# Outrageous!

## Moral panics in Australia

**Edited by**
Scott Poynting
& George Morgan



**ACYS Publishing**

ACYS Publishing
University of Tasmania
Private Bag 64
Hobart Tasmania 7001



Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 9781875236596 (pbk.).

1. Moral panics - Australia. 2. Social problems in mass media. I. Poynting, Scott. II. Morgan, George, 1960- .

302.240994

Cover design: Nick Gross
Text design and layout: Nick Gross
Printed by Monotone Art Printers

# Contents

# Authors

## Jayde Cahir

Jayde Cahir is a doctoral student at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney.

## Drew Cottle

Drew Cottle teaches history and politics at the University of Western Sydney. His most recent publication, *The Brisbane Line: A re-appraisal* (UpFront Publishing, Leicestershire, England), is a study of the Australian ruling class and its relations with imperial Japan both before and after the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941.

## Chris Cunneen

Chris Cunneen has the NewSouth Global Chair in Criminology at the University of New South Wales. He has published widely in the area of juvenile justice, policing and Indigenous issues including reports for the Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner, and a number of books, including *Juvenile justice: Youth and crime in Australia* (2007, Oxford University Press), *Indigenous people and the law in Australia* (1995, Butterworths), *Faces of hate* (1997, Federation Press), and *Conflict, politics and crime* (2001, Allen & Unwin).

## Selda Dagistanli

Selda Dagistanli is completing her PhD thesis in the School of Humanities and Languages and the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. Her thesis explores the interrelated considerations of the Anglocentric nature of the Australian criminal justice system, and the role of the courts in moral panics around cases represented as "ethnic gang rape" in 2000–2001.

## Tanja Dreher

Tanja Dreher teaches in the journalism school at the University of Technology, Sydney and is a researcher at the UTS Shopfront. She has previously published on news audiences in Cabramatta, community news intervention strategies and on the experiences of racism in Arab and Muslim communities in NSW after 9/11.

## Raymond Evans

Raymond Evans is Adjunct Professor with the Centre for Public Ideas and Culture at Griffith University. He has written extensively on social history, race and gender relations, war and society study, conflict study, convict history and popular culture. He is presently working on *A concise history of Queensland* for Cambridge University Press.

## Glen Fuller

Glen Fuller works as a freelance journalist and a cultural consultant for films. He is currently completing his PhD, 'Modified: Cars and culture', at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney.

## Kate Gleeson

Kate Gleeson is a postdoctoral fellow at Macquarie University. She was recently awarded her Doctorate in Politics and International Relations from the University of New South Wales.

## Shane Homan

Shane Homan teaches media and cultural studies, and is Deputy Director of the Cultural Practices and Industries Research Centre at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He is the author of *The mayor's a square: Live music and law and order in Sydney* (Local Consumption Publications, Sydney), and co-editor (with Tony Mitchell) of a forthcoming two-volume series, *Popular music in Australia: Local, national and transnational*, for Black Swan Press.

## Nahid Kabir

Nahid Kabir is a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Communications and Multimedia at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. She holds a PhD in History and an MA in Historical Studies from the University of Queensland. Dr Kabir is the author of *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, race relations and cultural history* (2004, Kegan Paul, London).

## Angela Keys

Angela Keys is a PhD candidate with the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University. She is writing her doctoral thesis on industrialised cotton production in north-western New South Wales. She has co-authored articles for the *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, *Labour History, Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, the *Journal of Chinese Australia, Sporting Traditions, Z Magazine,* and co-wrote a chapter on the political economy of Tonga for *The eye of the cyclone: Governance and stability in the Pacific* (eds. I. Molloy & R. Reavell, 2006, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland).

## Murray Lee

Murray Lee is a senior lecturer in criminology with the School of Applied Social and Human Sciences at the University of Western Sydney. He has conducted community research studies in a number of south-western Sydney localities.

## George Morgan

George Morgan is a senior lecturer at the School of Humanities and Languages and Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney and the author of *Unsettled places: Aboriginal people and urban life in NSW* (2006, Wakefield Press, Adelaide).

## Greg Noble

Greg Noble is an associate professor at the Centre for Cultural Research and the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney. He is co-author of *Bin Laden in the suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (2004, Institute of Criminology, Sydney) and *Kebabs, kids, cops and crime: Youth, ethnicity, and crime* (2000, Pluto Press, Sydney).

## Scott Poynting

Scott Poynting is an associate professor in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney. He is co-author of two books dealing with racialised moral panics: *Kebabs, kids, cops and crime: Youth, ethnicity, and crime* (2000, Pluto Press, Sydney) and *Bin Laden in the suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (2004, Institute of Criminology, Sydney).

## James Rowe

James Rowe's primary interests revolve around the conduct of qualitative research with "street-based" drug users. His recent research has been used to support the establishment, design and evaluation of primary health services tailored to the needs of street-based users. James divides time as a researcher between Access Health, a primary health facility managed by Salvation Army Crisis Services and RMIT's Centre for Applied Social Research, and lectures in politics and sociology in RMIT's School of Social Science and Planning.

## Michael Sturma

Michael Sturma is an associate professor and Chair of the History Program at Murdoch University. He is the author of *Vice in a vicious society: Crime and convicts in mid-nineteenth century New South Wales* (1983), *Australian rock'n'roll: The first wave* (1991), *South Sea maidens: Western fantasy and sexual politics in the South Pacific* (2002), and *Death at a distance: The loss of the legendary USS Harder* (2006).

## Affrica Taylor

Affrica Taylor is a lecturer in the School of Education and Community Studies at the University of Canberra. Her teaching, research and publications are across the fields of queer, gender, postcolonial and race/ethnic studies.

## Rob White

Rob White is a professor and Head of the School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania. He has published extensively in the areas of youth studies, criminology and social issues. Among his publications are *Youth and society* (with Johanna Wyn), *Juvenile justice* (with Chris Cunneen), *Australian youth subcultures* and *No space of their own*.

# Introduction

Scott Poynting
& George Morgan

Why have we put together a book about moral panics in Australia, and why now? As Yvonne Yewkes (2004, p.65) points out, the area of study in which the concept was first developed, sociology, has not shown much interest in it for the last 25 of the 35 years since it was advanced and deployed with much promise and enthusiasm, and it is not very fashionable in media studies either. Yet, as Yewkes also concedes (p.65), the notion remains well entrenched in criminology, in youth studies and in the study of deviance and social control; it has even percolated into common parlance in the popular media that it holds up to criticism.

While there is a substantial literature dealing with youth cultures and subcultures in Australia (e.g. White 1993, 1999; Hazlehurst & Hazlehurst 1998; Butcher & Thomas 2003), and with the media reporting of youth crime (see Bessant & Hil 1997), there has not, to our knowledge, been a book concentrating on moral panics in Australia. (A special issue, No.85, of the journal *Media International Australia*, in 1997 did, however, deal specifically with moral panics.) Yet events which arguably constitute the cycle of moral panics keep happening in Australian society – and have done so for more than a century. This book presents historical and contemporary case studies that illustrate the persistence of the patterns in question. What are these?

For Stan Cohen (1972), who first made the notion famous[1] in his analysis of the furore surrounding the clashing youth subcultures, the Mods and Rockers, at the English seaside in the late sixties, there were seven distinct moments of a moral panic. Cohen (1972, p.173) was

clear that these moments were not necessarily sequential and could take different temporal orders in different contexts. In the first moment, certain forms of behaviour became defined as problematic, as providing a looming sense of a threat, although as yet not clearly defined. The second moment involves the media in crystallising the threat through exaggeration and stereotyping. The third involves the participation of "moral entrepreneurs", the right-thinking guardians of respectability – politicians, clergymen, "community" representatives of various sorts – in pronouncing upon the problem. In the fourth, experts are called upon to offer strategies and remedies. The fifth moment sees the formulation of official strategic responses to the problem, which entail the involvement of various arms of the state – police, judiciary and welfare agencies in particular. In the sixth moment the condition that has been the focus of the moral panic subsides. The seventh moment concerns the legacy of the moral panic: how, if at all, it reshaped the arrangement of social forces in society, how it is related to subsequent moral panics.

This is a collection of Australian case studies of moral panics. While some contributors have subjected aspects of the moral panic model to close scrutiny, theoretical discussion is not their primary purpose. However, it is appropriate that we explore some of the criticisms that have been levelled at the moral panic framework, and ways in which it has been extended. The first of these questions whether it is possible to isolate particular moral panics because, as Thompson (1998) observes, the "increasing rapidity in the succession of moral panics" makes it impossible to distinguish the boundaries between each. Moreover, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, p.229) argue, sometimes the accretion of a series of moral panics and the hardening of institutional responses may take several decades. Cohen's timeline, they suggest, may be altogether too short. Where can we say one particular panic ends, and another starts? They argue that moral panics "… do not come and go, vanishing, as it were, without a trace. Even those that seem to end without impact often leave informal traces that prepare us for later panics" (1994, p.229).

Then again, as Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1990) suggest, modern societies have become so engulfed by a sense of risk and uncertainty that it is impossible to distinguish particular moral panics from the background radiation of popular anxiety (see also Ungar 2001). Chas Critcher sees this aspect as a higher "level" of moral panic (2003, p.175). He posits a hierarchy of moral panic, a progression from the identification of a problem to seeing that problem as a threat to the moral order, then to a third level: "The discourse becomes less specified and more generalised. The threat is no longer localised; we are all at risk; we confront not people mostly like us but the Other embodying evil" (Critcher 2003, p.175). With Critcher, we would argue that – and we believe the work of our contributors indicates – it is still possible to isolate turning points when intensified moral indignation congeals around particular marginalised groups of people and their actions are increasingly seen as "deviant", and when aspects of inchoate popular moral concern are hitched to new vocabularies of blame and new official repertoires of social control.

This is not to suggest that the white heat of moral panic is the only means of producing shifts in the symbolic construction of subaltern groups or the power relations they are subjected to. Of course, as Watney (1987) argues, power operates in diffuse and fragmented ways. Nevertheless, all is not so diffuse and fragmented that there is no structure to power relations. Certainly, it is important to explore enduring structures and not just the flashpoints. Profound realignments in relations of power can occur beneath the radar of the mass media and do not need the momentum of a moral panic. But case studies such as those explored in this volume still trace significant moments at which aspects of common sense are conscripted in the process of highlighting marginal or minority culture, interpreting its aberrance as deviance, demonising its practitioners, and thus detecting further deviance and demanding that it be dealt with by authorities. The power of Cohen's original study of Mods and Rockers lay in the way it synthesised the sociological with the symbolic dimensions of moral panics. He recognised that the clashes between young people on English beaches served as theatre of anxiety; the demonised representations gained popular purchase precisely because they played upon anxieties associated with postwar working-class experience. These insights were taken up for an influential decade by researchers within the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), in their analysis of ideology as the imaginary resolution of real contradictions in everyday life. This process was exhibited in a number of the CCCS and contemporaneous studies of youth subcultural styles (e.g. Hall & Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). These studies showed how "resistance" of various forms is central to the symbolic work that constitutes subcultures. This resistance is frequently impotent. The proclamation that "Lebs rule", for example, is often made in graffiti around Sydney beaches. They don't – and the message is sprayed on walls *because* they don't. Yet this line of theory, in what was initially a useful corrective of directing emphasis to creativity and expression (though sometimes in the process romanticising resistance), shifted attention away from social control and the state. Moral panic analysis is able to make sense of the contexts in which the resistant acts of subcultures are publicly represented and officially regulated.

In the context of "authoritarian populism" in Britain under Thatcherism, Hall et al. (1978) made a close and enormously influential study of the moral panic over "mugging". This brought the state and the media back into the picture in a Gramscian analysis as apparatuses of hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Buci-Glucksman 1980). In this model of moral panic, the notion of the "deviancy amplification spiral" adapted by Cohen from earlier criminological works such as Leslie Wilkins's (1964), becomes a "signification spiral". The CCCS Mugging Group (1976, p.77) sets out the elements of [the "mugging"] signification spiral as:

(a) The intensification of a specific issue.
(b) The identification of a "subversive minority".

(c) "Convergence" or the linking by labelling of the specific issue to other problems.
(d) The notion of "thresholds" which, once crossed, can lead to further escalation of the problem's "menace" to society.
(e) The element of explaining and prophesying, which often involves making analogous references to the United States – the paradigm example.
(f) The call for firm steps.

Paul Jones (1997) argues that Hall et al. (1978) and indeed many of those who have worked with the moral panic model since Cohen, have overestimated the media's ability to shape public opinion and have failed to recognise that moral panics will only take off if they articulate real popular concerns that exist prior to the media beat-ups. Unless the language of panic resonates with everyday life it will never gain purchase. While it is certainly the case that common sense must reflect the experiences which the mass of ordinary people know to be true, it is important to recognise that public representations associated with moral panics can reconstitute social problems in new ways and offer solutions based on the new ways of seeing. For example, what came to be called "muggings" in Britain in the 1970s (Hall et al. 1978) had been happening for centuries, as Geoffrey Pearson (1983) elegantly shows, but the invention, or rather importation, of the category of "mugging" and its application to a particular occurrence of street crime had certain ideological baggage (racialisation) and political consequences ("tougher" policing, in line with shifts to authoritarian populism by the Thatcherite state more generally).

For an Australian illustration (one not detailed in this book), during the 1990s the media reported on a spate of violent attacks that were associated with break and enter episodes in suburban houses in Sydney. The reports fed into existing anxieties about home security that were evident in the growth in consumption of technologies of protection (alarm systems, CCTV, barrier hardware). The reports began to refer to the problem as "home invasion" rather than burglary and a new folk devil of "home invader" was summoned up: a new category[2] for the criminal justice system to deal with. The demand was raised in the media for tougher laws and increased penalties to deal with "home invaders", and the state responded. To argue that real people – even working-class real people – are really suffering from real muggings or home invasions which need to be dealt with realistically, is therefore beside the point, as is to emphasise that there must have been something in the first place for the media to exaggerate, amplify and demonise. What is reasonable and realistic is defined in particular historical and political conjunctures.

Other commentators have stressed the ability of those who are the focus of moral panics to contest their demonisation and to prevent campaigns against them gaining momentum (McRobbie & Thornton 1995). This argument holds that the ability of the mass media to shape public debate is considerably curtailed today when compared with the mid-20th century. Marginal social groups are adept at making their voices heard, both getting through

as dissenting voices in conventional media and through the use of alternative media and forms of cultural production (see Dreher in this volume). While in the mid-20th century, public debate was conducted largely through the mass media of television, radio and newspapers, today the proliferation of new media, in particular the internet, has meant that there are now numerous sources of information. What is less well understood is the way in which new forms of communication (text messages on mobile phones, blogs etc.) shape the events that form the focus of moral panics and the way those panics unfold. Of course, the dissenting voices are easily overwhelmed by CNN or News Limited, and few would suggest that the internet is a level playing field. McRobbie and Thornton (1995) have also recognised that the dynamics of some youth subcultural production feed off the process of demonisation, revelling in their marginalisation.

Although the work presented here is specifically Australian, it is clear that the forms of representation and political discourse associated with contemporary moral panics in any nation must take into account the symbolic circuits of contemporary global politics. Local events are increasingly being encoded in ways that represent some folk devils and their practices not just as threats to a society, but as fifth columnists, internal enemies in the post-9/11 world, part of a broad international conspiracy. This has dramatic consequences for the way subordinated minorities are treated in the West, as politicians dispense with long-cherished legal rights on the pretext of dealing with the perceived threat of terror. In some recent moral panics the media and moral entrepreneurs have used the vocabulary of warfare to characterise local conflicts involving people from Middle Eastern and/or Islamic backgrounds. Incidents that in the past would have attracted little if any public attention – the patriarchal preaching of an Imam, street violence involving immigrant young men, and so on – have come to assume a more sinister significance. While the basic framework of moral panics remains useful, those researching in the area would do well to pay attention to the effects of contemporary colonialism and the wider context of international conflict.

A collection of this sort is, of necessity, diverse. What follows brings together a range of case studies that fit broadly within the rubric of moral panic. Some follow Cohen's model quite closely while others focus on particular moments in the moral panic cycle. They range in scope from the contributions that explore particular subcultures and/or forms of social practice (music and dance, intoxication, sexuality, etc.) to notorious incidents, crimes or outbursts of collective violence that have precipitated new moral panics. Some focus primarily on media representations while others are more sociological or social historical. Each of them deals with some aspect of deviancy amplification, the symbolic work associated with the construction of new problems and folk devils (although not all chapters explore moral panics that have been fully consummated – see, for example, Cahir and Noble's contribution).

The first chapter, by George Morgan, details a moral panic involving two key themes of this book which are common among moral panics: young people and a cultural minority –

in this case Indigenous Australians. It also deals, as does Glen Fuller's chapter, with "deviant" motor vehicle use. In August 2003, a 12-year-old Aboriginal passenger in a stolen car driven by his 14-year-old friend was killed when the vehicle crashed after being pursued by police. This chapter explores the moral panic that followed this incident against the background of longstanding respectable concerns about parents allowing their children to be out in public places without supervision. It looks at the colonial and class dimensions of these concerns.

Chris Cunneen, in Chapter 2, considers some recent examples of disturbances in Aboriginal communities, including Palm Island and Redfern, and the governmental and media interpretations of and responses to those disturbances, particularly the extent to which various narratives of lawlessness and disadvantage are employed. Each of these cases concerns a death in which police were implicated, yet officially exonerated: the Redfern case, as in Chapter 1, involving a police pursuit. The argument will contextualise governmental and media responses into a broader framework of how government sees the Indigenous "problem".

Chapter 3, by Drew Cottle and Angela Keys, is a historical case study which also involves "riot" and state response: in this case over an organised working-class movement to defend families impoverished by unemployment against evictions during the 1930s Depression. The chapter examines anti-eviction battles, the moral panic they provoked and the limited concessions the state belatedly offered to those without homes of their own to preserve the moral and social order of property.

Rob White's Chapter 4 deals with collective youth behaviour in its various panic manifestations (e.g. gangs, mobs, swarms, raves), and the structural forces that frame this behaviour (e.g. technology, security measures, urban life). It looks in particular at the 19th-century "push" larrikins of Sydney (noted for their mass street presence), conflicts associated with the Bathurst bike races (involving youth/police ritualised violence) and contemporary examples of swarming behaviour (e.g. gate crashing of private parties).

A case of collective behaviour labelled as "riot" is the focus of Chapter 5 by Murray Lee. In February–March 2005 the working-class outer suburb of Macquarie Fields saw violent clashes between a large group of young people and New South Wales police. This followed the death of a young person during a police pursuit, as in cases dealt with in Chapters 1 and 2. While attempts to reassert law and order following the "Macquarie Field riots" showed all the standard features of a moral panic, a problematic aspect of this response, argues Lee, was its tendency to shift attention from the underlying problems of isolation and social exclusion of Macquarie Fields residents.

In the sixth chapter, Raymond Evans returns us to the well-travelled terrain of youth subcultures, their outrageous music and shocking behaviour. This chapter presents a social historical case study of rock and roll in Queensland in the mid-1950s, its media construction as a social and moral danger and the attempted modes of social control, particularly through the policing of public events.

Shane Homan considers another instance of moral panic involving a youth subculture and its associated music in Chapter 7, but in this case centred on the use of the illegal drug "ecstasy". He discusses the moral panic about the use of this drug at "rave" parties that developed after the death of Sydney teenager Anna Wood in 1995. It compares the different media and government discourses around ecstasy and alcohol consumption by young people and shows how these led to differential policing of dance clubs and hotels.

Moral panic over another drug, heroin, is the subject of Chapter 8 by James Rowe. This chapter analyses the media reports of the heroin trade and its consequences in Melbourne in the mid-1990s. It traces the official response to the moral panic that evolved, and demonstrates how this precludes rational public debate on drug law reform.

Chapter 9 also concerns a moral panic over heroin dealing in the 1990s, one in which the Western Sydney suburb of Cabramatta became the focus of racialised media portrayal as "Australia's heroin capital". Tanja Dreher here sets out the background of media demonisation of Cabramatta, from reports of "Vietnamatta" and "boat people" in the 1970s to the "Asian gangs" moral panic of the 1990s. The second half of the chapter explores the way Cabramatta communities sought to contest this negative and damaging depiction.

Glen Fuller, in Chapter 10, presents an insight into the subculture of motor car enthusiasts labelled as "hoons", arguing how media constructions of these young drivers express anxieties about automobility. Fuller shows how young male drivers occupy street space as social space through rituals such as cruising and racing. By constructing "hoons" as a road safety problem and presenting them as a danger the government avoided "more complex social and cultural questions about who these so-called 'hoons' actually are".

In Chapter 11, Jayde Cahir and Greg Noble draw on research with young people and on media coverage of a cycle of "moments" which could constitute the formation of a moral panic about mobile phones. They examine the paradoxical nature of these moments concerning the physical and mental harassment of young people in school and their access to pornographic material; moments that participate in the wider set of representations of the mobile phone as both making young people "safe" and yet threatening their social and physical well-being. Their analysis is informed by Cohen's work but they argue for a "more nuanced sense of the moral turbulence at stake and the forms of moral regulation that are entailed".

In another of the book's historical pieces in Chapter 12, Nahid Kabir investigates the "othering" of Afghans in late 19th-century White Australia, as non-white "Asiatics" and (less so) as Muslims. She shows how they were demonised in moral panics about supposed dirtiness, disease, taking of jobs, arrogance, violence towards women and other themes that we see reprised in more recent moral panics.

Scott Poynting's Chapter 13 takes up some surprisingly similar themes in the racialisation of "Middle Eastern" and Muslim immigrants at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. An accumulation of moral panics about so-called "Lebanese gangs"

and about the "Muslim Other" is seen as giving moral licence for the violent mass race-hate expressed at Cronulla beach in 2005. After the Cronulla riot, the themes of "ethnic crime gangs" and supposed Muslim violence, misogyny and refusal to integrate, which had led to the riot, were returned to in media and opportunist political demonisation of Arab Australian and Muslim communities.

Kate Gleeson presents in Chapter 14 an historical case of moral panic about gangs of young men and sexual assault, this one from the late 19th century. The 1880s saw a spate of violent gang rapes in inner Sydney. The daily press warned that law and order was at the mercy of gangs of "larrikin" young men with no fear of authority. This chapter examines the political and press reaction to these rapes, especially the notorious "Mount Rennie outrage" of 1887, to show how white native masculinity, sexuality and collectivity were constructed as a dangerous natural force to be feared by the respectable and subdued by authorities.

Selda Dagistanli's contribution, Chapter 15, outlines moral panics about a series of gang rapes in Sydney in this early 21st century, where the deviance, lawlessness and misogyny is represented as inherent to Arab or Muslim culture and stemming from the failure to integrate to mainstream Australian culture. The chapter traces the panic over the so-called "Lebanese gang rapes" in south-western Sydney in 2000, and a case from 2002 involving four brothers who identified as immigrant Muslims. Dagistanli emphasises the impact upon criminal justice processes of media, political and legal racialisation of the offences.

Michael Sturma's Chapter 16 deals with moral panic over disease and sexuality – two common themes – in its historical account of the campaign against the "VD menace" during World War II by media and moral entrepreneurs. Underlying this moral panic, argues Sturma, were anxieties over increasing economic and social independence of women. The chapter shows how representations of venereal disease in wartime Australia exemplify how concerns over public health can "perpetuate sexist ideology and act as a form of social control".

The final and seventeenth chapter, by Affrica Taylor, is also concerned with moral panic over sexuality, but this time in connection with the supposed corruption of childhood innocence, another favourite theme. It details the furore over the showing by the national public broadcaster in a children's television program, of a segment about a little girl who has "two mothers". The chapter explores the propensity for moral panic to be generated at the intersecting imaginaries of childhood "innocence" and "dangerously queer" families. It reveals the heteronormative assumptions involved, about the nature of childhood and of families, the "valorisation of heterosexual lives through devaluing queer ones", and the "paradox of disavowing some children's lives in the name of 'protecting children' ".

Together, the empirical studies made in the contributions to this book suggest a number of ways in which the moral panic paradigm can be, and needs to be, extended. The model does not tell us all that should be said about the cases which they detail. Nevertheless, collec-

tively, these offerings constitute a powerful case that the concept of moral panic remains, as Critcher (2003, p.178) concludes, "a necessary but not sufficient explanation", which we cannot yet do without.

# 1 Curfews, children, class and colonialism

George Morgan

(Extracts)

In August 2003, Carl Morrison, a twelve-year-old Aboriginal passenger in a stolen car driven by his fourteen-year-old friend, was killed when the vehicle crashed after being pursued by police in Perth.

The death of Carl Morrison occurred at the end of a period of unprecedented national soul-searching around the history of colonialism and the treatment of Indigenous people. During the 1990s and the early part of the 2000s, narratives of Aboriginal suffering at the hands of the colonial state circulated widely in the public sphere. Western Australia was at the centre of some of the most notorious of these forms of violence and social engineering (Haebich 1992). Yet Premier Gallop was vehemently opposed to any assertion that the legacy of history or cultural factors might have played some part in the events that led to Morrison's death, or that contemporary citizens, as the beneficiaries of past colonialism, might shoulder some of the responsibility.

Gallop's implacable stance was echoed by one of his lieutenants, Michelle Roberts. Her comments illustrate how, amid the hyperventilated public discussion that forms part of moral panics, the folk devils are silenced and dehumanised (Cohen 1972). Moral entrepreneurs make strenuous attempts to counteract efforts to humanise those who have been accused of transgressions, to resist narratives that reframe the problem as needing social welfare rather than policing solutions. The hard discourse of law and order trumps the soft discourses of welfare and reconciliation. Whatever the damage done to family structures in the past, however problematic parenthood is for those who have seen the colonial state break up their families, such evidence is inadmissible. As the Conservative British Prime Minister John Major said at the time of the James Bulger case in 1993, in which two 10-year-old boys were convicted of murdering an infant after abducting him from a shopping centre, "we must condemn a little more, and understand a little less" (Morrison n.d.).

2

# Riot, resistance and moral panic

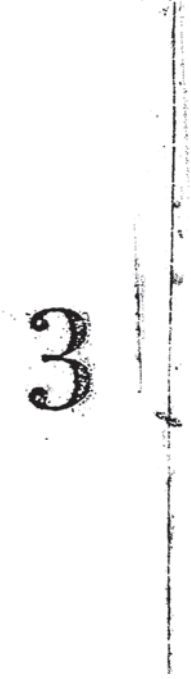
## Demonising the colonial other

**Chris Cunneen**

(Extracts)

At times the anger, frustration and fear arising from deaths in custody results in a collective sense of injustice of a level of that spills over into a riot (which is inevitably directed at the local police). Recent riots in Redfern and Palm Island reflect the depth of community anger at perceived injustices. Collective disorder or riots are relatively rare in Australia, so it is significant that Indigenous "riots" (they could also be called "demonstrations") almost exclusively arise as a result of perceived injustices caused by the actions of criminal justice agencies. Yet the dominant representations by media and politicians steer clear of these understandings, and prefer to focus on either the irrationality of lawlessness, or the passive victimhood of disadvantage. To the extent that the moral panic of lawlessness predominates, then the implied solution is invariably an increased level of criminal justice intervention through more and better armed police, stronger laws and increased penalties.

One criticism of the use of the concept of "moral panic" has been that it perhaps too simplistic in its understanding of the media – particularly its multiple forms and outlets, which are not monolithic. In connection to deaths in custody, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody noted that some sections of the media played a significant role in the establishment of the inquiry by covering the issue through critical and investigative reporting. Yet the type of investigative journalism that can assist social movements take a critical stance against state or corporate power is rare. The media are big business, and their representations need to be understood within the context of profitability (what sells) and of discourses about social normality. The economics of news production and the news values of the media also fit in well the agenda of politicians eager to be seen to be doing "something" to solve the problem. And after a riot, what seems more acceptable and more reasonable than increasing police numbers, buying better equipment or building a bigger and more expensive police station to deal with elements of a black lawless minority?



# Danger from below

## Anti-eviction struggles in Sydney, January to July, 1931

**Drew Cottle & Angela Keys**

(Extracts)

In May 1930, the Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM) was formed in Sydney's Trades Hall. In the depths of the Depression, the UWM staged a short-lived "eviction war". It was a form of class war in which the UWM achieved brief unfinished victories (Wheatley 1981, pp.27-29). Sydney's "eviction war" angered property holders. Some in the establishment, feared that these anti-eviction battles would be the catalyst for a social revolution. Amid the numerous unchallenged evictions and driven lives of Sydney's unemployed, several anti-eviction struggles marked a turning in capital's strategy to destroy an exaggerated threat from the militant unemployed. This turn to state repression occurred over a six-month period from January to late June 1931.

The mass anti-eviction struggle at Newtown signalled the end of the UWM's campaign of refusal. Although militant and increasingly well organised, they could not halt the tide of evictions throughout Sydney. Their challenges to the rights of private property were punished by the batons and guns of the police. Their campaign of rising militancy among the unemployed ended in blood and broken bones. While the propertied were momentarily unnerved, a revolutionary insurrection was never likely. Depressed Sydney would return to normal with the unemployed bearing its greatest social and economic burden ever as the hokum of equality and sacrifice fooled no-one. The folk devils of capital's panic had been put to rest.

# 4 Taking it to the streets

## The larrikins and the Lebanese

Rob White

(Extracts)

This chapter has provided a description of two groups in Australian history that have variously captured the public imagination and that have been at the centre of moral panic in their respective time periods. The push larrikins were known as louts (and perhaps, today, legends) who accosted people on the streets and who, by their very presence, asserted their own particular social identity. Their fun, however, was not the fun of the respectable or the ruling classes. Accordingly, they were castigated, put under surveillance and arrested. The changing nature of the street, and of class relations, stopped the larrikin – the "rough" end of the working class – from doing what they had done before in the public spaces of the city.

A century later, it is the so-called Middle Eastern gangs of Sydney that are featured in moral panics about street-present youth. Like the push larrikins, these youth likewise take it to the streets. It is here where they, too, are most visible. They, too, are notable for their appearance. And they, too, have managed to created their own category of "offence" for which they are named. This time, however, the Lebanese youth is considered a "foreigner" as well as "outsider". This is so even though history tells us that, like the "street Arab" and the larrikin, contemporary youth are products of their own time, their own neighbourhoods, their own circumstances. They are "made in Australia".

5

# The blame game

## Struggles over the representation of the 'Macquarie Fields riots'

**Murray Lee**

(Extracts)

To begin to understand the problems at Macquarie Fields we need to consider broad questions of the social and spatial planning that have defined everyday life on the estate, and that circumscribe the sense of social isolation felt by residents, although this too provides only a partial analysis. We also need to account for the effect of the housing market on both the depth of socioeconomic disadvantage on the estate and the mix of tenants. Of course police–community relations also need further analysis.[13] Finally, we need to look at public policy more generally and the effects of the market economy and globalisation on employment opportunities in the area. Only then do we begin to get a clearer picture of how the February 2005 disturbances emerged (Lee 2005, Lee 2006a). In this sense it is only the event and its aftermath that a framework of moral panic can adequately address.

The moral panic that accompanied the dissent at Macquarie Fields tapped into and intensified the sense that life in Australia in the 21st century is insecure. While dissenters found solidarity in the carnivalsque community created under the cloud of losing two mates to a common enemy, much of the broader community was able to distance themselves from the fray via stereotypical images and representations of criminal "rioters" and/or "stupid housos". In the end the biggest casualty wasn't the police or the dissenters; the "riots" themselves resulted in very little injury to person or property (Owen 2006). Rather, the most depressing thing about both the dissent and its reaction was that it failed to shine a light on what remain pressing social problems in areas such as Macquarie Fields.

6

# '… To try to ruin'

## Rock'n'roll, youth culture and 'law'n'order' in Brisbane, 1956–1957

Raymond Evans

(Extracts)

As Lesley Johnson (1993, p.108) has observed, "bad" young people, it appeared, became juvenile delinquents; "good" young people merely became the misguided but harmless "teenage fans". The latter were not only considered harmless but lucrative. Thus, as working-class teenagers branded bodgie were continually hounded by police and clinically analysed by unfriendly "experts", those now designated as "fan" – an increasingly middle-class appellation – were courted by admen and entrepreneurs. In the process, rock'n'roll was slowly moulded into a more certifiably predictable entertainment commodity, its defiant and iconoclastic potential progressively curbed – at least for the time being. No longer so universally feared and detested by adults, this new cultural nexus was increasingly promoted, as it was simultaneously homogenised for wider mass appeal. As the 50s drew to a close, the economic advantages of the adolescent "fan" increasingly outweighed the inflated social liability status of posturing and maligned "rebellious youth".

7

# 'Why are they all drinking water?'

## Raves, ecstasy and the death of Anna Wood

Shane Homan

(Extracts)

I similarly argue that the following rave panic has to be considered within a particular moment of national governance and state history. In NSW, Premier Bob Carr's successful election strategy had promised a "tough" stand on crime. In the state election of 1995, both parties stringently observed the central ritual of NSW elections: the law and order "auction", the bidding process for the harshest and "toughest" policies on crime prevention.[3] Nationally, the election of the Howard Coalition Government in 1996 signified a reversal of the former Keating Labor Government's drugs policy of harm minimisation, to one of prohibition and heavier policing. These policy contexts played their part in the mixture of concerns about youth music choices and sites of activity, and different articulations of risk and illegality in relation to youth drug consumption.

The *Daily Telegraph Mirror* dutifully ignored the presentation of its own borrowed statistics in the desire to produce a vision of youth communities overrun by ecstasy. Accompanying the Wood school uniform picture, it cited a NSW Australian Medical Association (AMA) report headed 'Teen drug use an epidemic' (Allport 1996, p.3). The survey, part of an AMA Anna Wood Drug and Alcohol Education Project to formulate education strategies among state schools, was notable for revealing the disproportionate media coverage of ecstasy usage. Alcohol was deemed responsible for the majority of all drug-related deaths in the 15 to 34 years age group; 25 per cent of those aged 12 to 17 were cigarette smokers; four per cent of 14- to 19-year-olds used amphetamines. Only three per cent had used ecstasy. In 1992, 128 youths aged 15 to 24 died from illicit drug usage (AMA 1996). The role of placing the Wood panic within wider public health contexts fell to dance promoter Tony Papworth: "what people fail to understand is that closing down dance parties is not going to solve the drug problem — the weekend that Anna Wood died, six teenagers died as a result of alcohol" (*60 Minutes* 1996).

8

# Heroin epidemic!

## Drugs and moral panic in the western suburbs of Melbourne 1995–1996

James Rowe

(Extracts)

In this article I document the "construction" of a "drug epidemic" in Melbourne's western suburbs in late 1995. Again, I do not deny that a drug problem existed, but argue that the heroin trade that was characterised as increasingly "violent", "predatory" and "expansive" existed almost entirely in the statements of senior police and subsequent reports of the print media. The moral panic that resulted is an example of how image and representation can augment reality to the degree that they build the momentum necessary to shape a political and policy agenda. Indeed, the moral panic of November 1995 was so compelling that the government was effectively *forced* to act so as to avoid potentially damaging claims of inaction or indifference. This case study is a salutary reminder of how policymaking depends on complex processes of social construction. While I want to focus on the moral panic of November 1995, it is important to note that the potential threat posed by heroin was already well established as a staple of the "bad news" that constitutes so much of the formulaic reporting of the news.

Rather than address the structural influences underlying the drug trade in Melbourne's western suburbs, the Kennett Government undertook an extensive policy process to address what was "displayed". The role that the media played in the prioritisation of this policy agenda is evident from the above discussion. Although tentative in its beginnings, the media's continued "construction" of a drug "threat" inspired widespread alarm in the wider community. As each separate event was described in the pages of the press, a further, more powerful threat was implied, such that the understanding of the drug problem was of an ever-growing, "predatory" and "indiscriminately violent" danger. By early December 1995, the moral panic derived from what the public had "heard" was such that political action was needed to address the representation of the problem, as opposed to the problem itself.

9

# Contesting Cabramatta

## Moral panic and media interventions in 'Australia's heroin capital'

Tanja Dreher

(Extracts)

This chapter has provided a snapshot of the symbolic struggle to define Cabramatta and its communities at a time of moral panic around crime and Australia's relationship to Asia. There is considerable evidence of shifting representations in the light of both community media interventions and professional journalists' interests in telling different stories. Several factors can be seen to influence this shift: a reduction in criminal activity in the area following intensive policing, the passage of time and the news cycle, the wider shift from "Asia" to "Islam" as Australia's "other" and the impact of ongoing community responses to racialised news reporting.

Although Muslim and Arab Australians had been subjected to media scrutiny since the first Gulf War of 1990, this escalated dramatically in 2001 with the reporting of a series of vicious group sexual assaults in Western Sydney, refugees arriving by boat from the Middle East and the attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 all linked through the figure of the "Arab Other", the preeminent folk devil in Australia (Poynting et al. 2004). This reporting also referenced public debate following the murder of schoolboy Edward Lee in 1998 which focused on the existence and activities of Middle Eastern or Lebanese "ethnic gangs" around the Western Sydney suburb of Bankstown (Collins et al. 2000). Initially the coverage of Middle Eastern "ethnic gangs" was regularly linked to "Asian" gangs in Cabramatta (Collins et al. 2000, p.56), but the events of 2001 served to displace debate on Asian immigration and "Asian crime" as news attention turned to the perceived "threat" of Islam. This shift underscores the argument that outbreaks of moral panic are in fact "part of an endless debate about who 'we' are and what 'our' national culture is" (McRobbie & Thornton 1995, p.571).

10

# The hoon

## Controlling the streets?

Glen Fuller

(Extracts)

The practice of street racing (through rolling blockades) and, to a lesser extent, cruising, certainly appear dangerous and even sinister. However, the statistical evidence indicates the reality is otherwise. The percentage of so-called hooning accidents in Queensland in the context of all accidents is insignificant.

The Queensland hoon moral panic was so successful because the media image of the hoon as folk devil connects with a popular experience of modified-car culture. Modified car enthusiasts build their cars to "turn heads", to attract attention in public places. The mix of the hoon moral panic involves modified-car enthusiasts, their cars, the media apparatus capturing and representing the attention-attracting capacity of modified cars, and the politicians who discourse the imagery of modified cars in terms of a road safety "problem". This mix allowed the Queensland Government to posture as if it were governing the streets and the system of automobility by targeting "hoons" when any actual improvements in road safety have been statistically negligible. The governmental inclinations are reflected in the way the police represent the "severity" of the hoon issue in Queensland as a function of complaints first and then accidents (Folkman 2005, pp.3-4). This case study provides an example of how politics is often concerned with the attention threshold of the public rather than actual governance. By making hoons a road safety problem and writing them off as a danger – potential killers – the government did not have to consider the more complex social and cultural questions about who these so-called hoons actually were.

11

# 'It's a security thing

## Mobile phones and moral regulation

Jayde Cahir
& Greg Noble

(Extracts)

The public debates around porn and bullying during 2006 represent moments in a cycle that could have produced a moral panic along the lines spelt out by Cohen (1973). However, we characterise the period as one of "moral turbulence" in which the social problems associated with mobile phones were defined and debated, but with insufficient volatility to lead to a full-blown moral panic. As several scholars have suggested, it may be that the short-term focus of moral panics is increasingly giving way to the sustained risk anxiety of late modernity (Ungar 2001). This debate aside, we hold that in the moments discussed, the stalled development of a panic over mobile phone use may be partly (but not entirely) explained by the fact that the cultural meanings of the mobile were contested, and even in contradiction. These moments involved specific popular sentiments, including the following: communication technologies extend but threaten human sociality; there has been a loss of control of children, which means they need to be increasingly protected; schools are meant to be safe but offer opportunities for danger; and these issues are fundamental in constituting "good" and "bad" parenting. These sentiments intensified the moral turbulence around young people's uses of mobile phones.

# 12 The Afghan Other

Nahid Kabir

(Extracts)

In the late nineteenth century, at the advent of the White Australia Policy, a series of racist moral panics about Afghan immigrants to Australia fomented indignation and hostility against them among white Australians. A number of local newspapers, from the *Barrier Truth* in New South Wales to the *Coolgardie Miner* in Western Australia, campaigned virulently against these "Asiatics" from "inferior races", attacking them as "black devils", uncivilised, dirty, disease-ridden, brutal and violent towards women: a threat to the moral fibre and the racial integrity of the new nation. Many were forced to return to Afghanistan, and their livestock were slaughtered. At the height of the conflict, there were shootings and woundings, stock were set loose, and there was even a vigilante style double killing, over which the white perpetrators were acquitted. While most of the racist animosity was directed at the Afghans along lines of "colour" rather than their Muslim religion (in fact they were sometimes referred to as "Hindoos"), these hatreds are hard to disentangle in practice, and their religion was implicated in the fatal shooting, as is detailed below.

The Tampa crisis, when the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa,* rescued 438 asylum-seeking "boat people", mostly Afghans, off Australia's west coast in August 2001, and the Australian government refused them landing and eventually incarcerated them on Nauru, has also revealed that a section of the Australian community did not want the Afghans because they were Muslims and culturally different. A similar dynamic of moral panic to the one traced in this chapter, as Poynting et al. (2004) have shown, played a part in this more recent history of xenophobia.

13

# 'Thugs' and 'grubs' at Cronulla

## From media beat-ups to beating up migrants

Scott Poynting

(Extracts)

This chapter analyses how a swift spiral of deviance amplification, impelled by a campaign of moral outrage in commercial media and incitement through mass mobile phone text messaging, precipitated a further moral panic in a series of moral panics that focused on "Lebanese thugs" and Muslim outsiders. The latest cycle escalated in one week in late 2005 from a beachfront brawl by a handful of young men in Sydney into a violent racist mob attack by thousands of angry white Australians on anyone nearby who they suspected of being of "Middle Eastern appearance". This sudden escalation could only occur because of prior ideological priming about the purported criminality and savagery of the Arab, or Muslim "other", which was itself the outcome of an accumulation of moral panics about "Lebanese gangs" (Collins et al. 2000) and, especially since 9/11, about supposedly violent, irrational and misogynist Muslims (Poynting et al. 2004). After a brief period of widespread public shame and remorse over the racist attacks, there was a rapid return to the story that the victims were to blame because of their community's history of uncivil behaviour on the beach and elsewhere. There was also a shift to a clear pattern of vastly disproportionate media, political and, eventually, police attention to the "reprisal" assaults and property damage by a couple of hundred mostly Lebanese-Australian young men on the night of 11 December and the following day. The language of media reports and political rhetoric about these latter young "grubs" and "thugs", as both the New South Wales (NSW) premier and the opposition leader pointedly called them, closely paralleled that of the series of moral panics about "Lebanese youth gangs" and "ethnic criminals" over the previous decade.

# 14 White natives and gang rape at the time of centenary

Kate Gleeson

(Extracts)

Mt Rennie is one of a "multitude of pack-rapes that has characterised our history" (Summers 1981, p.27). Despite, or perhaps because of, the frequency of gang rape, the related panic of the late-1800s was widespread and multi-faceted. For mainstream commentators, gang rape suggested a barbarous crisis in Australian masculinity, thus a crisis for the nation. For the radical nationalists of *The Bulletin* and its ilk, this paranoid, misplaced discourse resulted in the "scandalous" verdict and sentence in response to Mt Rennie, an imperial assault on a potentially independent nation. Indifferent to women's experience of rape (and murder perhaps), in the mythology of *The Bulletin*, Mt Rennie was at least an understandable sexual escapade, at most a national rite of a masculinity that represented rebellion, independence and the quintessential Australian way.

The panic over Mt Rennie subsided. Not because gang rape subsided (it is surely as frequent as ever[4]), but because larrikins moved out of the cities to the suburbs, and, certainly, once the war broke out, Australian masculinity was thought to be consolidated and on track, at least until the next generation of youths were scrutinised and suspected. Far from being an anomaly to our culture, gang rape has been crucial in *defining* Australia, a nation understood in terms of masculinity, and cultural, political and judicial independence. Its impact on women, of course, has been largely overlooked.

15

# 'Like a pack of wild animals'

## Moral panics around 'ethnic' gang rape in Sydney

Selda Dagistanli

(Extracts)

This chapter explores the media-fuelled moral panic around what was termed "ethnic gang rapes" in Sydney in 2000 and 2002, in particular those involving a group of Lebanese-Australian youths (brothers Mohammed and Bilal Skaf and others), and a later, less media-saturated case involving four brothers (the "K" brothers) who identified themselves as Pakistani-Muslim immigrants. These cases were chosen because, first, they were extensively reported; second, representations surrounding these crimes were heavily invested with racial and cultural dimensions, and, third, because the racialisation of these crimes was largely attributable to both the prior racialisation of "gang" crime in south-west Sydney, and, later, to the social and political climate in which there was fear of Islamic terrorist attack against the West. The extent of the media attention surrounding these crimes only makes sense in such a climate. And, I suggest, it is the racialisation of "gang" crime plus the fear of terrorism that draw a fundamental divide between the culture of the perpetrators of these crimes and that of mainstream society.

To point out the ideological dimensions of the representations of the crimes in no way diminishes the brutality of the crimes and the experiences of the victims, nor does it exculpate the perpetrators. The point here is rather to show the ways such representations function within a particular social and political context that exceeds the legal dimension of the cases.

16

# Public health and sexual morality

## Venereal disease in World War II Australia

**Michael Sturma**

(Extracts)

In summary, descriptions of venereal disease in the press and other public forums, and the response of health and civil authorities to the disease in Australia during the Second World War, often had little to do with a real epidemic. Given that much of Australia's social dislocation during the war was identified with the growing independence of women, the disruption of families, the presence of many foreign males and falling birth rates, it is perhaps not surprising that the country's malaise was articulated largely in terms of sexual immorality. In the 19th century, syphilis was commonly used as a metaphor by antidemocrats in denunciations of egalitarian aspirations (see Sontag 1979, p.59). In wartime Australia, the public's response to venereal disease was metaphorically, as well as literally, directed against the aspirations of women. Just as venereal disease threatened individual health, women's new autonomy was viewed as threatening the social body. That efforts to exert greater control over sexual conduct were directed mainly toward women was indicative not only of a double standard for male and female victims of the disease, but also of the belief that women's changing role threatened the very fabric of domestic moral order. The need to regain moral order provided a rationale for reasserting traditional sex roles, and, in this respect, venereal disease as a public health issue served as an ideological tool and instrument for women's repression.

17

# Innocent children, dangerous families and homophobic panic

Affrica Taylor

(Extracts)

In this chapter I examine moral panics that illustrate the ways in which this new kind of homophobia works. I look at two media furores that were created around the issue of children in same-sex families at a time in Australia's political history when the Federal Government was aggressively moving to ban gay marriage. The inclusion of children in the debate around gay and lesbian relationships was quite significant in mobilising this new form of homophobia. By drawing on entrenched notions of childhood innocence and rekindling latent anxieties about the essentially predatory nature of homosexuality, these two homophobic panics were built upon a distinction between "putting up with" gays and lesbians as a part of our diverse society, but not tolerating children being associated with them or exposed to them. As the then federal leader of the National Party, John Anderson, put it … "I do think [being gay or lesbian] … is a choice people have an absolute entitlement to make, but … if I choose a particular lifestyle, certain things are not open to me … you've got to recognise you can't have it all" (quoted in Wroe 2004). The "certain things" he is referring to here are children.

As a counter to the accusations of gay activists pushing a "minority fundamentalist" agenda (Howard, cited Evans 2006) and "homosexual propaganda" being pushed on vulnerable children (Fred Nile, cited in *Daily Telegraph* 25/3/2005), my analysis of the two media events points to the strategic ways in which the notion of childhood innocence has been simultaneously exploited and reproduced by conservative political forces in Australia in order to advance and consolidate a new kind of homophobic agenda.