8 Moving Abjection

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This chapter draws on a wider study of the intersections between the changing social and cultural base of place and identities as they are increasingly caught up in, and also attempt to stand apart from, globalizing flows. The focus is on mobility and stasis in places beyond the city in Western first world countries and their implications for relationships and inequalities.

Appadurai (1996, 2000) considers mobility through his notion of scapes. Ethnoscapes are:

...landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals [that] constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. (2000, p. 95)

Lived cultures of ethnoscapes are reconfigured in global ideoscapes (moving political ideas) and mediascapes (moving electronic images). These “scapes” come together to form imagined worlds. Such worlds are “multiple [and]...constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the global” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 2).

We read global ideoscapes and mediascapes in terms of Giroux’s (1999) assumption that culture plays a central role in producing narratives, metaphors, and images that exercise a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to others.

We add political and affective edge to the pedagogical potential of Appadurai’s “scapes” and “imagined worlds” through Bauman’s (1998a, 1998b) work on “global hierarchies of mobility” and Kristeva’s (1982) notion of the “abject.” These concepts allow us to think through the ways in which young Aboriginal masculinities are produced as abject. We show how this localized process is entangled with global flows of people, ideas, and images. Bringing this range of theoretical resources together also assists us in highlighting contemporary inflections of longstanding social and cultural prejudices.

Our concern in this chapter is the unjust politics of the interlaced scapes associated with Aboriginal people in Australia. We begin with a brief elaboration of what we call “scapes of abjection.” We then consider the abject dynamics of the ways in which tourist ideoscapes and mediascapes construct Aboriginal people. Throughout, we note the implications of such noxious politics for masculinity and gender dynamics. This chapter focuses on one Australian locality—Coober Pedy (a tourist and opal mining desert town). We call our approach to identifying, gathering, and reading data for this study “place-based global ethnography” (see Kenway, Kraack, & Hickey-Moody, 2006, pp. 35–59). This methodology links Appadurai’s global scapes to Burawoy et al.’s (2000)
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notion of global ethnography, and is concerned with flows through places. The ethnographic fieldwork involved in-depth semistructured interviews with 36 young people. For six weeks, 24 males were each interviewed weekly and 12 females were interviewed every two weeks. Loosely structured focus and affinity group discussions were held with mothers, fathers, community members, teachers, and youth and welfare service providers. Informal conversations were held with a wide range of local people. All participants have been rendered anonymous. Field research also involved time at a variety of community and youth-specific locales (e.g., the school, beach, and main street) and events (e.g., sporting matches, discos, and local carnivals). Bringing these localized texts together with global media and ideoscapes, we identified and analyzed popular discourses in film, television, print media and Internet media about places beyond the metropolis.

Mediascapes and Ideoscapes as Public Pedagogies

Giroux (1999) argues that pedagogy can no longer be considered as confined to the site of schooling. It needs to be understood as applying to everyday political sites in “which identities are shaped, desires mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning.” Such sites are, arguably, those that Appadurai considers global mediascapes and ideoscapes—cultural mores of thought, image, and patterns of association. Giroux’s concept of “public pedagogy” draws on his belief that scholarly communities need to:

...acknowledge the primacy of culture’s role as an educational site where identities are being continually transformed, power is enacted, and learning assumes a political dynamic as it becomes not only the condition for the acquisition of agency but also the sphere for imagining oppositional social change. (2004b, p. 60)

For Giroux, culture is pedagogical. We learn about ourselves and understand our relations to others through our position in lived cultures. A more explicit consideration of how culture influences identity production and relations of power is, for Giroux, one of the intended outcomes of considering culture as pedagogical. In demonstrating culture’s educational role, Giroux hopes that we will become more cognizant of the myriad effects associated with consumer-media culture. For Giroux, this is an important task because such knowledge of the role of culture is intrinsic to acquiring agency and “imagining... social change” (2004b, p. 60).

For example, in his essay, “Education after Abu Ghraiib,” Giroux (2004a) draws attention to how the nature of photographs and the technologies that produce them enable particular meanings; how these meanings connect with broader discourses and relations of power; how these sites allow or disallow resistance and challenge. In this chapter, we analyze local and global media and ideoscapes as forms of public pedagogy. Vernacular and Internet depictions of Aboriginal people, celebrated ghosts of Aboriginal elders forever on the move, public figures and private beliefs fold together as media and ethnoscapes produce evolving, pedagogical depictions of Australian Aboriginal people.

Scapes of Noxious Mobility and Immobility

Fraser (2005) argues that there are two main forms of injustice, “socioeconomic” and “cultural or symbolic.” These two profound forms of social injustice are affected by global movements. The former refers to experiences of economic exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation. The latter involves cultural domination, nonrecognition, and
disrespect. She observes that although some social groupings suffer injustices that are primarily economic these may also involve cultural devaluation, and the reverse. In globalizing circumstances in which “the world is on the move” as Appadurai says, notions of material and cultural injustice are usefully complemented by ideas associated with the unjust politics of mobility, immobility, and affect.

One of the ways these unjust ethnoscapes are linked is through global ideo- and mediascapes of abjection. In the early 1980s Kristeva (1982) theorized the corporeal, psychological, and social processes associated with the abject. She identified three main forms of abjection associated with food, waste, and sexual difference. The abject has since come to be associated with those bodily fluids, people, objects, and places that are couched as unclean, impure, and even immoral. The abject disturbs “identity, system, order” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4) and provokes the desire to expel the unclean to an outside, to create boundaries in order to establish the certainty of the self. It involves the production of social taboos and individual and group psychic defenses. Insofar as the abject challenges notions of identity and social order it “must” be cast out. Abjection involves the processes whereby that or those named unclean are reviled, repelled, and resisted. But the “abject” does not respect such expulsions and boundaries and so constantly threatens to move across them and contaminate. It is thus understood as a threat to “the pure and the proper.” Grosz (1989) observes, that the abject “can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the borders of our existence, threatening the apparently settled unity of the subject with disruption and possible dissolution” (p. 71).

Scapes of abjection circulate globally and seep into national and local geometries of power and affect. As we will show, they reinvigorate such things as the ugly history of colonization and the geopolitical relationships between the metropolis and its othered spaces. They justify injustice, draw attention away from social suffering, and thus deny the social reality of the marginalized. They are woven through neoliberal economic and social ideologies and help to legitimate the more insidious aspects of global economic restructuring. They provide a justification for the diminishment of state welfare support for those who suffer the economic and cultural consequences of the noxious politics of mobility. The associated social tensions come to be expressed in the language of disgust and it becomes accepted that certain social groups, the Black welfare poor particularly, can justifiably be treated as trash. Scapes of abjection can also be entangled with the long chains of commodification associated with global ethnoscapes. In such cases, we go on to explain, the processes of abjection take on an even more complex configuration as culture is navigated for profit.

Abjectifying Aboriginality

Explaining the historical and spatial processes of abjection, McClintock (1995) argues:

Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on. Certain threshold zones become abject zones and are policed with vigor: the Arab Casbah, the Jewish ghetto, the Irish slum, the Victorian garret and kitchen, the squatter camp, the mental asylum, the red light district and the bedroom. (p. 71)

The various processes whereby the abject is expelled, restricted to “abject zones” and returns to “haunt” are all evident in the complex history of the abjection of Aboriginal Australians. These processes of abjection are integral to Australia’s colonial and
neocolonial history and have been rearticulated in recent discourses of “downward” envy associated with the abject positioning of Aboriginal welfare recipients. They are also rearticulated in the ideoscapes and mediascapes related to the tourist industry.

The noxious politics of mobility and associated processes of abjection are a characteristic of the treatment of Australia’s original inhabitants by the British occupying power in the 18th and 19th century. Cast out and treated as nonhuman contaminants, Aboriginal Australians were dispossessed of their land, denied their laws and customs, refused citizenship, and usually treated brutally and exploited by White settlers (Broome, 2001; Reynolds, 1999). Australia’s colonial history involves the dispossession, denial, and exploitation of Aboriginal peoples who continue to experience well-documented, indisputable economic injustice and widespread social exclusion, cultural denial, and denigration. Such injustices are integral to their mobility, which has included not just voluntary movement but also being forcibly moved (Haebich, 2001).

The life chances and opportunities of Aboriginal males are severely circumscribed. According to the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Health (NATSIHC; 2003, p. 10) significant numbers of Aboriginal men have very poor physical and mental health, suffer from alcohol and substance abuse, and are involved in family violence. Fifty-three percent die before they reach 50 years of age. Such men commit suicide more often than non-Aboriginal men and they are more often imprisoned. They are less likely to have educational qualifications and employment than non-Aboriginal Australian men and their personal and household income is particularly low. These patterns for older males arise early in life. Aboriginal boys have far less educational success than their non-Aboriginal peers. Indeed, completing primary and secondary schooling and attaining a higher education qualification are much less likely for Aboriginal boys than non-Aboriginal boys. Twenty-two percent of Aboriginal males are unemployed, compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal males (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2003, p. 25). Aboriginal boys living in remote or regional areas do not have access to the same housing and environmental health facilities that other Australian boys take for granted. Such facilities include safe drinking water, continuous power supplies, effective sewerage systems, housing and transport (ABS, 2003, p. 35).

Various forms of government welfare support seem little able to alter this situation and, equally, varied approaches to reconciliation seem unable to end racist sentiment. Interwoven with this situation is a racialized version of abjection in which the White working poor and the White welfare poor join forces to abjectify Aboriginal people who come to be seen as privileged, undeserving, and ungrateful.

There is quite a common belief in Coober Pedy that Aboriginal people “get it easy” because of the government subsidies and allowances allotted to them. Take the case of schooling. Systems have been put in place to try to encourage Aboriginal young people to regularly attend school. For example, those schoolchildren living in the Umoona Community (a settlement outside the main township) are bussed to the school every day, while local White students walk (most live much closer to the school). The State government also subsidizes school fees and the costs of extracurricula activities for Aboriginal students. This extra financial assistance is the focus of much resentment. Indeed, the provision of government benefits more generally is central to the local White residents’ abjectification of local Aboriginal people. Stefani Moulder, age 14, holds this dominant view:

When school camps come up,—we had to pay $200 and the Aboriginals only had to pay $20. That is because the government pays for them, and I think that is stupid…. They [Aboriginal people] think that they own this place but they don’t.
Stefani’s logic is that everyone in financial difficulty should be entitled to the same financial subsidies and allowances. At a “commonsense” level this seems reasonable enough, but it denies the history and current difficulties of Aboriginal people. Like most residents, Stefani does not agree that such benefits are a justifiable means of addressing the broader social, cultural, and political denial of Aboriginal people in Australia. The common view is that the local poor Whites are more in need and deserving of assistance. Further, Stefani’s comment that “They think that they own this place but they don’t” is a rather poignant reminder that while they once did, they now do not. Welfare benefits seem little compensation for the loss of their land and independence and the attacks on their identities and pride. Stefani’s view is also that Aboriginal people should not be so “pushy,” should not act as if “they own the place.”

Such “pushy” assertions of Aboriginality have been “shaped within a long-standing, but now vigorously contested subordination” (Cowlishaw, 2004, p. 11). They include an assertion of self-respect and a denial of an “ever-abject state of being.” This state of being is implied in the “permanent victim status” associated with a politics whose “central motif” is “injured and suffering Aboriginal people” (Cowlishaw, 2004, p. 52). Who represents whom, how, and with regard to what, are central and highly contentious questions within and beyond Aboriginal communities and come to the fore in relation to the Indigenous tourist industry.

The Tourist Gaze

The cultural and economic dynamics of abjectifying Indigenous peoples now feature prominently in global tourist ideoscapes and mediascapes. Bauman calls people who are on the move by choice and who accept few territorial responsibilities as they travel, “tourists.” “They stay and move at their heart’s desire. They abandon a site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere” (1998a, p. 92). Bauman’s notion of the tourist is one of many “metaphors of mobility” (Urry, 2000, p. 27), in current social thought and his tourist metaphor is applied largely to the mobile winners of globalization, “the global businessman, global culture managers, or global academics” for instance, those who are “emancipated from space” (Bauman, 1998a, pp. 89–93) because of the resources at their disposal. Amongst Bauman’s “tourists” are actual tourists—those who combine leisure and travel in search of “experience” (MacCannell, 1999).

Tourism has become a key economic renewal strategy among many nonurban communities around the world. It involves branding place. It is about the identification and promotion of difference, where differentiation marks a place as unique. It is also about the construction and promotion of marketable differences within places. Aboriginal culture has become a highly marketable feature of the Australian tourist industry, particularly to those sorts of tourists whom Cohen and Kennedy (2000, p. 219) call “alternative tourists” (as opposed to mass tourists). These people require adventure, contact with nature, spiritual renewal, or experiences of authenticity. As Cohen and Kennedy (2000, p. 221) observe, they yearn to “sample exotic cultures,” seek the “curative properties of wilderness, remote regions,” the “off beat and unusual.” They “are disposed to interact directly with locals and show interest in traditional culture.”

The contemporary ideoscapes and mediascapes that frame our discussion are certain global, national, state, and local tourist texts constructed to tantalize the palate of such tourists. These texts and some of their associated spatial practices involve complex abjection processes of selective recognition and erasure. Aboriginality with all its complexity (Cowlishaw, 2004) is spilt in two; certain aspects become cultural embellishments to the...
tourist industry while other aspects are denied. Denials and erasures occur when features of Aboriginality are found lacking in market value or when they detract from the image of place. These are eliminated by restricting them to abject zones beyond the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990). Alternatively, marketable aspects of Aboriginal identity become tourist “zirconia”: culturally fabricated gems—the tourist glaze.

Aboriginal Australians have their own disparate and evolving cultures and histories, which continue to be significant despite past and present injustices. But it is highly selected aspects of Aboriginal culture and history that have become Australia’s cultural tourist zirconia. These aspects are the acceptable and commodifiable parts of the abject split. Included here are Aboriginal cultural knowledge, ancient art, connections to the land, and experiences of spirituality. These are allocated a tourist patina. Such processes of commodification and exotification can be understood as contemporary examples of Aboriginal abjection. They involve a stage-managed set of comfortable images that White populations want to see. They suggest that Australia has now exorcised the ghosts of the trauma of White invasion and injustice and become reconciled. As culturally objectified zirconias, Aboriginal identities become bound to a colonial past and a neocolonial present.

In appealing to the tourist demographic, marketing Australian places beyond the metropolis often involves the historical and spatial fixing of Aboriginal Australian people. They may thus, for instance, be conflated with Australian bushscapes. They may be used to make nonmetropolitan places seem especially interesting and profound. But they are likely to ignore the fact that many present-day Aboriginal people live in the metropolis and that urban Aboriginal people and sites might be of tourist interest. The consumer-driven psychology here is that tourists will feel there is something tantalizing, almost sensual, about Aboriginal histories. In order to relate to such ancient powers, one must travel and get close to the land, as the soil holds traces of such “mythical peoples.” Subtly implied within these ideoscapes are particular tropes of Aboriginal masculinity. Authentic Aboriginal masculinity is sutured to timeless ideas of the wise tribal elder, the purveyor of spiritual wisdom, the skilful hunter and tracker with spears or sticks in hand, the pensive player of the didgeridoo, the seminaked, body-decorated and scarified ceremonial dancer. Such cultural character is, in its very synthesis, simultaneously put forward as fascinating but ultimately impractical. It is a reason to visit a place, but not a way of life that will be useful for “getting on” in an economically driven world. Many examples of such temporal and spatial fixity and exotification can be found in online tourist mediascapes. The examples to follow are collectively emblematic of abject splitting processes.

Texts produced by the Lonely Planet publishers are a significant feature of contemporary global tourist mediascapes and ideoscapes and have important implications for out-of-the-way places around the world. They support “adventure on demand” (Friend, 2005, p. 20). Journeys to Authentic Australia is written as a guide to what the Lonely Planet suggests is “Authentic Australia.” The Lonely Planet has declared the left-hand side of Australia is its “authentic” region. From Mount Gambier in South Australia, via Alice Springs in Central South Australia, to Darwin and the top of the Northern Territory, and down along the coast of Western Australia via Albany and Esperance back to South Australia, the Lonely Planet maps out the “real heart and soul” of the country. Indeed, according to their advice, traveling this land is a way of “accessing Australia’s heart and soul” (The Lonely Planet, 2005). A key aspect of this “authentic” Australia is ancient Aboriginal culture, which lends the land particular desirability:

Away from Australia’s eastern seaboard lies a treasure-trove of superb beaches, mind-blowing natural features, authentic outback experiences, world-class wines and gour-
Through the use of the word *ancient*, Aboriginal culture is positioned as temporally distinct from “the resilient and intriguing people” (some of whom are Aboriginal) “who have made this part of Australia the intriguing and unforgettable place that it is.” Here, ideoscapes of abjection deploy what McClintock (1995, p. 37), drawing on Foucault, calls “panoptical time.” Panoptical time is an “image of global history consumed—at a glance—in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility” (McClintock, 1995, p. 37). Panoptical time makes invisible the full history of colonized peoples but also makes hypervisible, indeed turns into a tourist spectacle, those historical features that can be exoticized.

Sadly, Aboriginal sensibilities do not play a major role in most tourist constructions of Aboriginal Australia. They certainly do not resonate with Coober Pedy’s construction of itself as a tourist destination. Coober Pedy’s District Council’s promotional online site is aimed at showcasing Coober Pedy to a “World Wide” audience. The District Council invokes a selective, past tense notion of Aboriginal people that imagines them only in relation to landscape. Indeed, the following quote is one of three past-tense references made to Aboriginal people or communities on this particular page of the website. There are no present tense references to Aboriginal peoples on this page. It reads:

> For thousands of years Aboriginal people walked across this area. Because of the desert environment, these people were nomadic hunters and gatherers who traveled constantly in search of food and water supplies as well as to attend traditional ceremonies. (District Council of Coober Pedy, 2005)

According to this website, the land around Coober Pedy is steeped with the sacred significance of ancient nomadic knowledges of Aboriginal people. But no connection is made between these “nomadic hunters and gatherers” and the existing, large Aboriginal population in Coober Pedy. It is as if contemporary lived cultures of Aboriginal local people are being imagined into extinction. By focusing only on the past, it is easier to erase them from the present.

Alongside the construction of Aboriginal people as spirits that infuse the landscape with qualities of desirability, they are positioned as charming zirconias to be consumed alongside fine local produce, live art, and scenic tours. For instance, the South Australian Tourist Commission (STAC) suggests that tourists with “special interests” in backpacking or four wheel driving may like to sample some Indigenous Culture. The backpackers’ page of the South Australian Tourist Commission’s website (2005) features images of didgeridoos and a link to the Commission’s page on Indigenous Culture, which also discusses Aboriginal people mainly in historical terms, or positions them as the special ingredient that makes Australian landscape worthy of tourist consumption. This retrospective/consumed by landscape discursive continuum is broken by a single reference to seeing the “city through the eyes of the Kaurna people” and learning to play the didgeridoo. Interestingly, none of the Commissions’ “special interest” tourist groups are Aboriginal people—nor are there images of Aboriginal people in representations of “special interest” groups, which include Family, Gay, and Lesbian, with Pets, Disability, Backpacker, and Self-Drive.

The SATC (2005) publicity website suggests the tourist might like to:
...see the world’s largest collection of Aboriginal artifacts at the South Australian Museum, get tips on how to play the didgeridoo at Tandanya, or take a guided Tauondi tour to experience the city through the eyes of the Kaurna people. Coorong National Park, south of Adelaide, was declared a Wetland of International Importance in 1975. For thousands of years it’s been home to the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal peoples—their ancient middens (rubbish and fire mounds) strewn with cockle shells and heating stones can still be found at sheltered spots throughout the sand dunes. The Ngarrindjeri gave the region its name of Karangh, meaning “long narrow neck”, and today share their culture at Camp Coorong on Lake Alexandrina. Stay in simple accommodation and learn about the environment, food, traditional life and Dreaming stories of the Coorong. In 1929, a 7000-year-old skeleton of a young boy was discovered on the Murray River in Ngaut Ngaut Conservation Park. Today, you can take a guided tour of the archaeological site and listen as tribal elders unearth Dreamtime legends of the region. (South Australian Tourism Commission, 2005)

No mention is made of who these “tribal elders” are. Contemporary Aboriginal creative practices or art forms, and contemporary Aboriginal engagements with the ways their cultural histories are commodified are also excluded from this discussion of Aboriginal culture. No reference is made to where the proceeds of these cultural tours go, who owns the land being promoted, and who owns the companies that facilitate tourists being able to “stay in simple accommodation and learn about...Dreaming stories of the Coorong.”

Erasure and Spatial Purification

Another example in which historicized imaginings of Aboriginal Australians are deployed to market place can be found in the media corporation Fairfax Digital’s international tourist website. This website is called the Walkabout Australian Travel Guide (2005). “Walkabout” is the name given to the wanderings of Aboriginal people and has deep cultural resonance. But what we see here is the deployment of the concept as a linguistic gimmick rather than a comprehensive engagement with contemporary Aboriginal cultures. Indeed, in relation to Coober Pedy, the Walkabout Australian Travel Guide textually erases the town’s Aboriginal people. It does so via a discussion of the town’s multicultural population:

At the moment there are about 4000 people living in and around the town and over 45 nationalities are represented. The majority of the population is Greek, Yugoslav and Italian (the town has a remarkable similarity to a dusty Mediterranean village) with many Chinese buyers of opals. (Fairfax Digital, 2005)

Aboriginal people are not mentioned here even though they constitute 11.8% of the total population of Coober Pedy (ABS, 2001). This is a notably higher percentage than the Greek population (4.0%; ABS, 2001) and the Yugoslav (2.8%; ABS, 2001) population. Only 1.4% of Coober Pedy residents were born in China. The Italian population of Coober Pedy is so small that it is not listed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

As this example suggests, tourism results in the development of artificial authenticities. These conceal those things that are seen to detract from “best face,” including place-based divisions, stratifications, and conflicts. The packaging and selling of place by the tourist industry is not just about mobilizing marketable differences but also about willing away certain unpalatable differences. In Coober Pedy such willing-away has involved a form of “spatial purification,” an attempt to provide a “clean space” (Sibley, 1995, p.
77) for tourists. Here many local Aboriginal people are made invisible in order to attract tourists.

The development of the Coober Pedy tourist industry has resulted in an increased focus on the image of the town. Even some of the young non-Aboriginal people see the presence of Aboriginal people in the main street as detrimental to this image. Pailin Rieflin, age 13, observes “They [Aboriginal people] make the place look messy. The street is ruined by the drunken Aboriginals.” Chuck Clinton, age 14, agrees:

They look like flies hanging around. They used to drink booze up and down the street, and I have even seen them throw bricks at each other…. A bit of that still goes on. It is not quite as bad but you still do get the occasional people who hang around the streets and do bad things and make Coober Pedy look bad.

Flies are an abject symbol. Aboriginal people in the street are marked as dirty and dangerous. Their public alcohol consumption is seen as a particular issue. Indeed, Aboriginal people are often constructed as a constantly drunk public spectacle. “It is not really something you want to see or you want your children seeing everyday” says Mario Ciccone, age 16. Steps have been taken to remove them from the main street; the establishment of a “dry zone” being the most notable.

The town applied to the Attorney General’s office to make its streets alcohol free. Anybody caught drinking in the street could be moved. Given that mainly Aboriginal people drink outdoors, this change was clearly racist in its intent. It also came to mean that any aboriginal residents who were found drinking in town were dumped in Umoona, whether they resided there or not. This caused such subsequent problems as increased violence and property damage. It also led to a clash between what Cowlishaw (2004, p. 191) calls “respectable and disreputable Aboriginality.” The Umoona community then applied to become a dry area. This move was met by significant opposition from other Coober Pedy townspeople, who realized that they could not so easily sweep public drunkenness out of view to the abject zone of Umoona and neither could they use this excuse to create a “clean space” for the tourist gaze.

Kristeva explains, “that word, ‘fear’...no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all...with a hallucinatory ghostly glimmer” (1982, p. 6). The deployment of abject splitting keeps Aboriginal identity and culture both erasable and marketable. But it also means that the tourist industry constantly “shades off” into a “hallucinatory ghostly glimmer” of fear that the erased will return to “haunt” the industry. A particular fear is associated with what we call “abject agency” (drawing on Cowlishaw, 2004). Such agency arises from “chronic discontent” and “continuing and unresolved rage and resentment which has resulted from past injustices” (Cowlishaw, 2004, pp. 75, 189). It is derived from the derogatory symbolic codes used to abjectify the group in the first place. “Abject agency” involves “taking up an abject position” (Cowlishaw, 2004, p. 158), mocking and exaggerating it through defiance and disrespect, and hurling it back at the original perpetrator. Cowlishaw talks of the ways in which some young Aboriginal men participate in this process. As a result, say, of being noisy or fighting in the street or throwing stones at shop windows, or drinking or chroming (sniffing gasoline), many come into direct contact with the White legal system. She explains how:

Anger and abjection are performed in the court and in the street, using language which confounds, disconcerts and embarrasses the White audience.... [and] seem to confirm the grotesque images of deformed Aboriginality. (2004, p. 74)
Cowlishaw then suggests that: “Experiences and actions that Whites despise can be displayed as triumphant defeat of attempted humiliation” (Cowlishaw, 2004, p. 192). As a consequence, such young men may be treated “like champions” with cries of “Good on you brother.” This form of “desperate excess” (Cowlishaw 2004, p. 163) is designed to evoke extreme discomfort, disgust or dismay in the dominant White population. It can thus be argued that “spatial purification” for the tourist gaze may create precisely the sorts of behaviors it seeks to hide.

Kristeva explains:

...abjection is elaborated by a failure to recognize its kin...hence before they are signifiable—[the subject in question] drives them out...and constitutes his own territory edged by the abject.... Fear cements his compound.... (1982, p. 6)

The splitting of abject Aboriginal people and culture into “compounds” of the desirable and the undesirable can be read in Kristeva’s (1982, p. 6) terms as a refusal to let a population solidify and become fully recognizable to itself and to others; to be understood and to understand itself in all its complexity and ambiguity. So, for Aboriginal boys growing up in Coober Pedy, tourism has a range of different significances, not the least being its abject refusal of their full selfhood.

Moving Abjection?

We look to create possibilities for moving scapes of abjection. We do so by adding spatial, political, and affective density to Appadurai’s global scapes. These scapes intersect with local geometries of race, poverty, and gender. Even minor mobilities within the nation state can be modulated through noxious global ideoscapes and media scapes of abjection. We have illustrated how ethno- and mediascapes abjectify “local” populations in contradictory ways. We have put further flesh on ideas associated with the disjunctive flows of the global cultural economy by offering examples of such flows in and through marginalized places. Further, we developed the notion of “scapes of abjection” to show how affect and abjection work on and in the imagination. They have flow-on effects on economically and culturally marginalized and stigmatized populations of Australian Aborigines. Long-standing injustices are rescripted and reinscribed through their links with contemporary scapes of abjection, highlighting the noxious politics of movement and stasis and the infectious ill-feelings they provoke. At local and global levels, education seems the most critically equipped social process available to move scapes of abjection. Classroom contexts and popular pedagogies such as film, television, radio, Internet, and print media, need to be mobilized as devices for speaking back to, and intercepting, the processes of abjection produced by local and global scapes of abjection.

Note

1. This wider study (Kenway, Kraack, & Hickey-Moody, 2006) considers youthful masculinities and gender relations in marginalized, stigmatized, but also sometimes romanticized and exoticized places beyond the metropolis in the so-called developed West. We thank the Australian Research Council for funding this three-year study, Anna Kraack for her contributions to this chapter, and Palgrave for permission to reprint selections from Kenway, Kraack, and Hickey-Moody (2006).
References


