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ARTICLE

"It's time to get Australian": Unpicking populist responses to immigration, asylum-seekers, leprosy and the nation

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ABSTRACT

I argue that the Federation of Australia, when Australia became a nation, was predicated on producing a solution to the threat, not only of "others", but also of "disease-bearing others". Current research shows that the "other" is now redefined based on religious, rather than racial, grounds. In this paper, I describe the symbolic power of leprosy, the work to which it was put in the colony of Queensland in the nineteenth century, and the determining power of the social imaginary in its ability to make powerful and resonant associations that are persistently recirculated and rearticulated in times of stress. Subsequently, while asylum seekers have overtaken immigrant workers as posing a threat to the nation disease no longer needs to be marshalled to do the symbolic work that it did in the past because a far greater threat resides in Islamic fundamentalism, the new leprosy. In the discursive formation, one potent signifier (leprosy) is replaced by another seemingly unrelated but equally powerful one (Islamic fundamentalism); so that a complex of associations persists in producing subjects—(nineteenth century immigrant laborers and twenty-first century asylum seekers)—speaking about them, understanding them, and positioning them in populist discourse. Thus, embedded within Australia's Pacific Solution and Border Protection Policy, the most recent evidence of immigration practices that have been in the making since Australia became a nation, we can find powerful and ghostly notions of disease and fears of contamination that reinforce fears of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (Parliament of Australia 2001).

KEYWORDS

leprosy, asylum seekers, Australia, Islamic fundamentalism, diseases

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> As Australia led the western world in the development of policies of racial exclusivity at the end of the nineteenth century, so one century later it provides the lead in its harsh policies to deter asylum seekers. (Markus 2003, 189)

Australia takes pride in its immigration policies. In 2016, at the extraordinary United Nations (UN) Refugee Summit in New York, prime minister of Australia, Malcolm Turnbull, announced: "Addressing irregular migration through secure borders has been essential in creating the confidence that the government can manage migration in a way that mitigates risk and focuses humanitarian assistance on those who need it most" (March and Anderson 2016; *Huffington Post* 2016; Glenday 2016). Distinguishing between irregular migration and humanitarian assistance, he pledged to permanently raise the annual humanitarian refugee target from 13,750 to 18,750 places by mid–2018, in addition to a one-off intake of 12,000 refugees from war torn Syria and Iraq.

Of "irregular migration", the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Border Protection informs us that as of 31 January 2017, there were 1,351 people in immigration detention facilities in Australia, including 269 on Christmas Island. In addition, there were 380 people on the island of Nauru and 861 on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG). There were also 45 children of refugees on Nauru and 234 in community detention, which is an improvement because in 2013 there were 2000 children of refugees in detention. The average time spent in detention is 493 days and counting. Many, including children, have suffered and continue to suffer extreme mental distress (Triggs 2013). There have been 35 deaths since 2010. Two people on the island of Nauru died from self-immolation. One adult male was murdered.

Currently, the Australian government is expecting the United States (US) to honor a commitment made by the Obama administration to take many of the refugees on Manus Island subject to stringent security checks. On 16 May 2017, those remaining refugees on Manus were told they could no longer stay and within two weeks had to either settle in PNG, where the local people had indicated emphatically that they were unwelcome, or return to the country from which they fled. The detention center was scheduled to close at the end of the fortnight (Vogl and Methven 2015, Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2017; Doherty and Davidson 2016; Koziol and Gordon 2017; Tlozek 2016; Triggs 2013). In 2017, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton announced, amidst protests from refugee lawyers, that the 7500 "fake refugees" in Australia would be deported if they did not apply for temporary protection visas by October 2017 (Borello 2017; Doran 2017). Applying for a visa is not easy. Immigration lawyer David Manne explains:

> These applications take many hours because we're looking at completion of forms with well over 100 questions, plus a detailed written statement, of the person's fears of return to their home country, all in English and needing expert legal help so that people can understand the requirements of the process. (Borello 2017)

The Australian electorate tolerates this state of affairs, although these policies fly in the face of the Human Rights Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and have attracted international censure (Human Rights Law Centre 2015). The average responses from 25 surveys of Australian voter attitudes to "asylum seekers and the policies of off-shore detention" conducted between 1999 and 2010, show that 52 per cent of the people are in support of the current level of asylum seekers, or even of an increase of immigration numbers; 43 per cent support a reduction of such; and, five per cent are uncertain (Pakulski, Markowski, and Markus 2014). Research commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in March 1997, and 18 eighteen years later by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute, University of Melbourne, shows a "broad middle opinion" that does not favor this system but reluctantly accepts the detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island and on Nauru. These "publics", apparently, still want "secure borders, strict control of immigration, credible screening of asylum applicants, and protection from the risk of terrorism" and an end to drownings at sea (Laughland 2014). In the face of international censure, and without a better approach to this issue, the provisional support for the present policies has become a default. The surveys show a new sense of physical insecurity in the wake of overseas terror attacks from Islamists which represent a threat to culture and the rule of law, and the sense that "Islamic state are coming after us" (Muller 2016, 61). The researchers found out that "there are many constants. . . that have prevailed for decades" in Australian attitudes to immigrants (65). One of these is a "self-conscious ambivalence about whether Australia is or is not a racially tolerant society" (63), an issue that "never seems to be resolved" (65). Likewise, there is an increased awareness of the element of hypocrisy in touting Australian tolerance of difference: "Insecurities in one form or another, then, are one constant in Australia's attitudes to immigration" (62).

This paper investigates the basis for this persisting ambivalence. In *The archaeology of knowledge*, Michel Foucault writes: "We should follow certain texts through their sleep, through their oblivion, and lost origin", to discover "what mode of existence" characterises them, "in the density of time in which they are preserved, in which they are reactivated, and in which they are also. . . forgotten

and possibly even destroyed" (1972, 123).

In search of these "lost origins", Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds link influential nineteenth century ideas circulating between the US, South Africa, and Australia (2008). They explain how anxieties about racial competition that drew inspiration from James Bryce's *American Commonwealth* (1888) and Charles Pearson's *National life and character: A forecast* (1893) influenced Australia's response to immigration at the moment of federation. Bryce argues that the emancipation of the slaves in America and the subsequent experiment in multi-racial democracy resulted in a failed project of radical reconstruction. Pearson argues how other nations would eventually undermine British ascendancy throughout the world, and Chinese and other immigrants in the Australian colonies, for example, would eventually overwhelm those of British origin, in the same way that the Indian diaspora of indentured labor was threatening Natal.

Drawing upon ideas circulating in the New World, Australian unionists and Labour politicians reasoned that a democracy of equals could not be attained in these circumstances; for those of other ethnicities and other cultural and political systems were incompatible with the ideals of the new nation: "Nation-states required ethnical homogeneity, a common language and homogeneous institutions to maintain national unity" (Lake and Reynolds, 57). Consequently, Australia's founding fathers championed a white Australia policy, as Lake and Reynolds put it: "Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Australians drew a colour line around their continent and declared whiteness to be at the very heart of their national identity" (138). Lake and Reynolds produced a transnational history that shows the interconnectedness of ideas and lively communication in which Australia took the lead, as Theodore Roosevelt claimed:

> The Australians are building up a giant commonwealth, the very existence of which, like the existence of the United States, means an alteration in the balance of the world and goes a long way towards ensuring the supremacy of the men who speak our tongue and have our ideas of social, political and religious freedom and morality. (111)

My caveat to Lake and Reynold's hypothesis includes the determining influence of and arguments against immigrant labor that were based on the fear of leprosy entering the colony of Queensland as the nation moved towards federation. This connection between opposition to immigration and fear of disease came about when, in their attempts to hold onto their hard won rights, the newly formed workers' unions objected to migrant labor coming into colonial Queensland, arguing that Asian, Melanesian, and Polynesian laborers were bringing disease, specifically leprosy, into the colony. These unionists campaigned against immigrant labor, representing it as physically and morally suspect—a

threat to national integrity. Those who mobilized these arguments became the first members of the Australian Parliament. Andrew Fisher, the most successful and progressive of Labour prime ministers, bears this mixed legacy. He came to the Queensland Parliament as a unionist on an anti-Kanaka platform and in 1901, was elected to the new Federal Parliament before serving three terms as Australian prime minister (1908–1915).[1]

To further Lake and Reynold's argument that at the moment of federation Australia drew a color line around the nation, I argue that the Federation of Australia was predicated on producing a solution to the threat, not only of "others", but the threat of "disease-bearing others". Alison Bashford has already made the connection between white Australia and international hygiene by arguing that "Immigration regulations then, were quite literally health regulations" (Bashford 2004, 150; Bashford and Howard 2004). Those who were unwell, especially those afflicted with communicable diseases, were rejected as unsuitable. In this regard, exclusion on the grounds of illness was used as a proxy for racial exclusion and the slippage between race and disease was secured (Bashford 2004, 144). I argue that while disease is a vital component in the histories that trace the discursive formation set in place when Australia became a nation, it is also vital to the understanding of a significant shift in the redefinition of the immigrant "other". Current research shows that the "other" is now redefined on religious rather than racial grounds (Muller 2016, 60).

In this paper, I describe the symbolic power of leprosy, the work to which it was put in the colony of Queensland in the nineteenth century, and the determining power of the social imaginary in its ability to make powerful and resonant associations that are persistently recirculated and rearticulated in times of stress (Castoriadis 1987). Subsequently, while asylum seekers at present have overtaken immigrant workers as the threat to the nation, disease no longer needs to be marshalled to do the symbolic work that it did in the past because a far greater threat resides in Islamic fundamentalism—the new leprosy. In the discursive formation that I trace, one potent signifier (leprosy) is replaced by another seemingly unrelated but equally powerful one (Islamic fundamentalism), so that a complex of associations persists in producing subjects (nineteenth century immigrant laborers and twenty-first century asylum seekers), speaking about, understanding, and positioning them in populist discourse. Therefore, embedded within Australia's Pacific Solution and Border Protection Policy, the most recent evidence of immigration practices that have developed since Australia became a nation, we can find powerful and ghostly notions of disease and fears of contamination that reinforce fears of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

So, to an already existing and comprehensive analysis of transnational historical influences responsible for an Australian global color line I append a locally inflected story that further intensified notions of racial difference by

reinforcing those differences with a rhetoric of disease. In conclusion, I ask what this means in terms of the representation of nations, their foundations, and their boundaries, if not to add to the potency of the discursive formation of the founding mythology and to guarantee its continuance. What does it tell us about the ubiquity and flexibility of the role disease played in relation to immigration and nation, especially that most resonant of all diseases, leprosy? It is obdurate. In Foucauldian terms, it slumbers and reawakens and reinvigorates itself by transferring its connotations to new subjects; its potency is un-attenuated.

Leprosy at the end of the nineteenth century

Author Zachary Gussow sees the coincidence of a heightened interest in leprosy at the end of the nineteenth century with the need to control mass migrations of the time, especially in the light of the germ theory and concerns over racial mixing (1989, 24). Political and economic interests under pressure of flows of migration underpinned these anxieties, as studies of responses to leprosy in other contexts demonstrate. Anthropologist Rita Smith Kipp refers to the interests of planters in establishing the leprosarium in Sumatra (1994, 166). Historian Harriet Deacon argues that Robben Island became important at the end of the nineteenth century, first as a leprosy colony and later as a prison, in order to control the influx of immigrant workers in Cape Colony politics (1994; 1996a; 1996b; 2000). Studies on leprosy in Hawaii by anthropologist Pennie Moblo and cultural historian RDK Herman (2010), place the leprosy colony of Kalapaupa within the context of colonialism and colonial interest in land and trade, particularly exports to the USA. According to Moblo: "Leprosy posed a threat to economic expansion, especially to the sugar industry" (1997, 698–99). The rise in the number of those afflicted with leprosy who were sent to Kalapaupa coincided with hot spots in the politics of Hawaii and its annexation to the US. Historian Diana Obregon refers to the period in Colombia after the war of a thousand days and the loss of Panama when a program of national reconstruction and Panama's entry into the world market necessitated control of leprosy to assure the acceptability of Colombian products (1996, 2003a, 2003b). Historian Marcos Cueto notes how the work of social hygienists who took measures against leprosy received Peruvian government support during an economically significant period of growth for Peru in the 1940s (2004).

In this sense developments in the colony of Queensland were typical of what was going on in other parts of the world. What is peculiar to Queensland, however, was the legacy of how these developments permeated the national imaginary. When twenty-three year old James Quigley, a young white man, was diagnosed with leprosy in 1891, it caused a sensation in local newspapers (*Brisbane Courier* December 1891, 4–5). As other cases of Chinese and Pacific Islanders were uncovered, a heated public debate broke out between the medical profession and the colonial administration over what to do with them and how to contain

the threat that the disease presented.

One of the most difficult decisions, and one that gave rise to continuing controversies and scandals, was to find a suitable site for a lazaret. From 1889 on, Daymen Island, in the Torres Strait, was already being used to detain and isolate leprous Chinese. Over the next 70 years, invariably in controversial circumstances, various island sites would be identified and pressed into service as detention centers for those with leprosy. Quigley was eventually isolated at Dunwich, on Stradbroke Island, in Moreton Bay. This site remained in use for those diagnosed with the disease until 1910.

Friday Island (again in the Torres Straits) was similarly used for such purpose from 1892 until 1910. In 1906, a lazaret was erected in the northwest corner of tiny Peel Island, off the southeastern coast of Queensland, where in July 1907, 71 patients were admitted: 16 Europeans, 3 Chinese, one Indian, four Australian aboriginals, and 47 Melanesians. From 1907 to 1959, when Friday Island was closed, a total of 400 people had been admitted, the maximum in a single year being 84 in 1910. Two hundred and fifty died there (Riddel 1993, 14). After 1940 (and until the 1970s), Fantôme Island next to Palm Island, near Townsville, became the asylum for indigenous people with leprosy in Queensland.

The colony of Queensland

The closing decade of the nineteenth century was an uncertain time for the colony of Queensland. In 1892, after a period of booming prosperity, all of the Australian colonies except Western Australia, were plunged into a frightening depression. The sense of economic insecurity was pervasive. The *Brisbane Courier* reported "the unstable condition of fiscal and commercial affairs in the city" (6 February 1892, 5). The following year, the *Australian Medical Journal* noted that 1892 would be remembered as "one of financial disaster, of anxiety and depression, affecting members of the medical profession in common with everyone else" (1893, 43). Falling export income, bank failures, unemployment, drought, and industrial unrest converged in 1893 and were felt for the rest of the decade.

Twenty-five to thirty per cent of skilled tradesmen were unemployed; there was an even higher percentage for unskilled workers. The plight of the unemployed in the colonies was dire: "There was no dole, no pension, no child endowment, and no health scheme to assist them. Once a man's savings, if he had any, were exhausted, he and his family were totally dependent on private charity until he could find another job; the forlorn and destitute workers are herding in alleys and lanes, or cowering in garret and cellar like hunted animals," reported the *Age* (22 June 1892, 5).

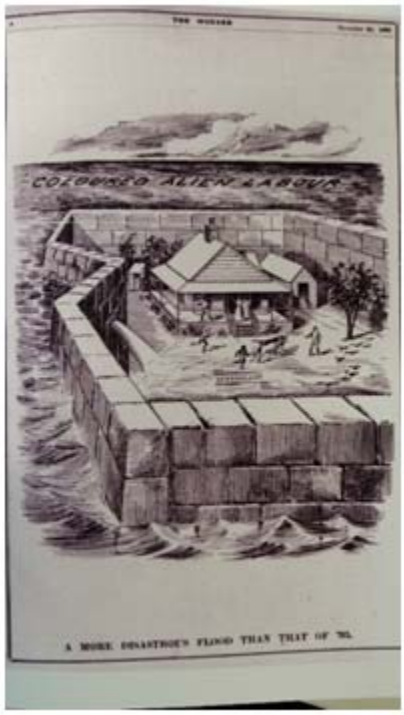
The continued immigration of workers also unsettled the balance of available labor. Since the 1860s, the sugar industry had made a significant contribution to

the Queensland economy and the demand for colored labor grew dramatically: by 1867, there were 1,237 employed; during the first four months of 1868, 900 more was added to this number (Fitzgerald 1982). Captain Robert Towns (1794–1873), an entrepreneurial shipowner, first brought South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) to Queensland for cotton growing in 1863. By 1883, there were 11,443 Melanesian and Polynesian laborers in the colony; by 1904, 62,000. Liberal politician, Samuel Griffith, established his government in 1883 on an anti-Kanaka platform with the *Pacific Islanders Act of 1885*, designed to end indentured labor by 1890. After a brief period in political opposition and upon reelection to the government of the colony, he joined forces with his Conservative rival, Sir Thomas Macllwraith, to form a coalition government and with Macllwraith, produced on 13 February 1892, what was considered the most dramatic betrayal of a mandate in Queensland politics—the reintroduction of Kanaka labor in his 1892 *Manifesto to the People of Queensland* (Joyce 1983, 237). In his defense, Griffith blamed "a certain group of men" who refused to labor in the sugar cane fields of tropical north Queensland because it was degrading, so they priced their work at an unaffordable level and prevented anyone else from working there. Consequently, he reasoned that if Polynesian immigration were not resumed the European settlement of the colony would be in jeopardy (237).

In his Manifesto (cited above), Griffith went on to refer to this period as a tumultuous period of industrial unrest. The Maritime Strike in 1890 had involved 50,000 men; in May 1890, the Queensland Shearers' Union, alongside the Brisbane wharf laborers, contended with the Darling Downs Pastoralists to force them to employ only members of the union. Coal miners joined in the strike demanding that only union labor could ship their coal. The effects of these demands were felt in ports all over the world as union labor on the docks refused to unload non-union ships. One of the results of the Great Strike was the trial of 200 Queensland shearers for conspiracy, intimidation, and riot. The mythology of these events, including the burning of shearing sheds, arrests, and skirmishes with the police, was that the colony was brought to the brink of civil war. Out of the embers of the strikes some of the first labor movements in the world emerged. In June 1891, the Labour party representing the working class in New South Wales won 35 seats in parliament, enabling Sir Henry Parkes, the Father of Federation, to hold office for three terms; in 1899, in Queensland, the Dawson Labour government came briefly to power as the first Labour government in the colonies (and in the world). The working classes in the colonies apparently had, through a painful process of trial and error, discovered how to represent themselves. In the face of their heroic efforts, however, the importation of indentured labor became a maddening strategy of the money-grabbing powerful landholders who incidentally also monopolised the political class of the time

(See Hanley 2016). [2]

The prospect of degeneration for those living in the tropical climate of northern Queensland was also a subject for speculation as well as an obvious source of anxiety. There was popular consensus that when the white race moved out of its "natural" home, it underwent a process of biological degeneration—it became "tropicalized" (Pick 1989; Chamberlin and Gilman 1985, 99; Hurley 1996). The concern over the white race's tropicalization, however, also carries undertones of an even more insidious threat—that of miscegenation. Mixed-race marriages would produce a degenerate type and the descendants of the early European immigrants would become "enfeebled and infertile" (Fitzgerald 1982, 280). Whether through the effects of interracial breeding or as a consequence of climate the very existence of whites in the North was perceived to be under threat.



"A more disastrous flood than that of '93'".
(*The Worker* 26 November 1898)

Newspapers and the re-introduction of Kanaka labor

Two Queensland newspapers, *The Worker* and *Progress,* battled the colonial government's interests in resuming indentured labor. A large part of the newspapers' strategy was to highlight the presence of leprosy in the colony; and as the impetus towards the federation of the colonies approached, to look towards the national forum as the arena where this problem would be solved. The

movement towards a federated nation at the turn of the century presented the potential for national integration of the Australian colonies; and leprosy, as the exemplary figuration of the corrupt, decaying and fragmenting body, served to externalize the horror and uncertainties of both desire and failure to achieve this integration. In both newspapers, the "threat" of the disease served as a rhetorical impetus towards national unity. In the colony of Queensland particularly, the working class movement against the conservatives employed the threat (or perceived threat) of leprosy and the figure of the "leper" to exemplify the struggle between labor and capital and to create momentum for the federation of the colonies to become a nation.

The unionized "body of men" or the "laboring population" had formed themselves into an extremely powerful and persuasive movement. They represented themselves so effectively that the "type" they identified themselves with even in contemporary times, embodies the stereotypical Australian. Counter-intuitively, this self-construction took place through a series of oppositions, which would include the metaphoric resonances of leprosy. Discourses of disease, class, masculinity, and race converge at this moment in Australian history. Writer Banjo Paterson's *A Bushman's Song* depicts a self-deprecating, ironic, but good-humored archetypal working-class Australian in search of a job:

> I asked a cove for shearin' once along the Marthaguy:
> 'We shear non-union here,' says he. 'I call it scab,' says I.
> I looked along the shearin' floor before I turned to go —
> There were eight or ten dashed Chinamen a-shearin' in a row.
>
> It was shift, boys, shift, for there wasn't the slightest doubt
> It was time to make a shift with the leprosy about.
> So I saddled up my horses, and I whistled to my dog,
> And I left his scabby station at the old jig-jog. (1921, 65)

Non-union labor was, in the bushman's terms, "scab" labor, referring to the strike breaker, a term originating in the eighteenth century (Smith 2006, 99). It is also, in these verses, labor that opportunistic workers from another racial group supplied. The "eight or ten dashed Chinamen a-shearin' in a row" are an efficient, homogenous, undifferentiated, and totally replicable group insinuating themselves into the heroic struggle between employer and worker. The organized workers, on strike for better working conditions, had their industrial action stymied by an almost self-replicating Chinese working machine. The bushman's haste in leaving the station reflects an eagerness to quit the site in which race, disease, and the frustration of the working class converge. In the process, scab labor and leprosy become synonymous with the Chinese.

William Lane, editor of the *Boomerang* (1887–1889) and *The Worker* in 1890,

was one of the most influential voices in this period of working class unrest.[3] After the imprisonment of the leaders of the Great Strike, at the time, the conservative *Brisbane Telegraph* suggested that the arrests were misdirected, and that Lane was "the real criminal". The paper called him "the Man behind the Curtain". The *Courier* also noted Lane's influence, characterising him as "the chief plotter" and "arch-conspirator"(Wilding 1980, 2).

Lane's socialism drew from a masculinist ethos in which bushman, fellow worker, and mateship converged. It was expressed as "the desire to be mates", as "an ideal of living together in harmony" and "brotherhood", "as manly independence whose obverse side was levelling, egalitarian collectivism, and whose sum was comprised of the concept of mateship" (Ward 1954, 167). The construction of the working class hero is forged in its address to the readers of *The Worker*. They are identified as an irresistible elemental force emerging out of the Australian landscape: "The workers of Australia are organising.. . in great conglomerate masses, by hundreds and thousands and by tens of thousands. And Queensland leads." They are "flood waters that run a banker" and the "lightnings of quivering thunder clouds on a sweltering summer night" (*The Worker* 1 March 1890, 8). In short, they were represented as a force of nature, as natural and unopposable as the elements.

Lane's newspaper, *The Worker*, was an arm of the Australian Labour Federation. Its first editorial claimed that it was "a journal of the workers, in touch with their thoughts, inspired by their needs. What they want it wants. The way they go it goes" (8). This identification addresses an already existing body, but simultaneously produces it, and by identifying the goals of the worker with those of the newspaper, Lane embarked on the subtly prescriptive task of actually producing the worker as a richly textured ideological product.

Lane and the newspaper editors who follow him constantly negotiate a version of reality that contests those expressed by the Conservatives, particularly in the *Brisbane Courier* and in the colonial Parliament. The conflict between employee and employer over the importation of indentured labor, as expressed in *The Worker*, becomes a struggle for the identity of the worker. The progressives' worker is white; conservatives' is black. For the progressives, the black worker is a scandal and an affront to everything they have fought for; for the conservatives, a means to an end. The battleground for the meaning of the worker in the colony of Queensland thus became an increasingly specific battle over his body, particularly his physical health. In the process, the loathsome disease of leprosy was attached to the body of the black worker as a clear manifestation of the scandalous nature of indentured "slave" labor. What began as a classic story of a battle for control of the means of production (with an additional element of racial difference) became a struggle to determine the identity of a nation and the

policies towards immigrant races: the white Australia policy.

For *The Worker*, the black laborer was unavoidably the very opposite of the white egalitarian worker in whose hands the future of the nation rested. The potent, selfless, just, secure, thinking, and wage-earning man who values freedom, equality, and responsible citizenship embodied in the bushman, had found his "other" in the poor, dependent, apathetic, impotent, and servile slave who is a tool of the individualistic and competitive regime of capitalism. When the "other" of the worker became the Kanaka laborer, "he became an inversion of the archetypal bushman, the antithesis of the white worker—a slave" (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993, 168).

When the bill for the reintroduction of Melanesian and Polynesian labor was passed, *The Worker* expressed disgust at the morality of a government prepared to countenance slave labor. The concern that an inferior race would compete with, and triumph over, an innately superior group, coexisted with an argument that only those who were of the same order should be admitted to a social structure that gave equal rights to all who belonged to it. The protection of both racial status and the value given to citizenship among those of the same kind was imbricated within a discourse of disease, corruption, and degeneration:

> Hard times have taken the backbone out of Queensland. . . . The fruit of twenty years' agitation, of two apparent victories at the polls, of a big movement which had for its object the preservation of Australia as a white man's land, has been snatched away by the unparalleled treachery of a Premier . . . .And if our Society did not deserve to be betrayed and deceived, if it were not so rotten in itself that little but rottenness could spring from it, we would not have any Griffiths "Editorial: A White Australia". (*The Worker* 16 February 1901, 2)

Paramount is a sense of disgust at the society and the political process. The newspaper exclaims: "This cancer of alien coloured labour has been allowed to eat into the body politic far too long already" (2). To convey this message the indentured laborer is portrayed as a source of disease, the antithesis of everything that the *Worker* had established as ideal.

The vicious stereotype of the Kanaka that historians such as Kay Saunders identifies in the last phase of colonial indenture, was not, then, a surprising and embarrassing aberration in colonial history, but a logical result of the formation of the identity of the Queensland worker in a climate of impending federation (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993, 163). A cartoon from *The Worker* with the caption "Griffith's revenge: What black labour means" shows the white worker chained to the black worker, conveying the sense that the black worker will necessarily impede the white worker in his efforts to secure better conditions

(*The Worker* 9 April 1892, 1).

Leprosy's association with the Chinese preceded the depiction of the black body of the Kanaka as leprous. Little distinction was made between different cultural or racial groups that were othered, although at different times the Kanaka was regarded as having the same potential for communicating disease as the Chinese; depicted as an uncivilised victim of the leprous Chinese but nevertheless an active source of contamination (Lane 1888).

In support of its arguments against disease-bearing immigrants, *The Worker* published James Cantlie's medical and scientific investigation, "The Ethnography of Leprosy in the Far East" (1897). For Cantlie, leprosy is attributed to the Chinese, and the black worker is viewed as a uniquely susceptible victim of an insidious Chinese invasion: "No one can look upon the splendid races of the Pacific, and see how rapidly they become leprous, without feeling they are doomed, unless the Chinese coolie is prevented from infecting them. . . " The article concludes that from the Chinese province of Kwantung and Fokien, "leprosy spreads with diminishing intensity in all directions, "and "in not a single instance are the native races attacked without there being Chinese lepers in the country" (23 July 1898, 6).

As the white worker was seen as threatened by races who promised to deprive him of his livelihood, the black worker was invaded by armies of germs that would rob him of his health and life. The predicament of the white worker is thus in part displaced onto the black body, overcoming the potential contradiction between (civilized) white resistance to germs and white susceptibility (otherwise there would be no threat). Cultural and literary historian Sander Gilman describes Western concepts of disease as "the fear of collapse" and a sense of "dissolution" (1988, 4). Leprosy was (and is) always associated with loss: loss of fingers, toes, nose, and facial features. For the white worker, when the black body is branded with leprosy, fear of loss of identity, collapse of a potentially ideal social order, and disintegration of the organised body of the worker(s) are simultaneously externalized. It is not so surprising then that this black body will eventually be understood as a threat of the same order, as a disease which produces defacement and loss, particularly the loss of human features; and that this threat would ramify, like an epidemic, throughout the whole colony and eventually the nation. Black labor (like the Chinese) is, therefore, for the white worker, literally "scab" labor.

Another pattern in this externalization of social collapse and the loss of working class identity is graphically represented in "A visit to the Queensland White Leper Station" (*The Worker* 28 May 1898, 7). The visit pertains to Stradbroke Island where innocent victims of the Government's policies are revealed. One young man is described with "horribly misshapen and distorted features. . . puffed up in an extraordinary manner. The fingers were twisted, several toes had dropped off, and the voice was almost inaudible, with a peculiar huskiness" (7). The most

vivid description is reserved for a child who is close to death:

> The sight that made our hearts grow sick and a feeling come over us as if the blood were freezing in our veins was when the doctor took us to the bedside of a little boy who used to attend one of the State schools. The ghostly appearance appalled us and can never be forgotten. The flesh had been eaten away from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. We were gazing on a breathing skeleton. The whole body was the colour of a piece of raw meat turning black with decay. The features had disappeared, nothing being left but the bones covered with large repulsive scales. He could not suffer the bedclothes to touch him, and was in constant pain. He scarcely even slept, and the appetite was almost gone. Yet he was exceedingly patient, but anxious to die. (7)

The disease has metamorphosed an innocent child into a featureless, suffering mass of raw, decaying flesh—a picture of living death. His plight is represented as an attack on the family. The article further reads:

> Think of it, fathers and mothers! A disease of such unspeakable loathsomeness is brought into our land with 'suitable labour'—brought here by the cheap Asiatic and South Sea islanders, who are utterly despised by their masters, and are the means of driving away or reducing to starvation the white worker and his family. (7)

The child becomes emblematic of the attack upon the white working family as the unit of the state. The statistics of those suffering from leprosy gives evidence that "leprosy among the white population of Queensland is evidently on the increase" and that there are "over one hundred on Friday Island". It concludes:

> Our advice to the people of Australia is to take no risks from the filthy Asiatic and South Sea aliens, who bring with them many disgusting vices and habits. They are unnecessary parasites, and the sooner legislation exists that will exclude them from the country altogether the better and safer it will be for the people of Australia. (7)

In the end, Polynesian and the Melanesian labourers are made to bear responsibility not only for the spread of an actual disease, but for being the source of "social disease":

> Used-up kanakas are as numerous in Bundaberg as mosquitos in a gully on a summer night and as malodorous as a procession of overladen night-carts. They lie about, physical and moral wrecks as they are, filling the air with social disease germs more deadly than influenza or leprosy. (*The Worker* 21 May 1892, 2)

Such deadly "social germs" have the potential to cause more damage than "influenza or leprosy." Saunders also points out that one of the most commonly expressed fears was that of the sexuality of the black man, particularly of the

results of miscegenation and its resulting social contamination (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). This mixing of races was taken to be a violation of the laws of nature, the punishment for which was the outbreak of leprosy:

> Asiatics and kanakas are of a different civilisation to ours. We cannot blend with them, unless at the cost of degrading our race to their bestial level. They are noted for their filthy and unclean habits, being satisfied to live in a much lower hygienic plan than the lowest member of our civilisation, and their peculiar susceptibility to dirt diseases makes their presence now a danger of greater gravity than ever. (*The Worker* 5 May 1900, 2)

In addition, the moral tenor of the society was fragmenting: "The licensed and unlicensed immorality, the ravages, . . insults to women, and murders, rampant everywhere where the alien population gathers, is an alarming feature in the development of this momentous question" (*The Worker* 24 March 1900, 5). To trace this deterioration in the tone of the social organism, *Progress* published statistics of the marriages of Kanaka men and white women and ran a column, "In Darkest Queensland", in which the officially lower numbers of black laborers in the colony were disputed and any scandals or crimes committed by black laborers, particularly against women, were reported. Generally, the column kept tabs on what it called the "coloured alien invasion" by reproducing the history of the repeal and reintroduction of legislation in the process. It traced the surreptitious introduction in 1868, of 437 men and two women in six ships; in 1869, of 276 men and two more women; and, in 1870, of 581 men and 14 women in nine ships, until the end of December in 1898, when it claimed that a total of 24,447 aliens were in the colony.

These "aliens" were categorized as Chinese, Pacific Islanders, Japanese, Javanese, among others. It further argued that the "Kanaka bridge" that (Sir Samuel) Griffith had claimed would be a temporary measure in his 1892 Manifesto, had become the "means of bringing hordes of other and more dangerous aliens into this afflicted country" (*Progress* 4 March 1899, 7). It also distinguished between the "newly arrived Kanaka" and the "semi-civilised black Labourer" who was to be discovered leasing land, marrying white women, and working in other occupations. He could be seen "walking about the colony" and "in fact becoming a part of the population" (*Progress* 15 April 1899, 7). In *Progress*, the "walkabout Kanaka" (using a racist term referring to the Australian aboriginal people going on "walkabout" whenever it suited them) was responsible for increasing the demand for Chinese gambling dens and "many other infamies in this Christian land" (13 May 1899, 7). Leprosy had thus also become a metaphor for social disintegration, a plague "subtly and silently" infiltrating the white population.

As this trope metastasizes the colony itself is figured as leprous. After the election in early 1899, in which the Conservative James Robert Dickson (1832–

1901) was returned as premier, *The Worker* exclaimed in despair: "Queensland is tainted. . . Queensland is now as leprous in political mind as she is in actual body: she lays rotting in the lazarette which she has created for herself." The colony is infected with "political vermin . . . this party with the reeking record and smelling soul have been returned to power with a majority" (*The Worker* 25 March 1899, 11).

In this process of representation, the stigma of disease is transferred from the body of the colored worker to the politicians who support their importation, and ultimately to the body politic itself: "Queensland is spiritless. . . it has accepted these things with the blots stamped upon their faces and which we call our rulers; it has taken the lepers of its politics to its arms and has contracted the disease" (*The Worker* 25 March 1899, 11; 20 January 1900, 5). In *Progress,* Queensland was pronounced "the leper of the Australian states", and imagined, once again, as a woman but this time "among the fair daughters of the World now meeting and exchanging garlands and greetings across our Great South Land", yet still concealing "beneath her white vesture—between her breasts—the mouldering leper's scab." (24 June 1899, 7). The importance of the disease metaphor and the increasingly extensive burden leprosy comes to bear is tellingly indicated when *The Worker* stated: "Capitalism and leprosy are our two greatest foes at the present moment if only we knew it; let us deal with them" (6 August 1898, 5).

Initially, *The Worker* had reservations about the movement towards federation of the colonies into a nation. Federated Labour was suspicious of a regime that did not grow out of a workers' revolution and suspected that those in power would simply reproduce the structures that would ensure their continued ascendancy. They attempted to block the enabling legislation in Queensland that was designed to set up a referendum on federation. By the time of the first Federal Conference of Australian Labour, however, support for national federation was already founded upon a reformist package that included not only an end to indentured labor but also the exclusion of all colored aliens from the country. *The Worker*'s agenda here was to shift the responsibility for a decision on indentured labor from the colony to the federal arena. At the same time, it represented the federal elections as the last chance to "fight to a finish upon the coloured alien question" in order to ensure a nation which refuses to "allow the black taint to foul her white body and degrade her to inconceivable depths" (10 February 1900, 2).

The Worker newspaper embodied the struggle that the working class engaged in over the life of the colony of Queensland and of the new nation. The balance in this struggle was shifting. There were moments of distress, betrayal, and frustration over the blindingly overt exercise of power against the mandate of the people; and there was a relentless campaign, which gathered strength over certain potent signifiers, such as the body of the black worker and then the body

politic, or the nation. This movement resisted the dominance of the ruling class to such an extent that in the moment when the nation was formed, that is, at the federation of the colonies, the counter-hegemonic force of the labor movement comprised a very large portion of the collective will. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes that Antonio Gramsci understands hegemony as "a very particular, historically specific, and temporary moment in the life of a society". When this rare degree of unity is achieved, a society "sets itself a quite new historical agenda, under the leadership of a specific formation or constellation of social forces" (1986, 15). One strand in this coordination of interests, perhaps the one strand that did in fact demonstrate a moment of genuine hegemony negotiated across classes, was an imperative for Australia to be white. The White Australia Policy was enacted through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, by the new commonwealth government (Curthoys, 2003, 31). The Pacific Islander Labourers Act ensured that most of those indentured to work in the sugar industry were deported (Markus 2003, 177). These were the first acts of the new nation. At the center of this imperative was a connection between "other" races and disease, symbolically through the trope of leprosy.

Australia is exemplary as a modern nation state in its sorting, categorizing, and expelling of populations in order to establish and protect the integrity of its body politic. Professor David Theo Goldberg suggests: "Race is integral to the emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, and materially) of the modern nation-state" (2002, 234). He elaborates:

> States are racial more deeply because of the structural position they occupy in producing and reproducing, constituting and effecting racially shaped spaces and places, groups and events, life worlds and possibilities, accesses and restrictions, inclusions and exclusions, conceptions and modes of representation. They are racial, in short, in virtue of their modes of population definition, determination, and structuration. (239)

For Australia, in the period of its formation as a new nation, the distinctions of race that built the nation find their expression in the contamination of disease, specifically leprosy.

The values and images attached to leprosy in Queensland were thus inseparably wedded to those "others", specifically those other races who threatened, in straightened economic times, to take away "our jobs". The significance of Queensland at this formative moment of federation is expressed by Archivist and Historian Bryan Harrison in his paper on the origins of the white Australia policy:

> As is well known, events in Queensland in the closing decades of the nineteenth century were watched very closely by the other colonies and exercised considerable influence not only on the course of the movement for federation, but also on the predetermined policy of the new nation that resulted from it. (1954, 886)

He also identifies the arguments "at least while federation was in process" that emphasised the white Australian policy as "a counter to cheap coloured labour for sugar" (908).

The effect of this class struggle was that this conjunction of disease and race would fuse inseparably until the specifics of the disease would be almost invisible. In contemporary debates on immigration in Australia people are surprised at the heat that is generated around the unacceptability of "others". Australians seem to have forgotten that there was, at the turn of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century leading to Federation a potent metaphorical resonance of disease with all its symbolic power attached to their physical bodies.

The resurgence of the link between immigration and disease

Leprosy has already faded from the Australian imaginary, yet its effects linger. Over a hundred years later at the turn of the twentieth century, the integrity of Australia as a nation, again became a subject of debate in terms of metaphors of the body and its physical health and well-being, as it once again faced a moment of stress (Brown 1996; Campbell 1999; Gunn 1997; Steketee 1997). Newspaper reporter Heather Brown described 1996 as "the year of the running sore", but leprosy was not mentioned, as there was no need (19 October 1996, 21). Its legacy was so potent, so enduring, and so much a part of the national consciousness that only a few key issues spoken from particularly pertinent sites of enunciation were sufficient to revivify the idea of contamination of the body politic by "others".

Re-establishing the connection between immigration, disease, and moral contamination, right-wing political aspirant, Pauline Hanson, declared: "Australians are sick of imported problems be they crime, disease or aspects of cultural difference that will never be able to accept the Australian way of life" (1996; 1997). Hanson's rhetoric summoned the ghosts of William Lane's heroic workers:

> And so, it seems, the romantic notion of the Aussie battler has finally come back to haunt us—and brought with it the anxious, the struggling, the poor. They come from small towns, from farms, from sprawling suburbs that swing between mortgage and misery. All the losers from the transformed global economy the politicians tell us about. (Brown 1997, 23)

To widespread relief, her political party *One Nation* disappeared from the political landscape, but only for a time. After the 2016 federal election, it returned; but instead of Asian immigration, focussed its vitriol on Muslims. Journalist and

political commentator David Marr argues that Hanson's people are not the disaffected, working class, unemployed, the left-behinds from globalisation (Marr 2017, 54). Instead, Hanson's people are native-born Australians who are "secular, working class conservatives", middling prosperous, but gloomy about their prospects and the state of the economy, and most of all hostile to immigration. They constitute between 25 and 30 percent of the population (10; 19).

> Hanson's people know she is talking race. They talk about it themselves in focus groups. Her candour on race is fundamental to their respect for her. They fear being branded racists if they complain about burqas and mosques and schools forbidding Christmas. She is not afraid. Nothing so establishes her bona fides in their eyes than the courage she shows denouncing blacks and Muslims. (64)

In a rare moment, with a deft talent for reawakening echoes of the past, Hanson recently announced that Islam was a disease against which Australians needed to vaccinate themselves. In response to widespread condemnation of her comments, she argued, "I am listening to the Australian people" (Remeikis 2017). In riposte, writer Waleed Aly coincidentally reiterates Lake and Reynolds's interpretation of those recurrent anxieties:

> I think that's what we're talking about here: the Australian imagination. How do we imagine ourselves?' Aly sees a nation vulnerable to fears of invasion. 'We've always felt endangered. We've always felt endangered from the first moment that white settlers stepped a foot on this country.' And from the start that fear has been manipulated. 'Sometimes it bubbles below the surface and sometimes it spills over the top and you've got to wonder at what point do we as a society go, enough! Two hundred years. Come on, people, move on. (Cited in Marr 2011, 56)

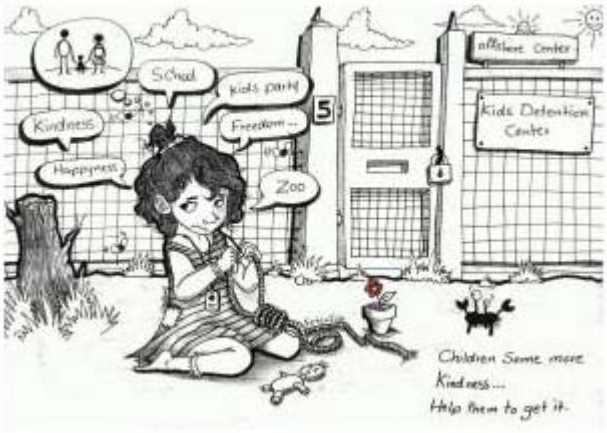
Political scientist and author James Jupp identifies an Australian racist inheritance as a form of populism that is especially present in Queensland (2002, 124). It flares up along with the changing immigrant population and in times of economic uncertainty, and it is fanned into flames by public debate (126). He opines that the "simplest explanation for much of One Nation support was that many people were racists" (134). He identifies the period from 1997 to 2000 as a time of rising numbers of asylum seekers: "This increase put pressure on numbers and processing and began to alarm public opinion and the immigration department, most of the asylum seekers were Muslims and this sparked off a hostile reaction based on public belief of the link between that religion and terrorism" (193). The fear of being "swamped" by the increasing numbers of "people from an alien culture" was "a fear that recurs regularly in Australian history and never seems to die" (197). The arguments and terminology of One Nation "echoes

those sanctified by a century or more of Australian usage and often repeated by influential public figures, including politicians" (218). My contribution to this argument is to claim that those arguments were underpinned by the figurations of leprosy as a disease that disfigured the physical body and the body politic.

Conclusion: The return of madness

Few remember that the island of Nauru was once the site of a puzzling leprosy epidemic. Early in 1922, there were 139 people in a population of approximately 1,168 infected with leprosy and requiring segregation (Austin 1952, 2). Now that leprosy has disappeared, madness has moved back in. In July 2016, a cartoon, captioned "The Terrible True Story of Mr Eaten Fish, Manus Island Cartoonist", appeared in The Guardian. The Guardian cartoonist, "First Dog on the Moon", tells us of the self-designated "Eaten Fish", a 24 year-old Iranian and fellow cartoonist, "number RUF115", living in detention on Manus Island. Eaten Fish's medical report tells of his traumatic flight to seek asylum, his experience of violence and sexual assault in detention, and his mental distress (2016).

The plight of Eaten Fish is typical of those who have attempted to find asylum in Australia. In an irony of circularity, the space vacated by leprosy is now occupied by unreason, by those going mad in indefinite detention (Foucault 2001). In fact, maybe the origin of this story is located in an earlier history, for not much has changed from the situation early Australian journalist and novelist Marcus Clarke recognized when he visited Port Arthur, when "a genial official, with a calm self-satisfaction (so it seemed to me) extolled the excellence of the system he administered: 'He's all right now; we've got him all right now! He's a lunatic at Port Arthur now!'"(Clarke 1870, 143).



One of Eaten Fish's cartoons
("Save Eaten Fish", *The Guardian*, 2016)

Australia's immigration policies have been held up as worthy of emulation throughout the world, both in the nineteenth century and today in the twenty-first century. (Garner 2007, 67; Sparrow 2015; Lake and Reynolds 2008; Neumann 2015, 239; Walsh 2008, 793). My historical example makes the contemporary Australian policy towards asylum seekers predictable, although not excusable. But I wonder if knowing this makes any difference? In the face of the many people who are fleeing their shattered homes in fear of their lives, does it make any difference to know that the asylum seeker detention centers on islands off the coast of Australia, being offered to the world as models for the management of refugees, are founded on potent notions of nation, race, and disease? If we are aware that this genealogy of incarceration includes an association with disease, does it make any difference to the surprisingly large numbers of detention camps scattered throughout Europe and Britain who as "asylum seekers are stripped of their rights and deployed as Others"? (Garner 2007, 61; *Migreurop Observatorie des Frontières* 2017). As an Australian, I am mortified to make this connection between the past and the present policies for dealing with asylum seekers, but I must own it, just as I will have to answer the question that will inevitably come to me in the future: where were you when this was happening? What did you do?

Endnotes

1 "Kanaka" was the derogatory term used to describe Polynesian and Melanesian indentured laborers.

2 See Hanley 2016 for similarities to the British working class.

3 William Lane's "White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of AD 1908", was serialized in *The Boomerang* from 1887–1892, totalling 208 issues.

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