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THE INVASION COMPLEX: DEEP HISTORICAL FEARS AND WIDE OPEN ANXIETIES

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THE INVASION COMPLEX: DEEP HISTORICAL FEARS AND WIDE OPEN ANXIETIES

Fear of an external invasion has always operated alongside guilt over the foundational occupation of the land in Australia. The popular support for the Prime Minister John Howard's pre-election stand against the refugees in 2001 and his dogged defensiveness during the indigenous-settler reconciliation process revealed the unease over cultural difference in the national imaginary. The myth of *terra nullius* and the fantasy of an 'Asian invasion' are two constitutive features in Australian nationalism. Combined they have produced a profound anxiety about space and mobility. This essay addresses the rhetorical responses to the 'invasion' in order to consider the way fear is used to shape contemporary subjectivity.

Keywords: immigration, multiculturalism, nationalism, borders, Australian culture, global fears

When is violence acceptable? The natural response is self-defence. The law enshrines the right to defensive reaction, but also insists that the threat must be real and the response is proportionate to the original act of violation. For violence to gain acceptability legitimacy must be woven into its threads. There is also violence that is hidden from view. Its legitimacy remains shrouded by abstract codes or conducted in remote places. We may choose to not speak of this violence, but we not only condone it, but feel positively reassured that brute force is being exercised by mute guards. The silence of this kind of violence is one of the hidden pillars of security. It is excluded from polite conversation. Such reticence is a marker of an unbearable contradiction. We want to see ourselves as "compassionate" and "humanitarian", but in the words of the Australian Prime Minister John Howard, we also want to give the signal to the world that, "we are not a soft touch". We may have soft hearts, but also a steel skin.

The August 2001 arrival of the Norwegian container ship the Tampa, loaded with 468 refugees, and heading towards the Australian port of Christmas Island, initiated an international crisis. It also triggered a series of military interventions in civil administration, the re-drawing of Australia's borders, an assault against the international laws on human rights, vilification of refugees, the illegal co-option of a client state and the marginalisation of the professional and humanitarian spokespeople from public life. In short, it unleashed a violent response of military interception, hijacking and incarceration that was unprecedented by a Western state, and the forced transportation of refugees to the 'declared' safe countries like Papua New Guinea and Nauru, or what was euphemistically called the "Pacific Solution", have subsequently expanded the front in the combating the "invasion" of refugees.

On many levels these events have produced a 'shock' to civic leaders, liberal intellectuals and even radical activists. They were ashamed of the government's blatant abuses of power and systematic effort to distort morality and deny the truth. By the end of the campaign the government had prevented 2,390 people from landing. The cost of the operation has been estimated at AUD\$500 million, or to put this figure in perspective, almost half of the UNHCR's annual budget for dealing with the 21.5 million asylum seekers worldwide. However, there is more to this story than simply exposing the lies, madness and costs of these vile actions.

The *Tampa* crisis exposes both the secret violence in contemporary power and the dynamics of the siege mentality that grips the global political landscape. In the rhetorical responses to the 'invasion' we gain a deeper insight into the fear that now shape contemporary subjectivity and the establishment of detention centres has, in Giorgio Agamben's words, become the "paradigmatic" space of modern sovereignty. By focusing on the fear of the outsider and the delimitation of human rights, we can now also appreciate the levels of anxiety and the contemptuous indifference in contemporary political life.

The legitimacy of violence is challenged by the tough-love messages that are sent to refugees. It is now hard to accept that the risk of devastation by a boat-load of refugees was real and that the response was in any way proportionate to the threat. Violence against the refugees is increasingly conducted in full view of the global media. Despite the establishment of a task force, that was set up to coordinate the military interventions and control media relations, the violence towards the refugees on the Tampa was broadcast on the media. The government's tough stance was condemned by priests, scholars and elder statesmen. The shifting of legal conventions generated protest from senior members of the judiciary. The abusive treatment of the detainees earned the rare

rebuke of the UNHCR as well as confronted an opposition by all the medical bodies in the country. Public knowledge of the violence did not operate as a brake, nor were the powerful calls for compassion sufficient to provoke an ethical political response. This brutal shift in the political landscape occurred in full view. It was not a case of voter manipulation but a more disturbing instance of public complicity. Everyone knew!

The Australian Prime Minister John Howard is usually a very cautious politician. He has perfected the art of qualifying his promises and hedging commitments. Careful not to trap himself, he is always conscious of the need for room to manoeuvre. However, when faced with the arrival of the *Tampa*, all his furies were unleashed. His steaming anger and rampant threats gained fuel from the gains in his approval ratings. Inside this anger was a new constellation of fear and anxiety. It blurred the boundaries of risk and opened the door for expansive violence. But where did these fears come from?

Today fear comes from a number of directions. There are deep historical fears and wide open anxieties. They are both at play, simultaneously and interconnectedly. These ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ emotions interact in a prism that I call the ‘invasion complex’. Inside this complex both the local – vertical, and global – horizontal forces collide and shape the way we relate to others, affirm idealised self-images, and assume a sense of place in the world.

Deep Historical Fears

The persistence of the fear of the other in the discourses on Australian national identity has been noted by many historians and cultural commentators. There is now a well-established body of research that has traced the lines of earlier fears in the contours of contemporary culture. Following these arguments, it should come as no surprise that, most of the current media reports on the arrival of refugees by boat were announced by declarations of an imminent ‘flood’ and an oncoming ‘invasion’.¹ The fear of invasion resounds throughout the pages of Australian history. These images were drawn from the matrix that combines the primal trauma of colonialism, the ongoing ambivalence over the sense of place, and the doubts over regional security in the national imaginary.

While the formation of migration policies as a security measure was prominent in the formation of most nineteenth century sovereign states, in Australia, this defensive reaction reflected a heady range of motivations and insecurities in relation to the nation’s foundations as a colonial outpost (Burke 2001). Since the inaugural sitting of the Parliament in 1901, fears of invasion have played a significant force in Australian political culture. The first act that was passed, The Immigration Restriction Act, 1901, was driven by the fears of an Asian influx.

These fears were rearticulated in the post war slogan 'populate or perish'. After the failure to attract sufficient numbers of British and European migrants the Australian government began to expand the scope of recruitment. The racist White Australia policy may have been formally revoked in 1973 but its residual fears of invasion and its explicit suspicion of neighbours remained firm in the national imaginary.

A further index of regional insecurity is found in the fact that throughout the twentieth century Australia volunteered to fight in almost every battle that involved Britain and the USA. This enthusiasm to share in other people's wars was always justified by the need to both demonstrate Australia's ongoing loyalty to its allies and also a defensive measure, to ensure that its contribution would be reciprocated in the event of a future invasion. This fantasy of military invasion has, according to historian David Day, "cost us dearly over the years". For as he argued, Australia "occupies one of the most secure geographic positions on earth".² Continental isolation and its arid expanses, was part of the rationale why even the Japanese saw little benefit in launching a serious invasion.

The anxieties over the invasion from Asia are even replayed in the form of the new economic realism that tried to re-imagine Australia as part of Asia. In this discourse the nineteenth century phobia of being abandoned by the 'mother-country' and swamped by 'alien neighbours' is overtaken by the fear of being bypassed from the flows of globalisation, and in particular, concern of being excluded from the roaring economic success of East Asia. As Ien Ang (2001) has argued this still preserves the role of fear as the motivating principle for engaging or distancing relations with the other.

David Walker's account of Australian nationalism (Walker 1999) is also structured by what he calls a 'survivalist anxiety', whereby the entrance of a single foreign element is imbued with the catastrophic power of destroying the whole. The rise of one element is premised on the demise of the other. According to Walker, this 'eliminationist' battle has framed the political discourse on regional security and immigration policy in Australia.

Fear of outsiders is bound to a trauma that barely registers but continues to shape national identity. The extreme defensiveness towards foreigners is the other side of the guilt towards the displacement of the indigenous people. Howard's defiant stance towards the 'flood' of refugees echoes his passionate refusal to apologise for the crimes committed against indigenous people. In both instances, he sees the rights of asylum and aboriginal tenure as a threat to national sovereignty. The scale of this threat is always represented in apocalyptic terms. Refugees can bring total destruction and Aborigines have the power to take everything away. Howard has consistently made national and global

responsibilities comprehensible, by transposing the reparations for indigenous people and the duty of hospitality towards the refugee, to the panic that would follow a sudden increase in mortgage rates. Such change, as would be necessary to meet their needs, is represented as the cause of ruin to suburban bliss. Hence, 'losing your backyard' has been the slogan that underscored populist fears of 'giving in' to either Aborigines or refugees.

The difference between the needs of refugees and Aboriginal people and the needs of 'ordinary Australians' is set up as a conflict. Power and normative value are invariably slanted in one direction. However, in this conflict the rights of the other are not trampled upon because of the intrinsic inferiority of their identity and culture. Rather, the opposition is mobilised from within an ontological insecurity. The traditional binary oppositions between 'us' and 'them' are overlaid by deeper fears and underscored by a secret violence. Contemporary racism starts from the fear that in meeting the needs of the other everyone becomes homeless! This was dramatically portrayed during an appearance on national television, when Howard held up a map of Australia with the largest part coloured in brown. "78% of the land mass of Australia" was at risk of being handed over to Aboriginal people, he warned the nation. The reality was closer to 12% and most of it only on vacant and remote crown land (quoted in Brennan 1998: 61).

This logic of tumultuous dispossession was repeated in his anxiety over allowing the *Tampa* to dock because this would 'open the floodgates' for global refugees. The phrase 'open the floodgates' is often used as a descriptor of various and unspecified phobia. The term 'open the floodgates' was first used in 1985 by Chris Herford, the then Australian Labor Minister for Immigration, in response to the arrival of 5 refugees from Indonesia. At that time, the ideals of suburban life were described by, Howard's favourite historian, Geoffrey Blainey, as being "submerged by newcomers", and that "poorer Australians" were having to "defend" themselves from the "Asian influx" (Blainey 1984).³ The term 'flooding' was repeatedly used to capture headline space in the tabloid press. Howard naturalised the need for manic defensiveness by pointing to the near infinite geographic contours of the nation.

We are an island continent and we therefore have a large exposed border and people can sail to Australia in circumstances where with such a large border we face a very significant surveillance problem.⁴

The spatial image of a vulnerable and expansive boundary is aligned to the cultural phobia of Asian people as the 'yellow peril', or immigrants arriving in 'hordes'. To prove that bi-partisan support for this phobia is ongoing, Laurie Ferguson, Labor Opposition Immigration spokesman, warned on public radio, that the concession given to 30 asylum seekers on the basis of their conversion

to Christianity would open the floodgates to what he charmingly called “rice Christians”.⁵

Spatial anxieties and cultural fear merge in the shadows of this rhetoric. Collectively they draw from both colonial anxieties and the deep Western fear of the other as barbarian. Since early Christianity, the West saw itself as the privileged centre of the world. Its own superior qualities were defined against a spurious belief that others were bestial by nature and lacking in culture. The term ‘open the floodgates’ originally referred to agricultural practices in building safety measures to cope with the seasonal flows of nature. However, when agricultural terminology is ideologised within spatial and cultural discourse, anxiety is compounded, as natural forces are imputed into human agency. When the phrase, ‘open the floodgates’ is politicised it no longer refers to a relief mechanism, but as a descriptor of immanent chaos and inevitable devastation. These internal anxieties are more than matched by the fear that the island-continent is surrounded by threat. Where others are perceived to have security in numbers and a unified cultural identity, Howard stresses that Australia’s “exposed” and “large border” and the pretentious forms of “fake multiculturalism” make us vulnerable to penetration. Historical narratives and fictional accounts of Australia’s place in the region are structured by the belief that beyond the border there are malevolent and duplicitous strangers, that seek to exploit the benevolence and gullibility of the national culture (Walker 2002: 329-330).

The fear of invasion is also stoked by the belief that it is only by good luck that Australia has managed to escape a dreadful destiny. Australia’s security and stability is rarely explained by the efforts to establish a fair society and develop good diplomatic ties with its neighbours. The image of luck has more appeal than effort. Somehow, Australia inherited European political institutions but then escaped the tyranny of European history. It is located on the edge of Asia but remains insulated from the Asiatic problems. Luck, escape and exemption are elevated as the secret to national survival. However, the precarious irony of luck hovers in the collective unconscious. Donald Horne’s vision of Australia as “The Lucky Country” was not a self-congratulatory national portrait, but rather a reminder that its own foundations were tenuous and on the brink of collapse. His prediction that Australia could not forever ride on the back of sheep, and that the bountiful resources would be squandered by blinkered politicians, lazy entrepreneurs and rigid bureaucrats, was startlingly accurate. The rural sector, which contributed more than 20% of the GDP in the 1960s is now reduced to a mere 3%. Despite ongoing state support for the farming sector the global value of farming produce has been in decline. Luck always runs out.

The fear of 'paradise lost' has not been realised by the invasion of a traditional enemy. No Aboriginal or refugee ever kicked down our suburban fence and stole our backyard. However, the old insecurities persist inside new forms of social and cultural change. This new mixture of traditional fear and contemporary anxiety has, so far, eluded the attention of cultural commentators and social historians. If the refugee can no longer be linked to an invading army, then why is she so threatening? In Australia, the defensiveness towards the most minor border infractions are never seen in their own terms, but as part of the whirling forces that create panic. These threats of devastation need to be now addressed not just within the context of national consciousness but also in the turbulence of globalisation.

Wide Open Anxieties

The fear of refugees is connected to the broader anxiety over globalisation. The distinction between fear and anxiety is illustrative of complex processes of interconnection in contemporary life. Fears are usually linked to specific objects of dread, whereas anxiety is an uncomfortable state that is objectless. The horror of anxiety is that it produces a pervasive sense of fear. Anxiety can provoke insecurity without sensory apprehension. Today the fear of the refugee has been internalised within an anxiety over homelessness as the new global condition. It has proved harder to address the interconnection between people who have been displaced and the growing sense of not being in control of your own sense of place. However, what is more common is the attempt to restrain a cultural panic towards global anxiety by offering a heightened defensiveness against the fear of refugees.

Today the object of fear has no single origin. The fear of refugees is not equivalent to the phobia of an invasion by an enemy nation. In the nineteenth century there were political cartoons that specified the brutal traits of the marauding Russians and the engulfing vices of the devious Chinese. It is not out of political correctness that refugees are now spared these grotesque caricatures. It is simply that they are located in a darker part of the unconscious and positioned in a more ambiguous place. The refugees have no specific origin and so their identity is preceded only by abstractions. The current fear is not that the invasion will be launched from a discernible port, but rather that it springs from anywhere. Keeping out the refugee is keeping out the chaos of global migration. It is a way of filtering the global mobility without declaring war against globalisation. Thus when the Liberal party launched its 2001 electoral campaign under the slogan of 'we decide who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they arrive', they were both tapping deep historical fears and drawing on wide open anxieties.

Since the 1980s, the full force of globalisation had arrived on Australian shores and not everyone was cheering. Flexibility in the labour force also meant greater levels of insecurity. Vibrant forms of cultural difference were being set up in opposition to a declining image of national identity. New communication and information technologies were expanding the range of ‘virtual communities’, but rural towns were eviscerated and established members of local communities were complaining that their towns were losing their character. There was a deep malaise. Uncertainty and volatility dominated the political horizon, but the risks and anxieties hovered without any focus. When Howard first came to office he spoke to the public as if a generalised culture of abandonment, impotence and fear had already permeated the whole of society. According to Howard’s political vision, Australian common values were under threat from both external and internal forces. However, the focus of his anxiety was not the economic tumult but the shift in cultural politics. He promised to ‘correct the swing of pendulum’ by destroying the political authority of Aboriginal land claims, cutting immigration intakes, and slashing the budgets of multicultural programs (Markus 2001: 40-1).

This shift in the discourse on multiculturalism is another marker of the oscillation between deep fears and wide open anxieties. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s Australian debates on multiculturalism were primarily related to national processes of cultural and social transformation. It was part of an internal debate on settlement and national identity. Today multiculturalism is also elevated as an index of global and local interactions. It is no longer a matter of negotiation between minorities and the dominant culture, but a wider challenge of national survival in the context of global culture and diasporic networks. John Howard had resented multiculturalism not just because it was a deep problem that undermined national unity and an obstacle to the development of a “common Australian culture”, but also because it widened the field of cultural identity as it encouraged a form of cultural promiscuity so that people could “pretend that we are a federation of cultures and that we’ve got a bit from every part of the world” (quoted in Henderson 1995: 27). The only way Howard could even utter the concept of multiculturalism was by prefacing it with the adjective “Australian”. Howard could not bear to contemplate a multicultural Australia but an Australian multiculturalism was acceptable because it showed “that we have developed an Australian way of doing things” (quoted in Cope and Kalantzis 2000: 331). The ‘m’ word was speakable once it was monogamised and nationalised.

Underscoring the fear of multiculturalism is not the threat of being consumed by a rival culture, but the dread of the combined effects of a new global codes

that seek to standardise local differences, and the proliferating dynamic of diasporic mixtures that do not threaten to displace, but bypass the older core culture. The state is thus threatened in two ways, and reacts by adopting a parsimonious attitude to the proliferation of the new dominant forms of global culture and redoubling efforts to put the diasporic forms in check. Hence, the new fear of diasporic multiculturalism is found neither in the assumption that it is an incomplete vestige in the long phases of assimilation, nor that it represents the tip of an alternative national identity, rather, it is feared because it is expressive of a more ambiguous and formless hybrid. Composed of various and undefined identities which have no fixed properties and no clear allegiances, diasporic multiculturalism is now grasped in relation to forms of social practice that at once melt into the dominant cores but also span across several nation states. This transnational level of association and complex form of cultural amalgamation defies the segmented models of ethnic ghettoisation and challenges the conceptualisation of migrant membership in a specific territorial and national structure.

The contemporary challenge of assimilation and differentiation presents itself at two levels. First many liberal states are increasingly unwilling or unable to enforce assimilation, and secondly, the practice of differentiation causes resentment in that it exposes the limits of the power of the elite. Howard's desire to "correct the pendulum swing" in cultural conformity presumes that the state can hold the string, and masks a deeper fear that the state has lost control of the spinning cultures.

John Howard is not alone in this anxious state. The current paranoia towards refugees is neither confined to one political movement, nor to one national arena. It has spread across the ideological spectrum: both Margaret Thatcher and the former Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett repeatedly described refugees as "swamping" Britain.⁶

In the US state of Idaho – closer to Canada than to Mexico – Robert Vasquez, a Republican county commissioner and Mexican American who was born on the border town of El Paso, has been elevated as the new hero of talk back radio, not for his record of bravery in war but for his call to sue employers of illegal immigrants and issuing a bill to the Mexican government for the cost of the "imminent invasion".⁷ The advance of neo-nationalist policies in countries as far apart as Denmark and Australia was also driven by a mixture of anti-immigrant campaigns in the media and a backlash against multiculturalism. In different contexts the cultural panic has manifested itself in unique forms. While in Denmark the arrival of Bosnian refugees provided a focal point for the new racism, in Australia the right wing projected its anxiety on an amalgamated target

that comprised of indigenous people, immigrants and refugees (Hervik 2004: 263). However, certain patterns are discernable in a number, if not all, places.

In a fundamental way politicians are victims of the very fears that they seek to vanquish. Fear of the other is presenting itself in common forms across the world. The common complaint that refugees will steal from society or exhaust the supply of welfare, that they have a secret mission to kill ‘us’ or destroy ‘our’ culture, and that they will soon outnumber the locals and contaminate the cities, is also a coded form of resentment against the tendency for the disloyal outsourcing, aggressive competitiveness, and rootless flows of global capital. There is a growing recognition that globalisation is neither a tool that is controlled by a single agent, nor a discernable force that can be totally regulated within national borders. The process of fragmentation and displacement has already produced radical and irreversible changes. In an ontological sense the politicians are the ones who are most frightened. For in terms of governance they already know the limits of their authority. Rather than facing their impotence they naturalise their hostility by pointing to the subterranean cunning of the other. In the words of a Danish Social Democrat MP: “If you try to legislate your way out of these problems (Muslim organisations) it is a historical rule that rats always find new holes, if you cover up the old ones” (quoted in Hervik 2006).

Cultural panic over global terrorism and the growing awareness of the turbulent patterns of globalisation provided further ballast for the government’s emerging policies on national security and border control. However, the extreme response in Australia cannot be explained purely as a response to global trends. Howard always knew that vast torrents of migrants were not about to come splashing against our shores. The military campaign against the refugees was more effective in relation to the punitive imprint that it left in the Australian imaginary, than it was a deterrence against the global movements of refugees. If Howard is genuinely committed to tackling all forms of illegal migration, then he would also confront the 60,000 visa overstayers within Australia. Despite the fact that the Department of Immigration ranks British and American citizens as ‘low risk’, they are the majority of illegal immigrants within Australia.⁸ Refugees have also been ranked as ‘low risk’, but despite their lower numbers, different criteria seem to operate when measuring the threat that they pose to the nation. One can only wonder what holds back the desire to launch an assault by a unit of commandos flanked by tanks and guided by helicopters on a backpacker’s hostel filled with ‘illegals’.

Outline of a Psycho-Social Model

What sort of political satisfaction was there to be gained from the violence

towards refugees? For a government that prides itself on fiscal responsibility, why was there such disregard for the cost of ensuring that “people like that never land on our shores”? The number of asylum seekers in Australia is tiny in the global context. The adoption of a mandatory detention system and the exercise of draconian military actions not only violate human rights as enshrined in international law, but as it has been discovered in the USA, lack credibility as either a deterrent or as a cost saving measure (McMaster 2001: 115).⁹

Given that there are no realistic threats of an invasion, the government’s violence towards refugees warrants further examination in terms of the repressions that are involved in the cultural unconscious and political sovereignty. The extreme effort that was mobilised to keep refugees out of Australia, and the perverse claims that the nation was being victimised by having to carry the impossible burden of refugees, corresponds to what psychoanalytic theory would describe as the resistance against the return of an unconscious fear, and is consistent with Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the unplacement of the other in the bio-politics of modern sovereignty (Agamben 1998).¹⁰

It is with these two different theoretical perspectives that I will address the complex way in which violence and anxiety are linked with the contradictory formations of contemporary identity. The psychoanalytic model will help explain the psychic forces that differentiate the self from the other, and through Agamben’s analysis of sovereignty we gain insight into the process by which human rights are delimited. The repression of fears and the impunity with which the other is suspended in limbo are neither isolated events nor marginal features in social life. Fear and violence play a crucial role in identity formation. In these defensive reactions we witness the establishment of a new dynamic that informs the way we relate to others and assume a place in a globalising world.

The condensation of unconscious fears and the relocation of the figure of the other have been structured into a dialectical system that I call the invasion complex. This complex not only coordinates personal responses and drives social behaviour in a patterned way, but in return, it also offers the individual a stronger sense of his or her place in the world. It affirms the self through the negative representation of the other. If the fears of the refugee were examined purely by objective and rational criteria then they would immediately dissolve. However, the refugee is not a distinct issue. Even as a single agent the refugee cannot be identified; his or her specific identity buckles and twists as it ricochets within a complex of contradictory and placeless fears. Loaded with contradictions: refugees are constructed as cowardly and omnipotent, pathetic and threatening. As the refugee comes from beyond, then it is possible to externalise the origin of fear. However, buried inside and blurred by the figuration of fear is another

complex accumulation of internal ideas and memories. Today, the expulsion and elimination of the other is incomplete. The fear of the refugee is both unconscious and spatial. Two questions remain unsettled: 'Where did they come from?' and 'Where to put them?' Once the refugee enters the national imaginary these questions must be answered. The place is contradictory: they are to be pushed back into international waters, and if they have succeeded in entering the land, they are detained indefinitely, or dropped into the limbo that is now tagged as a 'temporary protection visa', or worse, the 'removal pending visa'.

This arrangement of unconscious and placeless fears is not arbitrary. It structures the multiple lines that interconnect the vertical fears and horizontal anxieties by ordering them into a chain of associations. Within the complex it becomes possible to delineate where the fears originate and develop a modality for addressing them. In the Freudian idea of the Oedipus complex, the dialectic of love and hostility towards the parents, is not only a mechanism for defining their interpersonal relationships but it is also the way in which the individual finds and appropriates a place. The invasion complex in the national imaginary has a similar dynamic. It not only provides an external origin for fear, but also enables the individual to assume that their place is confirmed in this ambivalent relation to the other. Freud was clear that the Oedipus complex is a destiny that awaits everyone. It was not a process of elimination but a gradual coming to accord with the forces that drive one's own conduct. On a broader level I will argue that what the Oedipus complex is to personal development, the invasion complex is to nationalism.

Identity, Violence and Boundary Formation

Part of the invasion complex can be explained by analogy to the psychic struggle to preserve an idealised self by means of either expelling or suspending the other in a state of unplacement.¹¹ A critical feature of the invasion complex is not just the construction of an idealised identity but also the deployment of mechanisms for resisting the incursion of foreign elements. A boundary is established to separate those who do, or do not belong to the nation. Across this boundary values are projected that define the characteristics of the self and the other, and then force is mobilised to ensure that the boundary and the differentiated identities remain intact. These projective and defensive mechanisms operate in contradictory ways, they tend to both exaggerate and trivialise the figure of the other, while also asserting the right to aggressivity and minimising the extent of recognising the violence in the self. The fear of the other is premised on the assumption that the other's needs cannot be met without the self having to suffer irredeemable damage. The response is not a form of negotiated settlement of

differences, but a defensive reaction that constructs the other as dreadful and propels their needs into the realm of the impossible. Two fears chase each other in this looped exchange. There is the risk of being exposed to limitless demands and the dreaded loss of control. To avert the horror of confronting complicity and weakness, the invasion complex operates to produce a perpetual state of self-exoneration.

The separation of identities that occurs in the invasion complex proceeds by a division that monopolises the ideals of humanity within the self, and then projects the qualities of bestiality and criminality onto the other. The refugee is constructed as either the monstrous mother who sacrifices her children in order to gain a 'migration outcome', or the dangerous parasite father who not only carries unknown risks but also has an insatiable appetite for welfare payments. The refugee is both malevolent and indolent; prepared to risk everything in order to get in, and then happy to retire at the expense of the state. Ultimately, the refugee threatens everything, family values, economic stability, and as Zizek (2002) has noted, even robs us of our collective enjoyment. Once the other is constructed in the position of debasement, abjection and evil, then not only are they excluded from the field of human values, civic rights and moral obligations, but the boundary that divides 'us' from 'them,' becomes even more crucial.

The moral division between genuine and 'bogus' refugees can be grasped as part of the psycho-social boundary maintenance. Those refugees, who were prepared to wait in 'offshore' camps, and achieve clearance by the UNHCR, are then deemed genuine and entitled to a permanent place in Australia. Whereas those who arrived 'onshore' by their own means, and had the temerity to seek asylum before they had been processed by the UNHCR, were predefined as 'bogus.' The 'onshore' refugees, even if they are eventually cleared by the UNHCR, are never granted a permanent place *in* Australia. At best, they could gain temporary permission to stay *on* Australia.

This quasi-legal divide between the genuine and 'bogus' refugees is part of a general strategy to manage the needs of the other. Tolerance of the other presupposes both invisibility and passivity – a kind of distorted version of the Christian image of inheritance being reserved for the meek. After 31 months in detention Ebrahim Sammaki knew exactly what to say to the media: "I want to be a good resident of this country. (...) I don't want to talk about politicians – I just want to thank the good people of Australia".¹² Sammaki found himself on the generous side of the passive/active divide that structures political compassion. His case was brought forward because the plight of his children was linked to both the nation's trauma and its humanitarian self image. On a visit to commemorate the Bali bombing, Howard, in a proud display of paternalism, was

photographed with two orphaned children. Their Indonesian mother had died, alongside innocent Australians, outside the infamous Sari nightclub. The children were reputedly found wandering the streets. Their father, Ebrahim Sammaki, was at that time languishing in an Australian detention centre.

Underpinning the principle of tolerance is an ambivalence towards compassion and control. The image of the refugee is threatening because it simultaneously summons the vertiginous fear of facing the limitless needs of the other, and because it exposes a profound lack in the self. According to Lacan's idea of anxiety, the individual is caught in an ambivalent state – wanting the comfortable feeling of being human and whole – and yet also discovering the paralysing and dreaded sense of lack. This tension is unsustainable, and the self creates a counter-fantasy of his own superior sense of wholeness and a new found preparedness to act against the danger of the other. Dread provokes panic, which in turn can inspire self-righteous acts of violence.¹³

The fantasy of the anxious self relies on strong boundaries and heightened vigilance against any sign of violation. This boundary becomes invested with the need for security against decline and contamination. For if the nature of the other is composed of animalistic appetites and malicious calculations, then 'they' will be driven to violate the boundary. In the absence of either a negotiated separation or an agreed mutual distancing, boundary zones are injected with invasion fears and populated by images of the unplaceable others. The violence against the other is, therefore, not only seen as a necessary form of self-defence, but as a justified response towards the bestial and placeless state of the other.

A psycho-social modelling of boundary formation provides a useful perspective for explaining the violence that is conducted to preserve the integrity of national borders. But how do we explain the construction of the new detention centres? What legitimates the forms of spatial exclusion and exemption from the codes of international law and human rights that is exercised in these camps? In this heightened state of vigilance, the Howard government literally moved the national boundary. In fact, the border was constantly on the move, both at the perimeter and within the territory of Australia. The boundary not only served as a regulative membrane for entry and exit, but also as an elastic sheet that could be lifted from the ground. Islands, as well as detention centers, hospitals and motels on the mainland were excised from the migration act. After their excision, where do these places belong? In what kind of no-mans-land were they located? Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty offers some shocking insights on the role of exemption in contemporary power.

Sovereignty and Violence

Howard's repeated emphasis on humanitarianism as central to the Australian character was not just idle flattery, but a necessary appeal to virtue prior to the execution of acts that are supposedly exempted from its framework. He constantly takes the opportunity to cite the statistic that since the Second World War, and on a per capita basis, Australia has received more refugees than any other country apart from Canada. This fact of historical humanitarianism is presented as if it could both frame all subsequent actions and deflect all current criticisms; leaving us with no option other than to concur with his protestation that: "It is monstrously unfair to describe Australia as heartless and inhumane".¹⁴

This linkage between a humanitarian track record and the necessary steps to protect national sovereignty skims open the "secret solidarity" (Agamben 1998: 133) between humanitarianism and the violence it opposes. Agamben argues that the entanglement of humanitarianism with violence is most evident in the foundation for the detention centre. This enclosure is not an aberration of the normal function of the state but, in his terms, the logical extension of its power. It is the space in and through which the state can determine who does and does not have the right to belong, and to whom it can concentrate responsibility. The scandal of this differentiation of rights and responsibilities, is therefore not experienced as a distortion of a common humanity, but as the eventual discovery that 'even' citizens were 'mistakenly' detained. Agamben makes the bold claim that in this space the state "creates and guarantees the situation that the law needs for its own validity" (Agamben 1998: 17).

The infamous detention centre Woomera was built in one of the most remote and inaccessible parts of the Australian desert. It is a township that was first established to service the nearby sites for British nuclear tests and eventually reclaimed by the Australian government. After many years of decline the town was catapulted as a global icon for the machinations of outsourcing migration management. The new detention centre was built and administered by a US based company that specialises in building prisons. In the 'dead centre' the state relocated the site for asylum and redefined the status of the territory so that people detained there were effectively divested of their human rights. The case of Peter Qasim, the longest serving detainee, is expressive of this condition of confinement without cause and the State's right to hold the other in limbo. Although Qasim has abandoned his case for asylum in Australia, he still spends most of his days lying on a bed, in his own words, "like a dead body". He has remained in detention for seven years because no other country will take him. Australia imprisons him despite the fact that, as Liberal backbencher Petro Georgiou has noted, "nobody argues that he is a threat to Australia".¹⁵ The absurdity of this

form of incarceration cannot be relieved by an appeal to Qasim's human rights or natural justice. Such legal avenues do not exist in the detention centre. It is a space of exemption. Civil law has been expunged from this zone. At the edges of public visibility and the limits of the law, the detention centre straddles the "zone of indistinction between inclusion and exclusion" (Diken 2004: 84).

This ambivalent state should be intolerable in the contemporary landscape. We recoil from the revelations that in the past there were places of abuse. But we also take comfort from the view that the horror of Apartheid was far away, or that the evils of Nazism were kept secret. Today we do not have the comfort of distance and ignorance. We are enmeshed in the barbed ethics of mediated proximities. Distant camps, like Woomera, are not just broadcast around the world, they are brought home to us. In whose name is human life suspended? Who has the right to strip the other of their humanity? For instance, everyone knows that children arriving as refugees or born in a detention centre, cannot be guilty of any offence. And yet, in Australia they remain imprisoned. When they are born in a hospital, as was Mahzar Bakhtiyari, the room was temporarily designated as outside of Australian territory. The baby was born on this ground but, in the dark hours before Christmas Eve he was, along with his family, deported. A child born in a detention centre is in a zone that has been excised from the territory of Australia and excluded from Australian citizenship.¹⁶ But where is this person born?

When refugees land on Christmas Island, where are they? Where does the subject who is subjected to this kind of suspension in a geo-political void belong? They are on Australian territory but not in its legal framework. The excision legislation is aimed at not just removing remote islands from the migration zone but rendering the entire nation as beyond the reach of the refugee. The purpose is not to make mockery of migration law – this is just a secondary effect. The aim of excision has a higher claim, which is drawn from the need to assert the absolute power of sovereignty. Giorgio Agamben's analysis of political sovereignty explains how the state now not only seeks to exclude and expel the other, but also holds them in limbo. It is the right of the Sovereign State to declare a place of exemption in which the detained are stripped of everything but their bare life. They are suspended in a zone where they are excluded from the fullness of the judicial system, but also subject to specific rules.

The camp as a dislocating localisation is the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are still living, and it is this structure of the camp that we must learn to recognise in all its metamorphoses into the zones *d'attentes* of our airports and certain outskirts of our cities. The camp is the fourth, inseparable element that has now added itself to – and so broken – the trinity composed of the state, the nation (birth), and land (Agamben 1998: 175-6).

The unplacement of refugees in the camp is therefore a mechanism for keeping them outside of the Australian law, even when they are inside Australian territory. This spatio-legal paradox also threatens the underlying forms of national belonging. As the anomalous identity of the camp is inserted into the system it creates a rupture in the trinity of state, nation and law. Agamben argues that this ‘fourth element’ breaks the irrevocable bond of citizenship. His argument finds its most ghoulish manifestation with the unplacement of children born in detention. When the former Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock justifies the imprisonment of children, on the grounds that they should remain with their parents, we should not be deceived by his paternalism. For his concern for family unity is emptied by his commitment to a detention centre as a place that distorts the normal conditions of domestic and civic life. The very existence of the camp exposes the ruin in the nexus between place and belonging. Children, in these places, are witness to excessive violence, and regular attempts at suicide. They have seen bare-chested men flinging themselves off rooftops and landing on razor fences. These children inevitably experience depression, participate in acts of self-harm that range from wrist slashing to drinking shampoo, and constantly shudder through the night in states of torment and agony.

After Woomera, who can dream of citizenship? It is not just the violence on the body that rips the bonds that tether loyalty to place, citizenship to territory, but the exemption of their human life from the body-politic will forever haunt everyone’s right to belonging. Denying rights to refugees, refusing to grant citizenship to those born in an Australian detention centre, creating an abusive system of incarceration as a deterrence for prospective refugees, discounting the inevitable injury of the victims is not only a successive violation of the law but also a cancelling of the bond between people and place.

In the face of such violence both Howard and Ruddock presented a steadfast image of unyielding resolve. Acts of criminal behaviour were not referred onto the penal system, because under this code the refugee would have expanded rights. Similarly the signs of physical and psychological damage were deflected as blackmail that was used to test their convictions. In a candid interview Ruddock declared that:

(...) there are some people who do not accept the umpire’s decision, and believe that inappropriate behaviour will influence people like you and me, who have certain values, who have certain views about human rights, who do believe in the sanctity of life, and are concerned when people say, “If you don’t give me what I want, I’m going to cut my wrists”. (...) You say it’s desperation, I say that in many parts of the world, people believe that they get outcomes by behaving in that way. In part, it’s cultural.¹⁷

In this statement we move from the banal figure of the ‘umpire’ as protector of fair play and the cosy presumption that ‘you and me’ respect human values and rights, to the account of self harm as mere behaviour, a performance that reveals manipulation and coercion as a habitual feature of such a foreign culture. It creates a border of virtue and vice and neatly positions the need for counter-violence as a necessary prophylactic. Both Howard and Ruddock were conscious that their moral legitimacy as protector of the state’s integrity was dependent on the defacement of the refugee’s identity and the unplacement of the condition of asylum. At the core of their defense is the very denial of the other. Howard and Ruddock’s denialism is so deep that in response to questions on refugees they say, “what refugees?”. They beggar logic by disputing their status, describing them as ‘illegals’, ‘queue jumpers’, ‘boat people’ and ‘rejectees’; denying that they have a legitimate right to request asylum, and linking them to a stigmatic chain of associations with terrorism. In this symbolic limbo they can then justify the excision of territories from conventional laws and the return of refugees to third countries. With every step the state empowers itself to cut itself free from its own circles of duty and obligation.

Who permits this abyss to form in the heart of governance? It starts with the robbing of identity and ends in the stripping of citizenship down to a shabby ragdoll. The impunity with which the refugee is treated is not an isolated instance. It is a marker of the proximity of violence. Refugees are denuded of their humanity, reduced to empty abstractions, purged of all signs that might connect them to our own subjectivity and space of responsibility, and in this vortex of negation the door is opened to a dark spiral of abuse and humiliation. Indifference to their needs soon becomes intolerance of their presence. Any sign of resistance becomes a spark that ignites a fury that has no moral breaks. In the fire of violence the state is already absolved of moral culpability. Its cruelty has no checks because it has already displaced the other from the scales of human values. If there is no recognition of their worth, then there is no injury. If the refugees have already created their own conditions of harm, then the state cannot bear responsibility for the cumulative suffering.

Conclusion

The fear of invasion by refugees in 2001 was never about the impact of refugees but more about the anxiety over the strength of borders in a context of global fears and a need to redefine internal debates on the saliency of cultural differences. Crossing the border was threatening not because it would challenge the infrastructure of the welfare system but in its threat to the national ideal of order and control. Border crossing was charged with potency not because there

was evidence of a real ‘flood’ or even credible projections of an oncoming tidal wave of refugees, but rather because it was loaded with the racist fears of the other. The fears had both contemporary and historical sources. The colonial myth of *terra nullius* and the Federation fantasy of an Asian invasion, this “foundational blindspot” (Cash 2003) and the ongoing “racial/spatial anxiety” (Ang 1999: 192) in Australian nationalism, were reconfigured as a focal point for the more generalised anxiety about mobility.

Globalisation has ushered in many new forms of change, but the refugee is isolated as the agent of disruption and chaos. This selective anxiety over the condition of fear is one of the primary indices of the contemporary ‘racism without races’. Howard has always insisted that he has never shown disrespect to either any individual or any culture. He hangs on to the principle that in an egalitarian society there is no room for discrimination. Those who belong are to be treated as equals. However, to protect the illusion of egalitarianism, the border of belonging must also exclude the refugees from their own human rights. Hence, he has not hesitated to place refugees on a depersonalised continuum that links them to a vertiginous complex of deep fear and wide open terror. This strategy has put racism on different footings. Racism is no longer confined to a stigmatic hierarchy that divides people according to biological differences (Barker 1981). Racism is also articulated through a complex combination of deep historical fears and wide open anxieties.

The logic of the invasion complex is thus entangled in an ambivalent state of aggressivity against boundary violation, denialism of the violence, and suppression of the needs of the other. The turbulent shifts in the forms of cultural interpretation, demographic mobility and social fragmentation that are associated with globalisation have also created more complex and diverse communities. Howard is frightened by these changes. He represents the crisis in the logic of modern sovereignty. He sees the complex forces that puncture the image of sovereignty – global capital, communicative technologies and human mobility. He recognises the limits of his powers and then lunges against the most vulnerable elements. Keeping out the refugees does not halt all the other flows. Sovereignty is never secured. However, in order for Howard to maintain the belief that the body of sovereignty is intact he must subordinate hospitality. But hospitality in limbo is not hospitality. He has made the turbulence of global change more comprehensible by structuring fear according to the dialectic of the invasion complex. The profound levels of insecurity that have been provoked by these changes have been rendered tolerable by targeting the refugee as scapegoat for all the accumulated wounds and grievances of globalisation.

NOTES

1. See Tascon 2002. For a more generalised and incisive exploration of the psycho-geography of the frontier in the national imaginary see Gibson 2002.
2. David Day, "The real threat to our nation is hype, not war", *The Age*, 3 February 2004.
3. For critique of Blainey's book see Markus and Ricklefs 1985.
4. Transcript of television interview with Australian Prime Minister John Howard, by Rosemary Church, CNN, 31 August 2001 <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2001/interview1203.htm> (viewed 17 October 2005).
5. <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2005/s1328437.htm>
6. M. White and A. Travis, "Blunkett defends 'swamping' remark", *The Guardian*, 25 April 2002.
7. T. Egan, "Mexican-American fights illegal immigration", *New York Times*, 29 May 2005.
8. "Overstayers and People in Breach of Visa Conditions", Fact Sheet 86, *Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs*, Canberra. Out of the overstayers identified at 30 June 2002, 6,400 were from the UK and 5,400 were from the US.
9. In September 2003 Senator Bob Brown criticised the government for the excessive costs in maintaining the detention camps on Christmas Island. According to government's figures this method of holding a refugee costs four times as much as maintaining a prisoner at maximum security and slightly more than a five star hotel. Ruddock's justification of the detention policy on the basis that the majority of claimants are 'bogus' and that they would abscond was also disproved by the fact that over 95% applications were found to be genuine.
10. The term 'unplacement' is from Zygmunt Bauman, but I use it because it succinctly describes the spatial location of the other in Agamben's analysis of the *homo sacer* – a subject in Roman law who has committed a particular crime that renders him outside of the rule of law that has been defined for citizens. Being situated outside this system, the *homo sacer* loses all value, he is not even worthy of sacrifice. The existence of the *homo sacer* is reduced to mere biological life, all the political and cultural values of citizenship are stripped away. In this meager state the *homo sacer* has no rights that can either register within or deserve protection from the civil code. This figure, who is neither exiled or assimilatable, that is neither displaced nor placeable, becomes suspended in a zone without rights and can be dispensed with impunity. Agamben connects the *homo sacer* to the refugee to expose the contemporary violence that truncates human rights within national boundaries. Refugees have by definition lost, left behind, or been excluded from the territorial

boundaries that confer the rights of citizenship. Their human rights are therefore in a zone where there is no structure that can ensure them. “Hence the paradox is that precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other – namely, the refugee – marked instead the radical crisis of the concept”. For the refugee having “lost every quality and every specific relation except for the pure fact of being human”, is now in a limbo (Agamben 1998: 160-161).

11. In this section I am drawing on John Cash’s application of psychoanalytic model for social and cultural theory. See Cash 1996.
12. Terry Plane, “God has blessed me and my family”, *The Australian*, 8-9 November 2003, p 2.
13. For an incisive application of Lacan’s theory of anxiety see Salecl 2001: 92.
14. John Howard, “The World Today”, ABC, 30 August 2001.
15. Andra Jackson, “Life in Detention for Seven Years”, *The Age*, 5 March 2005, p 10.
16. Terry Plane, “Not too young for detention”, *The Australian*, 8-9 November 2003, p 2.
17. Quoted in Kumar Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004: 44.

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