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beyond borders

BOB HODGE AND JOHN O'CARROLL

Borderwork in Multicultural Australia

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Asylum seeking, migration and multiculturalism have remained firmly in the Australian media spotlight in recent years thanks to a number of high-profile controversies: the Tampa affair, the Pacific Solution, asylum-seeker hunger strikes, the 'children overboard' affair, and the false detentions of Cornelia Rau and Vivian Alvarez Solon, to name just a few examples. These events have renewed fervent debates about Australian immigration policy, and increased anxiety over border protection. This interest in border protection has also infused popular culture: one of Australia's most popular television programs is Channel Seven's *Border Security*, which most commonly represents non-Anglo visitors contravening Australia's customs and immigration laws. The program propagates a cultural of fear surrounding Australia's borders and their need for protection.

Borderwork in Multicultural Australia, by Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll, offers strong challenges to such representations. For Hodge and O'Carroll, *Borderwork* is 'a book for the current stage in Australia's ongoing search for its place and role in a multicultural global world'. (1) This timely book aims 'to stimulate good discussions (lively, diverse, well-informed, passionate, critical, open-minded, transformative) as the best foundation for good citizens'. (2) For Hodge and Carroll this should occur through a thorough analysis of Australia's past, a comprehensive look at the present including an analysis of the social frameworks surrounding the abovementioned 'hot topics', and an optimistic vision of Australia's multicultural future.

Borderwork confronts its readers to challenge their taken-for-granted knowledge about multiculturalism and borders. The simplest challenge offered by *Borderwork* is that it asks readers to consider the myriad ways in which ideas about borders are socially and politically constructed, and explores the various historical, political and ideological agendas that underlie these constructions. For Hodge and O'Carroll, 'borderwork' is 'an active process of meaning-making, designed to manage both separation and connection, in combinations that can often themselves become highly complex'. (218) Thus borderwork encompasses geographical territory or location, ideas of nation and nationality, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, professional, and social status, to name just a few examples. Borderwork is any of the processes by which humans 'construct, maintain, police and negotiate a variety of relationships, whether based on similarities or difference, love or fear'. (2) However, the text does not offer up borderwork as divisive or a threat to multiculturalism; rather, it is central to understanding the ways in which multicultural relationships exist.

Hodge and O'Carroll also want to 'unshrink' the term multiculturalism—to take away the limits that have affected the term in recent times, particularly negative connotations. Hodge and O'Carroll offer the concept 'multiculture' as a more useful framework than multiculturalism for analysing Australia's cultural makeup. Multiculture takes multiculturalism a step further; it describes what happens in a multicultural society. Rather than simply recognising that multiple cultures circulate and

reproduce themselves within Australian culture, multiculturalism emphasises the dynamic nature of multiculturalism:

a process which we define by the claim that in any field (culture, class, profession etc.) the new or the different can be generated by the 'same'. These unities are also inherently plural in that they involve the coming together of diversities around particular cultural locations or issues. This means that multicultures are themselves made up of multicultures, with multiplicity and unity all the way down. (217)

Multiculture is a more inclusive term: it refers to the 'dynamic interweaving of cultures and diversities', and thus encompasses Indigenous Australians, and also considers gender and class as contributing factors to Australia's multiculturalism. In other words the term 'multiculture' asks Australians to consider their cultural makeup as broadly and dynamically as possible. This approach looks to de-stigmatise multiculturalism, to prevent a ghettoisation of the term in much the same way as 'whiteness studies' inserted whiteness into examinations of race.

Borderwork is formed by ten chapters each addressing a different concept (multiculturalism, multiculture, borderwork, tolerance, the Anglo-Celtic, racism, schismogenesis, Aboriginal Australia, Islam, Austral/Asia, the Pacific, and imagining multicultural Australia). Each offers a thoughtful and timely analysis of the issues presented, and the authors' approach to

their subject matter is comprehensive. Hodge and O'Carroll present each of these chapters using case studies or stories to contextualise and thus better illuminate these issues for their students. The topics discussed are current and should be familiar to most readers as the topics draw heavily on issues covered by the mainstream media.

The authors rightly assert that the media is 'a representative weave of viewpoints', and thus media analysis is an important component of this text. (5) *Borderwork* offers a close examination of the ways in which the media construct multicultural relationships within Australia, particularly in their negative representations of Indigenous Australians and Muslims. However, as Hodge and O'Carroll maintain, 'in spite of all the bad press, the vast majority of Australians know they live in a multicultural society, and they are delighted with the fact'. (3) The excellent chapter on 'Tolerance Paradoxes' addresses these issues particularly well. Using discourse analysis, it examines the uses (particularly contradictory uses) of the word 'tolerance'.

A highlight of this text is its appendix: 'Tools for analysing multicultural and borderwork'. I have found this 'toolkit' approach useful in other texts (I am thinking of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's excellent 'Toolkit' for analysing life-writing texts in their *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*)—summarising the key concepts and offering examples for discussion. 'Analytic points' are offered which could be used as simple points for practical reflection or could be given to students as theoretical application tasks. The structure of

this text, particularly its transparent representation of key concepts, presents scholars with a range of theoretical tools with which to work.

A further strength of this text is the refreshing optimism with which it approaches Australia's multicultural future. In short, Hodge and O'Carroll believe that multiculturalism has proven successful in Australia's recent past and that tolerance is being productively incorporated into the daily lives of Australians. *Borderwork* demystifies a great deal of recent multicultural rhetoric—for example, the negative connotations attached to terms such as multiculturalism, tolerance and borders. It also envisages an important role for scholars working in this discipline. For Hodge and O'Carroll, scholarship offers opportunities for creative and informed interventions into Australian multiculturalism: for example, addressing misconceptions, looking at new ways to read history, and exploring new ways to address and approach cultural diversity.

According to the authors, this book is drawn from an undergraduate course they have taught for some years; however, they suggest that the book is intended 'for anyone who wants to be inspired anew by the promise of multicultural Australia, without evading any of its difficulties—past and present'. (1) *Borderwork* will appeal (primarily) to undergraduate scholars in the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies. It is an excellent teaching text because it assumes little prior knowledge. However, those with prior knowledge of *Borderwork's* terrain will likely appreciate the opportunity to refresh their knowledge and deepen their understanding (as

I did). *Borderwork* will also appeal to those working in the disciplines of education and Australian Studies, as multicultural studies is playing an increasingly important role in analyses of Australia's past and present.

Drawing on the work of scholars such as Ien Ang, Homi Bhaba, Jacques Derrida, Ghassan Hage and René Girard—to list just a few of the diverse range of scholars and ideas that this book considers—*Borderwork* adopts a broad theoretical framework, drawing particularly on very recent scholarship. *Borderwork* finds a very effective balance between theoretical sophistication and accessibility. The book contains an excellent bibliography that would prove to be a useful starting point for scholars commencing research in this discipline. The bibliography references its 'media sources' in a separate list from its more general bibliography. Apart from providing a useful set of media resources (reminding us of the usefulness of media resources in contemporary studies scholarship), the list demonstrates the broad political terrain covered in *Borderwork*—from Indigenous politics through to September 11, asylum-seeking in Australia and community attitudes towards migration. *Borderwork* also draws upon government reports (from the Department of Defence and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) and statistics (social trends and population changes) to further develop its analysis of Australia's multiculturalism.

Borderwork is an excellent book, which I plan on using in a course I teach on post-colonial literatures and cultures. This is a post-traumatic text, a book that responds to a number of traumatic events in Australia's recent

history: the Hansonite era, the history wars, September 11, Tampa, ethnic gang violence in Australia and so on. In synthesising these issues and preoccupations, and in analysing shifts in community responses to multiculturalism, *Borderwork* offers strategies to move forward. This book provides another encouraging example of the ways in which scholars in the social sciences and humanities can tackle racism and injustice. It proposes a challenging mandate for those who read and teach this text.

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