

Email to Kealy Smith, Midweek Crisis

3RRR 102.7 fm in Melbourne and <http://rrr.org.au> streaming worldwide.

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Hi Kealy

I gotta say with all due respect (and that's *PLENTY* - don't get me wrong) that closing down talk-back with a board full of people just bustin' to have their say with the standard media excuse of "sorry, we're out of time" is kind of lame when you turn around and play half an hour of music. Seems to me you weren't out of time, you were freaked out by the can of worms you'd opened and were in a hurry to close it again. But that's okay - its easy for me sitting at home to criticize; when you're actually running a live to air show, no doubt the perspective's kind of different. And I totally agree that it's an interesting exercise to put a right wing cat among the left wing pigeons.

But since I didn't get to have my say, I'll get it off my chest this way. To be honest, I was relieved: I hate the sound of my own voice and it was a big effort to force myself to ring in, but I REALLY wanted to say...

1. Aboriginal Australians are not just one culture among many in our great multicultural country. I say this because all other subcultures - whether European, Aisan, African, Cornwallian (as was your guest) or whatever - are instances of something that can be found elsewhere on the planet. But Aboriginal culture is utterly unique and exists nowhere else but here. This make it very special - yes, more special than other subcultures.

2. The comparison with New Zealand is fallacious. The Maori were a single people speaking one language who had been on the Islands of NZ for a relatively short period (only a thousand years or so) who were thus able to present a unified resistance to the whitefella, who consequently were forced to

take them more seriously. The Australian Aboriginals in contrast had been on this continent since time immemorial, and only seemed like "one" people from the ignorant perspective of the whitefella ("they all look/sound the same to me"). In fact there were over 600 different languages being spoken in Australia before 1800. This is a greater diversity than Europe exhibited then or exhibits today. Treating a Wutherong as "the same" as a Kaiadilt is like taking a Swede as "the same" as a Greek, or a Spaniard as "the same" as a Scot. They were no more alike and no more able to communicate with one another. Of those 600 different languages, about 150 are still with us today. Somewhere around 450 languages have been wiped out by us. The policy of assimilation continues this genocidal agenda, wittingly or not.

3. Having traveled pretty widely I can confidently claim that we ARE one of the most successful multi-cultures on the planet. Although Australia is too small to do any leading of the world by force or by strength, we can however lead the world by example, and show a troubled planet how it can be done on a small scale, such that our solutions can be scaled up and employed on a larger scale - this is true for global warming no less than multiculturalism no less than indigenous affairs. But multiculturalism and indigenous affairs are two distinct questions and its a big blunder to confuse them.

4. I was recently at a wedding of a friend, and I was talking to his mother who was down here from Queensland for the occasion. We were making smalltalk when she dropped into the conversation something like "those bloody abos just sit in the park getting drunk and taking handouts from our tax dollars." In an unpremeditated brainwave (so rare!) I said to her "Imagine Japan had actually won the second world war, and you had to wear Japanese clothes, eat Japanese food and speak the Japanese language. Do you reckon you'd be a happy, functional member of New Japan? Or do reckon you'd be sitting in a park, pissed, swearing in English at the Japanese colonists?" Then we just looked at each other in silence for the longest time, she apparently thinking that thought for the first time in her life, and me amazed that for once I'd actually said the right thing at the right time.

5. Regarding the guy you had on this morning: as I said I agree that it's an interesting exercise to put a right wing cat among the left wing pigeons every so often. Complacent mutual back-patting and preaching to the converted is a decadent situation. But let's not forget that he is a right wing apologist who didn't actually realize the work his own assumptions were doing in what seemed obvious to him. It went without saying for him that economic issues were the "real" ones, and that symbolic gestures were "merely symbolic", "only symbolic" and "just symbolic" (all quotes). I maintain to the contrary that the

situation is in fact the exact opposite. It is the symbolism that is of paramount importance, and the level on which the real decisions are made and enforced, at least in the long term (and remember that as far as big picture questions go, this is one of the biggest).

The one and only change that I want to see, and the only one that I think will make a real change, is to change the key symbol - the master sign that decides how what goes without saying gets organized for us as we grow up. We need to change our flag. The Union Jack needs to be replaced by the Koori flag - its THAT simple, and THAT difficult. The yellow setting sun on the red and black in the place where there used to be a union, jack. This says to the Aboriginal: we are proud of you; in fact, you are the most important thing about us; you are at the core of who we are. This also says to every non-Aboriginal in Australia that we are all equal. The English got here first, other Europeans in various waves next, then more recently from all over the world. Whatever. What matters is who was here for a hundred thousand years, and that's the one and only thing that actually makes us different to the rest of the world.

And what does that do to solve the "real" problems? A guy called Frantz Fanon wrote a very cool book back in 1961 called *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which he pointed out how with marginalized and persecuted groups, instead of unifying and fighting back, they tend to turn on themselves, and replicate the nazi-esque behavior being perpetrated upon them upon each other and upon other weaker groups. A disrespected person disrespects them self. A sexually abused child grows up to be an abuser. Israel acts like nazis to the Palestinians.* Australia acts ashamed of the blackfella and the blackfella acts shamefully. If however we as a whole and to the whole world say: "we respect the blackfella so much we put him on our flag" then the problems of self abuse and cultural suicide will start to solve themselves in ways which can never be achieved with any number of armies of soldiers trying to force the issue.

Aboriginals are not one subculture amongst others. They are our one and only chance to be something other than generic McCountry, the 51st state, a colony of the English Empire, or some other equally banal fate. Make learning an Aboriginal language compulsory in all primary schools, and give blackfellas who know their own language a job teaching that language in every primary school around the country (state or private), and lets give some REAL meaning to talk of "Australian Values".

* Opposition to the actions of the state of Israel can still be held while also attacking anti-Semitism wherever it raises its ugly head. For the same reason, patriotism is still possible (or better a balanced mix of patriotism and matriotism, i.e. respect for one's elders of both genders) while still denouncing and repudiating state-run nationalism, a suspicious game prone to exploitation and abuse.