



# Australian Feminist Studies

ISSN: 0816-4649 (Print) 1465-3303 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cafs20>

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To cite this article: Erica Millar (2015) 'Too Many', Australian Feminist Studies, 30:83, 82-98, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2014.998457](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.998457)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.998457>



Published online: 28 Apr 2015.



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# 'TOO MANY'

## Anxious White Nationalism and the Biopolitics of Abortion

Erica Millar

**Abstract** The statement that Australia has 'too many abortions' often circulates with intensity in times of increased worry over the vulnerability of white demographic and sociocultural dominance in Australia. Contrasting two such periods—the 1970s (with 1979 as the apex point) and the mid-2000s (2002–2008)—this article will show that, in times of national crisis, debates over abortion can become a site where politicians, journalists and other influential social commentators displace and assuage anxieties regarding the size and constitution of Australia's future population. The statement that Australia has 'too many abortions' carries the imperative for white women to reproduce the nation. This demand is made perceptible through a history of maternal citizenship for white women, which reverberates in the present, and the articulation of the desire to eradicate abortion (amongst white women) alongside other key biopolitical technologies—the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty and the exclusion of non-white immigrants from the nation. The figure of the aborting woman thus stands alongside other bodies perceived as threats to white sociocultural hegemony in Australia and one of its key institutions—the white, hetero-family. In the 1970s, such figures included the communist, the divorcee and the (non-white) immigrant, and in the 2000s, the lesbian mother, the single mother and the boatperson. The association of aborting women with other threats to the security of white sociocultural hegemony in Australia produces her as an object of fear for the nation, re-affirming the goal of white reproduction as a national duty and social good.

### Introduction

A certain imam from the Lakemba mosque actually says Australia is going to be a Muslim nation in 50 years time ... I didn't believe him at the time. But when you look at the birth rates... we are aborting ourselves almost out of existence by 100,000 abortions every year. You multiply that by 50 years—that's 5 million potential Australians we won't have here. Danna Vale, Federal Member for Hughes, 2006. (as quoted by Maiden 2006)

In the mid-2000s, abortion was a subject of national discussion on a scale not witnessed since the aftermath of law reforms in the 1970s. The discussion centred on the frequently reiterated and almost universally condoned sentiment that Australia had 'too many abortions'. Although uncharacteristically forthright in evaluating the 'problem' of abortion, then Federal Member for Hughes, Danna Vale, expressed a fear that, I will argue here, underlay worrying about the abortion rate more generally. Vale asserted that, if the abortion rate continued, Australia would soon be a 'Muslim nation'—with Muslim

representing, in the mid-2000s, the antithesis of white. Abortion threatened Vale's aspirations for the nation's future. By excluding Muslim women from the category 'Australian', and prescribing a particular role for non-Muslim (white) women—that of national breeders—Vale clearly claimed Australia as a nation that belonged to non-Muslim (implicitly white) bodies. The gendered and racist biopolitical landscape Vale conjured to present a crisis in Australia's abortion rate fed into a more general, contemporaneous national panic concerned with securing the fantasy of white sociocultural hegemony in Australia. As a practice with direct bearings on the future population, concern over abortion (amongst white women) has often accompanied such nationalist panics. This article examines the historical conditions that enabled Vale to so casually associate the figure of 'the aborting woman' with that of 'the Muslim'. We will see that in nationalist imaginings, these figures are united by a shared orientation away from the fantasy of the future that the white foetus represents: a future Australia populated by happy, white, hetero-families.

Barbara Baird observes that unless explicitly stated otherwise, all discourse on abortion in Australia implicitly addresses the bodies of white women (2006b, 205). Baird's work on whiteness and abortion, published the same year as Vale's comments, argues that the intense debate over abortion in the mid-2000s represented a literal and more figurative attempt to discipline white women's reproductive bodies to reproduce the white nation. Debating the 'problem' of abortion was not only an attempt to, in Baird's words, 'make like reproduce like', but also 'a displacement activity where anxious white nationalists can performatively reinstate white power' (Baird 2006b, 214). By expressing anxiety over abortion, individuals claimed ownership and authority over the practice, turning aborting women into objects to be worried about and managed. Baird's analysis of national debates on abortion adds gender and reproduction to Ghassan Hage's theorisation of the 'white nation fantasy'—the fantasy that only white bodies should inhabit Australia and white people should manage domestic space (Hage 1998).

This article builds further on the connection Baird identifies between national concern over abortion and white nationalism. It begins by providing a theoretical framework for understanding how the positioning of the aborting woman as an object of fear for the nation is a means of attempting to secure white hegemony in Australia, a biopolitics that involves three interlocking elements: the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty, the exclusion of non-white others and the promotion of white reproduction. The article then maps the escalation of two periods of moral panic pertaining to abortion in Australia's recent history—the mid-2000s and the 1970s. After showing the existence of these two, parallel moral panics, the article moves to examine their underlying causes. A comparison of these two moral panics reveals that in times of national crisis, the aborting woman can become a conduit for fears relating to more than the practice of abortion. The fear circulating around her relates to a fundamentally unmanageable anxiety that the white hetero-family is under threat and will not remain the dominant form of social organisation into the future. The white aborting woman relays historically-sedimented fears of white vulnerability, a vulnerability inextricable from the promotion of the white hetero-family as a national ideal, and the will to secure the series of gendered and racial privileges this ideal supports and helps sustain.

### Foetal Biopolitics

The aborting woman is positioned in the national imaginary according to the threat she poses to the foetus-citizen. Sara Ahmed writes that the figure of the white child—and I argue the foetus—holds a promise for the future. This promise is bound to national love, and specifically the expectation that the nation will reciprocate one's love for the nation by guaranteeing them 'the good life' (Ahmed 2004, 130). Nationalist visions of the 'good life' in Australia involve a nostalgic longing for what never was: a nation populated by happy, white, nuclear families (Hage 1998, 40–42, 74–76). When the nation fails to deliver the 'good life' it has promised, one's investment in the nation is often intensified and displaced onto the future, which is posited as the place where one's love for the nation will be reciprocated (Ahmed 2004, 130). The figure of the white child—and foetus—thus holds a prime position in the social imaginary because it contains the promise that the good life will materialise in the future. The promise of a reward reciprocating one's investment in the nation retains this investment while uniting the national community through an ideal—white reproduction—and orientation towards a shared happy object—the white foetus.<sup>1</sup> In the realm of biopolitics, the white foetus is a white body populating Australia as well as a fantasy object containing the promise of a future populated by white families. The foetus contains a 'cluster of promises' (Berlant 2007), displacing anxieties about, as Lauren Berlant asserts, 'whose subjectivity, whose forms of intimacy and interests, whose bodies and identifications, whose heroic narratives—will direct ... [the nation's] future' (Berlant 1997, 6).

White aborting women threaten the imagined future that the white foetus represents. The emotion of fear repels the 'us' of the nation away from those perceived to threaten the values and fantasies it hopes to preserve (Ahmed 2004, 8, 64). Fear is an emotion closely related to anxiety, with both linked to a feeling of potential loss or injury. Anxiety, however, engenders a more pervasive sense of insecurity and vulnerability because it has no fixed object; and as Ahmed writes, 'the more we don't know what or who it is we fear *the more the world becomes fearsome*' (2004, 69).

Australia is anxious by its very constitution, an anxiety deriving from white Australia's tenuous claim to Australian land (Birch 2002, 45). The Australian state and white Australians have managed this constitutional anxiety through the white nation fantasy, which involves three interrelated processes—disavowal (Wolfe 1994), exclusion (Hage 1998) and reproduction (Baird 2006b)—that are often examined separately. Danna Vale's statement in the epigraph to this article is remarkable because it cites these processes simultaneously. First, Vale (Maiden 2006) *disavowed* Indigenous claims to land by claiming for herself, and white Australians more generally, the role of 'national domesticator', controlling who belongs to the nation and the nature of their participation in national life. Second, she *excluded* Muslims from full belonging to the body politic. Third, she called on white women to *reproduce* the nation. The national politics of reproduction always carries a racial dimension (Baird 2006b). In Australia, reproduction is racialised through its entanglement with the logics of disavowal and exclusion. This entanglement is acutely evinced in the 'populate or perish' narrative, where, positioning the Aboriginal population as a 'dying race', the state advanced the notion that Australia's small white population left it vulnerable to invasion by its marauding Asian neighbours (Walker 1999, 4). The narrative of 'populate or perish' carried the imperative for white women to reproduce the nation at the beginning of the twentieth century, and continues in a less explicitly (biologically) racist form to this day.

At certain historical periods, the nation's general and constitutional anxiety is converted into fear directed at specific objects. This conversion enables a fantasy of containment to be sustained, where the nation manages or expels feared objects from the body politic, so preserving the object or ideal that is perceived to be under threat (Ahmed 2004, 67). Some figures of fear transform over time. So, for instance, the figure of the 'yellow menace' at the beginning of the twentieth century was transposed by the figure of the 'Muslim' at the turn of the Millennium. Some objects of fear reappear. Australian governments have repeatedly mobilised the aborting woman as a threat to the nation, albeit discursively constituted in specific ways at particular times, through the twentieth (Mackinnon 2000, 112–114) and, as we shall see, into the twenty-first century.

The idea that white women owe the nation their reproductive labour reveals their role as maternal citizens, which as Vale's statement makes clear, reverberates in the contemporary production of aborting women as feared objects. White women's motherhood has been a primary site whereby the white nation has been literally and figuratively reproduced. Through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, government reports, policies and political speeches have incited white women, implicitly or explicitly, to carry the nation's future children. Broader sociocultural images of the 'good mother'—often defined in explicit opposition to the pathological or irresponsible Indigenous mother—have similarly been deployed to demonstrate white sociocultural superiority (Cutcher and Milroy 2010; Jacobs 2009). The figure of the white mother is firmly located in the nuclear family, a key site in the reproduction of a nation, supporting, as cultural theorist Kristen Phillips affirms, 'the idea of the nation as a reproducible racial formation' (Phillips 2009, 608).

If national love is framed as a relationship of reciprocity, where the nation promises its citizens 'the good life' in exchange for their labour (Ahmed 2004, 34, 124), for white women, the service specifically required is their reproductive labour. The figure of the white aborting woman disobeys this indenture, and thereby becomes a conduit, where the anxiety that whiteness will not be reproduced into the future is displaced onto a material object. This displacement identifies a legitimate source for fearing a non-white future while offering the potential that the threat could be contained and the white nation preserved. This process occurs through a preoccupation with Australia's abortion rate.

### **The Development of a Political Problem—The 1970s**

In the 1970s, three Commonwealth measures—two parliamentary bills and a Royal Commission—attempted, in different ways, to develop a national consensus on the issue of abortion after the turbulence caused by the liberalisation of abortion law in several Australian states. The abortion rate became an increasingly prominent focal point of political discussion, reaching the point of crisis in 1979.

The Medical Clarifications Bill (commonly termed the McKenzie-Lamb Bill) of 1973 represented the first Commonwealth response to the altered legal and political landscape of abortion, and sought to decriminalise abortion in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) during a woman's first trimester of pregnancy. In the debate, parliamentarians (who were given a conscience vote) generally deployed abortion numbers to argue that the law must properly regulate what was a prevalent practice (Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives (CHR), 10 May 1973, 1969, Tony Lamb, Labor). Although many parliamentarians called for a reduction in abortion numbers (CHR, 10 May 1973, 1967, David

McKenzie, Labor), this was not a dominant theme in the debate. This private member's bill did not pass the lower house, but led eventually to the establishment of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, which reported in 1977. The Royal Commission was established largely because parliamentarians felt they needed accurate data on abortion in Australia to meaningfully debate the issue. The Commission estimated that 60,000 abortions were performed in Australia annually (Evatt 1977, v. 1, 58).

The figure of 60,000 was repeatedly cited during debate on the Lusher Motion of 1979, at which time the abortion rate had become a fixture of concern for parliamentarians, regardless of party membership or their views on liberal access to the procedure. The Lusher Motion was another, ultimately unsuccessful, private member's bill where parliamentarians were given a conscience vote. Sponsored by Stephen Lusher, an anti-abortion MP from the National Party, it sought to remove Commonwealth funding for the vast majority of abortion services. The majority of parliamentarians who supported the bill voiced their 'deep concern' with Australia's abortion rate, particularly when compared to its birth rate, and argued that the cessation of government funding for the procedure would reduce it. Lusher framed his motion in these terms (CHR, 21 March 1979, 964), and a proposed amendment added the explicit sentiment that: 'this House expresses its deep concern that for every three live births in Australia there is one abortion' (CHR, 21 March 1979, 967, Ross McLean, Liberal). Emotive and alarmist language accompanied judgement about abortion numbers; numbers were declared, for example, to be 'alarming' and a cause for disgust, evincing an 'abortion syndrome' and 'the steady growth in the abortion mentality amongst ... [Australian] citizens' (CHR, 21 March 1979, 969, Ross McLean, Liberal; 1004, Les McMahan, Liberal; 986, John FitzPatrick, Labor; 999, Ian MacPhee, Liberal). In addition to targeting government funding for abortions, supporters framed the debate as an indictment against state laws, particularly those in Victoria and New South Wales, which had, they claimed, 'open[ed] the gateway to enable abortion on demand', allowing for 'mass slaughter' and 'open slather' on abortions (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1099, Kevin Cairns, Labor; 1111, David Connolly, Liberal). Many opponents expressed similar concern with abortion numbers, but believed the motion would not affect these numbers (CHR, 21 March 1979, 972, Barry Simon, Liberal; 984, Michael Young, Labor). One member stated that, 'I abhor abortion ... and I would do all that I could to prevent it' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1107, Barry Jones, Labor). Another, while opposing the motion, nevertheless commended it for serving, 'to remind and perhaps in some cases awaken the Australian population to the grave and continuing problem of the number of abortions in this country' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1122, James Porter, Liberal).

Margaret Tighe, President of Right to Life Australia, communicated the organisation's support of the Lusher Motion by declaring abortion to be a 'national tragedy of great magnitude' ("The Abortion Debate" 1979). The phrase 'national tragedy', would come to haunt political discourse on abortion when the Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, echoed it 25 years afterwards. His comments heralded a period of intensified public and political focus on abortion on a scale not witnessed since the Lusher Motion.

### **A Nation's Tragedy—The 2000s**

Tony Abbott was appointed the Minister of Health in 2003 during the third term of the Howard Government. In one of his first speeches in this position, he declared that abortion was 'a national tragedy' (Abbott 2004). Abbott's speech followed a period of

agitation for legal clarity surrounding abortion in Western Australia (1998), the ACT (1998) and Tasmania (2001), agitation resulting in laws that confirmed and tightened medical control over the procedure and, eventually, saw the ACT become the first jurisdiction to decriminalise abortion (2002; Baird 2006a). Abbott's intervention pushed abortion onto the Commonwealth political agenda. His speech incited fervent debate on the abortion rate, with a chorus of politicians and journalists echoing his concerns (Shaw 2004; Shanahan 2004). *The Age* journalist Amanda Dunn captured what was represented to be a developing consensus: '[b]oth sides of the abortion debate agree that the number of terminations in Australia is too high. So what can be done?' (Dunn 2004). Not surprisingly, prominent, anti-abortion politicians and organisations eagerly retained public focus on abortion, with Nationals Senator Barnaby Joyce, for instance, speaking on 'The tragedy of abortion in Australia' at the 2005 Right to Life Conference ("Abortion Issue Ready to Flare Up" 2005).

The conservative abortion politic that emerged in the wake of Abbott's speech culminated in two parliamentary debates. The Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial Responsibility for Approval of RU486) Bill 2005 (henceforth referred to as the Commonwealth Bill) was the first federal debate on abortion since the Lusher Motion. The bill sought to remove the veto Tony Abbott enjoyed as Health Minister over the release of the abortifacient RU486 to the Therapeutic Goods Administration for approval for use in Australia. The Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008 (henceforth referred to as the Victorian Bill) in the Victorian parliament sought to decriminalise abortion in the state. The fear that Australia had 'too many abortions' permeated the two debates. Parliamentary supporters maintained the resultant legislation would not increase the abortion rate, as opponents argued they would lead to more abortions: one's political party and position on abortion emerged as irrelevant to the truth claim that Australia had 'too many abortions.' Nearly all speakers in both debates referenced abortion numbers. Thus, in the Victorian debate, Liberal MLA Ryan Smith, who opposed the bill, confidently asserted that 'all members of this house and of our communities would agree that too many abortions are being performed' (Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Assembly, 9 September 2008, 3362). Labor MLC Jenny Mikakos, who supported the bill, similarly urged parliamentarians to 'put aside our polarised views on this issue and commit to working together to reduce the rate of abortion' (Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council (VLC), 7 October 2008, 3941). Supporters and opponents used the same language to condemn Australia's abortion numbers. Prime Minister John Howard, who opposed the Commonwealth Bill, declared that 'the Australian community is unhappy' with the current abortion rate (CHR, 16 February 2006, 133). Coalition members who supported the bill similarly stated that they were 'appalled' and 'deeply troubled' by the number of abortions performed in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, Senate (CS), 8 February 2006, 116, Judith Adams, 156, Russell Trood); these numbers were purported to constitute 'a national disgrace' (CHR, 14 February 2006, 87, Sussan Ley) and a 'terrible tragedy' (CHR, 15 February 2006, 129, Michael Keenan). Supporters from the Federal Opposition endorsed this sentiment, condemning the abortion rate as '[u]nacceptable and simply astounding' (CHR, 15 February 2006, 153, Steve Gibbons).

The intense circulation of the discourse that Australia had 'too many abortions' in 1979 and the mid-2000s represented moral panics pertaining to the abortion rate, producing the aborting woman as a figure who threatened the nation. The panics were in no means confined to these years. Rather in 1979, the Lusher Motion led to an

intensification of the public debate on abortion occurring through the 1970s. The moral panic of the mid-2000s culminated in the Commonwealth debate in 2004, but the 'too many abortions' discourse re-emerged with veracity in the debates to decriminalise abortion in Victoria in 2008. These two panics occurred despite the notorious inaccuracy of abortion statistics and the distinct probability that abortion rates have remained relatively stable since laws were liberalised (Chan and Sage 2005). In his classic definition, Stan Cohen defines moral panic as when a 'condition, episode, person or group of persons ... become[s] defined as a threat to societal values' (Cohen 1972, 1). The declaration of a threat legitimates government action aimed at preventing or containing that which is apparently threatened, thereby securing these social norms or values (in the present case white reproduction) as social goods worth protecting (Ahmed 2004, 64). Statistics occupy a central role in precipitating moral crises (Hall et al. 1978, 9). By turning abortion into a number the tens of thousands of women who have abortions annually, and the diverse and heterogeneous contexts in which their need or want for abortion arises, are regularised and made quantifiable, ripe for management and control. *Enumerating abortion turns it into a 'problem' of government* while de-politicizing this process by transforming political problems and aspirations into objective, technical measurements (Rose 1991, 647). This process is intensified when numbers are taken to represent 'too many', which Hage (1998, 32) identifies as a 'nationalist practice concerned with one's relation to territory', organising the imaginary relationship between those who manage national space and the objects of management.

The very effects of enumeration and declaring something as constituting 'too many' suggest that moral panics over abortion relate to broader national anxieties pertaining to which bodies should populate the nation. As we will see, the characteristics of these ideal citizens are revealed through the articulation of abortion numbers alongside other fears, including those surrounding divorce, homosexuality and immigration. Such chains of association reveal a pivotal logic relating to the stability of the white nuclear family into the future—fantasies held together in part by the figures of the white mother and her foetus/child.

### Populate or Perish

The 'moral domino theory' circulating widely during the 1970s demonstrates that anxiety over abortion numbers at that time constituted a moral panic reflecting concerns much broader than the number of abortions performed in Australia. Drawing on cold war rhetoric, this thesis proposed that liberal abortion laws would 'open the floodgates' (Hawkin 1973) and ensure Australia's moral and social fabric was 'eroded from within' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1109, Tom McVeigh, Country). Anti-abortion activists and politicians have maintained that abortion threatened 'the very foundations of our society' since the movement's beginnings in Australia ("Abortion Is Key Issue: Cardinal" 1973). Parliamentarians echoed this fear in the debates of the 1970s (CHR, 10 May 1973, 1957, Billy Snedden, Liberal; 1973, Phillip Lynch, Liberal), and concern that abortion would ensure 'the erosion of the values that have held our society together for so long' continued into the debates of the 2000s (VLC, 8 October 2008, 4000, Jan Kronberg, Liberal).

The use of the metaphor of 'the flood' to describe abortion deepens its implication in perceptions of national crisis. Politicians, journalists and other prominent social commentators—usually, but not always, with an anti-abortion agenda—have feared, for



some examples, that the Menhennitt Ruling would open the floodgates to abortion, the decriminalisation of abortion in Victoria in 2008 to more abortion, and that abortion itself opened the floodgates to general moral and social degeneracy (Hawkin 1973; VLC, 9 October 2008, 4086, Bernie Finn, Liberal; String 2001). The historically-sedimented fear that undesirable others are flooding Australia relates to the nation's perceived vulnerability as an island, culturally identified with yet physically distanced from Britain, and with an immense and ultimately indefensible border. A flood connotes an explosive breach of border, which poses a serious and irrevocable threat to the Australian people and the nation's natural resources (Ahmed 2004, 76; M. MacCallum 2002). When people or practices are likened to floods threatening Australia's security, asylum seekers, for example, present an external threat. Conversely, abortion threatens to erode the white nation from within.

Although I make a general claim that, when placed as an issue of national concern, abortion is posed to threaten the white nuclear family and its attendant privileges, the more precise values that abortion is perceived to threaten depend on the socio-historical context in which moral panics have arisen. The 1970s was a period of significant sociocultural and legal change in Australia. The Women's Liberation Movement, Indigenous activists and gay liberationists destabilised white, heterosexual men's privilege to stand as the uncontested norm in relation to a series of others. Responding to this activism and further enabled after the election of the reformist Labor government led by Gough Whitlam in 1972, the liberalisation of abortion law in several Australian jurisdictions coincided with a raft of significant legislation that loosened the legal regulation of white hegemony and the nuclear family. Chief amongst these changes were the recognition of Indigenous citizenship (1967), the cessation of the White Australia Policy (1973), welfare payments to single mothers (1973), no-fault divorce (1975), anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation and the decriminalising of some homosexual acts (Jupp 2002, 19–36; Swain and Howe 1995, 196–208; Bull, Pinto, and Wilson 1991).

A nostalgic longing for the gender and racial certainties that existed, at least in law, before abortion laws were liberalised, fuelled the abortion politics of many members of the House of Representatives (which comprised solely of white men in the two debates on abortion in 1973 and 1979). This nostalgia was conveyed in expressions such as 'society today is ugly' (CHR, 21 March 1979, 972, Barry Simon, Liberal), or '[w]hat has happened to this country?' (CHR, 21 March 1979, 985, John Fitzpatrick, Labor), as well as lamentation for '[t]he good old fashioned values upon which we have based our whole civilization, our whole existence' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1111, Mick Cotter, Liberal). Several parliamentarians singled out marriage and the family as the social institutions that abortion particularly threatened. In the words of Country Party Member Doug Anthony:

the demand for abortion on request is part of the manifestation of the change of values occurring in our society ... one which raises a serious threat to the continued existence of the basis of our society—the family ... The trend of which I speak is evident in such matters as calls for the legalisation of homosexual acts, [and] for the making easier of divorce. (CHR, 10 May 1973, 1982)

The association of the aborting woman with the homosexual and divorcee intensified the threat she posed to the (family) values holding the Australian community together.

Parliamentarians represented the foetus as a future citizen, most explicitly by referring to aborted foetuses as future Australians. Australia's future Prime Minister, Paul

Keating, who opposed the Lusher Motion, nevertheless pronounced that '[a]bortion threatens the nation through the destruction of its children' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1098). The anti-abortion movement has referred to aborted fetuses as Australians since it was established (*The Age* 1973; Francis 2002). The fetus further manifests as a citizen through the common practice of viewing abortion numbers alongside the nation's birth rate, which presumes uniformity in the object of measurement. One *Herald* poll in 1978, for example, asked readers, 'Australia's abortion rate is at least 50,000 a year compared with 226, 000 births. Do you think abortion should be continued?' ("Abortion: 50, 000 Last Year" 1978).

The Lusher Motion was debated after the Australian birth rate had fallen below replacement level for three consecutive years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). This helps explain why, unlike in the McKenzie-Lamb Bill of 1973, the notion that Australia had too many abortions was a prominent theme. One member opposed the motion because 'Australia has a need for population' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1094, James Bradfield, Liberal), and another similarly proclaimed that terminated fetuses:

are children that Australia cannot afford to lose ... [because] the transfer of thousands of the present generation into the incinerator ... [will lead to] a situation whereby an increasing number of older people will need to be supported by a dwindling number of working aged people. (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1088, Bruce Goodluck, Liberal)

In the most widely reported speech of the day, Minister for Health, Ralph Hunt, warned that:

today we are heading rapidly for a zero growth rate ... In the long term, the consequences of the loss of this human potential and potential consumer demand will be reflected in fewer employment opportunities in this country unless we are prepared to engage in a massive immigration program to try to fill this great land of ours. (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1077)

Hunt went on to claim that abortion threatened the employment opportunities of young women by enabling and encouraging married women to remain in the workplace. The capitalist ethos running through his speech, which identified Australians as workers and consumers, was, therefore, clearly gendered: men should engage in paid employment; young women should work (presumably in low skilled jobs) until married, then reproduce more consumers and producers.

Hunt contrasted Australia's need for population with 'developing countries, where over-population is a real problem' (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1076). This contrast resonated with a survey reported in the Royal Commission of 1977, which found Australians supported fewer restrictions on abortion in developing countries such as India than in Australia (Evatt 1977, v. 3, 214). Concern regarding the survival of Australian life into the future, rather than foetal life in general, thus appears to have motivated Hunt and many Australians' opposition to abortion. In the late 1970s, concern that abortion would diminish Australia's population represented a renewed imperative to 'populate or perish', brought in the context of a steady flow of asylum seekers into Australia fleeing Timor and the Vietnam War from 1976 to 1981, which had reinvented the historical fear of an 'Asian invasion' and become a major political issue in the 1977 Federal election (Betts 2001; Jupp 2002, 183).

Liberal MP David Connolly located Australia's zero population growth in the international context, declaring his support for the Lusher Motion by stating that:

No country with the manifest resources of Australia can indulge itself in a de facto policy of zero population growth and expect to have the luxury of deciding indefinitely its own destiny in a world where the availability of space and resources will play an even greater part in deciding the affairs of nations. Perhaps it is a truism, but Australia as we know it must populate or perish. (CHR, 22 March 1979, 1111)

Connolly framed abortion funding—and by inference liberal laws on abortion—as a 'de facto policy of zero population growth', negating Australia's success in the competition for world resources. Connolly's invocation of an empty land—like the 'great land' evoked in Hunt's speech—ripe with natural resources and in need of a healthy (white) population is a classic iteration of the ideal of *terra nullius*, which legitimated Australia's settler-colonial project and, as he reiterated, carried the imperative to populate or perish (Walker 1999, 154–155; Wolfe 1994, 93–95). Hunt spelled out the alternative to white reproduction: massive immigration.

### A Population Crisis

Australia's fertility rate continued to fall from 1976, reaching an all-time low in 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Nascent apprehension regarding Australia's ageing population in the Lusher Motion had, correspondingly, reached the level of critical, national concern at the turn of the millennium, culminating in Population Summits held in Melbourne and Adelaide in 2002 and 2003, respectively (Vizard, Martin, and Watts 2003; Australian Population Summit 2004). After attending the Melbourne summit in 2002, Christopher Pearson—weekly columnist for the conservative broadsheet newspaper, *The Australian*, advisor to the Liberal Party, and personal friend of Tony Abbott—criticised the Howard Government's failure to develop a population policy. He applauded himself for representing 'a small minority who identified the fertility rate, rather than immigration, as the crux of the matter', and deplored 'the 100,000 abortions now carried out each year in Australia and the cumulative loss of *well over a million citizens* since the 1970s' (italics added, Pearson 2002).

Intensified focus on the fertility rate, and the concomitant anxiety over abortion numbers, came amidst widespread fear regarding the alternative solution to Australia's population concerns—immigration. The racial politics of the Howard Government (1996–2007) are well documented, and culminated in a revived preoccupation with the menacing figure of the 'boatperson' in Australia's media (Betts 2001). The Government represented Australia as besieged by threats, both internal (aborting women, Indigenous people and 'third-world-looking' people) and external (asylum seekers; Altman and Hinkson 2007; Hage 2003). The crisis stemmed from the perceived fragility of white sociocultural dominance in Australia generally, but was, more specifically, a crisis in white male authority. Panics over national security are gendered, involving masculine protection of a feminised land, deemed at once vulnerable and penetrable (Brown 2010, 130). The heightening of global security in the wake of 11 September corresponded with an intensified, masculine nationalism (Hunt and Rygiel 2006). In Australia, this masculinism was reinforced by a popular and political narrative, growing since the early 1990s, of a masculinity crisis

propagating the idea that—as Pauline Hanson, leader of the nationalist One Nation Party, claimed in 1996—‘the most downtrodden person in this country is the white Anglo-Saxon male’ (Hanson as quoted by Hage 1998, 182). This narrative propounded that ‘the balance has gone too far’ and (white) men—and especially boys—no longer ‘know what to do’ (Hage 1998, 182). Several interrelated phenomenon fuelled the perceived crisis, including: the increased public visibility of single parent and queer families (with the concomitant concern that boys were growing up with no permanent, heterosexual ‘father figure’); girls’ outperformance of boys in all levels of education; men’s experiences with the family court and the coinciding growth of the ‘men’s movement’; and the heightened participation of non-white men in Australia’s sociopolitical domain (Berns 2005; Murrie 1998).

With white women’s motherhood a point where the gender and racial order of Australia is reproduced, it is no accident that the purported crisis in white masculinity was met with several policies that encouraged married women to have children and stay-at-home to raise them. John Howard and the treasurer, Peter Costello, introduced the Baby Bonus (a fixed sum payable to women on the birth of a child) in 2002 with the battle cries of, respectively, ‘come on, come on, your nation needs you’ and ‘one for your husband, one for your wife and one for the country’ (Shaw and Farouque 2004). Such explicit pro-natalism had, by that time, become increasingly common (Kevin 2009, 59). Catherine Kevin notes that the policies of the Howard Government evinced a re-emergence of the ideal of maternal citizenship, connecting the goal of white reproduction to the concomitant concern with border protection and a renewed pathologisation of Indigenous mothers (Kevin 2009). The government’s pro-natalism was certainly conditional. In 2006, for example, it amended the Baby Bonus to pay Indigenous women living in remote communities of the Northern Territory in instalments rather than a lump sum. The government transparently introduced this policy to curb the reproductive behaviour of women, who, it speciously presumed, were irresponsibly having babies simply to claim the sizeable government payment (Cutcher and Milroy 2010).

With (white) women very clearly called on to choose the nation by reproducing, (white) aborting women were positioned as threatening the social good of white reproduction. Abortion was likened to momentous events of national mortality. Anti-abortionists compared the lives taken in abortion to the most venerated Australian martyrs—soldiers killed in war (Cameron 2004). Tony Abbott referred to Australia’s ‘abortion epidemic’ (Grattan and Wroe 2004). The *Herald Sun* worried about Australia’s ‘abortion toll’, reverberating with the needless and sometimes reckless deaths inflating Victoria’s road toll, numbers for which were coincidentally listed at the end of the editorial (“Editorial: No Easy Answers” 2006).

Danna Vale’s exhortation that Australia risked becoming a Muslim nation because ‘we are aborting ourselves out of existence’ (as quoted in Maiden 2006) reiterated the metonymic association between abortion and non-white immigration. Tellingly, the government’s response to Vale’s remarks recapitulated rather than challenged the underlying logic that Australia is and should remain a predominantly white country as well as the appropriateness of discussing abortion in terms of Australia’s future ethno-racial demography. Immigration Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone, reassured the public that ‘[i]n the next 50 years Australia will remain what it is today—a predominantly English-speaking, multicultural and diverse country’ (Frenkel 2006). National Party member De-Anne Kelly claimed that Vale’s facts ‘were alarmist and simply wrong’ (CHR, 14 February

2006, 74). Shadow Minister Laurie Ferguson similarly reassured the public that ‘the Islamic intake of population to this country is actually declining’ (CHR, 15 February 2006, 190).

Vale’s speech in the Commonwealth debate was steeped in nostalgic longing, with the (white) nuclear family occupying centre stage. Vale took the prevalence of abortion amongst women in 2006 as testament to the fading good life that existed when ‘children were valued’ and abortion prohibited by law (CHR, 15 February 2006, 45). Abortion was repeatedly linked to the general erosion of the patriarchal nuclear family, not merely by anti-abortionists. In response to Abbott’s speech of 2004, then Governor General, Michael Jeffrey, declared that he would like to see Australia’s abortion rate reduced to zero, reasoning that:

We’ve got a million kids now living with a single parent, mostly women, and most of them through no fault of their own are probably doing it very hard ... I think boys, in many cases, now are growing up without access to a male role model ... [and] are going to grow up with a big problem of how to be men, how to treat others, and so on. (Hudson 2004)

Ostensibly, Australia’s abortion rate has nothing to do with single parenting and male role models for children. If, however, abortion numbers are viewed as a site where more general anxieties pertaining to the white nuclear family are expressed, Jeffrey’s slippage between abortion and the (white) masculinity crisis is perfectly intelligible.

Tony Abbott (2004) similarly framed the abortion rate in terms of the security of the nuclear family. In his notorious speech labelling abortion a ‘national tragedy’, he suggested that a focus on abortion should succeed government policies that had: ‘backed the Catholic bishops’ challenge to lesbian IVF, singled out stay-at-home mums for extra financial assistance ... [and] sought to allow Catholic schools to offer scholarships to male teachers’. In this way, Abbott fixed the aborting woman alongside the lesbian (and, less explicitly, the working) mother as a threat to the family, an institution secured by stay-at-home mothers and male teachers as paternal role models to Catholic children. Abbott introduced his concern with abortion by asking:

Why isn’t the fact that 100,000 women choose to end their pregnancies regarded as a national tragedy approaching the scale (say) of Aboriginal life expectancy being 20 years less than that of the general community? ... When it comes to lobbying local politicians, there seems to be far more interest in the treatment of boat people, which *is not morally black and white*, than in the question of abortion *which is* ... The sense that things aren’t right and that every person has a duty to make a difference is at the heart of the Christian calling and helps to explain the relative strength and solidarity of countries like ours. (italics added, Abbott 2004)

Because Christianity is a primary signifier of whiteness in Australia (Stratton 2011, 7–9), Abbott’s suggestion that Christianity bound Australia together in ‘strength and solidarity’ reinstated white Australians as possessors of the nation. While conceding that the gross discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy in Australia constituted a ‘national tragedy’, Abbott displaced the tragedy of Indigenous life expectancy with focus on the life of (white) foetuses. By proposing that abortion is a morally black and

white issue while the detention of asylum seekers is not, Abbott further suggested that asylum seekers, unlike foetuses, were not fully human.

During both moral panics, journalists, politicians and members of the broader public claimed Australia's abortion rate as a problem that belonged to all of us, and as something that had 'got out of hand' but could be brought under control (Grattan and Wroe 2004). In the debates of the mid-2000s, for example, legislators decried that '*[a]s a society, we must do more*', and '*we should be trying to do everything possible to reduce the number of abortions in this state*' (italics added, VLC, 9 October 2008, 4149; 7 October 2008, 3912). The framing of abortion as a social problem '*we*' *should* judge and *can* manage enabled government officials and the broader community to project a fantasy of control over the procedure. Opponents of abortion have enacted this fantasy at the level of the law, hoping to prohibit abortion, limit the means of obtaining it, eliminate government funding for the procedure, or, in recent times, introduce incremental restrictions on abortion, such as pre-abortion counselling (Baird 2006a, 139–140). In contrast, those who support liberal abortion laws imagine that improved sex education programmes and reliable contraception, and contraceptors, would prevent the need for the majority of abortions arising. Both fantasies displace aborting women as the people who determine how many abortions are performed in Australia. The idea that *Australia* has too many abortions turns the nation into the subject of abortion, obfuscating the fact that it is *individual women* who have abortions, and that abortion has always (Riddle 1997) and will always be a component of women's reproductive lives, regardless of laws regulating the practice.

The fantasy of control enacted in debate over abortion helps explain why the intense panic regarding abortion numbers dissipated with the Lusher Motion's defeat in 1979 and the Commonwealth debate of 2006. Baird (2006b) argues that the act of debating abortion is a means of performatively reinstating governmental belonging, turning aborting women into objects under the control of the people who worry about and evaluate them. Any change to the legal status quo of abortion also appeared unlikely to succeed after Lusher's resounding defeat, and the passage of both the Commonwealth and Victorian Bills. Critically, the recent panic over abortion further subsided alongside the steady growth in Australia's fertility rate from 2002–2008 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

For those looking to curtail the abortion rate through the law, the fantasy of control over abortion relies on another: that no abortions, or at least dramatically fewer, occurred before laws were liberalised. This was the undercurrent of Tony Abbott's assertion in the Commonwealth debate that: '[t]here would not be anyone under fifty in this country who has not come up close and personal against this issue' (CHR, 15 February 2006, 114–5). Abbott's absurd suggestion that no abortions occurred before laws were liberalised—and thus only individuals under fifty years of age would have faced the issue—constructed an imagined past, used to amplify the troubled present, where the prevalence of abortion is regarded as both symptom and cause.

### The Biopolitics of Abortion

The encouragement of white reproduction stands alongside disavowal (of Indigenous sovereignty) and exclusion (of certain immigrants) as a technology that aspires to manage the constitutional anxiety of white belonging in Australia. At certain periods in Australia's history, this anxiety has focused on manageable objects of fear as a means of attempting to restore or preserve that perceived to be lost or under threat. The aborting

woman emerged in 1979 and the mid-2000s as an acutely feared object. During these years, unease pertaining to the perceived vulnerability of Australia's borders to intruding others converged with anxieties regarding Australia's fertility rate, the stability of the nuclear family, and the gender order as a whole. As a figure implicated in and threatening to all these demographic trends and sociocultural structures and values, the aborting woman became a site of projection where individuals could 'performatively reinstate' (Baird 2006b, 214) authority over the practice of abortion, thus restoring women's identities to the family and white women's bodies to the nation.

The fear circulating around and producing the figure of the aborting woman in Australia is a consequence of a history of maternal citizenship for white women and is intensified by her metonymic association with other figures posed as threats to the security of the white nation fantasy and its key institution, 'the family'. In the 1970s, these figures included the homosexual and divorcee, and in the 2000s, the figures of the lesbian mother, the Muslim and the boatperson. Like these figures, aborting women threatened the fantasy of what Australia should be, a fantasy that involved nostalgic longing for a fabricated past comprised of happy, white, hetero-families. The fantasy future conglomerating this objects through fear would have no abortions, at least amongst white women (Baird 2006a), and tight controls on immigration. In this imaginary future, white women would choose the nation rather than abortion, thus aligning with the nation in orientation towards their future children as happy objects.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to warmly thank Barbara Baird, Ann Genovese, Shane Kaluza, Claire McLisky, Maree Pardy and Jordana Silverstein for their generous and insightful help in the preparation of this article. Thanks also to the two anonymous *Australian Feminist Studies* readers who helped polish the article in its final stages.

## NOTE

1. I take the idea of 'happy objects' from Sara Ahmed, who argues that happiness animates our conformity to normative life paths, individualising social, structural and cultural mechanisms of power by transforming social norms into social goods and sociocultural normativity into personal desire (Ahmed 2010, 91). For the way in which the figure of the white child operates as a 'happy object' in Australia's political landscape, see Baird 2008, and Hosking and Ripper 2012.

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