

## THE POLITICS OF BAD FEELING

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It should, I think, be apparent to all well-meaning people that true reconciliation between the Australian nation and its indigenous peoples is not achievable in the absence of acknowledgement by the nation of the wrongfulness of the past dispossession, oppression and degradation of the Aboriginal peoples. That is not to say that individual Australians who had no part in what was done in the past should feel or acknowledge personal guilt. It is simply to assert our identity as a nation and the basic fact that national shame, as well as national pride, can and should exist in relation to past acts and omissions, at least when done or made in the name of the community or with the authority of government. (Governor-General of Australia, cited in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1996: 3)

What does it mean to claim an identity through shame? How does national shame work to acknowledge past wrongdoings, whilst absolving individuals of guilt? In this article, I want to explore expressions of 'feeling bad' or 'bad feeling' within national culture. It is not so much that such feelings are 'felt' by nations, but that declarations of shame can work to bring 'the nation' into existence as a felt community. In the quotation above, the nation is represented as having a relation of shame to the 'wrongfulness' of the past, although this shame exists alongside, rather than undoing, national pride. Shame becomes crucial to the process of reconciliation or the healing of past wounds. To acknowledge wrongdoing means to enter into shame; the 'we' is shamed by its recognition that it has committed 'acts and omissions', which have caused pain, hurt and loss for Indigenous others. The presumption of an essential relation between recognition and shame is shared by Raimond Gaita, who argues that: '[S]hame is as necessary for the lucid acknowledgement by Australians of the wrongs the Aborigines suffered at the hands of their political ancestors, and to the wrongs they continue to suffer, as pain is to mourning' (2000a: 278, see also Gaita 2000b: 87-93). Our shame is as necessary as their suffering in response to the wrongs of this history. This proximity of national shame to Indigenous pain may be what

offers the promise of reconciliation, a future of 'living together', in which the rifts of the past have been healed.

But what kind of recognition and reconciliation is offered by such expressions of national shame? In the preface to *Bringing Them Home*, shame involves movement: the 'nation', in recognising the wrongfulness of the past, is moved by the injustices of the past. In the context of Australian politics, the process of being moved by the past seems better than the process of remaining detached from the past, or assuming that the past has 'nothing to do with us'. To put this point simply, feeling bad about the past seems better than feeling good. In this context, shame is certainly better than pride. But the recognition of shame—or shame as a form of recognition—comes with conditions and limits. In this first instance, it is unclear who feels shame. The quote explicitly replaces 'personal guilt' with 'national shame' and hence detaches the recognition of wrongdoing from individuals, 'who had no part in what was done'. This history is not personal, it suggests. Of course, for the Indigenous testifiers, the stories are personal. We must remember here that the personal is unequally distributed, falling as a requirement, or even as a burden, on some and not others. Some individuals tell their stories—indeed they have to do so—again and again, *given* this failure to hear (see Nicoll, 2004: 25-26), whilst others disappear under the cloak of national shame.

What is striking is how shame becomes not only a mode of recognition of injustices committed against others, but also a form of nation building. It is shame that allows us 'to assert our identity as a nation'. Recognition works to restore the nation or reconcile the nation to itself by 'coming to terms with' its own past in the expression of 'bad feeling'. But in allowing us to feel bad, does shame also allow the nation *to feel better*? What is the relation between the desire to feel better and the declaration of bad feeling?

In this article, I want to consider what I am calling the 'politics of bad feeling'.<sup>1</sup> That

politics works in complex ways to align individuals with and against others, a process of alignment that shapes the very surface of collectives. Now, we can have a bad feeling in the sense that we feel something bad might happen. This would involve the logic of premonition, which anticipates that something bad might happen in the future. Or a bad feeling might be a feeling that feels bad in the present. Pain can be described as a bad feeling, which surfaces on the skin. Pain is often thought of as a sensation rather than emotion; whilst sensations have been understood as being 'too' immediate to require much thought (see Massumi 2002). But pain often slides into other negative feelings, or to other kinds of social as well as psychic negativity (sadness, shame, anger, fear, despair, grief, and so on). Pain is clearly affected by memory, and may even involve a 'retrospective intentionality', that tendency to attribute pain to something or another, often after the pain recedes (Bending 2000: 86). In attributing pain to something, we generate that very thing as an object of thought as well as feeling. So I might feel bad about something and the feeling reads that something (as being this or that kind of thing). Insofar as the feeling is a bad feeling, then it involves an orientation towards that thing as a bad thing. So we might experience pain (it hurts!), which attributes something as the cause of injury (it is bad!), or even identifies someone as causing the pain (you are bad!), which might involve action (go away!). Emotions are powerful as we experience the 'truth' of their judgements in the sensations of bodies: for example, in reading the other as being bad, I might then be filled up with a bad feeling, which becomes a sign of the truth of the reading.

In considering the politics of bad feeling, I am concerned not only with how emotions shape bodies, as sensation felt by the skin, but also with how feelings are declared or named within public culture. Naming emotions involves differentiating between the subject and object of feeling. When we name an emotion we are not simply naming something that exists 'in here' (what I call the 'inside out' model of emotions). So a text may claim that 'the nation mourns'. Here, the nation becomes like the individual, a feeling subject, or a subject that has feelings. We would need to ask: *what does it do to say the nation 'mourns'?* This is a claim both that the nation has feelings (the nation is the

subject of feeling), but also that generates the nation as the object of 'our feelings' (we might mourn on behalf of the nation). The feeling does simply exist before the utterance, but becomes 'real' as an effect, shaping different kinds of actions and orientations. To say, 'the nation mourns' is to generate the nation, *as if it was* a mourning subject. The 'nation' becomes a shared 'object of feeling' through the orientation that is taken towards it. Now words cannot be separated from bodies, or other signs of life. So the word 'mourns' might get attached to some subjects (some more than others represent the nation in mourning), and it might get attached to some objects (some losses more than other may count as losses for this nation). So the politics of bad feeling is not simply about how we might feel bad in the present, or as an anticipation of the future; it is also about who is attributed as the object and subject of that feeling *in the moment of its declaration*. At one level, we can examine how others are attributed as the cause of bad feeling: for example, the global politics of hate and fear since September 11 attributes others, those who 'could be terrorists', who are also those who 'look Muslim', as the origin of death insofar as they threaten our love, reified as the very form of civilisation (see Ahmed 2004). We also need to examine how 'bad feelings' circulate when they are precisely *not* attributed to others. We might, for instance, feel for the other's suffering (compassion), or we might feel bad about causing another's suffering (shame). When we feel bad about others what happens? What does 'feeling bad' about such 'bad feeling' do?

### ***Charity, Pain and Compassion***

We have been asked to care and feel compassion for others by public intellectuals such as Ghassan Hage (2003) as a form of resistance to the 'care-lessness' of Australian politics. A caring nation would resist the paranoid nationalism of the worrying nation, which represents the proximity of racial others, such as asylum seekers, as an injury to the national body. Indeed, the discourse of asylum as injury works powerfully: the pain of asylum seekers, 'stitched' into the national imaginary through the 'stitching up' of their bodies, is already heard as damage to the nation. The asylum seekers in such an affective economy are the origin of bad feeling: the nation is represented as 'hurt' by the display of pain which is seen as a

refusal of the conditions of Australian hospitality, for which only 'gratitude' is expected in return. Surely, to express care for others, rather than seeing their presence as injurious, would be a more ethical response to the pleas of asylum seekers? Surely to feel compassion would be to offer hospitality to those whose injuries are effects of histories of violence that are not necessarily legible on the surface of bodies, but which are faced when we get close enough to face those bodies in the present?

In this section, I want to explore how compassion towards the other's suffering might sustain the violence of appropriation, even when it seems to enable a different kind of proximity to others. In order to reflect on the politics of compassion as care, we can explore how the pain of others is evoked in discourses of charity. Take the following paragraph:

*Landmines.* What does this word mean to you? Darkened by the horrific injuries and countless fatalities associated with it, it probably makes you feel angry or saddened. *I'm sure you will be interested in the success stories that your regular support has helped to bring about: Landmines.* Landmines are causing pain and suffering all around the world, and that is why Christian Aid is working with partners across the globe to remove them. ... *Landmines.* What does this word mean to you now? I hope you feel a sense of empowerment. (Christian Aid, letter, 9 June 2003)

In the quote above from a Christian Aid letter, the pain of others is first evoked through the use of the word 'landmines'. The word is not accompanied by a description or history; it is assumed that the word itself is enough to evoke images of pain and suffering for the reader. Indeed, the word is repeated in the letter, and is transformed from 'sign' to the 'agent' behind the injuries: 'Landmines are causing pain and suffering all around the world.' Of course, this utterance speaks a certain truth. And yet, to make landmines the 'cause' of pain and suffering is to stop too soon in a chain of events: landmines are themselves effects of histories of war; they were placed by humans to injure and maim other humans. The word evokes that history, but it also stands in for it, as a history of war, suffering and injustice. Such a letter shows us how the language of pain operates through signs, which convey

histories that involve injuries to bodies, at the same time as they conceal the presence or 'work' of other bodies.

The letter is addressed to 'friends' of Christian Aid, those who have already made donations to the charity. It focuses on the emotions of the reader who is interpellated as 'you', as the one who 'probably' has certain feelings about the suffering and pain of others. So 'you' probably feel 'angry' or 'saddened'. The reader is presumed to be moved by the injuries of others, and it is this movement that enables them to give. To this extent, the letter is not about the other, but about the reader: the reader's feelings are the one's that are addressed; they are the 'subject' of the letter. The 'anger' and 'sadness' the reader should feel when faced with the other's pain is what allows the reader to enter into a relationship with the other, premised on generosity rather than indifference. The negative emotions of anger and sadness are evoked as the reader's: the pain of others becomes 'ours', an appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralises their pain into our sadness. It is not so much that we are 'with them' by feeling sad; the apparently shared negative feelings do not position the reader and victim in a relation of equivalence, or what Robert C Solomon has called 'fellow-feeling' (1995, see also Denzin 1984: 148). There are different forms of 'fellow-feeling' or 'feeling-in-common': they include compassion, as well as empathy, sympathy and pity. These different forms cannot be equated. For example, Elizabeth Spelman differentiates between compassion, as suffering *with* others, from pity, as sorrow *for* others (1997: 65). All of these forms of fellow-feeling involve fantasy: one can 'feel for' or 'feel with' others, but this depends on how I 'imagine' the other already feels. So 'feeling with' or 'feeling for' does not mean a suspension of 'feeling about': *one feels with or for others only insofar as one feels 'about' their feelings in the first place.* To return to the letter, we can consider how the reader, in accepting the imperative to feel sad about the other's pain, seems aligned with the other. But the alignment works by differentiating between the reader and the others: their feelings remain the object of 'my feelings', while my feelings only ever approximate the form of theirs.

It is instructive that the narrative of the letter is hopeful. The letter certainly

promises a lot. What is promised is not so much the overcoming of the pain of others, but the empowerment of the reader: 'I hope you feel a sense of empowerment.' The pain of the other is overcome, but it is not the object of hope in the narrative: rather, the overcoming of the pain is instead a means by which the reader is empowered. So the reader, whom we can name inadequately as the western subject, feels better after hearing about individual stories of success, narrated as the overcoming of pain as well as the healing of community. These stories are about the lives of individuals that have been saved: 'Chamreun is a survivor of a landmine explosion and, having lost his leg, is all the more determined to make his community a safer place in which to live.' These stories of bravery, of the overcoming of pain, are indeed moving. But interestingly the agent in the stories is not the other, but the charity, aligned here with the reader: through 'your regular support', you have 'helped to bring about' these success stories. Hence the narrative of the letter ends with the reader's 'empowerment'. The word 'landmines', it is suggested, now makes 'you' feel a sense of empowerment, rather than anger or sadness. In other words, feeling bad about the other's suffering allows the subject to feel good, where 'good feelings' (empowerment) form the 'hope' of the letter. What are erased in such a conversion are the very social relations that give some the capacity to feel good. In this case, the West is the one that gives to others only insofar as it is forgotten what the West has already taken in its very *capacity* to give in the first place. In the Christian Aid letter, feelings of pain and suffering, which are in part effects of socio-economic relations of violence and poverty, are assumed to be alleviated by the very generosity that is enabled by such socio-economic relations. So the West takes, then gives, *and in the moment of giving repeats as well as conceals the taking*. The 'we' emerges as 'feeling good' by 'feeling bad' about others, bad feeling that is converted into good feeling only by forgetting that the capacity to give depends on past and present appropriations. And indeed, such forgetting makes the other the 'object' of our feeling: they are indebted to us, and must return what we extend to them, through gratitude. To be indebted is after all to be positioned as both beneath and dependent.

### **Sorry Books**

Sympathy in response to pain can work to position others as the object of feeling, and as indebted by the extension of feelings towards them. What then about shame as a response to pain? Shame isn't after all just about feeling bad *for* others, as it is about feeling bad *about* oneself *before* others. When shamed, one's body seems to burn up with the negation that is perceived (self-negation); shame impresses upon the skin, as an intense feeling of the subject 'being against itself'. Such a feeling of negation, which is taken on by the subject as a sign of its own failure, is usually experienced before another. As Charles Darwin suggests: 'Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment. We turn away the whole body, more especially the shame, which we endeavour in some manner to hide. An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those present' (cited in Epstein 1984: 37). The subject may seek to hide from that other; she or he may turn away from the other's gaze, or drop the head in a sensation more acute and intense than embarrassment. In other words, shame feels like an exposure—another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful—but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other and towards itself. Or, as Erik H Erikson describes, in shame, 'one is visible and not ready to be visible' (1965: 244). To be witnessed in one's failure is to be ashamed: to have one's shame witnessed is even more shaming. The bind of shame is that it is intensified by being seen by others *as* shame.

The very physicality of shame—how it works on and through bodies—means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies 'turn away' from the others who witness the shame. The 'turning' of shame is painful, but it involves a specific kind of pain. Pain can involve the reading of the other as bad ('They hurt me', 'They are hurtful', 'They are bad'). In experiences of shame, the 'bad feeling' is attributed to oneself, rather than to an object or other (although the other who witnesses my shame may anger or hurt me, I cannot attribute the other as the cause of bad feeling). The subject, in turning away from another and back into itself, is consumed by a feeling of badness that cannot simply be given away or attributed to another.

Shame also involves a different kind of orientation from disgust towards the subject and others. In disgust, the subject might be temporarily 'filled up' by something bad, but the 'badness' gets expelled and pushed out onto the bodies of others (unless we are talking about self-disgust, which is closer to shame). In shame, I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I would have to expel myself from myself (unsurprisingly, prolonged experiences of shame can hence bring subjects perilously close to suicide). In shame, the subject's movement back into itself is simultaneously a turning away from itself. In shame, the subject may have nowhere to turn.

This double play of concealment and exposure is crucial to the work of shame. The word shame comes from the Indo-European verb 'to cover', which associates shame with other words such as hide, custody, hut and house (Schneider 1987:194-213). Shame certainly involves an impulse to 'take cover' and 'to cover oneself'. But the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover; in shame, one desires cover precisely because one has already been exposed to others. Hence the word shame is associated both with cover and concealment, as it is with exposure, vulnerability and wounding (Lynd 1958; Wurmser 1981).

Shame is a very bodily feeling of badness, in which one is witnessed or caught out by others. As Jean-Paul Sartre argues in his existential phenomenology of shame: 'I am ashamed of what I *am*. Shame therefore realises an intimate relation of myself to myself' (1969: 221). But, at the same time, Sartre suggests that: 'I am ashamed of myself *as I appear* to the Other' (1969: 222). Shame becomes felt as a matter of being —of the relation of self to itself— insofar as shame is about appearance, about how the subject appears before and to others. Crucially, the individuation of shame—the way it turns the self against and towards the self—can be linked precisely to the inter-corporeality and sociality of shame experiences. The 'apartness' of the subject is intensified in the return of the gaze; apartness is felt in the moment of exposure to others, an exposure that is wounding.

And yet, as Silvan Tomkins (1963) and Elspeth Probyn (forthcoming) emphasise, we can only be shamed by somebody

whose 'look' matters to me, in whom I am interested, or even whom I love. If we feel shame, *we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the very practices of love*. What is exposed in shame is the failure of love, as a failure that in turn exposes or shows our love. The very physicality of shame—how it works on and through bodies—means that shame involves the bodies 'turning away' from the others who witness my shame, but a 'turning away' that simultaneously 'turns towards' others in an expression of love. Shame is the loss of indifference. My shame in the face of the exposure of my failure to embody an ideal shows my love, *and my desire to embody that ideal in the very moment of experiencing its loss as failure*. The intimacy of love and shame is indeed powerful. In showing my shame in my failure to live up to a social ideal, I come closer to that which I have been exposed as failing. This proximity of shame can, of course, repeat the injury (the shamed other may return love through identification with an ideal that it cannot be, such that the return confirms the inhabitation of the 'non'). Shame may be restorative *only when the shamed other can 'show' that its failure to measure up to a social ideal is temporary*.

Given the intimacy of love and shame, we can ask: What does it mean for the nation to 'admit to' feeling shame? What does it mean to declare one's own shame, that is, to bear witness to it, or to expose it to others? At one level, the national subject is being shamed here by itself; it attributes the bad feeling to itself rather than to others. In the preface of *Bringing Them Home*, the nation is described as shameful *because of* the past treatment of Indigenous Australians; their wounds (narrated in testimonies of loss, violence and pain) become the 'reason for' our shame, and the reason why national identity must be redefined as shameful. In some sense, the readers of the document, which is implicitly addressed to non-Indigenous Australians ('our shame' is about 'their pain') are called upon to bear witness to the testimonies of Indigenous Australians. These testimonies are made up of another kind of witnessing—a witnessing of trauma, of a past that lives in the present, on the land, on the skin. But the readers, who are called upon to witness these other acts of witnessing are in a double, if not paradoxical, position. They are asked to witness their shame as

'our shame', that is, to be first *and* third party, to be 'caught out' *and* 'catching out'. The implications of such a double position—that white Australians catch out white Australia—is that the national subject, by witnessing its own history of injustice towards others—can, in its shame, be reconciled to itself. As Fiona Nicoll (1993:706) has shown us, reconciliation can also mean to pacify, and to bring others in. Reconciliation becomes here a process whereby white Australia is reconciled to itself through witnessing the pain of others. We might also question here 'what' or even 'who' is the object of feeling in public shame: even if non-Indigenous Australians appear to be the subjects as well as the objects of shame (being shamed by oneself), it is clear that shame *might be expressed about some things and not others*. For instance, shame about the theft of children might be more easily expressed, than shame about the theft of land, as such shame would 'unsettle' or 'un-house' non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>2</sup> Such shame about the Stolen Generations could even take the place of shame about the theft of land, and in doing so, may actually be a mechanism for the disavowal of the 'grounds' of national shame.

National shame can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the 'wrong' that is committed provides the grounds for claiming a national identity. Those who witness the past injustice through feeling 'national shame' are aligned with each other as 'well-meaning individuals'; if you feel shame, then you mean well. Shame 'makes' the nation in the very witnessing of past injustice, a witnessing that involves feeling shame, as it exposes the failure of the nation to live up to its ideals. But this exposure is temporary, and becomes the ground for a narrative of national recovery. *By witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can 'live up to' the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present*. In other words, our shame *means that we mean well*, and can work to reproduce the nation as an ideal. The transference of bad feeling to the subject in shame is only temporary, as the 'transference' itself becomes evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud.

In order to address the complexity of the affective alignments possible in expressions of shame I want to examine

the performance of shame in Sorry Books in Australia. Sorry Books are one activity in the process of reconciliation, which has also included Sorry Days.<sup>3</sup> Sorry Books involve individual Australians (mostly non-Indigenous, but also some Indigenous Australians) writing messages of condolence and support; they are compilations of statements and signatures, which create the effect of a shared narrative of sorrow as well as an account of national shame. Sorry Books have also been created through internet sites, which allow web users to post messages anonymously. They hence exist in paper and electronic forms. The Sorry Books generate a 'we' that is virtual, fantastic and real through the identification of past injustices and the way they have structured the present for different individuals, who are aligned by the very process of posting messages, even as they tell very different stories and make different claims. The messages become 'I's, while the 'we' becomes the 'Sorry Book' itself, the mediation of a collective story of sorrow and shame. Such affective and textual alignments do not simply create a 'we'; they also testify to its impossibility. I want to reflect on the role of shame in the de-forming and re-forming of the national 'we' through the articulation of the relation between the national subjects and the national ideal. To do this, I will offer a reading of some messages posted on an electronic Sorry Book.

It is important to note that this Sorry Book functions as a petition to the government, therefore many of the messages are addressed to the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, who has refused to offer an official apology to the Stolen Generations. By addressing the Prime Minister in this way, the messages work to identify the refusal to express shame as the source of national shame, as the grounds for an intensification of the shame about the past: 'If you don't, I'll do it for you, and then you'll look a lot worse than what you think you would.'<sup>4</sup> In this way, the Sorry Book functions as a demand to and for the nation to appear ashamed, and to speak the shame on behalf of Australians. The lack of shame becomes another form of national shame witnessed by subjects: 'Disgrace our country no longer Mr Howard. Recognise past injustice so we can move forward together. Your arrogance on this issue is a national shame!'<sup>5</sup>

Shamed by the shameless, this demand is also a plea that the nation move beyond the past, and enter into a future where pride can itself be 're-covered': 'The failure of our representatives in Government to recognise the brutal nature of Australian history compromises the ability of non indigenous Australians to be truly proud of our identity.'<sup>6</sup> Here, witnessing the government's lack of shame is in itself shaming. The shame at the lack of shame is linked to the desire 'to be truly proud of our country', that is, the desire to be able to identify with a national ideal. The recognition of a brutal history is implicitly constructed as the condition for national pride: if we recognise the brutality of that history through shame, then we can be proud. As a result, shame is posited as an overcoming of the brutal history, a moving beyond that history through showing that one is 'moved by it' or even 'hurt by it'. The desire that is expressed is the desire to move on, where what is shameful is either identified as past (the 'brutal history') or located in the present only as an absence (the shame of the absence of shame). Such a narrative allows the national subject to identify with others, such that pride becomes the emotion that sticks the nation together, an ideal that requires the nation to pass through shame. What is witnessed is not the brutality of this history, but the brutality of the passing over of that history. Ironically, witnessing such a passing over might even repeat the passing over, in the very desire to move beyond shame and into pride.

The complexity of witnessing and its relation to shame structures the genre of Sorry Books. On the one hand, the messages themselves bear witness to the shame of the nation's shame. On the other, they demand that the nation itself becomes a witness to its shame. At the same time, messages evoke other witnesses, those who are witnesses to the shame of the individual subject and the shame of the nation. One message states: 'I think that it is time that we say sorry. People all over the world are comparing us to south African apartheid.'<sup>7</sup> There is a slide from 'I' to 'we' that involves both adherence (sticking to the nation) as well as coherence (sticking together). That 'we' is not idealised in the present: rather the statement asks the 'we' to say sorry, so that it can be appear as ideal in the future. Hence the statement evokes others ('people all over the world') as witnesses to Australia's shame; it is the look of the

world that makes the subject ashamed, as it 'catches out' the nation by seeing the nation as like other shameful nations ('South African apartheid'). What is shameful about Australia's past is not named; what is shameful is only negatively indicated, in the comparison made to another shameful nation, a comparison that 'shows' Australia to have failed, by making Australia appear *like* other failed nations. Being like the nation that has failed to live up to the ideal hence confirms the ideal as the proper desire of the nation. The fear of being seen as bad, or 'like them', structures this shame narrative, as well as the desire to be seen as 'good', defined in terms of civility. Is declaring shame here about looking good?

Histories of violence, of course, remain concealed under the very ideal of civility, which in Australia typically takes the form of the utterance 'fair go'. If we show our shame, then we can be proud of our character, our tendency to say 'fair go', and indeed our shame *becomes an expression of that character*. What this reminds us is that the national ideal takes the shape of white bodies. Of course, not all non-Indigenous Australians are white. I myself am a non-white and non-Indigenous Australian. One must note here that the non-white and non-Indigenous Australian can still participate in the idealisation of the nation; they can still claim to inhabit that ideal through repeating the utterance 'fair go', as if this utterance marked social civility of the nation, even when they fail its form. One suspects this would be a melancholic identification with the nation—it would be an identification with an ideal that one has already failed (see Crimp 2002). But such identifications remain possible. At the same time, non-white non-Indigenous Australians are also more likely to have experienced the violence that is concealed by the ideal of civility, as the violence that upholds the ideal, and which is of course directed to some bodies rather than others. It is the shared experience of violence, which we can re-describe as the ongoing force of racism, which might point to solidarity between non-white non-Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Australians. At the same time, such solidarity can only be possible with full recognition that being non-white and non-Indigenous does mean inhabiting a place outside the unfinished history of colonisation: non-white non-Indigenous Australians also walk on stolen ground.

Gestures of solidarity between those who have suffered racism are only possible if the refusal of the promise implicit in the use of the utterance 'fair go' is followed by an active support for Indigenous sovereignty.

Let us return to the Sorry Books. What is also crucial in the messages is how declarations of bad feeling also evoke a witness. They create a sense of exposure before others. The witness to the shame of the nation—and the shame of its refusal of shame—is implicitly 'international civil society' which exposes the shame of the nation. Messages evoke this imagined witness: 'The eyes of the world are upon you. One hundred years from now, how do you want to be remembered?' Being seen as an ideal nation is here defined as that which will pass down in time, not in our memories, but in how we are remembered by others. The desire for shame is here the desire to be seen as fulfilling an ideal, the desire to be 'judged by history' as an ideal nation. The imagined witness to the nation, the one who will record the nation's achievements, is not always presented as exterior to the nation, but as a reflection of its better self: 'How can we point the finger at other countries' abuses and not put a mirror up to our own.'<sup>8</sup> The mirror that allows the national subject to see its reflection shows the nation its shame, a 'showing' that would allow the national gaze to be directed towards others who have failed the national ideal, to be a witness rather than witnessed. Only when we have seen our own shame in our reflection, the message suggests, can we then 'point the finger' at others. Another message makes a similar declaration: 'Stop telling us to be proud of our country until you take positive steps to remove the source of our great national shame'. Here, pride would be shameful until shame has been expressed, while the expression of shame would justify pride. The politics of shame is contradictory: it exposes the nation, and what it has covered over and covered up in its pride in itself, but at the same time *it involves a narrative of recovery as the re-covering of the nation.*

Such a narrative of recovery, expressed as the demand for government to make shame 'official', becomes an act of identification with the nation through a feeling of injustice. This involves not only a sense that 'past actions and omissions' have been unjust, but also that what makes the injustice unjust is that it has

taken our pride away; *it has deprived white Australia of its ability to declare its pride in itself to others.* In this way, some of the messages in the Sorry Books seem to mourn the very necessity of witnessing shame, as they call for shame to be witnessed such that pride can be returned, and the nation can stick together through a shared embodiment of the national ideal. It is in the name of future generations that shame becomes a way of sticking together, by exposing the failure of the nation to live up to its ideal, described in one message as 'love, generosity, honor and respect for our children'. As one message puts it:

I am an Australian citizen who is ashamed and saddened by the treatment of the indigenous peoples of this country. This is an issue that cannot be hidden any longer, and will not be healed through tokenism. It is also an issue that will damage future generations of Australians if not openly discussed, admitted, apologised for and grieved. It is time to say sorry. Unless this is supported by the Australian government and the Australian people as a whole I cannot be proud to be an Australian.<sup>9</sup>

The utterance, whilst calling for recognition of the 'treatment of the indigenous peoples' does not recognise that subjects *have unequal claims 'to be an Australian' in the first place.* If saying sorry leads to pride, who gets to be proud? In other words, the ideal image of the nation, which is based on the image of some and not others, as I have suggested, is sustained through the conversion of shame into pride.

The desire for pride—for the nation to embody its ideal—is crucial to these expressions of shame. What is in question here is not the allegiance of the national subject, but whether or not the nation is seen to be living up to its ideals. Exposing the failure of that ideal is politically important—and part of what shame can do and has done—but it can also become the grounds for patriotic declarations of love. In such declarations of love, shame becomes a 'passing phase' in the passage towards being-as-nation, where the ideals that the nation 'has' are transformed into what it 'is'. Nowhere is this clearer than in the message: 'I am an Australian Citizen who wishes to voice my strong belief in the need to recognise the shameful aspects of Australia's past—without that how can we celebrate present glories'.<sup>10</sup> Here, the recognition of what is shameful in the



past—what has failed the national ideal—is what would allow the nation to be idealised and even celebrated in the present. In other words, the desire to feel good or better can involve the erasure of relations of violence; expressions of shame about histories of violence work not only as a narrative of 'recovery', but also as a form of 'covering over'. Furthermore, shame involves a narrative of conversion: non-Indigenous Australians express sorrow, sympathy and shame in order that they can 'return' to their pride in the nation, as an affective relation to nationhood, which was the proper scene of the violence.

However, this is not to say that the experience of being shamed necessarily returns us to pride. (It is, after all, a question of return.) But saying sorry does not necessarily mean being sorry. Let us consider the apology as a speech act. J L Austin considers the apology as a performative utterance, as an act that 'in saying something does something'. Like all performative utterances, certain conditions have to be met, or they are unhappy; they do not perform. The conditions that have to be met for an apology to be happy relate mainly to the emotions of the speaker. The speaker must feel sorry, if the apology is to work; insincerity would be condition enough for an unhappy apology (Austin 1975: 40, 47). Such a model, however, assumes that emotions are inner states, which are then either expressed or not expressed through words. One can equally imagine that an apology can do something without necessarily being a measure of true feeling: for example, to apologise for one's role in hurting another might 'do something' even if I do not feel sorry. Or the apology could become the basis of an appeal for compensation: it could be 'taken up' as evidence of responsibility rather than feeling. The difficulty is that whilst apologies are doing something, it is not clear what they are doing. If the apology is an action, then it is unfinished, as its action depends upon how it is taken up.

When thinking about speech acts that apologise in the case of Australian reconciliation, we can see that these do not 'originate' in bad feeling. The speech act *is the request for an apology*, so the apology is the return address. This means that it is necessary to start recognising that the political action begins not with national sorrow or national shame, but with Indigenous Australians as those who are

acting, who are making the speech act. As we know only too well, the Prime Minister, John Howard, has refused to apologise, preferring the word 'regret'. It is not that he has returned the demand for an apology without an action; he has acted, for sure. The return address is a refusal, and takes the form of 'I/We do not apologise.' As Elizabeth Spelman suggests, regret admits no responsibility; it does little work (1997: 104). This speech act also works as a political action: it 'makes' the nation, by declaring that the nation is not responsible: 'We did not do this', 'We were not there.' The foreclosure of responsibility certainly does something: it cuts the speaker and the nation off from the histories that shape the present.

If we consider shame as a return address, rather than as a bad feeling that is about our relation to ourselves, then perhaps something else might occur. When others, who have been wronged, ask for signs of shame, then the expression of shame does not return ourselves to ourselves, but responds to demands that come from a place other than where we are. The apology in this instance would be a return address, an address to another, whose place is not inhabited, and which cannot allow the overcoming of bad feeling. Saying sorry, if it is to be a gesture of return address, cannot be a moment in the passage to pride: to return such a speech act, one cannot turn back towards oneself. We can stay open to hearing the claims of others, only if we assume that the act of speaking one's shame does not undo the shame of what we speak. The expressions of national shame in the preface to *Bringing Them Home* and the Sorry Books are problematic, *as they sought within the utterance to finish the action, by claiming the expression of shame as sufficient for the return to national pride*. As such, they do not function as a return address: they block the hearing of the other's testimony in turning back towards the 'ideality' of the nation. It remains possible to express shame before others without finishing the act, which refuses this conversion of shame to pride, in an act of shame that is not only before others, but for others.

I will return to this more hopeful thought in my conclusion. Suffice to say here that to critique this mode of politics, which I have described as a politics of bad feeling, is not to deny the possibility of gestures of solidarity. However, such gestures can only count as gestures of solidarity insofar as

they do not block the hearing of others. My critique suggests that to claim solidarity through declarations of bad feeling is problematic insofar as it takes the declaration as 'sufficient grounds' for solidarity. Solidarity, I would argue, requires much harder work. It is interesting that one meaning of the word solidarity evokes sentiment: solidarity is often described as a feeling of fellowship, or even as 'fellow feeling'. Perhaps we need to turn to the etymology of the term, which is after all derived from 'solid'. Perhaps solidarity only works when sentiments solidify into actions. Indeed, it is the premature claim to solidarity, as if it is something we already have, that can block the recognition that there is much harder work left to do.

### ***What Happens to Bad Feeling?***

I have talked so far about shame declared by non-Indigenous Australians. I want to turn now to think about the role of bad feelings and racism. My reading of the Sorry Books noted a paradox. Let me reformulate the paradox in the following way: The shameful white subject expresses shame about its racism. In expressing its shame, it 'shows' that it is not racist; if we are shamed, then we mean well. The white subject that is shamed by its racism is hence also a white subject that is proud *about* its shame. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'.

There is a widely articulated anxiety that if a subject feels 'too bad', then he or she will become even worse. This idea is crucial to the idea of reintegrative shaming in restorative justice. A reintegrative shame is a good shame insofar as it does not make subjects 'feel too bad', in John Braithwaite's terms, it 'shames while maintaining bonds of respect or love, that sharply terminates disapproval with forgiveness, instead of amplifying deviance by progressively casting the deviant out' (1989: 12-13). Shame would not be about making the offender feel bad (this would install a pattern of deviance), so 'expressions of community disapproval' are followed by 'gestures of reacceptance' (Braithwaite 1989: 55). Note that this model presumes the agents of shaming are not the victims (who might make the offender feel bad), but the family and friends of the offender. It is the love that

offenders have for those who shame them which allows shame to integrate rather than alienate. As such, Braithwaite concludes that: 'The best place to see reintegrative shaming at work is in loving families' (1989: 56).

This idealisation of the family is not incidental. According to this model, too much shame would be too bad as it would make relationships and social bonds impossible. Shame is only 'good' if it can be quickly converted into good feeling. What is presumed in the literature on restorative justice is that injustice is caused by the failure of the social bond. The restoration of the social bond (the family, the community, the nation) is hence read as a sign of justice. Justice is also assumed to be about 'having' good relationships. I would argue that the struggle against injustice cannot be transformed into a manual for good relationships. Justice might not simply be about 'getting along', but may preserve the right of others not to enter into relationships, 'not to be with me', in the first place. The other, for example, might not want my grief, let alone my sympathy, or love. If we must feel good (about each other) according to the restorative justice model, then what happens to bad feeling?

It is hence no accident then that racism has been seen as caused by bad feelings. For example, the reading of white people as injured and suffering from depression is crucial to neo-fascism: white fascist groups speak precisely of white people as injured and even hurt by the presence of racial as well as sexual others (see Ahmed 2004). But this claim has also been made by scholars such as Julia Kristeva, who suggests that depression in the face of cultural difference provides the conditions for fascism (1993: 37). She hence suggests we should eliminate the Muslim scarf in order to avoid national depression. For Kristeva, fascism is a politics of depression: so we should remove the signs of difference that challenge the ego ideal of the nation. There is more sophisticated version of this argument in Ghassan Hage's *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003), which suggests that continued xenophobia has something to do with the fact that there is not enough hope to go around, although, of course, he does not attribute the lack of hope to cultural difference. Despite their obvious differences, the implication of such arguments is that anti-

racism is about making people feel better: safer, happier, more hopeful, and so on.

It might seem that happy, hopeful and secure non-racist whites hardly populate our landscape, so we really should not bother too much about them. But I think we should. For this very promise—this hope that anti-racism resides in making whites happy or at least feel positive about being white—has also been crucial to the emergence of pedagogy within whiteness studies.

Work conducted in whiteness studies expresses a strong anxiety about the place of 'bad feeling' and 'feeling bad'. Even within the most 'critical' literature, there is an implicit argument that whiteness studies should not make white people feel too bad about being white because bad feeling causes racism. Partly, such positions respond to the work of bell hooks (1989) and Audre Lorde (1984), who emphasise how feeling bad about racism or white privilege can function as a form of self-centeredness, which returns the white subject 'back into' itself, as the one whose feelings matter. hooks in particular has considered guilt as the performance rather than undoing of whiteness. Guilt certainly works as a 'block' to hearing the claims of others as it 're-turns' to the white self. But does the refusal to make whiteness studies about bad feeling allow the white subject to 'turn towards' something else? What is the something else? Does this refusal to experience shame and guilt work to turn whiteness studies away from the white subject?

Ruth Frankenburg has argued that if whiteness is emptied out of any content other than that which is associated with racism or capitalism 'this leaves progressive whites apparently without any genealogy' (1993: 232). The implication of her argument is, in my view, unfortunate. It assumes the subjects of whiteness studies are 'progressive whites', and that the task of whiteness studies is to provide such subjects with a genealogy. Kincheloe and Steinberg make this point directly when they comment on 'the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive antiracist white identity' (2000: 3-30). The shift from the critique of white guilt to this claim to a proud anti-racism is not a necessary one, but it is a telling shift. The white response to the Black critique of shame and guilt has enabled here a

'turn' towards pride, which is not then a turn away from the white subject and towards something else, but another way of 're-turning to' the white subject. Indeed, the most astonishing aspect of this list of adjectives (positive, proud, attractive, antiracist) is that 'antiracism' becomes a white attribute: indeed, *antiracism may even provide the conditions for a new discourse of white pride*.

Here, antiracism becomes a matter of generating a positive white identity, an identity that makes the white subject feel good. The declaration of such an identity sustains the narcissism of whiteness and allows whiteness studies to make white subjects feel good by feeling good about 'their' antiracism. One wonders what happens to bad feeling in this performance of good, happy whiteness. If bad feeling is partly an effect of racism (rather than its origin) and racism is accepted as ongoing in the present (rather than what happened in the past), then who gets to feel bad about racism? One suspects that happy whiteness, even when this happiness is *about* anti-racism, is what allows racism to remain the burden of racialised others. Indeed, I suspect that bad feelings of racism (hatred, fear and so on) are projected onto the bodies of unhappy racist whites, which allows progressive whites to be happy with themselves in the face of continued racism towards racialised others.

### ***Conclusion: Is There Room for Feeling Better?***

My argument suggests that justice and injustice cannot be 'read' as signs of good and bad feeling: to transform bad feeling into good feeling (hatred into love, indifference into sympathy, shame into pride, despair into hope and so on) is not necessarily to repair the costs of injustice. Indeed, this conversion can repeat the forms of violence it seeks to redress, as it can sustain the very distinction between the subject and object of feeling, repeated by the extension of feelings towards others. But what about the feelings of others? Isn't the very reality of suffering a sign of injustice?

The relation between injustice and feeling bad is complicated. Lauren Berlant has argued that injustice cannot be reduced to pain (2000: 34-47). Although pain and injustice cannot be reduced to each other, they also cannot be separated: the fact of suffering, for example, has *something to*

do with what is 'wrong' about systematic forms of violence, as relations of force and harm. The effects of violence have something to do with why violence can be judged as 'bad'. Now, this is not to say that what makes violence bad *is* the other's suffering. To make such a claim is dangerous: it makes the judgement of right and wrong dependent upon the existence of emotions. The reduction of judgements about what is bad or wrong to experiences of hurt, pain or suffering would be deeply problematic. The claim would allow violence to be sustained in the event that the other claimed not to suffer, or that I claimed the other did not suffer. We must remember that some forms of violence remain concealed as violence, as effects of social norms that are hidden from view. Given this, violence itself could be justified on the grounds of the absence of consciously felt suffering. The reduction of injustice to emotions also 'justifies' claims of access to the interiority of the feelings of others. We have probably all heard arguments that justify power relations through the claim that this other is in fact 'not hurting', or might even be 'contented', or 'happy'. Indeed, I could make this claim about myself: 'I do not hurt, I am happy, therefore it is not wrong.' But injustice still has something to do with feeling bad in the sense that what make injustice so unjust is 'felt', injustice hurts.

If injustice is not simply *about* feeling bad, even if it affects bad feelings, then justice is not simply a matter of feeling 'good' or even feeling 'better'. As I have shown, the desire to feel good or better can involve the erasure of relations of violence. I have examined how expressions of shame about histories of violence work not only as a narrative of 'recovery', but also as a form of 'covering over'. Shame becomes an expressions of 'bad feeling', *which is even 'about' feeling better in the present.*

Is there a way of considering feeling better as a form of exposure rather than recovery? Do testimonies of suffering work as they expose bad feelings without assuming that the act of putting feelings into speech is an overcoming of the social relations that shaped such feelings? Within the politics of reconciliation, and in the truth commissions that have been set up in response to trauma and historical injustice, telling the story of injury is crucial. This is not to say that

'telling' a story of pain and injury is necessarily therapeutic. Indeed, what is clear in *Bringing Them Home*, is that the 'telling' is also about a witnessing, which does not always get a just hearing. Whilst the white response to this document can 'cover over' the injury, by claiming the pain as 'the pain of the nation', we should not then surmise that the work of the testimony is over; far from it. The recognition of injury re-writes history, and it re-shapes the very ground on which we live. If the violence of what happened is recognised as a violence that shapes the present, that shapes the skin of bodies that shudder and breathe in the present, then the 'truths' of history are called into question. Recognition of injury is not simply about others becoming visible (although this can be important). Recognition is also about saying that injustices did happen; this re-telling of history offers new insights into the present and how lives in the present have been shaped not only by past injustices, but by the forgetting of those injustices. Healing does not cover over, but exposes the wound to others: *the recovery is a form of exposure.*

Doing the work of exposure is both political and emotional work, and is not over in the moment of hearing. Political struggle is a struggle because what we struggle against can diminish our resources, our capacities for action, our energy; it can even take lives. This is why justice has to leave room for feeling better, even if it is not *about* feeling better. For those whose lives have been torn apart by violence, or those for whom the tiredness of repetition in everyday life becomes too much to bear, feeling better does and should matter. Feeling better is not a sign that justice has been done, nor should it be reified as the goal of political struggle. But feeling better does still matter because it is about learning to live with the injuries that threaten to make life impossible. The projects of reconciliation and reparation are not about the 'nation' recovering: they are about whether those who have been affected by injustice can find a way of living in the nation that feels better through the process of speaking about the past, or through exposing the wounds that get concealed by the 'truths' of a certain history. Feeling better might be an effect of telling one's story, of finding a more liveable way of sustaining silence, of having those who committed the crime

apologise, or of receiving material forms of compensation or other modes of recognition of injury. Feeling better might be about having the room left to think and feel, or to dance on the ground; it might be about having space and time apart from others. Feeling better might be about having sufficient materials to sustain life in one's body; it might be about having energy, shelter, warmth, light, or air to breathe. Feeling better, whatever form it might take, is not about the overcoming of bad feeling, which are effects of histories of violence, but of finding a different relationship to them. It is in the face of all that endures of the past in the present, the pain, the suffering and the rage, that we can open ourselves up, and keep alive the hope that things can be different.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Aileen Moreton-Robinson for this point.

<sup>3</sup> Since May 1998, and on the recommendation of *Bringing Them Home*, annual Sorry Days have certainly brought some Australians together through the shared expressions of sorrow as well as shame about the violence towards Indigenous Australians that 'blackens' the

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past; the history and present of the Stolen Generations. Sorry Days have involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians marching together in gestures of solidarity, a 'walking with' that promises to open up a different future for Australia, in the very recognition that the violence of the past has affected Australia in the present. A question remains as to whether Sorry Days can live up to this promise, or whether they embody *the sentimentalisation of loss*, which can easily coincide or even support the continued refusal to accept the grounds of Indigenous sovereignty. See Chapter 5 of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) for a longer critique of the politics of Sorry Days, which also reflects on wider issues around apology, guilt and the politics of reparation.

<sup>4</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry5.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>5</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry2.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>6</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry5.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>7</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry5.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>8</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry5.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>9</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry2.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).

<sup>10</sup> See

<<http://users.skynet.be/kola/sorry2.htm>> (accessed 13/12/2002).