



# ETHICAL RESPONSIVENESS: LISTENING AND READING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

**Friday 18 March 2016, University of Wollongong  
LHA Research Hub (19.2072)**

Colloquium convened by Dr Tanja Dreher (ARC Future Fellow, University of Wollongong)

Supported by the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong and a UoW Visiting International Scholar Award (Prof Anshuman Mondal)

# COLLOQUIUM OVERVIEW

The past year has seen Indigenous sovereignty activism across social media, European countries closing borders to refugees, and rising Islamophobia. This colloquium focuses on the ethics, politics and practices of listening and reading in the context of racism, inequality, difference and controversy in a globalising world. Scholarship and practice around multiculturalism, antiracism, marginalisation and difference has long mobilised a politics of speaking or representation, yet attention to listening and reading is underdeveloped in both research and practice. The focus on listening and reading reframes debates in media studies, literature and politics to highlight questions of receptivity, recognition, response and responsibility. By bringing listening and reading to the forefront of attention, questions of responsibility, power and privilege are brought to the centre of analysis.

The colloquium explores ethical responses that are active, open, often difficult and potentially unsettling. To develop the emerging scholarship on political listening and reading, we ask what can be learned from critical scholarship on negotiating difference, alter politics, ally and solidarity work, or decolonising strategies? The colloquium will engage recent work on rethinking recognition and the limits of liberal free speech theory. We are particularly interested in approaches that move beyond a comfortable politics of empathy, and engage instead with processes that might disturb, unsettle or discomfort. This colloquium explores the productive possibilities of moving beyond the politics of voice to explore listening and reading across difference in research and in advocacy work.

The colloquium brings together researchers from a range of disciplines and approaches to generate new conversations on the ethical possibilities and pitfalls of listening and reading. The aim is to showcase emerging work, identify potential collaborations, and further the development of critical scholarship on the ethics of responding across difference.

Papers will be considered for an international themed collection, edited by Prof Mondal and Dr Dreher.

Possible themes include:

- listening across difference
- the ethics of reading/response
- alternatives to empathy and dialogue
- allies and solidarity work
- listening/reading and a critical politics of recognition
- listening/reading in the digital age
- communication rights beyond voice
- listening in to Indigenous, alternative and community media
- anxiety and un-settling responses
- reading/listening other-wise

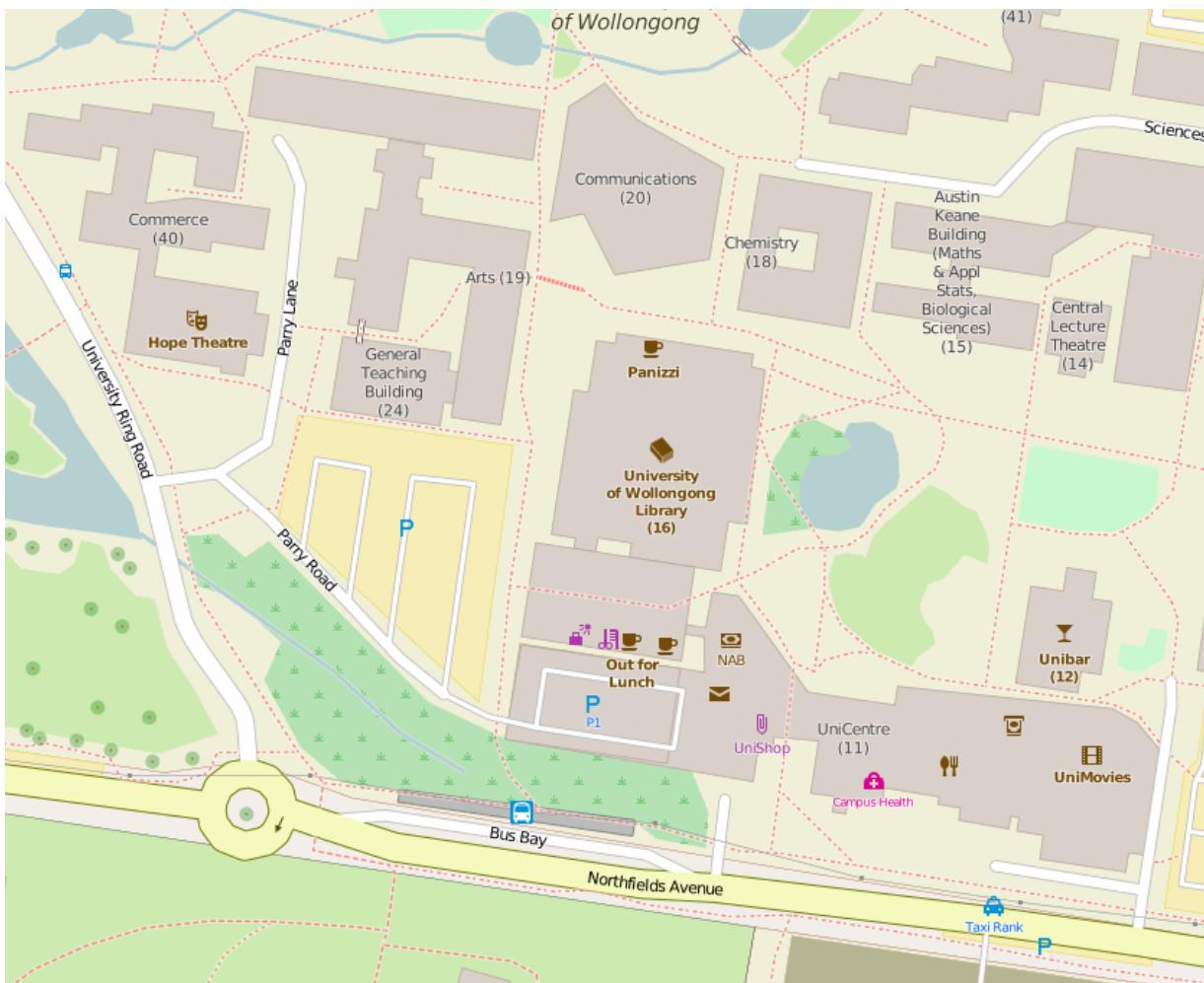
The colloquium is organised in conjunction with Future Fellowship research of Dr Dreher (FT140100515) and the UoW sponsored visit of Prof Mondal (UoW Visiting International Scholar Award)

# Getting to the venue

The Colloquium will be held at the Research Hub in Building 19 at the University of Wollongong (UOW).

Building 19 is located just North of the P2 carpark, next to the library (see map, below). From the Bus Terminal, there is a path that heads towards the P2 car park. If you follow this path past the car park, you will see Building 19 on your left.

To reach the Research Hub, take the elevator (near the front entrance of Building 19) to Level 2. Take a right, and you will find it at the end of the corridor.



You can reach UOW by taxi or by taking the Wollongong Green 'Free Bus' (55C).

For [taxi](#), call Wollongong Radio Cabs on 02 4229 9311.

For the [Wollongong Free Bus \(55C\)](#): From the Adina Apartments, the nearest stop for the 55C is on Corrimal Street, on the opposite side of the road to the Adina. Cross the road on Corrimal Street, then turn left to cross Market Street. The 55C Bus Stop is approximately 50 metres from the corner. The bus will take 15-20 minutes to reach UOW.

The bus does not operate according to a fixed timetable. Buses arrive approximately once every 10 minutes from 7am onwards. Please be advised that the bus can be crowded.

Trains to and from Sydney run hourly. A free shuttle bus runs between the North Wollongong train station and campus – allow roughly 10 minutes. The timetable and trip planner are available at: <http://www.transportnsw.info/>

Further information on reaching UoW available at: <http://www.uow.edu.au/transport/index.html>

# PROGRAM

Time	Presenters	Chair / discussant
9am	Welcome coffee	
9.30	Introductions	Dr Tanja Dreher
9.45 –10.45	Dr Tanja Dreher Prof Anshuman Mondal	Prof Ian Buchanan
	Break	
11 – 12.30	Dr Catherine Thill Dr Clare Land Dr Shakira Hussein	A/Prof Bronwyn Carlson
12.30 - 1	Lunch	
1 – 2.30	Prof Allison Weir Dr Sukhmani Khorana Dr Anna Szorenyi	Dr Ika Willis
2.30 – 2.45	Coffee	
2.45 – 4.15	Dr Lisa Slater Dr Lisa Waller Mr Shinen Wong	Dr Mike Griffiths
4.15 – 4.45	Closing discussion	Prof Anshuman Mondal and Dr Tanja Dreher

# SESSION CHAIRS

**Ian Buchanan** is Professor of Cultural Studies at UOW.

**Associate Professor Carlson** is an Aboriginal woman who was born on and lives on D'harawal Country in NSW Australia. She is a scholar with both a national and international reputation in the field of Indigenous Studies. She is the recipient of two consecutive Australian Research Council Discovery (Indigenous) grants (2013-2015 & 2016-2018) for her research focusing on Indigenous Australians online engagements on social media. Bronwyn was the 2013 recipient of the prestigious Stanner Award (a national award administered by Australia's leading institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) for her doctoral research which has now been published by Aboriginal Studies Press. Her book is titled, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?*. Associate Professor Carlson maintains a strong connection between Indigenous Studies pedagogy and research. In 2013, she established the Forum for Indigenous Research Excellence (FIRE) at UOW. This was a new initiative and remains the UOWs only Indigenous focused research entity. She is committed to ensuring Indigenous peoples in Australia and around the globe have access to resources and information in relation to Indigenous Studies establishing a unique and innovative digital journal in 2014, *The Journal of Global Indigeneity* While housed at UOW the journal has a global focus.

**Michael R. Griffiths** is Lecturer in the English and Writing Discipline at the University of Wollongong. He received his PhD in English from Rice University in 2012 and was INTERACT Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University from 2012 to 2014. He has published on topics ranging from settler colonial biopolitics to indigenous life writing to the critical theory of decolonizing poetics, and much besides. This work has appeared in such venues as *Settler Colonial Studies*, *Discourse*, *Postcolonial Studies* and *Postmodern Culture* amongst many others. He edited the book *Biopolitics and Memory in Postcolonial Literature and Culture* (Ashgate 2016) and of a special issue (with Bruno Cornellier) of *Settler Colonial Studies* titled: "Globalising Unsettlement."

**Ika Willis** is Senior Lecturer in English Literatures at the University of Wollongong. Her research focuses on reception theory – how readers make sense of texts, but also how we appropriate, rewrite and remix them for our own purposes.

# DR TANJA DREHER

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## *Turning to listening*

At the heart of contemporary movements for justice in a globalising world profoundly shaped by colonial legacies, is an injunction to listen. From #blacklivesmatter to #rhodesmustfall, from #sosblakaustralia to #luister, protest movements that challenge systemic racism and seek to decolonise institutions are being amplified in social media. Despite their diverse aims and different locations, these movements all claim greater attention for voices that have been historically marginalised – including remote Indigenous communities threatened with forced closure in Western Australia (#sosblakaustralia), African American communities subjected to police violence in the USA (#blacklivesmatter) and students demanding decolonisation of their universities in post-apartheid South Africa (#rhodesmustfall and #luister). In countries which declare themselves to be ‘reconciled’ or ‘post-race’, these movements draw attention to ongoing inequality structured by categories of ‘race’, ethnicity and Indigeneity. A key demand of these movements is summed up in the hashtag #luister, meaning ‘listen’ in Afrikaans.

This paper introduces the key arguments of an emerging turn to ‘listening’ in political theory, media and cultural studies. The turn to listening is productive in those contexts which more commonly focus on ‘voice’ or speaking, and in projects for transforming social relations of privilege and colonialism. Listening is gaining ground as an intervention or a corrective particularly in political theory and in feminist theorising including postcolonial or intersectional approaches. There is a growing literature on media and democracy that highlights listening as a key intervention for the legitimacy crisis of neoliberal democracies. Feminists have long debated speaking positions and the politics of representation as a way of grappling with difference and diversity. Within this tradition, listening emerges as a way of responding to calls to theorise giving up power and shifting inequalities and unearned privileges.

**Bio:** Dr Tanja Dreher is an ARC Future Fellow at the University of Wollongong, and a Senior Lecturer in media and communications in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts at UOW. Tanja’s research focuses on the politics of listening in the context of media and multiculturalism, Indigenous sovereignties, feminisms and anti-racism. Her current Fellowship, funded by the Australian Research Council (FT140100515, 2015 – 2018) analyses the political listening practices necessary to support the potential for voice in a changing media environment characterised by the proliferation of community and alternative media in the digital age. During 2008 – 2010 Tanja was a co-convenor of The Listening Project exploring the practices, technologies and politics of listening as political practice. Tanja’s particular interest lies in listening across difference and the politics of recognition in listening for media justice. Her previous research has focused on news and cultural diversity, community media interventions, experiences of racism and the development of community anti-racism strategies after September 11, 2001. Tanja has worked closely with diverse communities in western Sydney through collaborative research with Arab and Muslim communities and with media and community arts organisations. Tanja has previously worked as an ARC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney and as the Research Manager at the UTS Shopfront community engagement program. Prior to her employment at UOW, Tanja taught media and cultural studies at UTS, the University of Western Sydney and Macquarie University.

*Select Publications:*

Dreher, T. 2009, 'Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice', *Continuum*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 445-458.

Dreher, T. 2009, 'Eavesdropping with permission: the politics of listening for safer speaking spaces', *Borderlands E-Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-21.

Dreher, T., McCallum, K. & Waller, L. "[Indigenous voices and mediatized policy-making in the digital age](#)." *Information Communication and Society* 19 .1 (2016): 23-39.

# DR SHAKIRA HUSSEIN

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## *Islamophobia, Aboriginality and Australian authenticity*

Far right movements such as Reclaim Australia have used their proclaimed support for (undefined) Aboriginal rights and their supposed Aboriginal support base as an alibi against allegations of racism. The Aboriginal flag has been prominently displayed at Reclaim rallies with the explicit message that the rallies were at least in part intended to defend “Aboriginal land” against Islamisation.

Muslim responses to racism have only recently begun to address the issue of Aboriginal sovereignty and to acknowledge their own role in settler colonialism. Aboriginal Muslims as well as the centuries-long history of exchange between northern Australia and Indonesia are also cited as evidence of Muslim “belonging” in Australia. How can Muslims (particularly those whose countries of origin have been subjects to colonialism’s violence) continue the struggle against Islamophobia while also acknowledging our own role in settler-colonialism?

*Bio:* Shakira Hussein is the author of *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim women since 9/11*. Someone give her a regular salary already.

# DR. SUKHMANI KHORANA

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## *'Ethical Witnessing and Refugee Documentaries: Using "Mediators" within the Narrative and in Screenings'*

In Australia, the policy of deterrence with regards to asylum seekers is occasionally questioned when the courts insist that it must not violate Australian law, and when the public sporadically shows compassion for individual asylum seekers, especially children. This has been seen to be the case in the recent #LetThemStay campaign, which rallied for 37 babies born in Australia to asylum-seeker parents to not be sent with their families to the Pacific island of Nauru as 'illegal maritime arrivals'. The renewed focus on children has led to mixed responses from media and political commentators. "Using a little child as a political football is a manipulative and irresponsible act. Instead of taking the law into their own hands, asylum seeker activists should voice their concerns at the ballot box", wrote Terry Barnes for ABC's *The Drum*. On the other side of the political spectrum, academic Angela Metopoulos has argued, "In more than two decades, all the evidence suggests that the constant preoccupation with 'children out' has not only been ineffective in undermining or abolishing the detention system but that it has contributed to its expansion".

This paper takes this recent debate as a point of departure to look at examples of refugee-themed documentaries that rely on similar devices of mediation (in both the narrative, and the context of the screening) to 'move' audiences previously indifferent to the plight of asylum seekers. In previous work, I have examined how an Australian-made refugee documentary titled, *Mary Meets Mohammad* uses the figure of a Tasmanian retiree to invite identification from the audience. By screening in a range of community venues (including detentions centres), the filmmaker also attempted to turn the viewer into an 'ethical witness' of sorts. In this paper, I chart a comparable screening trajectory for the documentary *Freedom Stories*, that also uses the community screening model, but not the in-text mediator (that is, we hear first-person asylum seeker testimonies). This is situated within a broader global context of refugee documentaries receiving critical accolades at film festivals, and in the mainstream media (such as the Italian doco, *Fire at Sea* winning the Golden Bear at the Berlinale). Thereby, the paper attempts to address the issue of whether a narrative mediator, like a 'relatable' narrator, or an extra-textual interlocutor, such a cast member or filmmaker at a film screening, facilitate the process of ethical witnessing.

*Bio:* Sukhmani Khorana is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Wollongong. Previously, she was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland. She is the editor of a Routledge anthology titled *Crossover Cinema* (2013). Sukhmani has published extensively on news television, diasporic film, and the reception of multi-platform refugee narratives. With Kate Darian-Smith and Sue Turnbull, she holds a current ARC Linkage project with the Museum of Victoria and The Australian Centre for the Moving Image examining the role of television in the experience of migration to Australia.

Sukhmani is currently working on a new book project on food and mediated cosmopolitanism in Australia. She has also published creative non-fiction and commentary in outlets such as *The Conversation*, *Overland*, *Kill Your Darlings*, and *Peril*, and is a co-convenor of the Asian Australian Film Forum and Network.

Select publication(s):

Khorana, S. "Self-distribution and *Mary meets Mohammad*: towards ethical witnessing." *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 9 .1 (2015): 66-76.

Khorana, S. "The Problem with Empathy." *Overland* (2015). <https://overland.org.au/2015/10/the-problem-with-empathy/>

Khorana, S. "Film festivals and beyond: activist discourses in the reception of *Samson and Delilah* and *The Tall Man*." *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 6 .2 (2012): 217-227.

# DR CLARE LAND

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*Unlearning privilege, unlocking usefulness: Learning journeys for activists of colonial backgrounds seeking to be supportive of Indigenous struggles*

Dr Clare Land will discuss both the key insights of her research into the politics of solidarity by people of colonial backgrounds with Indigenous struggles, and her beginning reflections on the way these principles are imparted and learned within social movements.

Aboriginal people have long encountered difficulties in imparting the politics of solidarity to active and prospective supporters of Aboriginal political struggles in the south east of Australia. Central to this difficulty is that prospective supporters, sometimes bearing multiple privileges, need to unlearn aspects of their formal education in order to learn the skill of supporting a community's self-determined agenda.

In her recent book, *Decolonizing solidarity*, Clare exposes the rationale for her research by exploring moments within iconic campaigns when Aboriginal people have challenged unwelcome modes of solidarity that have been expressed. She also consults the writings of anti-racist trainers and community practitioners in an attempt to discover ways to unlock the profoundly non-transformative responses that are usually given by liberal white people and institutions when racism is called out.

In this presentation, Clare will attend to the delicate pedagogic arts of Aboriginal community members who have worked to educate and nurture solidarity activists, and reflect on her own recent forays into provoking and educating people who regard themselves as supporters.

**Bio:** Dr Clare Land is a non-Aboriginal, Anglo woman living in Melbourne who has been an active supporter of land rights struggles in south east Australia since 1998.

She has a BA(Hons)/BSc from the University of Melbourne, where she was awarded the Margaret Kiddle Prize in history and the WMC Prize for archival research. She has a PhD from Deakin University, for which she was awarded the Isi Leibler Prize for PhD thesis which best contributes to advancing knowledge of racial, religious or ethnic prejudice in any time or place.

Clare's PhD research was the basis for her book, *Decolonising solidarity: Dilemmas and directions for supporters of Indigenous struggles* (2015, London: Zed Books). She was supervised by critical social work academic and pro-feminist Professor Bob Pease. Clare was also guided by a critical reference group of members of the political community whose struggle her book addresses.<sup>1</sup>

Clare currently works in both academic and community settings. She is a researcher in Gary Foley's Koori History Archive at Victoria University's Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit and supports social justice projects at the Reichstein Foundation, an innovative philanthropic foundation.

However, Clare is also a trained community practitioner, facilitator and trainer in Courageous Conversations About Race. She has worked in community development in Australia, for ANTaR Victoria: Working for Land Justice and Reconciliation, and in East Timor, as a volunteer with University Students for East Timor.

Clare has been a long-time volunteer at 3CR community radio as a broadcaster in a 10-year collaboration with Gunai/Maar campaigner and broadcaster Robbie Thorpe, and as a member of the advisory group for a book in celebration of 3CR's 40th anniversary. She has also been a live-to-air broadcaster on 3KND Koori radio and SBS Living Black.

*Select publication(s):*

Land, Clare (2015). *Decolonizing solidarity : dilemmas and directions for supporters of Indigenous struggles*. London Zed Books Ltd

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Foley, Tony Birch and Marjorie Thorpe.

# PROFESSOR ANSHUMAN MONDAL

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*'Protest/Persuasion/Performance: The Ambiguities of Liberal Free Speech Theory'*

My paper will explore some of the ambiguities of liberal free speech theory through a sustained critique of Mill's 'classic' argument for free speech in *On Liberty*, on the one hand, and a reflection on the ways in which these are played out in contemporary liberal responses to free speech controversies on the other. I will examine the central role of performance and performativity in liberal free speech theory, by showing how the limits of liberal performativity are exposed by two concepts – persuasion and censoriousness – that fall within the realm of the civic-intellectual-ethical sphere rather than the juridical even though Mill himself is more concerned with the former rather than the latter. Moreover, these concepts seem to sit awkwardly within liberal free speech theory even though one of them – persuasion – is absolutely fundamental to it. This awkwardness is a function of liberalism's political performativity: one is entitled to express a protest against something that one finds morally unacceptable but one should not expect anything to actually happen as a consequence. For if that were to happen it would impose a limit on the free play of ideas that must be kept infinitely open to all possible ideas. This allows one to display tolerance and acquire the virtue that comes with it, but it comes at a price: a moral indifference that is both at odds with Mill's emphasis that freedom of thought and expression is the only way to establish rational convictions of 'truth' and, at the same, the logical consequence of his argument for expressive liberty itself. These confusions and hesitations about what free speech is for, its purpose, are crystallized in uncertainties about censoriousness and persuasion, which expose the performativity of liberal free speech theory: it is all show and no substance. I will conclude by thinking through how the idea of 'responsiveness' to other opinions is also related to liberalism's performance of tolerance: it too is both fundamental to Mill's argument, but also paradoxically marginalized by the ways in which he conceptualizes 'thought and expression'. What, then, must be done in order to reconceptualize social discourse and communication in terms other than those that are asphyxiated by liberalism's emphasis on the autonomy of the sovereign individual and the concomitant ambiguities that arise about the very nature and purpose of social discourse? How might we go beyond liberalism in order to truly hear and listen to other voices that are silenced by liberalism's own regime of 'freedom' and thereby open up new perspectives for social justice?

*Bio:* Anshuman A. Mondal is Professor of English and Postcolonial Studies. He is the author of four books, *Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity: Culture and Ideology in India and Egypt* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), *Amitav Ghosh* (Manchester UP, 2007), *Young British Muslim Voices* (Greenwood, 2008) and *Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech after Rushdie* (Palgrave, 2014). He has also published many essays and book chapters on the construction, development and negotiation of cultural, racial, religious and political identities within the colonial period and the continuing legacies and effects of this history in the post-colonial period. His work touches on many of the major concerns of colonial and postcolonial modernity, including nationalism, racism, religious fundamentalism, secularism and multiculturalism. It also encompasses many geographical locations, in particular South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Europe. Since 2008, his research has focused especially on literary and cultural representations of Islam and Muslims, multiculturalism and inter-cultural relations, and the social rhetorics through which Muslim identity is constructed by themselves and others. More recently, through his work on freedom of speech controversies, he has been concerned with developing a critique of liberal conceptions of freedom so as to open up space for the articulation and reception of social and cultural alternatives to liberalism that speak to the problematics of social difference within the frame of globalized, gendered and racialized inequalities.

*Select publication(s):*

*Islam and Controversy: The Politics of Free Speech after Rushdie* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

# DR LISA SLATER

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## *The Anti-festival*

It is not the enormity of the task of hosting over 3,000 people from across the Kimberley on ceremonial grounds with no infrastructure, 100's of kms from 'town', which first struck me when I drove into the KALACC<sup>2</sup> festival. Not the army of Kimberley Land Council (KLC) rangers erecting bush loo's and tents, makeshift kitchens, and clearing a dance ground, or the stray bullock wandering into camp. Or the sea of tents, campfires in 39 degree heat, the diversity of languages, or old men and women painting up young people to dance. But rather that in a policy era characterised by a move to 'normalise' relations between Indigenous peoples and the wider population, that there is such demonstrable commitment to Kimberley Law and Culture.

The KALACC festival is an uncompromising event. In fact it could be called an anti-festival. For the last thirty years, KALACC has advocated for culturally based self-determination for the Kimberley, and supports Traditional Owners to keep their culture strong. Notably, unlike other Indigenous festivals, KALACC is not open to the general public or to non-Indigenous people who are not closely allied with key Kimberley Aboriginal organisations. It is on Traditional Owners terms and in their control, for local and regional 'business' and is not easily (if at all) translatable for outsiders.

The festival lies in stark contrast to how Aboriginal people are portrayed by governments and the media. We know all too well that it is a narrative of dysfunction: socio-economic inequality, poor health, education, and housing, growing incarceration and suicide rates, the so-called 'loss' of culture, etc. Closing the gap in statistical disadvantage is now the dominant way of framing the relationship between Indigenous and settler Australia.<sup>3</sup> Statistics make people intelligible: known and thus fixable. Aboriginal people come into frame, are recognised, as vulnerable and suffering, and in need of government intervention, and good white people's pity.

Cut to KALACC festival: where people are mobilised to action, sure of their course, and know that Law and Culture provides the guidance and sustenance – pathway – for viable life. In 2014, for the first time philanthropic, government and corporate agencies were invited to the festival for a five-day cultural immersion and knowledge program. Approx. thirty people attended, who represented agencies who have significant influence in the Kimberley region or more generally Aboriginal Australian: funding bodies, resource industry or government agencies implementing policies and programs, primarily aimed at improving Indigenous health and socio-economic outcomes. KALACC ran the 'philanthropic tour' as a fund raising and advocacy exercise. As noted KALACC's key mission is to advocate for culturally based self-determination. In this paper I will discuss what the 'guests' recognised, how they were affected and if the event reframed their perceptions of remote Aboriginal Australia. My interest is in what happens when you throw 'good white people' into imponderable spaces.

*Bio:* I work primarily in the disciplines of Indigenous, postcolonial and cultural studies, with a research and teaching portfolio that is strongly interdisciplinary. My work is committed to broadening and challenging key concepts that inform policies and politics such as 'reconciliation', 'recognition', 'wellbeing', 'community', 'sustainability' and the 'environment'.

Such challenges require concepts that help unpack the relationship between people, knowledge, power and governance, to understand the effects of privileging the ideas of particular cultures over others. Place is foregrounded in my work because politics and policies always unfold somewhere. My recent projects have a strong focus on remote, rural and regional Australia.

## Current research projects

Aboriginal festivals provide a rich focus because 'Aboriginal culture' is both celebrated and problematised by settler Australia, but rarely understood on Indigenous terms. Festivals are meeting places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's stories, knowledge and histories take precedent. I ask, how do cultural festivals help broader Australia's understanding of Indigenous lives? In these cultural spaces, how are solutions to social problems, wellbeing and the future differently imagined?

Another strand of my current research examines the cultural politics of 'recognition' and 'equality' by analysing what 'well-intentioned' settler Australians see and feel when they interact with Aboriginal people. To do so, I examine

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<sup>2</sup> Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Culture Centre

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Strakosch, 'Indigenous affairs: close the gap, but open the conversation' in *The Conversation*, Feb, 14, 2014. <http://theconversation.com/indigenous-affairs-close-the-gap-but-open-the-conversation-23115>

various cultural artifacts – memoirs, film, cultural tourism and policy – to map settlers' emotional responses to Indigeneity. My particular interest is in the anxiety that arises when settlers are confronted with, what they perceive as politics when they wanted to learn about 'culture'. I ask why does Aboriginal political will continue to provoke and disturb? How does settler anxiety shape and inform public opinion and political solutions to Indigenous inequality and issues of social justice? How is 'culture' imagined and understood by different peoples? Through this work, I also investigate models for moving through and beyond settler anxiety to learn to be at home together in difference.

*Select publication(s):*

Slater, Lisa (2015) 'Saltwater Cowboys: life in a time of death & destruction', *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 6. Iss.1, p. 77-87.

Slater, Lisa, (2013) "Wild Rivers, Wild Ideas": emerging political ecologies of Cape York Wild Rivers', *Environmental Planning D: Society and Space*, Iss. 5, p.763-778.

Slater, Lisa, (2013) 'Anxious settler belonging: actualising the potential for making resilient postcolonial subjects', *M/C journal*, 'Resilient', Iss. 5, Vol. 16, 2013, np.

# DR ANNA SZORENYI

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## *Facing vulnerability: Reading refugee child photographs through an ethics of proximity*

This paper discusses the recently famous image of drowned Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, hailed as a ‘shot that shook the world’, alongside a less well-known but critically acclaimed photograph by Yto Barrada, titled ‘Advertisement Lightbox, Ferry Port Transit Area, Tangier’. Photographs of suffering children are the staple fare of mediatised humanitarianism because of their potential to inspire empathy, but at the same time have been subjected to much criticism for objectifying and commodifying suffering, and for contributing to stereotypical and colonising images of the ‘Third World’. This paper starts by briefly summarising some of these debates, pointing out in particular the influential approaches based on liberal moral philosophy that construe the problem as one of ‘distant suffering’. In response to that problem definition, this paper offers close readings of these two photographs of children caught in the precarity of illicit migration, beginning from a position based not on distance but on *proximity*. This reading draws on Judith Butler’s theorisation of an ethics based on the positing of a shared human vulnerability, and her discussion of Levinas’ concept of ‘the face.’ It suggests that the images’ power may lie not only in what they show, but in what they *do not* show. Rather than offering a transparency of the other, they bring us to an encounter with the inadequacy of representation, which shows us the impossibility of knowing or ‘capturing’ the other, and thus help to sidestep the objectifying and distancing colonial habits of photography. Paradoxically, it is precisely this encounter with the limits of representation that can bring us instead to meditation on injurability and precariousness as shared conditions of life, not only because all life inevitably leads towards death, but because life is fundamentally social: we live in proximity to one another, and we are exposed to one another’s actions. Ideally, such a reading may work (precariously) to ‘break the frame’ which positions suffering as ‘distant’, a framing which currently works to divert compassion for refugees into border control, thus *keeping* asylum seekers at a distance even as they seek to become potentially near.

*Bio:* Anna Szorenyi lectures in the Department of Gender Studies and Social Analysis at the University of Adelaide. Her work draws on feminist and postcolonial critiques in order to analyse cultural representations of refugees, asylum seekers, and human trafficking, tracing gendered and racialised constructions of victimhood and agency, placing these in the context of colonial and neocolonial habits of representation, and seeking more ethically productive ways to understand and challenge global distributions of precarity. Currently she is working on a book to be published with Palgrave Macmillan, due out in 2017 and titled *Refugees, Trafficking and the Ethics of Vulnerability: Bordered Compassion*. She has a particular interest in applying Judith Butler’s theorisations of the ethics of vulnerability to the context of migration, and also a long-standing interest in documentary photographs of refugees, with her article on ‘refugee coffee table books’ (*Visual Studies* 2006) being her most cited publication. Her work is published in journals including *Feminist Review*, *Social Semiotics*, *Visual Studies*, *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* and *Overland*.

Anna is an Advisory Board member of the Fay Gale Centre for Research on Gender and has served on the Editorial Board of the *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, and the Executive of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association. She is a collaborator with the Border Observatory at Monash University.

## *Select publication(s):*

Szörényi A, 2014, Rethinking the boundaries: towards a Butlerian ethics of vulnerability in sex trafficking debates, *Feminist Review*, 107.1, 20-36

Szorenyi A, 2009, Distanced suffering: Photographed suffering and the construction of white in/vulnerability, *Social Semiotics*, 19.2, 93-109

Szorenyi A, 2006, The images speak for themselves? Reading refugee coffee-table books, *Visual Studies*, 21.1, 24-41

# DR CATE THILL

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## *Against the process of recognition: Listening for social justice*

This paper focuses on the relationship between recognition and listening. Although recognition has been the dominant framework for understanding the struggles of cultural, social and political movements over the past two decades, nevertheless the concept of listening addresses a significant gap in this framework and offers a more transformative alternative. Across its many different formulations, conceptions of recognition fail to address the question of how recognition claims get heard. The tacit assumption is that the moral force of demands will somehow produce the outcome of recognition without careful analysis of the *process* between claims and outcomes. By using the concepts of voice and listening to examine this process, I demonstrate that the framework of recognition is affirmative and assimilationist rather than transformative. This argument meets up with critiques of recognition articulated by Indigenous scholars including Audra Simpson (2014) and Glean Sean Coulthard (2014). While they argue for a politics of refusal and self-recognition, this decolonizing strategy alone leaves the onus for change on Indigenous peoples. I argue that social justice-oriented listening opens the possibility of more transformative responses to the politics of refusal and self-recognition than the framework of recognition.

**Bio:** Dr Cate Thill is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Notre Dame Australia. Cate's research focuses on social justice-oriented listening in the context of policy and Indigenous sovereignty, disability and feminism. She has recently developed a methodology for researching social justice-oriented listening with Dr Tanja Dreher (UoW) and Dr Justine Lloyd (MQ). Cate is also writing a co-authored book on disability and listening with Prof. Gerard Goggin (USyd) and Rosemary Kayess (UNSW) as well as developing a project on listening to students in the process of curriculum design with Dr Denise Buiten (UNDA). During 2009 -2010, Cate co-convened the ARC Cultural Research Network funded Listening Project exploring the practices, technologies and politics of listening.

## *Select publication(s):*

Thill, C. (2015). Listening for policy change: how the voices of disabled people shaped Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme. *Disability & Society*, 30(1), 15-28. doi: 10.1080/09687599.2014.987220

Thill, C. (2009). Courageous listening, responsibility for the other and the Northern Territory Intervention. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(4), 537-548.

# DR LISA WALLER

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## *Indigenous research methodologies and listening the Dadirri way*

It is no longer acceptable to use Western research methods to understand Indigenous peoples, or carry out research that does not serve Indigenous people's self-determined research goals. At the same time, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers who want to undertake projects that are culturally relevant, safe and give Indigenous people a voice face a range of complex methodological and ethical considerations. It is critical to develop approaches that are consistent with the philosophies of Indigenous peoples, while acknowledging the challenges inherent in this. Dadirri is one way of addressing the problematic nature of research. It is an Indigenous method that operates at multiple levels. It is founded upon the notion that truly listening to others is at the core of spirituality. It is also the language of the Ngangikurungkurr people, of Daly River in the Northern Territory. Ungumerr-Baumann, a renowned Ngangikurungkurr elder, has also explained it as a way of life and a spiritual quality: 'It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness'. It has also been recognised as a liberation methodology. For the researcher, it brings together practices that recognise the crucial role of community; reciprocity, where both the participants and researcher share with each other something of themselves; and the trust of the people in the other person. Reflexivity is vital here, because Dadirri means listening to and observing the self as well as, and in relationship, with others.

*Bio:* Lisa Waller is a senior lecturer in Communication at the School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Victoria. The relationships between news media, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and policy-making are a key research concern. Dreher's conceptualization of listening has provided a valuable and productive approach for exploring ways that the powerful, including journalists and bureaucrats, can contribute to better public and policy discussion and outcomes. Lisa has undertaken research in collaboration with Yolngu of North-East Arnhem Land, drawing on Indigenous methodologies and theories of listening to generate insights into their media-related and policy-related practices and produce works of journalism that serve their self-determined aims.

### *Select publications:*

Waller, L. (2010). Indigenous research ethics: New modes of information gathering and storytelling in journalism. *Australian Journalism Review*, 32 (2), pp. 19-31.

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# PROFESSOR ALLISON WEIR

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## *Islamic and Secular Feminist Philosophies of Freedom*

Many transnational feminists have criticized the western secular unquestioning faith in ideals of individual autonomy, liberation, and freedom. Lila Abu-Lughod has pointed out that imperialist regimes and invasions have been justified by the claim that “we” must liberate “their” oppressed women (Abu-Lughod 2002). Saba Mahmood has argued that both liberal and poststructuralist feminists subscribe to a dogmatic belief in freedom (Mahmood 2005). This argument tends to fall into two opposed sides: secular feminisms affirm the importance of individual freedom and choice and capacities for questioning and critique as central to feminism, and transnational feminisms criticize the provincialism of the ideal of individual freedom. In my own work I have been arguing that we can challenge this opposition by rethinking what freedom is. This requires considering and analysing diverse conceptions of freedom.

In this paper I take up Aysha Hidayatullah’s recent analysis of Islamic feminist philosophies, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford 2014). Hidayatullah, herself a believing Muslim, concludes that Islamic feminists need to embrace radical uncertainty, in a path toward freedom. I consider Hidayatullah’s argument in relation to the work of Amina Wadud, who has produced two important feminist analyses of the Qur'an. Wadud, I argue, conceives of freedom differently, as the practice and fulfilment of a relationship of trust with God.

Here I engage with Islamic feminist philosophy to discuss the challenges of listening to and engaging with others who affirm worldviews in which there is a limit to what can be questioned. Rather than assuming that Islamic feminisms argue for closure and secular feminisms for openness, I analyse questions of closure and openness in various positions, including my own secular faith in openness and questioning.

*Bio:* Allison Weir is Research Professor in Social and Political Philosophy and Gender Studies and Director of the Doctoral Program in Social and Political Thought in the Institute for Social Justice at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney.

She is the author of *Identities and Freedom* (Oxford 2013) and *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (Routledge 1996), as well as articles in the areas of feminist philosophy, queer theory, critical theory, critical race theory, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, and 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century continental philosophy. In *Identities and Freedom* she analyzes theories of individual and collective identities in relation to freedom, arguing for a theory of relational freedom, and for a conception of identities in terms of multiple contesting relations among diverse relations of power and diverse relations of meaning, love, and solidarity. Her current book project, *Decolonizing Freedom*, explores diverse nondominant conceptions of freedom, focusing in particular on Indigenous and Islamic feminist and queer conceptions, to develop a theory of freedom that can sustain practices of decolonization and struggles for global justice. She also works on caregiving as a global issue, focusing on global care chains. Forthcoming articles include “Feminism and Freedom” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* and “Feminist Critical Theory” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy*.

Allison Weir moved to Sydney, Australia in 2010 from Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, where she was Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and the Program in Gender and Women’s Studies, and has held visiting positions at Goethe University in Frankfurt, the New School University in New York, the University of Dundee, Scotland, and Concordia University in Montreal. She completed her PhD in the Interdisciplinary Program in Social and Political Thought at York University in Toronto.

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*Identities and Freedom* (Oxford 2013).

“Islamic Feminisms and Freedom.” *Philosophical Topics* 41, 2, 2013. (This volume was published in 2015 but backdated to 2013. I don’t know why.)

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# MR. SHINEN WONG

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## *Noble Speech / Thunderous Silence: A Buddhist Alter-Politics*

Social change frameworks of organised resistance, such as anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-fascism, can be understood to be part of what Ghassan Hage refers to as the sphere of oppositional “anti-politics”. Some of the ways that these may manifest are in the centering of particular, idealised or partisan forms of political speech, such as in exhortations to “speak out” against injustice or in taboos against “keeping silent” in the face of oppression. On a cultural level, these constructions of speech/silence frame “call out culture”, where people who have been perceived as having perpetrated oppressive behaviours, rightly or wrongly, are then “called out”, publicly shamed, and subjected to social reprimand and ostracism, with attendant competitions to have the last word, or to “out-silence” one another.

While Hage acknowledges the legitimacy and the necessity of “anti-politics”, that is, the necessity of resistance in the face of oppression, he also acknowledges some of their limitations, in that they are defined, at an ontological level, by the very conditions of oppression that they are setting themselves up as in opposition to. Hage considers an alternative to a politics of resistance, or what he calls “alter-politics”. This would be a space which does not (only) re-centre one’s oppression or one’s oppressors as against whom one roots political action or political identity. Instead, an “alter-politics” attempts to define and refine a life of political meaning that may well include “anti-politics”, but also strives to transcend it through a vision of a radical political alternative in which “oppositional” conditions and concerns are, however impermanently, suspended.

In this paper, I will present a model for actualising Hage’s “alter-politics”, that is, a way of inhabiting “otherness” that is rooted in non-Western epistemologies; in particular Chinese Taoist dialectics (i.e. “Yin and Yang”), and Buddhist ontological perspectives on the reality of human suffering, its causes and its ends. I will contrast “anti-political” constructions of speech and silence with the utility of Mahayana Buddhist constructions of “Noble Speech” and “Noble or ‘Thunderous’ Silence”. Through an investigation of the Buddhist metaphors of “Nobility” and “Ignobility”, I will then propose a model of speech and silence to critically inform, manifest and enact Hage’s notions of the “alter-political” and to ethically respond to existential suffering, the flourishing of life and the maintenance of human dignity.

*Bio:* Shinen Wong is a Melbourne-based, MalaysianChineseAustralian man, via Sydney, San Francisco, New Hampshire, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. B.A. in Gender Studies, GradDip in Buddhist Studies, and current M.Ed student. Writer and public health professional. A love of people, country, music, adult development, Buddhist philosophy, Eucalypt and skinned knees. Shinen convenes and is one of the two blog editors for the Asian Australian Democracy Caucus (AADC), a non-profit and non-partisan civil society organisation to lift stock of civic knowledge and facilitate democratic practice among Asian Australians. The AADC blog ([www.peril.com.au/aadc](http://www.peril.com.au/aadc)) is hosted in partnership with Peril Magazine, the largest online platform for Asian Australian voices in arts, culture, media and politics.

### *Select publication(s):*

Hacking Diversity: Who are we to need diverse books?

by Shinen Wong

<https://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/hacking-diversity-who-are-we-need-diverse-books>

Defining “Asian Australian” in the “Asian Century”

by Shinen Wong

<http://peril.com.au/topics/defining-asian-australian-in-the-asian-century/>

Australians All: Toward an Ecology of Universal Freedoms

by Jen Tsen Kwok and Shinen Wong

<http://peril.com.au/topics/featured/australians-all-toward-an-ecology-of-universal-freedoms/>