

Culture wars and corporatism: The cultural mission in Australian non-fiction book publishing, 1958–2018

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NATIONAL cultural histories are written in non-fiction books as much as in fiction. In works on current affairs, politics and popular history, ideas are floated, criticisms made, old programs denounced and new ones declared. Such books not only report on the nation. They also work to construct new understandings of the nation as part of a struggle over national meaning and identity. Books such as Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* (1964), Anne Summers's *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975), Henry Reynolds's *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981), Paul Kelly's *End of Certainty* (1992) and Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country* (2017) have changed the way Australian national affairs are discussed.

In this paper, I sketch a framework for thinking about the major phases in Australian non-fiction publishing between the late 1950s and early 2000s, focusing on works of current affairs, politics and popular history. My argument is twofold. First, I seek to make a case for the 'cultural mission' in Australian non-fiction book publishing, where an imperative to publish reforming books in genres such as, but not limited to, current affairs, politics, and popular history, motivated many publishers to publish books they believed to be of greater than commercial importance. Cultural mission non-fiction publishing in Australia, I argue, has made a crucial contribution to a complex, ongoing process of national critique wherein competing versions of the nation are offered up for scrutiny by reading publics. Second, I suggest that cultural mission non-fiction book publishing in Australia has had a crucial role in the Australian culture wars and that these have played out in four overlapping phases that reflect shifts in national debate and the commercial imperatives of book publishing:

first, a ‘renaissance’ phase from the late 1950s until roughly the late 1960s; second, an ‘insurrectionist’ phase from the late 1960s until the mid-1980s; third, a ‘reaction’ phase from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, and fourth a ‘corporatist’ phase that gathered pace in the late 1990s. All four phases orient around questions of national identity. The ‘renaissance’ phase sought to contest earlier cultural nationalist formations so as to modernise and pluralise Australian public life; the ‘insurrectionist’ phase was mobilised by social movements that sought to challenge the (white, masculine) grounds on which previous debate was predicated; the ‘reaction’ phase contested earlier attempts to pluralise issues of national identity, and the ‘corporatist’ phase involved an ever greater focus on commercial imperatives amidst a fragmented market, a growing emphasis on data, and a return to more conservative understandings of national identity, potentially at the expense of mission-based publishing.

To show how these phases unfolded, I track the dynamics of national debate from the late 1950s to the present day via an evaluation of key titles and the companies that published them. This evaluation is not intended to be encyclopaedic. It does aim, however, to capture the titles that played a crucial role in an ongoing contestation of Australian identity and cultural, social and political convention as part of various overlapping projects to ‘improve’ Australia, with the idea of nation as something that can be improved taken as a given. Where available, sales figures are used to support the argument.

In outlining this publishing history, it is not my intention to reify a somewhat artificial generic divide between fiction and non-fiction. Another, more hidden role of mission-based publishing has been to help stabilise this generic difference on the basis that non-fiction seeks to establish what the pertinent ‘facts’ are on a given issue. This responsibility afforded non-fiction is part of a western tradition whereby fiction and non-fiction function as distinct ‘genre worlds’, produced by their contexts, thematic content and particular formal attributes (Frow). My use here of ‘non-fiction’ as a category is a matter of convenience, since this category is presently in use, rather than an endorsement of its generic solidity.

The article proceeds by first clarifying what is meant by the expression ‘cultural mission’, then follows with a discussion of the debates that defined each of the four phases and the publishers and titles that helped set the terms of discussion.

The ‘cultural mission’ in book publishing

Book publishing, like all business, is profit-driven. Yet, as is the case with most creative industries, publishers are also driven by imperatives that in many

instances include a sense of ‘cultural mission’: publishers, in effect, seek to change the national culture and the terms of debate on cultural, social, political and even economic matters. The mission approach to publishing, as Albert N. Greco *et al* have said of book publishing in the United States, is closely connected to ideals about its function:

If questioned, many readers (and perhaps a clear majority) would maintain that the book is a cultural object, the means by which knowledge is passed from author to reader, from one generation to the next. Books played a pivotal role and, in many instances, a crucial one in the intellectual, cultural, and educational life of the United States, and they are not perceived as a commodity the way that coffee, orange juice and television sets are . . . Defenders of the ‘cultural mission’ theory of publishing maintain strenuously that society has an obligation, often bordering on the ‘sacred,’ to ensure that books are published and preserved. (1)

This mission-based approach sits in tension with, though not necessarily in opposition to, commercial imperatives:

Although publishers and editors are deeply involved in the transmission of knowledge and perform invaluable gatekeeping functions, publishing has been and is likely to remain a business, albeit a business that supplies readers with printed or electronic books that educate, inform, and entertain. Publishers and editors have a fiduciary responsibility to the owner(s) of the publishing house and to their readers and society. (2)

Australian publishers, too, have often published out a sense of cultural mission that arises from a deeply embedded assumption that book-length fiction and non-fiction are potential vehicles for cultural change. As Andrew Fabinyi, publisher at F.W. Cheshire, wrote in 1966:

Many, even if not enough, books in Australia are written and published by iconoclasts. In this society which, on the whole, detests originality, is baffled by courage and believes essentially in the one Establishment which embraces stockbrokers, wharf labourers, and all, The Australian book, often published and sold in only a small edition, can still propound themes and values which newspapers do not publish, TV stations ignore, governments ridicule and the public cares little about. (160)

One function of cultural mission publishing is democratic debate. Cultural mission non-fiction books are rarely published in their own right. Instead, they play a role in struggles over national meaning and act as rejoinders in a cycle of call and response that often involves a contest of ideological positions. This dynamic arguably plays an important commercial role and takes place via interaction with other media. As books contest each other, so audiences for debate are constructed as books help shape what counts as ‘national conversation’, driving and reflecting agendas and even on some cases, the news agenda. Examples include the mid-1990s furore around Helen Garner’s *The First Stone* (1995) and recent disputes over Bruce Pascoe’s *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (2018). Such books also generate considerable cultural capital for their publishers and ideally do so at every stage of their production, from the publicity generated by signing a prominent author, to winning literary prizes, to playing a high-profile role in national debate. A core function of cultural mission books, as I argue here, has been to play a major part in Australia’s culture wars, from those of the 1960s over the ‘new nationalism’, through battles in the 1970s relating to the role of women and masculinism of Australian identity, to the culture wars of the 1990s and 2000s with their struggles over race, gender, Indigenous Australia and the environment. When an issue is highly contested, a timely cultural mission title can achieve substantial sales and become a bearer of significant economic as well as cultural capital. For publishers, this result is a profitable accommodation between cultural contestation and market competition.

‘Renaissance’: late 1950s to late 1960s

The late 1950s and early 1960s are often positioned as a self-consciously formative period in Australian culture. Australia, to use a popular metaphor of the time, was considered to be ‘growing up’ and shaking off the shackles of Empire. This included a ‘growing willingness to criticise Australian life frankly and firmly, to see it clearly and wholly with a view to all its limitations’, as Peter Coleman put it in the introduction to his *Australian Civilization: A Symposium* (1962) (11). Accounts of the period cite the first appearances of Barry Humphries’s Edna Everage and Sandy Stone in 1955, the original performance of Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) the same year, the first performance in 1960 of Alan Seymour’s critique of Anzac day rituals, *The One Day of the Year*, the publication of George Johnston’s novel *My Brother Jack* (1964), and the television debut of the iconoclastic *Mavis Bramston Show* (1964–68), as evidence of cultural change. The mid-1960s, as James Curran and Stuart Ward have said, saw ‘the most vigorous makeover in Australia’s history’ during which ‘Australians were confronted with the task of remaking their nation in the wake of empire’ (5). This remodelling included a questioning of

‘identifiably “British” ideas, symbols, motifs, precepts and practices’, whereby ‘the designs on coins, banknotes, passports and the national flag became subject to scrutiny’ (5).

Developments in print media were crucial to this self-consciously figured cultural ‘renaissance’, as Robin Boyd later called it (*Artificial Australia: The Boyer Lectures 1967* 6). These included the founding in 1958 of both the *Observer*, edited by Donald Horne with Peter Coleman as associate editor, and *Nation*. (Barry Humphries had introduced its publisher, Tom Fitzgerald, and founder-editor, George Munster). In 1961, Horne commenced the first of his two stints as editor of a rejuvenated *Bulletin*. On arrival, Horne binned the metal type for the slogan that adorned the magazine’s masthead, ‘Australia for the White Man’ at a time when The White Australia Policy was still operative. In 1963, the iconoclastic *Oz* magazine was founded. In 1964, Rupert Murdoch launched the *Australian*. Through this period the Australian book publishing industry grew rapidly as it began to free itself from the Traditional Market Agreement by which British publishers dominated the ‘colonial market’ (Magner). Established presses such as Angus & Robertson, Horwitz (a publisher of mass market pulp fiction), Melbourne University Press, and F. W. Cheshire, were joined by new presses such as Jacaranda Books in 1954, Rigby in 1959, and Landsdowne Press in 1960. Overseas publishers established local lists. In 1951, Frank Eyre took over as Manager of Oxford University Press’s Australian office and appointed local editors and designers to build an Australian list. In 1961, Penguin founder, Allen Lane, visited Australia and wrote that ‘My own feeling is that Australia is about to emerge, speaking from a publishing point of view, into a creative phase in place of an absorbent one’ (McPhee 62). Soon after, Penguin Australia inaugurated a local list presided over by Brian Stonier with Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris as editorial consultants.

The emergence of an urban, middle class readership with an appetite for both periodicals and books (see Carter and Osborne) and narratives of Australian culture underwrote these commercial developments. In 1960, the historian Max Crawford speculated in his *An Australian Perspective* that new outlooks appeared to be emerging to challenge dominant understandings of Australian history. He was referring to a view held by historians such as Russel Ward, Geoffrey Serle, Ian Turner and Brian Fitzpatrick, namely that Australian society tended towards natural egalitarianism, fraternal collectivism, healthy anti-intellectualism and larrikinish anti-authoritarianism. Ward’s influential and popular *The Australian Legend* (1958), published by Eyre at Oxford University Press, provided an archetype. Yet, even as Ward’s book was being published the certitudes of ‘bush nationalism’ were being contested. In his *Australian Accent* (1958), published in the UK, J. D. Pringle, a UK journalist who was editor

of the *Sydney Morning Herald* for five years, argued that Australians were aspirational people who, ‘while fundamentally working class in origin and in habits of thought’, nonetheless desired to be middle class and own their own home in suburbia (100). Pringle had summed up an emerging counter-narrative to the Australian Legend: in Australia the social problems of class had been largely solved. Suburbia was the measure not of the desultory, conformist failures of radicalism, but of national success.

Two years later, F. W. Cheshire published Robin Boyd’s *The Australian Ugliness* (1960), in which Boyd took direct aim. ‘Cruel but kind’, was his summary of the Australian character as venerated by the cultural nationalists. ‘The Australian’, he said, ‘is forcefully loquacious, until the moment of expressing any emotion. He is aggressively committed to equality and equal opportunity for all men, except for black Australians’ (72). Pringle and Boyd were among a group of ‘new critics’, as Tim Rowse later called them, impatient with the settled cultural, political and economic norms of Australia’s post-war years and determined to challenge what they characterised as a left-leaning Liberal establishment: ‘They brought together a certain ensemble of opinions on foreign and domestic policies and on Australian character and the arts and attacked it as the established “conventional wisdom”’ (214). Boyd’s publisher at F. W. Cheshire, Andrew Fabinyi, a Hungarian refugee from Nazism, later contacted Peter Coleman at the *Observer* to suggest bringing together a number of *Observer* contributors, ‘intellectuals of a broad liberal disposition for a “symposium” about where Australia was going as it entered a new and promising decade’ (*Memoirs of a Slow Learner* 197). Coleman’s subsequent edited collection, *Australian Civilization: A Symposium* (1962), brought together figures such as Boyd, Robert Hughes, James McAuley and Manning Clarke. In his introductory chapter, Coleman claimed that in the ‘Australianist’ legend he heard ‘the snarl of the collectivist bully’ and evidence of a ‘democratic-nihilist complex’, which brought together ‘humanism and nihilism, democracy and violence, the open smile and the broken bottle’ (2–3).

Donald Horne’s *The Lucky Country* (1964) remains the best-known expression of this agenda. Commissioned by Max Harris in the lead up to the launch of Penguin Books’ Australian publishing operation, the book drew inspiration from Anthony Sampson’s *Anatomy of Britain* (1962) and almost remained unpublished because of opposition from Penguin headquarters in the UK (Reinecke). In it Horne laid out a case for national reform against what he saw as an ongoing national malaise, concluding with its famous declaration that ‘Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck’ (239). The book’s title subsequently entered the vernacular, mostly without Horne’s intended irony. Penguin followed up with books by other ‘new critics’,

such as Robert Hughes's *Art of Australia* (1966), and Craig McGregor's *Profile of Australia* (1966), which openly championed the suburban rock music and surf culture condemned by exponents of the Australianist tradition.

In 1965, Stonier, Dutton and Harris, tired of dealing with British management, left to found Sun Books (Dutton, *Out in the Open* 312). The first original Sun non-fiction title was Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966), which Dutton had commissioned while still at Penguin. Another successful Sun Book, George Johnson's *The Australians* (1966), proselytised Australian modernity in full colour and glowing prose, and provided a prototype for the large-format illustrated Australiana that subsequently become a publishing industry staple.

Australian history was the topic of another important book of the period. The first volume of Manning Clarke's six volume *History of Australia* was published by Melbourne University Press in 1962. Clarke, too, rejected bush socialism and Marxism, and wrote Australian history as epic tragedy. The series was a financial mainstay of the press through to the publication of its final volume in 1987.

These books found a ready audience among a public evidently hungry for new accounts of Australian life. Boyd's *The Australian Ugliness*, Horne's *The Lucky Country*, and Robert Hughes's *Art of Australia* sold 94,000, 250,000 and 56,000 copies respectively across their various Penguin editions – figures that would still be spectacular today.¹ And the publishing industry itself strengthened. Between 1960 and 1971, membership of the Australian Book Publishers Association almost doubled to sixty-seven firms, nearly forty of them Australian-owned (Thompson 31, 34), and between 1961 and 1979 the value of Australian publishing doubled three times (Magner 9).

Insurrectionism: late 1960s to mid-1980s

Each phase of cultural mission non-fiction book publishing in Australia can be read as a story of the contestation and opening up of the Australian publishing field to new voices. Just as the Australianists were challenged by the 'new critics', so, in the late 1960s the 'new critics' were overtaken by events. The Vietnam War had put ideology back on the agenda and mobilised the New Left. These critics' relative silence about women and Aborigines rankled. The Wave Hill Walkoff of 1966 and 'citizenship referendum' of 1967 put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues on the national agenda. A year later, W.

¹All Penguin sales figures cited in this essay refer to actual copies sold (after returns and excluding gratis copies) as recorded in company records, kindly made available by Penguin for the ARC funded research project 'Australian Literary Publishing and Its Economies, 1965–1995', in which I was an investigator.

E. H. Stanner's Boyer lectures entitled 'After the Dreaming', excoriated the 'The Great Australian Silence' about Australia's Aboriginal history. Among the books censured was Coleman's *Australian Civilization* (1962) for its 'total silence on all matters aboriginal' (qtd. in Curthoys 237). Nor did *Australian Civilization* have any female contributors.

There was no such silence in Frank Hardy's *The Unlucky Australians* (1968), which carried a foreword by Horne. Its account of the Gurindji campaign against appalling conditions at Wave Hill station included sections in which activists put their concerns directly in first person voice. Like Stanner's lectures, this volume was in print a decade later. In 1969 Julie Rigg's *In Her Own Right* anthologised concerns about what was being called the women's 'problem' in Australia. Like Hardy's book, it was published by Thomas Nelson and brought new voices into debate. As a querulous reviewer warned, 'A number of dangerous women appear in this symposium' (Hutton 9).

Another important new voice in debate was the naturalist, Vincent Serventy, who put the environment on the national agenda with his *The Australian Nature Trail* (1965). A television show, *Nature Walkabout*, and string of successful books followed, most of them published by the Australian branch of New Zealand publisher A. H. and A. W. Reed.

The 1970s opened with a clarion call from the New Left. Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (1970), began with a quote from Lenin and took on *The Australian Legend* from the left. The politics of the labour movement, McQueen argued, were less socialist and more thoroughly complicit in the history of ruling class domination of Australia than had been acknowledged by earlier historians. Socialists, he said, 'must realize that Australia is a capitalist society and is not possessed by some natural socialist ethos (mateship)' (4).

Other authors displayed little interest in these debates. One of the most quietly iconoclastic and influential books of the period was Hugh Stretton's self-published *Ideas for Australian Cities* (1970). No enemy of suburbia, Stretton had little time for argumentation about Australian history or identity. His project was instead driven by practical idealism: how to improve people's lives through improved civic design.

Rosalie Stephenson's *Women in Australian Society* (1970) was concerned with a no less practical question: could women work and bring up a family? And what could be done to support them? Stephenson's book was part of a broader questioning of the gendered nature of rights, equality, work and family that was unfolding to create a distinctive form of Australian feminism

(Genovese). Titles such as Anne Summers's *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975), Jan Mercer's edited collection *The Other Half* (1975), and Miriam Dixon's *The Real Matilda* (1976) helped build this lineage. They also intervened in the debate about Australian nationalism – a debate that, as Summers wrote, had relegated women to the margins. *Damned Whores and God's Police* opened with a withering critique of Horne and McGregor for perpetuating a simplistic view of Australian family life. As Summers said, expanding a point made by R. W. Connell, W. K. Hancock's *Australia*, published in 1930, had crystallised the themes subsequently taken up, with minor elaboration, by writers such as Horne, Pringle, Coleman, Harris and McGregor, among others – all of whom 'used the terms "Australian" and "men" synonymously' (104). Dixon was no less forthright. The 'single most striking feature of our national identity', she wrote, was 'a womanlessness that amounts in some senses to her obliteration' (58). In her sights were the historical accounts of Vance Palmer, Russel Ward, Michael Roe, Ian Turner, Geoffrey Serle, Geoffrey Blainey and Humphrey McQueen. As the Foreword to *The Other Half* put it, 'We live in a society designed by men, for men, and controlled by men who offer us a social organization and a set of values alien to us' (Mercer, 'Foreword' 2). Horne and McGregor were also censured for their influential, masculinist accounts ('The Sexist Society: An Introduction' 23).

A pivotal figure in the emergence of this new wave of critique was Penguin publisher John Hooker, who had moved from F. W. Cheshire in 1969. He and John Curtain had commissioned *A New Britannia* when Hooker was at Cheshire (McLaren 20). At Penguin, Hooker also published *Damned Whores and God's Police*, *The Other Half* and *The Real Matilda*. Charles Birch's *Confronting the Future: Australia and the World; The Next Hundred Years* (1976), broke new ground as a globally focused environmental title. Hooker also put Penguin at the forefront of a defining trend in 1970s Australian cultural mission book publishing: the publication of books by and about Indigenous Australians. An early experiment was the republication of C. D. Rowley's *Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (1972), *Outcasts in White Australia* (1972), and *Remote Aborigines* (1972), which were first published in 1970 as academic titles by Australian National University Press and found commercial success under the Penguin imprint. As Ann Curthoys has said, *Destruction of Aboriginal Society* 'put Aboriginal history on a new footing' (246). Another landmark title, Kevin Gilbert's *Living Black* (1977), was written at the instigation of Hooker who asked Gilbert to show what living as an Aborigine was like. Hooker later learned of comments from Penguin's UK board that 'Hooker's a bit too radical. He was even a "nigger lover"' (Dutton, *A Rare Bird* 106). Hooker would ultimately resign from Penguin after increased intervention by the UK head

office in Australian operations that included opposition to Hooker's radical politics and his having published Gilbert's book (Dutton, *A Rare Bird* 134–37).

Through this period, non-fiction cultural mission publishing proved an effective means of transforming cultural capital into economic capital. As Hooker pithily put it, the 1970s were a time when 'radical politics made money' (qtd. in Dutton, *A Rare Bird* 97). *Damned Whores and God's Police*, *The Other Half* and *The Real Matilda* all found a significant public, with sales that would be regarded as stellar today; 57,000, 26,000 and 21,000 copies respectively. *Confronting the Future* sold over 50,000 copies. C. D. Rowley's *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, *Outcasts in White Australia* and *Remote Aborigines*, together sold almost 50,000 copies. Kevin Gilbert's *Living Black* went on to sell almost 25,000 copies through many reprints.

Other publishers also showed an appetite for publishing books of national re-evaluation. In 1971, Sun Books had a hit with Ronald Conway's critique of Australian masculinity, *The Great Australian Stupor: An Interpretation of the Australian Way of Life* (1971). It sold over 70,000 copies and for a time its title entered the vernacular (Strong). That same year, Sun was bought by, and became an imprint of, Macmillan, with Stonier as managing director. Conway's follow up, *Land of the Long Weekend* (1978), foreshadowed current debates about work-life balance. Another highly successful Sun Book was Geoffrey Blainey's *Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Ancient Australia* (1975), which argued that far from being prisoners of their hostile environment, Aborigines had triumphed over it.

In 1972, *Oz* co-founder Richard Walsh took over as managing director and publisher at Angus & Robertson, a publishing company that had recently emerged from a decade of takeover ructions. Walsh rebuilt the company and published iconoclastic titles such as John Docker's *Australian Cultural Elites* (1974), which argued there was more nuance to ideological debates than the 'new critics' allowed, and an Australian edition of Dennis Altman's landmark gay rights book *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1972). R. W. Connell's *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* (1977), published by the local office of Cambridge University Press, sharpened the critique of the 'new critics'. According to Connell, Horne, Coleman and Pringle and company operated as mere handmaidens for a liberal-capitalist ideological status quo:

there was a systematic attempt to sell suburban living as the most desirable way of life. In the decade or so after the war real estate developers, builders, consumer goods manufacturers and retailers mounted a massive campaign in the media promoting suburbs and all the equip-

ment of suburban living. (216)

Also opposed to the development ethos were environmentalists. Books such as Judith Wright's *The Coral Battleground* (1977), published by Thomas Nelson, helped cohere the environmentalist movement in the wake of events including the Lake Pedder and Franklin River protests of 1972–73. It is still in print at Spinifex Press.

The 1970s also saw the emergence of independent presses such as Outback Press, Wild & Woolley, McPhee Gribble, Hyland House, Fremantle Arts Centre Press (FACP) and the Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited (APCOL), all of which helped push along agendas to reframe how Australian society was understood. One of Outback's first books was *A Book About Australian Women* (1974) by Carol Jerrems and Virginia Fraser. An early Wild & Woolley title was Dennis Altman's *Coming Out in the Seventies* (1979). Hyland House published *The Immigrants* (1977), an oral history by Wendy Lowenstein and Morag Loh, which documented the migrant experience in Australia. The Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited published a number of books on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues such as Frank Stevens's *The Politics of Prejudice* (1980).

Another development was the emergence and reinvention of specialist presses. These included the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Press, which brought Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices into publication through books such as Jimmie Barker's *Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900–1972* (1977).

Reaction: 1980s to late 1990s

In 1976, the British publisher Allen & Unwin sent Patrick Gallagher to Australia, where he began putting together an Australian list that, in the 1980s, would develop into one of Australian publishing's most important non-fiction lists. Among the books published was Richard White's *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688–1980* (1981), which laid bare the question that has driven cultural mission in Australian current affairs book publishing: national identity. All these books ask a version of the same question: who are 'we'? White rejects Ward's *The Australian Legend* and McQueen's suggestion that with more, better analysis a real Australian identity might be found, and instead posits Australia as a multi-faceted invention:

there is no 'real' Australian waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention. There is no point in asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all

intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible – and necessarily false. They have all been artificially imposed upon a diversified landscape and population, and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions. When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creations they are, and whose interests they serve.
(viii)

White's openness to questions of national identity prefaced a bruising decade. For all its contestation, cultural mission publishing had been generally dominated by a reforming, modernising impulse. In the 1980s, the forces of anti-reformist reaction gathered.

Bruce Grant's *The Boat People* (1980), published by John Hooker's successor at Penguin, Brian Johns, was among the books of the 1980s that continued the reform agenda. Henry Reynolds's *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1982) inverted traditional Australian settlement history to tell it through Indigenous eyes and went on to sell over 28,000 copies in its Penguin edition, having sold out an earlier James Cook University edition (see Davis). Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles at Home* (1981), published by Angus & Robertson, asked what it meant to be a woman writer in Australia and was still in print two decades later.

But this willingness to contest how Australian self-understanding was constructed was soon itself under challenge. Alex Buzo's *Meet the New Class* (1981), published by Angus & Robertson, hijacked Horne's *The Lucky Country* thesis that an out-of-touch elite was running the country, to position post-1960s progressive culture as the new bastion of self-interest. Robert Manne's edited collection, *The New Conservatism in Australia* (1982), published by Oxford University Press, sought to recast conservatives as iconoclasts battling leftist elites. And in March 1984, Geoffrey Blainey inflamed the immigration debate with a speech questioning Asian immigration; a subsequent newspaper article claimed that Asians had become 'a favoured majority' in immigration policy and that Australia was now subject to a 'slow Asian takeover' (Markus 63). A follow-up book, *All for Australia* (1984), published by Methuen Haynes, set out his case for 'Asian influx' in no uncertain terms. In the six months following the speech, over 350 newspaper articles on Asian immigration were published, many of which cited Blainey (Markus 63). As Andrew Markus has argued, Blainey's speech and book prefigured 'the politics of resentment and xenophobia which Pauline Hanson was to bring to the national stage in 1996' (65).

These were early shots in an increasingly bitter culture war over the legacy of liberal progressivism. This conflict frequently drew its ideas and rhetoric from the brutal US culture wars, which had brewed since the civil rights struggles

of the early 1960s. Here, as there, in the cross hairs were a ‘new class’ of self-interested ‘elites’ who were depicted as beneficiaries of the struggles of the so-called oppressed. As Peter Coleman, by then editor of *Quadrant*, lamented in a 1984 editorial:

ideas matter and the dominant ideas in Australia have become those of the New Class regulators who despise the liberal traditions of the country. There are few more urgent tasks than that of mounting an ideological offensive in support of those traditions and against the cultural and intellectual hegemony of the New Class. (qtd. in Markus 56)

Through the bitter land rights battles of the early 1980s and into the lead up to the Bicentenary celebrations of Australian settlement of 1988, debate intensified (see Davis and Sharman). Talk was of the ‘multicultural industry’, the ‘Aboriginal industry’, and the excesses of feminism. The question at the centre of all this was, and remains, just how far were new conceptions of Australian identity going to go.

As debate intensified, a new wave of books made it their mission to set the record straight. Allen & Unwin inaugurated an Aboriginal Studies list precisely because, as publisher Elizabeth Weiss said, of a ‘long term interest in publishing in areas that can be called black arm’ (qtd. in Poland 98). This list would include Richard Broome’s *Aboriginal Australians* (1982) and Diane Bell’s *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1984). Another response was first person accounts of Indigenous life such as Elsie Roughsey’s *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* (1984), published by McPhee-Gribble, and Glynise Ward’s *Wandering Girl* (1988), the first title published by the newly established Magabala Books, initially funded by a Bicentennial grant. Penguin made a contribution to the telling of Australian culture in Indigenous voice with Ruby Langford Ginibi’s uncompromising *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988), which went on to sell almost 32,000 copies. University of Queensland Press made a strong contribution to Indigenous issues via books such as Lyndall Ryan’s *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (1981), Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *My Bundjalung People* (1994) and Jackie Huggins’s *Sister Girl* (1998), and by a program to train Indigenous editors.

These re-examinations of history and identity, though, mostly located themselves in a national frame. Alongside them, in the wake of the economic reforms of the early 1980s, another strand of books preferred to locate questions about Australia’s future in a global frame. Barry Jones’s *Sleepers, Wake! Technology and the Future of Work* (1983), looked at how the emergence of a post-industrial

‘information society’ would impact on Australia. Published by Oxford University Press, it sold around 40,000 copies in its first few years (Cunningham 18).

Towards the end of the decade two books captured the prevailing tumult and the impact of new ideological forces on Australian culture. The first was the prophetic collection *The New Right’s Australian Fantasy* (1987), edited by Ken Coghill and published by McPhee Gribble. In it, Alex Carey wrote:

It is vital that the counter to democracy the New Right is seeking to exploit should be checked. Otherwise we risk a future in which, not humane values, certainly not mateship and egalitarianism, but the values of commerce, the worship of wealth and material consumption, will, even more uniformly, govern the minds of a managed and determinate majority. The business of Australia will be business and, in the words of R. H. Tawney, society will be run ‘as a by-product of the market relationship’ – which is, indeed, the ideal of the new right. (16)

The second, Michael Pusey’s *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes Its Mind* (1991), published by Cambridge University Press, sparked a national debate and introduced a new term – ‘economic rationalism’ – to the vernacular. The power of ideas was also on Pusey’s mind: ‘I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval’ (5).

Into the 1990s this economic transformation, along with advances in information technology, began to significantly influence the Australian publishing industry. The impact included the streamlining and computerisation of warehousing and inventory systems; the growth of national bookstore chains; the increased outsourcing of editorial, design and marketing processes to freelancers; and, crucially, the financialisation of the publishing industry. Publishing became increasingly corporatised, focused on the demands of investors, and companies sought to achieve growth through mergers and takeovers. The rounds of mergers and acquisitions that began in the US in the late 1950s ultimately resulted in the creation of global conglomerates. By the end of the 1990s, just on seventy per cent of the Australian market belonged to seven major houses, six of them globally owned. They were, in order of market share, Penguin (eighteen per cent), Random House (fourteen per cent), Harper-Collins (thirteen per cent), Allen & Unwin (nine per cent), Pan-Macmillan (seven per cent), Hodder Headline (six per cent), and Simon and Schuster (just over two per cent) (Webster 83-4). Local imprints such as F. W. Cheshire, Collins, Greenhouse,

Jacaranda, Lloyd O'Neill, McPhee-Gribble, Rigby and Sun Books had by then been absorbed by larger companies.

Room was nevertheless created for new players by the expansion of the Australian book market from \$509.2 million in 1989–90 to \$1207.8 million in 1999–2000, by which time over sixty per cent of books sold were locally originated. Yet, the market also began to fragment as publishers produced more titles overall while the number of sales per title dropped, at risk to profitability (Webster 82). Sales data from Penguin Books, one of the few publishers whose activities span the entire period, shows the change. In the 1960s the average printing for Penguin Australia originated non-fiction current affairs books was 98,000, across five titles. In the 1970s the average printing was 23,833 across twenty-seven titles. In the 1980s the average printing was 19,626 across seventy titles. In the 1990s the average printing was 10,345.²

The fragmentation of the market mirrored a growing sense of cultural fragmentation. The 1990s were, as Hugh Mackay described it in his *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90s* (1993), published by Angus & Robertson, and 'age of redefinition' defined by multiculturalism, feminism, growing unemployment and inequality, and technological change. A sharp recession, the *Mabo* (1992) and *Wik* (1996) High Court Native Title judgments, the Hindmarsh Island dispute with its claims of fabricated 'secret women's business' holding up development, and the emergence of Pauline Hanson as a national figure, all helped to escalate the ideological skirmishes of the 1980s into a full-fledged, bitter culture war fought in the political mainstream (see Sawer and Hindess; Markus).

During this period, Allen & Unwin emerged as a leading publisher of progressive, reformist titles. In 1990, a management buyout separated the local branch of the company from its London head office. Books that followed made significant interventions in debates about feminism and Indigenous rights, such as Marian Sawer's *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia* (1990), Heather Goodall's *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972* (1996) (published in association with Black Books), and Peter Read's *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generations* (1999). Perhaps the most prolific author of the period was Henry Reynolds, who published six books on Indigenous issues with two publishers through the decade, including *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Reflections on Race, State and Nation* (Allen & Unwin, 1996), and *Fate of a Free People* (Penguin, 1995).

²For commercial in confidence reasons data is unavailable beyond this period.

As the market fragmented so new publishers were founded. One was the Text Media Group, started in 1990 by McPhee-Gribble co-founder Di Gribble and Eric Beecher. Their collection *Shutdown: The Failure of Economic Rationalism and How to Rescue Australia* (1992), edited by Robert Manne and John Carroll, fired a salvo in the debate about deregulatory economic reform. In 1992, Michael Heyward was appointed as publisher and the company was reconfigured as Text Publishing. Robert Manne's *The Way We Live Now: The Controversies of the Nineties* (1998), sought to sum up a tumultuous decade and Susan Maushart's *Wifework: What Marriage Really Means for Women* (2001) continued the debate about the role of women and Australian masculinism.

Changing attitudes to the roles of women formed a pivotal motive in the founding by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein of another small press, Spinifex Press, in 1991 and in the midst of a recession. Established to support feminist and literary publishing, Spinifex broke new technological ground, launching one of the first publisher websites, and backed the medium with the publication of Dale Spender's *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace* (1995). They also made a direct contribution to the culture wars with Diane Bell's *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: A World That Is, Was, And Will Be* (1998), which supported the Ngarrindjeri women at the heart of the Hindmarsh Island dispute.

Another, quite different strand of titles continued the anti-elite 'war of books' sparked by Buzo and Blainey. The most prominent of these was Helen Garner's *The First Stone* (1995), published by Pan Macmillan and which purported to be an account of a sexual harassment scandal at a Melbourne University residential college. It imported its key terms and ideas from the US culture wars and helped popularise a new, brusque concept, 'victim feminism', to describe the supposed excesses of young feminists. The ensuing controversy dominated newspaper front pages for much of the year. Garner's book reportedly sold well over 50,000 copies. It also provoked three book length ripostes that sought to give voice to young feminists themselves, Virginia Trioli's *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist* (1996), published by Minerva, Kathy Bail's edited collection, *D.I.Y. Feminism* (1996), published by Allen & Unwin, and the collection *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life* (1997), edited by Jenna Mead and published by Random House.

Also under scrutiny was multiculturalism. In 1995, the debate found a talismanic incident in the Demindenko Affair, in which Helen Darville, a young Queensland woman who posed as a Ukrainian migrant named Helen Demindenko, won a number of literary prizes, including the Miles Franklin Award, with a fictionalised account of the Holocaust supposedly informed by her family history. It was soon made clear that the book trafficked in anti-Semitism,

that Demidenko's identity and the family history were fabricated, and parts of the book had been plagiarised. Again, the controversy was a media sensation. It also prompted backlash books such as Robert Manne's *The Culture of Forgetting: Helen Demidenko and the Holocaust* (1996), published by Text Publishing, and Andrew Reimer's *The Demidenko Debate* (1996), published by Allen & Unwin, focused on progressive excesses and the supposed historical ignorance of the young.

Backlash books were becoming a staple. Peter Coleman's edited collection, *Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays* (1996), published by Mandarin, attempted to document the newly discovered climate of censorship supposedly being fostered by 'political correctness'. A more dramatic intervention was Paul Sheehan's *Among the Barbarians: The Dividing of Australia* (1998). Published by Random House, it promised to 'lift the veil of intimidation' that Sheehan claimed prevented critical discussion of Australia's immigration policies and multiculturalism, not least the supposed criminality of Asian immigrants. The book spent five months on best-seller lists.

Shots echoed into the 2000s with the publication of Keith Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (2002), by Macleay Press which he founded. The book claimed that frontier killings of Aborigines by whites had been deliberately exaggerated for political reasons. It was taken up as a culture wars *cause célèbre* by the Murdoch Press, in particular the *Australian*, which used it to promote the idea that Indigenous history had been subject to a leftist takeover. Robert Manne's edited collection, *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (2003), published by the then-recently established Black Inc., compellingly fact-checked Windschuttle's fact-checking.

Through the 1990s, another strand of books sought to document and make sense of the culture wars themselves, including Pamela Williams's, *The Victory: The Inside Story of the Takeover of Australia* (1997), and my book *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism* (1997), both published by Allen & Unwin. Jon Stratton's *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis* (1998), and Ghassan Hage's *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multiracial Society* (1998), both published by a revitalised local office of Pluto Press, laid bare post-Hanson debates about race and national identity.

In 1976, Henry Rosenbloom had founded the independent press Scribe Publishing but the imprint remained largely dormant until his family sold its interest in a printing company Rosenbloom managed. Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930's Depression in Australia* (1978) was published through this period. In 1999, Rosenbloom renewed Scribe, focusing

on 'serious non-fiction'. Scribe was among a number of small presses that prospered on the back of overseas licensing deals facilitated by parallel importation restrictions that protected local rights holders, introduced in 1991. Into the 2000s these successes would help support the publication of local titles such as Tony Kevin's *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of SIEV X* (2004), which brought to light the loss of hundreds of lives at sea with the sinking of an asylum seeker boat off the coast of Australia and addressed another emerging front in the culture wars: Australia's mandatory detention of asylum-seekers.

Another small publisher of the 1970s, Morry Schwartz, had co-founded Outback Press in 1971. Outback lasted until 1980 and in the 1990s Schwartz founded Outback's successor, Schwartz Publishing. Its early imprints included Unicorn Books, Bantam/Schwartz, and Bookman Press, before Schwartz founded Black Inc. in 2000. *Two Nations: The Causes and Effects of the Rise of the One Nation Party in Australia* (1998), edited by Robert Manne and published by Bookman Press was a direct response to Hansonism.

Behind the smoke generated by the culture wars, large scale economic transformation continued apace and prompted new books to make sense of what was being called 'globalisation'. The most prominent of these was Paul Kelly's *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics and Business in Australia* (1992), published by Allen & Unwin. While the nuance of Kelly's argument about the rise and fall of what he called the 'Australian settlement' was open to question (Walter), the phrase 'end of certainty' aptly summed up the possibility that during the 1980s and into the 1990s an epochal shift had shaken Australia's social settlement.

Corporatism: late 1990s and early 2000s

The introduction of Nielsen BookScan (then known as BookTrack) to Australia in 2000 presaged another change to the publishing environment: a growing emphasis on metrics, arguably at the expense of mission-based publishing. BookScan enabled publishers to see, for the first time, actual sales across the entire market, not simply their own sales, in close to real time. The temptation for publishers was to follow the data about the past of the market rather than their instincts about its possible futures; a pressure multiplied by a growing emphasis on budget targets in an increasingly corporate environment. An increasing attention to risk management saw publishers play closer attention to inventory control and stock levels, which were also visible to booksellers via the online industry-wide price and availability service, Titlepage. Metrics such as 'track' (sales track record) and 'platform' in prospective authors, became ever more important, and the shape of the market began to change. Chain stores struggled (the REDgroup and its Angus & Robertson and Borders chains would collapse in 2011) and Big W would consolidate a position as the country's

largest bookseller in the second decade of the 2000s, while online sales surged and independent bookstores held their own. These pressures impacted on literary publishing (Stinson) and the shape of the market for non-fiction politics, current affairs and popular history titles began to change as well.

Through the first decade of the 2000s, Allen & Unwin maintained a strong focus on traditional cultural mission publishing through titles that intervened directly in culture wars debates, such as David Marr and Marian Wilkinson's *Dark Victory: The Military Campaign to Re-Elect the Prime Minister* (2003), Marion Maddox's *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (2005) and Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison's edited collection *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate* (2007).

In 2003, Louise Adler took over as publisher at Melbourne University Press, since renamed Melbourne University Publishing, and controversially set about transforming a small university press into a commercial publisher, competing in 'auctions', paying large advances to celebrity authors, and seeking large sales. This formula enacted on a small scale the corporatisation of Australian publishing but not necessarily at the expense of mission-based publishing, as seen in the commercial and critical success of Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark's *The History Wars* (2003).

By the early 2000s, the front of Australia's culture wars had widened and spread across multiple issues as the Howard government rolled out regressive policies in areas from Indigenous rights, seen in the refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generations, the winding back the rights of women, draconian anti-asylum-seeker policies, and aggressive inaction on climate change. Into the 2000s independent publishers such as Black Inc. and Text responded with influential titles focused on culture wars issues such as Clive Hamilton's *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change* (Black Inc. 2007), and Tim Flannery's *The Weather Makers: The History & Future Impact of Climate Change* (Text, 2008).

Such titles, however, were published into what appeared to be a declining market. As Jan Zwar showed in an analysis of Nielsen BookScan non-fiction sales in Australia between 2003 and 2008, sales of books in the politics and current affairs category fell from around \$9 million per year to around \$5 million per year. During this same period, sales of biography and autobiography went from \$63 million per year to \$81 million per year (1). In an increasingly tight market, three to five thousand had become the benchmark of a successful print run – Zwar identified 2,880 as a rough category average – with the occasional breakout bestseller (15).

Recently new, hopeful trends in current affairs trade non-fiction publishing have emerged. Female authors and writers of colour have emerged with the publication of books such as Clementine Ford's *Fight Like a Girl* (Allen & Unwin, 2016) and *Boys Will Be Boys* (Allen & Unwin, 2018), Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country* (Harper Collins, 2017), Anita Heiss's edited collection *Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia* (Black Inc., 2018), and Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*, published by Magabala. These books often reflect on a lack of progress in the areas they discussed. As Grant writes of Indigenous rights struggles:

Yet with each high point we seem to retreat. The apology was meant to atone for the Stolen Generations. Since that day the number of indigenous children removed from their families has increased by more than 400 per cent. Two decades after the royal commission inquiry into black deaths in custody the number of indigenous people locked up in Australia has grown 100-fold. (215)

While it would be unfair to reveal sales figures of individual authors, data kindly provided by Nielsen BookScan shows that all of these titles sold well over 10,000 copies and between them they sold over 270,000 copies. These sales figures demonstrate an ongoing public appetite for cultural mission non-fiction books. Analysis of Nielsen BookScan data for a basket of seventeen titles in the politics and current affairs category published in 2018 and 2019 (excluding the five titles mentioned above) shows average sales of 5,612 with a range from 277 to 25,528 copies sold.

Publishers compete in an increasingly fragmented book market and face significantly greater competition from other forms of media such as social media and streaming video. At the same time, the 'infrastructure of debate' has diffused. Where journalism and in particular newspapers played a key role in brokering debates sparked by books, cultural commentary is now scattered across multiple online platforms. There is also a question of nation. Who or what is now the 'Australia' being improved as a result of the critiques outlined in cultural mission non-fiction books? The quest to somehow define Australian national identity and the attendant assumption that there is a 'single Australia' waiting to be addressed by campaigning non-fiction books has become increasingly problematic given the increasingly obvious reality of a complex, diverse and fractured polity. What, then, is national debate, and where does it take place?

Perhaps as a reflection of these fractures and the present atmosphere of uncertainty, another non-fiction category has come into prominence in recent

years, one that looks back to a past in which certain myths of national identity were cemented in place. Sales of military history titles have surged, a genre in which authors such as the late Les Carlyon, Paul Ham and Peter Fitzsimons, have sold tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of copies. As Mark McKenna has written, in the decade from 2002 to 2012 over one hundred and fifty titles were published that made mention of ‘Gallipoli’ or ‘Anzac’ in their titles (30). Anzac Day, as McKenna says, has become a ritual of national celebration rather than commemoration. The mythology of such battles and therefore the act of remembering them, tends to position national identity as having to do with masculinism and mateship. The current affairs, politics and popular history market appears to have cleaved in two; books on feminism and Indigenous rights and history compete with works of military history aimed squarely at the popular market. While the first category struggles with possible futures the latter category looks to the past. These books have little in the way of mission. With their rituals of national remembrance the wheel appears to have turned full circle, to a lost mythological identity past. There is an echo in them of the fraternalism that underpinned the Australian Legend and a remembering of the forms of white patrician national identity that successive waves of cultural mission non-fiction books published since the 1960s sought to overturn.

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