

Voices of the Past in Anglo Primal Scream

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From billy tea to gum trees, old Australia fears it is under siege, says Peter Cochrane

There is a lot of Robert Menzies in Pauline Hanson. Much of what she advocates is Menzian. Not the paranoia about Aboriginal "privileges", Asian immigration, foreign aid, world bankers and the United Nations, but just about every thing else.

In her maiden speech to the House of Representatives, she called for a string of trademark policies - discriminatory immigration, monoculturalism, grand scale national development projects, conscription (for civil as well as military service), the retention of icons such as Qantas in Australian hands and tariff protection for Australian industries.

Her two quotations came from the Menzies era - Paul Hasluck and Arthur Calwell, both endorsing a White Australia - and she clearly favoured full employment over balanced Budgets. She also attacked the "disgraceful senator Lionel Murphy", lamenting the passing of family life before the Family Law Act which causes we are told, nothing but "death, misery and heartache to countless thousands".

And, like Menzies, she is basing her career on a constituency of allegedly "forgotten people". In her case, the forgotten people are the mainstream Australians, that is the Anglo-Celtic majority - Anglos for short. These are not the polished, cosmopolitan Anglos from politics and the arts, transcendent cultural beings such as Paul Keating or Hilary McPhee, but the Anglos from the school of hard knocks - working-class battlers or shopkeepers like herself, the

unpolished, simple white folk, what the poet Les Murray has called "vernacular Australia" with its vernacular heritage - billy tea, swags, FJ utes, Blue Hills and blue gums.

Hanson was tapping into this strata when she described herself as "not a polished politician" but merely "a woman who has had her fair share of life's knocks". Her fish-and-chip shop credentials are symbolically perfect.

"For two long ordinary Australians have been kept out of any debate by the major parties," she told an almost empty House.

Ron Casey and Graeme Campbell also talk about exclusion. Exclusion is the theme song of the outcast Anglos.

It is easy to point out that Anglos own more wealth and have more power and influence than other ethnic groups in Australia. It is also true that Australian icons - whether shearers, surfers, rockers, radio personalities or movie stars - are still, mostly Anglo. But that sort of argument will not defeat Hanson. It's like telling a royalist the monarchy is too costly - they don't care. Hanson's thinking is so thoroughly grounded in the Menzies era, it is easy to see what she is really on about. The talk about Aboriginal and ethnic privileges, the calls for equality and so on are a lament for the time when Anglos saw only their own reflection on the world around them, when they and they alone had a sense of homely belonging in this country, when the culture was an enchanted glass that mirrored only their own idealised image and their own heritage.

Take the two quotes from her maiden speech - the first Hasluck celebrating a vision of a single society; the second Calwell warning against immigrants who are anti-white.

Hanson is a primal scream. She represents the

greed that goes with the loss of cultural centrality and the loss of identity that happens when a cosmopolished (mostly Anglo) elite lines up with the new social forces on the block.

There is nothing new about Hanson's grief and rage. She is simply the latest outburst in a "discourse of Anglo-Celtic decline", which has a history going back to the Whitlam period. It was then that the cachet of the knockabout Anglo-Celtic Australian was first affronted by the fake Mediterranean garishness of Al Grassby and the ever so cosmopolished Whitlam.

In 1976, Murray penned a sort of manifesto for ordinary white folk and their heritage in the journal *Quadrant*. He emphasised their exclusion and victimisation, arguing that the political elite, a "New Ascendancy" - of smart-talking over-educated mandarins had become estranged from its own culture.'

"The educated classes have moved towards a position of all-out war on vernacular Australia," he wrote.

"It was a Class war" between the vernacular and privileged cultures. The New Ascendancy had lost all compassionate understanding. It had betrayed its own people and its own past.

Between Murray's 1976 manifesto and the Hanson phenomenon, there are many milestones in the discourse of Anglo-Celtic decline - Geoffrey Blainey's 1984 speech, Casey's biography, *Confessions of a Larrikin* (1989), Campbell's address to the League of Rights, and the emergence of a redneck lobby that will defend to the last man the freedom of telling boong jokes at its barbies. It is a 20-year old lament of varying twists and shades.

The point is that Hanson's potency rests not only on racism but on a powerful sense of cultural loss - of displacement for the centre of things - which has been worked readily into a mythology of victimisation. Her Anglo constituency has not been excluded, but it has lost its exclusive claim on this society and its resources. Its sense of entitlement has been

undermined, and this feels like victimisation to the audiences that applaud Hanson on the Middy show.

Hanson has injected the discourse of Anglo-Celtic decline with a new intensity and her support indicates that things are coming together, strange manifestations are abroad - resentments are surfacing, hurts are finding voice.

Only a few weeks ago, Anglo parents were complaining about the unfairness of national costume days at primary school because their kids had nothing to wear, that is, no Anglo or "non ethnic" identity.

Helen Demidenko/Darville's imaginary life depended on secretly shedding her Anglo identity - as if she has to be ethnic to be colourful or real. And consider the coincidence of Hanson's maiden speech with the publication of Murray's *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, a title rich with defiant exclusion to say nothing of irony.

Murray recently defined Anglo-Celts in Australia as "immigrant natives without immigrant rights". Whatever else separates them - and he is neither hateful nor heartless - Hanson and Murray share a belief in the outcast Anglo.

It is easy to find faults in Hanson's arguments, but this can strengthen her position. In her maiden speech she got the population of Malaysia radically wrong, revealed that she knows nothing of the remarkable assimilatory powers of Australian culture and recommended the abolition of treaties she has yet to read.

But to her supporters, her ignorance is not a problem. If she were educated she would belong to the enemy. She is just a fish-and-chip shop lady. Her supporters identify with her because they, too, feel knocked about, marginalised and looked down upon. They need scapegoats.

Her limits only enhance the aura of exclusion on which her appeal is based. Her appeal hinges

on where she claims to be - on the outer. Her emphasis on exclusion is a cover for a refusal to share, a nostalgia for the culture of the enchanted glass, for a time that was narrow, conformist, exclusive and intolerant - the heyday of the simple white folk.

Is that the future we want to go back to?

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