



Symposium Report

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Key observations	4
Welcome to country	6
Caroline Martin, Manager, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre	
Opening address	8
Dr Patrick Greene, CEO, Museum Victoria	
First Key Note	10
Bonita Bennett, Director, District Six Museum, Cape Town	
Part One <i>Methodologies for change</i>	
Part Two <i>Unity does not grow wild</i>	
First Plenary	19
Research – Methodologies around engaging with racism	
Second Plenary	31
Best practice	
First Breakout	42
Youth – Growing up in multicultural Melbourne	
Second Breakout	43
Anti-racism policy developments	
Third Breakout	49
Cyber-bullying in the classroom	
Third Plenary	51
Museums – Learning in public spaces	
Second Keynote	64
Indigenous identity and representation	
Richard Frankland, Singer, Writer, Actor, Activist	
Fourth Plenary	77
How creative practice deals with the issues	
Fourth Breakout	94
Education – Capacity building, intercultural understanding, Multiculturalism in the classroom	
Fifth Breakout	97
Media – Mirror, mirror on the wall ... Has the media moved beyond the 'white picket fence' view of Australian society?	
Summary	112

Abstract

The two-day symposium *Owning Racism – Can we Talk?* – a symposium for academics, service providers and arts practitioners – is the first major initiative to emerge from *Identity: yours, mine, ours*, a permanent exhibition launched at the Immigration Museum in 2011.

The symposium brought together a community of practitioners and academics to speak about their research, program work, service delivery or study around themes exploring racism and cultural and social intervention in order to facilitate social cohesion. Examples of research and/or practical applications in youth engagement, CALD connections, multicultural and cross-cultural exchange, refugee and asylum support services were explored.

The symposium and associated events was intended to position the Immigration Museum as an instigator of, as well as a responder to, these challenging and often confronting issues. In this way, the Immigration Museum intended to bring together like-minded practitioners to share ideas, methodologies and practices to engender genuine social change in the areas of prejudice and racism. The symposium provided a forum to:

- Share methodologies across disciplines in areas of social intervention, anti-racism projects, applied theory in community practice;
- Highlight key research in related fields;
- Provide practical examples of project work and case study evaluations;
- Showcase best practice by museums, schools, universities, local governments, arts, non-government organisations, etc;
- Encourage active and ongoing networks and collaborative partnerships

The Immigration Museum's commitment to challenging racism and promoting diversity has resulted in best-practice models being established within the organisation, including *Identity: yours, mine, ours*; as well as more broadly through program/project development, including *Talking Difference*, VicHealth – *Arts About Us* funded program. Museum Victoria is also engaged as an ARC research partner with Deakin and Melbourne Universities on the project *Using museums to counter racism and increase acceptance of diversity among young people*; as well as with Deakin University on *Museums as sites of learning*, and with Victoria University on *Collaborative exchanges with museums to engage students in experiential learning and citizenship*.

The symposium provided a forum for exchange on current practice, thereby encouraging the emergence of cross-disciplinary dialogue in order to inform recommendations that build on existing best-practice models. The symposium also facilitated knowledge exchange and built an interdisciplinary community of practice focused on current activities being undertaken in Melbourne and Victoria.

Key observations

The following key observations are intended to provide a sample of the discussions that resonated during the two-day event. This is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of presentations but rather indicative of some of the issues raised.

Research

Racism is individual, institutionalised, and systemic and has a negative impact on education, mental and physical health, employment, homelessness, crime rates and social cohesion – just some of the visible and hidden costs of ignoring, or not dealing with, racism.

While there is the obvious moral argument for opposing racism (that it is morally and philosophically wrong from a human rights perspective), there is also the pragmatic argument that racism damages its victims and others by distorting social relations and undermining people's opportunities, all of which has a number of damaging, long-term flow-on effects.

Racism is causal, rather than symptomatic, of social disadvantage and dysfunction. This is borne out through research and statistical analysis, and documented real case studies.

Racial divisions are being entrenched as a result of lack of holistic planning by governments, federal, state and local.

Policy

Government funded and systemic change is critical so that grassroots community empowerment and action can affect social change in relation to racism and discrimination.

A holistic planning and policy approach that reduces isolation and nurtures connections within and between communities will contribute to the building of a cohesive, inclusive and healthy society. This must move beyond self-congratulatory multicultural social awareness campaigns, and towards deeper acknowledgement of our shortcomings and complicity. This includes an honest recognition of individual privilege, be it cultural, gender, ability, age, socio-economic background, or geographic location.

Education

Schools can play a critical role in tackling racism from an early age by embracing current curriculum objectives around inter-cultural learning and understanding that are most effective when they are lived and not just taught experiences. This in turn prepares schools to become safe and harmonious places where students can realise their potential, part of which helps students to understand diversity and become more informed and active citizens. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and associated government agencies have a critical role to play in identifying, understanding and creating a safe place for all students to learn without fear of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

The impact of social media and the consequences of cyber-bullying on young people cannot be underestimated. Parents, teachers and communities need to recognise the risks involved in this ever-complex landscape of communication where there is a balance to strike between encouraging free and independent Web access for young people, being prepared to act to support young people at risk, and encouraging them to support one other against bullying peers.

Formal and informal learning's can have a cumulative positive effect on people's understandings about racism, the breaking down of cultural stereotypes, alleviating fears and anxieties about difference, and changing people's attitudes and behaviours – this form of community education occurs beyond the classroom, in theatres, museums and art galleries, community festivals, sporting arenas, and online campaigns.

Community

Our collective investment in a truly multicultural society can attenuate threat and reduces prejudice by being inclusive of all groups and enable an active commitment towards social change. This holistic activism requires making anti-racism a common cause that is owned, advocated and lived by everyone.

Indigenous

Genuine reconciliation is impossible without acknowledgement of indigenous rights and past injustices at every level of government and the community. This includes the identification and acceptance of government failings with regards indigenous education, health, social services, housing, and land rights. The Federal Government's Apology to the Stolen Generations (2008) was a critical first step, requiring follow up with genuine action.

Broad community education is essential to public learnings about the diversity of indigenous cultures and languages, and the recognition of Aboriginal peoples as Australia's First Peoples. Anti-racism strategies and action must have Aboriginal rights and recognition, and the embracing of indigenous cultural understandings at its core.

Real change

The symposium explored many examples of grass-roots projects that are tackling racism, providing best-practice models, including those led by local and state government agencies, museums, creative practitioners, sporting associations, community organisations and youth (particularly multicultural) organisations.

Symposium Co-convenors Tatiana Mauri and Moya McFadzean

February 2013



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February 2013

Welcome to country

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speaker

Caroline Martin, Manager, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Culture Centre

Good morning everyone. I am the very proud Manager of Bunjilaka Aboriginal Culture Centre. I have the utmost privilege of managing the culture centre and also the relationship between the Victorian Aboriginal community and the museum.

First and foremost, I am a traditional owner. I am Yalukit Wilam of the Boon Wurrung. My traditional lands extend from the Werribee River, inland Melbourne all the way along the peninsula coast to Wilsons Promontory – beautiful, beautiful country. You may have heard of Derimut, Derimut Drive, there is also a suburb called Derimut. Derimut was the *Arweet* or headman of the Yalukit Wilam of the Boon Wurrung. He was a significant leader of the Boon Wurrung, and I am proudly a descendent of his.

It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge that Melbourne Central Business district is recognised as shared country between the Yalukit Wilam of the Boon Wurrung and the Wurundjeri Baluk of the Woi Wurrung. I am a direct descendent of Doogbyerumboroke. Her granddaughter, my great-great grandmother Louisa Briggs, provides my family's link between pre-settlement of Melbourne and the history of post settlement. The fact that she lived for more than ninety-five years has meant that the oral history tradition of my family has been maintained. Louisa played a major role in the history and politics of Victorian Aboriginal people from the 1850s until her death in 1925. In 1872 the Melbourne *Argus* described Louisa Briggs as a most 'resolute woman'. She was the matron of Coranderrk Mission at the time.

Because of the racist government policies Louisa and her family were forced off their traditional lands to live on Coranderrk Mission near Healesville. And because of the same racist government policies and consequently the growing activism of this mission in response to them – I should point out here that Louisa was a driving force of the well documented Rebellion of Coranderrk, which saw her fight against racist policies and advocate for better conditions on the mission for her people – the government moved her further away from her country to Cummergunja Mission on the Murray River in Yorta Yorta Country. Here she lived out her life, often telling stories of her past and keeping our culture alive.

In 1925 Hall and Taylor, a team from Sydney University, interviewed Louisa. They recorded her story. We are very lucky to have this. In one extract from these recordings Louisa remembers Melbourne when the city had no more than three houses and was smaller than Cummergunja. The site where the Royal Exhibition Building is was all forest. I work in the same precinct as the Royal Exhibition Building. When I walk past it, I often reflect on my great-great grandmother's words and try to picture a forest, which of course requires a lot of imagination because it's a lot of concrete – I often reflect on what might have been but more importantly, I would like to see more recognition of what was.

With recognition of the First Peoples will come respect. It is a strongly held view of mine that if this country cannot first acknowledge its past and its First Peoples in a meaningful and respectful way, it will always struggle to combat racism and truly celebrate the uniqueness of cultures and of difference; I understand this is a big statement in relation to this country not acknowledging its First Peoples or not reflecting or recognising the past. It can feel quite overwhelming, particularly if we left it to our country's politicians 'to fix', but we must remember we are also a part of this country and we're all of its bits, so it's actually up to us. The team of Bunjilaka and of course the Immigration Museum work very hard to challenge racism in a safe way, but we also know that it requires more than just us. It requires all of us.

My mother Carolyn Briggs is a respected elder of the Boon Wurrung and a recipient of the National Aboriginal Female Elder of the year 2011. I was born in 1967. She calls me her referendum baby. My grandmother Carrie Briggs, her mother, died in 1970, only being recognised as a citizen in this country for three years. I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of those that were never recognised as citizens in this country – in the country that was theirs. It is for them and my family that I will continue to ensure that my ancestors' connection to this country is maintained. I've much to be proud of; we all do.

I pay my respects to our elders and our ancestors, both past and present. I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners and if there are any other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders in the room, I acknowledge you as a Traditional Owner in your own right from wherever you come from in Australia.

Bunjil is our creator. He shows himself to us in the form of the Wedge-tailed Eagle, and Waa is our protector and shows himself more regularly in the form of the Crow. Bunjil taught us to always welcome guests. But he required of our guests to make two promises: to not harm the children of Bunjil and to protect the land and the waterways of Bunjil. In return you will have safe passage. It is with the spirit of generosity afforded to me by my ancestors and in the language of my people that I welcome you.

Wominjeka mirimbeekbeek boon wurrung nermderp buruptumudur wilam.

Welcome to the land of Bunjil and welcome to today's symposium, *Owning Racism – Can We Talk?*

It is also with the same spirit of generosity that I trust that all conversations had today will be done honestly and respectfully and the outcomes of such will assist in making a difference in ensuring that racism in this country is seen for the ugliness that it is and, as equally important, is no longer tolerated.

Wominjeka – Welcome

Opening address

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speaker

Dr Patrick Greene, CEO Museum Victoria

It's interesting to think about remarks about identity. Identity is a topic that will appear again and again in the next two days. My own identity is somewhat mixed. My father was a migrant too. He migrated from Ireland to England; and I migrated from England to Australia. I have identities that relate to Ireland, to England and to Australia. It's interesting that in this world, this fast changing world, we can actually collect identities as we go. We don't necessarily end up stuck with the one we were born with. Multiple identities are both exciting and often challenging.

It's a pleasure for me to participate in this symposium. I welcome all of us here on behalf of all my colleagues in the museum. Caroline and Padmini, you've already heard from; from Moya, from Tatiana and everyone else who is part of this museum. We are a museum that wants to make a difference. Combating racism is one of our values and important objectives. This is one of those activities that will help to achieve that objective.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the people of the Kulin Nation, traditional owners of the land on which we are now gathered, and pay my respects to elders past and present and particularly thank Caroline for her welcome. Caroline is involved in the new version of the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Culture Centre, which will contain the first nation's exhibition. It's an exhibition that has been developed in partnership with indigenous communities right across Victoria. It will also look across the whole of Australia, but focus particularly on Victoria. By this time next year, it will be open and it will be, I believe, ground-breaking in many, many ways.

For the moment, I remind you that Museum Victoria comprises three museums; the Immigration Museum, where we are now, Melbourne Museum in Carlton Gardens, Scienceworks in Spotswood and incorporated in all of that is Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, the IMAX cinema at Melbourne Museum and, of course, also the world heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building. Melbourne is one of only two cities in Australia to have an Immigration Museum. Consequently, this place is important in giving space to the stories of multicultural Australia and in recognising the great value of diversity. It's worth mentioning that in Victoria we have a commitment to multiculturalism at a time when, unfortunately, in some countries, multiculturalism is regarded as retrograde, instead of progressive. We are committed to playing our part, along with many of you in strengthening a cohesive society.

Articulating the value of diversity is an ongoing role. Societies evolve and new people and cultures are welcomed into our mix. Understanding diversity and difference should be promoted and enabled by positive representation of diversity in everyday life. Here at the Immigration Museum, for

example, we engage with communities at the grassroots level and we aim to explore and challenge perceptions about immigration, identity and diversity. Over the last eighteen months we've launched two significant projects that demonstrate this. *Identity, Yours, Mine, Ours* is our newest long-term exhibition. It is an intercultural and interdisciplinary initiative that challenges cultural stereotypes and confronts everyday prejudices by asking people to look at themselves and to look at those around them. It takes a mirror to who we are, examining how we see ourselves, how we see each other; and I'm pleased to say a couple of weeks ago we won an award for it through the Museums Australia Victoria branch, where it was described by the judges as a perfect exhibition. We wouldn't claim it's perfect, but that description is flattering. The most important thing is the way people react to it. To go in there and see young people, who are our key audience, participate in it is very heartening. I encourage you to do that.

Sweets is another project. Delicious prospect, which to date has included an exhibition, a community festival, a celebrity chef hosted dinner and a book. It uses common experiences of food to talk about the importance of diversity. Like all the community exhibitions we do, we are the facilitators, not the authors. The communities are the authors. In this case, six communities came together to create an exhibition about the significance of sweets in the life of those communities.

Another example of how Museum Victoria fosters diversity is *Talking Difference*, an online media project designed to facilitate dialogue around cultural difference, identity and diversity. The project involves collaboration with a number of communities and has just completed a successful tour of regional Victoria, including Shepparton, Cobram, Horsham, Lakes Entrance, Bairnsdale and Mildura. The portable studio has generated over 1000 pieces of multimedia content, all addressing race based discrimination, sparking a virtual dialogue within communities about who they are and what is important to them. I'd like to acknowledge the support of VicHealth in continuing that project, which will run for another three years.

This symposium will continue conversations around social cohesion and behavioural impacts generated by the *Identity* exhibition and other key Immigration Museum engagement projects. We will learn from this and we will put those learnings into practice. In this way the Immigration Museum aims to bring together like-minded practitioners to share ideas, methodologies and practices to engender genuine social change. We've invited you here as leaders from different sectors so we can hear about and learn from a range of initiatives being undertaken – not just in this country but from overseas as well. Bonita Bennet, who kicked off this series with a lecture at Melbourne Museum two nights ago, has very kindly visited us from South Africa. This kind of cross pollination does not happen often so we've taken the step of organising this series to explore new ideas, relationships and future opportunities. Sometimes work in this area can seem lonely. By coming together we can strengthen each other's initiatives.

Thank you for participating over the next two days. We appreciate you've already made the time to share your ideas and experiences about diversity and I look forward to hearing some interesting conversations. Thank you.

First Key Note

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Bonita Bennett, Director, District Six Museum, Cape Town

Andrea Witcomb, Facilitator

Hannah Reich, Rapporteur

Introduction

I trust I will be able to do justice to this part of the conversation, which seems to be so necessary across the world. I welcome this opportunity to share some thoughts with you based on my own South African experience, and I look forward to entering into dialogue with your own varied experiences, both of racism and of ways of overcoming racism in your own contexts. I'll be doing my presentation in two parts. The first will be a visual work through the methodologies of the District Six Museum, which I hope will provide you with a context within which I am located, both as an activist and as a museum professional. The second part of the presentation is entitled *Unity does not grow wild*. The reasons for the title will become clear as I go through the paper.

Part One

District Six Museum, methodologies for change

District Six is a small museum on the edge of Cape Town. It is a beautiful city, yet still divided. These divisions go back to the colonial period and are responsible for the entrenchment of privilege; economic, political and others. In 1948 National Government radicalised laws were introduced including the Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act, the Immorality Act, Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act, amongst others. District Six is considered a cosmopolitan area, multicultural. For the apartheid government it was important that people believed that difference was wrong, that difference was bad and not something to be desired. District Six proved to the apartheid government that this was not true and thus became a target of the apartheid government (a place renowned for its embracing of difference – ideologically opposed to the government's policies). The district thrived on diversity, from a mix of diverse backgrounds. In 1966, District Six was declared a white group area and precinct by precinct, home by home, the area was destroyed and residents moved to Cape Flatlands (still known today as dysfunctional and lacking community cohesion). District Six museum grew out of 1980s 'Hands off District Six' movement – dedicated to preserving and activating the memory of the original community. The campaign was trying to stop the removal of community, and although it could not prevent this it was never really repopulated by the white groups. Movement prevented further development and it remains a scar on the landscape.

The District Six Museum was established to record and work with the legacies of forced removals in the city – when the political landscape changed in 1994, the museum became an active player in land claim – re-building District Six, re-imagining Cape Town (pre-racialised Cape Town). It became a keeper of the memory of the people, but also made it possible for the land claims to happen. To remind people that were born into a free South Africa, after apartheid, that there was a pre-racialised Cape Town. Although District Six cannot be rebuilt physically, it is important to work with the memory and look at rebuilding that important fabric of the community, which was really the driving force more than the physical building of that community.

The museum is a place of debate, recovery of knowledge, of identity and community. One of the slogans came from a woman who was removed from the area. After viewing the signs and floor map she said:

‘No matter where I’ve been, I’ve been here.’

Evidence that people had lived there is important evidence; street signs give people a tangible memory. An artwork was created to remind people of what had been. The struggle to connect to the land continues. Banners made by clubs and activities groups remember the social cohesion that had been. A map on the floor, a recreation of the old street grid of District Six, was created in 1994. Community came in and marked their places of residence; people come and reaffirm and remember, tell their story – on national heritage day there is no line between tour guide and visitor: everyone is a tour guide. It was only intended to be there for two months, but it’s still there after eighteen months. It has become an important part of memory and a place of dialogue and reconnection. Through this process the museum has been able to play a role in the land restitution. People did not have documentation and the map provided a memory aid.

Some examples of programs and activities at the museum include, National Woman’s Day, Intergenerational programs, Commemorative Walk on February 11, the day District Six was declared a White Group area in 1966. A stone memorial has been created as a result of Community Practice.

The museum tells the story of displacement, trauma and hope.

Unity does not grow wild

Can we talk, but can we also listen?

Part One was intended to provide a contextual backdrop against which much of my own engagement around inclusivity takes place as part of a collective citizenry trying to re-imagine, renew and re-create a new Cape Town in South Africa that invites diversity, embraces it and goes beyond the discourse of tolerance. The Nationalist Party that came to power in 1948 did not introduce racial prejudice in South Africa when they marketed and legalized segregation and called it apartheid. They systematically and efficiently codified it through a series of laws underpinned by all the organs of state. It permeated all aspects of life: education system, religion, leisure, places of work, where we lived, what we did, our access to healthcare; it was based on a very clear and strong

belief in the existence of race. It believed in a hierarchy of races, the right of one supreme race to dominate over others and the belief that each racial group had distinct identities. In fact, a report called the *Sour Report* produced to create the logic and justification for organising society along racial lines ahead of the 1948 elections reported that racial integration would result in the loss of the personality of all racial groups. It assumed that each racial group had a particular personality. There are a number of projects currently underway in South Africa that focus on tracking how far we have come in terms of de-racialisation, and they actively address our racial legacy issues. Unfortunately some of the ways of tracking the progress of the breakdown of racial divisions involves using the language of race. This in some ways reinforces the belief in the existence of race. Similar contradictions emerge in the progress of tracking changes in the racial demographic at schools, for example. Children, although born in the period we describe as the born free period, have been required to identify themselves racially in order to enable statistical tracking of improved access to education and the changed demographic in schools. I know of children who were disturbed by the fact that they were required to fill in these forms and to tick the correct box. It was very interesting to see how some of the teachers responded to that and said no, you've got to be something. It disturbed some children where this was not well mediated and contextualized. I wonder how much of that has been a contributing factor to the return to racialised identities we are witnessing at present.

For a long time South Africa was been defined by the institutionalised racism embodied in the political and economic system of apartheid. In a post-apartheid period, racism is still rife. No longer does the law uphold racially determined privileges, but it would appear that the insidious, sometime silent, sometime invisible racism is even more difficult to eradicate. The acceptance of the interconnectedness of our differences cannot be enforced by decree alone. It needs continuous lobbying and on-going vigilance. If not deliberately challenged in an actively anti-racist framework it can make people believe they were born with a racial identity, not into one which has been assigned to them.

Despite our successes, our conclusion is that in a business-as-usual basis we are likely to fall short in meeting our objectives of a prosperous united, non-racial and democratic South Africa with opportunities for all, irrespective of race or gender.

This reinforces my point that it cannot be business as usual, for government or for citizens. I do not wish to diminish the impact of law. The protection afforded to all citizens by our constitution and bill of rights is wonderful and forms the basis of our commitment to our growing, if troubled democracy.

This preamble of the constitution forms a wonderful inclusive framework for the rest of the constitution and sets the tone for it. On a somewhat simplistic level, I do not believe in the existence of race and definitely not in the way that formed the basis for the Nationalist Government policies. I believe in the existence of difference whether they are genetic, linguistic or geographic, but not the basis for any judgment of ability or behaviour. My own orientation tends to lean more towards anti-racism and non-racism than thinking about the inclusion of all races. I am sure there are many here that share my view. It's very hard to engage in conversations about the inclusion of all races, which is

why it has always been a source of pride to me that the preamble speaks to be inclusive and anti-racist without giving authority to the existence of race. It forces us to think beyond the boundaries of our limitations. My answer to the question about *Can We Talk*, is yes we should; we have no choice if we are committed to building a truly inclusive and humane future in the world, believing in the indivisibility of human rights across the globe. Talk, yes. But who talks to whom? To what end? And who listens? Dialogue is essential, but we must not be blind to its limitations. Literal talk and dialogue should form part of an arsenal of activities, relating to the protection of human rights, such as community campaigns; such as good governance, good legislation. Despite the limitations of talk, it cannot be avoided.

In South Africa, the legacy of race runs deep. The legacy is still reflected in the reality of poverty and access to wealth. It is reflected in the racialised geography of our city and our country, which has changed minimally. It should not be surprising that the 'who talks to whom' question in terms of public dialogue could be curtailed by the bounded nature of these communities. The boundaries of geography coincide with the boundaries of racial identities in the apartheid sense of the word. There are many organisations like District Six Museum who work against the ghettoization of knowledge and conversations. They create enabling platforms outside of these boundaries for people of all ages to engage in conversations. These form part of what we broadly call dialogue but often they are not obvious or literal conversations in the sense of being talk sessions. It might be an invitation to engage in a project like the making of an exhibition or the planning and execution of a commemorative event, for example, which becomes a way of entering into conversations through a joint activity or project. A conscious attempt to move people between and beyond their racially bounded communities is necessary. I believe that talk about race sometimes needs to be direct and sometimes it needs to be neither talk nor about race. People should experience each other in equalising contexts.

The National Planning commission was established in 2010 and has just handed over the document called *Vision for 2030* for South Africa. It was handed over to parliament last week. It provides a diagnostic overview at the end 2011 in which it identified the major challenges in South Africa, together with the underlying causes. It names nine main challenges of which I will refer to two that are relevant to this talk. The first one refers to the spatial challenges that continue to marginalise the poor. It reports that the spatial legacy of apartheid continues to weigh on the entire country. Reversing the challenges of spatial apartheid will be an ongoing challenge in the decades ahead. The second one, South Africa remains a divided society. We have made significant progress in uniting our country since 1994. Racism and prejudice has declined and we have infinitely more interaction as equals between black and white. Despite this progress we remain a divided society and the major dividing line is still race. Crime finds fertile ground in countries with huge inequality. Its citizens feel they need not practice good citizenship because they do not feel a part of it. Crime encourages the growth of gated communities in wealthy communities. The separate living spaces generated a high degree of relational distance so people do not see themselves as part of a common citizenry. This compounded with the legacy of poor public transport and the sharing of geographical space across class and race still remains difficult.

I return now to the title of my talk, *Unity does not grow wild*. The sentence was spoken by one of our great leaders, Oliver Tambo, the secretary general of the African national congress in 1955. The phrase caught my eye as I was reading through the text of a speech made at a Pan African Youth congress in 1961. It spoke to my own needs to think about a way to describe the importance of constantly protecting the gains we had won. To remind ourselves that 1994 was a wonderful milestone year in South Africa, but in the words of a South African rights and political commentator William Gumede, 'It was not year zero.' We did not enter 1995 with a metaphoric clean slate. And what we are experiencing in part is a situation where many South Africans handed over agency to government, particularly during the Mandela era, to solve problems entwined in this moment of celebratory arrival and to maintain our democracy. We are reminded of the fragile nature of these gains. Unity does not grow wild, it has to be nurtured, built up; it wears away. It must be doctored, treated. It also has many enemies and you have to keep vigilant against those. The unity Tambo refers to, and which we continue to strive for, is not premised on a melting pot where individual, religious, cultural and other differences disappear but rather a society with a shared South African identity that does not detract from our diverse multiple identities. This is one of the reasons I'm excited by symposia and other platforms like this one. It is an awareness that the need to talk is ongoing and global, and of the existing condition which can be best described as the invisibility of our human rights from each other. In the words of another great man, Martin Luther King, 'No one is free until everyone is free.' The injunction to own racism put to all of us is essential. We need to listen, listen with sensitivity, humility and with an understanding that there are ways of listening and sense making that are also culturally nuanced and influenced. We are all part of each other's stories and conversations.

In conclusion here is another of my favourite writers Arundhati Roy.

'The only dream worth having is that you will live while you are alive and die only when you are dead. To love and to be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of the life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength. Never power above all. To watch, to try, to understand. To never look away and never, never to forget.'

Facilitator

There are a lot of museums around the world that deal with the legacy of trauma, museums that engage in memorialisation and remembrance. District Six Museum is different because not only is it doing work that is not disassociated with therapy but it is finding strategies to preserve the experience of community that once existed there. Bonita has given us very complex reflections on the difficulty of fighting racism. We all collapse in to thinking about the big problems of racism or whether it's the problem of living with cultural diversity. The kneejerk reaction is to understand our objective as the building of tolerance. I think that what Bonita is involved in is far more complex than that. The concept of tolerance involves within it the existing power relations. We need to ask who is being tolerant of whom. If we ask that question, we can see that the same power relations remain.

That notion that it is not only important to recognise difference, it's not only important to talk, but it's also important to ask who are we talking to and who is listening, is part of the project of going beyond tolerance.

Question:

Can you tell us how you extend your work from beyond the community that was to others?

Bonita Bennett

What we struggle against is the notion of District Six exceptionalism. It was one of many areas destroyed in the apartheid throughout South Africa. Forced removals were the way of the apartheid government. District Six is very visible and it is the only place of active memory. It's a community that captured the imagination due to its rich and diverse culture. But having started with this story, one particular community, we are now using it as a lens to understand South Africa past and future. Trying to make everyone feel part of the story, white people feel like it's not their story – we trying to get them involved. There is an active youth program that is trying to connect young people to history and past. Wonderful young people come into the museum. They read books and write poetry, they are interested in dialogue and conversations. Breaking down stereotypes and boundaries between people. The notion and perception of the limitations of young people has informed our practice. We try to speak to young people intelligently, teaching them and learning from them. We try to create an enabling environment at the museum. It is one of the few places in Cape Town where people can actually come and tell their stories. We don't give voice to people; people have their own voices and we provide an environment for people to talk to a world and to themselves. Conversation rather than talk.

Question:

Two sides here, part of it is about celebrating what was and the other part is remembering the various problems. I'm wondering with youth engagement, some of what went on was very evil and graphic – how do you deal with that in terms of young people? What is kept back and what is shared? Is there an appropriate age level?

Bonita Bennett

We don't have a particular policy related to age. Do you know the Apartheid Museum? We try to invite people into the space where you experience the horrors of apartheid in a victorious way... not the right word. We do try not to be graphic in what we represent. Apartheid Museum is very different; a large museum in Johannesburg, and that museum tells the broader story of apartheid – more graphic. District Six is a more intimate space. Apartheid is translated to the impact on ordinary people – how they lost their photographs and how the relocation changed their lives. Most graphic image is the bulldozer. Not trying to underplay the horrors of apartheid but experience in a different way and explore destruction in an alternate way. Young people engage in a way that makes them

uncomfortable. Permanent exhibition is called 'Digging Deeper', suggesting that this story is still being explored. So we get age-appropriate story-tellers, layering in the space.

Question:

How did South African educators or historians go about writing history books that were accurate for teachers in schools and universities?

Bonita Bennett

Accuracy is a controversial idea. I'm not an historian and I come to the museum in a different way. The education department, as part of its own renewal, commissioned different people, drawing on the alternative history movement, history from the underside, from people's history. In the 1980s, my involvement in the apartheid movement was about this. Alternative education. Documenting and questioning the canon – alternative history that is also committed to representations of accuracy. The exhibition *1994 Election*, with new government and the new education minister, draws on all of these sources.

Question:

Forced removals – why has the District Six group been so unique? Are there other groups in other areas who have tried to capture and gather the memory?

Bonita Bennett

District Six was the largest urban removal in Cape Town; 60 000 people were removed from the area. Because of its location at the foot of Table Mountain, valuable beautiful land, you wonder why this land is vacant. Very visible. District Six was also a mixed economy, so working-class people living next to professionals, musicians and writers. Prominent people came out of the area. Though history is the lived experience of all people, prominent and every day – so this is a place to talk about displacement as a violation of human rights. But the District Six story is a lens from which to understand a larger story. The power of absence, that nothing happened with the land; it's a scar on the landscape.

Quite an important discussion during restitution and return (1995 land acts people can claim the right to return). We are now part of supporting that because of *Hands off District Six*, which kept the district undeveloped, so people can actually come back to the land. Besides the museum, people do their own remembrances and acts – one woman would go to the site of her former backyard and she gathered strength by looking at Table Mountain. It's the rock of her strength. She says that in a few years she won't be able to do this; this will be someone else's yard – aware of the losses and the gains. So the museum is now involved in the development process; the discourse is changing. Talking about parking lots rather than restitution. We have made the argument that certain spaces need to remind people that something happened here, trying to save heritage spaces. Fight between lack of housing and need for memorial park. Hard argument. But these spaces are necessary; need to maintain a small park which is a memorial to absence. People are not just bricks and mortar, we

need spaces for people to exercise cultural rights, community and sports – we need it for community cohesion. Memorial markers. Our museum works with absence and fragments, parts of stories, imaging what was. We have a wonderful archive of many fragments.

Question:

You talked about being inspired by the stories. We are inspired by you. We heard this week about miners being killed in South Australia. Do you think we will ever go back to what was? The future?

Bonita Bennett

I still feel hopeful. The whole issue of race is still there. The miners were all black. I'm shocked. It's difficult to understand. Moments of back and forth. The journey is hard. There's lots of slipping. But I would never have believed that this is possible in the new South Africa. There is a lot of critique of government response and lots of issues with wealth and ownership, of means of production are the bigger questions now.

Question:

How do you in the museum move beyond the discourse of tolerance?

Bonita Bennett

The dialogue programs, the talking programs. For a long time there was a colour blind discourse, erasing difference teaches kids that difference is bad. We start our dialogue programs with a discussion of difference not based on race. We talk about difference. We say race is there, no question about it and you can talk about it and name it. I asked the ex-residents; I asked them, 'I know you have racial nicknames for the others', and they told me them, it was cathartic; people talk about it and teasing each other. Naming the words was important. Create a forum for people to talk, the differences are there but do they really matter? How do we break them down? When we invite people into the space it's clear that there are rules of engagement. My colleague is creating a game called re-imagining Cape Town, helping kids understand what a racialised Cape Town meant, explains why we live in these areas. Kids come in and are assigned a random identity. Their access to things during the day is determined by their racial identities. Help kids understand what Cape Town was like and what it possibly could be.

Question:

It sounds like Cape Townians and young people look to District Six as an inspiration for their own work as poets, artists. How are they supported and nurtured in Cape Town as artists? What's the level of support in the community? Are there partnerships for supporting young people and their art?

Bonita Bennett

Growing number of forums like District Six Museum, which create those kinds of spaces. But formalised support from government is hard. We are battling for resources for arts, culture and

heritage. We are battling extreme poverty and HIV/AIDS and issues relating to housing and service delivery. So arts, culture, heritage falls right at the bottom of the pile. When we have some resources, we argue that what artists do is real work; not just voluntary or nice or a hobby. When we grant for the museum we try to make part of it available to artists, to immerse themselves in our archive and be inspired, or to facilitating engagements with young people (workshops). Try to create in a real way, a place for artists to earn a living. Where would we be without our artists?

Question:

The material culture, the street signs – how does the museum incorporate stories of the people who were part of the regime?

Bonita Bennett

That's one of our shortcomings. We haven't done that well enough, part of an ongoing storytelling and documentation, finding those people. The museum started off as a story for victims of the apartheid and the experiences, because there weren't any other spaces for people to do that. But now people are asking that, for the other side. I believe in subjectivity; we taking a pro-voiceless people bias. But in this new era we may need to explore creating that space for the other side. In 1994 that wasn't appropriate. That is something we will be trying to develop going forward.

First Plenary

Research – Methodologies around engaging with racism

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Yin Paradies, Researcher, Deakin University

Farida Fozdar, Lecturer, University of Western Australia

Dr Clare Land, Researcher, Deakin University

Margaret Kelaher, Facilitator, University of Melbourne

Jessica Walton, Rapporteur

Principles, strategies and nuances of anti-racism (A/Prof Yin Paradies)

Evidence we think about and use in our work. We use a number of interventions and evaluations trying to address racism, promote diversity, cultural competence and intercultural understanding, and some of the broader finds from around the world.

What is racism? Thinking about the inequities in the way that societies operate, in terms of the resources, benefits and opportunities that people have. How they may vary depending on their identity, their racial, ethnic, religious, cultural identity. It occurs through things that are avoidable and unfair, that create disadvantage for people who already suffer some disadvantage or, on the alternate side, can further advantage people who have unfair privileges. Racism can be about attitudes, what people believe and importantly how they behave towards others but also about institutions and organisations in society and what they do and how they operate intentionally or unintentionally to create or reinforce inequalities and inequities. Generally in the literature, there's talk about three levels of racism, internalised ideas about other groups, your own group, what you believe about inferiority, superiority, those kind of ideas. Then interpersonal racism, what happens to people in Australia when they are confronted with racism on the streets, in the workplace, in their educational context and the system level. It's harder to see. It's harder to address, but probably is the strongest form of racism – that institutional and organisational affect within government, workplaces and educational institutions.

What is antiracism? It's very much an oppositional concept and there has been critique of that. Not being more about a positive but a negation of something. It's about addressing the causes, manifestations of racism. It's different from other things like cultural awareness, for example, because of that strong focus on the dominant culture in Australia, an Anglo culture, and mainstream institutions and practices, not about a focus on minority groups, CALD groups or indigenous people. It's about mainstream and how that can be reoriented and how that can become more equitable. I would argue that it's not so much about addressing disadvantage, but more because racism is a driver of disadvantage. What we are trying to do is to treat the disease and not the symptoms. So, disadvantage is a symptom and racism is one of the causes.

There is probably not enough thinking about this in the academic literature but there are very broad and different approaches to anti-racism. In psychology there is a lot of focus on prejudice reduction, the idea that people can be prejudiced and it is a lot of the time about individuals. How we can try to create better harmony and more tolerant attitudes. Then there is working organisational psychology, diversity management as a discipline looking at organisation and how they can be reoriented and changed and become more equitable and recognise racism in their systems and address them. Then there is other work from peace studies, international relations and other related fields on conflict resolution, which I think is an important addition to the prejudice reduction approaches. It starts to recognise that different groups can have real basis for conflict, for tensions between communities. It recognises that idea about real threats and symbolic threats to ways of life and tries to address that through intercultural dialogue, for example. Then there is other working collective action and social change, which has been studied from a number of different perspectives; but is more about power in society, social power and how certain groups need to change the nature of society so they can be recognised and respected and treated fairly. There is a tension between these approaches. Collective action and social change can in the short-term increase prejudice between social groups; it can create conflicts that need to be resolved. It's important because of the power lens that it works through.

Example: Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity – LEAD

The program focuses on intercultural relations, on building positive attitudes and behaviours, inclusive communities and identities. It doesn't try to do everything.

It is important to know where an activity sits within a spectrum and to be clear about the activity's aims and what it hopes to achieve.

There have been some reviews looking at anti-racism broadly. From psychology there's a review of prejudice reduction in terms of what works in terms of reducing prejudice for people and individuals.

Broad take-home messages from the reviews, what kind of principles people have used to reduce racism, prejudice and discrimination. Increasing empathy, raising awareness, dispelling false beliefs, for example that people may have about other groups or their own group. Values – incompatible beliefs are really about values. Promoting egalitarian values like a fair go in Australia. That is one to help people to understand that racism is not such a great idea; personal accountability, social norms and the idea of contact and interaction and positive encounters with others as a method of reducing racism. From that flows strategy. Some of them about social change, social movement, like advocacy, community strengthening, organisations and institutions and how racism can be addressed within institutions. And broader stuff: legislative reform, programs of interaction, whether intergroup contact or intercultural dialogue, communications and social marketing campaigns and the need to understand how, when and why a program works through research, monitoring and evaluation.

Psychology Study

How different messages intersect with each other. This study found that when there are mixed messages people did not respond well to messages that mixed positive and negative data.

Another example is more common. Diversity Training – messages about race, diversity, racism or culture. The problem is that about a fifth of people who do this training end up more racist then when they started – another example of the nuances of anti-racism.

Reflexive anti-racism (see Kowal, et al. 2012). Helps people to be aware of their reactions, not to feel guilty but to learn ways to address those feelings effectively.

‘Standard’ multiculturalism is what we can achieve if we collectively support ethnic minorities to speak languages other than English in the workplace, school or other public arenas. The ideas were presented to a group as a national approach, a popular approach to multiculturalism. Recipients were threatened by these approaches. Another way is to use inclusive multiculturalism, including both majority and minority groups in strategies to promote multiculturalism. This attenuates threat and reduces prejudice by being inclusive of all groups.

There is much backlash against multiculturalism in the world at the moment; but perhaps it is about how multiculturalism is framed, not about the essence of it.

In conclusion, there are a range of principles and strategies for effectively addressing racism but it’s tricky and it’s complex and there is a lot of potential for doing more harm than good. All these methods and approaches need to be applied cautiously. They need to be carefully studied so we can do some good in this area.

Flagging racism: Why can’t we talk about racism in Australia? (Farida Fozdar)

Flags on cars for Australia Day research

Within sociological theory we separate old racism from new racism. Old racism is the traditional biological version of racism where we separate people into groups according to visible difference and we produce those groups in a hierarchy where white people are at the top and black people are at the bottom. Racism is seldom that simple. New racism is about producing a similar hierarchy but not based on physical differences; it’s based on cultural difference. We also tend to distinguish between interpersonal racism (racism between people) versus structural racism (the ways in which social structures and institutions discriminate unfairly) and discursive racism (the ways in which racism is generated and perpetuated through the ways we talk about others and talk about difference). Anti-racism refers to interventions that challenge these forms of racism. We also have a phenomenon called anti-anti-racism, which is generally a defensive reaction against being accused of being racist. Anti-anti-racism will often be framed within arguments for freedom of speech. The ways in which racism is linked to nationalism is of particular interest in relation to the flags on cars research. Within academic theorising about nationalism there are a lot of arguments about whether

nationalism is a good or bad thing. In the US there have been attempts to distinguish between patriotism, which is simply a positive feeling about one's country, and nationalism, which includes a positive feeling about one's country within a framework of negativity towards others. Some of the research shows that you can't really separate these two phenomena. There is also a distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. A civic form of nationalism is a positivity about one's own nation, but it is based on a rational support for civic structures, for democracy and some of the values associated with one's nation. Whereas an ethnic form of nationalism is one that is much closer to traditional forms of racism, where you have a love for your nation that is based on a sense that we are all one people, we share the same ancestry; we share the same culture, the same language, to the exclusion of others.

I'm also interested in cosmopolitanism and post nationalism and the extent to which we have moved beyond the desire to celebrate our connection with nations and moved to a celebration with our connection as humans, regardless of where one is from.

We also need to consider why it's important to oppose racism. There are two simple arguments. One is a moral argument that this is morally and philosophically wrong from a human rights perspective; and secondly a material argument that racism damages its victims and others by distorting social relations and undermining people's opportunities and this has a number of flow-on effects.

Finally, why is it that those who work in academia; those who work in the public service; those who provide services to migrants; why do we have a different perception about the existence of racism in Australia compared to the rest of the population? There are a number of different approaches to combating racism. How one approaches combating racism will be affected by how one theorises racism. So if we think it's psychologicistic, something that occurs in people's minds, then intervention should be at the level of the individual and trying to change people's attitudes. If we think it's structural, then we have to change the structures that produce racism by providing resources that are shared more equitably. If we think it's discursive, more action in terms of interventions based on the way in which we construct difference and the ways in which we talk about difference is needed. We also need to think about what it is we want to change as part of such interventions. Is it our attitudes towards diversity in terms of accepting difference? And what are the limits to those levels of acceptance?

The flag study

Many of you would have heard about the media coverage of this research. My research question was based on something that has been identified – that the flag is used as a site of contestation of values – and I was interested in why the phenomenon of putting Australian flags on cars for Australia Day had become a big deal. This has been particularly in Western Australia since 2005-06 and has spread to other parts of Australia as well. I was interested to find out what is the message here, what are people trying to say by putting flags on their cars for Australia Day? I undertook a survey of people who had gathered to see the fireworks. We got through 513 people with one in five putting

flags on their cars for Australia Day. The research found that people who flew flags held more exclusionary nationalistic attitudes. However, even among non-flag flyers there were still quite high levels of negativity towards diversity and minorities. There was an enormous amount of publicity, with seventy newspaper articles, 200+ hate mails amounting to over 300 pages when printed out. Themes in the hate mail included sexism, violence, racism and anti-intellectualism.

One of the letters to the editor, which goes to the question ‘why do we understand racism so differently from the public?’ is shown in this slide. For some, racism means Nazism; that is the definition to the general public. Many emails and blog postings suggested criticism of the research was justified. They appeared to be using a minimalist definition of racism, of the most extreme form.

Why the outrage? Part of it is that people think that maybe racism exists but it belongs to somebody else; part of it is having racism linked to the use of the national flag. But the research was not linking it to the flag itself. It was to how people were using the flag as a particular type of symbol.

I would like to focus briefly on differences in methods. Quantitative methods tend to get more media coverage compared to qualitative methods. The bit of the press release about flag use that reported the qualitative responses from people which were much more nuanced and interesting was generally left off the media coverage. Quantitatively, we end up with lower levels of racism than are out there because of the recognition by research participants that we have a norm against racism in Australia – people know the ‘politically correct’ answer to tick on surveys about racism. Qualitative research that looks at the ways in which we talk about race and difference identify more wide-reaching, more common ways, in which racial discrimination is perpetuated in the ways we categorise and talk about groups and diversity. So it is a shame this part of the research did not get coverage.

I wanted to briefly touch on a number of different research projects that I have undertaken. I touch on these because I want to explain why I was so surprised with the response to the flags research. All my research over the last ten years has been looking at issues of settlement of migrants and refugees. All of this research indicates that although there are lots of positive things to say about the settlement of migrants and refugees in Australia, many do experience racism. One study looked at refugees and employment outcomes in the early 2000s. It clearly found that about half feel they had been discriminated against in the workplace. We also interviewed employers and have written a paper about the ways employers justify the discrimination that occurs. They don’t see it as racism; they see it as justifiable exclusion of minorities who can’t fit into the workplace culturally. So you’ve got evidence from refugees themselves and employers about why discrimination occurs.

We’ve done other research looking at blog discussions, the way in which people perpetuate racism against asylum seekers on blogs. There are also people who are challenging that racism. So if we want to explore anti-racism strategies, we have to be aware that there’s a lot of anti-racism that goes on already in everyday life.

Politicians' speeches

I've done some research that analyses the way in which politicians talk about Australian values and Australian culture as having a Judeo-Christian basis and an Anglo heritage, and the ways in which this fundamentally excludes people from different backgrounds. This is also evident in the public representation of Australian identity; for example, in the first version of the citizenship booklet which I've also written about. We've recently completed a project on the settlement of refugees, comparing people who have been here one or two years versus two to four years. What has been interesting about that is the sense of belonging. We've found that a lot of people, although they are very grateful for the kindness of every-day Australians, still feel like they don't quite belong. They have an aspirational sense of belonging. They hope that at some point in the future – once their English is good enough, once they've understood the Australian culture and make friends with mainstream Australians, once they've found employment in Australia – at some point in the future they will belong here.

Finally, in research looking at supporters of asylum seekers, you can also see ways in which some of the presumptions about racism can be perpetuated by people who are supporting minorities and we've already talked today about the notions of tolerance. An example cited.

To conclude, I'm interested in anti-racist discourse and how we can encourage challenges to racism through the ways in which we talk about race. Evidence has been provided that it doesn't take more energy and more effort to challenge racist discourse compared to perpetuating racist discourse. What action is needed? Basically, we need to sensitise the public to the ways in which racism is expressed, using a much broader definition of racism than just what Nazis did; and how this is perpetuated in language and how this flows on to attitudes and behaviours.

'I can't say I'm proud to be Australian' (Dr Clare Land)

My talk today will focus on white, non-indigenous people who are very conscious and critical of racism. They accept that Australia is a very racist country and have tried to work out how racism has embedded itself in them personally. They recognise themselves as colonisers and can see how systems of oppression advantage them in some ways and disadvantage them in others. They've tried to undo their own racism. They have also joined with other likeminded people to spread this project through supporting indigenous struggles and combating institutionalised racism. I talked to a number of such people in my research. Based on what they said, I wrote a chapter in my thesis about how non-indigenous supporters of indigenous land rights struggles in the south-east of Australia understood and experienced themselves as non-indigenous.

I asked indigenous people in south-east Australia, from the political community concerned with land rights, sovereignty, black power and community control, about the nature of support they want.

I also asked them what are they doing to nurture the support base of non-indigenous people. I placed an emphasis on the responsibility of non-indigenous people to play a part in the struggle for justice, and sought the reflections of non-indigenous people who've supported the particular political community of indigenous people that I've mentioned.

The method I used to discern this was to conduct in-depth interviews with twenty-four handpicked people – nine indigenous people and fifteen non-indigenous people – as well as reflecting on my own experiences as a supporter of indigenous struggles and a researcher in this area. So the research was reflective, purposive, and qualitative and located within the field of critical sociology. I spoke to non-indigenous people who were regarded by indigenous people as reflective of the issues that surfaced by working together.

Today I'll talk about three ideas. I want to talk about whiteness and why I focus on whiteness in the research; and I want to give an example of a non-indigenous person who has grappled with her understanding as a white person. I also want to talk about how it could be in white people's interests to change and to be anti-racist. That's one thing that activists and scholars in this area have tried to do: they think it might be more effective to make it in white people's interests to be involved.

My focus on white, non-indigenous people is part of a research trend towards interrogating those privileged by systems of oppression. The flip side of disadvantage is advantage and this is something that critical whiteness theory and research is concerned with. Such research springs from the conviction that white people's lives are shaped by race. Whiteness can provide people with opportunities and privileges not available to non-white people. This leads to the insight that white people are complicit with racism and benefit from its privileges even if they or we think of ourselves as not racist; even if we don't do or say overtly racist things. As white American scholar Robert Jensen says, 'It is possible to not be racist in the individual sense of not perpetuating overtly racist acts yet at the same time fail to be anti-racist' in a political sense by resisting a racist system. He goes on to say that because white people benefit from living in a white supremacist society, there is an added obligation for us to struggle against the injustice of that system. If white people think of themselves as complicit, then it is possible to identify how our habits and dispositions reproduce racial hierarchy and white privilege.

What is most important to the discussion today is that some non-indigenous people have found themselves deeply changed by their engagement with indigenous struggles. They've experienced a deeply felt shift in their self and in what is important to them. What this suggests is that genuine change is possible for some white people. I think it also leads to asking what made them change and can this process be repeated for more people.

Here is an example of a white, non-indigenous person who talked about her whiteness. Her name is Sally. She owns her structural position as a person with privilege in society, even though she has urges to deny her whiteness:

'I find my identity as an Australian very, very problematic. I can't say that I'm proud to be Australian because I am a coloniser. I'm going to move from one space to another within it. I am part Irish. They just love to be Irish, but I could never feel like that about being an Australian. I accept it because that is who I am in this time and place, in this lifetime and if this is the only identity I've got, then this is it, I'm not going to hate it.'

You can see that she felt self-conscious about knowing her structural location and that it would be dodgy to try and escape from that by trying to find an Aboriginal ancestor. She wanted somewhere in her genealogy to have some indigenous heritage.

I want to draw attention to one of Sally's insights – her conviction that she's stuck with her identity as a coloniser, but she's going to move from one space to another within it. In many ways Albert Memmi's writings from the French colonies of North Africa apply to this context. In 1965 he wrote about the reactions of colonisers who discover the 'economic, political and moral scandal' of colonisation, yet who live within it. He wrote that, 'It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live within its actual relationships.' Even though the non-indigenous people I spoke to were anti-racist, they were criticising colonialism but living in a colony and actually still being constructed by the relationships of colonialism. It's a contradiction you're stuck with. Memmi says coming to criticize colonialism 'deprives the reluctant coloniser of all tranquillity'. Coming back to Sally, we can see that one step involved is developing a self-consciously articulated white identity, so: realising that she was white, and realising what Aboriginal people know about white culture and accepting that that was true. That was followed by an ongoing struggle to reshape that white identity and move from one space to another within it. Essentially she had to look for new ways to be white.

The sense of an inescapable contradiction, being stuck within something that is problematic and the only possibility being to move from one space to another within it very much connects to theorising by activists and scholars about the project of transforming privileged subjectivities. How can we transform people who are privileged by racist systems?

For Bob Pease, my supervisor, his main work has been concerned with pro-feminism amongst men. His challenge is to get men or members of other privileged groups to develop a new sense of what is in their interests so they can feel more committed to dismantling a system that provides them with privilege. What are some of the enlightened interests that a person might have, beyond a very crude understanding of your self-interests? What are some of those enlightened interests? Bob Pease has said that this can range from doing something because it will make one feel better, to doing it because if you don't it will diminish your integrity as an ethical being. His view of the constructed rather than the determined nature of men's interests leaves open the possibility that interests can be reconstructed.

By what process might men and other members of privileged groups reconstruct their interests and our interests? (I speak as someone who has multiple privileges. I'm a white woman and I'm also privileged by my class. In that sense, people of multiple privileges have more of a duty to be involved

in undoing that.) Activists and scholars have found that rational arguments against racism aren't sufficient. Maybe the following can help:

- There is a need to create discomfort for members of privileged groups. But not too much because that can make them fearful, which in turn can turn them off the idea of anti-racism.
- There is a need to provide some sort of 'transformation experience'.

How can anti-racist organisers try and give those experiences to other people?

What about some of the new habits you could get into that might start to undo some of your white privileged habits? Volunteering for non-white and NGO projects or appropriate visits to indigenous contexts that can give you a sense of not being 'normal' (in the sense that whiteness seems 'normal' and is the dominant culture here, but white people are actually from a specific culture). The problem with white people moving into indigenous contexts or into supporting non-white projects or NGOs is the danger of taking over, which is something that white people do. There is a tension between strategies that will transform your subjectivity and the dangers you have to be aware of as well.

Now I want to talk about white people who have been permanently changed to being anti-racist. Some members of dominant groups who do get involved in anti-racist or pro-indigenous politics become aware of a dynamic whereby they have privilege to choose to be involved and committed to social justice struggles. Whereas non-whites feel they have no choice. It is a duty, something they have inherited from family. However, over time, some dominant groups find there is a point of no return. They find that they cannot act against racism. We can say that their involvement in supporting struggles for justice has begun to reconstruct their subjectivity. This can be permanent. So a new sense of self makes it impossible not to remain committed to struggles for social justice. Some suggest that this is akin to scales falling from the eyes. For instance, Jake Swamp, a Mohawk (Native American) Elder speaks about the situation of his people and of people elsewhere in the world who are suffering. He says, 'When you come to know about these problems, I guarantee you are never going to sleep again.' Bob Pease says: 'My experience in campaigns tells me that there comes a point of no return for allies. Significant reconstruction of subjectivity can occur to the point where turning away from activist involvement is no longer viable.'

Some of the key ideas in the project of reconstructing the interests of privileged groups are:

- Encouraging the privileged to support abstract values and principles rather than self interest. Make it a moral and a values issue.
- Encouraging the privileged to realise there is a cost to members of privileged groups for ignoring indigenous and anti-racist struggles. That is, to tolerate racism and inequality is to be diminished as an ethical being.
- To develop a broad moral and political framework that racism is connected to other forms of discrimination and even that the majority of people, black or white, have common cause against greed.

- To see that something has to change because environmental collapse is imminent.
- Finally, considering that white people in Australia were not always white, they did come from somewhere, and have had to give up something to become white. This can be considered a 'cost of whiteness' and a way of entering into an understanding about the way white privilege distorts white people. This can send white people on a journey to find out more about family and community and history. This is a really important thing you would do alongside your anti-racist political action.

Finally, if members of dominant groups do get involved in supporting anti-racist activities and campaigns they may experience a process of change in the sense of self so that to turn away from activist involvements is no longer viable. I'd like to finish with the proposition that members of privileged groups can come to see that it is in their or our interests to change ourselves personally and to contribute to wider social change.

Question:

Why is it that the public and academics don't recognise racism? Is it because racism isn't used in public discourse by leading figures in the community? There are some tentative signs that we may be able to speak about racism like National Anti-racism strategy.

How would you react to government censoring the use of racism in documents?

Speaker

Racism has become such a sensitive term that people are adverse to be seen to be accusing people of racism or even talking about racism. There is a tendency for people to think about racism as biological racism and not recognising cultural forms of racism by saying those forms aren't racism. But you can't replace this with terms like religionism, ethnicism etc, so it's best to just stick with racism.

Question:

The South Sudanese have proudly flown their South Sudanese flags on cars in Geelong. What is your reaction in comparison to your study of Australians having the flags on their cars and the South Sudanese proudly celebrating their independence by showing their flags on their cars?

Speaker

There are migrants to Australia who fly Australian flags on their cars. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with having a flag on a car to express nationalism but it's the type of nationalism the flag symbolises in term of how it's used and represented (e.g. Pauline Hanson draping herself in the Australian flag, Cronulla riots and the flag, Big Day Out). The problem is not the flag; it's the meanings we provide for the flag.

Question:

Was there any difference between those attending Australia Day celebrations and those not attending?

Speaker

I suspect there would have been greater distance. There would have been lower ratings if you evaluated the general public. However, an interesting story to be told with the sample that was used.

Question:

Isn't the flag the problem in Australia? It has the British flag in it.

Speaker

People initially thought it was a survey about flags – e.g. style of flag, republic or not, etc., but the research was not about this. Does having a Union Jack on the flag produce a certain type of nationalism? You could make that argument. US study – flag in top corner of study survey vs. and without – it was concluded that flag was generating stronger negative attitudes of nationalism.

Question:

What do you think about surveys? Sometimes there is a difference between what people say in a survey and how they act towards one another – attitudes and behaviour.

Speaker

You need to focus on both. Attitudes and behaviours are related, but some studies show they are not always very strongly related. References work on implicit v explicit racism, that we all have implicit racist attitudes but anti-racist people override these attitudes and don't act on them. Evidence shows that attitudinal change can lead to behavioural change, as well as vice versa. References made to an indigenous man who said that Australians are very good at knowing when to express racism and when not to.

Question:

Are there any relations of those vilified here that personally could go in the direction of a King philosophy or an early Malcolm X philosophy in the sense that we're all after equality. We all recognise there is a problem, but there is a very distinct individual pursuit of equality and integration. Do we know anything about those who are continually vilified or are aware of vilification from their family, or those who don't want to integrate, or those who don't want to belong. Are there statistics or theories or research on that field?

Speaker

The struggle of the indigenous is a struggle against genocide. White culture has proved itself capable of terrible things. There is a resistance. There is a strong sovereign movement amongst indigenous communities. It's a myth that minority groups are self-segregating. People are not self-segregating of their own accord; there are other issues, mainly mainstream neglect and exclusion.

Second Plenary

Best practice

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Pamela Rodriquez, VicHealth

James Demetriou and Chris Gillard, Sports without Borders

Liz Freeman, La Trobe University

Katherine Hill, Melbourne University Centre for Community Partnerships

Tatiana Mauri, Community Engagement Manager, Museum Victoria

Jamie Dawson, City of Dandenong

Kim Webster, Facilitator

Hannah Reich, Rapporteur

Creating safe spaces for talking about racism and countering racism

LEAD (Pamela Rodriquez)

The overall objectives of the Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program, is to improve the health outcomes among aboriginal and migrant communities through increased social and economic participation. Specifically the program aims to achieve this by reducing race-based discrimination and promoting diversity. LEAD is guided by research findings indicating that efforts to reduce race-based discrimination are most successful when a coordinated range of strategies are implemented at different levels that is targeted to individuals, communities, organisations and the wider society in ways that support and reinforce one another within a defined location. As a result, LEAD has been designed as a locality based, multi-setting partnership program and is currently being implemented by the cities of Shepparton and Whittlesea. Aside from these two councils the LEAD partnership also includes the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, The Municipal Association of Victoria, Beyond Blue, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, VicHealth, University of Melbourne.

Within these localities a number of settings have been identified as key sectors for focus for interventions and activity. One of the key components of LEAD is working with organisations in these settings to develop an understanding of what racism and race-based discrimination are and impacts on individuals, organisations and community. Organisations and workplaces have been identified as places where race-based discrimination occurs, as well as a priority setting where anti-discrimination and diversity can be supported and enhanced. They provide a natural environment for contact between people from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore workplaces and organisations can play an important role in modelling and enforcing

anti-discrimination standards. LEAD is working with organisations to modify or introduce practice to prevent race-based discrimination. In order to achieve this we need to be able to name, define and acknowledge its existence. Although most people can easily identify blatant forms of racism and racially motivated personal attacks, and most organisations are governed by legislation and policies protecting people from these forms of discrimination, some forms of race-based discrimination are less overt and therefore less visible. Indirect or systemic forms of racism can therefore go undetected and unchallenged with many people disadvantaged and exposed to a range of consequences and impacts. Research undertaken in Australia and overseas has identified a range of negative consequences that result from exposure to racism and race-based discrimination. These and their impacts affect individuals, organisations and the community as a whole. The link between racism and health has now been well established and includes a clear link with depression, cigarette smoking, and substance abuse as well as a probable link with conditions such as anxiety, psychological or psychiatric distress, high blood pressure and violence and a possible link with heart disease and diabetes. The wider implications for organisations and the community have been documented and include reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, loss of reputation, negative impact on workplace and/or community culture as well as a lack of opportunity for cohesive communities. Clearly racism affects us all in numerous ways.

LEAD is underpinned by a framework that recognises that race based discrimination is a result of a range of factors occurring at an individual, organisational, community and society level and therefore strategies to reduce it must also include and target all of these. A significant LEAD intervention is to resource and support organisations to undertake self assessments in relation to race-based discrimination and based on these develop action plans aimed at preventing and reducing race based discrimination. The workplace diversity and anti-discrimination assessment tool is one of the resources that has been developed as part of LEAD to assist organisations to undertake a self-assessment. Developed by The University of Melbourne in consultation with the two LEAD councils, The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and VicHealth, the tool identifies five domains for assessment, representing key organisational functions. Self-assessments help organisations to identify where and how workers may be disadvantaged as a result of practices that discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, language or religious beliefs. In many instances, it is the practice of treating everyone the same, with the intention to not discriminate that results in an unequal distribution of power, resources or opportunities across different groups, precisely because not everyone is the same and the barriers that some experience may not be recognised. Having identified the areas requiring improvement or change, organisations are then able to develop strategies and actions to address these. Anti-discrimination and cross cultural skills development training, policy and procedure review development, modification to HR policies and practices to make these more accessible and inclusive to all groups, and the development of culturally and linguistically diverse specific communications protocols are examples of the types of initiatives included in the action plans developed by the two councils involved in LEAD to date. A similar process occurred in the other settings with schools, workplaces, sporting clubs etc, also identifying a range of actions they can undertake to reduce race-based discrimination and to promote diversity within their contexts. By increasing awareness and understanding impacts of race-based

discrimination, LEAD is supporting organisations to identify and tackle systemic and indirect discrimination. LEAD is not about naming for the purpose of shaming. Rather to be able to recognise that disadvantage and inequities do occur as a result of some of our organisational structures and systems; identifying the ways to prevent or reduce this whilst maximising the benefits that cultural diversity brings to us as individuals and in our organisations, communities and society.

Sports without Borders (James Dimitriou and Chris Gillard)

The social media campaign, *We're all on the same team* was launched by Minister for Sports and Recreation, Kate Lundy on 15 June 2012.

Australia was built on teamwork. There's a train that runs across our country called the Ghan. It was originally called the Afghan Express named after the hard-working and fearless Afghan cameleers who took their own trains into our rugged centre 150 years ago. Someone might want to remind our current political leaders of facts just like this. That's if you can call them leaders. Every sports person in this campaign that we're running is a leader. None of them had to ask their management for permission to be in it; none of them needed to do a social media poll on how the association might affect their popularity, and none of them asked for payment. All of them immediately understood the goal of the campaign and their part in reaching it. All of them understood that the ethnic variety of their last names is one of those things that make them Australian. *We're all on the same team* is a campaign designed not simply as a brand launch for Sports without Borders but as a positive counterpoint to the negative political and media interests that have had their day. It's time the positives of multiculturalism were discussed and celebrated *en masse*. This campaign is about creating a space for conversation and a safe area to broadcast positives and to try to resolve some negatives around multiculturalism. If so called political leaders will only react to the latest news, well this campaign will give them the latest news. It's time for us to work as a team.

Media running irresponsible sensationalist stories pandering to political agendas on both sides, and a lack of strong political leadership in politics has become shameful as a habit and led to a widely skewed view of the Australia that we live in, both here and overseas. We live in a place where it's okay to classify people as boats and to throw the truth overboard. Where the fear of a few people coming from a desperate situation is manufactured, to the extent that a group that wouldn't even fill the MCG in twenty years, is seen as an invasion. Leadership is not reacting to the crowd, its having the courage to outline and execute an idea that challenges the norm or the crowd or a common belief. People are not elected as leaders to then go and fretfully ask their constituents what to do. We're inspired by true leadership and this becomes a self-reinforcing dynamic that propels the ideas of a leader forward and turns them into reality. This is the vacuum in this country that the real leaders are hoping to fill.

The Ghan is a wild and awe-inspiring journey across Australia, but it's also a metaphor for the inspiring journey of a nation and the positive influences that have had a hand in building it – not just indigenous, but wherever they might be from. The teams of Afghan cameleers bravely marked out a solid path to the heart of nation 150 years ago. For the strength of our country we need to ensure

that that path remains permanent and enduring. In my opinion, I don't think we need to own racism; I think we need to give it back to its traditional owners. That's the media and the politicians.

Enhancing relationships in school communities: a professional learning program to support teachers in building culturally respectful school communities (Liz Freeman)

The *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS)* project was an Australian Research Council funded project evaluating a professional learning program to help primary teachers to build culturally respectful school communities. The project was undertaken by The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University in partnership with the Australian Psychological Society (Psychologists for Peace Interest Group), Catholic Education Office Melbourne, Haig St Primary School Heidelberg and St Anthony's Primary School Alphington, Victoria, Australia. The Scanlon Foundation also provided funding.

Aims The Project focused on building a whole school culture that respects and values cultural diversity and opposes racism. In addition, the program also contained a conflict resolution component to enable the development of a school culture that handles differences and conflict between individuals and groups in ways that enhance relationships. ERIS also provided schools with curricula for students, that schools were encouraged to implement during their participation in the project.

Project rationale It is often difficult for school communities and teachers to deal confidently with issues of diversity, and with issues of racism. There is little training for teachers in this area. There were concerns for teachers about whether they should speak about diversity issues openly, and what might happen if they did so. There were also misconceptions about at what age children actually noticed differences.

Program processes and concepts What we did was to provide a professional learning program to core teams of three to five teachers, including a school leader, from ten primary schools. (There were three non-program schools). The seven-day professional learning program was conducted over eighteen months. We were expecting the core team from each school to disseminate their project learning back into their schools. We also visited schools and consulted with, and provided support, as they worked on the project and tailored it to their local contexts. One of the complexities of this project was that each school needed to develop its own set of aims to focus on issues relevant to their community.

We introduced conceptual tools such as 'justice alerts' (derived from post-colonial theory), which provided a shared language for teachers that would potentially enable them to engage more fully with the complexity of cultural diversity issues. The program also presented adaption of Sleeter and Grant's (2009) five standpoints (assimilation, human relations, tourist, multicultural and transformative), as a framework for teachers to assess their school's approach to cultural diversity.

The program was highly interactive, including a range of activities and processes such as reflective activities, role-plays and access to resources. One of the important processes in the program was the

opportunity for schools to share their experiences and talk about the dilemmas and struggles they had while working in this area.

Student perspectives While we had supporting research evidence from many studies that children do recognise differences at an early age, one of the most powerful moments in our program was when we brought in data from teachers' own schools, derived from focus group interviews, using a Diversity Dolls methodology. It was evident in numerous focus group transcripts that the children were very aware of differences in skin colour. Teachers heard through students' voices awareness of diversity issues that they had not expected. They recognised that students were having, or were aware of experiences, such as exclusion based on skin colour, that may not have been apparent to teachers. This data motivated some teachers to reconsider their views and empowered them to act. We were suggesting that it was important to surface these issues in schools and that teachers could play a very significant role in helping children navigate diversity issues.

Curricula Teachers could also choose to implement the ERIS cultural diversity curricula (designed for three levels, Prep-Grade 2, Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6). The curricula included, for example, modules on recognising stereotyping and discrimination and awakening a sense of injustice.

Project outcomes The project evaluation suggested that many teachers were able to reflect on their own practice in a more nuanced way with the help of new concepts. They were more motivated to review their school policies and practices in the area of diversity. They also felt more confident about discussing issues of colour, naming racism and getting children engaged in such discussions. They reported that when they did so the students valued the discussions and were surprisingly 'confident and mature' in talking about cultural diversity.

African voices of Carlton (Kate Hill)

Creating safe spaces, professional reflection and constructive critiquing.

'The way in which art and research is practiced and represented can have unintended and objectifying effects. Potentially and problematically this can include reproducing negative perceptions or identifications of people and place.' Art Research Catalogue, West Heidelberg.

Should we talk about racism and are there times we should ignore it? I met a young Austrian man the other day who told me there is no discourse around racism in Austria and if you talk about it, it is considered that you are racist. Difficult conversations are not easy to start, but it is important we have them. As a teacher, I have made mistakes in distinguishing misinformed teenage conversations about asylum seekers and refugees. I did not feel that I was able to debunk myths or facilitate conversation because the topic is a very emotional one for me. I regretted this but I knew that I didn't feel that I could be neutral in engaging these young people in this particular instance. So I felt it wasn't a good idea to push the conversation too far; it wouldn't be safe for them or others in the classroom. I simply asked my young people to ask themselves this question: 'What do we know about asylum seekers and refugees? And is what you think based on what you've heard?'

We were reflecting on the fact that we as humans often forget to think about what we know, or to question what we think we know. My focus is on safe spaces, particularly in schools and particularly with young people.

Perceptions of safety differ from person to person so we cannot agree on one safe framework. We need to continually reflect and build safe spaces with those we are hoping to talk to so that each unique group or individual's emotional safety is ensured. It's difficult to achieve this with young people, especially in schools. How do we talk about it? We often need structure and scaffolding to engage in meaningful, potentially emotional conversations. We need to have some idea about what we expect to achieve by discussing racism. Perhaps safe sharing means we need concrete aims and presumed goals for what we hope to gain or change when talking about racism. Perhaps we need to be more specific talking to themes about or around a particular space, place or event.

For example we might look at racial discrimination as it occurs on public transport, sporting centres, in schools, at work and in the media. We might talk about ways to report suspected racial discrimination via the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC). What are the concrete things we could do? I wanted to draw attention to the fact that perhaps when we feel safe incidental conversation might be a good option. Talking about it as it arises, if you are able, as we often have to do in schools.

Recently, I was referred to as a typical *cowadj*, or typical white foreigner, by one of my friends. It would have been best to discuss this at the time; however, it wasn't the right time or the right place and I didn't feel safe, even though I was within my group of friends. Also, I was hurt and in shock and needed time to digest what had happened. Later I took time to write exactly how I felt. I have communicated that with this person, but we haven't been able to resume that conversation.

Our recent postcard and poetry writing project was designed to initiate dialogue around identity, difference, belonging and racism amongst young people from African backgrounds. It was going to be held in a private space with a group of young people we had previously worked with. This meant that the relationships were pre-existing. We were also likely to see this group soon, so we could reflect and check back in with them. However, a few days prior, our small group became unavailable. We desperately sought other participants through people we had previously worked with.

Eventually, on the morning of our proposed chat, with only two confirmed participants we realised we had to change our plan altogether. We took a microphone, an amplifier and ourselves to Nicholson Street, Footscray. The project took on a completely different form.

Our grant stipulated that we needed to work with young Africans; however, as the context was now so different we felt that we must engage with everybody. Perhaps because we had a group of facilitators who were male/female, African/non-African it helped us to be seen as a more open group with an open invitation to join. Although we did what we could to create a safe space with what we had, most of those we engaged with stayed with us only briefly and moved on. It's true that several people we engaged were known to us, but even then the discourse around racism, identity and belonging was not confrontational, provocative or even very personal.

Obviously, there were many factors at play. We did not have pre-existing relationships with some participants. Participants had not planned to have these conversations at this moment and particularly not in a Footscray street; and therefore unable to record poignant encounters with racism that they otherwise may have been able to. Participants were not entirely certain about what we were doing and why we were doing it. We didn't have time to engage people in the history of our project.

Talking difference (Tatiana Mauri)

'Australia is a country known for its diversity of cultural and ethnic groups. Despite support for cultural diversity and multiculturalism, racism and discrimination is a pertinent problem in Australia, specifically for migrant, refugee and Aboriginal populations. Numerous strategies have been identified and implemented in attempts to reduce race-based discrimination and promote positive intercultural contact. One such strategy is using arts-based interventions.' Kaitlin Lauridses, *Talking Difference Evaluation Report*.

How can we create safe spaces for people affected by racism so that they can name and discuss their experiences and the issue generally?

Talking Difference is a multi-platform online social media project designed to facilitate dialogue around cultural difference and to promote diversity. This project is funded by VicHealth, *Arts about us*.

The first part of the project was made up of numerous bits. There was a fellowship; there was a pilot team; there were champions. There's a website that brings together all the work we've been doing over the last three years.

The thing I'm going to talk about is the Portable Studio, which has been an overwhelming success. I'm going to talk to a physical space that is a safe space for people. I'll talk a little bit about the community engagement aspect of creating this safe space. Inside the studio is an interactive space where people can create content with video, audio, text and drawing. We didn't know when we designed this whether or not it would be a success. We didn't know whether people would be courageous enough to walk into this little space, let alone tackle some of the issues we were asking them to tackle – all about race-based discrimination, all about their personal experiences of race-based discrimination within their communities and inter-communities.

Part of what we needed to do was go into the communities in a meaningful way. We ran workshops with numerous communities. The first tour of the studio was to Brimbank and we worked with the library network who were fantastically supportive of the project. Libraries are a community hub. They bring people together for all sorts of reasons: to meet with one another, to learn, to engage. I think that starting in the libraries put us on a path to understanding what true community engagement is all about. It's about building up relationships; it's about building up trust and it's about becoming part of a community. It's not about going in and coming out.

We advertised workshops, we told people what the workshops were about and we invited them to come along and pose questions about what was important to them to their community – questions around race-based discrimination. Questions like:

- Are you proud of your skin colour?
- What is your favourite music?
- Have you experienced racism lately?

Some questions were quite sensitive and others encouraged people to relax a little bit. Over the last six months we've had over 1000 people unload content via video, audio, text and drawing.

The project is about facilitating dialogue as a means of challenging racism and promoting diversity; to create a 'safe' space for people to engage by using a multimedia platform. To facilitate dialogue about cultural difference and diversity in new and creative ways by providing participants with an opportunity to record their views using video, audio, text, drawing; and to build connections within the community by means of virtual dialogue.

And that's what we found to be quite extraordinary. People were having virtual dialogues. They were responding to one another and that's a level of intimacy may not have occurred in just an open space. There was something about being able to do that in your own time and in your own space. It was really important that the participants created the questions that were relevant to their communities, and that they were able to respond to questions from other community members.

That was really key for us.

Face to face (Jamie Dawson)

Face to Face was a community project that brought people together from diverse backgrounds to tell their stories. It aimed to capture the everyday life in the community and help people understand the different cultural backgrounds of the people who live and work in Springvale. It was about changing the perception of what Springvale was by bringing forth the incredible diversity and rich stories of the community. I'm going to share a couple of personal learnings from this project which I think go towards this wider theme of a safe or appropriate space, although I'm defining space in the widest possible context.

The first is how we designed this project from the start, and there was flexibility at every point. We wanted multiple art forms; we wanted multiple outcomes, but we actually did not predetermine anything along the way. I believe the success of face-to-face is underpinned entirely by this flexibility. We did not set out to tell stories by film; we didn't look to design a theatre piece, a book, a doco, or an exhibition, although we did all of those things and much more over three years.

We simply set out to offer as many points of connection as possible and to see what could come out of that. The only given was we were going to do it through arts-based programming.

There is no one way to tell a story; but, more to the point, there is only one universal arts approach to achieve our aims. So if we wanted to engage the people in our community and have the community engage with this project, we had to be prepared to approach things in a multitude of ways and to make sure they were well rounded, diverse, engaging, professional, high quality opportunities.

It's not as easy as it reads. Try working in local government and convincing them to fund something that not only doesn't have a predetermined outcome, but you actually have no idea how you're going to get there in the first place. We set in place some basic frameworks for the project to convince those who needed to fund it. An example of this is through our artist in schools program. We worked with Anu Patel. She worked with six different secondary schools and every outcome was a different style and approach; every piece of work differed from the other and yet it was the same conversation every time.

I want to come back to the notion of quality, which for me is hugely important in the notion of creating spaces for people to engage. We worked with very professional artists across the board. We hosted in quality venues; we had top quality equipment and materials access; we provided the best possible project and participant support right through to using graphic designers for our promotional material. This does have budget implications, but I'm going to suggest that if you really want your participants to donate their time, embrace a vision and an idea before offering their personal and incredibly challenging story then the least you can do is provide a space and experience that respects this.

Having worked at programs at each end of the spectrum, every single time the buy-in, pride, growth, development of participants is greater when offered a high quality experience. This is because they feel valued; this is because they feel respected; they feel they are part of something significant.

I'll finish on a story of hope. It taught me the incredible desire of a human being to share his story when he felt he had something to offer. A young man who made a film arrived as an unaccompanied minor at 15 years of age. He felt he had something to share and decided to enter the *Face to Face* program via the film-making project. Several weeks of screen writing development and editing, through to development. He got through to final edit when his case-worker told him he could not be part of this project. The concern was that if someone from his homeland saw it, it could pose a significant risk to his people back home.

I was able to go back to identify the two main concerns; they were that he showed his face on film. It also contained his voice. We reworked the story and visual shoot to come up with an outcome that I believe is a better film. We planned to use a voice over actor but in the end the young man refused to have any other voice tell the story he wanted to tell. He won that argument.

Question:

How did you do it without demonstrable outcomes?

Jamie Dawson

Not sure. We were able to convince the director that we had a vision. We ran a whole series of pilot projects leading up to it – to show that it works, had an evaluation. Partnership with VicHealth helped.

Question:

A lot of the focus is on new media for anti-racism as distinct from traditional media. Is it a generational thing that makes new media the preferred platform?

Tatiana Mauri

It's about having as many tools at hand as possible to engage with as many people as possible. Social media is a very powerful tool; to be able to use it in a way to give people the opportunity to speak out against racism. Traditional methods are also important. It's also good to integrate the two things. New media allows for a different dialogue to happen, social media continues conversations and they take on a life of their own – very important, impossible to be everywhere at once. Conversation blows up – which is both good and bad.

Chris Gillard

Social media is inclusive; everyone has access to it. It's safe. You can do it alone in your room. It helps people to find their voice, wherever they might be.

Jamie Dawson

I'm a huge new media advocate. We tackled traditional forms. One young woman made visual art and then decided to come back to make a film, but realising the permanency of it made her hesitate.

Comment:

New media is effective because that's where a lot of the hate is. It's not filtered, anyone can publish – the hate can collect there. The public sees it, but it's also where they can respond to it. It's where the people causing the problem are. It's the right venue to address it there.

Comment:

Old media want to be part of new media. Online is popular. Things online start there and end up in the newspapers. Stories gain traction online.

Question:

Sports Without Borders is very important, looks well funded. Where's Arts Without Borders?

Chris Gillard

Actually not very well funded, lots of people are doing pro-bono work.

Question:

I've been working in schools in the western suburbs. I've never heard of ERIS. Has anything translated to other schools?

Liz Freeman

Unfortunately we were only funded for certain schools. The ability to roll it out is dependent on systems. We are now involved with the intercultural understanding field trial. We have published papers and have resources. But it's a matter of funding.

Kate Hill

There was an article in *The Age* the other day about crimes committed by African youth. A lot of youth took to social media to respond to it. Where are the positive stories? When are the media reporting on that?

First Breakout

Youth – Growing up in multicultural Melbourne

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Vishnu Chari, Multicultural Multifaith Youth Network

Yasmin Hassen, Youth Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural Commission

Soo Lin Quek, Facilitator, Centre for Multicultural Youth

Lobna Rouhani, Rapporteur

Humour, sarcasm and wit (Vishnu Chari)

The media force-feeds us news via comedy. Australians have enjoyed a good laugh. Nothing is sacred. The ability to laugh at anything, especially oneself, is a defining trait of being an Aussie. When does funny become rude? How much does the context and setting of a joke determine whether or not a joke is funny? Jokes can be rude, crude or offensive, regardless of whether there is anyone in the room to take offense. Making fun of a culture is wrong even if there is no one there to hear the joke.

Stereotypes are often depicted and people often find this funny. And this in itself is a problem. There are many examples, like Aboriginal memes, which Facebook refused to take down claiming to have no responsibility for content on their servers. It wasn't until pressure from the government was applied and legal action was threatened that the site was refused. What does this say about the society we live in?

Sports: There is a social understanding that language used at sports grounds is not offensive because it is in the heat of the moment. This is clearly wrong. Dale Thomas, a Collingwood football player, challenged a spectator and exposed their racist behaviour. This took a lot of courage. He ensured the football club and the AFL acted upon it. Do sports fans want to take a stand? Or do they prefer to ignore it? The way these matters are managed ultimately fights or perpetuates racism. Are we not comfortable dealing with racism or do we not care enough?

We should begin to think about individual liberties, rather than group stereotypes. Generalisations are dangerous. Spreading such stereotypes through media prevents people from getting to know an individual.

Second Breakout

Anti-racism policy developments

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum Theatrette

Speakers:

Naomi Priest, Facilitator

Dr Helen Szoke, Race Discrimination Commissioner

Gaetano Greco, Councillor, City of Darebin

Elise Murphy, Rapporteur

Messaging about racism (Dr Helen Szoke)

I pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, past and present, and recognise their continuing spirit and connection to the land and culture.

This session is about the journey of developing an Australian Race Discrimination Strategy (ARDS), a government initiative that I have led and developed. It's an exciting time to be launching this strategy – it's the first time that the Australian government has had a formally named Australian Race Discrimination Strategy. It is important to call it what it is so it is known and recognised by individuals and groups, as racism is often poorly understood in the community.

To develop this strategy, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) did a lot of online surveying and research into sister organisations (for instance the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission), and commissioned research into experiences of racism.

The brief to the organisation commissioned to do the research was to reach 'middle Australia.' If we think about a spectrum of racism – where at one end there are people with strong views or those who identify as 'racist' and on the other end there are people who experience racist behaviour – we wanted to target the middle group. We wanted to explicitly use the word racism in the testing as well.

There was a focus on Gen X and Y with methodologies including testing concepts with an online focus group (over three days) with feedback, and focus group testing.

The organisation came back with the campaign title *Racism: It Stops With Me*. Keeping the word 'racism' in the title was important. The campaign doesn't label people as good or bad; it invites participation rather than directs it, models behaviour rather than censures it. We also didn't want to single out one group of people, rather to say that combating racism is everyone's responsibility.

Prior to the launch, I was communicating with people across all walks of life to get the message out. Racism is not an issue just for those who experience it, or for the human rights industry, but for all of us.

Early adopters of strategy have been:

- Elders – 175 year-old Australian agricultural business based in regional, remote and urban Australia and whose clients are first, second and third generation Australians who often work with indigenous Australians and traditional owners of land.
- Sporting groups.
- Arts and non-government sector.
- Some local councils, including Darebin (Victoria) and Port Augusta (South Australia).
- The only group that didn't want to engage was the national RSL, as there was concern from the national executive – however, the RSL does have its own policies and strategies.

This campaign is a framework asking people to understand what racism is and what we can do about it. It is asking people to endorse and enact it, aiming to promote best practice. For our communication strategy, images and messages that were rejected in favour of the more personal *Racism: It Stops with Me* were based around questions such as:

- Do we challenge fears?
- Do we encourage activism?
- Do we 'out' people?
- Do we focus on stereotypes?
- Do we ask people to think about their behaviour?
- Do we ask people to act?
- Do we focus on kids and parents?

Question:

What do you think about the use of humour to challenge racism, rather than the use of subtlety or just smarter ads?

Helen Szoke

Our advisory group for the campaign noted that stereotyping, even through humour, can stigmatise a group, even if unintentionally. American/English stereotypes can be brought into play too much in our Australian situation – ie the use of 'gangs' in those countries isn't so applicable in the Australian context. The key is local consultation – the grouping of minorities in a 'gang' isn't done to white groups. Our advisory group thought that the campaign should be thought provoking not just reflect a depressing reality.

We shouldn't reinforce 'us' and 'them' stereotypes – preaching to white middle-class backgrounds. The use of the 'bystander' in campaigns sometimes doesn't work, as it shows instances such as ejections from sporting venues or extreme racist behaviour, making it seem like racism is always extreme, not something that occurs in everyday settings, such as the workplace. It's one thing to have a message that says racism is bad, but it should also explain why it's bad. For instance, it's important to document the social/economic/health impacts on individuals and societies. Racism makes us all sick – perpetrators and victims. Young people can be confused about their behaviour and what racism is – they often need clear practical examples. Being racist is not just a matter of not being nice; it's unlawful, and we need to emphasise punishments.

Darebin City Council inquiry into racism 2012 (Gaetano Greco)

This discussion introduces Darebin City Council's Inquiry into Racism 2012 and how we develop and enact strategies to combat racism. The first question we asked is, 'What is the situation in Darebin and how do we tackle it?' Darebin Council has done a lot of work on racism and has a history of tackling it; however, it is important to find new ways of addressing problems.

A question we are often asked is, 'Why does council get involved in this sort of work?' The answer is that we have a mandate to uphold legislation and to provide a safe environment for citizens.

The background to this inquiry was that the new National Multicultural Policy in February 2011 brought the word 'racism' back on the agenda. There were also some worrying findings for Darebin in the University of Western Sydney's *Challenging Racism* project. The project suggested that areas like Darebin and neighbouring cities have a higher incidence of racism than the national average. To put this in context, of the 140 000 people in Darebin, thirty per cent were born overseas and close to fifty per cent speak a language other than English at home – so perhaps, in some ways, this is understandable.

Darebin Council wanted to be proactive about combating problems. In April 2011 we embarked on the inquiry. The aim of the inquiry was to gather views and ideas, to document experiences and impacts and to determine the nature and extent of racism in Darebin. The methodology was:

- To bring together a steering committee, which included community representation and involvement
- A literature review
- A phone survey with 300 residents
- An online survey with 65 people
- A public forum
- Focus groups – 15 groups with 100 people in total
- Invisible theatre to test bystander responses to racism (in trains, public places, RSLs etc.)

This period of research, data compilation, analysis and report-writing took place between July 2011 and April 2012. The findings were mostly positive, indicating strong in-principle support for cultural diversity:

- 89% of people thought it was a good thing for society to be made up of people from different races, cultures and religions

- 85% thought it was important that Darebin remains culturally diverse
- 81% felt secure when they are with people of different races, cultures or religions.

However there were also some negative findings, indicating beliefs that differ from the stated in-principle support:

- 40% believed that some groups don't fit into Australian society. Among these respondents:
- 42% believed that some groups don't make the effort to fit into Australian society
- 38% believed that there are groups that have different values
- 27% believed that there are groups who don't mix and stick to their groups
- 7% held overtly racist attitudes.

Experiences of racism in the municipality of Darebin:

- 8 in 10 were not victims of racism in last 5 years
- 4 in 10 witnessed race-based incidents
- 2 in 10 experienced personal verbal abuse
- 1 in 10 experienced personal threat or physical assault (much higher proportion for some groups though)
- Most common experience of racism was seeing it portrayed in the media

Places where racism was experienced in Darebin:

- 9% work/employment
- 8% educational
- 7% shops and restaurants
- 7% sporting/public events
- 4% dealing with agencies/government services
- 2% dealing with police
- 2% housing market

Affected groups in Darebin:

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD)
- Non-native English speakers
- Newly arrived refugees/migrants
- Indigenous Australians particularly targeted
- Muslim and other minority religious groups
- Younger people
- Some women

Reactions to racist attitudes:

- 47% anger
 - 41% sad
 - 20% stressed
-
- 17% didn't belong
 - Similar reactions from males and females, although males had a higher anger response
 - Impact on health and social life: 1 in 3 (29%) even changed their behaviours (avoided locations, changed friendships).

Community suggestions to combat racism:

- 28% unsure
- 19% public education
- 16% already doing enough (view that this is not necessarily council's business)
- 15% celebration of multiculturalism
- 8% more targeted services
- 8% work with established communities to be more welcoming
- 8% work with new arrivals to assist with integration
- 7% encourage migrants to assimilate
- 6% improve policing in stamping out racism

The next step for Darebin Council to move from research to policy is to create the 2012-15 Darebin Council Anti-Racism Strategy. The vision is for a 'racism-free municipality' where community diversity is valued, celebrated, respected, embraced and leveraged. We:

- acknowledge Wurundjeri people as traditional owners
- promote leadership within the council and have a zero tolerance approach to racism
- value and celebrate diversity, dialogue and intercultural activities
- build a council reflective of our own community

Goals are to:

- Be an inclusive and reflective organisation
- Offer inclusive and equitable services and programs
- Contribute to an inclusive and empowered community

To achieve these goals, examples of actions include:

- Audit of all policies, strategies and programs for equity and inclusion
- Establishment of an Intercultural Centre in Darebin, which has been done.

Question:

Congratulations for showing leadership at Darebin Council – but how have other councils viewed the strategy? Are they interested in the findings?

Gaetano Greco

Whittlesea Council is also taking the lead and doing a similar study.

Question:

Where did you get the budget/resources to do this? How was it driven?

Gaetano Greco

The councillors of Darebin Council led the strategy. We constantly need to address issues and target actions and areas for improvement and not relying on festivals or other one-off occasions to do so.

Third Breakout

Cyber-bullying in the classroom

Thursday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum Theatrette

Speakers:

Hannes Berger, Program Manager Access and Community Arts Centre Melbourne

Sandy Phillips, FUSE and Digital Content, DEECD

Rapporteur, Hannah Reich

Creating safe and responsible digital citizens

Student well-being and digital content and literacy

Cyber-bullying is an area where we need to talk about the behaviour. The technology is a tool. It is not about the technology. It's about the behaviour. The Posti project simulates a social media site. Students are able to work through a number of scenarios to learn more about how to interact. Parents are also encouraged to use the tool.

There is a need to understand the language and forms. Twitter vs blogs vs email vs Facebook. There is also a need to understand how kids are using technology in order to understand cyber-bullying. Why is it an issue now? Web 2.0: two-way, anyone can publish and create, everyone can be connected at any time, everyone has a voice. Issue used to be about filtering – but this doesn't work anymore. We have to teach kids how to use technology in a positive way and how to deal with situations when they see stuff online they don't like. Seventy-nine per cent of households had Internet in 2010-2011. Evidence suggests that kids engage in three communities: Me (personal space), We (group space, where most cyber-bullying goes on, Facebook) see (world-wide audience, Twitter).

Students are concerned with cyber-bullying, digital footprint (things staying online forever), verifying people/truth on the Web. However, the law is concerned with copyright and privacy. Kids won't tell you if something's wrong or if they did something wrong; then the technology will get taken away from them – advice for parents: sit with them and see how they use the Web.

Inform yourself: YouTube things in plain English, Twitter in plain English, ACMA runs PD sessions. What are the new rules? Instil a sense of rights and responsibilities and some empowerment. Producing ethical people, even when no one is looking, creating kids who have a solid moral compass. There are fantastic resources on the Web – great ways to open the dialogue with student. Great videos made by kids.

Posti – the social network game came out of a live performance in schools about alcohol awareness. It seemed strange to write a play about cyber-bullying, but this game is a modernisation of the theatre education model. Funding from FUSE for a project – Posti is an online play about playing

online – much more than just the issue of cyber-bullying. It's more about how to behave in digital space. Aimed at upper primary age. Secondary students have been looking at it and suggesting new parts for the game. Animated and theatrical – simulated as a social media site. When you get in there it triggers a timeline/live feed and characters begin posting on the network/friend requests etc.

There are challenges that encourage people to read the content. There is a narrative that the kids follow – the kids view and follow the story, enter the characters' world. For the classroom but also at home – a game about ethics, not monitored – asks kids to behave well without being watched. Asks kids to think. Lose points for wrong answers, so incentive to choose the right answer.

DEECD wants to give students a voice, empower them to solve problems in their schools – integrating kids into policy development. Kids wrote a charter for ethical behaviour online.

Schools need to cyber-up their existing policies and kids know best how to do this. There's lots of arts-based interventions that address cyber-bullying.

How do we get feedback from people using Posti?

Unfortunately, we don't know who is using it. We need to ask schools if they've heard of it or if they will use it. Potential for secondary school kids to write their own stories. Use it as a springboard for drama classes to improvise. Ways to help kids with low literacy levels (as its text heavy). Can be used for teachers and parents to learn about what happens on social networks.

Third Plenary

Museums – Learning in public spaces

Friday 23 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Kylie Message, Facilitator, Australian National University

Moya McFadzean, Senior Curator, Migration and Cultural Diversity, Museum Victoria

Jan Molloy, Program Coordinator, Humanities, Immigration Museum

Bonita Bennett, Director, District Six Museum, Cape Town

Jessica Walton, Rapporteur

Good morning everybody, welcome back to the second day of the *Owning Racism* conference. It's been a real pleasure to be here and I'm really looking forward to another fantastic day today. And I think we're going to start off in a fantastic way with the session that we've got planned for you.

I'll start by introducing myself. My name is Kylie Message. I'm in the school of archaeology and anthropology at the Australian National University. I'm an academic there and I do a lot of work on museums and with museums, particularly museums that work with cultural encounters, so my area is cross-cultural research. I've done a lot of work in particular in the States looking at American museums, looking specifically at how tribal museums relate with national museums. I've also worked in New Zealand, and in many other places around the world. Controversy is my friend; I'm no stranger to conflict and I'm hoping that we can use a case study of the *Identity* exhibition today to tease out some of the themes and issues and conflicts and tensions and difficulties that I'm sure we've all observed and experienced in that space.

The panellists today are Moya McFadzean who is Senior Curator of Migration and Cultural Diversity at Museum Victoria. Moya was also a curator of the *Identity* exhibition. We've got Jan Molloy who's the Program Coordinator of Humanities for the Immigration Museum, and she's developed a lot of education programs, working both with school students but also with staff that focus on the exhibition. The third speaker is Bonita Bennett who was our wonderful keynote speaker from yesterday.

I'm going to ask her to respond informally after the first two speakers. And she'll also bring a bit of an international perspective to the conversation.

We got together yesterday and we had a fairly efficient and fast conversation about how we're going to run the session. Moya will speak first. She's got a fifteen to twenty minute presentation and she's going to address some of the themes that have been raised in relation to the *Identity* exhibition. And then Jan is going to speak for about ten minutes. Then I'm going to ask Bonita to give a brief response to the presentations and also to the exhibition. Then we'll open the conversation for your input.

So we're hoping that this session will provide the opportunity to discuss and think about how museums provide public spaces for learning as well as safe places for challenging ideas.

This idea that museums are safe places, public places, is that true is that not true? Is the museum a public space? So without further ado I'll invite Moya up.

***Identity: yours, mine, ours* – Exhibiting difference and making a difference? (Moya McFadzean)**

The purpose of this session is to consider the role museums can play in community conversations about challenging issues, and even contributing to shifts in attitudes and behaviour by using as a case study the *Identity: yours, mine, ours* exhibition which opened in 2011. Delegates have had an opportunity to view the exhibition. I will provide a brief overview of the development of the exhibition, our desired objectives and challenges, and my colleague Jan Molloy will focus on the exhibition as a vehicle for a variety of educational opportunities.

David Fleming, Director of the National Museums, Liverpool, observed in 2009 that 'Museums are – or should be – mirrors of society...museums, through their role as accessible and responsive educational organisations, should put diversity issues centre stage...Those who, for example, revere museums as unique and special purely because they look after collections of objects, rather than because they are also places where ideas can be explored, stories told, and emotions expressed, may struggle with the idea of museums joining the fight for human rights, respect and equality.'ⁱ He made this observation while discussing specific international museums of genocide, slavery, Holocaust and apartheid, and their proactive role in terms of forwarding agendas of representation, education and action. These are what have been termed museums and exhibitions of conscience, with a charter to engender social change and achieve collective understandings. These are big, ambitious and courageous objectives. In our own way, while not a site of trauma, it is through such principles that we hope our modest exhibition, *Identity: yours, mine, ours*, contributes to promoting diversity, respect and equality in our community.

Exhibition development background

The Museum can provide a safe environment for these experiences and interactions – inclusive, reaffirming, broadly representative, yet challenging, at times even confronting. Australian museologist and curator Fiona Cameron has suggested that the public want museums to tackle contentious social issues such as racism, diversity and identity.ⁱⁱ Teachers are advising our museum education staff that they are looking to museums to contribute to new curricula directions in terms of improving intercultural understandings. UK museologist Richard Sandell demonstrates that museums can create social change through courageous and challenging exhibitions, what he calls 'activist museum practice.'ⁱⁱⁱ Our challenge has been to strike a balance between assuming an ideological perspective with educational outcomes, and presenting content in a way that demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives so that the social message we convey is that of a community collective rather than the single voice of the museum. In this way, we hope visitors can respond in their own varied ways to the representations they encounter.

The Immigration Museum opened in 1998. After twelve years of representing Victoria's migration histories, stories and contemporary issues, the museum wanted to insert itself more firmly into the

community conversations about diversity, inclusivity, prejudice, and racism. Alarming statistics about racism, such as those published by *The Challenging Racism Project*^{iv} last year have highlighted the need for museums of social conscience to tackle these issues.

The museum wanted to be more contemporary, to reflect our society as it is, to emphasise our diversity in all its forms, how individuals, families and communities interact and define themselves in Australia today, beyond the narratives of migration. We also wanted to tackle the difficult question of our own role as an educative organisation within the community. It felt time to be more proactive, braver, more explicit in our social messages and perhaps to even reach some new audiences – the socially active and aware, young independent audiences, while maintaining our relevance to our older audiences and our schools. Finally, we wanted to take the opportunity for a new and creative way to incorporate more aboriginal stories and experiences into the Immigration Museum, beyond impact narratives, while remaining mindful of the first people's indigeneity.

An exhibition about identity in contemporary Australia was an ideal platform to launch this approach. *Identity* focuses on how our cultural heritage, languages, beliefs, and family connections influence our self-perceptions and our perceptions of other people – perceptions that can lead to discovery, confusion, prejudice and understanding. Through the paradigm of belonging and not belonging, *Identity* aims to champion cultural diversity in all its complexity, challenge racist attitudes, and promote positive social change. A topic of currency, *Identity* lent itself to a contemporary emphasis while still allowing room for historical narratives; it enabled us to engage in the dialogue around what we mean by difference and diversity, belonging and not belonging, individuality and collectivity. It is conceptual, personal, individual, subjective, organic, and multiple. Thus the exhibition has no one single voice. It asks lots of questions and certainly does not provide all the answers. It is hoped that visitors find something that moves, inspires, or challenges them, makes them curious, surprised, amused, or angry – and preferably more than one of these responses.

Key exhibition experiences

I will now highlight four key experiences in the exhibition that demonstrate our attempts to provoke and confront in creative and interactive ways. The exhibition commences with a multimedia installation developed in collaboration with Sydney-based multimedia artist Lynette Wallworth. This work, entitled *Welcome*, aims to challenge visitors to consider how it feels to be accepted, connected, different and rejected. We wanted to find a way to immerse visitors early in these concepts and even perhaps to unsettle them. The installation consists of a large rear projection of life-sized people drawing visitors down a darkened corridor in order to interact with the virtual but incredibly lifelike people. The creation of this piece involved fifty-five voluntary participants representing diversity in all its forms – senior men and women, school students, alternative punks, mothers and children, young hijab-wearing Muslim women, a three-generation East Timorese family, culturally-mixed young people, people from housing estates, footy supporters, and so on.

The continuous film loop has the people alternately welcome with warm positive body language, or reject with uneasy, scornful, suspicious responses. Of her own philosophy for the work Wallworth

states: ‘You can’t know what another person is thinking or thinks of you until you ask them. So much [of the way we think and behave] is subconscious; we’re oblivious to the way we train our thinking according to what we ingest from the media and other people. The only antidote to that is personal connection.’^v

The next central experience explores the theme of ‘First Impressions’ via a large multi-touch table that visitors can gather around and activate from different points. Visible and inherited identifiers inform our own ideas about self-identity, and influence the assumptions and judgments we make about each other. The idea behind the touch table is to challenge the visitors’ first impressions of people by discovering more about the ten very real people who appear on the screen. Visitors can select the people they would like to ‘meet’ and ask prescribed questions about how these people identify through food, family, appearance, clothing, name and language, uncovering both apparent and hidden identities beneath the surface. This includes some surprises and challenges to assumptions visitors might have made about an Aboriginal lawyer, a travel-loving professional woman in a wheelchair, an Afrikaans speaker of Chinese descent, a second-generation Lebanese hip hop performer, and a gay Malaysian academic. These stories also provided us with the opportunity to demonstrate the complexity of identity within individuals as well as instances of stereotyping even within one’s own culture.

‘Whose Next Door?’ is considered by many to be the exhibition’s core experience. The ways in which we cope with difference and diversity are influenced by our experiences and circumstances. Intentional and overtly negative reactions to encounters with difference can be conscious, defensive and planned and have long-term impacts for perpetrators and bystanders, as well as victims. This section considers these ideas through an immersive multimedia experience whereby visitors witness an act of not-so-subtle everyday prejudice on a Melbourne tram. They can then select to review the scene through the eyes of four participants – the victim, the perpetrator and two bystanders to hear what they were thinking. Hopefully this will prompt visitors to consider their own potential and actual actions.

We also present some ‘de-brief’ text that encourages visitors to consider how they might act in the future as witnesses to a prejudicial act. This piece was developed with a film director and script-writer, and actors in order to achieve a realistic and immersive experience. We see it as an unashamedly educative tool that visitors are finding confronting, moving, if not upsetting, and extremely significant in its messages. A comment left by a teacher of nursing at Goulburn Ovens TAFE demonstrates the broad potential of the interactive:

‘The students will work in Shepparton and surrounding areas. Many of the doctors they are working with are recent arrivals and the communities they are working in are very diverse with a number of Middle Eastern and African communities represented ... The wonderful interactive tram experience offered opportunities to discuss issues of bullying with our students. This was such a bonus. We were able to discuss the responsibilities of health-care professionals in the work-place and the interactive was a rich learning resource for us to discuss issues pertinent to OH&S in the workplace.’

So the idea was to feature an act of prejudice that is ordinary rather than extreme because it is these instances that impact upon and implicate us all – thereby making the visitor experience more rather than less confronting.

At the conclusion of the exhibition, an affirmation activity consists of two touch-screen kiosks, where visitors scan their handprint and leave their thoughts in the exhibition by contributing a short message about belonging, diversity or identity. People can elect to email their message to themselves as a postcard to share with others, and to add their message to the large video screen where it appears almost immediately. In this way visitors feel part of the broader conversation and have their say, feel involved and included, as well as leave an enduring legacy in the exhibition and on the website.

Exhibition challenges

If I had to summarise a few of the challenges in developing and executing the content for this exhibition, as well as some of the limitations I would mention:

Presenting objects that visitors may or not believe is discriminatory and so confronts their own attitudes. Our intent has not been to accuse anyone who owned a gollywog of being a racist, or to suggest that they are bad people if they are amused by some television ads that draw on the more benign cultural stereotypes. But we want to encourage people to question their assumptions and perceptions, to become more informed as to where our cultural references come from, to be broader and more thoughtful in our thinking.

Introducing contemporary indigenous stories into the Immigration Museum, beyond the contact and impact narratives. This was particularly challenging, involving consultation and negotiation, but it is one of the success stories of the exhibition that we have been able to feature strong, contemporary, diverse indigenous stories imbued throughout the entire exhibition.

Keeping the exhibition, which has an eight- to ten-year lifespan, remaining relevant, fresh and responsive, often difficult as resources tend to be diverted elsewhere after an exhibition opens. It is a currency that we need to find ways to maintain, both on the floor of the exhibition through additional community content, rotating display elements and an active exhibition website.

How to engage with the reality of reciprocal prejudice and intra-cultural discrimination. We do primarily point to the history and currency of the residual power position of the white Christian majority; but we all know that prejudice is two-way, non-exclusive and wrong no matter who is its exponent. I would make claim to a form of affirmative action if critiqued for this and the exhibition is after all a starting point for discussion. But where there remains a dominant culture, we must be accountable and vigilant. It was an extremely negative read on this approach that resulted in the following feedback on the *Australian Islamic Monitor* blog:

‘What a load of dangerous garbage, anti-white racist (probably the most common form of racism in the world) propaganda this stinking museum is full of. It's devised by some hate-filled jerks to twist the minds of young western children and try to fill them with the old, ‘black-arm band’ view of history and fill them with self loathing. I know I am proud of our western, decent liberal democratic way of life.’

An extreme response, but a recent conversation with one of the Immigration Museum's customer service officers revealed that at least one student felt that by highlighting difference only feeds division. This reaction is interesting to consider and cannot be dismissed.

Nevertheless, I find myself reflecting on the absence in the exhibition of stories such as one from our *Can We Talk?* youth forum last night. It was of a young person's mother, originally from Hong Kong, who was horrified to discover that her new neighbours were Indian. Cultural racism is common and cultural relativity controversial, but racism must be about individual and collective ownership, which lets none of us off the hook.

Ongoing impact

The challenge for the exhibition is to find creative ways to have an ongoing impact of a variety of audiences and stakeholders, both within and beyond the museum. One way this is being achieved extremely effectively is through the education programs that have been developed for *Identity*. My colleague, Jan Molloy, is going to talk about those shortly, demonstrating the collaborative ways in which materials have been produced, the surprising curricula links that have been made, and the opportunities for expanding the museum's audiences and educational reach.

Another significant project about to commence is being undertaken in partnership with The University of Melbourne, Deakin University and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Funded through an Australian Research Council grant over three years, the project 'Using museums to counter racism and increase acceptance of diversity among young people'^{vi} will reveal how high school students and their teachers understand racism, diversity and identity. The project uses the *Identity* exhibition as the central vehicle for this research that will also determine how museum programs can reduce racism and increase acceptance of diversity among high school students and their teachers. Working with curatorial, education and audience evaluation disciplines across Museum Victoria, this research project, jointly led by Deakin University and The University of Melbourne's McCaughey VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, offers a unique opportunity to undertake intensive and qualitative data-gathering and analysis to measure the genuine impact of museum programming on school students long after the actual visit. We hope that the *Identity* exhibition will answer the challenge that museums can engage in proactive intervention in social behaviours, that it is indeed a critical role for museums, and that the social impact can be measured.

The exhibition website also provides an essential means by which the exhibition can have an interactive life beyond the museum walls. It is a comprehensive reflection of the exhibition content, aesthetic and interactivity. Online visitors can explore personal stories, watch videos, have a say in relation to citizenship questions, opinions on political speeches, leave a pledge or a general comment. They can find links to related resources, explore the timeline at their leisure, and reflect on the tram interactive. We have uploaded as much of the exhibition content as possible in order to extend the exhibition's reach and impact while still recognising that, for the richest experience, people should come to the exhibition itself, if they can.

Our objective is to contribute to social change, but the challenge is how to measure our effectiveness once people have left the building. Feedback and evidence received to date indicates that the objectives to create forums for dialogue, challenge perceptions and enable participation are being achieved. Partnerships and collaboration with Victoria's multicultural communities and government and non government organisations have been significant in delivering this project effectively and achieving goals of providing access, building skills and capacity and creating networks and connections. Several participants have indicated that being part of forums associated with the exhibition and website has been significant in building confidence, relationships and connections. Over 200 individuals from diverse backgrounds have participated in this project and the numbers are increasing. This symposium is the first major public program initiative to evolve from the *Identity* exhibition, including the youth-led forum last night at the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne. This is a series we want to continue in order to continue to engage in the dialogue beyond the exhibition itself.

Conclusion

I would like to bring us back to the highly topical subject in museological circles of the role of museums in taking moral positions on subjects, what Richard Sandell, Director of the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, calls 'activist museum practice.'^{vii} As I have stated earlier, we developed the *Identity* exhibition with an agenda in mind. We wanted to promote intercultural understanding and engender social change in attitudes, no matter how modest or localised that change may be. To do this requires the taking of a position, a notion that can sit uncomfortably among museum professionals, as flying in the face of the generally accepted desire to objectively present issues and avoid alliances with a particular viewpoint. However, as I have described it, an exhibition such as *Identity* must be courageous and take the plunge; but we hope we have achieved this without prescribing visitor responses.

As Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd argue, 'Museums ... might most appropriately be understood not as sites of moral coercion but rather as learning environments in which infinitely diverse meanings can be constructed; but meanings which are generated out of engagement with a set of credible, authentic and ethically informed interpretive resources ... there is no neutral position. Just as visitors will create meanings out of the purposeful interpretations they encounter, they will also draw conclusions from the marked absences, awkward silences and skewed representations...'^{viii}

Our challenge has been to strike a balance between assuming an ideological position with educational outcomes, and presenting content in a way that demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives so that the social message we convey is that of a community collective, rather than the single voice of the museum. In this way, visitors can respond in their own varied ways to the representations they encounter. Nevertheless there is a clear message and the museum stands by it.

Ultimately, we hope both school and adult visitors to the *Identity* exhibition gain a deeper sense of self-awareness, the broader impacts of their processes of identification, and even to be active contributors to the exhibition itself. The exhibition supports the social values of understanding and

empathy in a culturally diverse nation. And I believe that rather than shying away from the notion of difference that we embrace it – it is a stronger more challenging word than diversity but one that we need to use more so that it becomes the norm, simultaneously unthreatening and enriching.

The following response left on our website by a visitor demonstrates how museum exhibitions can make a difference: 'I didn't expect it to move me as it did, it was both a powerful and insightful experience on a number of levels. Few exhibitions are able to dig deep and ask questions that we all need to ask ourselves as citizens of this land.' (*Identity* exhibition visitor feedback, 2011)

ⁱ Fleming, David (2009). *The Diverse Museum*. Fourth Stephen Weil Memorial Lecture. INTERCOM Conference, Mexico, 11 11/2009

ⁱⁱ Cameron, Fiona. (2006). 'Beyond Surface Representations: Museums, 'Edgy' Topics, Civic Responsibilities and Modes of Engagement.' *Open Museum Journal*, 8:1-34.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2010. Sandell, Richard et al [eds] *Re-presenting Disability. Activism and Agency in the Museum*. Routledge. London and New York. p 3.

^{iv} *The Challenging Racism Project* surveyed more than 12,500 people nation-wide and found that 12% of Australians agree that they are personally prejudiced against other cultures, and 84% believe there is racial prejudice in Australia. About 1/6 of Australians experience racism in their everyday lives (Dunn, Forrest, Babacan, Paradies and Pedersen et al, University of Western Sydney, 2011 http://www.uws.edu.au/social_sciences/soss/research/challenging_racism)

^v Lynette Wallworth in Webb, Penny (2011). 'The Search for Identity.' *Art Guide Australia*. May-June 2011.

^{vi} *Using museums to counter racism and increase acceptance of diversity among young people*, ARC Linkage Project, 2012-15. Key project investigators: Paradies Y, Priest N, Kowal E, Kelaher M, Mansouri F, McFadzean M, Meehan C, Sproul L.

^{vii} Sandell, op.cit, p.3

^{viii} Ibid, pp.20-21

Identity: yours, mine, ours (Jan Molloy)

I'm Jan Molloy and I am the Programs Coordinator, Humanities, at the Immigration Museum. I've been a teacher for over thirty years and I've been working in my role as Programs Coordinator, Humanities, at this museum for six years in October. I'm very lucky to have this role and I relish every day that I'm working in this place and appreciate the opportunities I have to work with exciting content and fabulous people like Moya and Tatiana, and to support the people who are the unsung heroes of the world: teachers.

Learning doesn't just happen in schools and it doesn't just happen in that time when you leave home and you start what is called 'the foundation year'; learning is a lifelong experience. Learning can happen in museums.

As we have seen, this museum is about a learning experience for every visitor. We are committed to the idea that if everyone who visits us comes away thinking about who they are in the world and who they are in relation to the people next to them, then we've done our job. The space here and the exhibitions are about engaging with the experience of migration and what that means for individuals.

If people can leave the museum and have one thought about what the experience of migration means to them, we have achieved our goal. This is an interesting question and it's something we do with every group of students and visitors that come to the museum. The most important thing to be gained from the *Identity* exhibition is the conversations that can come from being exposed to the stories in it.

Someone said earlier that museums are safe places for unsafe ideas. This is where we're at with this exhibition. If you're a classroom teacher and you've taught Year Nine and you've grappled with adolescent angst and aggression and lack of empathy for others, it's not easy to go in and start dealing with unsafe ideas. A lot of teachers realise that there are issues that we want to talk about and, as you'll see in a minute, there are imperatives for having those conversations. But sometimes you need to go somewhere for guidance and support. This exhibition gives us that opportunity.

This whole exhibition is digitised. A teacher can go in and find the resources required. It is a powerful example of what online Web-based learning can offer. And that was because our curators and the team behind it were aiming for something that was accessible. And it's part of the reason it's been so successful.

We put out a terrific marketing campaign to draw attention to the exhibition. Teachers saw it and called us up. We invited them to come in and I ran two sessions of teacher info about the exhibition; just walked them through the exhibition, asked them 'what does it offer, how would you like to use it, how can we help?' And then we started getting bookings, people bringing their students because they could see the connection.

We were working within the context of these interesting statements that are being made in Australia about education and what's important. There was the Melbourne declaration that's talking about a socially cohesive society; there's the Australian curriculum that's going to be introduced with a statement about intercultural learning and understanding.

Then we had VCE English (that's Victorian) and VCE sociology, both of which make statements about context of identity and belonging; and VCE sociology with ethnicity. We had an environment in the post-secondary where we've got vocational education and training with VET; we've got pathways projects and learning in the community as priorities where people are looking to make connections. I spent a lot of last year going to conferences, talking about the exhibition, and talking with the Department of Education.

We have had a lot of visits. Over 2000 students saw the exhibition. We've had return visits this year. And we've got people talking about it. Advocacy. We had 120 RMIT students with their lecturers coming through, and they were saying how good it was. One student wrote this: 'the exhibition is quite extraordinary and an extremely useful adjunct to university level studies in the area of identity and culture'.

Kylie Message

Thank you very much for those illuminating observations about the process of making the exhibition and also a reflection on some of the responses that the exhibition has attracted to date. It seems to me that the exhibition is a great example of a work in progress, whereby the museum is not just functioning in this location. It's very much about encouraging new relationships with different communities, different groups. Its focus is about change and transformation, of the museum and the society in which it functions.

I'd like to invite Bonita Bennett, from District Six Museum, to offer some reflection on the exhibition and what she's heard today.

Bonita Bennett

I feel like I'm joining the fan club of this *Identity* exhibition. I haven't had time to go through the actual exhibition, but I've gone through the online material and I feel like I know it. I think it's a great exhibition. Moya spoke about it as a starting point for discussion; and I think that's what you've achieved.

There are six points on my mental checklist for a successful exhibition, and I think I've ticked all of those boxes.

Museum exhibitions should be responsive to context. Museums should have a program that goes beyond the opening because I know a lot of exhibitions get stuck. You have a grand moment, the opening, the cutting of the ribbon and that's it. It feels dead, like a white elephant. This exhibition goes beyond that. I get a sense that there's been a lot of community participation (however you formulate who your community is), but it does feel like there's been co-curatorship. It feels like people were involved along the way; you feel that there are many voices coming through. The fourth point is that you take a stand and you own your subjectivity. And I think that comes across very clearly for me.

You also invite visitors to question themselves. You create a little bit of discomfort. I think that's also very important. Museums don't need to make people feel comfortable all the time. It's not about the 'feel good moment'. There should be moments of discomfort, where you're challenged and made to question your own stereotypes.

Lastly, the way the multiple voices come through is very strong and very important. There is no one South African story, there is no one Australian story. And I think that expression of multiple voices comes through very strongly.

So those are my tick boxes. I was very pleased and excited by this exhibition. I was working out how we could travel this to South Africa; maybe that's more challenge. But I think it's a great exhibition and I think the important point for me is about its life after the opening – the program, the education, the commitment to make sure that it lives in different places. That's what makes it a great exhibition from where I'm standing.

Jan Molloy

You said yesterday 'no matter where we are we are here'. It was interesting because as I walked through that exhibition yesterday I took that phrase with me. It echoed and resounded for me because that's what's happening in this museum exhibition. The exhibition is about relationships, it's about relationship-building and it's about relationship-stress and break-down. You are instantly placed in that series of negotiations. And I found that quite remarkable and moving. So it was interesting that your phrase, the international context, had a direct bearing on what I felt there.

Kylie Message

I'd like to ask the audience for some responses. Or can I give Moya or Jan the opportunity to respond to that. Do you want to say anything?

Bonita Bennett

The question I had was about there was little bit of a discussion about changing perception and changing behaviour. And I'd be very interested to know how you think about examining that, studying that, and getting feedback in terms of how has this exhibition moved from changing perceptions to changing behaviour. How are you measuring that?

Jan Molloy

The ARC project that Moya spoke about is one way, but it's really difficult to measure this kind of change. There's one example I refer to quite a lot. We have a project we've been working with Victoria University for some time, the last five years. It's not specific to *Identity* but it's about young people coming in and looking at our exhibition spaces, including *Identity* and then they make documentaries. One young man, white Anglo-Saxon background, stood up to introduce his film and he said, 'I came to this museum thinking it wasn't about me' and he said 'I now realise it is about me.' And I thought 'I wish I had a tape recorder then and there' I think that's the measure of what we do.

Moya McFadzean

In pragmatic terms, I suppose, what we're hoping is that the ARC project that is starting later this year will give us some really measurable data. Because that project is going to involve researchers going out into schools that have agreed to participate and actually doing those qualitative measures about what the lasting impact and learnings have been, from the exhibition through to the classroom and then, for kids, beyond the classroom. That project hasn't commenced yet, but it will be interesting to see what comes out of that because one of the ongoing challenges for museums is that you don't really know

what you've managed to imbue in people unless they've filled out a feedback form or you've captured them at an exit survey. So at that school level we're really keen that that project will give us those measures and also where we've failed, so that we can try and fill those gaps in the exhibition.

Question:

You were talking about perception to behavioural changes, but yesterday someone was talking about the fact that actual behaviour was much more relational to difference than the perception. I find that link from behaviour, the recognition that your own behaviour is actually very different from your understanding of your perception around difference and diversity, that link is harder to shift. And I'm wondering if you thought about that with the ARC project?

Moya McFadzean

Like I say, really early days. I would imagine absolutely. I think that behaviour question is critical because it's one thing to think ... you go into the tram experience and lots of people say they've gone 'oh gee, I didn't really think about that, I've been in that situation why didn't I speak up, why didn't I act'. So maybe that's the middle ground between perception, attitude and behaviour, so it's getting people then to make the next step that they'll actually do something about it later. And that's the difficult thing to measure. So yes, we are thinking about that.

But we can't expect an exhibition to do everything. The fact that this museum has got this exhibition; the fact that there are things happening along the way so cultural organisations like museums are putting in this kind of public conversation space, putting it out there in curriculum documents, there's talk about intercultural learning and understanding, that it becomes part of a social context in which we interact is a good thing. Yesterday we saw all of those other elements that are happening, VicHealth and their race-based discrimination, the assessment tools that you can use in different settings, local government and arts projects. I think that it's part of a number of ways in which we are looking to bring conversations about race-based discrimination into a more prominent part of public dialogue.

Emma Kowal

Hi, from Melbourne University. I'm one of the researchers on the ARC project that Moya was talking about. To respond to that point, we're using a range of methods to get a sense of the impact of not just the onsite experience but the online and offsite experiences are for school children and young adults. They range from using surveys that measure attitudes and intended behaviours, but also ethnographic methods in a smaller number of schools to try and get a sense of what happens among teachers and in the classroom.

Question:

Bonita I'm assuming that you work for a small independent museum in South Africa and the Immigration Museum is part of a large state agency. And I'm wondering between those different kinds of organisations, does that determine different kinds of exhibitions? Could an exhibition like this happen in your museum? And the Immigration Museum, could a District Six Museum exhibition happen here?

Bonita Bennett

Off the cuff I would say this is the kind of exhibition that I could imagine in the District Six Museum back home. I couldn't imagine it exactly in the same way in a state museum back home. The only thing that I can think of in terms of why it couldn't happen at a state museum is because we wouldn't have the money to do it; we would need to raise the money independently, so it's a matter of resources. But just in terms of the approach, the orientation, the co-curatorship, the asking of questions, all of those things it's an exhibition that I can see would work in our context.

Question:

And why don't you think it would work in a state museum?

Bonita Bennett

Most of our state museums are battling with transformation. They're very much still in the ... I mean they're emerging from the notion of a colonial museum, which is defined by its collections, defined by an object collection, and not as responsive to context.

Moya McFadzean:

I'll be upfront. It's taken us a long time to get to the point that we could do an exhibition like this. It's been a long road to be able to have the broader museum backing, if you like, the courage to do something like this. For the Immigration Museum to have the support and the trust from communities takes a long time to engender and doesn't happen overnight. There's shifts in education requirements and priorities and the place where Australian society is today that makes an exhibition like this acceptable and useful within the educational environment. To be able to make that shift and to broaden how we're defining the Immigration Museum, from being about historical narratives, which is our core business, and to shift more into talking about contemporary Australian society and how our society is evolving, partly as a result of migration, but also all sorts of other multiple identities. It has been a long road. The museum, as Patrick said yesterday, is overtly committed now to the braver social political platforms that we're talking about. This will also be seen in the new Bunjilaka exhibition. So it's been a bit of a shift and growth over time. And being a primarily educational facility enables that as well.

Second Key Note

Indigenous identity and representation

Friday 24 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Richard Frankland, Actor, Writer, Musician

Jason Eades, Facilitator

Mandy Truong, Rapporteur

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, my name's Jason Eades and for this next session I have the pleasure of being your facilitator; but firstly, we're going to hear from our keynote speaker, Richard Frankland. Richard is a long-time friend of mine but don't hold that against me. Richard is of course a singer. He's a song-writer; he's an author and filmmaker who is also an activist and somebody who for a long time has been fighting for the rights of the Aboriginal community in Victoria. Richard is a Gunditjmara man; he comes from the western districts of Victoria. I'm not going to say too much more because I reckon by the time Richard's finished speaking you'll get much more of an insight than what I can do in any kind of introduction.

Richard Frankland

I'd like to pay respect to the traditional owners, the people of the Kulin nation and thank the museum team for getting me along here. I'd also like to thank you guys for being here. Discrimination's a strange thing. It's an ugly beast. As a Greek looking Aboriginal who's worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant, which was owned by an unmarried white man who happened to be gay, not that there's anything wrong with being white, I've encountered my fair share of discrimination; I could rattle off incident after incident, but we know what that's about. We know that discrimination is about exclusion and it's about control. Today I want to reflect about our identity as a nation, who we are as a people and who or what I believe we can become, and I'm filled with hope.

So firstly I want to speak about my heritage, my identity and who I am, how I became that. I'm Gunditjmara, which means 'my God what a handsome Greek looking Aboriginal.' It actually means 'family of men' but I'm also of English and Scottish extraction and I celebrate the good things of all those cultures. I'm Australian; but I say to you really clearly I'm an Aboriginal Australian.

When I was a boy there were laws that took away my sister, that took away all my cousins, and I've seen how attitudes perpetuate legislation and policy. As an Aboriginal Australian I won't have anyone, man, woman or government, determine my depth of Aboriginality or how I'm an Aboriginal. It's not for them to decide.

I won't have my Aboriginality measured by a quantum blood test and I'll ignore those who say I'm not Aboriginal because my language was taken from me or my dances or my law. I'll shun those who have grievance toward me because I can't access my hunting or law grounds, all because my skin colour.

The pigmentation of my skin doesn't fit societal perspective of what a real identifiable Aboriginal is. I think that as a nation we should be beyond that infantile approach to identity. I think we're mature enough to say to people who have that mental health issue of racism, 'go and get healed', and I mean that in the kindest possible way.

So I reserve the right as an Aboriginal man, as a Gunditjmara man, to determine my identity and to encourage my children to hold their identity in whatever way they want. They're part of the oldest living culture in the world and I'm Gunditjmara; I'm Australian and I'm an Australian Gunditjmara man, and that's all there is to it. No one who represents the intervention, no one who represents any right-wing government, no one who represents a red-neck in any pub can tell me any different.

In saying that, there's a couple of questions I want to pose: who are we as a nation? who and what defines us as a nation?; what is it that makes us a nation?; who do we exclude from this national club? And how do we exclude them? What are the symbols and images that represent us collectively and who endorses those symbols and images? I mean are we Four n Twenty pies, Fosters beer? Are we the guy from the song about the sheep thief who committed suicide?

We're all those things and we're far more. But what we do is we live with a nursery version of history. Inga Clendinnen says in her book *Dancing with Strangers*, 'We live with a nursery version of history', and subsequently we have a people who cannot grapple with contemporary happenings. There are really fundamental questions that we need to ask ourselves. How come we can't say hello in one of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages? Why can't we name five Aboriginal tribes? Why don't we honour the battle sites of Pemulwuy, Yagun, Jandamara, Cocknose, Jupiter; the Umeralla wars that went for eighteen years? Why aren't there shrines to the many massacre sites of the first people? Why don't we honour the frontier dead, the white dead? Why does our history begin at the ANZACS? At the time of the Beersheba Light Horse charge there was a contingency of Aboriginal light horsemen. They led the charge, yet they're not mentioned in history. So we rewrite history to suit a dominant culture and we impose a structure that doesn't even work for the people who created it to dominate others.

Where does our country begin? This country, the story of our country, begins when there was nothing, just darkness and then with a blinding flash the creators created the land, and the earth was soft. This is a Gunditjmara legend and they took the people to the land and said, 'Here is the language that belongs to the land. Here are these animals, these birds, these beasts of the sea, your brothers and sisters, and here is your sacred duty. Protect. Don't take too much. Learn, create law, create custom and ritual,' and that's how the 500 Aboriginal nations were born. That's how an essential part of our current contemporary national identity began. That's the way it was for 1500 generations.

For 1500 generations that was our identity and it can't be stamped out or denied affectively in just eight generations. The simple fact is it was Aboriginal land; it is Aboriginal land; it is part of the national cultural tapestry of identity. It doesn't matter if they kill the last Aboriginal person and wipe the last bit of

Aboriginal art off rocks, we will still be here. From the tropical people to the north, the cold country people to the south, the mountain people, the plains people, the Riverina people and the desert people, the

Aboriginal nations and tribes were born. Now how can I get you to understand that? I reckon the best way is today you're all Aboriginal.

What about the natural resources, family, health, law, lore?

So we had a dispute resolution process. There was a way we got on well with people. In my language *malaka* means a shield. Now when you see a man carrying a shield, if I was traipsing along the bush and I'd seen Eadesy there all painted up playing with his iPhone, which is the contemporary shield, I'd not only look at him and say, 'Wow, that's a guy with a shield. What a handsome looking shield, a red shield'; I'd say something like, Well this guy is here to get a shield down to my country. You have to be able to harvest eels and you have to be able to kill those eels and smoke them; so you're an aquaculture expert. Then you have to travel through two to three tribes to speak two or three different dialects, trade those smoked eels for a special stone. With that stone you came back, so you had a bit of engineering stuff as well. You're a diplomat, aquaculture guy. You come back and you'd shape that for a spear tip because you use that to kill the large kangaroo to get the thighbone. The thighbone, once you hunted that kangaroo, which was a pretty courageous effort, because those kangaroos can be ... I don't know if anyone wrestled a kangaroo before, anything over... my son Joel has... we'll talk to you in the car about ... Then you chiselled part of the acacia tree. So when you see a man with a shield what you saw was someone who was skilled on a lot of levels. So pre-contact we had a lot of those things.

Freedom, rituals, and we have also had a kinship structure: which way to marry, how to marry; and we had farming techniques that surpassed even today.

Land, spirituality and religion. Trade – trade routes. You're an economist. All right and we had child-care ; and we had the village races, the child concept, we had a whole heap of things like that. Jill, I want you to read out each one and tell me if Aboriginal people still have that. If it's been taken from us, cross it out.

Language – in Victoria do we have our language? No.

Natural Resources – do we have access to our resources in Victoria? No.

Family – do we still have our families? Hands up for no. Hands up for yes. Yes and No.

Kinship structures. There's probably a 'no' there. That's part of our national identity that's been actively removed. In fact there were laws in place to remove that type of thing. As Aboriginal people that part of your voice has gone. If we fast-forward 200 years, the question to Aboriginal people is how does the world see you? I've asked this question to literally 4000 people, groups like this, sometimes smaller groups, sometimes larger, and what's freaked me out is how almost exactly the same answers come out.

So how does the world see Aboriginal people?

Extinct, marginal, irrelevant, under-represented, outsiders, exotic, primitive, welfare dependent. That leads us to another question about you Aboriginal people: Who sees Aboriginal people like that? Media, Anglo-Saxon majority, broader society, those in power, recent migrants.

What happens when cultures clash? They'd already practised this on their own poor. They did it to the Scottish and the Welsh and the Irish, India, so they were very refined at creating a dominant culture. Over 200 years of social engineering, which is exactly what it is, social engineering. We socially engineered society to perceive Aboriginal people as a problem people. Not as human beings with a problem, but as a problem people.

So when you drive down the street you see a problem. You don't see a man with a problem. You see a problem. The same thing has happened to the Asians, to the Arabs, to other minority groups. They are a problem people in the eyes of dominant culture. Your culture is denigrated, is slammed and put down, becomes a self-perception. This is the beginning of the depreciation of our national identity and it's this attitude we saw on the infamous *Insight* program the other night – let's condemn, let's divide and conquer, and it's a wonderful example of what has come to be known as 'lateral violence'.

What does this type of cultural load mean to the average Aboriginal person? How does it play itself out? Let's have a look at it.

I've been doing work on what I call Aboriginal talking cures and contemporary collective therapy for about twenty-five years. I go into a community or into a prison and I do a play or do a theatre piece. I don't do it so much anymore, but other groups picked up on it and they do it. But I've had a pretty good run at it. The foster kids at VACCA, the Aboriginal Child Care Agency, I'd set a camera up, all right? Name a resistance fighter. No one could. Name an Aboriginal battle site. No one could. What's your tribe?

What I want you to do is come up to the camera, say your name, say your tribe and say the name of an Aboriginal resistance fighter.

One little girl's answer is pretty standard: 'My name's Ruby. I'm from the Cape of New York tribe.'

By the end of it we made a film and we got them to ask questions. We got them to research resistance fighters. We got them to talk about the battle of Kalkadoon, 600 Aboriginal warriors charging down a hill against troopers. We got them to talk about the eighteen year Eumeralla war. About the greatness of David Unaipon. About Aboriginal servicemen and women. About us being contributors to society, despite being condemned and invisible. And what happened?

Ruby recently stood up at the Bunjilaka Museum, an exhibition where she was one of the artists, and she sung in language, in mine and my son's language, and she stood there and said: 'I know you elders are worried about losin' culture. Well, don't be. I'm gunna keep it, me and all these kids 'ere.'

It was one of the greatest victories I've ever had.

So these are the things we lost – economies, kinship structures, lands, waters, our defined cultural shape removed and injured; see ya later, didn't you get your photo? And we ended up on missions, reserves, incarcerated at a high rate, high mortality rate, and our identity changed.

A bloke called W E H Stanner, in 1968, he was an anthropologist in the forties and fifties, he did a very famous Boyer Lecture called the *Great Australian Silence*, and he defined what had happened to Aboriginal people. He asked the questions: why don't we know these things about Aboriginal Australia? Why are they homeless? Why are they dispossessed of their own culture? It's a question that has been asked since the wars in the 1850s. We're left with a psychological legacy that basically says we live with the nursery version of history.

Now this means an incredible cultural load. Jill would you pretend that you're Hermione from Harry Potter and change Jason into a nineteen-year-old non-Aboriginal girl?

Jason is now Jane a nineteen-year-old non-Aboriginal girl. So you've got a flat; you've got a job and a very happy existence. Everything's going well. Boyfriend, okay, thank you, and now we're going to change you into a ... now hold on, there's about eight things that we all deal with. So you pay tax? Rent and mortgage, transport, you've got issues of family relationships, health, you've got social activities, so, he looks like a tart doesn't he, okay, so now we're going to change him into a nineteen-year-old Aboriginal girl.

Righto, blackie let's get into it. So now on top of those eight things you can statistically go to fifteen funerals a year. You want to get your language back? Okay, so you're going to try and get your language back. There's another thing: one of those funerals is your sister. Your sister passed away. She's got four kids. She's a little bit older than you. So DHS, which is the Department of Human Services, has said, 'Well, we've got a kinship policy. You're going to take the four kids. You want the four kids?'

Okay, you've got the four kids. Now statistically one of those kids will have a chronic illness, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, otitis media, trichomona. There'll be a massive problem there. So that's another two things to manage.

Hold on, at the funeral how many people, family – because you're the only one that lives in town – how many people are going to stay in your two-bedroom flat? Fifteen? Okay fifteen people staying in your flat. Are you going to have an alcohol issue in the flat?

So you've got a warning for dismissal because you've been missing work and your boss has got no cultural competency framework. So you've got a couple of warnings for dismissal and all of a sudden, oh, hold on, a bit of charge going on so who's going to turn up? Boys in blue, right, all of a sudden you get a letter because you've got a cousin in jail. He's getting out, but he needs an address; otherwise they're not going to let him out. Can he use your address?

Okay, he's been in for rape, so what do you reckon? You go to the local Aboriginal Co-operative for help but you're family and the family that run the co-op are fighting with yours.

What's going to happen then? This is a pretty big cultural load, but you haven't got any income coming in so there's a bit of a health issue in the house. You're going to get evicted aren't you? So some of the girls at the co-op, you're too windy to go to the ATM because you might end up in conflict, a physical conflict. You've already been verbally abused. All of a sudden your mum's developed some of those issues that come round with alcohol distress, thank you very much, so Mum's in hospital. What do we do guys? We can go on all day like this.

So these cultural loads. We didn't even touch on discrimination in the shop; we didn't touch on discrimination as you walk down the street. Just the other month a bloke said to me: 'You're that Abbo.' And I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'I don't shake Abbo's hands.'

We think this is an uncommon occurrence, but when you're on the receiving end of it, it comes out in all sorts of ways. It makes people deny their culture, which is denial of our national identity, and it impedes not only who we were, but also who we can be.

This nursery version of history is far more debilitating to us than the collapse of a mining company. It takes away our morality, it says that we are a mono-culture, it says that there's a part of our society that is a problem and then it's easy to brand other cultures and other peoples. And when we do that, it's like injecting an illness into society and saying 'That's fine, leave it'. It gives people licence to stand back and let the problems exist. If we had the courage to recognise these battle sites, these massacre sites, these wonderful individuals, black and white, who contribute to society, we would soon realise what a wonderful thing cultural diversity can be. We can't lay a strong foundation to become a great nation if the foundation is based on a mono-culture.

So what is it that we face now? We face a government and an opposition who use humanity as politics. We face a situation where there's only one school in Victoria that teaches an Aboriginal language. So we've got the oldest living languages dying off.

Someone said to me once, 'What's your vision for victory?' And I said I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure what I wanted and I wasn't sure because I was stuck in victim and survivor mode. I was in that mode of juggling all those cultural loads constantly. I didn't know where we fitted and I was living under this, an external process of the colonised environment. Everything was in their cultural shape. They control the access points, the wealth and power; and, in fact, they determine what wealth and power is because my culture became almost valueless except for the exotic. So we had no voice. We're too much of an economic risk for affirmative action by politicians unless it is in a victim/survivor mode. There's an expectation that we'll be culturally safe under the dominant culture. Again, in my opinion, this impedes our national identity.

Cultural safety is basically what I'm seeking, and it means an environment that's safe for people to be able to practise their culture, their language, their cultural shape and voice without fear of being ridiculed, put down or harmed. Some people say this is what cultural safety is, but I think it's a whole lot more because as an Aboriginal man I cannot be free until you're free. And you can't be free until you challenge that inner racist.

A vision for victory is walking down the street and hearing a non-Aboriginal person say *ngatanwah*, hello, in my language. Not because they have to, not because it's politically correct, but because it's part of their cultural tapestry.

A Canadian study revealed that 140 suicides out of 100 000 are people who have no cultural safety framework around them. The stronger the framework is the fewer the suicides. The path to a good, strong national identity is for us to embrace diversity, to assist people, to facilitate programs and growth within their own cultural shape; and to seek out gradual change. It's not about assimilation, it's about creation.

So I went across the state and I asked 131 people ninety questions: where you feel safe? These are some of the answers that came up. I can make this report available for people if they want. So this is how Aboriginal people felt in all-white environments; most people felt intimidated, defensive; suicides, one community I worked in there were seven adolescent suicides in less than two years. That's the amount of funerals people could go to. A lot of people don't go to funerals anymore. I'm one of them. I go to one every now and again, rather than the ten or so you could go to a year. For a couple of weeks there I carried three coffins, I did three eulogies. This year there were five funerals in a two-week period. Earlier in the year there was another three or four.

The communities feel they're in a perpetual state of grief. A lot of that's because of the exclusionary practice that we've been socially engineered to practice. It's not unusual for people to ring each other up and talk about how they try and retain our sanity.

I was in a prison once and I got angry with these young fellows. I said, 'It's not our fault if we don't know our language, law, cultural practice because that was taken from us.'

Our obligation is to reclaim that, to get it back, and I said to these men, 'Our children are dying of third world diseases and we need you, we need you to stand up, we need you to march in the streets, we need you to take jobs, we need you to be contributors to our people, to our culture, to this national identity.' Every one of them committed to do it. Whether they do or not, whether there's an infrastructure that'll help them do it when they get out, I don't know. I don't think there is but I think if we win one out of ten, it's something.

We did a thing called the '*Thousand Warrior March*', which is happening again this year. The first Saturday in November, we've got about 400-500 Aboriginal men marching. We all took an oath, a pledge and this is us marching, these are the *0:41:05.4 [Careen] principles that I gave you. I wrote them for foster kids. This fella here came up to me and he said, 'Oh Unc, my face is hurtin'.' I said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'I've just been grinnin' all day.'

At the end we danced some of the young boys in. This fellow ripped his shirt off, another fella's on his bum in the dust pulling his shoes off. The different shapes of Aboriginality; the guy on the far right's a Gunditjmara fella, this fella's Wurundjeri and different way of representing culture and it's all culture, culture's a living, breathing entity; some of the Robinvale crew, the river men, thirty-one of them come down in a bus. They were yelling as the bus come around the corner. You could hear them. They reckon they're going to send 100 this year and all the other tribes are saying, 'No, we're going to send more.'

This is the chant we did. We've got to have the courage to change the cultural tapestry of this nation to stop it being the one colour; we've got to have the diligence and the sense of duty to make a home for all of us. When Rudd apologised I felt like I was home and if I wasn't home I was a good way of being home. We've got to shatter the notion of the mono-cultural club and we've got to state clearly that that cultural

tapestry must say this is the home of the first Australians and this is the home of the many nations that have come here since and that are arriving daily. If we have the courage to recognise the past, there's no telling what we can do. If we've got the wisdom to plant very truthful seeds in the present for future generations, the only thing that can limit us will be our imagination. If we pass on that banner, if we celebrate our diversity, if we see our history as a gift, good and bad, our future and the future of our children will be assured and safe. There'll be a home for our kids. I say that, and I've said for a while, when you've got voice you've got freedom and with freedom comes responsibility. You have to be responsible with your freedom; if you're not, then it makes the rest of us caged.

I want to conclude with a bit of a challenge – two challenges. I want you to find the racist inside yourself and heal it. I want you to find a racist among your family and heal them. I want you to find a racist in your workplace or in your social circle and heal them. Don't hurt them; heal them. If you heal them you're helping to heal our children. Racism is literally a disease, a lateral violence of pestilence and they're both potentially lethal to our collective future. We need to be brave and vigilant about our future. It doesn't belong to you and me' we're merely caretakers of the present. Our future belongs to our children and their children's children. Our sense of obligation should be to give them the best tools to move the future forward.

I thank you very much for having me here and for listening to the stories.

Jason Eades

Thank you Richard for an inspiring keynote. What we're going to do now is open to the floor for some discussions, but I want to lead with some questions. I want to talk a bit about this core issue around identity; in the Aboriginal community it's one that's being discussed an awful lot. Indeed it's being discussed a lot in the broader population. Andrew Bolt of course has written a series of articles about Aboriginality and defining Aboriginality and we've seen shows like *Insight* try to explore this notion. I guess the issue for me is trying to pick up on who has the right to define, who has the right to work out who's Aboriginal and who's not and indeed why should we be trying to define in the first place.

Richard Frankland

I think that we're in a situation where it was ugly to be Aboriginal for a long time and Aboriginal people were seen, as I said during my talk, as a problem people, as victims. That's changing. I think there are a lot more Aboriginal people around that haven't claimed their culture, for whatever reason; there's a lot of reasons people don't; and what's going to happen more and more is people are going to step out of the closet and reclaim that identity. I think that's a good thing. We need that type of diversity. There's a core group who have been Aboriginal for their whole lives.

I think there's a new cultural shape coming and I don't think there's going to be any one group that's going to control it; people are going to want to control it because that means power. I think that power needs to rest with the individual and the acceptance of the broader community – except the broader Aboriginal community, but that raises problems in itself. There's a thing called lateral violence when people turn on each other. They gossip, they put down, they malign characters and that can be exclusionary. So if a particular family or political group ostracise an Aboriginal family who say they're Aboriginal for whatever reason then that creates another problem.

To me it goes back to this – self-determination and self-management; us being able to create processes that are transparent, that are digestible by the community in the sense that we can resolve our own conflicts, that we control the decibels of our own voice. So we need to be in control, we need to create something that suits our cultural shape in both a historic and contemporary fashion to resolve these issues ourselves, we need the power essentially.

Jason Eades

Before your keynote, you and I were talking about Anita Heiss and her book *Am I Black Enough for You*. Anita of course was one of the litigants in the Bolt case and what I find interesting is this question: What is Aboriginality? What does it look like and what does an individual who says that they're Aboriginal actually have to do? Often people have this romantic notion of Aboriginality; that it's something that's caught up over 200 years ago. There's some lines in Anita's book that I absolutely love. She talks about 'Westfield Dreaming' and it's okay; she has this goal in life to go to every single Tiffany store around the world and purchase one item in those stores. She says, 'I drive a red sports car and that's okay.' What she's putting across is that she can live in a modern society and take on some of the things from the society around us, but that doesn't make her any less black. And I'm interested in your views about that because this is where people often get caught up. If you look at what Bolt's saying he's looking to physical features to describe identity. Others across society look at well, you know, what 'do youse want to go back to living off the land?' and all this kind of stuff.

Richard Frankland

Well for me Aboriginality is a collective and individual thing. I'll give you an example. My little girl Nakiah, when she was in prep, a couple of years ago, I picked up her and her mates from school which was a common practice, probably half a dozen of them. Her five mates are all non-Aboriginal. I'm in the kitchen making hot chocolate and marshmallows. I'm going to send them home with a sugar hit. We're in a perpetual state of renovations at the house so it was freezing and then this little white girl said, 'Nakiah, my moom's itchy,' meaning her bum's itchy. So I'm standing there and in the paper there was stuff about black paedophiles and I'm thinking, 'Geez, what do I say here?' So I turned around and said, 'Anise, we don't swear here in any language.' 'Sorry Richard.' There were a few giggles when I told the parents. But the thing was that Nakiah in practising her culture in her way, because she says I'm a yellow haired Aborigine dad, she's assimilating that girl and her mates and colleagues. Being Aboriginal is not just about your environment; it's a spiritual thing. My kids caught their first fish where their grandmothers and grandfathers caught their first fish for 1500 generations.

That doesn't make them anymore Aboriginal. That makes them bloody lucky. What makes them Aboriginal is a spiritual thing. It's also what I put into them as a primary Aboriginal carer. It's about their environment; it's about pride and strength and courage; it's about all those iconic things as well.

I guess the answer is being Aboriginal is an individual thing. I think it's a blood lineage. A famous Aboriginal musician said to me – he's married to a non-Aboriginal lady and they have lots of kids and they had an argument and he'd come round to talk to me – he said, 'My tribal blood flows through her veins, but of course she's given birth to these children, so how can she not be part of my people?' So I think it's going to change shape again. I think there's going to be a new Aboriginality come about; and I think we've got to be very careful about what we as a society create because I think it can hurt lots of us. I don't think it should be exclusionary. When this fellow comes down home I've got a cultural obligation to make sure he's safe on my land. That's the way it is because I took him on as like a little brother years ago and if his mob's in trouble and rings me I go there. That's Aboriginal, but it's also plain humanity. So it's a lot of things; it's spiritual, it's physical, it's emotional, it's a blood lineage and it's going to take a long time to define it in a sentence or a word or legislation. But I won't let them ...

I don't want them to define me. I know who I am.

Question:

You said the challenges are many. Is that the challenge to challenge the racist in us? What do you think is involved in that or is that for me to work out as a non-Aboriginal person?

Richard Frankland

We've been socially engineered to have a certain cultural lens about the way the world should look. That cultural lens can be really damaging. I've heard Aboriginal people say some of the most racist things and I've pulled them up. Someone said to me, 'Why are you so successful with your films?' It's because I humanise what had been de-humanised. When we challenge the inner racist ... I think it's human to be compassionate and understanding. Not to be submissive. So I think we need to re-create history for what it truly is and it doesn't mean to walk around with a guilt trip or carrying a heavy cultural load; it means to walk around saying 'Well, I know this is Wathaurong land; I know this is Gunditjmara land; I know my children were born over here; I wonder if I can help out at the co-op, how can I be inclusive, is the language being taught anywhere, is there actual history. I don't have to learn it all but I have to be able to know a little bit of it.' Open up doors for your children to embrace that. Challenging the inner racist is also having the courage to challenge the racist you meet in the street, but being smart about it. It's about putting it on your local school. Can we teach the local language here? Does the library create a decent enough access point to knowledge about local people and business and language? There's other things, too, about the way you think and feel towards other people.

Question:

I'm interested in how we can begin to install an anti-racism practice within policy. Is there a way we can become the gate keepers, which is normally controlled by the dominant culture?

Richard Frankland

There's a lot of great resources out there already. Some of the resources are reconciliation groups, like Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation. I know their membership's light on at the moment. They need people like yourselves. You're here to be part of those groups, to help bolster the numbers, to bring new ideas and to appreciate some of the older things that they've already got in place. Also, accessing some of the existing services – the Koori Heritage Trust is a great resource. It's actually encouraging people to interact at that level. Now, some people call National Aboriginal Week 'buy a black fella a beer week' because it's our one special week. I think that every week should be a National Aboriginal Week. Not for the beer, but to break down the barriers of people being able to interact.

Jason Eades

We have time for two more questions.

Question:

I'm wondering to what extent do you see a need to engage with Maoridom on a practical level, on a theoretical level, on a policy level? If you live in Australia, the only time when New Zealand is recognised is when the All Blacks beat the Wallabies. So what's your thinking on that one?

Jason Eades

I don't know if there are any Maori people in the room, but I'm a frequent visitor to New Zealand and I have some very close Maori friends. What we see in New Zealand today is not how it looked a couple of decades ago. At some point there was a very big cultural shift within general society; and one that didn't come easy, but one that saw things change in schools, for example, and that has permeated through their culture. I think they're richer as a country for it. And so the lessons to be learnt is about how – when the dominant culture takes on as a thing of pride the indigenous culture – what affect it has for the whole society. I think that's the key learning from that and I'm sure Richard would agree that New Zealand's indigenous people don't see themselves as out on their own. We have a dialogue going on across the world in terms of ... there are a lot of commonalities between countries that have been colonised.

Richard Frankland

Absolutely. The other difference between New Zealand and here was the diversity in Australia is spread over an incredibly large country. The other thing about it is the shift in the dominant culture over there came about because language was being taught in the schools. The *1:02:21.8 [Mariah's] who have been supported. There was a centre point of culture that was a very strong centre point.

Question:

My name's Vanessa and I'm from Nahpui tribe; my sub-tribe is Nga Iwi. I back up what this gentleman's saying. I'm fifty-three. When I grew up my parents didn't speak to us in Maori. We only learnt the Maori song in school. I've been here for twenty years, but over the years the next generation were taught in

school. People of my age who have had children they were taught in school, so that's around the time I believe it changed. It was my generation who I believe brought about that change.

Question:

I just wanted to say two things; one is if you are interested in provoking your inner racist I would recommend living in places where you're dealing ... a place like Darwin, where I lived for nearly twenty years. I went there because I wanted to be in Australia where Aboriginal people were part of the world, you know, the day-to-day life. There's something about the environment in Darwin, there's an everyday racism there that become s... it is so normative that people become more racist, I reckon, unless they deliberately challenge themselves. It's not the only place obviously. There are a lot of places like that, but I wanted to share that because that was my experience.

The other thing I wanted to say; you helped me to realise something about Andrew Bolt's comments. It's as if the only reason you would claim Aboriginality is for financial gain because the white majority's perception of Aboriginality is the status is so low. And I think that what we need are strategies to start to raise the status of Aboriginality as a state of being; and I wondered if you had any thoughts, ideas, for how we might do that?

Richard Frankland

My local primary school's got 40 kids. One day I went there and they were really excited because they had an Aboriginal guy teaching some songs. The songs were from Queensland and the Aboriginal guy was a (Papua New Guinea (PNG) fella, so I didn't say anything; I didn't attack them, I just contributed. I taught them the *moom* song which means 'bum' in my language. And what I started doing was dropping in little things, little maps of Australia with tribes, stories about different pieces, different Aboriginal stories from my area, different bits of language to empower them, because I don't want to be the Aboriginal library, I don't want to be the Aboriginal person that you click on for knowledge about Aboriginal stuff. I want to have a dialogue with someone who's not an expert in Aboriginality, but an expert in their country. I want them to be non-Aboriginal. I want them to know about the Wathaurong people. I want them to tell me about, not just about battle sites, but about Faith Bandler, about Lionel Rose, about David Unaipon, who's on the \$50 note. I think raising that consciousness is our collective responsibility. What I want is equity. I want my voice to be heard and I want my people's voice to be heard. In hearing that, I want your voice to join in. It's about us. It's not about us and them. It's about us. So I want you to be free to explore the Aboriginality of Australia and to claim it as part of your cultural heritage.

Jason Eades

I was recently sitting in a Perth airport, in the Qantas Club, and I overheard a conversation between the girls who were working reception. They were talking about the film *The Sapphires*. They were talking about what a beautiful film it was. They loved Jessica Mauboy. They thought she should have sung the final number. They also said that they thought it had been Americanised, that it had been changed to suit the American market, that Vietnam had been included for that purpose.

The fact that Martin Luther King was on the television set, they didn't think that Aboriginal people would have actually seen that speech by Martin Luther King. Sitting there as an Aboriginal person, in that Qantas Club, listening, I could have done two things: one – to go up and correct everything that they had said and said. 'You know, you're wrong, this is actually a real story, it's a real story from here in Victoria of people who did go to Vietnam. It wasn't made up. This thing actually occurred.' Or I could just simply let them go on with their conversation. I decided to let them go on because if I'd intervened and tried to educate them about the real facts I would have pushed them away, pushed them away from the fact that they had seen it, they had come away with some positive aspects of Aboriginal people and culture that they wouldn't have had before. And so to pick up on Richard's remarks about responsibility for learning for yourselves, you don't need to travel all over the country.

Victorians has a rich Aboriginal culture. There are over thirty-eight different languages groups in Victoria; there are many, many functioning communities, some living still on missions and reserves. My mum works at Lake Tyers where there's over 200 people who still live there. So you don't need to travel far. Your personal journey is your personal responsibility. There's tons of stuff there. You need to reach out and find it.

Fourth Plenary

How creative practice deals with the issues

Friday 24 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Hung Le, Comedian

Diana Nguyen, Actor, Community worker

Nur Shkempi, Artist and Islam Council of Victoria

Richard Frankland, Actor, Writer, Activist

Mandy Truong, Rapporteur

Jill Morgan

I'm Jill Morgan. I'm the CEO of Multicultural Arts Victoria and I feel very privileged to facilitate this session. We're going to start by introducing the panellists. Diane Nguyen, Richard Frankland, Hung Le and Nur Shkempi. We're going to start with Hung Le. Please make him feel welcome. I asked him is he going to present a PowerPoint and what did you say?

Hung Le

Here's my PowerPoint. It's loaded. Hi, my name's Hung. As you can see I'm not from here. I'm from Coburg. No, I'm from Nam. I'm from Nam actually, Pakenham. Anybody been to Vietnam? What's the currency in Vietnam? The dong. And believe me, people can't get enough of your dong in Vietnam; let me tell you this right now. So I'll tell you how it goes. Vietnam's a third-world country right, so there's 20 000 dong to one dollar. So pretend you're in Saigon and you go up to the ATM and you take out fifty bucks. So you're working around Vietnam right, like Gary Glitter right, five hundred thousand million dong in your pocket and hookers be coming up to you saying, 'Hey brother, that dong in your pockets is way too steamy.' It's Vietnam's new motto. 'Is dong is good.' Vietnamese banks got this motto. It goes, 'Your dong is safe in our hand', and you go what?

I'm from Saigon and lived there in 1975 Yeah it was this really stupid place to live, but we used to live across the road from the Presidential Palace. During the war we had a maid, we had a chauffeur, our very own sniper, like you do. We had a sniper across the road from our house. Every morning this dude, would wake you up with a couple of rounds on the roof, and then he'd wait for you to go to the toilet and try and make you go before you got there. Outrageous behaviour. So one day my dad decided we should leave Saigon. I don't know what gave him the idea. I think all those Russian tanks double-parked in our driveway might have had something to do with this. So this is the last day of the Vietnam War, 29 April 1975 and we get this phone call. They said, 'You've got three hours to leave the country.' So quickly we packed our bags and fed the dog, took granny and loaded the car. We franged it down to the dock, grabbed a slab of beer for the trip, because you know, there was a few of us and so, we set off on this old, old leaking prawn trawler. This boat was leaking so much the prawns were shitting themselves. On the boat we had no food, there was no water, no karaoke, nothing right.

We were picked up by the American Navy and they took us to refugee camps on this tropical island called Guam. Guam was sort of like Club Med with barbed wire on it. So we're on

Guam about four months and we had a choice of going to France, Canada or Australia and we didn't want to go to France because, you know, French people live there. We didn't want to go to Canada because, you know, French people live there. And so we came to Australia for two reasons. Someone told us it's really hot here and so we landed in Melbourne in the middle of winter. Totally froze.

We were one of the very first Vietnamese boat people in this country and when the Immigration Department didn't know what to do with us, so they decided to give us an interpreter; you know, a translator to help us get our bank books and get our life together and stuff. They gave us a guy from Malta. Yeah, no shit. They thought, oh yeah, Maltese, Vietnamese, close enough you know. And we didn't know what to eat when we came to Australia. In 1975 in Australia there was no such thing as Chinese grocery shops. So me and my mum went to the supermarket. We'd never been in a supermarket before. My mum came back from the supermarket on the first day with a box of cornflakes. So the whole family sat around a dinner table just trying to work it out, you know. We couldn't read it because, it wasn't in Maltese right. And it has a chicken on it, right. Cornflakes have got a chicken on the box. So my mum works it out. She's very smart my mum. She works it out, she goes, okay, okay, okay I get it. 'Okay, I get a piece of bread, I put margarine on it, I put some cornflake on it, some soy sauce', and sent us off to school. Man, the wogs were laughing at us. My dad ate cornflake sandwiches for fifteen years. He had no idea. We didn't have the heart to tell him, you know. So after fifteen years I sat him down and I said, 'Dad, listen, the cornflakes right, you have to put in a bowl and put Fanta in it.'

So you know what we had to eat? Italian food. I don't mind Italian food, your pizzas and your pastas. But there's one thing about Italian food that Asian people don't understand and that's risotto. You know risotto? Yeah, of course, you're from Melbourne right. What is that? You know what my mum reckons? Risotto is Italian for who mucked up the rice? I'll tell you one more thing, because Richard's just reminded me of this. I was in Tamworth a few years ago. You know Tamworth?

Four years ago, I turned up there because Pauline Hanson was in town and I'd never met Pauline Hanson and I really wanted to meet her, because I wanted to ask her why she hates me so much. It costs heaps to get to Tamworth, right. So I had no gigs, I had no money, I couldn't get out of the place. So I thought, what do I do now? I go find the biggest redneck pub in Tamworth.

So I walked in to this pub, I tell you, midday forty-five degrees outside and I walk in to this pub full of cowboy hats and rednecks, right and I go up to the boss of the pub and I say, 'Excuse me man, you know, you mind if I get on stage?' and the boss goes, 'I dare ya.' And I go, 'Man, don't dare me mate.' So I get on stage and it was like a moonshine mosh pit. I had a \$1.50 cowboy hat I bought from the \$2 Chinese shop, you know, a bargain right. I get up on stage and say, 'Nee howdy partner. My name is Uncle Hoe Down and today I'm going to sing for you some country and eastern music.' (They started to freak out right.) 'You don't know country eastern? Okay, I sing you a country eastern song. I'm clazy, clazy for feering so ronery. Herro, is it me you rooking for. I rove you.' I was telling jokes like this. What do you call an Arab country and western singer? Sulim Dusty.

And then I went looking for Pauline Hanson because my name's Hung and in Vietnamese it's Hung, but the Chinese people call me Hoong because Chinese people can't pronounce Hung. And Hoong is an old Mongolian word and goes all the way back to Genghis Khan. Hoong's a Mongolian word and it means bastard son of red-head European. So when I saw Pauline Hanson, I said, 'Mum, mum.'

Thank you very much. My name's Hung.

Jill Morgan

I think humour is universal. It breaks barriers and we're talking about systemic change and I think the arts are a really powerful way to do it. And another comedian is Diane Nguyen.

Diana Nguyen

Thank you. Hi everyone, I'm Diana and I question the word comedian because I was actually talking to Hung and I recently did a shisha night in Springvale – there's this new comedy night in Springvale now – who thought that Springvale would like to laugh at different things. So I performed up on stage with different kinds of people from different cultures and it was mortifying, because I'm more of a comic actor, if it makes sense. So maybe there should be a new word for a comic actor. What would that be? Comactic?

I've brought my glasses and oriental look today, so try to be more funny. But I'll just tell you about what it's been like for me being an actor in Victoria, Australia. I was born here. My mum, she let me have ballet classes and piano lessons. She thought, 'You know, music's so important. This is what I had in Vietnam. Here, I give it to you.' When I was in Year 11 she changed her mind. She said, 'Why are you watching Britney Spears? Do you want to be a slut?'

So mum kind of reversed that and took away the arts from me, but by then I had fallen in love with performing arts. It was in my blood. I love entertaining people. I love making people laugh at me and I love just being free. It's quite funny, I was born in Australia but I was actually sent to ESL class in grade six, which is really bad. My friends used to laugh about it. It was like, you were born here and sent to ESL class? And I was like, yeah, because I've been at home in a Vietnamese culture. Like for the language and be in conflict with my mother who didn't speak English very well, somehow it dumbed me. And I just fell in love with singing. Singing in the shower or singing walking home from school. Something about just singing words that weren't scripted or you know, a song I'd sort of written; I just felt free to just improvise. So in Year 11 I did the worst thing I could do and I picked Drama as a VCE subject and then went on to doing Year 12 and actually was top of my class.

I actually got top marks in my school for Drama, which was very abnormal for an Asian girl in Springvale. And then I was in a huge dilemma going, 'Where do I go now, what should I do.' So I did the smartest thing I could think of and went and did a Bachelor of Arts. It was so broad, something I could change my mind and be a teacher at the end if I decided that I couldn't find anything to do. And my mum kind of went with that idea. 'She has no idea what she's doing, but that's okay. She'll be a teacher. She'll have a salary, it's okay.' But what happened in university was that I fell in love with performing arts and I decided

to learn the structures of being an actor and learning scripts and learning the history. And when I finished university I became an actor trying to find work, having nine jobs, but not finding the roles that suited me because of my colour, being Asian. It was a huge battle not being type cast as a prostitute or a refugee or a drug addict or a maid for the Philippines. I get typecast for everything that's Asian. And it was really hard and I just relied on people to write things for me, like, send a script through, 'Can you do it?' I'm like, 'Oh, I'll do it because it's an opportunity I'll get to do.'

So what happened was that Alice Pung put together an anthology book called *Growing Up Asian in Australia* and that was in 2008 I think and that really steamrolled where I've come as a performer. So my short story was published. It's called *Five Ways to Disappoint your Vietnamese Mother* and studied by VCE students at the moment and kids love it. They're like, 'Whoa, I get her.' And it kind of steamrolled from there, because I thought if my writing is affecting young people it must be very relevant to them.

So from that I started researching about my mother's refugee experience, because when I was studying history at university I felt there weren't many memoirs about the Vietnamese experience. I relied on my research on American experiences and I was really, really disappointed and this kind of flowed into the story telling. I just find that with my generation, the second generation, if we can go to our parents and say, 'Mum, Dad, how did you get here? Tell me something so that I can learn.' Because I felt like because the communication with my mother didn't work out, I didn't know her story. So I read a play called *Tears in the Rain*, which was the four universal steps in a refugee story, which was the escape from your country to the surrender of your freedom, to the sacrifice and the struggle. And because I worked with Sudanese and I worked with refugee migrants, I found out this story that my mum had was so universal to the stories of young people coming to Australia today.

So I did a play at the Northcote Town Hall and it kind of just broke me and thinking, I can write stuff. I can perform my own stuff. So last year I did a huge step in breaking the norm and funding my own project with a good friend of mine, Fiona, and we did a show called *Phi and Me* at the Comedy Festival last year and we had no idea what the response was going to be like and somehow we got Vietnamese people coming to see our show. The community came in droves. We sold out. We sold out fifteen shows at the Comedy Fest. We got four stars in the *Herald Sun*. And I guess the achievement for me was not that we sold out, but that people came to see it. The Vietnamese people came to see it. It's so abnormal to get Vietnamese people to pay to see something. It's very abnormal. But that for me was the greatest achievement, was to tell my story and the story is a Vietnamese mother and her son and it's the conflict of second generation in a family and it's based on our life story of growing up. And from that, we had that motivation to, let's do a second story and it was *Phi and Me Too*, with a T-O-O, because you know we're FOBS, fresh off the boat. Does anyone know that joke? No. So we did that again and we had the same response. We had people coming out seeing it and we actually did a Clayton performance to get more families coming to see our show and we did one in Footscray four weeks ago, just to get a response from the community and get them to contribute to their own story as well. And I think it was so rewarding in that, and I have to tell you a moment. There was a moment when we were on stage and in the corner there was a young person translating to their parent what was going on the stage and I was so annoyed. I was so annoyed. I was like, 'Oh my God, just shut up, I can't remember the lines.' But then at the end I went, 'Wow, someone's come to my show, which is predominantly 80% English and someone's willing to

translate the whole show to their parent because they thought it was really important for them to come see this. It's all of their story as well.'

So yeah, I'm very fortunate that I've been allowed to write and perform and stuff. And so, you'd go back to your *Five Ways to Disappoint your Vietnamese Mother* and I'm actually bringing back this story, but not as a short story but as a performance. This story was written five years ago and in the last five years I've changed. I don't think I've disappointed my mother anymore, the last five years. The only one thing is that I'm twenty-seven years old and she's waiting for me to get married. So she's disappointed about that. But I'm doing a show called *Singing Five Ways*. It's going to be set in a karaoke bar and the idea is, my mum and the Vietnamese community, they always had huge and they would sing and blare it out for the whole world and the neighbourhood to hear them sing about what was affecting them. They've somehow found the words and the music just to let their soul go. So what I'm doing is I'm transforming this short story to a play using karaoke songs that affected my mum's life and my life and to continue the story after those five years: what has happened for me to go, 'Mum, I get what you did and why you came here.' I think as a teenager you go, 'Oh, I'm too cool, I don't care, I'm in a free world now, who cares about my past or whatever? You came on a boat, great.' But the last five years have been a learning curve for me. Just hearing my mum's story for the first time has just made me go, there's so much more potential to hear more other stories and I just want to enrich other young people to go out and grab that story and show it to the world because I think we can really change society.

Thank you.

Jill Morgan

Diana uses a lot of the arts and the story telling with the refugee work and cultural development work down in Noble Park, Dandenong way and it's a really powerful way for the young people also. And we also learn. I went to *Phi and Me*. I think there were about three non-Vietnamese. I was one of them and it was interesting because the Vietnamese people came up to me and said, 'Did you enjoy that story?' And I went, 'Yeah, I did.' But it was really interesting to have it flipped a little bit and it makes you think.

Diana Nguyen

I want to add that we had other communities. We took some Sudanese, young kids came to our show and they laughed their heads off because they saw that story in their household as well. So it's such a universal story that's performed in a different way and I guess everyone could do that. We can all laugh about our past and grow from it.

Jill Morgan

Thanks Diana. Nur is also an artist, a contemporary artist. She uses the arts in her cultural development work as well and she's an arts officer at the Islamic Council of Victoria, which represents over 90 000 Muslim people and thirty-seven member organisations. So I think, Nur, you're going to talk about yourself as a practising artist and how you utilise arts in your development work.

Nur Shkempi

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land upon which we meet and pay my respects to their elders, past and present. We have an image of my work up there and this is my contribution to humour this afternoon. Is my burka a hard-earned stereotype that deserves a big cold beer. So there you go. As an Australian Muslim artist and in particular, a Muslim woman, I find myself asserting my artistic voice for the most part in relation to the stereotyping about Muslim women that can at times emanate quite negatively in the wider public discourse.

Issues of the veil ominously exist as media filler and it now seems the once personal and quiet expression of belief has been hijacked and politicised to become an apparently contentious issue. From the book *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, Nada Shabout writes, 'The veil has been an enduring fetish in western orientalist art, always a signifier of repression. Western audiences were obsessed with seeing what was hidden behind it. It was an absolute binary separating east and west. It evoked however fantasy, exoticism and desire. Following 11th of September 2001, the veil became a signifier of Muslim aggression against the west. A shift in western gaze from that of desire to that of fear only solidified the binary.'

Often presented by the media as a problematic migration story, Australian Muslims in part seem to grace the imagination of so-called authentic Australians as either illegal refugees, or ungrateful migrants that bunker down in ethno-religious enclaves as the other or the outsider, refusing to accept or integrate into the Australian way of life. That, coupled with the often reinforced assumption about the hegemony of the Australian Muslim community beckoned a negative narrative to play out.

Muslims are apparently religiously fanatical, dull, monolithic personalities that like a personal story or journey, individualism, community mindedness, loyalty, intelligence, spirituality, sensitivity, creativity or self-determination. Public debate in recent years went so far as to question the validity of Muslims as Australians. This reinvigorated grand notions of patriotism, which began to spill forth from our television sets, radio stations and newspapers in what seemed like a clumsy attempt to reassert a so-called threatened national identity. I watched patiently throughout this episode as all the experts spoke about Muslims, but never with them.

To my dismay, I watched our nation fumble through a narrow, racist and exclusionary but also so-called iconic, rendering of white Australia; a kitsch nostalgia for the Australian I was apparently supposed to be. Not surprisingly, connections with and respect for indigenous Australia in this newly determined national identity was not to be heard of anywhere.

For the many ordinary Australian Muslims, the normally private and internal evolution of identity and spirituality was now being played out in the public arena for what seemed like nothing more than a few political brownie points.

As a Muslim, I was questioned about the perceived contradictions between tradition and modernity, as well as the religious or spiritual with the secular. Does the work that I create or choose to engage in occur because I am a Muslim, a woman or because I am an Australian responding to my socio-cultural heritage, religiosity and contemporary political environments? Why should I be expected to compartmentalise, fragment or deconstruct the composited absorbed and blended complexity of human identity to have to

answer to or apologise for this when few others are expected to? One may wish to consider how the externally inspired or internally motivated expression through the arts will vary accordingly and in relation to the push and pull of our lives; the ebb and flow as spiritual beings manifest in the material reality of our existence.

It was the famous Swiss painter, Paul Klee, who said ‘Art does not reproduce what is visible but makes things visible.’ Thus the acceptance of diaspora artists in the west is a continuation of the orientalist paradigm made evident in the specific celebration of hybridity in the choice of artists and exhibitions organised in the west by western curators. The notion of borderline artists, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s term, generally displaced and living between two cultures is favoured. Their art is asked to express and clarify its identity and politics. Those hybrid artists of the third space then become visual ethnographers and archaeologists to reveal their cultures through a specified process. The new discourse does not claim to correct errors of the past or pay overdue tribute to accomplishments of the other, but rather ignores it based on a very condition acceptance of the other that is predicated on forfeiting of the past. This other, historically deprived and excluded from modernity, remains in this state unless fundamentally transformed through a relationship that acknowledges the superiority of the western world into a globalised and civilised hybrid.

Reflecting on this, one can ascertain there is clearly the danger of reinforcing negative stereotypes or creating absurd cultural parodies or indeed the civilised hybrid through such condition acceptances. With the understanding of the potential power of art in relation to expression, how good are we as practitioners and educators in riding this powerful beast? Does my work as an artist addressing the issues of Muslim women only suffice because they have originated from me and are not prompted, produced or contextualised by anyone from outside the process, or is it simply unproductive to assume objectivity by default or goodwill or intention?

The type of platform we provide as practitioners and educators is vital. We are ultimately part of the narrative of our society, an integral part of creating the discourse. Although there may be the notion of minority or majority communities defined by the physical size of that community, I no longer accept the notion that there should be a minority or majority voice. It just simply has to be a human voice that has an equal platform. Society absolutely does have the ability to provide this. We should all be demanding this very basic standard of equality for ourselves and one another. We should then be gracious enough to humanity to actually hold our society to account and implement this equality in a natural and spirited way without any conditional acceptances.

And because I have observed that the majority of you are academics and educators here today, I thought I’d throw a bit of a narny in and leave you with some Rumi poetry to contemplate.

‘Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there. Where the soul lies down in the grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase each other doesn’t make any sense.’

Thank you.

Jill Morgan

Thanks Nur. I think all of the artists here make their identity visible through their art and Richard has been one who's worked for a long time, way back from *Who Killed Malcolm Smith* and the Royal Deaths in Custody Commission to *No Way to Forget, Harry's War*. You've done lots. And also in the Charcoal Club, too, he's been a fine performer. Over to you Richard Frankland.

Richard Frankland

Well thanks very much. I'm an author as well. I've got a couple of books. I'm just writing the *Indigenous Kama Sutra*. Its 40 000 years of love-making techniques can't be wrong, particularly with 200 years of invasion on top of it; and it's also about diet, that book, because in my culture you've got nine wives so you've got to be strong. That's what the song, *You've Got to be Strong*, was really about. It wasn't about racism at all. Believe it or not, I was an operational deployment force soldier and it was very racist. And everywhere I looked there was very little voice. My dad died, he was a white fellow, and when he died in the sixties we became a target for the welfare and I remember when they took away all my cousins and then later on my little sister was taken and I found her when I was investigating deaths in custody. In the army they used to go boong-bashing and coon-kicking and I used to wait for them and fight them and I was very good at fighting, but I didn't like being violent. And I remember one bloke, you know, with all his mates, and I was outnumbered. That was pretty common. He said, 'So, you're not a real abbo. Where's your man scars?' So I give him a man scar and his mates said, 'You're nothing but a boing.' He meant to call me a boong. And I started laughing that much that I couldn't hit him. I felt sorry for him. And his mates were embarrassed and took him away. 'You made us look like idiots in front of the boong.'

So I came home and I ended up on the fishing boats, a couple of other hard jobs. My partner and I, we hit Geelong with fifty-four dollars and a quarter of a tank of petrol and one son and one on the way and we were doing it pretty hard. I walked all over. I wouldn't take the dole. Anyway, lots of problems getting the rent and all that and lots of problems getting a place to live back then. And I started writing when I was thirteen, writing songs and poetry. I taught myself guitar. Anyway, I didn't believe that there was a place. The only bloke that I ever seen black fellas that sing were me uncles and a couple of others and that was all at home. You weren't allowed to perform publicly, except for Uncle Harry Williams and the Country Outcasts.

The next thing you know, I'm investigating deaths in custody and I was the only black fellow employed for two and a half states and you knew how much a person weighed when they were born. You'd no secrets about them that you'd never tell anyone. And you couldn't leave the job because so many people were depending on you and you actually thought there might be a sense of justice. Anyway, I lost everything. So I wrote it all down about eighteen months after and they made a movie about me, called *Who Killed Malcolm Smith* – me and a bloke who died.

He was born ten years and one day before me and he was a good bloke. He put a paint brush through his eye in the Malabar Assessment Unit. The night they put the movie on TV, I went down the pub. I didn't want to watch it. I walked in the pub, it was a gangster pub, and there were all these blokes, they had on the TVs and I said, 'Oh turn that shit off.' 'No.' And this is a big tough gangster. 'Come and sit down, Richard.' He said, 'Sometimes I think you're the smartest bloke I ever met. Sometimes I think you're an

idiot.’ I thought we were going to be tangoing. He said, ‘You don’t realise,’ he said, ‘what you’re doing is carrying our story, whether we’re black, white. You’re carrying our story to the world.’

And then I learnt that art is voice and voice is a sense of freedom, but with freedom comes responsibility. I went to my first dinner party around that time. I’d never been in many white fellas’ houses until I come home from the army and I remember a woman in a red dress, a white woman, knocked her glass of red wine over and said, ‘How come your people are killing themselves?’ She was sort of saying, why are you hurting our country. That it was our fault that we were oppressed. Anyway, made a few more films. I didn’t realise I was making films. I was just doing it because it was about voice. And I started playing music. I thought I’m going to get into these white fellas’ lounge rooms.

So I put out a few albums and we opened for Prince. And the elders approached me and told me to start the Land Council, so I did and I lodged seventeen land claims and I took a month off and I made a film called *No Way to Forget*, which was nominated for four Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards and was in Cannes. Cannes was a funny place. Here were all these fellas lined up for three or four blocks to come and see a film a black fella made. At that time there was 10 000 hours of film footage with Aboriginal subject or content matter. Ninety-eight per cent of it was written, directed and produced by white people. So it was their interpretation of us. So my brother fought with the industry and I did too, saying we want to tell our stories through our eyes.

I’m standing there on the stage in Cannes and got a ten-minute standing ovation or something like that, and they called me up and they said, ‘Any questions?’ I had to give a speech and I had this really full-on political speech in my head. It was brilliant. And I walked up on the stage and by the third step towards the stage I forgot the speech. And I said, ‘All I can think of is me mum and me tribe and what people have given up so that I could stand here as a free man.’ And they all clapped again, then they just stood there looking at me and I felt like I was in that Alfred Hitchcock movie, *The Birds*, because there were no questions. Pretty intimidating for a bunch of white fellas to be looking at a big Greek looking Aboriginal like me. So instead of walking off the side of the stage I jumped straight down and walked straight through them all, because I thought, I’m not going to show them that I’m scared.

Then this young girl said, ‘Excuse me *monsieur*, we have no questions because your film answered all the questions,’ and they all started clapping and touching me. So I put my hand on me wallet. White people steal land brother, I’m telling you. And we all cried around and cuddled for a bit.

And then I made another film about me Uncle Harry who died on the Kokoda Trail. He was an old black fella. I was a kid when he died. He got killed in another war. All the wars are stupid. And I went to a couple of wars myself, filming kids that had been shot and survivors of massacres. Nearly got shot and I was laying there and when you’ve got typhoid – I lost thirteen kilos in ten days and had all the footage and I’m thinking, ‘Jesus, I’m bloody gone here.’ And there’s lots of regrets. I didn’t think I was going to see the second *Lord of the Rings*. I’m truthful about that. They gave me this morphine. I don’t know who gave it to me but it was fantastic. It was amazing. My hair grew back. I got land rights. John Howard was a nice guy. Hung’s mother Pauline was really emotional with me. Anyway, I was laying there before they gave me the morphine and I was in this other world and I thought I was going, you know, so I thought I’ll stash

all the footage. So I'm stashing tapes behind the TV, because this country they killed a lot of people. They were sort of like Australia, how they killed my mob. Anyway, so I seen these big black things flying around the room and they were landing on the walls and I'm sort of looking at them and then they all flew around again and I'm thinking, 'Jesus, I'm going to ignore them.' And then one of them flew off and landed straight here. Sort of like a coalition member with a budget, clawing his way into your neck. Anyway, so I was laying there. I laid there for two days I think just ignoring it because I thought if I – maybe it was just me being mental – I thought if I acknowledged it I'd go insane.

I made it home. I wrote a play in two days – I was drunk and stoned and crying a lot – called *Conversations with the Dead*, where I actually started talking to the dead, where I investigated their lives and did thirty-three shows at Malthouse. Then the Attorney-General bought it and put it on for a week and used it to introduce the Koori Court bill and then I took it to the United Nations when it was in Sydney. And when I was at the UN the Australian government tried to have me struck off as a speaker, because of the play. I made another film called *After Mabo*, the amendments, and I sent 500 copies to the United Nations and the mob over there used it to get the committee for the elimination of racial discrimination to investigate John Howard.

That was the last film I made for a while, because I guess it doesn't pay to piss off the presses. Then I wrote a few songs, one that was about a bloke who got locked up for six months for spitting. An Oscar Wilde quote came into the song, because a bloke called Justice Lionel Murphy said, 'Mr Neil, I note that you've been locked up for spitting and the Magistrate said, "You're an agitator and a stirrer." Well if you are sir, you're in perfectly good company, because as Oscar Wilde says in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, "Agitators and stirrers are a meddling bunch of people who go down to perfectly content levels of society and sow seeds of discontent, thereby shaping a better civilisation and humanity, which is why they are so absolutely necessary." '

To me, art's a voice and as long as I can pick up a guitar, a microphone or a computer to write stuff, I'm going to be an agitator and stirrer. The day I stop will be the day I die or the day that there's no oppression. Thank you.

Jill Morgan

Hung Le has worked with indigenous performers in *Black & Tan*. So do you want to say, just quickly, how important that was for you?

Hung Le

I did a show in 2001 called *Black & Tan*. I met this actress called Ningali Lawford at the Punters Club in Fitzroy. I'd seen her before and she went to Edinburgh Festival with her show and she won the best new-comer at the Edinburgh Festival. Then she came up and she recognised me. So we sat there at Punters Club and we talked for about three hours and we said, 'Man, there's a show here.' And there's a sign on the bar that says *Black & Tan* and we said, 'Well, man, we should call it *Black & Tan*.'

Richard Frankland

See when I heard it I thought they said 'Black Tramps'.

Hung Le

Black Tramps. They've got transvestites now too.

Richard Frankland

And Blackula.

Hung Lee

So we sat there and I asked her about where she was from and she's from the Fitzroy Crossing and she asked about where I'm from and we just sat there and just talked about, you know, the similarities of our cultures and the difference of our cultures and we thought, 'Oh man, let's put this in the Comedy Festival.'

I went and applied for the Comedy Festival. We hadn't written it. And we borrowed a bar from Mick Thomas from Weddings, Parties and Anything and we borrowed two cue sticks. *The Age* rang us up and said they wanted to do an interview and we go, 'Oh man, we haven't even written it, you know.' So we go, 'Well let's go to Footscray where she lives. She used to live in Footscray. Let's go to the pub. Tell *The Age* to go to the pub in Footscray and we'll just sit there and we'll make it up.' So *The Age* came down to the pub in Footscray and we were sitting there and there was a pool table there and all the old fellows around, none of them were talking to each other until me and her went up and starting play pool and then this old fellow from Europe came up and this other old fellow from Europe came up and this other black fellow came up and all these Vietnamese people came up, stood around the pool table and started telling their own stories and we're going, 'This is what the show is about.'

And so, the journalist from *The Age* sat there and just wrote it all in, a massive two pages. We hadn't written it yet, right. And we just went to the Edinburgh Festival, made it all up and then toured for three years just telling each other stories of where we're from, our differences and our similarities and nobody had ever seen a black person at a Comedy Festival and she was the very first one.

We were the very first show off the cab, of the Comedy Festival, because they don't want to put black shows on after six o'clock. It's true. They don't want black people in the bar at night.

Richard Frankland

You know why that is, don't you?

Hung Le

Why?

Richard Frankland

We turn white after six o'clock. It's just an act.

Hung Le

So if you go to the Comedy Festival, if you want to go and see a black show, the sun's still out, you know, it's six o'clock. So we're in the bar. Straight away we're the first people in the bar and everybody came. She just held the whole room like a queen. It was unbelievable. No one has ever seen a person who can hold a room like Ningali Lawford. And yeah, we went to Hong Kong, sold out in Hong Kong. Chinese people were walking up to her in the street going, 'Africa. Africa.' They'd never seen a black person, right.

Richard Frankland

Quite often I get non-Aboriginal people who talk past me to other non-Aboriginal people. Two years ago the head of tourism in Victoria (my white business partner's sitting there) and I'm sitting here and she says, straight across from me (because we were tending for a film) and she says straight across me to Fossy, 'How will Richard go interviewing white people?' And I went, 'I don't know. Fossy, how will I go interviewing white people?'

Nur Shkembi

Try being a Muslim woman having a conversation with somebody who is talking about Aboriginal people. This is how the conversation goes. 'You people and those people. You people and those people.' So I am you people and Richard, you are those people.

Jill Morgan

We might open it up to questions. Has anybody got a question they'd like to ask this esteemed panel?

Question:

How are you finding the arts today, compared to what it was when you first started? Is all the racial stuff still around?

Nur Shkembi

Well the 'you' people and 'those' people conversation wasn't that long ago. That probably answers it. And that was in a gallery.

Richard Frankland

I still get pigeon-holed sometimes, like I've been in the industry twenty-five years and I've never been given a script with total non-Aboriginal content, other than when I was directing for *Blue Heelers* and I was topping the ratings and I went around to see a producer of another show, where I'm the godfather of the star's kids and he's godfather of my kids. He's a really good brother of mine. And he sat down and he said, 'Now Richard', and their voice changes when they talk from up here. 'Now Richard,' like he's got big.

‘Television’s seen through the eyes of the producer.’ I’m thinking, ‘Yeah, I’ve got quite a few hours of television under my belt and this producer happens to be white.’ And they’re actual conversations. So how has it changed? I reckon the day that I get a script that’s not about a race issue, that’s not about an oppression issue, that’s not about a black-fella cast, is the day that’ll change. It’s still a long way to go, but we’re winning.

Question:

All of you have demonstrated that where there are blocked opportunities, you create your own and that’s what’s showing in the literature for multicultural artists and people in all kinds of employment. Where they have blocked career mobility, they can’t get into the mainstream jobs or access the opportunities that fit their talents. They create their own opportunities in the most entrepreneurial way. You’ve all done that. You’re great success stories in your own right. What I’d like to ask Diana, particularly because you’re young and you’ve got so much ahead of you, compared to me. Have you given up on trying to access mainstream roles in the theatre or TV or whatever, or are you going to continue to do what you’re doing?

Diana Nguyen

I think I get more work when I write my own things and put my own money into it and hopefully I get paid at the end. But God damn it, I would love to see more Asian character roles on TV. Yes please. Someone said *Big Brother* is like *Neighbours*. There ain’t any Asian, any blacks or any Aboriginals on there. So it’s the world that we’re kind of living in and it’s so cliquey and hard to bash through it. I’ve kind of given up on the idea. People say, ‘Keep going, keep going’, but there’s a point where I can’t sell myself. I can’t sell myself anymore. This is what you get. I went to Vietnam for a holiday. Two months later I came back. The first phone call I got was a friend who said, ‘Hey, I’ve got a prostitute role. You want to do it?’

Richard Frankland

Honestly, I wrote a *Masters*. I’ve got a *Masters*. If you go online and type my name in you’ll get photographs of me in a possum skin mankini, but you’ll get the *Masters*. And the *Masters* is about what it’s like not to (I used myself as a template) and you just cannot break through the glass ceiling of whiteology. That’s a new word. That’s my word everyone.

Hung Le

I’ve been in heaps of movies in this country. *The Wog Boy* – got bashed. *Sensitive New Age Killer* – got bashed.

Richard Frankland

The one that’s floating the back streets of Koori homes, that one where you’re naked. The first Koori blue movie he was a star.

Hung Le

I was in the house doing your homework mate. Oh, that one. Every movie here I got bashed. I'm the best. You should see auditions. I go to an audition; they give me a part, Tran. It's always Tran and he gets bashed. And I go in there and there'd be all these Vietnamese, Chinese actors. You go in, you close the door and you hear [bang sound effect] ahhh and then you'd come out and then the next one goes in. I'm the best at it. Every movie here, except for *The Slap*. I was in *The Slap* with my own accent as a porn dealer. So I could live with that. I don't know why they had a Vietnamese porn dealer in a show about a kid getting slapped, but I was there. So I've been going back to Asia and Asia's the place to be now for comedy. They don't slap me there, man. To go back to Asia, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and I'm going to the Philippines to make a movie where I'm making an Asian Mr Bean and they think it's hilarious. So Asian people, they're right onto it. I'm going back to Asia and doing my stuff with my own money and doing what I want to do, like be slapstick and be funny instead of, you know, have to talk about being slapped all the time.

Richard Frankland

I think we four should make a movie. You should be our manager. The storyline could be you could be the manager and us three be the talent and you try to sell us to white people. A little sitcom.

Nur Shkembi

I was born in Christchurch. To answer your question, in my role as the arts officer, most of what I do is about providing a platform for Muslim artists. Also with the establishment of the Islamic Museum of Australia which will be opening hopefully by the end of 2013. That's pretty much a museum about Australian Muslims, because we had to create our own space where we could tell stories and express ourselves without being edited. And there's also another interesting project that I'm involved in called *Sultana's Dream*, which is an online journal and run by female Muslim academics and artists. We have the editor in the audience, Hanifa Deen. Hanifa, this is my plug for *Sultana's Dream*. You can slip me the twenty later. So yeah, absolutely it's about providing your own platform and not waiting for somebody else to do it for you. I can't wait for a white man to fix things for me as a Muslim woman and I won't.

Question:

How important are the arts in educating people about racism?

Nur Shkembi

I think it's crucial because, not to sound all sort of airy-fairy, it provides a really good platform. I can't say that enough. It's a universal language. It's also not in your face. You can expose yourself to various forms of art through music and television and performing art and visual art and take that message in yourself.

You don't have to argue with anybody. And the person that's on the receiving end has time to digest that and absorb it. Art in education is lacking to begin with, just education in general, and if we can have more

of that in education and cultural education, especially indigenous culture, I think that's definitely the way to go. Kids absorb things and you just grow up with it, so it should just be a natural part of your culture.

Richard Frankland

I've been working in that area for a long time. I do collective therapy with communities, prisons and all sorts of places. I had 500 white people singing in language. Do you want to sing a song with a little bit of language in it? You've just got to sing what I sing, all right. So, you ready? [singing]. I love doing that at the Premier in cabinet and then I told them the story of Moomba. They thought Aboriginals were going to die out, so they had a meeting of all the councillors and they went around to see all these Kooris. 'You know you're all going to die out. Before you die we want to do something wonderful for you.' 'Oh thank you.' 'We're going to let you name a festival for us, but we want to tell you the name we want. We want it to mean come together and celebrate.' So the old fellas went around the corner and had a bit of a talk and come back and said, 'Moomba.' So for fifty years white people have been celebrating the arsehole festival. I love the fact that Johnny Farnham's been the king of arseholes. You're the voice.

Diana Nguyen

Well, I've been working in community development for seven years now, with refugees and migrants who come to Australia. Art is crucial; I'm working in a school and work in an eight-week program where these Afghan boys are telling me their stories. Theatre is a way of healing. It articulates emotion without words. It's been inspiring to hear these boys talk about their journey coming to Australia. I'm also a member of Melbourne Playback, which does improvised theatre with storytelling. Playback is theatre therapy for me. I rehearse every Monday and I tell them everything that's going on in my life and I feel good after I leave. The arts should be in the curriculum in schools. It should be like a maths subject that's studied five times a week. Arts should be the same thing as well. So, more funding please. We need money.

Jill Morgan

Richard, you were involved in politics for a little while. What do you think's more important, arts or politics, the more powerful tool?

Richard Frankland

A government's only the government of the day. That's all they are. But a good song, a good painting, a good piece of theatre is forever. I think using art as a voice has been one of the saving graces. I've written so much and not all of it's doom and gloom. Some of it's venting, some of it's funny.

My little son caught a frog and he was loving this frog a little bit too much. I got him to let the frog go and he burst into tears and so I had to write a poem about him letting the frog go. It was more for me than him, but he loved it. My little girl, she nearly died when she was born and it was a terrible time. And so, I couldn't touch her. All I could do was sing through the humidicrib to her with my song. And when she was born I grabbed her and I quickly blew my spirit on her [blowing sound] because I wanted her to know my smell and I whispered her name to her. And then she's in the humidicrib so I just sung to her and all I did was I sung an old chant that I'd written when I was doing some really sad work once. [sings song]. So I

opened a play with that and everyone sung it and then I just told the story of what happened to her. And there was no black, there was no white, there was no other colour in the room. There was just humanity.

That's what art does. It facilitates our voice in the most beautiful ways and it can be rude, it can be hurtful, it can be painful, but it's ultimately a voice and we need voice. In this country we're complacent. We think everything's okay, but it's not. We let the politicians sit there and they're meant to be our voice, but they're not. They're their own voice. They're their political party's voice. Art's our voice. We need these people travelling the world, telling the story of Australia. We need to peel it all back and say, 'Look at the scars on this nation. How can we fix it?' Art will fix it. Our voice is vital. And we need to make people turn off their televisions, go to theatre, go to gigs; close down the poker machines.

Diana Nguyen

In April I was asked to be a panellist on Q & A. And I have to say I was so lost in between all the politicians. I felt, 'Wow, what a great opportunity for me being Asian on TV for an hour.' But I felt so lost sitting there. I wished I started singing on the panel. I wished I'd just gone out and just been a crazy lunatic in Dandenong, but I didn't and I just felt so conformed and stuck with all these politicians. And actually, a couple of days before that I was like, 'Oh my God, I'm going to read *The Australian* and *The Age* and everything to be informed.' But it's not my kind of world. I realised that. I just felt like, 'Oh God, I'm stuck.' But hey, I got on TV.

Question:

You can reach a far larger audience with new media, but if people see your new media they don't need to come to the show necessarily. So I'm wondering, how do you feel about that tension. Do you use both, or do you intentionally hold back?

Richard Frankland

I use all of it. In fact, Hung and I were discussing over a chicken sandwich outside about a new show and we're going to do pole dancing. I'm going to be the pole. Hung likes to call me his personal monkey bar. It's going to be on the web cam tonight.

Question:

I was specifically thinking of things like YouTube, because could reach an audience of millions very quickly with very little investment.

Hung Le

Yeah, I've got tons on YouTube. With YouTube you never know though. But you need YouTube to get people to see your stuff. But you never know. You can do all the best work and put it on YouTube and a monkey eating a frog can get three million hits. So who knows?

Nur Shkempi

I think new media has its place and one of the most powerful things about art is being in the moment. If you look at a Picasso painting on the web or you go stand in front of one – mind you I wasn't a big fan of Picasso and he came out to Melbourne – he didn't come out, he's dead – but the exhibition came out a couple of years ago. My son was so keen to go see it because he was a fan of his works and so I sort of was dragged along by him to the NGV to have a look at the Picasso exhibition. I stood in front of one of his paintings and oh my God. There is no art book; there is no high-resolution image on the Internet that translates what it's like to stand in front of a work of art. He's got it. Like when you stand in front of his paintings you feel something and that's like going to the theatre or being in the room and somebody's got a guitar and it's just their voice and they're singing. You can't recreate that in new media. New media is great perhaps for advertising or maybe bringing attention to issues, but in relation to reaching people in the deepest of ways and like touching the soul or connecting. Mate, you have to be there. That's all I have to say. You have to make the effort to be there.

Diana Nguyen

New media's a great way for advertising. Like the Comedy Festival this year, we only spent \$200 on advertising and the rest was just Facebook, people sharing and YouTube. It was great. We only spent \$200 and made a profit. We love the money. Like we said before about intimacy, like La Mama. I love performing at La Mama because you can have just thirty people in the room and they absorb everything out of you. That's the way I perform. And I just had to sigh and think, yeah Picasso. Imagine being in that room.

Hung Le

YouTube is good because I've been going to countries that don't have a voice, like Singapore and Malaysia, where stand-up comedy is just booming in those countries, and in China. These people have never seen people get up and be funny and talk politics and stuff until YouTube. Now, the Singaporeans, they're opening their mouths and they've got comedy clubs and stuff like that going on. But that's why YouTube is good and it gets people like me going over there – the Asian who left and came back with an accent – and they get me to come over there and talk about Australia and this is what Australia's like, this is what I went through. So I'm teaching them stuff because of the YouTube.

Fourth Breakout

Education – Capacity building, intercultural understanding

Multiculturalism in the classroom

Friday 24 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Clare Hardie, DEECD

Lindy Stirling, DEECD

Gary Shaw, Facilitator, DEECD

Lobna Rouhani, Rapporteur

One of the challenges is how you work with schools so that you provide transformative experiences for young people. The workshop that I facilitated was run by my colleagues so I have a little bit of an advantage here but it was capacity building, intercultural understanding and multiculturalism in the classroom. Clare Hardie and Lindy Sterling, two of my colleagues, presented that workshop. I must say we are a very small unit in a very big organisation, working across about 1600 government schools and about 2300 schools across Victoria – we work cross-sectorally. So we're a very small group working in the multicultural education global citizenship unit.

The focus of a lot of our work is reducing prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping. You know, it's about making schools safe, harmonious, places where students can realise their potential. Part of doing that is helping to understand diversity and helping them to become more informed and active citizens. Clare and Lindy went through the current policy environment that is conducive to this work. The Australian government has invested a lot into the new Australian curriculum, and some of the general capabilities in that work lend themselves strongly to what's happening in Victorian schools already – general capabilities that cross curriculum perspectives, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour, as well as critical and creative thinking.

In the Victorian policy environment at the moment the government has released a vision statement, one of the priorities of which is internationalising education. As a consequence, the perspectives we're taking in terms of intercultural understanding are looking outward, looking more towards the skills and the knowledge and the attributes that young people will need in the twenty-first century where we're more globally aware, more globally connected. The questions that were asked at this point is: what kind of skills do you need to live in the twenty-first century?

You know, we look around and see some of the problems we're facing. We want kids to be creative, we want them to be confident, you want them to be able to relate to each other, you want them to be able to understand and empathise with other people. These are the challenges teachers have in order to address some of the basic classroom tensions that may arise – playground tensions but more fundamentally to prepare young people to become contributing citizens.

We had a really good conversation around what intercultural understanding was. One of the things we tried to address was that at the moment the Australian curriculum is developing, so the definition of intercultural understanding is not fixed. Now we're actually engaging in a robust educational discussion across Australia. That is a very positive thing because many schools are also engaging in that debate and trying to do the best they can for their kids.

Lindy presented a very useful framework that is called 'stand-points'. I understand it was raised yesterday at the beginning of the conference, which suggests that for a lot of schools they might be at the very beginning stages, this idea that they are celebrating cultures or learning about cultures without understanding or moving towards a point where they can engage with other cultures, and where things like social justice are at the heart of the relationship that people have with each other. So this idea of stand-points and moving from understanding more about other countries to a point where they engage with different cultures is a significant thing for schools.

Some of the activities that are being used to drive multicultural education and global citizenship – Lindy is leading twenty-first century studies of Asia – are absolutely essential, so all this work is engaging the principal and ensuring that the principal is an advocate. At the moment there are more than 350 principals in Victorian schools that are engaged with that program. That represents 11.5 per cent of schools that are active in that area. We are also running teacher professional learning so there are – we've had more than a hundred schools in the last couple of years go through that program, teachers working in teams, focusing heavily on intercultural understanding and the idea of global citizenship; what that means, what they can do in their schools.

We have a strong program in civics and citizenship education. It's very important in terms of engaging young people – that they feel they are part of the educational process; they're part of the democracy that we claim we have. Now if that can't be modelled and demonstrated in a school environment in ways that young people can see for themselves, then they're more likely to be disengaged. So many of the programs we're running – we've run more than seventy across the state in the last three years – are about developing youth agency: the knowledge and skills, the capacity to make choice and to contribute to their communities. These are very strong programs that we are trying to model and show as almost a demonstration, if you like, of what can be done in the school at a very basic level.

Reducing racism – what can schools do? Schools need to develop clear, inclusive policies and practices, emphasising values, human rights and social justice. The point about values is important. Schools that actively engage in developing values that are lived in the actions of the teachers, that can be demonstrated in the curriculum and within the programs, are more likely to get students engaging in positive relationships with each other. They need to model those democratic processes and to provide broad opportunities for active citizenship. Within a democratic school you expect to see students engaging in and developing some of those policies.

At the heart of all this is to teach social, emotional skills for intercultural understanding, building and restoring relationships. Conflict management, listening, collaborating, developing empathy (a hard one to do but very important) and co operating with others.

At a very basic level all teachers contribute to that. What we advocate is that the entire school approaches the work. That way you get better results than a single individual doing things in their classroom by themselves.

In a nutshell the workshop pointed out that there is a lot happening. There are a lot of schools that are engaging in this space and there are a lot of schools looking for support, looking to work with their communities in a productive way. There are opportunities with the Australian curriculum; there are opportunities with the current Victorian policy environment – the outcomes we're looking for are about young people becoming more informed and active within their communities.

New Australian curriculum – capabilities will include intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour, critical and creative thinking, ICT capability, personal and social capability, literacy, and numeracy.

Intercultural understanding – gives impetus to schools to work in the area or to deepen their work. Critically reflect on one's own culture and positive interactions between people of diverse backgrounds. This can be measured by acquisition of critical cultural awareness, culturally respectful attitudes and positive skills. By developing an understanding of self in relation to others and organising ideas for intercultural understanding – recognising, reflecting, interacting, empathy, respect, and responsibility.

Standpoints of diversity – cultural integration, celebratory understanding, relational understanding, multicultural understanding, transformational. Participant stated that what's missing is existence of power structures, looking at class structures within ethnic groups. Participant expressed that children in multicultural school settings have no issues as they are 'used to it'.

Internationalising education – need to equip children for an increasingly globalised world. Creating safe spaces for children to learn in. Cross-curriculum priorities – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (economic reasons), and sustainability (global). Participant asked 'what about settler histories?' DEECD conduces a range of programs for schools to build capacity of principals, teachers, and students. Work that they are promoting is not an add-on but about how teachers self-reflect.

Fifth Breakout

Media – Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Has the media moved beyond the 'white picket fence' view of Australian society?

Friday 24 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Speakers

Hanifa Deen, Facilitator

Karen Farquharson, Swinburne University

Waleed Aly, Commentator/Broadcaster

Larry Schwartz, Journalist

Jessica Walton, Rapporteur

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Hanifa Deen. Firstly I would like to acknowledge traditional owners past and present of the land where we're meeting, and here you are for this discussion on the media this afternoon. I'll be playing the role of facilitator and occasionally agent provocateur.

My personal experience with the media has been confined to very kind book reviewers, a horrific experience on ABC's Q&A, a few articles in the papers and in magazines but my tribe, OzMuslims, as a group do not fare well. As we all know religion is often a surrogate for race these days. As far as Muslims go there's been a shift from indifference to out-right hostility.

Is the media mad, bad and beyond redemption? Has the media moved beyond the white picket fence? I think from the speakers of the last session we already have an inkling of the answer to that. Do we blame journalists unfairly? The speakers will be exploring some of these issues.

We're going to be looking at the impact of negative media coverage for migrants, asylum seekers and racial minorities, stereotyping, self-definition. We hope to be able to cover print media, talk-back radio, TV, and ask the question 'Is anyone getting it right?' We're going to try to look at media strategies that work versus the strategies that are doomed to failure and then we'll throw it open to you, the audience, because I'm sure you all have something to say.

The three amigos over there Karen, Larry and Waleed. An academic, Professor Karen Farquharson, a tough veteran journalist, Larry Schwartz and Waleed Aly, a man for all seasons - commentator, academic, writer and broadcaster. I'm not sure if that means he's crossed over to the dark side. I'll leave it to you to decide.

Our opening speaker is Dr Karen Farquharson, Associate Professor of Sociology and Head of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Swinburne University. Her research has been published in a variety of leading Australian and international journals and she's co-author of a book *Sport and Society in the Global Age*, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

She's currently part of the team working on an Australian Research Council funded research project investigating the media treatment of Sudanese Australians and looking at whether journalism training can enable minority communities to develop a media voice. This is being done in conjunction with three other universities and the ABC and Adult Migrant Education Services. Last week during the Olympics Karen was being interviewed on race in athletics. Jamaican sprinters, no surprise, they were the topic. Something along the lines of what secret genes did they possess that made them excel?

Her answers were sane and debunked the myth of natural talent. She probably disappointed her interviewer and surprised many listeners. Newspaper representations of Sudanese migrants is another one of her areas and given Monday's front page story in *The Age* I'm looking forward to listening to what she has to say. Thank you, Karen.

Karen Farquharson

I'll be talking about the Sudanese media project today. I'll just give a bit of a background about myself. I studied media discourses. I've been studying media discourses for quite a long time. So how – particularly how minority groups are portrayed in news media and print news media. I come from a place that says the media both shape and reflects societal values, so the media is not a thing. The media consists of people, people who are part of their society, part of their social context, who are – have their own biases, their own interests. It's also situated in a space where they're trying to make money, especially the news organisations. So that is shaping the kinds of news we get and that has a big impact on how minority groups are portrayed.

Australia and other countries' print media have a track record of portraying minorities and migrants negatively. So there has been – researchers have shown that asylum seekers and refugees are portrayed together and they are portrayed as illegitimate, as queue jumpers, as people of questionable values. Aboriginal peoples have been portrayed as lazy, as unemployed, as drunk; and Muslims have been portrayed in the context of violent extremism, have been portrayed as being misogynists and un-Australian. This is consistent across different media.

Why is this? Well at least in part it is because it's not news when people are behaving like normal citizens. Most people go about their lives, behaving like normal citizens. It's news when people are being deviant; it's news when people are throwing their children over board, even though we know that didn't actually happen. It's news when people are saying misogynist things. It's not news when people are seeking refuge because of genuine persecution. It's not news that Aboriginal Australians have lower rates of drinking than other groups. It's not news that ninety-nine per cent of African migrants are law abiding, family oriented people. That's not news. It's not news that very few Muslims are extremists, that the vast majority of Muslims are just regular people, not any more extremist than any other religious group.

Negative media images, what do you do? The Sudanese project that I'm working on is the AuSud Media Project. We're trying to develop a model for how the media portray minorities, how minority groups can disrupt their negative media coverage.

It's the second year of a three-year study funded by the Australian Research Council and it's in conjunction with the ABC, with Adult Multicultural Education Services and with Swinburne, Melbourne University and La Trobe University; the grant is sitting at The Centre for Advanced Journalism at Melbourne University, and I'm one of the chief investigations on the grant.

It's a media intervention with Sudanese Australians. Why Sudanese? We could have picked another African group; we could have gone all African. Part of it is because Africa is a big place and we didn't want to pretend to represent all Africans. Sudan is a big place as well. So even having a Sudanese focus is a little bit political and a little bit complicated because there are different groups of Sudanese peoples who come here. Nevertheless we're working with Sudanese Australians and providing them with media training and journalism training courses as part of the project.

I'll give a little background about Sudanese in Australia. Most of the Sudanese Australians have come between 2000 and 2007. They've come through the Australian humanitarian program, so they are all approved as refugees before they come here. They come mainly from south Sudan but there are also people from Darfur, also people from north Sudan. Sydney has the largest group of African migrants and they are all different religious backgrounds as well. Our research has shown that media representations of Sudanese have situated them as problematic others, as people who are not able to integrate, as people who are un-Australian, as people who are perpetual refugees. People we've spoken with about this, people from Sudanese backgrounds, say, 'When can I stop being a refugee? You know, I've been here ten years, why can't I just be an Australian now? I'm just a normal citizen now.'

Media representations don't allow for that. The people we've spoken with have said this has had a really negative impact on their lives, including areas such as being able to get a job and their health. They explicitly relate the way the community treats them to the way the media has portrayed them. This is particularly in the aftermath of 2007, when there was very negative media portrayal of Sudanese.

So our goal for the project is to see if we can change negative media coverage and the first goal is to see if there is negative media coverage. Yes, there is. The second goal is to see if we can change the media coverage. Up until recently when mainstream media reported on the Sudanese they rarely spoke to Sudanese people. Other people spoke on behalf of Sudanese people – Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), people from the police. Very rarely were any actual Sudanese people spoken to.

So our goal was to get the community's voice out. And it's not us giving people voice. It's about people developing a voice, people finding a way to have a voice, a voice that reflects the multiplicities of the Sudanese community. Like any other community there is no one Sudanese view. There are multiple views. And I guess that's one of the challenging things about having a voice for a minority group: which voice, whose voice, what kind of image?

Some research I've done on discourses around Muslims and Islam in the news also raises those questions. We're doing this through a journalism training program that's delivered by working journalists. The trainees are people of Sudanese background in Melbourne. Each trainee has a mentor who is a working journalist and if they want one, they have a language teacher as well. The project has a three-pronged approach. The first prong is to influence the mainstream media.

To change journalism practice we hook up working journalists with people in the Sudanese community. If they need a Sudanese perspective they have somewhere to start. Journalism skills development in this area – and I guess we've had some success so far – quite a few of our graduates have been quoted in the media since the first training that happened two years ago.

The second prong is to have people participating in our program also participating in the mainstream media. There has been some success there as well. People have had work published, articles published in newspapers, stories about them on the ABC, and a couple of people have book contracts as a result of participating in the training. So the second prong has had some success by having people participate in the mainstream media as authors, not as interviewees.

The third and probably most difficult prong is for people to develop their own media. They would have their own media outlet where they speak to other Sudanese-Australians, other Sudanese people around the world, and anyone who is interested; to report news that's of interest to the community. To inform interested outsiders on what's happening within the community and to show that there's a wide range of issues within the Sudanese community and a wide range of voices and, in fact, debate within the Sudanese community. In the group that's participating in our training there are lots of debates amongst people about all kinds of things. We're hoping to have a space for that to happen and it will be an online space. At the moment we're trying to develop that third prong, probably the most ambitious prong, to be sustainable, especially working on ongoing funding for it.

The main question is: 'Will it work?' Early indications are that the first two prongs can work; connecting people with working journalists is a good approach. Having people participate in the mainstream media, contacting journalists if there's a story they might be interested in, speaking back if there's a story that they feel has unfairly portrayed them, putting forward their own stories. I think that will work.

As for their own media space, we don't know yet. That will be very interesting to see. There's some indication that journalists are listening, which backs up what I said earlier about the media not being something that's out there; the media is us.

The lessons that we can take away from our project so far, and we're in the second year of the project, is that if you don't like the way the media is portraying your group, you can contact them and engage with them, and they're open to that. And we found that it's handy to contact journalists directly. There's also the letters and opinion pages. I guess the challenging thing is that news isn't news if it's a good news story. News doesn't tend to be about wonderful things happening within communities. We don't pick up the newspaper to say this group is doing really well. It's usually something that's negative, that's deviant; and so the way we structure news is a bit problematic in that way.

I guess the other part is to put forward your own stories. Hanifa has her online magazine; *Sultana's Dream* is an example of that, where Muslim women are putting out their own stories and this is the kind of space that we're hoping will be able to be developed for our group.

There are challenges such as ongoing sustainability and content and funding, but that is the goal. And I will stop there.

Hanifa Deen

You're brilliant with your timing and such great content. What is news? What is not news? I learnt a lesson a month ago in Sydney and I'll never make that mistake again. I didn't realise I was being insensitive. I was doing a talk and I used the term 'Australian-African Communities'. Afterwards two people came up to me and said, 'I'm Eritrean and he's Somalian.' I learnt not to generalise.

Now we move on to Larry Schwartz. He's a freelance writer and former senior writer with *The Age*. He worked for *The Sydney Morning Herald* before joining the *The Sunday Age* before its launch in the late 1980s. He migrated from Cape Town, South Africa, in the early 1980s and he's written extensively on migrant and refugee issues. He's the author of an apartheid era memoir titled *The Wild Almond Line*, published by Allen & Unwin in 2000. He is a PhD student at Swinburne, where he tutors in journalism and he also has experience conducting media training workshops for community groups.

He'll be talking to us about his experiences in South Africa and how that affected his journalism here. Digging around I read in *The Sunday Age* that Larry once went on tour with One Nation when they hit the road to sell their message to country Victoria. He wrote an article about it and asked the question 'Is anyone out there listening?' It still seems a valid question. Thank you, Larry.

Larry Schwartz

Thanks very much for that. Actually that trip – I've been described initially as a tough journalist and I wanted to make the point that I'm going to disappoint on those grounds. I was thinking a while ago about what it was that my beat was, my round was. People ask me, 'Did you have a column?' and people think they remember what I wrote but they're not quite sure. They confuse me with a guy called Barney. I realised that my beat was the bleeding heartbeat and I wanted to talk a bit about that. I wanted to talk about how that came about.

I was talking to Bonita earlier. We come from the same town and I was telling her that when I was a reluctant journalism student in Cape Town – I came here in February 1982 so I've spent most of my adult life here – I remember I did a course, a degree in journalism. At the end of it I kept thinking I'm not a journalist; I'm an imposter. We had to spend time at a paper for a couple of months and I went to *The Cape Argus*. On the first day, there were two of us rookies and the news editors sent us on a nightmare of a job – the most important job I ever did. We had to go to the family of an eleven-year-old girl who drowned on the first day of her school holidays. It's called a death knock.

It's called intrusions here. If you look at the media alliances code of ethics, the eleventh clause talks about intruding on grief. You're not supposed to intrude on grief. But somehow that wasn't an issue there and I was surprised that the family welcomed us in. They seemed to be happy to have us. They were grieving. Their daughter had died a day earlier and the news editor said, 'Grab all the photographs, get the photo albums so the other papers can't get them.' We didn't do that. We borrowed a photograph. Who would send a journalist, a rookie, on the first day?

Anyway, we came back and the other guy and I cobbled it together. And he asked if we say that this is an eleven-year-old coloured girl, which was a derogatory term at the time, or do we say that this is an eleven-year-old girl?

This was apartheid era in South Africa; it was the summer of 1978, Cape Town. It was an interesting discussion. This turned me from being the guy who was never going to do journalism to the guy who thought, you know, we honoured this person's, this child's, memory. There was some value, some purpose, in the journalism that we did.

It seems to me that this was the job that I did at *The Sunday Age*. I don't want to glamorise that or glorify it or make up that I was a good guy; but there was a time when I actually wanted to be a good guy. I really wanted to think that I was a good guy. So I published a book called *The Wild Almond Line*, which takes the title from Van Riebeeck's *Hedge*. The first Dutch settlers planted a hedge to demarcate between the Khoikhoi people and the white Dutch settlers. In the book I was exploring what it meant to grow up in the apartheid era – I came here when I was 25 – what it meant to grow up on the one side of the line and end up being conscripted in the army of apartheid.

I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to write about migrant issues for *The Age* and particularly for *The Sunday Age* at the time that people were being released from Woomera and from detention. I remember one night. I used to kind of ferret out stories. I went to see a guy called Amer, who was an Iraqi guy, a young guy who couldn't speak English. I was talking through an interpreter and I spent a couple of hours, asking really detailed questions in a room in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, surrounded by these men. Only men, I don't know where the women were. But Amer made the point as we were leaving, He told the Iraqi community guy, Hader. He said something in Arabic and I said, 'Hader, what did he say?' and he said, 'I have been talking for an hour but I promised the people before I went –' this is a time I think of lip sewing, a time of great trauma in the detention centres– 'I promised them I'd tell people what was going on.' Then he added, 'I haven't even begun to give – I have told only a fraction.'

That's the way I started this story.

It became – I don't know whether the fact that I came from South Africa laden with a beaten-up guitar, a typewriter and a lot of guilt – I don't know whether this was compensating, but I took this on board and I became this serial pest; started going to news conferences until I was asked not to, with stories on asylum seekers week by week until they rolled their eyes. I thought I don't want to be looking back – because I look back in *the Wild Almond Line* – looking back ten years from now and asking questions about why, as a journalist, I didn't do the right thing.

I'm not an optimist, but I do believe that despite itself journalism is a force for social cohesion. The story-telling that we do is almost a counter-narrative to the hard news stories. The story that you saw on the front page of *The Age* about Sudanese and Somalian youths and crime and that type of thing would be almost distorted.

There's a distorting lens and if you looked through newspapers you'd find that despite itself – and I'm not talking about the fourth estate and the bulwark against tyrannical governments and all that sort of thing – I'm talking about humanising – I think the privilege is to tell stories, ordinary stories, little stories, about ordinary people. I did some work for the Australian multicultural foundation last year in the western suburbs and I know it sounds like a glib slogan, but I would say to people go for goodwill. Initially I said assume goodwill. I found a lot of goodwill within these newsrooms.

Newsrooms are diminishing as we speak. It's a grim time in some ways, but I think that there is a possibility for journalism to be nurtured and to continue the story telling, the appetite for stories, and the strategies that we need to talk about.

Let me then end with one last thing. I was in a cab a couple of months ago and I was racing to try and pitch a story as a freelancer; the cab driver started talking, we had a wonderful exchange. We were talking about – he was talking about going to look for chestnuts and he was talking about going down to Tasmania... As the cab pulled up he turned to me and he said, 'What do you do?' and I said, 'I'm a journalist.' and he said, 'Tell me, tell me honestly, is it true that the Australian media favours the Jews?' and I sort of – I thought, 'Well, here we go,' and he then said he was a Palestinian and I thought – I said, 'Yeah, and I'm a Jew.' It was an interesting moment because I went to my dentist later that day and I said to my dentist, 'You're a Jew, aren't you?' and he said, '*The Age* is anti-Semitic.' I realised that it's very much in the eye of the beholder. Matthew Ricketson once did a very interesting piece where he compared different communities' perceptions of the same story and I'll wrap it up at this point but prejudice is very much in the eye of the beholder. Thank you.

Hanifa Deen

Waleed Aly came into the media world through the back door, it seems to me. He first studied commercial law and was an activist at the Islamic Council of Victoria. He was a TV guru on SBS *Salaam Café*, he's an author and newspaper correspondent and in his spare time he features regularly on the ABC *Morning Show* and other programs. He also lectures in politics at Monash and I've heard tell that he plays in a band. It's an interesting, eclectic mix and it seems to me that – I'm sure he didn't do it deliberately – that popular culture is one of the strategies that can reduce that dreaded social distance. He becomes Waleed Aly, the good bloke who barracks for Richmond. On a more serious note he's a prominent public intellectual. He writes for various newspapers. His book, *People Like Us: how arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* was shortlisted for several awards, including the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, and he's received public recognition for his activities in the community. So it's over to you, Waleed.

Waleed Aly

The last point Larry made about prejudice is crucially important, vastly over stated because everyone loves to complain about the media and how they generalise and they don't understand anything with any nuance that they view people as undifferentiated clumps, preferably de-humanised. And this is the way that the media is and in making that critique we're completely blind to our generalisation of the media and the people who work within it as though *The Green Left Weekly* and *Today Tonight* is the same thing. They're not, they're vastly different.

One of the things that I discovered early on in my media engagement was that everyone hated the media. It wasn't just me, everyone did and if Larry hadn't used this example I would have, about the latest conflict. I mean you talk to anyone who is partial to the Palestinian narrative and there is absolutely no question about the bias of the media until you run into, I don't know, a Zionist youth group and suddenly the sincerity with which the opposite view is held is equal.

What does the Labor Party think of the media at the moment? They probably don't really rate them but if you ask a Liberal Party staffer what they think of the media, they will probably say the same thing. What do you think the Catholic Church thinks about media at the moment? What do you think a football coach thinks about – I mean, I have not met anybody who has a field that is happy with the way the media interacts with their field. This is innate and so I think the first thing we have to do – this is not at all a way of absolving media behaviour. I think there are plenty of critiques to be made and plenty of analysis and indeed I've made them, but the first step is to recognise that these critiques are reflective of our biases and our own prejudices as well.

The main criticism we have against media is that it doesn't do what we want it to do. That is, it doesn't reflect what I think. Everybody can make that criticism. The reflection that I have on my experience with the media is that it was all an accident. I didn't intend to have a media saturated life. I didn't intend to be in a position where four days a week I'm broadcasting nationally on the ABC and then on the fifth day I'm usually doing something like this, usually on commercial TV. I didn't intend for that to happen. I think when I was in Grade 5, I wanted to be a journalist and that was it and then it kind of went away till I got to the end of law school and realised I hadn't really applied for any legal jobs. I ended up getting a legal job, in spite of myself, half way through an application for a cadetship at *The Age*, which I hastily abandoned.

So it was all an accident. How then, if the media is so closed and if the media is so impervious to outside influence and external penetration, how then did I accidentally end up in this position? It's a really interesting question to think about. It's more interesting to think about than just think about my career. How did that actually happen? I started off fronting a press conference when no one else wanted to. That was pretty much my job and it was not my paid job. My paid job was to be a commercial lawyer. And by fronting the press conferences no one else wanted to, I probably did a lot of damage to my aspirations as a commercial lawyer; nonetheless, that was the job that I had at that time. I was on the board of the Islamic Council of Victoria. That organisation had a religious vilification case in VCAT that had nothing to do with me, the decision to pursue that pre-dated me. But I was the shmo who had to stand in front of the camera and talk about how wonderful this case was, in spite of the fact that it was really significant.

That's where it started. I started writing things in newspapers, not because I wanted to be an activist but because I liked writing stuff and if you're going to write stuff then a pretty good thing to do with it is to get it published in a newspaper. And for me, it's interesting that the act of writing the piece and getting it published was completely divorced in my mind from the act of anybody reading it. I used to be genuinely surprised when someone had read it. It's like I forgot that it was published. It was the interaction with the editor and getting it past all of that, that was the thing that excited me but there was no grand plan in any of this. What I found was that if you provide a voice that is competent and fresh doors just open. This thing that is meant to be a completely enclosed monolith ceases to be such and I think the problem is that

we spend so much time – not without good reason – but we spend so much time analysing all the different ways in which the media is impossibly evil that we forget that it's not and that's a very different and varied beast when compared to the one that we have in our imagination.

So when I think about it, it was through writing, through doing a handful of interviews, that eventually I got a call from Jon Faine's producer one day saying, 'Would you like to come in and co-host *The Conversation Hour*?' and to me this was like wow, this is the biggest show that I've been associated with, this is going to be unbelievable.

I read the book that we had to read from cover to cover. This doesn't leave the room, alright, but there have been times on *The Conversation Hour* as the co-host where I haven't even known who the guests are going to be as they walk in. At that time it was like, wow and I read everything cover to cover and I just took the opportunity and I went in there. I had a chat to a friend of mine, Martin Flanagan, and he said to me, 'Yeah, look your first game won't be your best game, just go out and play, just go out and do it' and that's what I did. The next thing I know I got calls saying, 'Jon's taking leave, we were thinking you would be interested – wanted to see if you would be interested in hosting?' And I talked them out of it. I said, 'No, this is not my skill set. I don't know how to do it. I don't know why you think this would be a good idea and you're going to make fools of both of us.' And it took probably a couple of years before we ended up in a situation where I was prepared to go on air.

In the meantime I had friend's who put together a show on community TV called *Salaam Café* which, by all objective standards is pretty bad really, but it was interesting and different and SBS started sending along production companies to observe it. And then the next thing we know there's a contract in front of us from SBS wanting us to do a season on national TV and then around that time *News Breakfast* was starting up and I got a call if I'd be interested in considering hosting that program. None of this was deliberate. I was just writing stuff because I wanted to. I was an academic and none of it is because I am sort of some kind of unprecedented prodigious talent, it's not that but what it was, was I think that – like a convergence of factors where people were looking for something different to what was around.

Now had I been the person who spent all of my time analysing everything that was wrong with it, and I am that kind of person so it's kind of a miracle I wasn't in this case, but had I been that person in that circumstance none of this would have happened, for better or for worse. None of it would have happened and now I have this really unusual experience where I just go in and do a job. Like when I'm about to go on air, I'm going on air, it's what I do. I press a button, I talk; stuff comes out; hopefully it's okay. If not, I'll do it tomorrow but then I go to some function during Ramadan or it's Friday, so I went to the mosque today, and I run into someone who says, 'My son is just so excited to hear someone on radio or see someone on TV who has a name as funny as his, who is there.'

It's not that I'm out there thinking how can I do the most multicultural broadcast I can conceive of today; it's not that, but it's just presence and that presence happened by just seeing doors, knocking on them and walking through them and taking a bunch of risks. I wonder whether or not we do that enough, whether or not we actually make opportunities because I think in some ways critique is a lot easier than action and I think we're a bit comfortable with that so I'm going to shut up now.

Hanifa Deen

Thank you for that very reflective piece. I've changed my mind, you didn't come in through the back door; you knocked on the front door.

I'd like to check with the audience first, how many of you saw the SBS *Insight* program on polygamy? Not too many. How many of you are familiar with the SBS *Insight* programs generally? This is in line with the idea of strategies that work and strategies that maybe don't work in the long run.

About three weeks before the SBS *Insight* program on polygamy a number of Muslim communities and individuals were contacted to go on the *Insight* program. They decided 'no' and what emerged from that decision, and this is groups, individuals and associations all around Australia, mainly Sydney and Melbourne, was sort of a boycott. They wrote petitions to SBS producers; they met with them, letters, statements, backwards and forwards, twenty-two signatures all together on that. I'll call it a petition.

People were respectful on both sides, but what emerged from that was solid argument as to gosh, not another program that's focusing on us. And, you know, last month it was burqas and something else. There are only three Muslims who turned up and actually said anything on the show and one of them said he wouldn't have if he'd known about the unofficial boycott and the program sort of took a different kind of swing. Now, what do you think of that as a stand-up? Is it going to be – well I think it was effective for that program but how does it work in the long run with the media, that kind of a stand-off or boycott? Who would like to have a first go?

How does that work as a strategy, not playing ball? Saying you've invited us to go on to the program and to talk about polygamy in Islam but we say no, it's a complex subject, we know what's going to happen, it will be distorted.

Waleed Aly

I can jump into that. I think it's effective if you know you're going to win. Where it's not effective is where you – where all you do is vacate the field for something worse and that is the reason, the main reason probably, I've done – it would be a handful of interviews, most of them involve *A Current Affair*, that I did them for that reason; that I knew if I didn't, I knew what was coming. So I had to step in but if you've got something like that where it's coordinated and what you essentially do is you are draining their talent pool, then that will work. It's risky because it's all or nothing but in that case it kind of worked.

Hanifa Deen

So you have to weigh it very carefully?

Waleed Aly

Well, I think it's risky but what I do like about it is – because I think the big critique over the media, the one that's most powerful – intellectually most powerful, is not that journalists are biased and sensationalist and that they never tell positive stories, actually they tell a lot of positive stories.

They're often not on the front page or at the top of the news bulletin but there are plenty of them, actually. I think it's completely the wrong way to assess media by looking is this positive or negative. The way to assess it, a more comprehensive way, is what is the frame that media places around the conversation? So they reached a point, being a spokesperson for the Muslim community, for example, where I decided there was nothing I could do about it; standing up and talking about how the Muslim community – most Muslims in Australia are not terrorists is necessary at a level. In the end it reinforces the frame that says the way to understand and engage with the Muslim community is through terrorism.

Either they are terrorists or they're not. If they're not, and that's the best you can hope for, they are merely a negation of something, they are not something in their own right. That is you are not telling any other story about them. Muslims are not relevant when you have to ask – when work choices come up, for example, because they are not people with jobs or businesses or anything like that. So that is, the frame is suffocating and you can never escape the frame even if you're on the right side of the particular issue. And where that kind of activism is useful is it's attempting to change the frame of the discussion. A conversation which was once about Muslims and marrying too many people becomes about a broader social phenomenon which is not confined in the Muslim community and is in fact much more complicated than that. That's what's useful about it.

Larry Schwartz

I was thinking I liked the idea of engaging on your own terms, if you can, and I was thinking of an instance where we had the 'Be Alert Not Alarmed' – that fridge magnet we had in the Howard years. There was a case where a guy called Yasser Soliman, who was head of the Islamic Council, did this extraordinary thing. It was a radio talk back, I don't know which program; but this woman called Angela got on the radio and she said that she was confused. She'd seen a Muslim woman in a wheelchair and how did she know whether to be alert or alarmed ... It was post-September '11 and the host was outraged. People rang and they were outraged and, interestingly enough, they rang Yasser. Yasser asked for a tape and he came back the next day and gave a considered response.

He said, 'Look, this woman is wanting to understand she's not a redneck.' I think the host called her a redneck and he actually got together with her and they ended up meeting and they went together to the – she has a Catholic background – they went to the Jeffcott Street mosque. Yasser went to her and something positive came from it and so I'm thinking engaging is important, engaging in a considered way and trying to figure out how do we do it?

Hanifa Deen

What do you think Karen? We're talking about strategies that work and partial boycotts and so on.

Karen Farquharson

I didn't see the *Insight* program so I can't comment on it but if it was a program that was meant to be about Muslim polygamy, which is a very specific subset of polygamy, there's lots of other polygamies going on; you know disengaging with that and having other people brought in is probably a good thing.

I think the idea of changing the frame is really important. I'm just thinking of the context of the Sudanese research that we're doing. Clearly one of the frames that Sudanese-Australians are put in is this frame of violence. We've actually done a huge media analysis of that and there are lots of positive stories, but many of the stories are situating the Sudanese in this context of violence, of not fitting in, of not being Australian and I guess the challenge is how do you change that?

You can switch the story around, like the story that was in the newspaper this week about the African youth being more likely to be arrested. I'm not even sure that's accurate and switching it around to saying that most – the vast majority of African young people are actually not violent and really the problem is, you know, there are many more white young people who are being violent. Why is that not a story? Questioning the whole premise of the issue. I think it's challenging for minority groups who aren't coordinated to have a coordinated response in shifting their media frame.

Hanifa Deen

You're all calling for a more nuanced approach to media engagement and perhaps not automatically having our own stereotypes of the media because it's not all one giant or beast in a sense. But I'm going to be provocative; one last provocative question and then throw it to the audience. A lot of the media guys, a lot of them are men, particularly the journalists with the microphones who go out with the TV cameras and sometimes they're more comfortable talking to other men. So quite often, one of the reasons we got *Sultana's Dream* going was if you want to find out about the burqa or hijab or whatever ask a woman, instead of always asking the men; and the same with polygamy and a whole range of issues. How is that working out with the Sudanese community and the Somalians?

Karen Farquharson

We haven't done an analysis by gender. That will be interesting. I can comment on that in terms of the sports stuff, which is one of the other areas that I'm really interested in, race and sport and gender in sport and how sport is reported in the news and in the sporting context. Most of the sports journalists are men. If you look at the sports section in the newspaper the first ten pages are AFL, the last five pages are other things, maybe two articles on women. I had my students do a media analysis in my sociology sport class last semester and we found that over ninety per cent of sports articles were on men. Less than five per cent were on women and one person found there was more on horses than on women's sports – more on horse racing than on women's sport. So I think that the gender issue is an important issue.

I think it also interacts with race and ethnicity in particular ways in the media, so that women are portrayed in particular ways.

Larry Schwartz

I remember doing a piece about a child who had come here, an asylum seeker with her father. They were waiting to be reunited with the mother and the other child. Finally we got together and there was this beautiful story about a really sick child being reunited with her parents and the father wouldn't let the mother speak to us – she had to talk from another room.

We had a lot of difficulty saying to the father, 'Look, this is not the story where you speak for her.' I don't know what that is and maybe somebody can explain to me.

Waleed Aly

The point I make is that what we're talking about where the media comes with a set of requirements to generate its content and you then have a community that doesn't want to play ball with that. So, for example, in the Muslim community, all the leadership positions in the community historically have been held by men. They don't want to let women in on their boards. Then you finally get women on boards but they don't want to talk to the camera because they're – I don't know, they're worried about the backlash or they're just too shy to do it.

The difference is stupid men are prepared to talk on camera. Stupid women know not to, but the men will go, 'Yeah, okay, sure –' So you have this inherent selection bias because women aren't putting themselves forward and the structure of the community doesn't facilitate that, and that is not the media's fault. That's not a problem of journalism because in the case of the Muslim community, there is no shortage of desire to hear from Muslim women and to speak to Muslim women. What there is a shortage of supply really.

Question:

I'd like to ask whether you think there is something inherent in the formats, particularly television, but also to a lesser degree print journalism or media, that the issues and the people who are the voices of those issues become product and then need to be packaged in a way that is demanded by whatever the format may be?

Karen Farquharson

I'm a sociologist, I like social structures and so I guess the media is structured in particular ways so that particular stories are stories and other stories aren't stories and so the nature of the news industry shapes the kinds of things that we hear about, the kinds of things that are news. It's not just information, it's not just commentary – there are particular categories of things that become news and I think it does vary a bit by format. What's a good format for radio might not be a good format for a newspaper and I think it does vary a bit.

Larry Schwartz

Adam Bandt said something quite interesting recently on radio. He said that agreement goes on the back page and disagreement goes on the front page.

Waleed Aly

I'll just say format definitely does matter. I think if you're in a community organisation, for example, and you want to engage with media you need to think about this. They assume the president of an organisation or whatever is the person who is meant to do every TV interview and every radio interview.

But the fact is some people just don't present well on TV, they don't project well. Some people sound terrible on radio. You can get away with an accent much better on TV than you can on radio, for example, but people don't think about these things; and in print none of it matters, but your ability to phrase things in a way that jumps off the page matters. So these are the factors that are most predominate when people are making decisions about who to put on, who not to put on, and that's where there are real biases that need to be overcome. So to go back to the example of Muslim women, TV can become a real issue for them in a way that radio can't if there's a bias about headscarves or whatever. That's where those structural biases really do play a role.

Question:

Waleed, how often do TV cameras want a woman in a scarf?

Waleed Aly

Sometimes. It's contextual. It depends on the nature of the show and the story. It's fine if she's talking about that, but if she's talking about foreign policy or something, then no.

Question:

I just wanted to share a quick story. My partner is one of the graduates of the program that Karen was referring to and he's publishing constantly and writing and taking other courses and he's doing some really great things within his community as well. So programs like that are just fantastic.

Waleed, I've occasionally felt uncomfortable when you've been a guest and been sort of dragged in to represent a Muslim view. As a listener it makes me feel uncomfortable. It seems a completely different context to when you're presenting. Do you feel like you're sometimes being used in a tokenistic way and is there a negative to that as well as a positive?

Waleed Aly

That's absolutely true. I wasn't as bothered by that when I was in a community position where that was part of my role but now, yeah. But that's where it's a question of do I go there as a representative? Do I go there as a commentator who brings knowledge about something others don't have? In some cases it's as simple as I'm helping out a producer who is desperate for someone to talk on this and they're trying everybody and no one is picking up their phone and it's just a collegiate thing and it's as simple as that. But you're right, the tokenism thing you do have to be wary of. At the same time, this is where I come back to the thing about critique. It's not that I think the critique is invalid and like I say – and I'll remind you – I do the <inaudible> the critique and I accept it and I believe but sometimes wallowing in the critique prevents you actually getting on and doing. If you take that chance then who knows where it will lead? I'll leave it to you to judge whether or not that's a good thing.

Question:

I guess it's more of a comment and it's in relation to the website that Hanifa Deen edits and the purpose behind that; if you'd like to discuss that in relation to the idea that it's an e-magazine where Muslim women get to write about things that don't necessarily have to do with being a Muslim woman? You know, there are reviews of literature, there are articles on politics and it's pretty much what Waleed is doing in the general sphere of the media. He's just a guy that knows stuff, that's good on radio, that's a good journalist and he can talk about a range of things. He doesn't always have to be about him being a Muslim or his Arabic background or the colour his skin. He can just talk about stuff. About the football, about the Labor Government, about regular stuff that everybody else gets to talk about.

Hanifa Deen

Yeah, I think you're spot on there; that often you get asked to always talk about religion and there are times when I say, 'Look, sorry, you've got the wrong person here' and I'll refer to someone who will talk about Islamic theology and so on but thanks [Anur] for that and it reinforces the point that you were making about being asked to talk about non-religious topics, about economics, childcare, health issues and so on. It doesn't often come our way but I have been asked.

Waleed Aly

Also making that opportunity. Like one of the things I just did for myself and in the end turned out to be really significant, was I just started writing sport. I just started writing in the sports section of *The Age* about stuff and it wasn't about stuff that – you know, I wasn't being the Muslim supporter, 'What does the MCG look like through crescent shaped eyes?'. It wasn't that, I was just writing a thing. When I did *Conversation Hour* at first one of the reasons I thought that was really important was because I just went on and did whatever it was that I did. I wrote an article about St Kilda thinking of changing their theme song and I said this would be an absolute disaster and did a thorough analysis of the way all theme songs work and instrumentation and all this sort of stuff...

The thing is that was the stuff that got, for example, Jon Faine's attention. They look at someone and go, that person's interesting – there's something going on here and I want to know a bit more about what that is and that's when things happen.

Summary

Friday 24 August 2012

Immigration Museum, East Wing Gallery

Facilitator: Waleed Aly

So it's over to you and what we want to get from you here is your reflections on the things that you've heard; perhaps those ideas, those moments, those insights, those reports that have most surprised you. Maybe they've reaffirmed what you thought, but given you a fuller picture on which to base your position; and we might just keep it at that level for a while and then maybe for the last fifteen minutes or so allow you to expand, become Prime Minister for a day and see what are the kinds of decisions that you would make or what are the kinds of policy recommendations you might come up with. So you have a little bit of time to formulate your election platform. I'll give you fifteen minutes or so to do that. In the meantime if you've got reflections, here is a really good time.

Question:

My name's Karen. I probably should contextualise this. I was a project curator for the Identity exhibition under Moya. My observations and thoughts about this symposium were to think about the way that each of us has come to this symposium for different reasons and to maybe question why we haven't really talked about the journey that we all take. And how maybe we need to acknowledge that sometimes there are light-bulb moments, sometimes we're going to react in funny ways and I just want people – I guess I'm also asking people to think about where have they – where did they come from and where do they think they've gone?

Waleed Aly

You know, you're really tempting me to ask you to tell us where you came from? I'm not asking it at this point but if you want to volunteer it then I won't complain.

Question:

Well, what is my starting point? When I started at the museum I had these wonderful ideas of being able to talk to newer communities. I wanted to engage with Middle Eastern people, with Muslims, because I hadn't really been able to do that very much. I wanted to talk to African people. Both the research and the talking to people and that contact has probably meant that I've done quite a shift in perspectives of the way that I might want to deal with people; and perhaps I've become a bit more generous in trying to give people the benefit of the doubt. I don't think people most of the time are overtly trying to be discriminatory or bad, although sometimes they can be. And I think that it's made me think more about the nuances of our interactions.

I might be in a bad mood one day and that might colour my understanding of the way somebody has treated me or the way that I treat somebody else. In some ways I don't know that as a society we've got to a point where we can have difficult conversations about what happens between individuals without labelling it and coming to accusations of people being bad or being racist or insulting. I guess I'm just kind of in that space of wondering where do we go?

Waleed Aly

Well, that's a really interesting contribution, I think. Does anyone want to pick up that thread?

Comment:

I certainly feel that I've travelled far in the last two days but what you were referring to in terms of nuances and just constantly – you know, a friend of mine recently talked about questions behind questions and constantly questioning things and I'm also aware of stopping to do that – stop critiquing and act as well. However, I think no matter how we think we need to continually question the way we do that – and that's hard because that's sort of like un-learning and re-learning and that's kind of cognitive as well and that's really difficult. That's kind of where I'm sitting at the moment: how do I do that. It's scary and a good place to be.

Waleed Aly

It's a slow process though, isn't it? I don't want you to put any pressure on yourself that everything has to change right now.

Comment:

I want to comment about last night. Can I just maybe ask a quick show of hands how many people here were at the youth forum? Yeah? So it's – okay, so it's a small group out of the room here. Of the entire conference, including that, I think that was something – and we've had excellent speakers but that was something that I thought the format was just absolutely brilliant. For those that weren't there, there was the same sort of set up with a group of young people on stage. The audience – I don't think the audience was given a microphone at all, maybe at the very end?

But the participants on the stage were talking amongst themselves, questioning each other, passing the microphone backwards and forwards and that was bringing out both a youth voice and a whole lot of information that otherwise we wouldn't have got. I just thought that was really well done and it added something different.

Waleed Aly

Can I ask you to flesh that out because you saw that not a lot of people here – it might be good for you to...

Comment:

So I'll just say different young people from different backgrounds, talking about their experiences and things that have happened in school and this would all have been within the last five years. So they were current experiences and it was funny, people were open and it just brought out a lot of that real information, real data, not analysis of what's happening out there but what's actually happening out there right now and that was very valuable.

Waleed Aly

It's interesting because it seems to me that it's wonderful that the young people had this time but could it not have been shared? If everyone was in the room would that have been compromised?

The people who were there, was it because the forum was skewed towards you? No? I'm just interested in whether or not – you talk about how good it was to hear these alternative voices and the feeling in the room was totally different. If you brought that into the rest of the conference, if it wasn't just about a thing that is young people talking to young people and probably young people in the audience, would that have changed?

Comment:

I want to say that I think that it worked exceptionally well because we don't always get the opportunity to hear youth perspectives. What we were witness to, is youth engaging with each other without interference from adults, without opinions from adults. They were just having a good old yarn and – it was almost – it wasn't voyeuristic at all. It was really engaging. I'm so glad that I went. I've engaged with Tatiana. I want [Koori] kids involved in the conversation next time. I think it has to be broader. What I wanted to say last night was that the conversations were honest, they were raw, they provided me an opportunity to see hope within our community; and the opportunity to break down racism because racism is actually going to be broken down by that generation. If they continue, and we continue, to be the catalyst to ensure that they get the opportunity to keep having those conversations we're actually looking good. We're absolutely looking good.

Comment:

I think that we've been talking in terms of the context of creating safe spaces and I don't know if I'm an adult or a young person, but I feel like I'm a young person. I felt blessed and privileged but extremely daunted to be on that stage speaking myself. I imagine that it could have been brilliant, I'm sure, but I think that changing that setting and changing that context was – probably did allow for some of that change. So I think that – when we're talking about creating safe spaces I think that that was probably a wise move.

Comment:

Yeah, I stayed for the afternoon *Young People Growing up in Multicultural Melbourne* and it was just inspiring. It was here in this room and they were all really different in terms of their presentations and

different cultural backgrounds. I agree with Caroline that we're in good hands, but also one of the young women, [Nazrah] was quite amazing because she talked about starting school at Year 10 in Australia and here she was, being so articulate and being an activist for representing her community. It was just truly inspiring.

Question:

I've found the last two days to be quite inspiring. My only concern is that we might be preaching to the converted. How do we get this message out to the wider community? Because I'd like to get on the tram tonight and not be abused on my way home, which normally happens. So my question is how do we disseminate this, how do we make this part of the norm in the wider discourse and move beyond preaching to the converted?

Comment:

Can I say that we were very careful about understanding who was attending these two days. We have an enormous cross section of folk, from education, research, service providers, artist practitioners, et cetera, so we were really happy about that and community organisations... I'm not sure if Thelma is here from Frankston, and there are some people here from the Cranbourne Football Club... My point is that the people from within the community who are working at the local footy club will take that back to their footy club. I think that's a start at least. If we can continue to have those inter-agency, if you like, conversations, that's where it begins.

Comment:

Hopefully my comment builds on that. I thoroughly enjoyed the last couple of days and I think it's quite useful to finish off with the media problem. I really liked your comment that it's not monolithic, ancient out there or a totality. It's an androgynous complex and it's inherently contested but exactly that's why I'm interested. Why human beings in the media production produce simplistic reductions and outrageous or scandalous categories like boat people. Why do people in particular moments produce that sort of stuff and I think the biggest problem – and it links back to your comment– it's an insufficient sense of complexity and that includes media, that includes the political environment when I see the quality of political discourse in this country at the moment; and that includes academic knowledge production as well. A category like boat people is just as powerful in the public sphere context as academic categories, which are produced. That links back to the identities exhibition – it is so strong.

It's not strong in terms of promoting dialogue. I have a problem with this promoting because it can be easily critiqued as another form of social engineering or citizenship technology and it leads quite predictably to the responses you got.

I think the strongest point of that exhibition is that it sheds light on complexity. It shows how diversity is an integral part of any human life, as historically it's always been, will always be and therefore weakens the potentially conservative argument from within rather than creating itself as an activist, <inaudible> which creates a new binary and therefore stays out of the mainstream. It actually sheds light on the

complexity of reality as it is lived and performed on a daily basis and I think that's the very strongest part of that exhibition. I would take the response you guys got from that guy who responded – how did he put it? Our western, decent, liberal, democratic way of life, and I would exactly use those terms. What does 'western' mean, what does 'liberal' mean, what does 'democratic' mean, to dissect the inherent complexity, the difference within those taken for granted concepts which cannot explain me and no one in this room fully on a monolithic or homogenous level.

That's why I think museums are important. Proper knowledge production is important to allude to the complexity of life as it is lived beyond ideological crap.

Waleed Aly

Does anyone want to respond to that? What I'd be interested in knowing, do you feel that all the sessions that you've been to and the comments, even the questions from the floor, have they enhanced your sense of the complexity? I know exactly what you're saying because that is half the battle, is to complexify that which is complex. Now, we're human beings, we're always going to simplify. We can't actually function as human beings, we can't get through our lives in the absence of simplification, because we go mad with the stimuli. It just becomes too much.

It's about remaining critical of those sorts of things and recognising the distinctions that we draw, are distinctions that is an active thing. We draw them and asking questions about what they mean. So, yeah, if that's an outcome, that there's a greater sense of the complexity of the issues related to this entire field then I think – we come back to Nora's point about preaching to the converted. I agree there's a program with that. But sometimes preaching to the converted is a good thing. What it does is it can enhance the level of understanding of the converted. You can sing to the choir, but sometimes it's good to teach the choir to sing, you know.

Comment:

I grew up in Western Sydney and whenever I go home and I'm sitting at the kitchen table with my brother, who is the tradie, I can't have that conversation with him. He goes, 'Shut up! Just because you went to uni you think you're so smart. You don't know anything'. How do I talk to him? It's easier in our family or where I went to high school just not to have those conversations. It becomes conflict-driven. How do I sit on the tram and see people say things like – I don't know how to do it without being the one preaching, which is how people in my family kind of see me?

Comment:

I've been lucky enough to be involved in the LEAD project about which you heard a bit yesterday. I don't know if anyone saw the Shepparton Whittlesea stereotypically – pictures of people who are the targets of discrimination in this country and then characteristics of them as multiple choice on the side; general things like, you know, 'Loves the Lion King', you know, 'Cooks a great risotto', apart from the rice of course and to see the effect of that on ordinary, mainstream, Anglo-European Australians has been marvellous ...

Comment:

I've been honoured to be doing anti-racism training. Now we don't call it that. We've called it LEAD training and it's about embracing and accepting diversity; and it's been successful, partly because it is showing that we are admitting that we are human, that we suffer from illusions, that we leap to conclusions, that we exaggerate; therefore, our job is to start to do some critical thinking and start to recognise that there is always a generalisation hidden in any decision that we make and spotting it and outing it and knowing that, as people have said here today, it's a common stereotype.

Muslims are terrorists. Well, let's just look at that for a moment. 'Okay, is that true?' 'Christians are terrorists'. Some Christians are terrorists, some Muslims are terrorists, some people are terrorists, is what you get to. Once people start to see that generalisations are either, completely false and therefore harmful or they are true, you start to spot what's true and helpful or harmful and untrue and that's the sort of thing that means that we can address racism without accusing people. The whole point is not to go down into harmful reactions in the face of racism. It's to be helpful and to use humour or to use diplomacy or in some cases when it's extreme simply to reassure the target, rather than to do anything about the perpetrator in that circumstance.

Comment:

I can speak on two accounts from personal experience. I'm an academic who does research in this area and also from personal experience with my own family, having those difficult conversations with my father. I'm from the US and I was adopted. I'm South Korean by birth, but adopted into a white family in the US. When I was growing up, my dad would have a television channel set to Fox News. When you turn on the television there's like Fox News and Rush Limbaugh and all these crazy people talking on TV and so he was still quite – had quite racist attitudes towards minority people. I think the conversation with him was kind of at a personal connection, so telling him my own stories of discrimination or talking about other people's experiences and just making it more real and personal so that he knew – rather than saying, 'Oh, your attitudes are really offensive to me,' even though they really were. So kind of taking that angle seemed to be helpful.

On the other issue of experiencing racism or witnessing it on the tram; I've had personal experiences of that in Melbourne. I think first, as one who experiences it, I've occasionally spoken up about it and said, 'Look, I find that really offensive and I'm sure other people on this tram do as well.' And just the silence afterwards was actually quite debilitating; and so I think as somebody who might witness somebody speaking up it can be really helpful if you just say, 'Look, I support you, thanks for saying that.'

Thanks for saying something'; and just kind of banding together and having that support in public can be really helpful.

Hanifa Deen

Picking up the comment from the person over there, I think we've got what I call a bystander mentality. I travel by train and I do see something obviously. Even the word 'shame'. You don't have to have a tense

fight or anything, but to just pretend it's not happening or to turn away is not good enough. So it's what I call the bystander mentality. Social distance is a real issue. There was a big conference in Canberra two years ago and 200 non-Muslims came together with about fifty Muslims and I remember at afternoon tea one of the women came up, some of us were talking – 'us' being Muslims from around Australia who don't get a lot of chance to talk – sitting around, you know, and she said, 'Gosh, I didn't know Muslims had a sense of humour. I didn't know they smiled or laughed.' I thank her for that because that shows you what social distance is.

Another story. This woman also at the conference came up to me and said, 'What should I do? I get on the train every day. Two stops later this young woman wearing hijab gets on. She crouches in a corner. I want to speak to her but I don't know if she's got English.' I said, 'Why don't you just smile at her?' Just the body language, the smile or the whispered word. 'Shame' can sometimes work to stop the bystander mentality.

Waleed Aly

So you're in charge of the world for the next seven minutes. It's not a long time to implement a policy platform but it's something. What do we do? I see you're running for office very early.

Comment:

I've just got a little bug bear that needs to be fixed. Our Victorian legislation is a bit better than the Federal legislation and there's discussion at the moment from one side of politics about further reducing what's already in the Federal legislation. This gap between racism being unlawful and it actually being illegal; in fact I think it was one of the breakout sessions yesterday so maybe not everyone was there. The current situation is there is a lot of pressure to get a result has to rest on an ordinary citizen and that isn't the case for other aspects of life and society. Where there's a problem there's – you know if there's a problem with a telephone company there's an ombudsman to deal with it and I think there needs to be some policy changes.

Either the Australian Human Rights Commission needs to be given more power, more teeth, which was originally in the legislation when it was drafted and was all ripped out or again, my field is online stuff so [ACMED] sort of has the mandate but doesn't really have the ability to do anything unless it first goes through the classification board. It's just that these hoops that don't make any sense or we put in place new systems; an ombudsman or whatever, and I think that's something that the politicians need to address. Online at the moment there's been a high degree of racism against indigenous people.

People have tried complaining to the Human Rights Commission and they've been told – I'm sure it was done politely – to go away because they're not a member of the group that's being vilified; therefore they don't have standing to lodge a complaint.

My understanding from the Commission is they still listen to them enough to be able to log a complaint.

Comment:

That's people talking to me so I can verify that that was said. My understanding is it is being logged at least to say that people have made contact with them, but they can't turn it into a complaint because of the legislation. So it's got to be something that goes back to the politicians.

Comment:

I just want to – Helen was the person that also instigated the Facebook coming down through her actions. In the media the Human Rights Commission did make comment and did follow through. I just want to say that the Human Rights Commission actually do a really good job.

The Human Rights Commission is constrained by the legislation and this is something that really needs to go. Waleed's question was about the policy, it's a policy question that needs to go back to the politicians and.

Waleed Aly

Can I just get a response to that quickly because this is taking quite a legal/bureaucratic approach to the issue; is that – I'm not saying that as a critique, that's just a description. Is that what you want?

Comment:

Can I make a comment about that? I'm surprised that we are looking at that level of bureaucracy to create change. Change is possible but it's about each of us as individuals approaching our own member of parliament and those people of influence that we know at the local level and getting the notion of change introduced there. At some stage they all have to be part of the process of change anyway. That we start at the top where we are actually reducing our chances of getting the sorts of outcomes we need. You really have to build in the momentum for change at the grass-roots level, at that lower tier, the local member at least; come in from there to begin the conversations that need to happen.

Comment:

It's well established that legal frameworks aren't that helpful because to make something against the law simply drives the prejudice further down and deeper. So in fact it really is every single person that needs to change and gradually lead everybody else. You know, come through education and through kindness and compassion into – you know, to heal racism as Richard was saying. That was fantastic.

You know, much more opportunity to actually have a really sound understanding of the layers of complexity in Australia.

That means a much better Australian curriculum and Australian content in ways that really delve into the complexity and really bring out a kind of local biography. That's the way we're going to change ourselves.

Waleed Aly

I think it was the first comment we had about it's one thing identifying a problem to be solved, it's another understanding the people who embody it; and why it is that it exists. I think that's why it was such a valuable thing. I know you were all asked to find your inner racist. Is that true?

Okay, but you got to find it first, right? And I wonder whether or not – how many of us are in touch with our inner racist on a regular basis because if that's – yeah, because I don't know. It seems to me that racism demonises others but you can demonise a racist and (that's not to say that racism is good) but it is a human phenomenon that probably deserves a human understanding, and therefore a response on that basis.

Comment:

I was going to make the comment that the argument about needing to change people and grass roots and education and all this; I work in a lot of international forums and that comes through particularly strongly from the US. Laws do have a place, not just in changing behaviour but...

Laws also have a role in setting standards and setting norms. We have a lot of civil regulation to do, for example, company directors; all sorts of codes with penalties and all sorts of things where we've got a government regulator that can take people to court, get the court to impose fines, etcetera. I don't think the law should be completely forgotten. It does have a role, whether it's criminal or civil and I think we shouldn't push that to the side and say let's only focus on education and low-level change.

Symposium Reference Committee

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Venue

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‘Owning Racism – Can We Talk?’ A symposium for academics, service providers and arts practitioners was part of a suite of events including a Youth Forum held at the Wheeler Centre on August 23, 2012.
