

# the face of evil

*Demonising the Arab Other in  
Contemporary Australia*

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## — INTRODUCTION

The 'face of evil' has become a common media and political figure over the last few years. Most typically evoked in representations of international terrorism—the events of September 11, 2001, the Bali and London bombings and so on—the 'face of evil' has also become a recurring motif in local media representations of crime when questions of certain, visibly distinct, cultural and religious backgrounds are seen to be involved. Newspaper articles about 'race rape' and 'ethnic crime' among young Arab and Muslim men are often accompanied by graphic images of alleged wrongdoers who are seen to embody evil.

I'm interested in the figure of 'the face of evil' for several reasons. First, it builds on my work on moral panics around the construction of the 'Arab Other' as uncivilised, animalistic and evil.<sup>1</sup> Since that work, evocations of evil have become increasingly common, particularly in the wake of the 'war on terror'. This demonstrates that a highly moralised, and moralistic, language of good and evil has come back into vogue in recent years, not just in response to the 'war on terror' but also partly as a result of the resurgence of conservatism and religious fundamentalisms against what is seen as the moral relativism of liberalism.<sup>2</sup> It is part of the process of hardening the boundaries between good and bad, between law-abiding citizens and wrongdoers, endemic to the globalised culture of fear and panic we now inhabit.

'Evil' has, of course, long been a feature of political and moral discourse. Hitler and Nazism, for example, are used to represent the worst of human behaviour. They have been extensively canvassed in the analysis of the nature of evil in the twentieth century, most famously by Arendt to explore the 'banality of evil': the transformation of atrocities into bureaucratic

procedure seemingly devoid of human responsibility.<sup>3</sup> I don't wish to review that literature here, but a crucial insight of it has been to stress that, despite the status of 'evil' as primordial in moral discourse, fundamental to law and politics as well as religion, it is obviously a social construct central to the regulation of moral behaviour and social order. This is not to exonerate horrendous acts which cause suffering, but to recognise that in elevating some acts to a category of evil beyond 'normal' wrongdoing there is more at stake, and we need to be alive to the processes in naming something as evil. As Badiou argues:

There is no natural definition of Evil; Evil is always that which, in a particular situation, tends to weaken or destroy a subject. And the conception of Evil is thus entirely dependent on the events from which a subject constitutes itself ... there is no general form of evil because evil does not exist except as a judgement made by a subject on a situation.<sup>4</sup>

Second, despite the emphasis on the situated nature of invocations of evil, Badiou's own work is located in the broad traditions of philosophy, in which such questions are posed as abstract enquiries rather than empirical questions of time and place; it is for this reason that an area like cultural studies, which seems alive to such specificities, is well placed to consider these issues. Yet cultural studies and cognate areas in the humanities and social sciences don't grapple adequately with morality, except in so far as it is seen as an ideological facade. This is despite the insights of ethnomethodology, which explores how we experience social order as moral order.<sup>5</sup> Moral panic theory, for example, despite its talk of moral entrepreneurs and 'folk devils', avoids an elaborated discussion of the 'moral' dimensions of the model. Cohen is more interested in considering the labelling processes at work in constructing folk devils than with unpacking what is at stake when we also construe 'deviance' as a moral question, rather than just one of social order *per se*.

Third, while much attention has been given to particular historical figures in discussing events seen to represent evil, little academic literature has focused on the consequences of seeing those figures as actually *embodying* evil, capturing its essence in their very being. I am particularly interested in the significance of the visual images of *faces* of evil because this *faciality* stands out for the very intimacy and physicality that abstract discussions of notions of evil and fear in moral philosophy often overlook, and contrasts with assumptions about Otherness found in the recent take-up of the work of Levinas. The face is important because it conjoins questions of morality, affect, cultural difference and humanity. Philpott's analysis of the smiling faces of Bali bombers and Abu Ghraib torturers is a powerful reminder of the importance of this conjunction, as well as its complexity, because it symbolises relations of domination and resistance.<sup>6</sup>

To reassert the social constructedness of moral categories is not, however, enough. Nor is it enough to emphasise the ideological function of representations of good and evil: we need

to think about their sensual and affective charge, the kinds of moral investments that such representations invite, the racialised positions of those invoking and those subject to such categories, and the 'invitations' to emotion and action they present. This essay, then, considers the ways that the 'face of evil' works to 'fix' evil as an identifiable entity in terms of certain physiognomies and demeanours that are seen to reflect a deeper 'truth' of evil; a truth that comes down on the side of a dominant, Anglo-Australian culture. The imagining of evil moves between a necessary abstraction, which helps constitute evil as a general moral category, and a remarkable specificity which grounds our fears in everyday realities—a movement that seems central to the production of cultural panic around men of Arabic or Muslim background. The imagining of evil also moves, as we shall see, from the idea of a specific act being evil, to the perpetrator being evil, to the perpetrator's whole cultural community being evil. Such moves constitute a kind of 'permission' or 'invitation' to indulge in affectively charged social acts that target those identified as social demons.

#### — THE APPEARANCE OF OTHERNESS

The visibility of difference has long been an issue in Australia, but this has centred primarily on those, such as Indigenous or Asian Australians, whose difference is characterised as deriving from racial specificity.<sup>7</sup> Over several decades we have seen the emergence of what has been dubbed the 'new racism', a racism that focuses on cultural rather than physical difference. In fact, this distinction may not be so neat, given the overlap between cultural differences and the emphasis on questions of appearance. In Australia, this has been most obvious in terms of the increasing social preoccupation with young men of 'Middle Eastern appearance'. This category has been particularly evident both in media reports of particular events and in the 'ethnic descriptors' used by police, and yet the usefulness of it is hotly debated and critiqued.<sup>8</sup> The preoccupation of politicians and the media with these young men has been explored as a process of the *racialisation* of crime during moral panics concerning young men of Arabic-speaking background and the perceived prevalence of 'ethnic gangs': the ways complex social phenomena become understood primarily in terms of the single frame of a cultural pathology. This process amounts to the *criminalisation* of young men from particular cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

These themes were extended in *Bin Laden in the Suburbs*, in which we claimed that we were witnessing the demonisation of the 'Arab Other' in contemporary Australian society, and that this figure was becoming the folk devil of our times.<sup>10</sup> The Arab Other is a useful fiction that conflates people from different cultural, religious and national backgrounds, and different geo-political regions; it also conflates demonstrations of youthful bravado with the acts of criminal gangs, rapists, refugees and terrorists. In doing so, it creates an object of hate that articulates a range of social anxieties and concerns. It also folds the external enemy into

the 'enemy within', dissolving national and cultural borders, exacerbating the tendencies to 'neurotic citizenship' and fears of 'home-grown' terror.<sup>11</sup> The Arab Other is portrayed as animal, barbaric, uncivilised, inhuman and the essence of evil. This characterisation of the Arab Other as evil is most clearly registered in the representations of terrorism, and specifically the figure of Osama bin Laden (see figure 1), who has become for the West *the* face of evil. However, by a series of complex connections, the portrayal of young Arab and Muslim Australians involved in gang crime and rape has been framed by the same meanings (see figures 2 and 3).

Yet what the analyses of Collins et al. and Poynting et al. don't examine closely is the significance of the emphasis on the 'appearance' of the Middle Eastern male, beyond the argument that it is a form of racist stereotyping based on simplistic assumptions about phenotypical and cultural homogeneity. Specifically, they don't contemplate enough the significance of the need to portray *faces* of evil.

#### — THE TRUTH OF THE FACE

The face, as diverse scholars demonstrate, is central to human sociality. For Goffman, 'face' refers to the positive social value a person claims for themselves during an encounter. 'Face' is shaped by the extent to which we exhibit certain approved social attributes, and is central to ongoing, confident social participation. 'Face', therefore, must be maintained by 'face-work', the strategies in which we engage to align our actions with our 'face'. As Goffman suggests, however, this rather abstract sense of face, which focuses on questions of social order and relationships, is linked intimately to the physicality of an actual face—because for interaction to occur, we have to give attention to the visual and aural dimensions of a speaker. The link for Goffman is, of course, the forms of impression management that people engage in to sustain face-to-face interactions. Yet this isn't a simple exchange of information: we have an emotional response to the face. The feelings a person has for another's face 'constitute an involvement in the face of others that is as immediate and spontaneous as the involvement he [*sic*] has in his own face'.<sup>12</sup>

This dimension is developed by Tomkins, who argues that the face is the primary site of affective communication as part of a larger pattern of response and feedback. We rely on faces for information about how others feel as well as the kinds of socio-cultural information Goffman emphasises, and this shapes our behaviour in turn. We read faces to make judgements about whether we should treat someone as a threat, or see them as sincere and truthful.<sup>13</sup> As Gibbs argues, using Tomkins's work in an analysis of representations of Pauline Hanson, the face forms a rapid, largely unconscious communicative medium that fosters forms of affective mimicry and resonance (smiles beget smiles, distress begets distress) which characterise for her the 'contagious' force of affect.<sup>14</sup>

The complex meshing of social and interpersonal dimensions of facework is elevated to a principle of much greater import in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. For him, being face to face is the foundation of a humanistic ethics because the face has a certain 'nakedness' which makes certain kinds of demands of us. Being face to face with radical difference is the basis of the development of a responsibility for the Other. The Other appears fundamentally as a face which expresses not just a particular cultural difference, a physiognomy, but Otherness generally. It is a 'signification without context', he argues. The face of the Other calls forth an ethical response that is elemental to our experience of sociality and our desire to communicate with others.<sup>15</sup> For Levinas, there is a truthfulness to the naked face—a belief that is upheld in both popular discourse (the eyes as the window on the soul) and in the literature on the emotions, which tells us time and again that we reveal ourselves involuntarily through our facial expressions. There is a kind of humanistic universalism at stake in the claims of Levinas which in the end doesn't help much in the understanding of situated encounters and contemporary conflicts. Levinas has been significant in debates around the ethics of cosmopolitanism, in the wake of critiques of multiculturalism, but, as Butler suggests, the demands the face of the Other makes upon us aren't always that clear, or can't be decided outside the particular situation.<sup>16</sup>

Bauman tries to historicise Levinas's arguments to make them more applicable to understanding contemporary life. He argues that throughout most of human history, physical and moral proximity largely overlapped, as did distance and estrangement. The world was divided, he argued, into neighbours—with faces—and aliens, who were faceless. Modernity ruptured this link, requiring that we increasingly live with strangers who refuse to go away. The face, as a signifier of familiarity or strangeness, is crucial in the management of moral proximity. Despite Bauman's desire to sustain Levinas's claim that the encounter with the Other makes ethical demands upon us, his larger argument takes us elsewhere. He draws on Goffman's insights into the ways we avoid contact with the many Others in our midst—forms of civil inattention—but these help reproduce an indifference to Otherness, a denial of the stranger as morally significant.<sup>17</sup>

The truth of the face is, therefore, more complicated than the kinds of ethical claims Levinas makes, especially once we take into account forms of representation. The face is certainly a medium of signification: as one aspect of a person's presentation to the world it is profoundly expressive of all kinds of social, interpersonal and affective information. It is not, therefore, 'without context', even if we aren't aware of the cultural context from whence it comes. Our reception of faces is caught up in the frames through which we perceive the world and its Others; how we see another's face is not simply the outcome of a frank exchange of elemental humanity, but one moment in an ongoing politics of representation which entails schemas of intelligibility and perception. As Goffman suggests, my face and the faces of others are

constructs of the same social order.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, through the debates around ethnic profiling and the portrayal of criminals of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’, we have become increasingly aware of the fetishisation of cultural and physical attributes that are put to ideological work. This entails a boundedness of identities, a fixing of social categories of difference which delimit, rather than foster, interaction.<sup>19</sup>

Connections between social order and physical face become more complex, however, when we factor in the increasingly abstracted nature of globalised societies. In such societies strangers dominate our cityscapes and our sense of others is largely shaped by their how they are represented through the mediations of contemporary communications technologies: *virtual* encounters of a kind that Goffman, Levinas and Bauman don’t examine, but which play increasingly important roles in the production and management of pervasive anxieties in contemporary Australia.

Tester, like Ignatieff, argues that the media are especially significant in the mediation of moral relations in the modern world. I want to stress that I’m not presenting an audience study, so do not make any grand claims about what people actually think. I’m also, therefore, not saying that the media are singular or have any simple determining effect. Nevertheless, we need to address what Tester calls the ‘consequentiality of media’: he argues that the media have important roles in making people aware of moral concerns and their obligations to others.<sup>20</sup> The media also have a pre-eminent position in shaping the nature of public debates, and the language and perceptions involved in those debates.

One thing that is clear in Tester’s work on the media’s representation of famine and poverty is that such processes are emotional as well as moral concerns. Gibbs has similarly taken up the question of the relation between media and affect. She describes the illusion of intimate contact sustained by television, an illusion that seems to mimic the intimacy of face-to-face encounters but instead enables the *avoidance* of physical contact with real bodies, evoking a trance-like quality which has some import for the constitution of social beliefs. She argues that the media act as vectors in affective epidemics which ‘smuggle in’ particular kinds of cultural meanings.<sup>21</sup> Angel and Gibbs argue that the media function by coopting attributes of humanness, such as faces, which are used to cathect humans into flows of information and capital; they explore the way John Howard’s face functioned to solicit trust amidst a culture of fear.<sup>22</sup> But, I would suggest, this kind of trust is only viable in the presence of faces that threaten and intimidate, the forms of generalised, *negative* social value attributed to specific faces of evil.

#### — THE FACES OF MANY EVILS AS ONE

Let us return to those images of terrorism and the young men involved in gangs and rape. The central element of many of the stories involving such young men is that the perpetrators

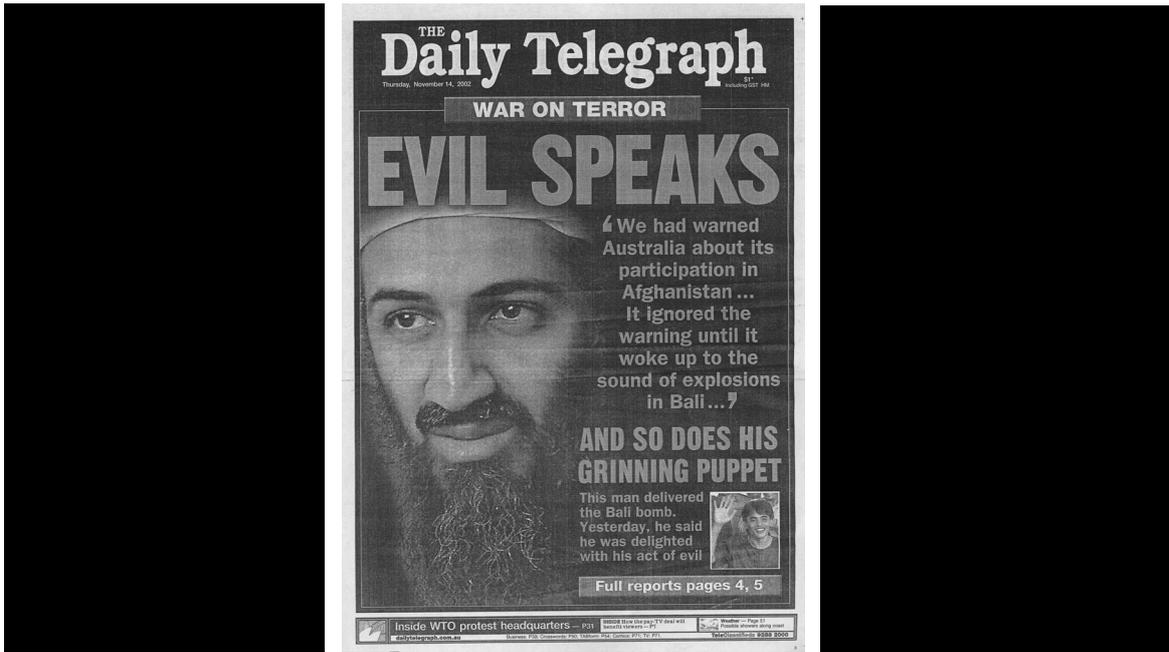


Figure 1: 'Evil Speaks', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 2002  
 Courtesy News Limited

and their acts are framed as evil. Osama bin Laden is frequently framed this way—as 'Evil Close to Home', 'Evil Speaks' (figure 1) and the 'Mastermind of Evil'—but so too

are other terrorists. Photofit images of three of the Bali bombers adorned the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, described as 'the faces of evil behind the bombs' (figure 4). The photo of Al-Qaeda's Abu Faraj al-Libbi was captioned 'The face of a killer', while the beheading of an American civilian by 'terrorist psychopaths' in Iraq was dubbed 'PURE EVIL'. The *Telegraph* described the 'fear and courage' of survivors of the London bombings 'in the face of pure evil'.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, 'ethnic' criminal gangs were said to have Sydney in 'their evil grip'. The Skaf brothers were described as two gang rapists of Muslim background whose 'evil crimes shocked NSW' and received record prison sentences.<sup>24</sup>

The characterisation of these crimes as 'evil' is only part of the story; a significant transformation occurs when the perpetrators themselves are portrayed as embodying evil. Butler describes what she calls the hyperbolic absorption of evil into the faces of bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, especially their eyes.<sup>25</sup> There is something of a paradox, or double paradox, here: on the one hand these faces represent very specific cases of criminal behaviour perpetrated by individuals while on the other they work together to constitute a universal moral category of evil—yet this universal category is culturally inflected *through* their specific faciality. These paradoxes exist because sustained notions of evil must both offer familiarity and strangeness, abstraction and specificity.



As we argued in *Bin Laden*, these various events may be quite distinct but they are stories that share the same figurative language and run together over time.<sup>26</sup> They function in terms of what Hartley and McKee call ‘narrative accrual’, the building up of an arsenal of meanings and images over time and through parallel, often juxtaposed, narratives.<sup>27</sup> We might add ‘visual accrual’ too—newspaper reports of terrorists and rapists make use of many, often very large, images of the alleged perpetrators (the presentation and significance of which we will return to below). Large images of the face of Osama bin Laden, for example, have recurred on, and within, the covers of major magazines such as *Time*, *The Bulletin* and *Newsweek* for many years. We have also seen repeated images of those involved in the bombings in Bali and of gang rapists such as Bilal Skaf.

The temporal dimensions of this accrual are complemented by the connections between different events and narratives made through media reportage and political commentary. Poynting et al. illustrate the role of the military metaphors, for example, in structuring the representations of so-called gangs of Lebanese male youths as of a similar order to militarily trained adult international terrorists. Sometimes the connections were explicit—claims that young Muslim men were being trained by terrorists or that a particular Muslim youth organisation had direct connections to terrorist organisations. In other examples, links between Beirut and Lakemba were frequently made. Much like the claims that boat people were terrorists, these links were rather fanciful. Nevertheless, they had purchase. The youthfulness

Figure 2: S. Birch, ‘PUT ON HOLD: Face of a Rapist’, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 2001  
Courtesy News Limited



Figure 3: C. Miranda and N. Casella, 'NO JUSTICE', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 February 2005  
 Courtesy News Limited

of many of the bombers in several cases was emphasised; sometimes linked explicitly to local youth. Miranda Devine claimed in a piece on the 'triumph of evil':

The perpetrators of the September 11 attacks were young Middle-Eastern Muslim men. Bin Laden's followers are young Middle-Eastern Muslim men. So it is young men of Middle-Eastern Muslim background who will be targeted in Sydney, many of them Australian citizens, who were born here.<sup>28</sup>

Within the paradox of the specificity of the face and the generality of evil, a number of interesting issues and themes emerge to unpack the ways our understanding of evil is constituted. Foremost, there is a reduction of the humanity of the alleged perpetrators both visually and in the text. Yet this dehumanisation is demonstrated in several, often contrasting, ways. One common image is a conventional portrait of the 'criminal type': a man of sinister demeanour staring straight at you with knitted brow, missing tooth, unshaven face, and a beanie on his head (figure 2). This large computer-enhanced image of an alleged perpetrator was captioned, 'Face of a rapist'.<sup>29</sup> This image has a menacing but unspecified quality to it: the expression is almost blank but certainly not easily defined. The downcast, perhaps closed, eyes of Mohammed Skaf in his 'mug shot' suggests a drug-induced reverie; again a kind of blankness (figure 3).<sup>30</sup> A frequent image of Osama bin Laden is a close-up of his face that conveys an unnervingly blank expression. This same image can be dressed up in darkened tones or framed through the green lens and target hairs of a rifle to add menacing



Figure 4: B. Clifton, 'WANTED', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 2002  
 Courtesy News Limited

effect, but the expression is still fundamentally blank.<sup>31</sup> Absence of expression is also seen in the computer images of the Bali bombers, framed as a 'wanted' poster (figure 4) and with the added anonymity of generic labels ('suspect one' and so on).<sup>32</sup>

The dehumanised nature of these pictures is partly explained by the stripped-back, decontextualised nature of computer-enhanced images and mug shots of criminals, but this doesn't fully explain the semiotic and affective impact. These images are sinister *because* of the absence of emotion. The face reflects a capacity for wrongdoing, criminal behaviour, moral transgression or social incivility because of the absence of remorse, guilt, shame or any specific affect.

'Humanity', both in terms of the analyses of facework by Goffman and Tomkins and in terms of conventions of aesthetic representation, is expressed through emotions; drain the emotion, and you drain the humanity. These images are in clear contrast to the humanity of victims, whose lives we read of in their emotional and social fullness, as in the case of the rape victims (whose faces are usually not shown), and see reflected in the family portraits and happy snaps of the bombing victims. After the London bombings one of the victims was dubbed the 'face of innocence'.<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* devoted a front page to images of the faces of dozens of the Bali bomb victims, and many pages to their stories. The images are first denoted as 'the faces of our dead', then 'faces of tragedy', 'faces missing', and the 'face of broken humanity'. This faciality is accompanied by the vast plenitude of human emotion. Alongside the happy faces we see mourning, agony, despair, distress, horror and grief: 'raw emotion' in the midst of which 'hardened professionals cry'.<sup>34</sup> A certain kind of moral

opposition is being constructed here, one which aligns humanity, emotion and morality on one side, and their absence on the other side, with evil.

In apparent contrast, there are examples where the perpetrator is shown with positive emotions, yet these images are also read as exemplifying the subject's lack of humanity. The mug shot of Bilal Skaf grinning broadly (figure 3) was reprinted several times over several years as cases continued after the initial trial, as was an infamous shot of the 'evil' Skaf smiling proudly while resting a gun on his lap.<sup>35</sup> He was condemned widely as 'a menace to any civilised society', and his lack of remorse and apparent joy in his actions taken as demonstrative of his lack of human feeling.<sup>36</sup> Most famously, Bali bomber Amrozi, the 'smiling assassin', was decried for his lack of compassion: 'Suspect Amrozi was "delighted" when his Bali bomb exploded, laughing so hard his wife asked him what had happened.'<sup>37</sup>

Much attention was given to Amrozi's behaviour in court; acting like 'a class clown' was taken as evidence of his status as both 'evil' and a 'madman'.<sup>38</sup> As Philpott argues, for many commentators this behaviour personified evil, partly because it defied easy cultural categorisation. This *excess* of affect, like the absences of emotion in the other images, contravenes our conventions of appropriate behaviours and expressions, and both are taken to be illustrative of a lack of moral feeling and care for fellow humans—the elemental condition of evil.<sup>39</sup>

Yet where Philpott shifts the analysis to examine this phenomenon in terms of resistance to state power, I want to stay with the inexplicable. The absence and excess of emotion are both seen as inscrutable within the 'normal', or normative, terms of human behaviour. This anxious lack of certainty about the meaning and origin of outrageous acts is central to their being characterised as evil. The inexplicability, or lying outside normal sense-making, of an act is part of the process of identifying it as evil. The response after the London bombings, as after the events of September 11 and the Bali bombings, was to first acknowledge the images of the young men responsible as 'the face of evil', then to ask, 'Why did they do it?'<sup>40</sup>

This enigmatic quality of evil echoes in other ways: it is seen in stories of terrorist ontogenesis which ask how a 'normal' young citizen becomes a terrorist.<sup>41</sup> These stories resonate with the increasing perplexity that second-generation migrants, or well-educated professionals, can become terrorists. It is also seen in the anxieties we have concerning the elusive identity of the terrorist: Al Qaeda's network was described as 'the enemy with a thousand faces'; one Al Qaeda figure was dubbed 'a man of many faces'. This elusive quality is not just reserved for terrorists: a criminal 'master of disguise', Ramon Youmaran, was characterised as having 'six faces'.<sup>42</sup> Despite this, the accumulated effect of these images of wrongdoers is their distillation into a singularity—an abstract noun that represents an essence or principle of evil.

— THE WORK OF EVIL

Evil here functions in two significant ways: it offers broad confirmation of a particular moral worldview that guarantees the possibility of good by posing the necessity of evil, but it does that by attaching evil to whole cultural ‘communities’ through an affectively charged threat of actions outside ‘normal’ human morality. There is a double movement—we are shown the face of a perpetrator who is cast as an evil person and this face is taken as the embodiment of a larger evil, one aligned with a cultural pathology. This movement is premised on a fundamental moral code of good and evil, and locates this ‘incomprehensible’ evil elsewhere. It doesn’t matter, in a sense, that these ‘communities’ are ideological fictions which conjoin different geopolitical regions, ethnicities, national backgrounds, faiths and languages, because the function is to provide evil with a recognisably different physiognomy—different, that is, to a perceived white normativity. The capacity for evil becomes seen as a cultural trait, or an endemic feature of a religious worldview, but one whose reception is affectively charged. One *Daily Telegraph* journalist was concerned about the existence of ‘evil families of hate’ whose young men were ‘bonded in name and culture’.<sup>43</sup> Miranda Devine argued that ‘the powerful tool of shame’ needs to be ‘applied to the families and communities that nurtured the rapists, gave them succour and brought them up with such a hatred of Australia’s dominant culture and contempt for its women’.<sup>44</sup>

The ‘face of evil’ works in several, sometimes contradictory, ways. In the first instance it allows us to identify evil, to recognise it as a material entity, to know it when we see it. It does this because it provides us with a physiognomy of evil (part culture, part demeanour), where a face is a reflection of the character of evil, personified in particular humans but representative of a certain moral universality, much like phrenology once promised. This allows us to recognise evil as type—hard, uncaring, sadistic, animalistic, violent, unemotional. Yet this type is then grounded in the abhorrent behaviour attributed to particular groups—Middle Eastern, Lebanese or Muslim. This face becomes the metonym for the cultural pathology of evil, while evil becomes the pathology of a ‘culture’. This allows us to fix in our sights a sense of evil as both present and removed—it is near, but someone else.

I want to rework the notion of defacement used by Goffman to capture the process whereby the individual face becomes the symbol of something other.<sup>45</sup> If face-work embodies the balance we achieve in aligning our personal identity to the encounter in which we find ourselves, an alignment that sustains our sense of self, then the symbolic violence that destroys that alignment and our capacity to function in that encounter is de-facement: we lose face, as Goffman explains. In the process whereby faces of perpetrators become *the* face of a racialised evil, not only the perpetrator but a whole community loses face. Recognition theory has had little to say about this process, except perhaps to cast it as misrecognition, but given

the identarian reduction so pervasive in the politics of difference there may be something more we need to unpack in terms of structures of recognition. And I would argue that what we see here is not just a process of reduction (which is a category of representation) but also processes of intensification, which focus on the affective dimensions of recognition. Bauman is close to talking about this when he argues that when media reduces strangers to surfaces, they remove them of their moral integrity, their existence as human.

This process of defacement moves between the specificity of certain acts and certain differences, and an abstraction which conflates larger groups of people and operates with a universalising notion of good and evil. This fixing of evil via defacement is an affectively charged, ideological displacement that serves to provide a sense of certainty, safety and security in an increasingly 'fluid' world, marked by economic and social instabilities and transformations, not just a world of cultural strangeness.<sup>46</sup> It addresses both the need for an abiding sense of moral truth and the identification of the social manifestation of evil in the early twenty-first century. It allays, or it is meant to allay, our anxieties around loss of cultural harmony and the acceleration of moral decay. It buttresses both moral and social order at the same time or, rather, it locates moral certainty in the social order we inhabit even as it identifies the sources of threat within it. As Badiou argues, 'the idea of Evil has become essential' in the West, but with the rider that 'real Evil is elsewhere': 'Under the pretext of not accepting Evil, we end up making believe that we have, if not the Good, at least the best possible state of affairs—even if this best is not so great'. We accept as ideal, therefore, the inequalities of capitalism—we may have problems, we say, but we aren't evil like foreign dictatorships. This turns, he suggests, on a universalising of evil: fascism and communism are constructed as of the same evil totalitarian family, 'political regimes that have fought against liberalism and democracy all share the same face of Evil'.<sup>47</sup>

Evil is typically linked to the threat of social disorder and chaos; it is seen here in the emphasis on the elusive character of terrorists.<sup>48</sup> Yet this linking of evil and disorder does not simply operate at the level of international geopolitics. It has resonances for domestic politics, particularly in the kinds of local demons we construct. Folk devils, as moral panic theory reminds us, are central to the ideological diagnoses of a society's ills and concerns regarding threats of disorder. As an 'explanation' they work because they speak to popular anxieties—about social, economic and technological change, loss of community, cultural disharmony and so forth—and because they work on and through entrenched social perceptions. They also help because they can articulate prescriptions for cures to these social ills—reduce immigration, affirm Australian values, increase policing and judicial powers, and so on.

Ironically, however, the increasingly pervasive and mundane nature of evil disrupts the certainty, safety and security it offers. There are moments when the fixing of evil in the face

of an Other falls apart. The popular debates around, and often institutional and legal responses to, the wearing of the veil are interesting to consider in the light of the analysis above. The veil, of course, has become a potent Western symbol of Islamic oppression of women.<sup>49</sup> Hence the tearing of the veil can be seen as the desire to enforce liberal conceptions of sexual and social freedom upon women who don't wish these freedoms, or who don't agree with equating unveiling with freedom.<sup>50</sup> But in the light of the above there is something more going on apart from this paradox. The veil covers part of the face, and reduces the capacity, at least for the non-Muslim, to identify aspects of the personal identity of the wearer. It thus resists the power of the dominant to engage in the act of defacement. It is no wonder then that in the aftermath of the first Gulf War and during the current war in Iraq, the tearing of the veil became a common act of racial vilification even though Arab and Muslim males are perceived as the source of aggression.<sup>51</sup> The social desire for some citizens to participate in the identification of evil is at stake. It is also no wonder, then, that some young women have asserted their right to wear the veil, even if they have not done so before, as they refuse the dominant's power to cause them loss of face.

Another odd example that reveals something about the current acts of defacement is the panic several years ago around the serial rapist operating in the St Clare area. In 2003, after a year of sexual assaults on young women in Sydney's west, renewed media attention was given to the identity, or lack thereof, of the 'sex attacker' the media dubbed 'Mr Bland' because of his 'inconspicuous appearance'. The fears aroused by the incidents of assault became focused not on the cultural difference of the attacker—as had happened with the so-called 'race rapes'—but on his cultural sameness: he 'shared the characteristics of many men in the area'. As this article announced, his '[b]landness puts everyone under suspicion'.<sup>52</sup> These incidents led to unprecedented panic: search parties and security groups were formed, initiating a new vigilance in locals about the movement of women at night. By blandness, of course, the media were alluding to the absence of ethnic difference. It's not that the attacker could not be identified as an individual that caused this level of anxiety—but that the crime he represented could not be fixed by what had become the standard cultural marker of evil.

The anxieties and fears contained by the easy recognition of the face of evil are never far from the surface. At stake here are two key elements. One is what Hage calls, in the context of analysing suicide bombing, 'homoiphobia'—the fear of the sameness of the Other. In other words, those whom we have come to construct as radically different, and hence a profound social threat, may not be that different after all.<sup>53</sup> Related to this is the anxiety caused by the realisation that 'evil' may exist within us all, irrespective of cultural difference. Suddenly, our certainties are unfixed. The categories through which we perceive the world, good and evil, white and ethnic, civilised and barbarian, human and inhuman, threaten to

dissolve. These anxieties are central to the climate of 'paranoid nationalism' in which we live, where the relation between nation and cultural diversity is structured by fragile concerns around security and safety, and the obsession with boundaries and their transgression.

The identification of evil, therefore, becomes an increasingly urgent, if anxious, task of the dominant. Indeed, as the *Daily Telegraph* reminds us, 'images of evil serve a vital role', they 'remind us that evil exists, and must be overcome if freedom is to be sustained'.<sup>54</sup> Note that evil here is contrasted with freedom, as well as with good, and it is presented as something that must be fought. In this discourse, evil has a totalising quality—it turns wrongdoing into absolute categories of self-evident right and wrong, shorn of context and causality. It also essentialises moral and social transgression, and, in the end, turns evil into a pathology which is easily translated into cultural terms as well as being deemed a flaw of individual psyche. As Baumeister has argued, we hold on to the 'myth of pure evil', an idea of evil as an intentional, pleasurable, egotistical act conducted on an innocent victim. In this myth, evil is Other, the antithesis to social order, and eternal.<sup>55</sup> This myth, however, conceals the complex causes of criminal and violent acts, and is typically involved in the suppression of minorities. It ensures Good and God are on our side.

Talk of myth recalls Barthes' insight that myth is a process of depoliticisation; myth turns history into nature, such that social contexts and complex causes get removed from our understanding of myth. Tester uses this theory to argue that that is why media representations of things such as famine can retain our moral empathy but produce disengagement as we respond in terms of charity rather than addressing economic and political causes. Therefore, we are seeing more than what Barthes describes as depoliticisation—what we see is a kind of repoliticisation or, rather, a reconstruction of politics as morality. This is in contrast to Bauman's claim about the prevalence of what he dubs *adiaphorization*: 'the stripping of human relationships of their moral significance, exempting them from moral evaluation, rendering them "morally irrelevant".'<sup>56</sup> Rather, we witness the *remoralisation* of social problems, whereby complex social, economic and political processes are transformed into starkly moral terms: this is not to reduce moralisation to an ideological façade but to recognise that the affective dimensions of moralisation deepen our stake in events and change our capacity to deal with them as social events. This extends Hage's argument about our 'fear of social explanation', the desire we have to avoid complex understandings which may make us complicit.<sup>57</sup> Such remoralisation not only aids the erasure of social explanation, it substitutes our anxiety around complicity with a reassurance of someone else's moral culpability.

Making something evil raises the moral intensity of the act and transforms and extends its existence as social threat. Against Levinas's focus on the phenomenology of the face as the basis for an ethics that recognises Otherness, Badiou suggests that such an ethics only works to sustain a fetishising of difference that is part of the problem. The real evil, he says, lies

in the perversion of truth by the pressure of particular interests.<sup>58</sup> In other words, it entails an ethical imperative to critique and contextualise those interests.

— CONCLUSION: THE PERMISSION TO HATE

To give a face to evil paradoxically produces it as concrete and abstract, knowable but elusive. The face of evil fosters the racialisation of crime through the suturing together of disparate events and is ultimately an act of defacement. It involves reduction, displacement and intensification. It decontextualises social acts and yet renders them more amenable to ‘explanations’ drawing on cultural pathologies. The face of evil is therefore very powerful. Central to the social imaginary, Taylor reminds us, is a conception of a shared moral order. While much of this sense of mutual benefit is structured by positive values and conceptions of moral unity, it is also shaped by negative conceptions.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Latour argues that a ‘society’ is unified less by a shared set of values than a dominant set of ‘worries’, our ‘matters of concern’, each of which ‘generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements’.<sup>60</sup> Such ‘matters of concern’ are not simply symbolic entities, but are also magnets for social emotions and actions.

It is not surprising that much effort has been made to ‘discover the face of Muslim Australia’ (both the *Telegraph* and the *Herald* ran series characterised as doing this).<sup>61</sup> At heart here, however, is a certain anxiety about ourselves. As one media report put it: ‘Face it. We’ve changed’. The report went on to ask, ‘what does an Australian look like? How have our faces changed over the decades?’ before concluding that ‘gone is the open, weather-beaten Australian visage’.<sup>62</sup> Identifying a face of evil, then, doesn’t solve this anxiety—at best it offers us a ‘virtuous paranoia’: we remain insecure about what we are but we have a kind of working explanation that at least reassures us of an overriding moral unity.<sup>63</sup>

Giving face to evil also raises questions, then, of human agency. We might say, rephrasing Velesens’s arguments about evildoing, that *naming* evil offers the foregoing of responsibility (deferring to a higher moral order) but it also offers the reclamation of agency, in so far as it provides an object and mechanism for restorative action. Like *doing* evil, the *naming* of evil entails a protest against vulnerability and a recuperation of social power deemed stolen or under threat by the named evil.<sup>64</sup>

But is an agency allowed to the dominant at the expense of the defacement of marginalised others? Perry argues that such agency licences what she has called the ‘permission to hate’, an implicit endorsement by the state of powerful negative emotions that can form the basis of what are dubbed ‘hate crimes’.<sup>65</sup> She sees this in terms of state intervention, or inaction, such as acts of covert surveillance, armed raids and the turning of a blind political eye to racist opinion in the current panic around the Arab Other.<sup>66</sup> Yet we need to recognise that it is not just the state that has the capacity to licence such emotions and actions; various

elements of (primarily) mainstream media also have the ability to *move* citizens, and to move them to act, often at the expense of others. This is where we must return to what Tester calls the ‘consequentiality of media’.

The consequences of the mediated alignment of different instances of wrongdoing under the category of evil are found in the increasing experience of racial vilification among Arab and Muslim Australians explored in research for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC). This research recorded experiences which entail humiliation, loss of face and loss of access to public space, as well as the threat of discrimination and violence. These experiences range from social incivility—being called terrorists and rapists, being stared at suspiciously, being abused—to more violent experiences of physical threat, assault, arson, institutional racism, and so on. They occur on the street, in shopping centres, at work and school, in government offices and private business; indeed, they are pervasive, ongoing experiences of hate and related emotions in the ‘affective regulation of belonging’.<sup>67</sup> The alignment of horrendous acts of international terrorism with violent rapes and criminal acts by young men does not serve, as the *Daily Telegraph* claims, the ‘brutal truth’. Rather, it serves, by conflating ‘enemies’ both without and within, near and far, to maintain a set of reified social beliefs about race, culture and crime refracted through moral discourse and applied to entire populations.<sup>68</sup> As Philpott argues, the ‘fixing’ of meaning around these images by political and media interests not only evades a deeper understanding of what is at stake in the war on terror, it encourages complicity in the erosion of civil rights.<sup>69</sup>

While it’s important to reiterate that, just as with the state, there is no simple or singular relation of causality with social beliefs and actions, the media are important for three reasons. First, the HREOC research showed that the media were cited by interviewees as a source of vilification in their own right—indeed, the media were the second most common source of racism. Second, many media programs and outlets were seen to provoke everyday acts of vilification. Interviewees recounted many examples where such events followed key stories in the media—on terrorism, rape and so on—and perpetrators often also referred to these stories. Third, dominant negative media representations were seen to *legitimise* such acts, to give an ‘endorsement’ from a key social institution with significant social power.

Defining evil as a cultural type marked by radical, cultural difference—a process buttressed by affectively charged media and political representations—not only gives what Perry calls ‘permission to hate’, it also represents an ‘invitation’ to legitimately act on that affective motivation. It licenses forms of hate crime, which has real consequences in the lives of Muslims through everyday acts of vilification and harassment because it treats victims as representatives of dangerous communities. But we are yet to really understand the cultural pedagogies of socially endorsed racism. This essay is an attempt to map out some of the issues at stake in understanding the mediated relations of morality via the figure of the face of evil,

but it suggests that the disciplines in which we work—cultural studies, sociology, media studies, communications—need to grapple much more thoroughly with questions of morality, affect and agency if we are to explore the role of mediated representations of cultural difference in the production of racism.

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1. I use the term 'Arab Other' following the arguments we made in Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar and Jock Collins, *Bin Laden in the Suburbs*, Sydney Institute of Criminology, Sydney, 2004, pp. 12–13. It is a useful fiction that points to the artificial conflation of people from different cultural, national, religious, geo-political and linguistic backgrounds. I also therefore use a number of categories throughout the paper—Lebanese, Arab, Muslim, Middle Eastern—these are all problematic but, given there is no all-embracing term, I'm trusting that they will be read with this qualification in mind.
2. Toby Miller claims that the term 'evil' appears 350 times in the speeches of George Bush Jr, see *Madeover Nation: The United States of Reinvention?*, a paper given in the *Trans/forming Cultures Annual Lecture Series*, University of Technology, Sydney, 11 July 2007.
3. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Penguin, New York, 1994. Arendt's work has been discussed extensively: see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1989; and Arne Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.
4. See Christoph Cox and Molly Whalen, 'On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou', *Cabinet Magazine Online* 5, 2001/2, <<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/5/alainbadiou.php>>.
5. Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984.
6. Simon Philpott, 'A Controversy of Faces: Images from Bali and Abu Ghraib', *Journal of Cultural Research*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2005, pp. 227–44.
7. While there has long been an academic recognition of the social constructedness of the category of race, the public discussion of this has been relatively recent, and somewhat controversial. The *Race for the Headlines* report, published by the Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales, 2003, under Chris Puplick, articulated this idea of the social origins of the category of race in its critique of media discourse and racism. The report was widely condemned by conservative media and politicians.
8. Ramon Jabbour, 'Policing Partnership in a Multicultural Australia', Australian Arabic Council, 2001, <<http://www.aac.org.au/media.php?ArtID=6>>.
9. Jock Collins, Greg Noble, Scott Poynting and Paul Tabar, *Kids, Kebabs, Cops and Crime*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2000.
10. Poynting et al., p. 251.
11. Engin Isin, 'The Neurotic Citizen', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2004, pp. 217–35.
12. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Order*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp. 5–6, 12, 123.
13. Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, vol. 1, New York, Springer, 1962, p. 204; Maria Angel and Anna Gibbs, 'Media, Affect and the Face', *Southern Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2006, pp. 24–39.
14. Anna Gibbs, 'Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect', *Australian Humanities Review*, 24, 2001 <<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-December-2001/gibbs.html>>.
15. Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. M. Smith, Stanford University Press, Stanford,

- 1994; Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1985, p. 86.
16. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, Verso, London, 2004, p. 131.
  17. Zygmunt Bauman, 'Effacing the Face: On the Social Management of Moral Proximity', *Theory, Culture, Society*, vol.7, no.1, 1990, pp. 5–38.
  18. Goffman, p. 6.
  19. Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2003.
  20. Keith Tester, *Media, Culture and Morality*, Routledge, London, 1994 and *Compassion, Morality and the Media*, Oxford University Press, Buckingham, 2001.
  21. Anna Gibbs, 'In Thrall: Affect Contagion and the Bio-Energetics of Media', *M/C Journal*, vol. 8, no.6, 2005 <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/10-gibbs.php>>; Gibbs, *Contagious*.
  22. Angel and Gibbs, p. 24.
  23. *The Bulletin*, 'Evil Close to Home', 19 February 2002, p. 1; *Daily Telegraph*, 'Evil Speaks', 14 November 2002, p. 1; B. Clifton, 'Wanted', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October, 2002, p. 1; R. Jawad, 'Net Closing in on Bin Laden', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 2005, p. 32; Phillip Coorey, 'Pure Evil', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 2004, p. 1; B. English, 'Fear and Courage in the Face of Pure Evil', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 July 2005, p. 4.
  24. K. Lawrence and C. Miranda, 'Outlaw Generation', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 October 2003, p. 1; C. Miranda and N. Casella, 'No Justice', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 February 2005, p. 1.
  25. It should be added that other crimes, such as paedophilia, are often described in terms of evil, but seem much less systematically so, and certainly not in such overtly racialised tones.
  26. Poynting et al., p. 13.
  27. John Hartley and Alan McKee, *The Indigenous Public Sphere*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.
  28. Miranda Devine, 'Triumph of Evil in Dancing on American Graves', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 2001, p. 28.
  29. S. Birch, 'Put on Hold: Face of a rapist', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 2001, p. 1.
  30. Miranda and Casella, p. 1.
  31. *Time Magazine*, 25 November 2002; *Time Magazine*, 26 November 2001.
  32. Clifton, p. 1.
  33. C. Gysin and A. Levy, 'Face of Innocence', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 July 2005, p. 5.
  34. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 2002, pp. 1–13.
  35. N. Casella, 'Why are We Breeding Evil Families of Hate?', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 August 2005, p. 21.
  36. Miranda and Casella, p. 7.
  37. R. Callinan, 'Bali Bomber Laughed When Told of Carnage', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 2002, p. 5.
  38. Cindy Wockner, 'Amrozi Sings for his Evil Mate', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 2006, p. 11.
  39. Philpott, p. 240.
  40. *Good Morning America*, NBC, 13 July 2005 (broadcast on Channel 9, Sydney, 4.30am, 14 July 2005).
  41. *Daily Telegraph*, 'One Boy's Journey from Suburban Australia to World Terrorism', Inside Edition, 12 June 2004, pp. 27–9.
  42. G. Kamiya, 'The Enemy With a Thousand Faces', *AlterNet*, posted September 13, 2001 <<http://www.alternet.org/module/1149731/10/2005>>; Z. Rizk, 'A Man of Many Faces', *Sunday Telegraph* 6 June 2004, p. 87; K. Lawrence and G. Jones, 'Six Faces of a Fugitive', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 2006, p. 3.
  43. Casella, p. 21.
  44. Miranda Devine, 'Racist Rapes: Finally the Truth Comes Out' *Sun-Herald*, 14 July 2002, p. 15.
  45. Goffman, p. 10.
  46. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 10.
  47. See Cox and Whalen.
  48. Roy Baumeister, *Evil*, W. H. Freeman, New York, 1997, p. 64.
  49. Vera Mackie, 'Faces of Feminism in Transnational Media Space', *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol.6, 2003, pp. 1–17.
  50. An important issue I've put aside for this paper is the gender of evil: the figures shown here are male. There are a number of elements to this, but they deserve a paper in their own right. Such a paper would discuss Western conventions of gender (which characterise aggression as male, care for others as female, and so on) and Orientalist notions of masculinity and femininity. It would also draw on the rapidly expanding literature on the figure of the veiled woman, who is typically used to represent oppressive, Orientalist patriarchy and despotism, and thence the removal of the veil can be seen as an act of liberation which delimits the capacity of the female to be the essence of evil. It would however, note certain connections, such as the juxtaposition of the enigmatic nature of evil and the unknowability of the veiled face.
  51. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Racist Violence: Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Isma Project*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2004.

52. M. Scala, 'Blandness Puts Everyone under Suspicion', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2003, p. 27.
53. Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 141.
54. 'Images of Evil Serve a Vital Role', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 2002, p. 16.
55. Baumeister, pp. 72–3.
56. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, Blackwells, Oxford, 1995, p. 133.
57. Hage, p. 141.
58. Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, trans. P.Hallward, Verso, London, 1998, pp. 8, 18–22, 77.
59. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2004.
60. Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public', 2005, <<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/96-MTP-DING.pdf>>.
61. 'Islam in Australia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28–29 April 2007, pp. 1, 8, 25, 31.
62. D. Smith, 'Face It. We've Changed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7–8 January 2006, p. 15.
63. Alan Morton, *On Evil*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 5.
64. Vetlesen, pp. 5, 289.
65. Barbara Perry, *In the Name of Hate*, Routledge, New York, 2001.
66. Poynting et al., pp. 168–76.
67. Greg Noble and Scott Poynting, 'Neither Relaxed nor Comfortable: The Affective Regulation of Migrant Belonging in Australia', in Rachel Pain and Susan Smith (eds), *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London, 2008.
68. As Morton (p. 6) argues, thinking in terms of evil makes us like the evildoers—it dehumanises us, and makes us possible accomplices in atrocities. Of course, there is no singular audience response to these representations, and no singular pathway into racist action: this paper is elaborating a possible logic of the relation between media images, affect and action—a logic that the victims of such crimes perceive.
69. Philpott, p. 241.