

# Downsizing Anzac: Speech to Balmain Institute, Sydney

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I acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of this land, and their elders past and present.

I want to talk about *Anzac* and why it should be downsized.

And in doing so, I'm presenting my personal views.

Honest History is a broad church and our supporters have a range of opinions.

## Defining 'Anzac'

Anzac is *short-hand* for the military part of our Australian history.

Essentially, it's the story of the exploits of various expeditionary forces that have left our shores since we invaded the Ottoman Empire on 25 April 1915.

The history ... *and* the myths that we have spun out of that history.

We are going to hear *a lot* about Anzac in the next four years.

Indeed, where other countries refer to the next four years as the centenary of World War I, we in Australia prefer to call it '*the centenary of Anzac*'.

I want to present *five reasons* why we should 'downsize' Anzac, why we should wind it back, corral it, reduce its proportions.

One caveat though before we start: I'm not necessarily talking about Anzac *Day*, provided the commemoration on that day is dignified and proportionate.

I'm talking instead about Anzac as a myth and a legend which has become *separated* from history and which has potentially *toxic* effects in our future.

We in Honest History have resurrected the term '*Anzackery*' to apply to Anzac *in extremis* – overblown, jingoistic, pompous commemoration or celebration, *often* with a money-making element.

Anzac often *topples over* into Anzackery.

## Five reasons for downsizing Anzac

So, five reasons for downsizing Anzac.

### 1. *Anzac encourages us to look backwards not forwards*

My *first reason* is that Anzac encourages us to look *backward* when we should be looking forward.

When the Rudd Government appointed a commission to look at how we should commemorate the Anzac centenary, there was *a split* among the commissioners and their advisers on whether the object of the commemoration should be Gallipoli *or* a much broader target, basically everything military that Australia has done since the Boer War.

They decided to do both.

So, *now*, alongside references to the Anzac centenary, you also find references to '*a century of service*', that is, service by our defence forces.

If you look at the *report* of that Commission, you'll find a list of more than 250 military events that are suggested as *deserving* of commemoration over the next four years.

These events range from the winning of a Victoria Cross in 1898 to the departure of a submarine for the Gulf in, I think, 2008.

And it's described as a *partial list*; there have been further suggestions made since that list was compiled.

But *regardless* of whether you pick a point in time or a slew of events, it's all *rear vision stuff*; it's all in the past.

Some of the events are so far in the past that we've pretty much forgotten exactly what happened.

But, if you listen to *Les Carlyon*, who is the author of a couple of big books on World War I and who was recently reappointed to the Council of the Australian War Memorial, you get the impression that it is, in his words, '*no bad thing*' that we cling to these legends of the past, like Simpson and his donkey, the Gallipoli landing under machine gun fire, and Ataturk's letter to the mothers of the Anzacs.

(Looking at those three legends, there *was* a donkey and there *was* a Simpson but that's about it.)

So, Anzac is about legends of the past, *rather than* ideas for the future.

But, *why* is Anzac so big now in 2014?

Some people blame *Bob Hawke* for falling in love with some old World War I Diggers in the lead-up to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli landing in 1990.

He kicked it on from there.

The Hawke Government had *some reason* to look for alternate national narratives, because the Bicentennial two years earlier (1988) had fallen a bit flat, particularly with Indigenous Australians.

Boosting Anzac commemoration was an alternative.

*And* it was the time of the first Gulf War, so Gallipoli and the Gulf kind of fitted neatly together – the exploits at one place (Gallipoli) somehow *justifying* or bolstering our involvement in the other (the Gulf).

(Hawke explicitly makes that connection in his memoirs, by the way.)

Anzac had been bubbling along in the background, particularly since Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* came out in 1981; it was there and available.

So, government bodies got to work.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs from the early 1990s began to expand its work in commemoration and later in preparing educational materials for children.

The Howard Government *took over* the Anzac narrative with enthusiasm and *it hardly missed a beat* under Rudd and Gillard.

The Australian War Memorial lifted its game.

Much more recently, state governments have got involved.

But it's *too easy* to look at the rise of Anzac commemoration in the last couple of decades and blame it on some government conspiracy.

There has been *bottom-up* pressure, as well.

There has been a *boom* in family history over this time and that fitted in perfectly with a *sentimental* remembrance of war.

*Then* there was the gradual and well-publicised demise of the Diggers from World War I – the last ten, the last five, the last one, memorial services, and so on – which kept that generation in the public eye.

Sentimentalism again.

There was *war tourism*, particularly of young people to Gallipoli.

There was, perhaps, a *nostalgia* for a past where the figures in the landscape seemed larger, braver and more heroic.

There is *no one reason* – no single explanation – as to why we have looked back so fondly at Gallipoli, why we've clung so tightly to that Anzac myth.

One could even argue that this sort of *dewy-eyed sentimentalism* is harmless enough; Les Carlyon probably *would* argue that.

Maybe this commonly-held Anzac myth even serves to *bind us together*.

*Maybe.*

There is an *opportunity cost*, however: too much looking backward takes effort away from looking forward.

It *stunts your growth*, in this case, your growth as a nation.

It turns you away from considering new opportunities, new ways of being, innovation.

It *misleads*.

Let me quote from Michael McGirr, a former Jesuit priest, who has written a couple of lovely books.

This is something he wrote in 2001; it was provoked by observing war memorials along the Hume Highway.

McGirr wrote about what he called 'creeping Anzacism' and this is what he said:

[Creeping Anzacism is] the way in which the remembrance of war is moving from *the personal* to the public sphere and, with that, from a description of *something unspeakable* to something about which you can never say enough.

As *fewer and fewer* Australians actually know somebody who fought in World War I or World War II, the commemoration of war has *changed* from a quiet remembrance of other people to an unrestrained endorsement of ourselves.

As ideology comes to replace history, there are fewer and fewer *faces* to go with the stories.

They have been replaced by *a lather of clichés*, most of which are as much about filling a void *in the narcissistic present* as lending dignity to the past.

People now seem to believe that in looking at the Anzacs *they are looking at themselves*.

They aren't.

The dead deserve *more respect* than to be used to make ourselves feel larger.

What McGirr is suggesting is that we are *not good* in modern Australia – and I don't think we've got any better at this since he wrote those words in 2001 – not good at constructing an image of ourselves that works for us today – he talks about 'a void in the narcissistic present' – so we *try to compensate* by pillaging an image from the past.

OK: what might we do *instead*; instead of all this rear-view stuff?

A recent letter to the *Canberra Times* suggested we should borrow from Indigenous Australians and promote *love of country* and attachment to country – in the way that the Arrente and the Gadigal and the Wiradjuri people feel it.

*Or*, there are people up in Lismore, among others, who are building *an alternative narrative* around diversity, around the many ethnic and cultural threads that bind us in different ways.

They work Anzac Day into this, not as a backward-looking commemoration dominated by *Anglo-Celtic military history buffs* but as a pointer to a peaceful, multicultural future.

To me, anything that *accentuates diversity* has a lot going for it.

Why do we need a *single* national narrative anyway?

(A single national narrative in which Anzac is a prominent pillar.)

Nick Bryant, the former BBC man in Sydney, made a perceptive remark about national identity.

He said we – including commentators – shouldn't insist on 'defining a singular Australia rather than acknowledging that there are *many Australias*. This, after all, is a nation that defies neat encapsulation.'

Just a *final* point on this before moving on.

If you look at the typical Anglo-Celtic statement about Anzac, you *will* pick up a future orientation.

But it is very much in the tone of 'more of the same'.

'Let us continue as we have been going so far' is the idea.

Here is an example.

*Senator Michael Ronaldson* is the current Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of Anzac.

The Minister spoke to the NSW Conference of the RSL in June and he said this:

2014 to 2018 means that you and I have another opportunity to teach another generation of young Australians what their obligations are.

And if we do not do so ladies and gentlemen, then we have failed them and we have failed ourselves.

The obligations he refers to are the continuing obligations to carry forward the '*torch of remembrance*' in which burns the Anzac spirit.

In other words, *we look back* to find the flame that lights our way forward.

When Tony Abbott spoke at the Australian War Memorial, a month before he became prime minister, he referred to 'the continuity of our martial tradition and of our national character' – note how he *splices the two together* – and he has said similar things since.

But, then, *so did* Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd, John Howard and Bob Hawke.

Anzac, from this point of view, is about *continuity*, it's about the embedding of tradition, it's about conservatism, and conservatism *across partisan divides*.

I'll come back in a moment to the *implications* of remarks like those of Abbott, Ronaldson and others – the implications for the next generation.

## **2. Anzac reinforces some unsavoury aspects of our national character e.g. racism, xenophobia, misogyny, parochialism and bellicosity**

But I want to move on to *my second reason* why Anzac needs to be downsized or wound back.

Anzac reinforces *some unlovely aspects* of our national character.

First, *racism*.

Nick Bryant, again, recently suggested that Australia had a high incidence of low level racism.

Other observers have referred to our '*casual racism*'.

Anzac fits nicely into this picture: the 'typical' Anzac of the Great War is Anglo-Celtic if not Anglo-Saxon.

The legend is Mark Lee and Mel Gibson of *Gallipoli* 30 years ago or the soldier boyfriends of the *Anzac Nurses* on television.

Nice, fresh-faced boys, with the famous *larrikin streak*.

Yet there were non-Anglo-Celtic Anzacs, Chinese Anzacs, Greek Anzacs, Russian Anzacs, Anzacs of Indian extraction ...

There were more than 1000 Indigenous Anzacs, although many of them pretended they were Filipinos or just naturally swarthy, since they were not supposed to be there (in the army).

But the image of the typical Anzac remains one of *a sun-bronzed 'Ocker'* of British or Irish extraction.

But ...

But reverence for an ideal type – *the Anzac larrikin* – can make it more difficult for those who identify most closely with that ideal type to accept those who do not match it.

So, Anzac *shores up* that low level racism, that persistent uneasiness that some of us feel towards some others of us.

Secondly, there's xenophobia or fear of 'the other', particularly fear of Muslims.

Another unlovely part of *being Australian*.

It's obviously *closely related* to racism.

There is some evidence that 'Anzac' was *a rallying cry* for the Anglo-Celtic youths on one side of the Cronulla riot in 2005, *just as* there is evidence that 'getting stuck into the Anzacs' was a motivator for the Lebanese youths on the other side.

Earlier this year a young woman, who described herself as 'a very proud *Strayan*', posted on her blog some remarks dedicated to '*my fellow ANZAC's*'.

She asked, 'How many Muslims have you seen singing our National Anthems?

How many Muslims have you seen waving our flags or having our national icons painted on their faces?

How many Muslims have you seen attending ANZAC Day?

How many Muslims have you seen wearing a Poppy to commemorate the fallen?'

She said the answer to all these questions was '*none*'.

She went on, 'they can act like us, but we ARE us.

We are the true ANZAC's, not them.

No ISLAMIST will be an ANZAC citizen.'

Thirdly, there is *Anzac and misogyny*.

Lieutenant General David Morrison, the Chief of the Australian Army, made a speech at the United Nations early last year.

He admitted that 'in too many cases the [army] team has been *defined* through exclusion of women'; it has been good at bonding in a way that *excludes* women.

He went on to look at how that bonding comes about; *the cement*, you might call it.

He talked about 'the Anzac spirit or tradition', 'a pillar of ADF culture' which 'helps attract male recruits', though it does not necessarily prepare them for a Defence Force which is full, *not* of larrikin Mel Gibsons, but rather of professional soldiers.

Morrison's *clear implication* was that many young men come into the army (and the other services) with an Anzac-fuelled but mistaken impression of what is expected of them and which includes a particular attitude towards women.

Morrison never quite spelled out the links *explicitly* – 'blokes-Anzac-misogyny' – but those potential links certainly *need* to be explored, not just in relation to young men in uniform but to Australians generally.

Then there is Anzac and *Australian parochialism*.

*Another* unlovely feature.

Parochialism is *not uniquely Australian*: most people in every country think their country is the best in the world; every country in the world spends a lot of time contemplating its own navel.

But we Australians seem to be *pretty good* at parochialism – and there is an Anzac link *here*, as well.

The fact that we talk about *the centenary of Anzac* rather than the centenary of World War I is parochial in itself.

We *extract* the self-referential part out of what was a world-wide struggle.

A few years ago, the historian, Graeme Davison, came up with the idea that the Anzac story was *an Odyssey* – the story of Ulysses – young men voyaging to foreign shores to do heroic things.

Today's Gallipoli backpackers *replicate* that journey, but with less danger awaiting them.

The *common thread*, though, connecting the Anzacs and the backpackers, according to Davison, is that Australians have always valued their worth in terms of how they are seen by great and powerful friends.

It's sort of parochialism plus an inferiority complex.

And that leads to an inclination to – using an old-fashioned colloquialism – an inclination *to skate*: 'look at us, here we are again, little Aussie battlers punching above our weight'.

Now, there are a couple of *obvious points* to make about Australians skating about our military exploits.

First, though we have gone across the seas to fight many, many times in the last 150 years, we really have been *bit players* in most of those wars.

*The most obvious evidence* supporting that claim is the statistic about the Dardanelles campaign: of the total numbers involved in that campaign in 1915, on both sides, Australians made up *roughly 5 per cent*.

We were also *about 5 per cent* of casualties (both sides) in that campaign.

Secondly, though we *relentlessly commemorate* the deaths of our soldiers in war – with an *orgy* of commemoration coming up – our 100 000 or so deaths in war (and every one of those deaths was a tragedy) – our 100 000 deaths in the twentieth century amounts to just *0.04 per cent* of the approximately *231 million* deaths in all wars and conflicts during that century – *0.04 per cent*.

We Australians *skite* – sentimentally and morbidly – on a grand scale.

(Of course, 80 per cent of that 231 million were *civilians*, including women and children.

Most of the civilian deaths in Australian wars were in the *frontier wars* of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Though we tend not to talk about them so much.)

So, Anzac and the unlovely parts of being Australian ...

I've *not* tried to claim that Anzac has been the *cause* of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, parochialism ...

But I think there are *links* between these phenomena and Anzac and we need to be more aware of them.

Finally, under this heading, though, there is one characteristic where Anzac *can* be fingered as a cause and that is our tendency to go to war, our 'bellicosity'.

Here, I'm mostly drawing upon the work of Hugh White at the ANU.

His argument runs like this.

First, '*soft*' wars over the last 30 years – that is, wars with relatively low casualties – have made Australians more prepared to fight more of them – more of these soft wars.

Secondly, we regard the Australian-American alliance as *vital* to our national security.

So we are always susceptible to phone calls from the White House, seeking our involvement somewhere overseas.

(We can talk more in question time about whether these arguments work for what's happening now in relation to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.)

Thirdly, Australians traditionally have not focused sharply on the *purposes* of war, either beforehand or in retrospect.

We tend to go off to fight without too much analysis of *why* we are doing it.

(As an aside, we do sometimes invent reasons *after the event* for why we fight.)

The *latest* such reason is altruism.

Here is Prime Minister Abbott early in March addressing the troops returned from Afghanistan:

[Y]ou have fought for the universal decencies of mankind – the rights of the weak against the strong, the rights of the poor against the rich and the rights of all to strive for the very best they can.

That's what Australians do; we always have and we always will.

Australians don't fight to conquer; we fight to help, to build and to serve.)

(We heard some rhetoric about humanitarian purposes *up front* this time around but it seems to have slipped away again.)

I'll leave that claim aside and get back to Hugh White.

Added to all these factors that make us bellicose, says Professor White, is the role of the Anzac tradition.

While we steer away from *why* we fight, we focus sharply on *how* we fight, on the details of battles and the experiences of soldiers.

(Think about all the military history books in bookshops, all the commemorations of battles coming up, all the TV shows about soldiers.)

White believes that part of the explanation for our failure to go into the purpose and the cost of war is 'the potent idea of war in Australian society, focused on the Anzac legend'.

He writes about 'the way Australians' intense focus on military history, centred on the Gallipoli campaign, has shaped, and in some ways distorted, both our understanding of Australia's history and our image of ourselves'.

So, Anzac is one of the causes of Australian bellicosity, particularly our bellicosity in *other people's countries*.

### **3. *Anzac threatens to overshadow other worthy parts of our Australian history***

My *third reason* why we should downsize Anzac is that Anzac threatens to *overshadow* other worthy parts of our Australian history.

If you look at our *Honest History website* you will see that our motto is 'not only Anzac but also ...' – also lots of other strands of Australian history.

The website is essentially a *resource* of bibliographical items covering the full range of Australian history – pre-history, environmental history, social, economic, political, cultural, and so on.

Of course, the military parts of our history are *important* – not so much because of what Australians did in war but because of *what war did to Australia and Australians* – but many other strands of our history are important as well.

So how does that view of our history *match up* with what seems likely to happen in the next four years?

We do military history *so well* in Australia, through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Australian War Memorial and the various state memorials, through school curricula, through the endless flood of military history books, good, bad and indifferent, through military tourism for all ages, through movies and mini-series during the Great War centenary, through commercial hucksters flogging everything from Gallipoli champagne cruises entertained by Bert Newton or hosted by a retired General to an Anzac Run and a Gallipoli memorial swag (\$275 or \$375 for the double version), as well as lots and lots of commemoration, anniversaries of this battle and that, new memorials being built with government money, travelling exhibitions, re-enactments, performance art, symphonies, and so on ... that there is a risk that some Australians, particularly young Australians, by the centenary of the Treaty of Versailles, will think that really there is *nothing* in Australian history worth noticing except what occurs on battlefields.

Yet there is *so much more* to our history that we should be researching, presenting, popularising, and celebrating.

We are a *much more interesting* country than we will seem if that khaki thread *strangles* all of the other threads of our history.

Australian history is made by women, men, individuals, families, artists, philosophers, scientists, unionists, business people, public servants, *soldiers* and politicians.

We carry the imprint of the First Australians, the builders of the CSIRO, the Sydney Opera House and the Snowy scheme, the pioneers of the bush frontier in the nineteenth century and the urban frontier in the 1950s, and 'boat people', whether they are convicts, post-war 'ten pound Poms' and 'New Australians' or asylum seekers.

Australian history is to the credit – and the fault – of *all of us*, not just our Diggers.

On our Honest History website there are links to books or articles that argue that *a key factor* – sometimes *the key factor* – shaping Australia has been distance, fire, flood, drought, mining, depression, cars, liberalism, socialism, mateship, immigration, multiculturalism, racism, sex, war, and camping (that's camping in tents).

Of course, *all* of these factors have played a part – even camping, if you look at Bill Garner's book on that subject.

And there have been plenty of other factors as well.

No single thing predominates; *many factors and many years* play a part in making us who and what we are today.

To return to the *military side* for a moment, there is, of course, a *difference* between military history and war history.

Australian military history is essentially about blokes in khaki doing heroic things.

War history is *broader* than military history, however.

On the site, we devote a lot of attention to the *full range* of war history: blood, shit and terror at the front as well as – rather than – tales of derring do; bad behaviour as well as heroism; what happens on the *home front* to families and the society; what happens *afterwards* to the men and women who return, to their families, to the society.

As I said, not just what Australians *do* in war but also what war *does* to Australia and Australians.

So, part of the downsizing Anzac project is *upsizing* the other parts of our history.

#### **4. Anzac is a danger to children**

My *fourth argument* for downsizing Anzac is that Anzac is a danger to children.

Anzac – *Australia's military history*, in the way it is presented currently – is a danger to the *psychic health* of our younger generations and may well be a danger to their future *physical* well-being also.

Let me explain what I mean.

A *key point* about our Australian obsession with military history is that a lot of that history and commemoration is *directed at children*.

And a lot of that commemoration – that *celebration*, as it often becomes – can be characterised as *Anzackery*, overblown, windy, jingoistic rhetoric, masquerading as patriotism.

Earlier, I quoted Minister Ronaldson about the '*obligations*' on the next generation to carry forward the torch of remembrance.

Julia Gillard, towards the end of her period in office, waxed lyrical about the number of *enthusiastic children* attending Anzac Day services.

I watched an Anzac Day march in Lismore this year, where *hundreds* of children participated, some of them marching in step like little soldiers.

There are *drayloads* of war-related material directed at children and that torch motif – the torch of remembrance – features prominently in it.

Sometimes it's 'the *baton* of remembrance'; sort of a relay race of remembrance.

Here's an example from Queensland, written by retired Colonel Arthur Burke OAM to inspire Anzac commemoration in schools.

On 25 April 1915 a new world was born.

A new side of man's character was revealed.

The Spirit of ANZAC was kindled.

It flared with a previously unknown, almost superhuman strength.

There was a determination, a zest, a drive which swept up from the beaches on Gallipoli Peninsula as the ANZACs thrust forward with their torch of freedom.

As they fell, they threw the torch to those following so their quest would maintain its momentum.

That Torch of Freedom has continually been thrown from falling hands, has kindled in the catchers' souls a zeal and desire for both our individual liberty and our country's liberty.

That desire has been handed down with the memory and burns as brightly as the flame which first kindled it.

That was Colonel Burke; it's quite current; I'll give you the website reference if you want to read it in full.

The torch is *fanned* by the Australian War Memorial, which encourages primary school children to write messages to dead soldiers on little plywood crosses which are then planted in graves in France and Belgium, which recruits primary school age children to record the names and age at death of dead World War I soldiers for playing on a continuous loop in the Roll of Honour cloisters, which hosts half a million school children a year (most of them *subsidised*) on visits to the Memorial, where many of them play in the Discovery Zone, which includes simulated rides in an Iroquois helicopter shooting up the Gooks in Vietnam or dodging snipers – that's how they advertise it – in the imitation (but sanitised) World War I trench.

*Heady stuff* if you're a ten or twelve year old.

One might *also* ask, 'what is it doing to their heads?'

Then there are the commemorative ceremonies that we *encourage* children to attend.

We say that, beneath our commemoration of war, there is an *abhorrence* of war.

We insist that we do not *glorify* war.

These denials often come, however, as *afterthoughts*, as *add-ons* to moving, patriotic, feel-good – or at least bitter-sweet – ceremonies with lots of flags, eloquent speeches, remembrance of heroic acts, sonorous hymns, Victoria Cross winners as celebrities, wide-eyed children and, now, sound and light shows.

*Heady stuff again*, if you're a kid.

Not glorifying perhaps but certainly *sentimentalising* – and doing so very efficiently and very powerfully.

But how much of it is really being understood – understood by the children to whom it is directed?

And how far is this *rosy glow*, applied early in life, permanently suffusing the way these children look at war?

When you *question* teachers or resource providers about the ethics of teaching children about war, the answer is often along the lines of 'we give the children something that is appropriate to their age' or 'they get a nuanced view when they are younger and then more details later'.

When you ask the people at the War Memorial what is the *rationale* for, say, the Roll of Honour recital of the names of dead soldiers, they talk vaguely about helping the children to 'connect with the fallen' or 'to understand what *they* went through'.

So, the essential message that war ultimately requires soldiers to kill or be killed is *lost* in nonsense about connecting or understanding or *smothered* in sanitised collections of war memorabilia and dress-ups.

The truth of death in war – evisceration, decapitation, being blown to bits – is diverted by *euphemisms* about 'the fallen' and 'making the supreme sacrifice'.

They are euphemisms that adults, particularly official and RSL adults, *still prefer to use*.

'They died for our freedom' has become the *official fig leaf* to cover up more complex and awkward explanations.

And it has become a very common inscription on those little plywood crosses.

But there's still *the torch*, the torch of remembrance; what is the real import of these obligations to carry the torch?

Minister Ronaldson gave a hint a couple of months ago, when he spoke to Sydney Legacy.

The Minister said he wanted by the end of 2018 to have the next generation of young Australians doing what you and I are doing at the moment.

*They will be carrying the torch ...*

And when they hop on a school bus, or they walk home, or they go shopping, or they go out at night with relative freedom – that they realise in many instances *that freedom has been paid for in blood*.

*And they must understand that.*

The implication is that freedom, 'paid for in blood', may have to be *redeemed* in similar fashion in the future.

That, it seems, is our legacy to future generations: the expectation that honouring the war dead of the past – carrying the torch – requires the preparedness to become the war dead of the future.

(Again, we can talk about how that might work in the type of war we are in for at the moment.)

##### **5. *Anzac could become the ideology of a fascist Australia***

My *fifth and final* reason for downsizing Anzac is this: Anzac could become the ideology of a fascist Australia.

'Fascist' is an epithet that is tossed around fairly readily, particularly when conservative governments are in power and their opponents are looking for a convenient – and not always evidence-based – bogey word that both encapsulates frustrations and rallies support.

In the case of Australia in 2014, however, it is *quite instructive* to do some research on fascism, or on 'integralism' – which has a history in Spanish-speaking countries but which BA Santamaria also flirted with – or on 'corporatism', or even on the thoughts of Josef Goebbels.

There are also works on communism that might be relevant when you look for evidence.

There are *bits and pieces* that leap out of all of these sources and make you think and make you start coining phrases like ‘early onset fascism with an Australian face’ – ‘a sunburnt nose’, perhaps – to possibly apply to where we are now.

And you try to find a copy of DH Lawrence’s book, *Kangaroo*.

Or you browse through Michael Cathcart’s book about *proto-fascism* in the 1930s in Australia.

Or you read about how the British Union of Fascists – they were the ones who had a thing about wearing *black shirts* – mused in 1937 about whether Australia was ripe ground for their kind of ideology.

(The liking that our recent – male – rulers seem to have for *blue ties* rings a few bells, actually, though I don’t want to make too much of that now.)

The prime minister’s use last month of the term ‘*Team Australia*’, however, got me thinking.

Was it just a *careless sound bite*?

Was it perhaps some *laboured sporting analogy* brought on by the Commonwealth Games?

Or was it *more than that*?

Of course, the prime minister has *form* in this area.

You might recall that around Australia Day he complained that the ABC needed to ‘have some basic affection for the home team’.

Our group, Honest History, took particular notice of that remark because, *just the day before*, a Liberal backbencher, a former Brigadier, had complained that the ABC lacked ‘*situational awareness*’.

This was because *ABC News 24* had broadcast a segment about the launch of our *then new Honest History website* and it was a segment which questioned some aspects of the Anzac legend.

(The ex-Brigadier’s argument seemed to be that such a broadcast was *bad form* in a year when Australians were commemorating the start of the Great War.

Lack of situational awareness.)

We researched what this term ‘situational awareness’ meant; it’s a military term, something to do with being aware of your surroundings.

In this context, though, it *probably means* ‘pipe down, pull your head in, keep your awkward opinions to yourself, and let the rest of us get stuck into some patriotic commemoration’.

‘Situational awareness.’

*George Orwell* could have invented that term.

What was interesting, however, was that around the end of February, when I and a colleague from Honest History paid a visit to – I’ll just describe him as a very senior Commonwealth official with a proprietary interest in war commemoration – one of the things this gentleman accused us of was ‘*lacking situational awareness*’.

‘Aha’, we said, ‘we’ve heard that term before!’

(We checked and we found out that he – the very senior official – and the retired Brigadier MP and some other MPs had enjoyed a *get-together* not long before and the concept of situational awareness had obviously been mulled over on that occasion.)

But I want to get serious again.

*If* – no more than that for now – if you wanted to develop in Australia a state ideology with a fascist tinge, you might use sporting analogies – ‘Team Australia’ – but you might also look for *something more solemn, more sacred*, as part of the binding cement.

That’s where Anzac could come in.

We spoke before about Anzackery; let’s look now for a moment at the possibilities for something we might call ‘Anzacism’.

(I quoted Michael McGirr previously about ‘creeping Anzacism’ but I’m using the term here in a slightly different way.)

Anzacism as a state ideology might have a number of characteristics.

Let me *compare* these possible characteristics with state ideologies we have known in the past:

A linkage with traditional national symbols: thousands of national flags as the main feature of party rallies in totalitarian regimes; compared with national flags as a dominant feature in Anzac Day marches.

A requirement for ritual observance: historians of the old Soviet Union refer to the ‘reverential’ attitude towards Leninism; here, Angus Houston, chair of the then Anzac Centenary Advisory Board, said: ‘The Board is determined to ensure that the Anzac Centenary is marked in a way that captures the spirit and reverence it so deserves’.

Moving mass ceremonies affirming loyalty to the ideology: May Day ceremonies and Nuremberg torchlight rallies; here, Dawn Services.

Adoration of mythologised ordinary people: the German *Urbemensch* or ‘superman’ and Stakhanov, the Soviet super-worker; for us, John Simpson Kirkpatrick and the bronzed larrikin Anzac.

Intrusion into fields where ideology is not normally present but where people gather *en masse*: compare the attitudes of the crowds at the 1936 Berlin Olympics with those at the Anzac Day AFL match or the Anzac Test.

Loyalty tests: pledging loyalty to a state ideology as a feature of communist or fascist regimes; the prominence of Anzac in the citizenship literature of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

On our Honest History site there is *a thoughtful article* by a gentleman named Paul Cannon, in which the author compares the characteristics of fascism with the state of Australia today.

Cannon derives these characteristics from the work of Umberto Eco and Lawrence Britt.

The characteristics are nationalism, disdain for human rights, scapegoating as a means of unifying, supremacy of the military, sexism, controlled mass media, obsession with national security, religion and government intertwined, protection of corporate interests, suppression of labour power, disdain for intellectuals and the arts, obsession with crime and punishment, rampant cronyism and corruption, and fraudulent elections.

Cannon reckons he sees *seven* of those 14 characteristics present to some degree in Australian 'government action and rhetoric' today.

I think he is being a bit conservative there – a colleague of mine goes for 13 out of 14.

Just a final point though, linking back to Team Australia: I don't believe that Team Australia is just about encouraging the assimilation of Muslims – *the outsiders*.

There is also an element of the Team Australia idea which is *directed at the insiders* – those of us who have been here longer.

And plucking constantly on that khaki Anzac string *adds to* the national patriotic tune to which all of us may increasingly be expected to march.

I recommend the article.

Meanwhile, *if we wind Anzac back*, if we balance it with other elements, it has less potential to become the basis for a rather nasty state ideology.

### **Conclusion**

Some summary points *in conclusion*.

We need to *downsize or wind back Anzac* for five reasons:

because Anzac keeps us looking over our shoulders in sterile sentimentality *rather than* looking forward;

because Anzac *reinforces* some of the less attractive parts of our make-up and *particularly* because it encourages us to make war;

because the *khaki thread* of Anzac threatens to *strangle* other important strands of our history;

because of Anzac's *potentially toxic effects* on the lives of future generations; and;

*finally*, we need to downsize Anzac before it becomes the binding ideology for *a fascist state* under our Southern skies.

*25 September 2014*

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