POST-SECULAR NATION; or how "Australian spirituality" privileges a secular, white, Judaeo-Christian culture

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Sophie Sunderland

> *I think an Australian value is that we are a secular society in the correct meaning of that term, which is that we don't have an established religion but not secular in the sense that our culture is not influenced by the Judaic-Christian ethic; it plainly is*[1].
>
> *Prime Minister John Howard*

There is no doubt that Australia is a secular nation. Section 116 of the Australian Constitution guarantees that the state cannot legally establish a religion; nor can it impose religious observance. Although the vast majority of current Members of Parliament are Christian, Section 116 also states that a religious test cannot be required for individuals applying for public office. In this sense, church and state are separated in Australia by law. It follows that Australia cannot be called a Christian nation. But how does this relate to the Australian people, or everyday life? Census figures have consistently shown that although the majority of Australian citizens identify as Christian, this figure has waned significantly since World War Two along with declines in congregational participation (Bouma 2006: 53,78-9). Although Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion, it accounts for only 1.91% of the population (53). This paints a picture of a nation that is, as political scientist William E Connolly remarked in *Why I Am Not A Secularist*, a "most secular country" not only legally safeguarded against

[1] John Howard (22nd September 2006b) "Interview with Prime Minister John Howard", Interview, 22 September, The Australian Jewish News, Australia, viewed 24th October 2006, <http://www.ajn.com.au/news/news.asp?pgID=1679>

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religious domination, but also characterised, in the most general sense, by a lack of religious feeling and fervour (Connolly 1999: ix).

However, secularism is not necessarily reducible to Census figures or Constitutional law. Indeed, anthropologist Talal Asad complicates the dominant understanding of secularism offered above by claiming that it is invariably the state that defines the place of religion within the nation; thus suggesting that the lines between church and state are irrevocably blurred (2002: 16). This is a case in point, as the separation of church and state in Australia has been tested legally and consequently critiqued, such that it is possible to argue that church and state are not legally separated in Australia (Frame 2006; Wallace 2005). Moreover, Asad's rigorous and innovative study *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* finds that secularism functions differently in different nations, and that the meanings and assumptions that shape secularisms consequently also vary (2003: 5). It is therefore quite possible that Australia can be considered "secular," whilst the precise meaning of this rather elastic term remains unclear. In this paper I do not attempt to arrive at a cohesive understanding of what the secular *really* means. Instead, I argue that in its current usage in the Australian context, 'the secular' includes the elevation of the 'Judaic-Christian ethic' to the level of national culture.

Prominent within this paradigm is Spirituality Studies academic David Tacey, whose strong publication record includes television and radio appearances, articles and monographs dealing with Australian spirituality and religion, which have been broadly received and steadily produced since *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* appeared in 1995. Tacey consistently claims that Australian culture is becoming less "secular," in the dominant understanding of the term, and more spiritualised; a shift he claims baulks at the traditional channels of institutionalised religious ritual. Rather, "spiritual transformation" refers to new, "post-secular", symbolic and mythical connections with the land and claims for the agency of indigenous peoples. Tacey admits that "spirituality" is difficult to define, but suggests that it is not organised and institutionalised like "religion", but "a desire for connectedness, which often expresses itself as an emotional relationship with an invisible sacred presence" (2000: 17)[2]. His

[2] Tacey's definition relates closely in content to that of religious studies scholar Marion Maddox. She recounts common definitions of the spiritual as "individualised, internal, eclectic, dynamic, anti-institutional and free form," opposed to religion, which is "organised, external, inherited, formulaic,

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concern is that white, Anglo-Celtic Australians are far removed from spirituality, myth and symbolism, and it is from here that Tacey advances the need for a cohesive, national unity based on the validation of the spiritual. He therefore advocates a shift from the current, secularised 'national psyche', into a post-secular paradigm that embraces spirituality as an important facet of everyday Australian life: an 'Australian value', as it were. But on what premises might a national spirituality be founded in a multicultural, multifaith society? In this paper I endeavour to show that Tacey's spiritual realm is in fact unmistakably coded Christian, and by extension 'Judaeo-Christian'. Furthermore, this constructed realm cites a white, Anglo-Celtic subject associated with settler history as most in need of spiritual salvation. I argue that in effect, and instead of offering new alternatives for social change, Tacey's version of spirituality functions to reinforce and reproduce a transcendent narrative of the dominance of Judaeo-Christianity and white Anglo-Celtic subjectivity in Australian culture.

National identity and 'Australian values'

In order to clearly understand the significance of Tacey's spiritualised national identity, I'd now like to consider the broader context of anxieties about national identity. As part of his ongoing focus on national identity, Prime Minister John Howard's leadership from 1996 to present has been pervaded by his understanding that Australia has a cohesive, Australian "core culture" punctuated by "a core set of values" (2006). One of the main "Australian values", for Howard, along with secularism, is the "Judaeo-Christian influence":

> I […] regard the Judaeo-Christian influence on Australia as the single greatest influence for good in the Australian community. But I do respect the secular tradition of Australia […] My belief in the centrality of the family, my very strong belief in private business enterprise, my very strong belief in the I think the stabilising influence of the Judaeo-Christian ethic in this country. Those beliefs haven't changed at all. And you can find at every point of my time as Prime Minister a re-affirmation of those things (2004).

Here, Howard is careful to show that his value system does not involve the establishment of religion, but he simultaneously asserts that Judaeo-Christianity comprises the moral underpinnings of Australian society. This links notions of socio-political stability with Judaeo-Christianity in a moral form that effectively constructs a

regulated and traditional" (Maddox 2005: 161). These definitions will suffice for the purposes of this paper.

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singular moral system or code within Australia's ostensibly multicultural and multifaith society. This is then constructed as commonsensical or "ordinary" (Sinclair 2004:279). Although he does not refer to Howard's position on Judaeo-Christianity, Ghassan Hage makes an important point about the implications of Howard's transcendent 'Australian values':

> This is the belief that these values are a trans-historical core which is almost automatically espoused by good nationals and is responsible for giving society its enduring character amidst all the changes it can experience (2003:71).

Hage is suspicious of the "causal essence" implied in "national values" that, as he remarks, dismisses the changes in Australian immigration patterns and fluctuating constructions of whiteness[3]. In this instance, it is useful to consider Hage's comments in the light of Marion Maddox's more recent book *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, which asserts that under Howard's rule Australian secularism has been undermined by, among other practices, the coalition's espousing of Judaeo-Christian ethics and morals (2005). Maddox argues that events such as the emergence of the Family First party in federal politics at the 2004 election, and increased attention on the religious convictions of Members of Parliament, as well as Christian prayer meetings and forums, are results of shifts that have occurred during the first ten years of Coalition Prime Minister Howard's rule[4]. This means that under Howard, politicians are increasingly mobilised to launch conservative social policies in an effort to reinforce Judeo-Christian morality (Maddox 2005:166-227). Given that Howard cites secularism and Judaeo-Christian morality as transcendent values, we can see that, following Hage, these values are constructed as the incontestable, pre-existing bedrock of Australian society. In contrast to this, it is important to remember that "Judaeo-Christianity" is indeed a relatively recent term that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), is traceable to only 1899[5]. Further, through its representation of two linked traditions, the term arguably refers to an assimilationist reduction of

[3] Jon Stratton discusses this type of nationalism, which he calls "post-nationalism" in his 1998 book *Race Daze: Australian in identity crisis*, Annandale, Pluto. For Stratton, 1990s nationalist rhetoric favours cohesion, symbolism and myth over aggressive nationalist fervour, and is comprised of transcendent narratives that reinforce the hegemony of white, Anglo-Celtic Australians and culture. This issue of pre-existent white, Anglo-Celtic culture is also raised in Ghassan Hage's *Against Paranoid Nationalism*.

[4] For development and theorisation of this theme, see also: Holly Randell-Moon, "Creating Pope John Paul II: Religion, the 'War on Terror' and the Politics of Discourses of Howardage", *borderlands* 5.3 (2006): 40 paras.

[5] The term does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) as a headword. Instead, it is included in the set of examples grouped under the prefix "Judaeo," with the earliest entry of "Judaeo-Christianity" occurring in 1899. This, arguably, has the effect of rendering the term in a considerable state of flux as the meaning is not fixed with the authority of an etymology or general usage.

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religious diversity in which Judaism may be constructed as only an historical antecedent to Christianity (Jakobsen & Pellegrini 2000: 13-4; Stratton 1998a:228). Thus, the current prominence of Christianity of which Maddox writes, and which is framed by Howard as an enduring Judaeo-Christian moral code, represents the imagined, natural expression among "good nationals" of the "ordinary," and yet exclusionary, Australian character in which secularism is inextricably linked to Judaeo-Christianity (Imtoual 2004).

Maddox provides compelling evidence to stake her claim, but Howard's conflation of national identity with the "core value" of Judaeo-Christian ethics and morals is also symptomatic of more generalised debates about national identity that are not reducible to his leadership. Indeed, the importance of national identity has a history that emerged in the 1970s with the Whitlam government and was instrumental to debates during the 1990s over multiculturalism and the republic. During this time politicians from the left and right, embodied by Prime Ministers Keating and Howard respectively, in different ways, imagined Australian identity as multicultural, with an Anglo-Celtic core (Stratton 1998b:105-33). Jon Stratton argues that it is the official policy of multiculturalism itself that triggers "significant anxiety within the population about the cohesiveness of the Australian nation" (39). In this cultural and political context, it is no surprise that David Tacey's works, which are pre-occupied with cultural unity and a cohesive national identity under the banner of an implicitly Christian spiritual realm, were produced and popularised. Indeed, *Edge of the Sacred* was released in 1995, and has since been reprinted at least four times. It is rumoured to have been listed by then Prime Minister Paul Keating as recommended reading for his Cabinet (Gelder & Jacobs 1998:9). This may or may not have occurred, but given the context I have just described, it is certainly not implausible that a government and populus mired in concern over national identity would be interested in a text that advocates a universalist solution to cultural fragmentation.

Indeed, a broad literature has emerged since 9/11 and the Tampa crisis in 2001 that discusses how issues of social cohesion and concomitant concerns about multiculturalism and national identity are highlighted and expressed through the

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production of anxieties about asylum seekers, Muslims and terrorists[6]. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss and develop these issues, it would appear that the privileging and naturalisation of Judaeo-Christianity which I am identifying can be seen to be mobilised in the active marginalisation of particular groups within Australian society and ideology; thus emphasising the multiple exclusions that underpin the structure and function of the 'secular' in this instance.

Whiteness and spiritual emptiness

Tacey works in the fields of spirituality studies, literary studies and Jungian psychoanalysis, and has published six books and one edited collection since 1995, with titles including *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (2002) and *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (2003). Tacey's thesis is that the 'Australian psyche' needs to be healed. Due to the processes of secular modernity and the legacy of rationality from the European Enlightenment, he argues that the 'national psyche' has become too secular and rationalistic. But in advocating a cultural shift to the post-secular, Tacey is not suggesting amendment of Section 116 of the Constitution. As we have seen, the secularism outlined in the Constitution ably co-exists with a transcendent and arguably hegemonic Judaeo-Christian moral code. Instead, Tacey's post-secularism signals a shift to a cultural embrace of a symbolic, mythical outlook and appreciation for the Australian landscape and indigenous cultures, which hence constitutes the spiritual.

Tacey constructs a causal link between "white Australians" and the condition of Australian society:

> The gnawing emptiness that many white Australians feel at the centre of their lives is spiritual in nature. Many try to fill this emptiness with compulsive economic consumption, absorption in the mass media, faddism, cults, ideologies, substance abuse and various other kinds of escapism. Our symptomatic behaviour gives us no sense of enduring meaning and the inner emptiness always returns. The so-called 'identity crisis' of white Australians is itself a spiritual crisis; it is a sense of disconnection from ourselves, from the land, from history and from the world. […] Only by way of reconciliation with the land and its indigenous people can we achieve that belonging, connectedness, identity, purpose we seem to lack. These are the spiritual values driving a grassroots movement that will transform this country (2000:128).

[6] For development and discussion of these issues, see: Mares, Peter. *Borderline: Australia's response to refugees and asylum seekers in the wake of the Tampa.* Sydney: UNSWP, 2002; Perera, Suvendrini. (ed.) *Our Patch: Enacting Australian Sovereignty Post-2001.* Perth: Network, 2007; Mason, Victoria. "Strangers Within in the 'Lucky Country': Arab-Australians after September 11", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.1 (2004): 233-43.

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Firstly, given the use of the generalised pronoun 'we', Tacey's assumed reader is obviously 'white'[7]. This implies that non-'white', Australians are exempted from spiritual transformation. I will discuss Tacey's usage of the term 'white' more closely in a moment. Secondly, the homogenisation of indigenous peoples as a spiritually rich or complete group is implied through their construction as of the land, in opposition to 'white' Australians' imagined emptiness and disconnection from this same land. Within the logic of this excerpt this works to exclude indigenous peoples from the economic consumption, mass media and so on that Tacey cites to characterise 'white' contemporary Australian life. In this way, indigenous peoples and cultures are aligned with an idealised, post-secular spiritual realm that is beyond the reach of 'white Australians'. Aboriginality and 'the spiritual' are thus positioned as always already *outside* the implicitly white, capitalist and modern sociopolitical realm. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, it is perhaps this understanding that causes Tacey to code the sacred as an 'invisible' presence that is also 'indigenous'. Hence, Tacey does not address non-'white', non-indigenous Australians and thus the complexities of a multicultural society are further evaded. We can see here the previously discussed narrative of an Australian national identity that is underpinned by an imagined 'white' core playing out in Tacey's work, which I will now suggest functions as a naturalisation of white, Anglo-Celtic subjectivity and culture.

For Tacey, the imposition of a monolithic, transcendental spiritual 'other-world' on the Australian sociopolitical, or material sphere, provides the key to transformation of the 'white' condition, which can be seen as *morally* depraved, if we consider his citation of faddism, cults and escapism through drug use as chief social problems. This 'other-world', or realm, is narrativised as trans-historical and always already existent:

> First we had spirituality (largely encased in religious tradition), then we had no spirituality (during the triumph of scientific materialism), and now we have spirituality again (looking for a new home, but not sure where it can be found).
>
> This little three-part story could describe the history of Western culture, with its dramatic shift from the premodern religious worldview, through secular humanism and reductive materialism, to contemporary postmodern science, with its renewed interest in the sacred potentials of matter in particular and human experience more generally. This narrative is also the story of my own life, from childhood religious belief, through intellectual enlightenment and disbelief, to present eclectic and pluralist spirituality. And this three-fold pattern is the history of Australia, from traditional Aboriginal animism, through white Australian sceptical materialism, to

[7] The broader context of *Edge of the Sacred* particularises the term 'white' to indicate a dominant, white, Anglo-Celtic subjectivity linked to Australia's settler history.

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> the present postcolonial and postmodern era where so many of us are talking about the 'spirit' of place, earth spirit, ancestral spirit, and even the spirit of things. After a relatively brief period of cultural exile, spirit has come back to haunt us, and it looks like being back to stay (2000:33).

Here, the 'spiritual' is constructed as autonomous, and so it can be read that Tacey imbues the spiritual realm with an agency that the material world is therefore denied. Also, Tacey's notion of the post-secular is framed here as the "postcolonial and postmodern era," in which the spiritual, constructed through an historical narrative as ever-present even during its apparent "exile" in 'white', secular modernity, has seemingly returned. This amounts to "a post-secular enlightenment, where religion and spirituality will return to centre stage and where secular materialism will appear out of date and anachronistic" (ibid: 7). However, if we return to the extensive quote above, it is of note that the apparent agency of a pre-existing 'spirit', which can be read here as the force that animates the norms and values of society at a particular time, is what enables Tacey to compose such a history. Again, we see that in the "post-secular enlightenment" he advocates, modernity and secularism are coded 'white'. To what or whom might this refer?

If we consider Stratton's claim that the official multiculturalism of the 1990s depends upon an "Anglo-Celtic core", it could be supposed that the 'white' people and culture referred to by Tacey are representatives of an imagined pre-existing, dominant group linked to colonial times and practices. Indeed, Tacey makes this clear himself when he explicitly indicates that his term 'white' refers to Anglo-Celtic subjects linked to Australia's colonial history (1995). This functions as an enduring, historical fantasy about a 'white' Australian 'core' identity. Jan Larbalestier states:

> Appeals to a collectivity of 'white' Australians are a means of constituting the historical and social space of a 'white' Australian culture and its subjects. Notions of whiteness then signal the idea of a continuing and essential homogeneity of a core Australian identity. Constructions of such an identity, among other things, serve to elide both the cultural diversity of Australia's population since 1788 and the contested and contradictory aspects of its construction (1999:146).

Thus 'white' cannot be considered a stable, enduring category but rather signals the imposition of an ideological, homogenous culture. I would like to further expand this point because I will later argue that it is through this generalised 'white' narrative that Tacey links an imagined core, white, Anglo-Celtic culture with a transcendent Judaeo-Christian moral code, which is then nevertheless constructed as 'spiritual' renewal or transformation. Jon Stratton argues in "Multiculturalism and the Whitening Machine, or

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How Australians Become White" that in Australia the dominance of Christianity and Anglo-Celtic subjectivity are "entrenched" by official multiculturalism (1999:163). He states:

> Whiteness has not disappeared in Australia as a key category in the construction of the nation. Rather, it has become abstracted into a general moral system, and ex-nominated, coded through terminology that identifies certain people as Anglo-Celtic and mainstream (ibid: 180).

This "general moral system" of the Anglo-Celtic "mainstream" is a Judaeo-Christian "monomorality" that Stratton neatly describes as "the preservation of Christian, European, indeed Anglo-Celtic white morality as the only legitimate moral system in Australia" (ibid: 181). The imagined "monomorality" is, as we have seen, "Judaeo-Christian." Indeed, Tacey states:

> The notion that Christianity could be swept aside saddens and alarms me, because I then have to ask: But if individualistic and feel-good [New Age] spirituality is to replace it, from whence will the moral dimension and ethical aspect of human civilisation arise? (2001a:5).

Tacey's spiritually empty white, Anglo-Celtic subject, then, is the representation of an anxiety about the centrality and transcendence of a Judaeo-Christian monomorality under multiculturalism.

Why is the white, Anglo-Celtic subject so important to Tacey's thesis about the return of spirituality? Tacey uses a Jungian psychoanalytic model based on archetypes in his argument that reconciliation cannot be achieved until white, Anglo-Celtic Australians encounter and validate an 'aboriginal' archetype within the collective unconscious. As I have argued, this constitutes an imagined 'core culture'. Tacey is careful to point out that this archetypal awareness is not the same as borrowing from an Aboriginal person or cultural product. For this reason he designates a capital 'A' for Aboriginality, as opposed to a small 'a' for the Jungian archetype, which is alternatively named the "archaic dreaming soul" (1995:11-2). Through this distinction Tacey is careful to state that he does not advocate the appropriation of indigenous peoples and culture, but rather refers to a mythical and symbolic, psychic transformation that signifies a shift to a post-secular national identity. But as has been noted elsewhere, Tacey does indeed blur distinctions between the small 'a' aboriginal archetype and Australian Aboriginal peoples not only by his reference to the Dreaming, but also by his reference to the archetype as "50 000 years old": a figure that undoubtedly indicates the history of

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indigenous cultures in Australia (1995:137)[8]. Further, this Jungian model configures social change as the activity of the core culture of white, Anglo-Celtic subjects with access to sociopolitical agency. Indigenous cultures are relegated to both spiritual and premodern, 'archaic' realms; racially marginalised through a transcendent, archetypal spirituality that is white, Anglo-Celtic and Judaeo-Christian; and further 'spiritually' marginalised in this construction of archetypal spiritual plenitude in opposition to the imagined vacuity of white, Anglo-Celtic subjects.

The anthropologist Andrew Lattas has argued that the vacant, empty interiorised space that is imagined in contemporary, popular representations of non-Aboriginal subjectivity, and which is accounted for as a lack of spirituality, is indeed a "space of power" (1992:51). He argues that this expropriation of subjective space for spiritual 'lack' operates as a locus through which panic about a waning 'national identity' can be expressed. Lattas is concerned that the creation of inner emptiness and concurrent extension of psychoanalysis to a national psyche produces 'empty' white people as victims of colonial history. He argues:

> In this discourse Australians are instructed that they can overcome their inner nothingness by overcoming the haunting emptiness of the landscape; and that this is most likely to be attained through discovering the unique spiritual meanings which Aborigines read into the land, and by making these the basis of interiority. (1992:52).

Further, Lattas states:

> In this psychoanalytic nationalist discourse the Aborigine also becomes a Christ-like figure inside our national psyches, and so in place of the killing of Christ we now have the killing of our (aboriginal) unconscious, reconstituted as the site of our sense of the sacred. […] Here, the suffering of Aborigines is internalised and appropriated by whites. The nation's slaughter of Aborigines is reduced to the sacrificial loss of its own spiritual identity, as though the real loss was the killing of a psychic portion of itself. Such narratives, with the focus on the existential side of suffering, allow whites to emerge as the 'true' sufferers of history, for it is they who have lost their souls and consequently wander soul-less (57).

Lattas' work, written in 1992 and thus three years before Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred*, succinctly identifies the psychoanalytic, nationalist paradigm that Tacey's work reproduces and reinforces. Lattas makes very clear that this works in the interests of the white, Anglo-Celtic subject and ideology. However, who is implied in Lattas' usage of *our* national psyches, and *our* sense of the sacred? The appropriation of Aboriginal

[8] See also: Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs (1998) *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation,* Carlton South, Melbourne UP; Mitchell Rolls, (1998) "The Jungian Quest for the

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suffering "by whites" is then equated with "the nation's […] spiritual identity". Here, Lattas repeats the structure I have been pointing to, in which an imagined, core, white Anglo-Celtic subjectivity is established as coterminous to national identity. Tacey's positioning of Aboriginal people as responsible for the spiritual 'salvation' of non-Aboriginal Australians, and by extension to reinforce the white, Anglo-Celtic subject as synonymous to Australian identity, is further developed in the following claim: "It is by rediscovering the presence of the spirit in creation with the help of indigenous religions that *Christianity* can recover the expansive dimension of the sacred" (Tacey 2000:103 my emphasis). Following the logic of Tacey's argument about social transformation, Christianity is clearly linked to the problem of the spiritually vacuous white, Anglo-Celtic subject here. Further, due to a racially constructed spiritual identity, Aboriginal Australians are here constructed as spiritual relics and providers of social/spiritual change, as the imagined Christian, Anglo-Celtic 'mainstream' is reinforced.

Tacey describes *Edge of the Sacred* as a "brainstorming source-book, containing many embryonic themes" of the ideas he later deepens and develops in *ReEnchantment* and then in *The Spiritual Revolution* (2000:12). The fact of the publication of these books, as well as Tacey's numerous appearances on television programs such as ABCTV's *Compass* and on Radio National's *Religion Report* and *The Spirit of Things* indicates a considerable level of popularity and consumer interest[9]. It is therefore important that we take seriously his advocacy of an Australian spirituality. I would like to dwell a little further on his construction of Aboriginality:

> It is an appalling irony that, in tertiary education at least, Aboriginals will not discover an environment in which their spiritual culture can be shared and their gifts received. In 'cultural studies' programmes, they will meet a radical, elitist, subversive culture based on Marx and Foucault that will want to turn them into radicals and victims. The studies will be based on power, resistance and revolution, not accommodation or growth through love. They will meet a hardened materialist culture that regards sacredness as "cultural property", and such property, they will be told, ought to be withheld and protected, not shared. The Aboriginal way, however, works in reverse: to withhold spiritual knowledge is to destroy it; only in sharing it is it strengthened and renewed (2000:160).

Aborigine Within: A Close Reading of David Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia.*" *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 25: 171-87.

[9] Following are several examples of Tacey's media appointments, of which there are many more: (2004) "Mysticism and Rationalism", Transcript, 11 January, Compass ABCTV, Australia, viewed 15 April 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s1027718.htm>; (2001b) "Jung and the New Age", Interview, 14 October, The Spirit of Things, Radio National, Australia, viewed 15th April 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s389645.htm>; (1999) "ReEnchantment", Transcript, 11 August, The Religion Report, Radio National, Australia, viewed 15 April 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/relrpt/stories/s42985.htm>.

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This passage, particularly in the light of Lattas' comments, renders Tacey's claim that he is not advocating appropriation rather weak. The ideological narrative that functions here is not only that all Aboriginal people are spiritual, but that all Aboriginal people, by virtue of racial identification, have a gift of spirituality that they are compelled to give. The sense that Aboriginal people will be taught to "share" their "sacredness", alongside terms such as "growth through love" can be read as subtleties that stand in for the more pejorative "appropriation". Thus, difference is erased, marking Aboriginal people as primordial spiritual relics, whose 'sacredness', a term which Tacey uses interchangeably with 'spirituality', is ably shared with and disclosed to the white, Anglo-Celtic, spiritually 'empty' core culture. Notably, this is framed as "the Aboriginal way", which suggests a convenient, homogenous, trans-historical cultural reality. Spiritual transformation in Australia then, marginalises indigenous peoples even in their apparent – mythic – centrality to the process.

Insurmountable differences

It is useful now to discuss the discourses of writing about the sacred, which are highlighted by a reading of Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs' *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and identity in a postcolonial nation* in which they explore the ways that Aboriginal sacredness impacts upon and shapes modernity in Australia. They acknowledge levels of incommensurability between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia, alongside points of contact as part of the postcolonial condition which they define as follows.

> The impulse is […] towards reconciliation at one moment, and division at another: 'one nation' and a 'divided nation'. It is the ceaseless movement back and forth between these positions which is precisely postcolonial (1998:24).

Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, this postcolonialism distances itself from an understanding of the postcolonial that supposes an historical shift to a moment 'after' colonialism. Instead, in this reading, Gelder and Jacobs conceptualise the postcolonial as a state of flux, which includes the assumption of difference between constituents, as well as colonising and decolonising tendencies and aims. Further, this definition does not assume an homogenous, trans-historical Aboriginal identity as that offered by Tacey, and thus makes space for partial, situated readings of sacredness instead of a transcendent spiritual subjectivity. It is of note that Gelder and Jacobs distance their work with Aboriginal sacredness from that of Tacey:

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> Tacey privileges the 'psychological': he has nothing to say […] about Aboriginal people and politics. Indeed his refusal to speak about Aboriginal people politically is precisely what enables him to do away with that capital 'A'. He has empowered them spiritually so that they may transform 'all of us'; after putting them to use in this way, all Tacey appears able to do is leave them behind (13).

And further:

> Aboriginal sacredness is also a fact of the modern, bureaucratic life: worldly, rather than other-worldly. It is continually being dealt with by governments, businesses, mining companies and mediators (1-2).

Gelder and Jacobs clearly disapprove of Tacey's archetypal discourse; most particularly because of its ultimate marginalisation of indigenous peoples and cultures and concomitant glossing over of everyday life in the sociopolitical *milieu*. Within the logic of Gelder and Jacobs' postcolonialism, Tacey's work falls outside of the postcolonial paradigm because, for Gelder and Jacobs, Tacey has absorbed Aboriginal people into a spiritual other-world, for the purposes of transforming the imagined spiritual vacuity of the nation. Although not specified by Gelder and Jacobs, for Tacey, 'the nation' is a white, Anglo-Celtic totality; in his work he makes little mention of other ethnic groups and the historicity of these categories. It is also important to remember here that the spiritual realm, represented by the Otherness of a Jungian-inspired notion of indigenous spirituality, is nonetheless a Judaeo-Christian, white, Anglo-Celtic construction, as discussed earlier. Thus it can be seen that this 'spirituality', which is projected onto the Aboriginal people and culture, need not have any relevance to the religions and spiritualities of many indigenous peoples and cultures[10]. What I am trying to make clear is that regardless of what realities there might be about the spiritual practices of Aboriginal, as well as non-Aboriginal people, a universalistic, Eurocentric and Judaeo-Christian model is imposed as 'the spiritual'. This eclipses the possibility for fluctuating, intersubjective and interfaith dialogue and moral codes, and thus does not perform the postcolonial relation mentioned in *Uncanny Australia*, where we can see that the levels of incommensurability between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures are acknowledged.

[10] Justin Clemens and Dominic Pettman conduct, through engagement with Giorgio Agamben's work on sacrifice and the state, a reading of the Aboriginal sacred that is careful to recognize cultural incommensurability. They state, "the seductive myth of the Aboriginal sacred is a white man's mythology" and describe Tacey's notion of spiritual exchange between Australian "Europeans and Aboriginals" as "utterly vapid" (2004) *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and the Object*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam UP: 175, 209.

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Tacey is significantly uncomfortable with difference. Following the publication of *Edge of the Sacred*, Australian academic Mitchell Rolls critiqued the text in the *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, after which a debate with David Tacey ensued. In his article, Rolls communicates his concern about Tacey's usage of a European, Jungian psychoanalytic model in relation to indigenous peoples. He summarises the logic of Tacey's argument:

> Hence, prior to colonisation, Aborigines were, in effect, in wait for a disrupting spirit that would enter their psyche and release them from their bonds, thereby enabling an uncertain and painful growth, but growth nevertheless. This transposition of Australia's political and social history, and Aboriginal life pre- and post-European settlement, into a Jungian psychodrama results in a startling hypothesis: in archetypal terms the arrival of the colonists was a preordained and necessary event (1998:179).

Rolls' reading of Tacey's works is that indigenous peoples and culture are constructed as dependent upon Jungian psychoanalysis and spiritualism, and thus a European model of subjectivity and change, in order to transform. What is important to my argument is the style of debate that took place within the journal. David Tacey refutes Rolls' claims in the same volume of the journal. It is notable that Tacey draws attention to a gap between Rolls' academic critique and his 'spiritual' position: a gap which is constructed as almost insurmountable:

> The *differences* between my own intellectual position and his reductive or materialist worldview strike me as almost *insurmountable*. […] He asks how I can impose "alien" archetypal structures upon Aboriginal culture, when the claim of archetypal theory is that it posits a universalising discourse in which no culture or time is alien to its theoretical structures. To materialists and social constructivists, my views appear antiquated, naïve, and out of touch. Rolls writes with the typically superior and higher position that is adopted by reductive thinkers who imagine themselves to be above the myth-making that they are attempting to deconstruct. Haven't I heard that universals no longer exist, that archetypes are Eurocentric, that spirituality is a fraud, that essentials are out? Yes, I have heard these claims for many years now, over and over, and yet they do not appear convincing or valid to me. There is a traditional wisdom that is *quite separate* from our clever contemporary intellectualism (1998:189, My emphases).

Here, the spiritual is directly opposed to the material world. Interestingly, this is couched in an idea about Rolls' academic position, which for Tacey connotes false superiority and a rejection of myth-making, spirituality and traditional wisdom. Rolls goes on to reject this assumption in the next edition of the journal. It seems that the difference of Rolls' position is not able to be accommodated and validated by Tacey, and vice versa. Rather, the tone is condescending and irate, and here Rolls' authority to speak on the subject is questioned. Significantly, Tacey identifies closely with the "traditional wisdom" of universalist archetypal theory, while dismissing Rolls' analysis as merely "contemporary." Here we can see the preference is for a transcendent,

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cohesive narrative structure that is inclusive, pre-existent, eternal and stable, rather than fluctuant. As I will now discuss, the celebration of this narrative enables Tacey to suggest the dismantling of the secularism he associates with 'intellectualism' and rationality.

Tacey and Rolls' debate does not conclude with Tacey's refutation, as Rolls offered a rebuttal in the following edition of the *Melbourne Journal of Politics*. But the difficulty is not their differing perspectives. Rather, Tacey's 'spiritual' position, which is the outlook he uses to write about Australian society, is used to frame Rolls' position as somewhat blinded: "Apparently, it takes a spiritual awareness to see this spiritual process" (1998:191). Indeed, I suggest that Tacey's real concern is that Rolls' critique appears to be, in opposition to the spiritual view, distastefully secular.

What is meant by the term 'secular' in this instance? The body of Tacey's works on national transformation suggest that it is the apparent secularism of the Australian 'national psyche' to which he is opposed. He states: "It is only through […] risk and adventure that our culture can break out of the imprisoning secular mask that currently confines and limits it" (2000:13). As I have mentioned, Tacey is not concerned with an overturning of Section 116 of the Constitution. Indeed, this political secularism preserves the free exercise of any religion, and by extension spirituality, without intervention by the state (Bouma 2006:8-9). Rather, Tacey's secularism, which refers to a rational 'national psyche' that he argues needs to shift to a focus on myth and spirituality, also appears to involve the construction and subsequent silencing of 'secular' dissent, as we have seen in the debate with Rolls. As I discussed earlier with relation to Howard, current understandings of the Australian 'national psyche' can be seen to valorise 'ordinariness' and a retreat from 'extra-ordinary' phenomena such as spirituality and religion (Sinclair 2004:279)[11]. This 'secular/ordinary' national imaginary, to use Jennifer Sinclair's demonstration of the interchangeable nature of the terms, paradoxically includes the privileging and naturalisation of a transcendent Judaeo-Christian 'monomorality', as I have demonstrated (Sinclair 2004:280). Ironically, then, Tacey's secularism functions as both product and reinforcement of this imaginary, which is perhaps why he uses the metaphor of a mask in the quote above,

[11] This view is arguably shared by Gary Bouma, for whom Australian spirituality is an expression of the sentiments that underpin the Anzac legend, which he describes as "a shy hope in the heart" and "laid back" (2006: 27-8, 35).

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suggesting that the spiritual/Judaeo-Christian culture persists beneath a 'secularism' that is only a veneer. The post-secular shift he desires is therefore a functionary of the secular/ordinary national imaginary, which, as discussed earlier, mobilises the dominance of a Judaeo-Christian monomorality and white, Anglo-Celtic culture. We can therefore understand that Rolls' and Gelder and Jacobs' refusals to validate the 'spiritual' and to write from within that imaginary, but rather to comment on the sociopolitical implications of its construction, particularly with respect to Aboriginality, constitutes a site of "almost insurmountable" difference for Tacey.

Language, Politics and Spirituality

'Spirituality' is a broad, perhaps ubiquitous term that is often loosely defined as a privatised version of religious faith or connection (Bouma 2006:6-16; Heelas 1996:2). But, as we have seen in the case of Tacey's work, other agendas can take place in its name. In "The Politics of Spirituality: The Spirituality of Politics" Canadian theorist Geraldine Finn discusses her reservations about the ways in which what she calls "postmodern spirituality" is represented. She says that when "spirituality" refers to an autonomous, benevolent realm that acts upon society, or the material realm, the results are politically conservative. This is because social agency is essentially removed from the sociopolitical sphere. She shows that this is the effect of a particular use of language:

> I have always been uncomfortable with the language of spirituality and its tendency to 'other-worldliness' in particular; that is, with its presumption of and aspiration to a being-otherwise-than-being *in and of the material world* – to a being beyond 'materialist interpretations' […] The differentiation of 'spirit' from 'matter', for example, both mystifies and falsifies the complex reality of material being by splitting off from it its most creative and potentially subversive possibilities and effects and syphoning them off into and for some 'transcendent' space of other-worldliness, of the *immaterial*: of God, the soul and/or the human spirit (1992:159-60).

Finn's discomfort is not with 'spirituality', however that might be configured, but with the *language* of spirituality that constructs an 'other-world' and thus eclipses the conditions that underpin its representation in the material world. What Finn is reminding us of, is that 'spirituality', when not seen as a product of the context in which it is produced, limits the agency and potential of life in the material realm. For Finn, the transplantation of material concerns into a discourse of 'spirituality' represents and reinforces the disempowerment of the sociopolitical sphere. Finn most particularly

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specifies 'transcendence' as the trope that effects the representation of the spiritual as 'other-worldly' and thus outside of sociopolitical reality.

In this essay, Finn discusses the way in which 'being' is organised in modern culture as 'being as': this is an effect of categorical, sociopolitical identity features such as woman, man, Jew, Aboriginal. The subject cannot embody the categories of 'woman', 'man', 'white' and so on fully, but only to a greater or lesser extent. For Finn, the experiences of *excess* and lack produced by the representations of 'self' that are offered by these categories are ineradicable, and indeed "the necessary and indispensable conditions of ec-stasy, creativity, change and critique" (163). Thus, rather than looking for an 'other-world' to originate change, Finn situates agency in the space *between* text and context, personal and political, that is generated by experience of "being as". She refers to this simply as the "ethical space-between". Her ethics maintains space for transgression within the material context of cultural production. Finn shows that this enables an interrogation of the political status quo, which is however not enabled by the transplantation of political concerns to an-other world that offers the illusion of "a better deal" but in effect reinforces the categories that are experienced as limiting in the material world (161).

This is crucial to an understanding of the way in which Tacey's representation of white, Anglo-Celtic people and culture as non-spiritual, and subsequent desire to remedy this through an abstracted notion of Aboriginal spirituality, can be read as *unethical*. This is because Tacey does not put whiteness and Aboriginality, as Geraldine Finn suggests, "into (the) question" by historicising and contextualising – and in so doing particularising – his ideas. Hence, given Finn's argument, Tacey's work can be read as actively limiting these 'categories' and thereby enacting a neo-colonial position; whilst apparently social agency is co-opted into the interests of spirituality, it is clear that Tacey's white, Anglo-Celtic subject is the beneficiary of the spiritual "revolution". By refusing to deconstruct and particularise these categories and the function of spirituality in relation to them, Tacey effectively closes off the 'ethical' "*space-between*" the socio-political category and its lived reality; and with it the opportunity for transgression and transformation he so desires.

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Conclusion

Although 'spirituality' might seem an innocuous, personal, perhaps 'warm and fuzzy' term, and although it is clear from David Tacey's work that he hopes for beneficial changes to Australia's social problems through acknowledgement of deeper meanings and connections between individuals, nature and society, the implications of his usage of this term are cause for concern. As I have explained, the post-secularism Tacey constructs involves the privileging of a Judaeo-Christian monomorality, which is reproduced and reinforced through the mainstreaming of white Anglo-Celtic subjectivity, and which is already in place as an 'Australian value', as is celebrated in the political sphere by Howard. Here, national identity is staked on grounds that are fundamentally separate from the social and political reality of Australia's ostensibly, and at least officially, multicultural and multifaith socius. This elision enables the privileging and naturalisation of a white, Anglo-Celtic, Christian Australia which is asserted in spiritual terms by Tacey as a 'grassroots value'. The construction of this transcendent, hegemonic, unimpeachable realm or 'other-world' is central to the function of Australian secularism, which, in turn, is inextricably linked to the ideology of Howard's conflation of 'ordinariness' with a transcendent, white, Anglo-Celtic subjectivity that is underpinned by a 'core' Judaeo-Christian morality.

Biographical note

Sophie Sunderland is a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Australia within the discipline of English and Cultural Studies. Her thesis analyses representations of the secular, spiritual and sacred in Australian and Canadian popular cultures, with attention to the importance of religion and whiteness to these secular, multicultural nations.

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