

**Personas and Places:
Negotiating Myths, Stereotypes
and National Identities**

Edited by
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Foreword to *Personas and Places: Negotiating Myths, Stereotypes and National Identities*

Sean Redmond

National Celebrity

Celebrity culture exists, in part, through intersecting forms of signification and as over-arching and textually specific discursive formations. Celebrities often stand as perfected or flawed creatures, extraordinary and ordinary at the same time; embody identity politics in and around gender, race, class, and sexuality; and give powerful meaning to the imagined body of the nation state. Celebrities are called upon to both ‘glue’ the social imaginary together and to outwardly represent what the nation state wants to be seen it is made of.

In relation to Ireland, for example, Moynagh Sullivan (2007) suggests:

British bands such as the Spice Girls or Take That were openly patriotic in their iconography and in their dress, manufactured Irish bands, such as Boyzone and Westlife, who stormed the Irish and British markets in the 1990s and the early years of this decade, never draped themselves in the tricolour nor riverdanced. So although the boy bands appear, in contrast, innocently apolitical, they implicitly perform not only the newfound success of Celtic Tiger Ireland, but also the reasons for that success (p. 184)

Diane Negra makes a similar argument, when analyzing the star images of Sonja Henie and Shirley Temple, but the analysis here connects their white purity to national recovery, “an element that compensated for the sense of diminished national, white vigour in the 1930s” (Negra, 2001, p. 90). As Richard Dyer notes, Marilyn Monroe transmitted what it was like to be a perfected white woman in a 1950s America dealing with racial difference, and growing female independence (1987). Monroe created the somewhat contradictory ‘experience’ of desirable white womanhood for an America undergoing radical social and political transformation. Her body moved freely, it registered as soft and appealing, the embodiment of girl-like optimism and white womanly sensuality.

National celebrity can of course move us to global connectivity. In Pramod Nayar’s (2015) recent work, celebrity and national identity can be infused with the vernacular of charity and benevolence:

Brand Bollywood Care (BBC for convenience) helps reframe India as a global nation state suffused with benevolent ethics, retaining yet subtly erasing racial, national and geopolitical identifications by merging with, in distinctive fashion, transnational organizations like the United Nations or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (p. 273)

However, Pramod is also at pains to express that a certain amount of legitimacy accrues to BBC due to its vernacular origins and roots. He uses the term “vernacular” fully alert to its racial and imperial roots, and to signal a binary with the ‘global’ interface. As he suggests, “care and charity work are technologies of global citizenship for the Bollywood star. They are conduits of hope and bring hope wherever their benevolence travels” (2015, p. 273).

Transnational stardom occupies a similar position in the global-local geopolitical space. Film stars can operate both as national and nationalist figures of identity – types of ‘social glue’ as noted above – and as international ‘de-nationalized’ entities that speak to and resonate with global audiences. For example, in terms of Hollywood, Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006) argue that star actors such as Russell Crowe, Kate Winslet, Jude Law, Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas function or operate as transnational stars, engaging in a “performance of Americanness” which is “increasingly becoming a ‘universal’ or ‘universalizing’ characteristic in world cinema” (2006, p. 2).

Russell Crowe: Transnational Ocker?

Russell Crowe is a fascinating example of the issues at play when thinking about national celebrity and transnational stardom: he occupies a cultural space when it comes to Australian film stars who are successful in mainstream Hollywood and American auteur cinema, and in Australian (made and set) films. The longevity of this career and the range of Hollywood and auteurist films he has appeared in, suggest a star-actor who can straddle popularist and niche, commercial and artistic terrains. That Crowe is also a national and transnational actor also points towards a mutability and semiotic transferability that allows him to cross cultural borders with relative ease. He is national icon one day, and a figure beyond national borders the next.

Crowe is a remarkable example of the star-actor import and export business: home-grown Australian talent, crafted in part out of national archetypes and identity tropes; and an internationalist figure, able to transcend (de-odorize) his Australianness in the US and global marketplace. He is touched by the glitz and glamour of tinsel town and yet, he is one of Australia’s own prodigal sons.

What is equally fascinating, however, is how Crowe's international success is also 'imported' back into Australia both to validate his talent and the value of Australianness, and to carry forward the signifiers of white-centric Hollywood stardom. Crowe re-enters Australian screen culture as a transnational fusion figure, simultaneously national and international, Australian and American, brute and cultured, ideally white and ordinary, and successful at home and abroad. Crowe's Australianness is 'here' and 'there' and this embodied fusion speaks to the way contemporary white masculinity plays out in contemporary Australia.

Crowe seems to be the personification and carrier of one of the dominant forms of Australian masculine identity: "He is perceived as an 'authentic man', a model of traditional values, a pre-feminist, anti-commodified or anti-metrosexual 'man's man'" (Gottschall, 2014, p. 863). For example, his involvement with the rugby league football team, the South Sydney Rabbitohs, connects him to a range of Australian signifiers and again places him in a male environment in deeply homosocial and parochial relationships. The widely circulated photograph of Crowe in an intense embrace with team captain Sam Burgess, after the Sydney Rabbitohs won the Australian NRL, places him within mateship type scenarios.

Connected to this, however, is the story of the underdog, played out in multiple ways: Crowe was the underdog actor who made it big in Hollywood; The Rabbitohs were the underdog footy team, on the verge of extinction, who Crowe helped re-build and resurrect, his own rags to riches story cementing the low to high mythology of the team. Setting this fable within settler and foundation myths, and one can see how Crowe is a national icon, capturing the qualities of white Australia and the battlers and achievers who make their way.

In this frame, Crowe exists in two cross-connecting representational streams: he is a Hollywood star who lives out the American Dream; and he is the Australian boy next door who is safely one of us. Crowe is in the ideological import/export business: his star image seamlessly moving across divergent national and international spaces. In a contemporary setting, where migration and immigration and indigenous identity unmake this myth, Crowe becomes a form of nationalist social glue. And yet again, not quite.

Crowe is an outsider, born in New Zealand, with a residence in Beverley Hills, whose left-centred politics is well known (he supported Julia Gillard in the 2012 'spill' vote). Crowe's ideological and cultural allegiances are full of fault lines and tensions, in the same way that his star image is. In a very real sense he embodies the complexities of modern global relations. *Cinderella Man* (Howard, 2005), for example, while being set in depression hit America, clearly speaks to the coming GFC and the austerity politics it unleashed across

the globe. Crowe's James J. Braddock, a labourer by day, is everyman set against corporate greed and an uncaring social system. This is a political message that is easily if vexedly imported into Australia.

Crowe's first directorial feature, *The Water Diviner* (2014) perhaps best sums up his contradictory and unravelling ideological function within this contemporary nationalist maelstrom. In an interview about the film he responds, "Growing up in Australia, you tend to see the battle from only one point of view," Crowe says. "I wanted to have the audience realize from the first take, 'Oh, this is not my grandfather's Gallipoli'" (Giamatti, 2005).

The Water Diviner tells the story of an Australian farmer, Joshua Connor, played by Crowe, who loses his three sons at Gallipoli and travels there four years later to find their bodies. On one level, the film draws upon all the masculine qualities of the Crowe star-character image: he is a "paragon of manhood" (D'Addario, 2015), wanting to return his sons to their rightful resting place and honour their sacrifice.

Crowe's character is given the power of insight: he can find water in the desert and this clairvoyance also enables him to find his sons, as if it is his manifest destiny to do so. On another level, however, the film is critical of the 'masculinity' and nationalist fervour of the Gallipoli landings, one of Australia's foundational 'mateship' myths. The film in part characterizes the Gallipoli campaign as an unprovoked invasion of a sovereign Nation State, and offers us access to the Turkish point of view, allowing audiences to also see the suffering they experienced. There are clear global markers here, not least the forced invasion of Iraq. However, one can also see the film as an allegory about the white settlers' invasion of Australia at the 'birth' of the modern nation state.

What Crowe's star image reveals is probably the unstable state of the nation, blinded by its settler past, holding onto its foundational myths, and yet forcefully aware of their limitations and of their past-tenseness. Australia is at a crossroad, the right wanting to set up borders and keep out undesirables, and the left wanting to re-navigate and recast what the nation state is. Australia is very much set within the mirroring fantasy of Crowe's unstable star image. At the level of stardom, de-odorized star images work globally and yet they also retain and maintain their national(ist) inflections; as import and export exercises they move representations, dreams, ideologies across the globe and closer to home.

Bridging Gaps

The inflections and directions taken in this wonderfully exciting and innovative collection speak very much to the threads I have pulled together above. The volume does indeed bridge the gaps between nation and the transnational, the imaginary and the bodied, and the historical and contemporary. The authors collected here offer us a series of fascinating case studies that take us from the migrant and settler shores of Australia to the American success myth, from the biopic of Jackie Kennedy to the dresses of Michelle Obama, and from colonial myths, New Zealand celebrity activism, to the photographic representations of Zambia.

National celebrity in this collection is fleshed, spatial, and political, enabling the reader to explore the way celebrity has worked and continues to work in shaping and mapping the affective ideologies of nation states. What is particularly impressive is the way dominant media nations are juxtaposed across minority nation states, so the reader can readily access the way power is exercised and channelled in the present and across contemporary media history.

Case studies include a star analysis of Chris Hemsworth, in some ways a mirroring figure for Russell Crowe; an astute new reading of the star image of Cary Grant; an exploration of two former Presidential Ladies, Jackie O and Michelle Obama, who if read comparatively, demonstrate the way history, cultural memory, gender and ethnicity have shaped the American Dream; case study analysis of three Australian national stars, Stan Grant, Adam Hills, Dami Im, each of whom exist on the cultural margins, allowing the authors to demonstrate how celebrity culture creates zones of exclusivity within the national imaginary; a post-colonial reading of how Zambia is photographically represented through a surveying gaze that very often Others its borders; and an advocacy reading of New Zealand filmmaker Taika Waititi's support for the Human Rights Campaign "Give nothing to racism". Taken together they are a timely and important set of chapters that takes our understanding of national celebrity into vital new areas of analysis.

Sean Redmond, February 2018

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Introduction: Representations and (Mis)representations

Jackie Raphael and Celia Lam

The significance of celebrity studies lies, in part, in its capacity to interrogate, to negotiate and to critique that complex entity known broadly as ‘society’. Within its multifaceted manifestations of culture (and cultures), societies define, and re-define themselves. They construct meanings around (and through) which its members locate sites of identification and signification. As high profile individuals possessive of signifying potential, celebrities represent issues that are both micro and macro in nature; simultaneously embodying both the personal and national. They are, in the words of Sean Redmond in the Foreword to this volume, “called upon to both ‘glue’ the social imaginary together and to outwardly represent what the nation state wants to be seen it is made of” (p. 1).

The chapters in this volume reflect on the role and function of celebrity figures and media representations thereof to uphold and challenge national imaginaries. Through a series of case studies, this book explores the intersections between representations of places and people. It interrogates the methods through which national myths are constructed, and examines the limitations of national identities. It offers critical reflection on the issues of race, gender, and disability/ability in the national imaginary of nations such as Australia, the United States, New Zealand and Zambia.

Personas and Places

This book is divided into three key sections: Part I: (Mis)representing Countries and Cultures, Part II: Representing People and Society, and Part III: Representing Gender and Nations. Part I offers critical analysis on racial representation. Jackie Raphael and Celia Lam analyze Chris Hemsworth’s Tourism Australian Ambassador Campaign and its perpetuation of white and male-centric discourses in association with Australia identity. Kerstin Hacker explores globalized representations of Zambian culture that reinforce stereotypical discourses of Africa. Through her account of photographic representations by Zambian citizens, Hacker challenges the established narrative and offers a postcolonial image of Zambia. Both chapters suggest a need for change in the media representation of national cultures.

Part II of the book focuses on how famous identities embody and challenge existing notions of national identity. Louise St Guillaume, Ellen Finlay and

Celia Lam explore how a ‘normalized’ Australian identity is both reinforced and challenged by Australian celebrities who exist on the cultural margins of Australian society. Through case studies on Stan Grant, Adam Hills and Dami Im, representations of race and disability/ability in contemporary Australian identity are explored. Similarly, Angelique Nairn and Frances Nelson explore themes of race through their case study of New Zealand director Taika Waititi and the social campaign he led. These chapters broaden the issues of who the public are and how they are represented (or not represented) in the media by famous personas.

Part III explores themes of gender through case studies of Michelle Obama, the characterization of Jackie Kennedy in the film *Jackie* (2016), and Cary Grant. Each chapter investigates the connection between the celebrities’ personas and the representation of America. Jo Coghlan focuses on how Obama’s political status reimagines notions of womanhood in the United States. While Melanie Piper, examines the American myth and idealized notions of femininity through a character study of Jackie Kennedy. Belinda Glynn’s analysis explores how the myth of the American Dream is used to recuperate the transgressive masculinity of the star persona of English-born Cary Grant. Overall, this book addresses themes of gender, race, culture, persona, myths and stereotypes, broadening the dialogue on national identity.

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PART I:
(Mis)representing Countries and Cultures