

## **'COMMON VALUES': WHITENESS, CHRISTIANITY, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT**

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### **Abstract**

The articulation of whiteness as a moral homogeneity comprising 'common' Judeo-Christian values has contributed to the formation and representation of Australian national identity as unproblematically Anglo-Celtic. The ways in which the Howard Government cites Christianity is reflective of this investment in, and protection of, a white teleology of Australian nationalism. By imputing a universal status to Australian and Christian values through an articulation of a 'common' set of values reflective of a 'broad church', Howard's statements on religion and national culture attempt to reproduce racially unmarked subjects and disassociate this location from the investment in and protection of white hegemony. By examining governmental responses to media reports of asylum seekers converting to Christianity it will be shown how the discursive association between whiteness and Australianness is produced as a naturalised norm. Within the media reports on asylum seekers converting to Christianity, differentiations based on race are subsumed by assumptions of moral difference that locate Christianity with Australianness. By aligning these values with a discourse of secular, Western nations, the Howard Government makes invisible a religiously inflected cultural agenda that presents Australian values as 'broad' and inclusive but underpinned by an adherence to a teleology of Australian nationality that is Anglocentric in its outlook.

### **Introduction**

This essay posits that the ways in which the Howard Government cites Christianity is reflective of an investment in, and protection of, a white teleology of Australian nationalism. By examining governmental responses to media reports of asylum seekers converting to Christianity it will be shown how the discursive association between whiteness and Australianness is produced as a naturalised norm. This examination will include attending to assumptions of secularity where the reproduction of a racialised construction of Christianity (as an abstracted signifier of whiteness) is obscured within a language of national values as 'common values'. Such a connection between religion and state evidences a teleology of nationalism that works to displace Indigenous sovereignty by affirming an Anglocentric identity and heritage as Australian. By suturing this Anglocentric identity to discourses of 'the West,' ethnicity and nationality are conflated into a homogeneous whiteness (Moreton-Robinson 2005: 23). In this way, Otherness in the form of asylum seekers and Muslims, are constituted by their difference from the religiously inflected 'common values' that unite Australia with other 'Western' nations such as the United States and Britain. Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes that 'whiteness secures hegemony through discourse by normalising itself as the cultural space of the West' (2004b: 78).

Drawing on this critical insight, it is argued that the ideas embedded in how

Australian values are presented and enacted by the Howard Government draw on racialised discourses of Western culture refracted through a 'Judeo-Christian' value system. After establishing the theoretical grounds of connections between Christianity, whiteness, and Australianness, a discussion will follow of media reports on convert Christian asylum seekers and the use of Christianity in political rhetoric by the Howard Government.

When launching the National Multicultural Advisory Council Report in 1999, Australian Prime Minister John Howard argued that 'what holds a nation together more than anything else are its common values' (Howard 1999). Elsewhere Howard has argued that 'we are a society that respects all religions, but we should respect our own history and our own traditions,' naming specifically 'our' Judeo-Christian foundations (Howard 2004: 119). The ostensibly inclusive 'common values' Howard speaks of in the context of multiculturalism, are associated in another context with one specific set of values, Christianity. National values are universalised on the one hand as 'common', but particularised as Christian on the other, situating non-Christian values as secondary to national interests. Michel Foucault defines different discursive processes as ensuring 'the distribution of speaking subjects into the different types of discourse and the appropriation of discourse to certain categories of subject' (1981: 64). In view of this, the expression of 'common values' raises a series of questions. Through which speaking position is 'Christianity' being accessed here? How is 'Christianity' made appropriate to the subject of nationality? What might be absent in Howard's invocation of 'Judeo-Christian' foundations? Such an invocation requires the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty and the displacement of migrant culture as assimilatory to a 'unified' na-

tional identity (Hage 2003; Standfield 2004; Moreton-Robinson 2005).

Many theorists have written about how discursive productions of Australian nationality are inextricably linked to whiteness through particular sets of colonial and cultural knowledge (Perera & Pugliese 1997; Lake 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2004a; Moreton-Robinson 2004b; Ahmed 2004). Joseph Pugliese argues that 'whiteness is not a racial category that necessarily inscribes or colours the body *en bloc*, as a type of totalising or homogenous thing-in-itself' (2002: 153), but is subject to cultural and political variations that attempt to signify whiteness as 'self-evidently white' (166). Whiteness as a racially signifying category is dispersed as localised and particularised according to different historical formations so that 'different people have been allowed in and forced out of Whiteness over time' (Elder et al. 2004: 209; Supriya 1999: 136). The consolidation of various English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh settler ethnicities including Anglo-Celtic and Anglo-Saxon, into a broad notion of 'Australian' whiteness has significant religious dimensions in Australian political history. An understanding of Judeo-Christian values as signifying Australian whiteness is evident in the current discourses of Christianity utilised by the Howard Government.

### **Australianness, Whiteness, And Religion**

The historicity of whiteness means, that, in Jon Stratton's words, 'we can take the term Anglo-Celtic to describe what is now considered to be the whitest group of Australians' (1999: 163). The embodiment of this form of whiteness is inscribed differently in relation to culturally specific notions of religion. In 'Multiculturalism and the Whitening machine, or how Australians became white' (1999), Stratton maps the ways in which the idea of

culture as deriving from a racial group shifted to the view of culture as implicitly signifying race. Such a discursive repositioning expanded the conception of what constituted 'Australian' whiteness and underscored the adoption of multiculturalism as government policy. After the Second World War there was a substantial intake of migrants from Levant, and Eastern and Southern Europe, which necessitated the broadening of the category white (British) Australian to that of 'European'. Stratton argues that 'this was made possible by the demise of the thinking that allied race with nation, that had allowed for the idea of a 'British race', and the move away from an emphasis on phenotype, 'white', to an emphasis on culture signalled by 'European'' (164). Underlying the Australian Government's broadening of the term 'white' for immigration purposes was a conceptualisation of whiteness as an abstraction of 'European moral assumptions ... articulated in terms of acceptable moral difference' (165). In this way, 'the idea of a common morality has usually been tied to the claim of a common religious heritage, a claim that equates 'white' people with Christianity, or a 'Judeo-Christian value system'' (Stratton 1999: 165; Dyer 1997; Dyer 1999: 458; Hall 1992: 289; Asad 2003: 166).

The gradual understanding of cultural variation within whiteness, underpinned by common religious identifications with 'a Judeo-Christian value system,' leads Stratton to propose that the adoption of multiculturalism by the Fraser government in the 1970s was underpinned by a cultural plurality (1999: 165). This policy aimed 'to solve the problem caused by the failure of assimilation' of marginal white groups, from nationalities such as Italy and Greece (Stratton 1999: 170; Lopez 2000, p. 2, 3; Cox 1987, p. 245, 246) through recourse to 'a set of moral and cultural assumptions that would make easy assimilation into the unitary Aus-

tralian culture' (Stratton 1999: 178). Where previously there was a differentiation between 'white, northern, Protestant Europeans from the not-so-white eastern and southern, Catholic and Orthodox Europeans' during the operation of the White Australia Policy, this gave way to the 'later identification of the latter as ethnics' during the advent of multiculturalism (165). It was for this reason that the binary opposition between Catholic and Protestants gradually relaxed its power with the de-racialisation of the Irish as ethnics. This is demonstrated by the term 'Anglo-Celtic,' which presumes the primacy of culture underpinned by a moral Christian homogeneity (172). Stratton writes that:

[B]y the time of multiculturalism, when it was the culture itself that was the ostensibly privileged entity, and when this was located in a more general moral system, white was no longer utilised as a classificatory term. Instead, 'mainstream', 'real Australians' and, most commonly, 'Anglo-Celtic', all terms that evolved their current meaning during the 1980s, were used (172).

The political implications of articulating whiteness in terms of a moral homogeneity means that a residual discourse of Christianity inflects and informs political institutional structures and arrangements in Australia. This is a useful way of understanding the Howard Government's excavations of an Anglo-Christian subjectivity and Howard's cultural agenda for 'mainstream' Australia. Howard's 1996 Federal Election campaign was premised on an aim to re-centre the notion of a unified Australia in comparison to a perceived privileging of diversity under the Keating Government. In an interview for the book *100 Years: The Australian Story* by Paul Kelly, marking the 2001 Centenary of Australian Federation, Howard argued that 'unity and diversity are both important' but 'I want Australia to be distinctive, to have Australian

characteristics that are different from English or Irish or French or Italian or Chinese—quite different' (Kelly 2001: 251). Ghassan Hage describes Howard's invocation of cultural values as a trans-historical reproduction of an Australian essence, 'these values are Australian in a 'strong' sense: they differentiate Australians from other people in the world. They trace what Howard considers a unique 'Australian way'' (2003: 70).

This cultural agenda for a distinctive but homogenous Australian national identity is religiously inflected through the mobilisation of a pan Anglo-European subjectivity. When launching the magazine and website *The Conservative*, Howard described the Liberal Party as 'a broad church', saying, 'you sometimes have to get the builders in to put in the extra pew on both sides of the aisle to make sure that everybody is accommodated' (2005b). The term 'broad' can be seen to denote an abstract whiteness capable of absorbing cultural diversity, but one that is nevertheless underpinned by a 'church,' by an adherence to a common morality that is religiously transposed to mean 'national values'. For example, in an address marking the ninetieth anniversary of Gallipoli, Howard argued that Anzac Day has an 'eternal place in the Australian soul' due to the sacrifice of 'Australians who have died in war and for peace in our name' (2005a). He went on to say 'they bequeathed Australia a lasting sense of national unity' (2005a). In order to identify as Australian, one requires a subscription to an underlying set of values, a 'democratic temper', 'questioning eye towards authority', 'easy familiarity', 'courage and compassion' (2005a), all of which reproduce a trans-historical Australian essence. The imputation of the Anzac soldier into a national subject 'implicitly excludes non-white migrants and Indigenous people from holding such core values' (Moreton-Robinson

2005: 22). As Moreton-Robinson points out, 'the core values which were displayed by diggers on the battle fields are never linked to their colonial origins and the part they played in claiming the nation as a white possession' (22). The pervasive ideal in Howard's 'broad church' is an 'equation ... between whiteness and assimilation' (Stratton 1999: 177). This is expressed in Howard's metaphor by adding 'extra pews' to an already existing moral structure or value system. Stratton argues that the notion of cultural diversity as being unified by a common identification of Australian values produces an opposition between culture and morals that situates moral difference with racial difference (170). The assignation of Judeo-Christian values to Australian nationality by Howard reproduces a cultural homogeneity underpinned by racialised discourses of religion that constructs Australianness as 'white'.

This relationship between 'whiteness' and a 'common morality' informs other areas of government policy and has effects in relation to the operation of the secular and non-secular in political discourse. Judith Brett, for example, has demonstrated how in early twentieth century Australian politics, Protestant conceptions of individualism as liberal and democratic tended to obfuscate Protestantism through the use of secular language. Based on moral and therefore racial difference, this cast non-Protestant forms of Christianity, such as Catholicism, as well as other faiths, as overtly religious and incompatible with government operations (2004: 40, 54). Religious values that privilege specific forms of whiteness can be rendered invisible through the assumption of secularity.

Talal Asad has argued that the secular conceptualisation of religion as outside of politics is specific to a modern West-

ern ideal of government. But rather than simply differentiating religious matters from political ones, secularism has the effect of producing the paradigms through which religion is understood.

[T]he insistence that religion has an autonomous essence—not to be confused with the essence of science, or of politics, or of common sense—invites us to define religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon ... This definition is at once part of a strategy (for secular liberals) of the confinement, and (for liberal Christians) of the defense of religion (1993: 28).

When the intersection of religion and politics in secular governments is thought to occur in a positive sense, the religion in question is framed as commensurate with democratic principles.

Only religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse are being commended, in which tolerance is sought on the basis of a distinctive relation between law and morality (Asad 2003: 183).

It can be further noted that the relation of specific religions to political spaces, even as secularism is upheld, is marked by processes of racial inclusion and exclusion. Moreton-Robinson draws attention to how 'whiteness is constitutive of the epistemology of the West' (2004b: 75). In this way, white relations of power and knowledge are represented as self-evident and normal: 'It is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life' (75). If Judeo-Christian religious values are the foundations of Australia's secular government, as Howard argues, it is because there is a moral compatibility between Christianity and Australianness. National values are asserted religiously whilst a discourse of secularity masks the specificity of these values so they can be presented (like Australian national identity) as a transhistorical essence. In the same way

that Asad highlights how certain religions are made compatible with secular governments through liberal democratic principles, this conflation of culture, morality, and nation is underpinned by a racialised discourse of religion. The discursive positioning of a pan Anglo-European subjectivity as embodying Judeo-Christian values affirms a teleology of Australia as a white, western nation. In the case of convert Christian asylum seekers, their representation in news reports and government commentary is underpinned by perceptions of racial, and therefore moral difference, that supports their location outside of the nation by government policies such as mandatory detention. These strategies of exclusion reiterate an understanding of Australian culture as Anglocentric through a discursive association between whiteness and Christianity.

### **'Detainees Who Find Christ'**

On the 21 March 2005, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the refugee claims for thirty long-term detainees, predominantly from Iran and Iraq, were being reviewed due to their conversion to Christianity. The cases were reassessed on the basis that the detainees would most likely face religious persecution if deported, particularly under the Iranian theocratic government which reprimands conversions from Islam (Secombe and Morris 2005). The reviews formed part of the Cabinet's consideration of approximately two hundred long-term detainees on 21 and 22 of March (ABC 2005a; Hurrell 2005a: 23). This story was subsequently picked up by other news outlets and generated debate concerning the legitimacy of the conversions in terms of a possible Christian bias by the Government that may exhort more asylum seekers to convert to gain citizenship; resulting in what an AAP feed described as 'copycat Christian conversions' (AAP 2005a).

The headline for the front page *Sydney Morning Herald* story, 'Detainees who find Christ may be allowed to stay,' conveys the implicit assumption that Christianity is the dominant religion in Australian society, following that those who are not allowed to 'stay', asylum seekers, belong to a religion other than Christianity. This use of a stable and unshifting Christianity is expressed as an opposition between an imagined Australian 'Us' and an Other asylum seeker 'Them'. Because Christianity is attached to the Australian 'Us', this binary is also overlain with a discursive association of whiteness and Australianness so that racial difference is subsumed by a language of 'values' difference. This demonstrates the ways in which cultural values are racially marked and religiously informed.

A number of points can be made in relation to the discursive framing of religion and Australianness in the news stories about the conversions. When replying to suggestions of Christian bias in the Cabinet reviews, Howard stated 'there's no denominational or religious-specific clause in the administration of our immigration policy' (AAP 2005a). Asylum seekers converting to Christianity make visible a whole series of suppositions about Christianity in Government rhetoric. The possibility, presented by news reports, of religious partiality by the Government in relation to asylum seekers, supposes an already preferential treatment of Christianity by the Howard Government. However, the question of religious priorities, or lack thereof, does not contest the Howard Government's access to a discourse on 'Christianity'. The print media reports reproduce a similar cultural causality between whiteness and Christianity that Howard's 'broad church' draws on. The logic of the headlines 'Detainees who find Christ may be allowed to stay' (Seccombe and Morris 2005), 'Switching religion no

key to asylum' (Hurrell 2005a), and 'No special treatment for Christian converts in detention' (AAP 2005a) makes sense only in the context of an already existing alignment between Australian values and Christianity.

Further, questions of religious bias by the Government with respect to asylum seekers are refracted through the racially informed policy of mandatory detention for 'illegal arrivals'. As Stratton observes, the detention of 'illegal arrivals' who come primarily from South-East Asia (2004: 236), can be contrasted with the non detention of illegal overstayers, the majority of whom are from the United States and the United Kingdom, countries considered "'white' within the definition Australia uses' (223). This points to ways in which 'the Australian border is more likely to be permeable' for those identified as 'white' (Stratton 2004: 223; Tascon 2004; Perera 2005). An assumption of racial and hence moral difference from white Australians informs the stories about convert Christian asylum seekers. This is despite for example, the previous detention of Iranian and Iraqi Christians, as well as Mandaeans who share with Christians a reverence for John the Baptist (Mercer 2002), which none of the stories from the headlines mentioned, nor that some asylum seekers are not religious at all but may form ethnic or cultural minorities within their country of origin. Asylum seekers are framed within a naturalised cultural determinism that subsumes overt references to racial difference with moral difference. The Howard Government exploited this naturalised understanding of moral difference in the 2001 Federal Election campaign by characterising asylum seekers 'as 'indecent', unfit to become 'decent' Australians' during the children overboard scandal (Osuri and Banerjee 2004: 161, n.4).

The news reports of asylum seekers converting to Christianity work to support the Howard Government's framing of Australian national identity as 'white' through a racialised discourse of religion that conflates cultural difference with moral difference. Goldie Osuri has theorised that the discursive production of Australian nationality through the media and its relationship to the Australian nation-state is exercised through 'newsmedia governmentality'. That is,

the interplay between the right of free press in a parliamentary democracy and disciplinary mechanisms of normalization, manifests itself in a concentrated manner on the newsmedia especially as it concerns those who are perceived to be 'other' than a particular norm (2000: 211).

The policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers is justified by the Howard Government as a security measure to protect Australian borders (Perera 2002). In the reports of convert Christian asylum seekers there is a conflation of national security with the security of Australian values through the questioning of the legitimacy of the conversions.

The then Opposition Immigration spokesman Laurie Ferguson was quoted in several articles urging the Government to assess the authenticity of the conversions saying, 'I would be prepared to put a large amount of money on at the TAB for a significant number of conversions (to Christianity) to occur now' (AAP 2005a; Hurrell 2005a: 23). Ferguson's comments express the idea that refugees cannot genuinely convert to Christianity and Australian values unless it is a 'ruse', which presumes an intrinsic investment in Christianity and Australian values is only called into question for non-white subjects. This anxiety over Australian citizenship recalls what Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese refer to as

'racial suicide' (1997) where the cultural compatibility of Christianity with Australianness is viewed as vulnerable by the embodiment of seemingly Anglo-Australian religious values by asylum seekers whose corporeal difference signifies a racial difference from whiteness. As Pugliese discusses elsewhere, the

'contingent ethnic variations [of whiteness] and its necessarily semiotic status generate the possibility for it to be defined topically—in the context of systems of differential, and often contradictory, relations that may incorporate a singular body' (2002: 153).

This 'historical mobility of whiteness' (165) is precisely why conversions to Christianity by asylum seekers pose a 'threat' to the security of Australian citizenship because they undermine the idea of a stable, essentialised Australian identity. Consequently, for Ferguson, the conversions can only be read pejoratively as an attempt to assimilate to this national identity rather than a reorientation in religious identification.

It is this changeability in religion as extrapolative to issues concerning the unstable nature of Australian citizenship that underpins the newsworthiness of the stories. The mainstream media is complicit in the ways in which Christianity is made appropriate to the subject of national identity through the privileging of those able to access discourses on Christianity. There were no Iranian and Iraqi Christian spokespeople mentioned in these articles. By contrast, those affiliated with mainstream Christian religions and Islam were quoted extensively; the president of the Uniting Church, Reverend Dean Clayton (who supported the some of detainee's religious conversions and applications for citizenship), Sydney Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen, members from the Family First party (which has links to the Pentecostal As-

semblies of God church) and the president of the Lebanese Muslim Association, Keysar Trad (Seccombe and Morris 2005; AAP 2005a; AAP 2005b; AAP 2005c). That the only non-Christian religion mentioned in the news stories was Islam, demonstrates the racialised ways in which religion is understood to relate culture and morality to nationality along a binary of Christianness-Australianness and Other. This may have been challenged since all the Christians mentioned above stressed their opposition to mandatory detention regardless of a 'fear' of inauthentic conversions. However, the primary newsworthiness of the story was supported by the idea that conversion to Christianity by asylum seekers is unique or out of the ordinary, as well as the Howard Government's views on Christian asylum seekers that makes the speculation of religious bias news.

The ways in which Howard mutes and deploys whiteness and Christianity is not monolithic but contextually shifting. The invocation of a trans-historical Australian essence articulated through an Anglo-Christian self is an ideal used to conceal difference and contradictions. Howard's position that there is no 'specific' religious clause expressing bias in relation to reports on convert Christian detainees is a claim to the secular operation of immigration policy. This externally constituted concept of secularity presumes a divide between religion and government policy that enables the displacement of whiteness and the racially informed practice of mandatory detention through a discourse of 'Australian' values. These 'values' obfuscate the relations of power and knowledge that sustain Howard's cultural agenda. In this way, by answering the possibility of religious bias through a presumption of secularity, Howard's comments perform a double erasure. Firstly, by invisibilising the discursive association between

whiteness and Australianness in government policy, and secondly, that his rhetoric of Australia's 'Judeo-Christian' foundations excludes certain subjects, such as Indigenous peoples, migrants, asylum seekers—those construed as non-Christian, from national identification.

Policy toward asylum seekers is also imbricated within the discourse of the 'war on terror' that is expressed 'via a culturally imagined 'West' versus a culturally constructed Islam' (Osuri and Banerjee 2004: 158). Within this particular context, racial difference is made visible to the extent that supposed differences in 'values' become inflated. The orientalist assumption that constructs the West in opposition to Islam works to homogenise differences within each binary term and link the West and Islam to a corresponding set of essentialised representations (Kabbani 1986; Said 1991; Hall 1992). This dichotomous logic works to privilege an association between a Western and white subjectivity to the extent that difference is reproduced as an Othered subject position (Frankenberg 1993: 193). In this way, the disproportionate media coverage of Islam positions Christianity as a minority within representations of asylum seekers.

The Howard Government's use of Christianity is also situated within a presentation of Australia as a Western nation in a global political context. Goldie Osuri and Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee theorise this representation of nationality as both localised and global within a colonial framework of white diasporas

where the ownership of Australia as a white, Western country is articulated through its political, cultural and military alliances with the United Kingdom and the United States (2004: 160)

and is 'based on the attempted erasure of Indigenous populations as native'

(159). For example, Howard describes Australian heritage by saying

we are a nation whose roots are Western, British and other European, we have strong links with North America, both historically and based on our common values and commitments (Kelly 2001: 249).

The presentation of Australianness as ethnically consistent with countries such as Britain and some ('other') parts of Europe affirms an Anglocentric teleology of Australian national identity as Western. Osuri and Banerjee write that

these relationships may not always be expressed or referred to, but they may be mobilised in specific circumstances where the legacies of colonial histories underpin differentiations based on race or culture (2004: 159).

Similarities in Judeo-Christian religious identifications form an important element to these 'common values'.

The ways in which moral differences between Anglo-Australians and those identified as 'Other' relies on an abstraction of religious identifications, that benefits whiteness, can be extrapolated into the context of the 'war on terror'. The mobilisation of cultural difference can be used to signify an opposition to an imagined 'kinship of whiteness' (152) that situates Western nations as morally homogenous. Preceding the Meeting of Islamic Leaders at Parliament House on the 23 August 2005, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello asserted that fundamentalist Muslim clerics hold values that are not congruent with Australia. He went on to say that Australia:

[I]s a secular society, with parliamentary law, part of the Western tradition of individual rights ... If you are looking for a country that practices theocracy, sharia law—which is anti-Western—there are those countries in the world ... you will be

happy there. But you won't be happy in Australia (Maiden 2005).

Costello portrays an antithesis between supposedly extreme Islamic values and secular democratic values by reproducing a religious discourse underwritten by a cultural determinism that combines race with moral difference. This discourse has been used to justify equivalences between terrorism and Islam and has had negative effects on the lived experiences of those who identify as Muslim since the September 11 attacks (Akram 2002; Kampmark 2003; Imtoul 2005). The notion of secularism that Costello appeals to represents Islam as undemocratic because religion and government are combined, and forms the basis of critiques of 'fundamentalist' Islamic subjects as over determined by religious principles that undermine liberal individualism. This ignores the various government mechanisms such as the opening of parliament services with the Lord's Prayer and the swearing in of Members and Senators on the Bible present in the current Australian government's operations (Maddox 2001: 109, 115), and in addition, obscures the ways in which Islam and Christianity share a common religious heritage (Said 1991: 103, 104). There is a double movement that allows a reading of Islam to metonymically stand in for an undifferentiated discourse of politics but separates the Christian influences from Australian parliamentary arrangements as apolitical. As Edward Said indicates, 'one would no more think of using ... the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons' (93) as a basis for comprehending all Western systems of government. But the invocation of secularity allows Islam to be misconstrued as overtly religious and makes invisible how Australian cultural values are racially marked and religiously informed.

In addition, Costello's remarks denote a white diasporic colonial relationship with similar Western nations, such as the United Kingdom. He repeats comments made earlier in August by British Prime Minister Tony Blair who argued that 'fire-brand (Islamic) clerics' could be potentially deported as all British citizens have a 'duty ... to share and support the values that sustain the British way of life' (Burchell 2005: 6). Australia's national identity is linked to other 'white' Western countries through a moral distinction to that of Islam whilst discourses of secularism simultaneously exclude how discourses of Christianity are entrenched in the presentation of Australia as 'white'. These ideas pervade news reports of the legitimacy of convert Christian asylum seekers and the potential for religious favourability by the Government. Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone argued that the reviews of asylum seekers who had converted did not constitute 'a compassion being allocated to Christians as opposed to Muslims' (ABC 2005b). However, the representation of Christian asylum seekers by the news media and governmental commentary on religion complicate Vanstone's statement. The discursive association between Christianity and Australianness depicts convert Christian asylum seekers as 'suspect' in using the possibility for persecution under the theocratic Iranian government as a means to garner citizenship in Australia. On the other hand, secularism renders fundamentalist forms of Islamic law, of the kind practised in Iran, incompatible enough with Australian law that Costello suggests some Muslims should leave the country. Both of these discursive representations form part of the same process that grounds Australianness to an Anglocentric Judeo-Christian heritage that can be masked through an appeal to a Western notion of secularism.

Howard's 'broad church' as representative of government intervention deploys an understanding of the nation 'that in its denial of Indigenous sovereignty is perceived to be a white possession' (Moreton-Robinson 2005: 21). Along these lines there are overlaps in the treatment of both Indigenous peoples and asylum seekers 'surrounding the issue of land' and Australian national identity (Tascon 2004: 239). The 'broad church' attempts to organise the Australian nation into various heterogeneous pews with a 'common' set of values. This structure implies that the nodal point for the church, the pulpit, is occupied by the Federal Government of Australia whose sovereignty works to unify and in some sense construct a 'broad' national identity. Given this national identity works to displace Indigenous sovereignty, this 'church' is invested in the association between Australianness and whiteness as culturally commensurate, and is consolidated through government policies. Revelations that the former Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (now renamed the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) had wrongfully deported at least two Australian citizens, Vivian Solon and Cornelia Rau, prompted the establishment of a non-judicial inquiry headed by former Australian federal police commissioner Mick Palmer (Hurrell 2005b: 5; Marr 2005a: 27; Marr 2005b: 9).

The investigation, known as the Palmer Report, was tabled in Federal Parliament on 14 July 2005. In response, Minister Vanstone argued the Department could cope with criticism and 'cultural' change because the Liberal Party was a 'broad church' (Sunday 2005). Vanstone's use of Howard's metaphor attempts to reaffirm governmental sovereignty as able to accommodate cultural variations and difference. That the deportation of two Australian citizens

does not rupture this 'broad church' demonstrates how it is structured (and which 'extra pews' need to be inserted) according to politically and historically contingent circumstances. This 'broad church' is tied to an Anglocentric national identity where whiteness may not always be located on the body, but can be an imagined investment in a system of values that associates Australianness with whiteness through Christianity.

### Conclusion

The reproduction of continuities and moral homogeneity articulated as 'common' Judeo-Christian values has 'helped to preserve the cultural and political power of those identifiable as white Australians' (Stratton 1999: 182). The universalisation of Australian values as Christian values produces racially unmarked subjects and disassociates this location from the investment in and protection of white hegemony. Within the media reports on asylum seekers converting to Christianity, differentiations based on race are subsumed by assumptions of moral difference that locate Christianity with Australianness. The Howard Government's use of religion mobilises this understanding to reproduce a discursive association between whiteness and Christianity. By aligning these values with a discourse of secular, Western nations, the Howard Government makes invisible a religiously inflected cultural agenda that presents Australian values as 'broad' and inclusive but underpinned by an adherence to a teleology of Australian nationality that is Anglocentric in its outlook.

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