worthy of celebration in the way that cultural warriors of the left suggest it should be:

Yet, while I am not an unqualified believer in ‘progress’ this statement seems to be unnecessarily self-deprecating and relativistic. Is not modern Australia clearly technologically superior to Aboriginal Australia? Is not the fact that we can feed many millions more people including people in other countries, than Aboriginal Australia an example of superiority? Is not the literature and science, the system of justice of European Australia and the treatment of women not superior to that before white settlement? (1988f, p. 50)

This assumption of cultural superiority allows Baker to abrogate himself of any guilt related to white settlement. One aspect of this is that crimes committed within indigenous culture are figured as collective, and therefore an artifact of a best-forgotten primitive past, which is juxtaposed against a superior, ‘modern’ western individualist culture:

On the question of collective guilt: there are societies which allow retribution against a man’s whole clan or tribe for crimes which only he personally is culpable. Traditional Aboriginal society was such a society. Ours, fortunately is not. It is in my view part of the achievement of Christianity to have liberated us from the notion of collective guilt. (1988a, p. 62)

On issues of cultural values the new right presented itself as battling a broad cultural front that included not only the traditional left, but a clergy radicalised by indigenous issues, or as Baker described them in one article, ‘a new liberation theology . . . with its confusion of Marxist and Christian pieties’. (1986a, p. 40) Here, to the dismay of conservatives, those who might otherwise be considered supporters of the western cultural tradition are in fact engaging with the critics of that tradition and supporting an old-fashioned Marxist critique of western individualist values. As Baker wrote in his ‘Strange times’ column under the heading ‘The price of virtue’:

In August ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] Radio’s *Insight*, a religious affairs program, interviewed liberation theologian Father Thissa Balasuiya, here briefly to lecture Australians about their sins. Our original sin predictably is ‘taking the land from the Aborigines’ and also the selfishness of ‘failing to share the vastness of

Australia with more people from Asia’...when Father Balasuriya says we should invite more people into Australia he does not mean a mere doubling or trebling of our immigration intake, he means increasing Australia’s population to 200M. What Australia would lose by joining the Third World, it would gain in virtue. (Baker 1988e, p.25)

Elites

The discourses of government, separatism, empire, history and tradition that characterise commentary in the *Review* coalesce in the figure of an amorphous, all-powerful cultural elite, whose interests are antithetical to those of ‘ordinary people’. The *Review* seeks to identify an unrepresentative minority cultural elite whose power and influence has progressed far beyond the traditional confines of the narrow group to which this minority has generally belonged. This power has been generated by the influence which this group has had in advising the Australian Bicentennial Authority and other relevant government agencies. As well this power has derived from the sense of moral superiority which has developed and flowed from the sense of righteousness asserted and claimed by the social justice movements of the 1960s and 70s. Baker approvingly quotes an Editorial in the *Australian Financial Review*, which argues that

‘progressives’ in the universities have taken over the bicentennial. In effect, they are at public expense rewriting the history of Australia to fit their own views, and in the course of it trying to convince Australians they have nothing to be proud of in their history. . . The writing of the bicentennial history is dominated by the kindergarten Marxists, the peacenicks, the loony feminists and the inverted racists of the black land rights movement. (In Reid and Baker 1985, p. 54)

Baker also cites an article in the *Age* that underlines how, for conservatives, the struggle about cultural loss was also a battle about gender and the feminisation of debate and indeed, a threatened feminisation of Australian cultural identity: ‘The Bicentenary celebrations seem to be firmly in the hands of a bunch of academic wimps trying to orchestrate an orgy of breast beating and hand-wringing about the last 200 years’. (In Reid and Baker 1985, p. 54)

In a speech published in the *Review* Geoffrey Blainey outlines how this elite culture derived from three different elite and minority cultures: the ‘Aboriginal industry’ of lobbyists who identified Aborigines as a separate group deserving of special treatment; the multicultural lobby; the socialists of the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) who were under attack for their supposed membership of a left-wing cultural elite, the broader

media, the universities and the broader education system. According to Blainey: ‘The first minority group is the Aborigines.’ (1985, p. 15) Blainey writes that the government is at the same time ‘wary of offending the vocal, richly subsidised but small multicultural lobby’. (1985, p. 15) According to Blainey, ‘Serious multiculturalism is potentially divisive and can be explosive’, and ‘Unfortunately too many supporters of the multicultural industry dismiss Australian history — the history that is, until they themselves arrived in this land — as hardly worth celebrating’. (1985, p. 16) A related issue is what Blainey calls ‘socialist rancor’, promoted by ‘an influential group of socialists — present in Parliament and on several newspapers, not unknown in some parts of the ABC, and busy in some classrooms and university departments — who rarely celebrate Australia’s past’. (1985, p. 16)

Another *Review* article, entitled ‘Changes needed to Bicentennial Program’, promotes a report by Baker entitled ‘Bringing the Bicentenary into the mainstream: Proposed revisions to the Bicentenary programme’, in which Baker argues that the Bicentenary celebrations should be taken out of the hands of elites and put in the hands of the ordinary Australian who is proud of the achievements of white Australian society. According to Baker: ‘The programme should focus on the values, collective experiences and cultural symbols which form the basis of Australia’s national identity and which are close to the hearts of the majority of Australians’. (In *IPA Review*, author not cited, 1986, p. 65) In another article Carroll sets out the terms of the struggle against the ‘concerted assault’ by elites on the ‘traditional picture we have of as our land as a success story’:

This traditional view of Australia, past and present, is still held by the vast majority of Australians. They like their country, and know it is a good place for their children to grow up in. Moreover, this view, in any reasonable historical and sociological terms is a true one. (1986, p. 27)

The alternative is an over-emphasis on the crimes of the past that leads to a lack of social cohesion and undermines the very fabric of the white British settlement which, according to the *Review*, has served Australia so well until now. In another article Baker speaks with Bob Liddle, an Aboriginal Alderman who says a treaty with Aborigines would ‘divide Australia’. Nor would it address the ‘real’ issues of Aboriginal poverty and disadvantage:

Mr. Liddle is sceptical about whom such a treaty would help: ‘It would do nothing for Aborigines living in grinding poverty, camping in shells of cars on the Queensland

border.’ He sees the proposal as ‘just another gimmick to ease the consciences of the trendy middle class of Mont Albert or Parkville.’ (Baker 1987, p. 20)

For Morgan in ‘The guilt industry’, ‘Australia’s future as a harmonious, confident and prosperous society is threatened by the politics of guilt.’ (1988, p. 17):

The power and influence of the guilt industry was brought into clear view on 20 May 1988. It was then announced that, despite sustained and energetic lobbying by Jesuit priest Frank Brennan and support of the Opposition Leader John Howard and Shadow Aboriginal Affairs minister Chris Miles, the Opposition had rejected attempts by the guilt industry to have a bi-partisan resolution, proclaiming the dispossession and dispersion of Aborigines, passed unanimously at the inaugural sitting of Parliament in the new Parliament House, in the bicentennial year 1988. (1988, p. 17)

According to Morgan this resolution was a decisive moment in the struggle to wrest control of the political agenda by the guilt industry and its supporters. It was ‘a resolution that will be recognized as the climax of a campaign by the guilt industry; a campaign which has been designed above all to delegitimize the settlement of this country.’ (Morgan 1988, p. 17) Using ideas of freedom from guilt, progress, technology and Australian modernity on the side of the opponents of the guilt industry, in language that is itself highly biblical, Morgan wrote:

The guilt industry says . . . Australians are irredeemably tainted with guilt and the Bicentenary is an occasion for weeping rather than celebration. Australians are guilty we have been repeatedly told, because the prosperity and freedom we enjoy are possible only because the Aborigines are poor and dispossessed. (1988, p. 17)

As Morgan states:

Australians are heirs to a culture, a technology, and a language which enables them ‘to replenish the earth and subdue it; and to have dominion over fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and every living thing that moveth upon the earth.’ (Gen 1: 28) (Morgan 1988, p. 18)

Somewhat surprisingly, this moment is referred to as a moment of bipartisan support for the aims of the ‘guilt industry’ among those who would later choose opposing sides in an unfolding culture war that is itself prefigured in Morgan’s ‘The guilt industry’: ‘The response from those whose self-respect, and tax burden, is adversely affected by this bi-partisan

wooing of the guilt vote (the overwhelming majority of Australians) has been defensive, uneasy, uncertain.’ (1988, p. 18)

Even those who are beneficiaries of the advantages and achievements of white Australian settlement are for Morgan incongruously and hypocritically engaged in a self-serving attempt to align themselves with the social and political disadvantage of others. Baker clearly articulates the conflict between the ‘apparent oppression’ and advantage of those who seek to identify themselves with the oppression of Aborigines. This is explicitly linked to the idea of national decline:

The very idea of a Bicentennial celebration continues to arouse much posturing and self-flagellation on the left. Julie Marcus, an oppressed lecturer in anthropology at the Research Centre for Women’s studies at the University of Adelaide, sees the Bicentenary as recreating all the chauvinism, sexism and racism that characterizes our past. It marks ‘a new height of indifference towards racism in history and racism now’ she writes . . . But I think Verity Burgman in the Marxist journal *Arena* says it best: ‘The problem with the bicentenary . . . is not merely that it celebrates the dispossession of the Aborigines, it is also the very fact of its being a national celebration.’ (Baker 1988d, p. 27)

For Baker, self-interested careerism is a key part of the agenda of those who seek to identify with the oppressed masses of Aboriginal society. ‘The culprits are the radical multiculturalists and the predominantly Anglo-Celtic intellectuals who have built careers disparaging Australia’s cultural identity and, in particular, the British heritage.’ (1988g, p. 35)

For Carroll this leftist posturing and careerism goes hand in hand with an ongoing and misguided attempt to rewrite the nation’s history:

The Bicentennial has produced thousands of books, one person’s view of this or that, much of it the rewriting of Australia’s history in darker colours. In fact we have been subjected to a deluge of fantasy, most of it pretty dismal fantasy, and at a great remove from the reality of the country and its people. (1988, p. 48)

A better approach, according to Baker, would be to uncouple the celebrations from the centralisation that has seen them fall prey to sectional interests and the oversight of advisers with their own ideological and careerist agendas:

The Birthday Beacons project was such a spectacular success because it drew on sentiments and values deeper than sectional divisions. It appealed to such a wide range of Australians because it was tailored to no group in particular. It relied on the strengths of local communities rather than on a central bureaucracy. (1988b, p. 48)

Discussion

These dispatches from the culture wars of the 1980s helped lay the ground for what was to follow. They helped cement definitional terms in place and worked to define the battleground for ongoing debate around cultural issues such as the impact of immigration, indigenous rights struggles, the right of ordinary citizens to make claim on government and the capacity and role of government in responding to such claims. They were also very effective. As Marcus Smith and Peter Marden argue, one role of conservative think tanks is to provide conservative elites with privileged access to the media and government (Smith and Marden 2008). The *Review's* objections to the proposed Bicentenary program received wide coverage in the press and reportedly contributed to the removal of the ABA chief executive officer by the Hawke Labor Government and changes to the travelling exhibition that was a principal part of the Bicentenary program (Macintyre and Clarke 2003, p.100, p.112).

The *Review's* contributions to debate also signalled a new sophistication in Australian anti-elite discourse. A defining feature of 'new class' discourse, as Barry Hindess and Marian Sawyer have argued, is that its anti-elitism is structured differently to more traditional forms of populist anti-elitism. Hindess and Sawyer differentiate between traditional populist anti-elitism as practised by political outsiders (they cite the rural anti-elitism of the nineteenth century), and what they call "'insider" anti-elitism' that is 'closely associated with two other discourses, that of "special interests" and that of the "new class", both of which suggest that university-educated elites have a vested interest in expanding the public sector in which they occupy privileged roles' (Hindess and Sawyer 2004, pp. 1–2). Whereas, in Max Weber's classic formulation, populist plebiscitary leadership speaks for and seeks to mobilise those excluded from political processes, for Hindess and Sawyer populist plebiscitary leadership is now located within government. This can be seen in the way that the Howard government from its outset constantly positioned itself against leftist cultural 'elites' who were deemed to exert a powerful ongoing influence on national affairs having established themselves in unassailable positions in the public service, the publicly owned media, the universities, and other institutions of governance. Such discourse, Hindess and Sawyer argue, serves to obscure more profound patterns of ownership and control, and includes an appeal to an 'ethno-

national identity, supposedly to be found in its purest form in regional areas' (Hindess and Sawyer 2004, p. 3) that has been sold out and betrayed by cosmopolitan urban elites who are seen as 'part of a larger, global elite that pursues international human rights and other agendas contrary to national interests.' (Hindess and Sawyer 2004, p. 3) It is an anti-elitism, too, as Cathy Greenfield has pointed out, that is necessarily closely connected to invocations of 'the people' (Greenfield 2007, p. 78). A constant tic in the *Review's* commentary on the Bicentenary celebrations is authoritative reference to what the 'majority of Australians' (Morgan 1988, p. 18) would approve or disapprove.

It is no accident that this forging of contemporary anti-elite discourse should take place in a free-market think tank. As Sawyer has argued, the libertarian economic thought of F.A. Hayek and his belief that social movements can never effect genuine social change, which is best left to markets, sits behind anti-elite discourse (2004, p. 37). Surrounding the articles related to the Bicentenary in the *Review*, the bulk of editorial material is related in one respect or another to the promotion of free markets, and to attendant issues of privatisation, deregulation, the role of government, and the drain on the economic efficiency of free markets imposed by unions and other forms of collectivity. For example, the Blainey article on elites mentioned above (Blainey 1985) is preceded by an article on privatisation around the world and followed by an article by then-Treasurer Paul Keating.

A major achievement of the *Review's* contribution to the Bicentenary debate was to help 'insider anti-elitism' become a normalised part of mainstream political discourse. As Smith and Marden argue, conservative think tanks achieve influence through networks of influence 'comprised of elites drawn from the public and private sector which are intent on imposing a particular set of values to further entrench privilege'; this is part of an 'anti-political' agenda designed to 'close political spaces available to alternative voices'. (2008, p. 700) So, for example, the Murdoch press gave financial support to the IPA (McKnight 2005, 61), while flagship Murdoch broadsheet *The Australian*, as David McKnight has said, regularly reprinted articles from the *Review* in the 1980s, including Baker's articles on the Bicentennial (McKnight 2005, p. 61). By the late 1980s such discourse had become central to government. Johnson, for example, has observed how the Howard government's 1988 *Future Directions* policy document spoke to an insecurity felt by Australians as a result of economic change and re-interpretations of Australian history wherein Australians were expected to carry guilt for 'wrongs committed generations ago'. (2000, 38). Subsequent Howard speeches traffic in the populist anti-elite language of 'mainstream' versus 'special interests'. *Future Directions*, as

Johnson says, laid the ground for Howard's successful 1996 election campaign and his subsequent government which focused on disparagement of 'politically correct elites' (p. 41).

The terms in which the Bicentenary debate was framed in the *IPA Review*, as well as in other conservative forums such as *Quadrant*, amount to something of a watershed in cultural debate, where new forms of insider anti-elite populism were refined and rehearsed, that have since become generic to Australian political discourse. In the anti-elite discourse of the *IPA Review* and other conservative forums can be seen the discursive framework later deployed by Pauline Hanson in the promotion of her far-right, anti-immigration, anti-indigenous rights and anti-elites One Nation party. While Hanson positioned herself as a true 'political outsider', her political career was managed by former political insiders. The language of her maiden speech to Parliament and other public statements, with their talk of multicultural and Aboriginal 'industries' defending minorities at taxpayers' expense, echoed the language of 'special interests' found in the *IPA Review* and other conservative publications. The *IPA* subsequently helped write the playbook for the Howard government, oriented around themes of the monarchy, race, and debates over cultural values such as 'mateship'. A version of this culture wars discourse persists in the *IPA Review* and currently informs the work of conservative commentators such as Piers Akerman, Tim Blair, Andrew Bolt, Miranda Divine, Alan Jones, and Howard Sattler. It is striking how, even as some specific areas of concern to commentators in the *Review* have faded from public discourse, the degree to which concepts, themes and terms used in debates around issues such as indignity, feminism, immigration, and the corrupting role of an all pervasive 'left-wing elite', continue to resonate. Absent from the *IPA Review* in the 1980s were issues such as the threat of Islamic extremism and the threat posed to society by those who believe measures should be taken to avoid global warming. Yet the basic framework of populist anti-elitism put in place has been readily adapted to these current issues.

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