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# Village in the jungle: the eighth annual Doireann MacDermott lecture

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*Village in the Jungle*  
*The Eighth Annual Doireann MacDermott Lecture*

**Baden Offord**

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**Editor's note.** This paper is a slightly edited version of a keynote lecture, delivered at the Aula Magna of the University of Barcelona as *The Eighth Annual Doireann MacDermott Lecture*, organized by the university's Australian Studies Centre in December 2007. Offord's essay takes us from Leonard Woolf's creative and ethical intervention in Britain's colonial project, forged through a transformative vision of the 'spirit of place' in his novel *The Village in the Jungle* (1931), to the Australian specifics of colonialism and its aftermath. Highly critical of the dominant power structures in Australian society that keep sustaining the Enlightenment discourse of an unfinished colonial project, Offord delineates alternative strategies so as to deal with identity and belonging, arguing for a notion/nation of 'cultural citizenship', no longer based on exclusions.

**Key words:** Leonard Woolf; Australian postcoloniality; cultural citizenship

## **Part One**

During my undergraduate student days of Indian Studies at the University of Sydney I came across one of the most remarkable novels I have ever read, and which to me remains utterly compelling. *The Village in the Jungle* was written and published by Leonard Woolf (1931). The novel is set in what was then known as Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and is a gripping story surrounding the plight of husband and wife, Silindu and Dingihami, and their children. It traces their lives in a village known as Beddagama, which means village in the jungle. Woolf writes about this village:

Its beginning and its end was in the jungle, which stretched away from it on all sides unbroken, north and south and east and west, to the blue lines of the hills and to the sea...

The spirit of the jungle is in the village and in the people who live in it.

It was a strange world, a world of bare and brutal facts, of superstition, of grotesque imagination; a world of trees and the perpetual twilight of their shade;

a world of hunger and fear and devils, where a man was helpless before the unseen and unintelligible powers surrounding him. (1931: 1)

The narrative of *The Village in the Jungle* is set against the tide of British civilisation, and its rendering deep into the heart of unknown territory an installation of British Enlightenment values and thinking. These passages I've just read foreground the purpose of the civilising process, to bring rationality and the concept of justice into relief through their stark omission.

The story follows the effects of imperial rule from the imagined desk of a colonial officer in London, and how, through the mechanism of governance, colonial power obliterates distance in its reach deep (and substantially) within the jungle of Ceylon, into the village of Beddagama, simultaneously beguiling and drawing the husband and wife out of their hut while altering their space forever. The long but palpable reach of the colonial touch (and psychological invasion) captures, to my mind, the complex interdependence of place that existed well before the instantaneous nature of the Internet. The story raises the question, is it possible to *be anywhere, go anywhere*, without colonising, without touching and being touched by the colonial project? Woolf's story of the very disastrous effects of colonisation, both on the colonised and the coloniser, is one that resonates with many histories of cultural and civilisational conquest and exchange. In 1904 Leonard Woolf had joined the Civil Service in Ceylon, and worked there for several years as a government officer. After returning to England in May 1911 he married Virginia Stephen who was, like her husband, a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group. Woolf's first novel, *The Village in the Jungle*, was published in 1913.

Although this novel has not attained a level of importance to place it prominently within the canon of postcolonial literature, it is a work that to my mind makes an extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the architecture and effect of the act of colonialism. Something of this novel's nature evokes the immense and inexorable movement of the colonial mind. The earth, space, time itself – are all intrinsically altered through the impact and exchange that occurs between the colonizer and the colonized. A review in *The Chicago Tribune*<sup>i</sup> has noted that *The Village in the Jungle* 'is not a work of art – it is a miracle in writing'. I agree. But, I would add it is a miracle of cultural translation, dealing with the transformation of culture through the effects of the colonialising process.

When Leonard Woolf wrote *The Village in the Jungle*, he was articulating the moment of perception that his life journey led him to when, for those years at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he was a collector in Sri Lanka. This was also the moment when motorcars, airplanes, X Rays, quantum theory, and *Picasso* were changing the way we see ourselves, the way we live in the world. He was articulating what Ashis Nandy calls the forgotten double of history – not history at all as we define it, but a story that is about the spirit of place, which gives meaning to existence. In effect the great lesson of Woolf's book is not about distance but space, not about journeys across continents between geographies or cultures but the active and timeless present.

Woolf's vision is iconic, and so not surprisingly his novel has never been out of print in Sri Lanka – it gives recognition to the colonial encounter without the need of

cultural translation, which the Catalan philosopher Raimon Pannikar has remarked is normally more difficult than doing a heart transplant (1982: 120). *The Village in the Jungle* has long inspired and sustained my curiosity about what happens in the meeting of cultures; of the question of the mutual dependence of cultures; of what we need to do to understand the cultural encounter and its implications. But, importantly, the novel presents a possible alternative future in the sense that it provides a conscious reckoning of the past in the present. There are several observations that arise from a study of this novel. The first concerns the movement of the Western mind into the world, as it were, into the jungle and what happens when the jungle is brought into the heart of the colonizer. What nourished the colonial reach was the momentum of a framework of concepts such as progress, equality, justice, tolerance and so on – basically the Western Enlightenment legacy. The installation of the Enlightenment and its values across the world has been regarded as a triumph of the Western mind. Its installation differed of course from place to place. Thus, very particular aspects of the Enlightenment were installed in Australia, which in a way was a true child of the British Enlightenment.

The second observation I would like to make is that colonisation is ubiquitous to the human condition. It occurs as the basis of any form of power relation in which the distribution of that power is not negotiated with respect to and recognition of mutual dependence. In Nandy's account in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), he persuasively outlines how colonialism is not just the conquest of space (*terra firma* or marine), but that it forms the content of cultures and societies, becoming indeed, a mindset. He writes: 'This colonialism colonises the mind in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all' (1983: xi).

The third observation is that in the very writing of *The Village of the Jungle*, Woolf is both demonstrating the colonial mind, but more explicitly and consciously, he is bringing the *other* into relief and participating in their suffering. There is a conscious recognition, in other words, of the mutual dependence of humanity underlying the story, underscored by the tragedy of the civilising process of the coloniser.

*The Village in the Jungle* also reminds me that in the end what we suffer from is a kind of cultural vertigo. This is where we become unconscious of the cultural priorities and imperatives of a society, when the values we have are fundamentally taken for granted. Cultural vertigo is also the hallmark of the cultural encounter and what occurs in the meeting of minds. What Woolf succeeded in accomplishing with his writing of this book was extraordinary. He demonstrated how to creatively and ethically intervene into the colonial project. For me, he has provided a template in *The Village in the Jungle* for being critically and culturally literate, being able to think of alternative futures.

## Part Two

In this next part I want to contextualise my thoughts so far and extrapolate on the themes I have raised to examine the content of recent events in Australian civil society. What I propose is that Australia is an unfinished colonial project

characterised by Enlightenment values that have become instrumental of pathologies of power, that is, where only specific epistemologies are given legitimation. These are evident in struggles within Australian public culture where alternative futures emerge and take shape.

Thus, to understand how the colonial reach raised in *The Village in the Jungle* continues to inform contemporary Australia – today – my purpose here is to introduce the usefulness of being culturally literate about Australia. As defined by Schirato and Yell, ‘cultural literacy,’ is ‘both a knowledge of meaning systems and an ability to negotiate those systems within different cultural contexts’ (2000: 1). I hope that what I now offer is helpful in gaining a deeper appreciation of what characterises Australia.

Contemporary Australian values have been and continue to be sustained through a matrix of power relations that have been established through the installation of the Western Enlightenment project. Values that underpin national discourse in Australia have become pathologies in the way they have been invoked and applied through the dominant powers; the rationalisation of tolerance, justice and equality for all, for example – as bedrock Australian values – have frequently produced their very antithesis, something that is resonant with *The Village in the Jungle*.

The complexity of these power relations is expressed through a variety of social, political and cultural effects that are produced in the way Australian civil society organises, interprets and understands itself. This occurs in significant symmetrical and asymmetrical conversations located within narratives, both formal and informal, of Australian belonging. What characterises the substance of these conversations are contests and struggles about how Australia is defined, by and for whom. In the wake of colonisation’s imperative – to alter and reject incommensurability – the mechanisms, strategies and negotiations that form the basis of the Enlightenment society become crucial positions of national site hardening. That is, where structures and institutions are defined and codified.

What informs and importantly acts as the decisive directive to the public sphere is an homogenous conglomerate of assumed (site-hardened) values that are at the core of contemporary Australia. These have been and are resisted, however, through a plethora of responses created and circulated in the arena of public culture, now perhaps the most important place where pathologies of power are scrutinised and challenged.

In this part of the paper I want to give an overview of the public sphere and its relationship to public culture. The public sphere we know is formed by and through the legitimated core institutions of a society. In Australia, given its legacy as a colonial (unfinished)<sup>ii</sup> project of the British Empire, the basic institutions that were installed into its (vacant assumed) landscape derive from a value-laden framework borne out of industrialisation, colonialism, the consolidation of the national statist system, and democracy, all imbued with Western Enlightenment principles and thinking.

Modernity in Australia has thus been constituted by the importation, assumption and triumph of the Western mind. The subsequent spatial enculturation of, and assimilation with this mind following European invasion and settlement upon the

landscape of Australia, (so named through the colonial conquest), has inscribed architectures of public and civic consciousness that have marked or site-hardened the public sphere in specific ways. Traditions have been established over the past 218 years and more that support and perpetuate dominant ideas and histories of national belonging and who or what is a legitimate Australian citizen. A dominant history and mythology has been installed that locates through the logic of identity essentialist notions of what constitutes Australianness.

This is problematic for the way the national culture survives as it is predicated on essentialist values that ultimately pathologise power through fixed notions of who should be granted legitimacy or not. In Australia, the clearest evidence exists that demonstrates the effects of these power relations, particularly in relation to the Indigenous population, their destruction through colonisation and their subsequent, systemic exclusion from the dominant narratives and institutions of belonging. Core institutions include education, medicine, economy, religion (Church), sport, the media and law. In Australia, these institutions have derived their legitimation from the ongoing effects of Enlightenment thinking, particularly ideas formed around the individual in relation to equality, freedom and tolerance. One particular principle – justice – became entrenched as an Enlightenment orientation, derived from its inherent relationship to the powerful notion of civilisation, where the individual becomes the rational civic and civil subject.

Overarching these ideas are instrumental national and state pathologies of power that are expressed in ideas and policies deeply based on the supremacy of a white Australian space. These have been realised through its culture and polity; a basic state heterosexism; patriarchal duty and obligation; preservation of Judeo-Christian epistemologies; all for the purpose of a general assimilation of the *other* – most frequently invoked in specific relation to, but by no means limited to, the Aborigine, the migrant, or the refugee.

Twentieth century Australia's public sphere was driven by two contradictory imperatives. First, following the Second World War, Australia modelled and benchmarked its core institutions consonant with the establishment of international human rights treaties, declarations, values and language. The entrenchment of a rights consciousness in Australia demonstrated the hallmarks of a rational, modern and civilised society.

Through much of the latter part of the century, Australia prided itself as a beacon of human rights law and practice. The other contradictory imperative that emerged, and which complemented the human rights framework, was the entrenchment of the notions that Australia was a tolerant, fair and just society. Indeed, through political rhetoric, national celebrations and the creation of modern traditions such as ANZAC, these notions became mythologised and rationalised as Australia formed and site-hardened the content of its consciousness. These imperatives have characterised Australia's development of its public sphere through the last hundred years and more. With the demise of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, which followed as a direct response to the waves of migration from non-Anglo European nations and increasingly from Asia, Australia became a nation in which there existed two dominant forms of belonging. The first was based on the maintenance of the mono-cultural traditions of the core institutions, which were primarily Anglo, white and

Christian. It was acceptable and indeed celebrated to honour ANZAC with the phrase 'Lest We Forget'. This tradition had become a key site of Australia's civilising *modus operandi*. Every statue and memorial across the nation dedicated to ANZAC became a site of national self-definition, a cultural, political and social marker that mythologised a specific narrative of memory, which more often than not spoke of only one legitimate form of belonging. This ritualised, cultural pedagogic and civic as well as civil act of belonging has stood in stark contradistinction to the maintenance of other institutionalised forms of forgetting.

Most significantly, the collective amnesia that existed regarding the effects of the colonial encounter upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has been actively maintained through the Australian lack of will to come to terms with that encounter. This frames what could be described as a shared Indigenous and non-Indigenous trauma of belonging. It is still hard to see the full effects of the apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that was given by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008. The second form of belonging that occurred cohered around the everyday experience of the multicultural, where the everyday exchange and interaction of cultural diversity was evident. Waves of migration from the outset of the formation of the Australian state have demonstrated this cultural diversity. Unacknowledged in the architecture of the public sphere is the fact that Aboriginal society itself was and is characterised by the experience of diverse peoples, communities and cultures. There was and is no monolithic Aboriginality.

In relation to the remarkable demographic changes of the second part of the twentieth century, Australian society became explicitly a national home of substantive, lived and expressed cultural diversity, layered onto a rich Aboriginal cultural diversity that had been systematically reduced. This form of belonging was recognised to some extent within the public sphere through the adoption of multiculturalism as a policy in the early 1970s. However, the dominance of mono-cultural ideology within the Australian political system was unable to alter the epistemological basis of the core institutions sufficiently enough so that by the end of the century multiculturalism became a suspect and diminished position.

Although the national imaginary had changed irrevocably, the project of modernity conspired with the establishment of mono-cultural borders, fixing the parameters of the public sphere. Traditions such as ANZAC; nationalist jingoism such as 'We will decide who will come here'; the Government's rejection of the notion of the public sphere endorsing an apology to Indigenous Australians for the wholesale effects of colonialism; and the legislation to entrench heterosexual marriage in 2004, were all signs of a retreat from the reality of cultural diversity.

At the launch of the book, *The Conservative*, in 2005, the Prime Minister, John Howard, was able to say that he was a 'profound opponent of changing the social context in which we live' (quoted in Wilson 2007). He even agreed with the Australian historian, Keith Windshuttle that students were 'grossly disadvantaged' if they were forced to study subjects such as gender studies, media studies, ethnic studies, peace studies, genocide studies, 'indeed anything ending with studies'. For Howard, the viability of the conservative social context was through the maintenance of borders – physical, psychological, political, cultural – framed through specific (site-hardened) values based on a mono-cultural public sphere. It is interesting to note

that the highest rating television program in 2006 was called 'Border Security'. The rationalisation of these borders was significantly legitimated simultaneously with Enlightenment discourse on tolerance, a just society and 'a fair go for all'. If the public sphere contains the legitimised core institutions of a society, the arena of public culture forms the unfixed and uncalculated content of that society's consciousness.

Following Donald Horne's seminal work (2006) on examining Australian public culture, which highlighted the various cultural avenues of interpretation and self definition that a society engages in – through its myths, rituals, festivals, legends and so on – here the purpose of understanding the role of national public culture in relation to the Enlightenment project and the production of values in contemporary Australia comes into sharp relief. What characterises public culture at this time is that it provides the primary arena in civil society through which resistance and calls for reform can be expressed and where challenging pathologies of power is possible.<sup>iii</sup>

This arena includes the broadest ambit of communication and expression about who belongs and who does not. Public culture can be conceived of as the aggregate of mechanisms, contexts and spaces available to a society that provide the basis of communal self-understanding and self-definition. These mechanisms can be found within the core institutions but are not limited to them; in this sense, any cultural form, artefact or practice can constitute an element of the public culture. From graffiti to the lyrics of a song; in marketing as well as through community organizations; through journalism and letters to the editor; in narrative product found in film, television, song, book, blog, youtube, or even report; in everyday cultural sites such as cafes, sporting clubs, churches or mosques; with the ubiquitous mobile phone; on the beach; anywhere there is an expression and/or exchange of communication, it is evidence of the explicit and implicit consciousness of the public culture.

Following the definition frequently provided about the role of the media – that it is society talking to itself – the public culture is constituted by a matrix of conversations of society: interpreting, producing, regulating, representing and consuming the context of that society. This forms the consciousness of a society. In contemporary Australia, the cultural arena is the civil space in which Enlightenment values are both embraced and contested. This is where the complexity of belonging becomes apparent, that Australia is an imbricated national culture: both a mono-cultural institutional society at the same time as being a multicultural reality where there are many diverse ways of knowing.

In this space the dissonance of democracy can be heard and observed; it is also a space that both nourishes cultural amnesia as well as ethical acts of resistance and reform. In Australian public culture, whiteness, heterosexism, patriarchy, capitalism and the mono-cultural are produced as well as resisted. But the hallmark of public culture is that it is a space where the other can also be represented and recognised. For example, while the public sphere may embed the instrumental nature of human rights through law and parliament, it is through public culture that human rights and their attached values and language about the vulnerability of being human are imagined, conceived and engaged with. Although the White Australia Policy has not been extant as a legal and political instrument of site-hardening for over thirty years, its legacy



continues through the culture of the core institutions and therefore in public conversations.

The debate over what constitutes Australian values has become a fault-line in contemporary Australian culture and society. Events such as September 11, the bombings in Bali and Jakarta, and the 'war on terror' brought Australian values powerfully into the purview of politicians, political cartoonists and media commentators. If, as John Ralston Saul suggested, September 11 brought God to every politician's table in the United States (2005), it brought Australian values to every politician's table in Australia.

For the duration of the Howard Government, a deliberate focus was placed on proscribing values that are related to a values sensibility for Australia. In 2006, this culminated in the release of a discussion paper, *Australian Citizenship: Much more than a ceremony*, which outlined the basic tenets of what Australian values were and meant. At the heart of this paper, Andrew Robb suggested that these values included:

our respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, support for democracy, our commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women, the spirit of the fair go, of mutual respect and compassion for those in need (DIMIA 2006).

This typology of values is self-evident in a society that embraces cultural diversity and wishes to sustain and enhance its multicultural reality. They are the building blocks of a liberal democratic society. However, the Howard Government, in contradistinction with these views, undermined their basis through support for a different set of values that were embedded within the Australian public sphere and circulating in its public culture.

This bi-polar approach to values continues to generate complex ramifications. On the one hand, Howard valued equality between men and women, yet discriminated against homosexuals. He valued mutual respect and compassion, but did not recognise Indigenous ontological belonging. This is where the Enlightenment project is fraught, evident in the absence of substantive support for the other. To provide another example, the conservative journalist Janet Albrechtsen, who wages an ongoing fight against a culture of diversity in Australia, maintained her 'fortress Australia' during the Howard era at the cost of understanding complexity.

Albrechtsen's anxieties are derived from a mindset that clearly creates borders between 'us' and 'them'; her views are rationalised again and again into the West and the rest. The intimate enemy for Albrechtsen is, in fact, the cultural diversity of Australian society, which disturbs and challenges her mono-cultural, mono-sexual and monochromatic worldview. In her world, there can be no borderland – and unfixed identities and undetermined allegiances, or ambivalence in other words – but only borders and site hardening, 'set up to define the ... safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them' (Anzaldúa 1987: 3).

In a story on how to tackle Muslim extremists, she sees a 'con job' of a national Canberra event that brought together Muslim and non-Muslim Australians to deliberate on how to build bridges between cultures (2007). Albrechtsen writes:

'We're fooling ourselves by imagining the problem will go away with a barbecue and a friendly chat over the fence' (2006).

For Albrechtsen, the values that need to be boldly stated and defended, dressed in the parlance of Western liberal democracy, are to be maintained through an attack on Muslim extremism. For her, there are no protocols of engagement required. Dialogue and notions of mutual dependence are redundant. In this sense, Albrechtsen makes a tyranny of Australian values. In her columns, the debate over Australian values has been linked to the maintenance of a culture of whiteness, a culture of heterosexuality, therefore a culture of exclusion. She wishes to civilise Australia, and to set forth a 'we' that shares certain beliefs, institutions, and values. This is resonant to John Howard when he stated 'Australia's core set of values flowed from its Anglo-Saxon identity' (2006).

Albrechtsen has taken a strong position in defining Australian values. In her 'we' the core common values of Australia are conceptualised as heterosexual, and rationalised in terms of family and marriage. There is no place for a sexuality (or identity) that is fluid, or unfixed. She defends marriage as a heterosexual and a patriarchal institution, which is crucial to civilisation. For her, gay marriage would be an idealistic experiment set to fail just as she argues both multiculturalism and Aboriginal rights have also failed (2006).

These views provide some examples of how Australian values have been essentialised and how the other has been brought into relief through their exclusion from the dominant narratives of belonging. Underpinning the basis of these narratives has been the principle of tolerance, one of the key discourses of civilisation. In its rationalised application this principle has become a tool to manage and regulate aversion to the other. It both pathologises the other and normalises it at the same time.

Tolerance, for example, has been invoked and institutionalised as a means of dealing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as well as dealing with Asia. In Australia, tolerance has been and is frequently articulated as one of its most characteristic values. For example, Prime Minister John Howard stated in 2006 that:

In the 21st century, maintaining our social cohesion will remain the highest test of the Australian achievement. It demands the best Australian ideals of tolerance and decency, as well as the best Australian traditions of realism and of balance (2006).

The problem of tolerance as a value, however, is that in regulating aversion its realisation actually depoliticises those who are tolerated, and by its operation produces 'us' and 'them'. As Wendy Brown has convincingly argued:

Despite its pacific demeanor, tolerance is an internally unharmonious term, blending together goodness, capaciousness, and conciliation with discomfort, judgment, and aversion (2006: 25).

Australia's ideal of social cohesion as it has been conceived and practiced through most of the twentieth century and into the present century, has therefore been inherently narrow and based on profound anxiety about the *other*.

### **Part Three**

Let me now turn briefly to the pivotal intersection between the public sphere and public culture in contemporary Australian society, which is the marker of citizenship.

Following a broad theory of citizenship that it is concerned with the relations between the state and citizen, and between subjects and citizens themselves, the concept can be educed as both a formal and informal process, which includes aspects of regulation, construction, negotiation and imagination. That is, in the public sphere citizenship is actively site- hardened – constructed through nationalist and statist discourse. In the arena of public culture, citizenship expands to mean that it is negotiated through, for example, cultural, social, political, religious, sexual alliances and identification, which are both fixed and fluid, thus context dependent.

Thus, the notion of cultural citizenship refers to the *arena of culture* as a primary field of citizenship production. This brings into focus a tension between the subject as citizen of the state (with the requisite paperwork) and subject as citizen of given cultural, global or social contexts. As noted earlier, embedded assumptions in narratives of belonging consist in what is decided, legitimated, ruled and regulated by the dominant powers in society. Citizenships of belonging, both instrumentally and indirectly, are constituted through and against processes of hegemonic identity formation. For example, the essentialist ideas of who fulfilled the ideal of Australianness explicated in the *Australian Citizenship Act of 1948* were based on patriarchal, heterosexist, Anglo-Saxon and racially embedded policies.

John Chesterman and Brian Galligan claim that ‘Citizenship is at the heart of Australian politics’ (1999: 1). The history of citizenship in Australia has been one of exclusion(s). The primary conception of Australian citizenship has been derived from Anglo-Saxon Enlightenment models, which have resisted the changing nature of Australia from a mono-cultural society into a multicultural one.

Having considered the above background to Australia’s public culture and identified key features in the construction of contemporary Australian values and citizenship, I would like to contextualise these concerns in relation to examples of narratives of belonging.

First, a government text is presented that provides the institutionalised (public sphere) incorporation and dissemination of specific values to the Australian polity, which appear stabilised, fixed and monolithic. Second, three films are briefly referred to that demonstrate how the arena of public culture provides a crucial space in which communal conversations – collective, inter-collective, subjective and inter-subjective – can take place in relation to an ongoing negotiation of belonging. *What it means to be an Australian citizen* was a formal document provided to new citizens between 1997 and 2006 (DIMIA 1997). Published by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the rubric of the booklet is ‘Shared values for a shared future.’ The main purpose of this booklet was to introduce an understanding of ‘the meaning and value of Australian citizenship.’ In it, the Minister for Citizenship

and Multicultural Affairs wrote: 'Australian citizenship, like our ANZAC tradition of mateship and commitment to a fair go, symbolises many of these values, including democracy, freedom and community harmony.'

Throughout the booklet the construction of Australian values is replete with images and symbols (both natural and human-made) that have become germane to the contemporary politics of belonging in Australia. The flag, the national anthem, the colours of the country, the Coat of Arms, Uluru, Aboriginal dot paintings, cricket, kangaroos and emus, the Queen; all these representations form a specific construct of Australian identity and the dominant narrative of belonging. Key values are underscored such as human rights, fairness and equality before the law.

All in all, the booklet is an example of the instrumental values – those that have been legitimated by hegemonic interests in the public sphere. What is of specific interest to the conversation it provides in terms of Australia's self-definition is that it cogently highlights internal contradictions within the society. The booklet actively supports the collective amnesia about colonisation and its effects.

For example, the only representation of Indigenous Australians is in a traditional primitivist format, but more poignantly, on pages 16-17 where 'the first Australians' are introduced, the depiction of Aboriginal society and culture is relegated to the past. Laid in bold print upon a sepia-tone photograph of Aboriginal men hunting, words are lifted from the National Anthem: 'In history's page, let every stage Advance Australia Fair...' This stark and anthropological representation of Indigenous Australian society completely undermines their value in the formation and present participation within the nation. The embedded hierarchical, Darwinist and racialised depiction of Indigenous Australians constructs a particular meaning of being Australian, which suggests that the nation is now post Indigenous. This booklet thus frames Australian values through the pathologising of Aborigines as the past, as history. That is, the Aboriginal is other to the present. Nothing needs to be reconciled.

This example demonstrates the construction of values through a core institution – in this case Government – where the very purpose of this document is to provide unambiguous, legitimised and stable content within Australian nationalist narratives of belonging.

In contrast, three films present ethical interventions. *Beneath Clouds* (Sen 2002), *Floating Life* (Law 1996), and *Head On* (Kokkinos 1998) are all examples of how citizenship and values are negotiated, fluid and unfixed – that is – ever-changing. These films each deal with specific contexts of identity and belonging and show that there are in fact alternative futures at work.

*Beneath Clouds* is a poignant story of two Indigenous teenagers, one visibly Aboriginal, one not. Using minimal dialogue, the film unpacks the presence of the colonial aftermath and its scars upon contemporary Australia, cogently speaking to the audience that Australia is not a post-colonial nation, but one that is caught in systemic colonialism and attempts at de-colonisation. *Floating Life* is about Asian migrants to Australia, encounters with a suburban landscape and the difficulties of cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication. Australia is imagined through a negative plate, as it were, an inverted representation of migrant settlement and

negotiation of belonging in alien light and sound. The narrative unfolds from within the Chinese family, an encounter with an Australia that gradually comes into focus. *Head On*, the story of a second generation Greek-Australian family in Melbourne, focuses on the life of Ari, the gay son, whose sense of belonging and identity is played out amidst contests between normative and unruly behaviour and subjectivity. An acutely urban film, almost universal in its scope, *Head On* imagines an Australia that is distinctly unfinished, unknown, resilient and deeply vulnerable.

All three films, however, demonstrate the ambiguity and ambivalence at the heart of Australian culture. The scars of racism, the attempts at connection and belonging, the pathos of inclusion and exclusion, are all present through the narratives. These film texts are therefore contemporary representations of how the arena of public culture provides a critical, creative and crucial space for negotiating how to belong; this is where complexity is not denied, but actively engaged. The films show how Australian values are directly and indirectly formed, that there are possibilities to resist and challenge the dominant Anglo-Saxon, white, heterosexist and patriarchal legacies of Enlightenment Australia. These are attempts at recognition in the lineage of Leonard Woolf.

So, these films and the Citizenship booklet illustrate the challenges to belonging in contemporary Australia. Nationally imagined as a just, fair and tolerant society, one that has been built on a self-definition of specific events, myths, traditions and values, Australia reflects inherent contradictions within the Enlightenment project. Madan Sarup has argued that 'tradition is always being made and remade,' that significantly 'tradition is about change – change that is not being acknowledged' (1996: 5). This is at the heart of Australia's ambivalence towards itself, evidence of which can be located in the interaction, expression and exchange between the public sphere and the arena of public culture where values are made – and remade. We are at an interesting historical moment. In the last couple of years more people live in cities across the world than in the country. New jungles have emerged with their own consequences and implications.

As I said at the beginning, *The Village in the Jungle* reminds me that in the end what we suffer from is a kind of cultural vertigo. This is where we become unconscious of the cultural priorities and imperatives of a society, when the values we have are fundamentally taken for granted. In relation to Enlightenment Australia, I suggest the imperative now is in recognising the necessary other like never before. *The Village in the Jungle* is very significant to me as a key narrative that helps me respond to and understand the implications that came with the installation of Western, British Enlightenment thinking into the landscape of Australia. Such powerful stories, which form part of the public culture, are tools for a better, more inclusive civilisation, one that values attempts at de-colonisation and presents alternative futures.

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<sup>i</sup> Cited at Eland Books, available at [http://www.travelbooks.co.uk/book\\_detail.asp?id=76](http://www.travelbooks.co.uk/book_detail.asp?id=76). Accessed 1 December 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Following Ghassan Hage 2001. *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (Pluto Press, Sydney). The unfinished project of colonisation is not in itself continued by Britain, but by the installed colonial consciousness and its effects, which is manifest through the collective amnesia of its core institutions and the ongoing suffering of the Indigenous people.

<sup>iii</sup> Following an argument put forward by Craig Macgregor 1999, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October.