GETTING “WOMEN” ON BUTCHER’S PAPER AT THE *AUSTRALIA 2020 SUMMIT*: “SOCIAL INCLUSION” AND WOMEN’S PLACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Just over a month after the *Australia 2020 Summit* an extraordinary ‘first’ was reported in the Australian media. Two Australian women, Cheryl and Nikki Bart, became the first mother and daughter team to scale the summit of Mt Everest, having climbed the tallest peak on every other continent.¹ Well, I thought, from my vantage point of a month’s contemplation since the excitement of being a summiteer: ‘That’s one way of getting women on to a summit!’ The media interest in the Bart story suggests at least two things; women can do anything, as we have been saying for years, but we are still doing ‘firsts’ because women still experience many barriers as they try to do everything. And while Cheryl and Nikki were toiling up that awesome mountain, 1,000 people met in Canberra at that other Summit ‘to explore the challenges facing Australia over the next decade and beyond’.²

Part of the purpose of this article is to provide a narrative — a personal story of attending and participating in the Summit. However, another purpose is to explore the way in which women were included in and excluded from the processes, content and discussions of that event, in the hope that the analysis may assist in formulating ways to enhance effective strategic thinking, policy development and service delivery which specifically addresses the needs of and opportunities for women in Australia over the next decade and beyond.

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¹ *Mother-Daughter Team Reaches Summit of Mount Everest*, 24, May, 2008 accessed on 31 May, 2008 at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,357929,00.html>

² *Program*, ‘Overview’, p 1

1.1 I'm Going!

At about 9.30am on the morning of Saturday 29 March, 2008 my friend Danielle rang me to ask: 'So are you going? I saw outside a newsagent that the list has been published.' It was only three weeks before the *Australia 2020 Summit* would commence in Canberra and four weeks after the closure date for nominations. This pace of process is a feature of the Summit to which I will return.

I had actually opened *The Weekend Australian* by the time of the phone call but had missed the smallish notice on the front page that advised that the 1,000 selected participants were named in the *Inquirer*.³ I expected not to find my name because I had not heard anything since submitting my nomination on 29 February, but I scanned through the list, noting its break up into the ten discussion areas or 'streams' to be covered, and the further break up into states and territories. And there amongst the twelve Queenslanders in the 'Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion' stream list, I found my name!

To my surprise, despite working in the community sector in Queensland in various ways for over twenty years, I did not personally know any of the other eleven co-summiteers in this group.⁴ I learned at the Summit that many summiteers had a similar experience. The Steering Committee certainly chose many people who were outside of the 'usual suspects' in terms of government consultation — and the diversity and freshness created by these groupings of people who did not have a long history with each other was one of the strengths of the Summit.⁵ Further nearly all 1,000 people were given the same space in the published list. Whoever it was, however well known — everyone was just in the list — in about size 6 font! There were nine photographs of some particularly distinguished participants, but I felt that the equalitarian way of recording us boded well for the Summit.

Twenty years in the community legal centre sector has left me a little cynical about governments and process, so I was a bit surprised at the genuine sense of honour and pride I felt to be selected. I considered soberly that, having nominated myself (at the instigation of others), I now had an obligation to contribute to making this event positive, to be part of something energising and exciting for Australia. I also knew that there would be criticism and that we would have to be robust about that. As Professor Michael Wesley said in his opening address:

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³ The 'Inquirer' is a weekly segment of *The Australian*, Australia's most 'national' newspaper. It contains a deeper analysis of issues covered in the news and wider social matters. The list of participants was on p 24.

⁴ I did, however, know a number of summiteers in the other streams, in particular the Governance stream. Perhaps not surprising for a lawyer.

⁵ I have attended a number of feedback sessions in Queensland since the Summit and other participants have also made this point.

In our conversations this weekend we will discuss major challenges and worrying problems, aspirations and comparisons. There's some cynicism out there — as there probably is in here — about this 2020 process. Of course there is scepticism: this is Australia.⁶

1.2 Why Did I Nominate?

One of the reasons I decided to nominate was because of the lack of women appointed to the critical roles of the 'independent co-chairs' for each stream. These were people of standing in the Australian community with expertise in the broad stream topic. The ten independent co-chairs, led by the Summit Co-convenor, Professor Glyn Davis AC,⁷ made up the Steering Committee which commenced its work before the Summit began. They assisted in the selection of the 100 participants in their streams and contributed towards preparation for the Summit. Each of the streams was co-chaired by a government Minister and a non-government person at the Summit.

The only woman originally appointed was Cate Blanchett — to the Creativity co-chair. Of course, she was BIG news in every way; the irresistible fascination the media has for movie celebrity, natural interest in a successful international actress agreeing to play a serious real role — and she was in the final stages of pregnancy. But also news — bad news — was the fact that she was the only woman and women were outraged. Claire Braund from Women on Boards asked:

... why is it that the top 11 people, the first in the class, don't include at least one woman of substance in the areas of science, economics, health, rural affairs, governance, sustainability? Is there not one other woman with the qualification and experience who can join Cate Blanchett and assume a leadership role in this important summit?⁸

I had complained about this to all who would listen, so when tempted to nominate on the last possible day by a friend and former colleague, I realised I could either continue talking about it or give myself a chance to participate directly. So I nominated, determined to emphasise my work with women as what I would bring. In fact, after nominations had closed the original independent co-chair of the Indigenous Stream, Dr Kelvin Kong, had to withdraw for personal reasons and he was replaced by the thoughtful and gracious Dr Jackie Huggins⁹, a woman of the Bidjara and Birri-Gubba Juru peoples, a Queenslander and a friend. Julianne Schulz¹⁰ was appointed as a second independent co-chair to the Creativity Stream after Cate Blanchett gave birth to her baby, Ignatius, on the Sunday before the Summit. As far as I saw, Cate still attended the whole Summit — with Ignatius.

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⁶ Wesley Michael *Summit Opening Plenary*, 19 April, Great Hall, Parliament House, p 7, accessed on 31 May, 2008 at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/business/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/2020-Plenary12.pdf> Professor Michael Wesley is the Director of the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, Queensland.

⁷ Vice-Chancellor of The University of Melbourne.

⁸ Claire Braund on 'Outcry over lack of women in 2020 Summit', *PM*, ABC Radio National, interviewed by Peta Donald on 26 February, 2008, accessed on 1 June, 2008 at <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2173261.htm>

⁹ Deputy-director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland.

¹⁰ Professor in the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University editor of the *Griffith Review*

1.3 Background to the Summit

Calling a Summit of the people of this nature is, perhaps, a brave thing for a Prime Minister to do. After twelve years out of government, the Australian Labor Party, under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, seems to want to demonstrate to Australians that they will do things differently from the Liberal / National Coalition under an apparently out-of-touch and out-of-date John Howard.¹¹ Even the ten topic areas demonstrated a commitment to a new set of priorities for public debate. They were:

- *Productivity Agenda* — education, skills, training, science and innovation
- *Australian Economy* — the future of the Australian economy
- *Sustainability and Climate Change* — population, sustainability, climate change, water and the future of our cities
- *Rural Australia* — future directions for rural industries and rural communities
- *Health* — a long-term national health strategy — including the challenges of preventative health, workforce planning and the ageing population
- *Communities and Families* — strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion
- *Indigenous Australia* — options for the future of Indigenous Australia
- *Creative Australia* — towards a creative Australia: the future of the arts, film and design
- *Australian Governance* — the future of Australian governance: renewed democracy, a more open government (including the role of the media), the structure of the Federation and the rights and responsibilities of citizens
- *Australia's Future in the World* — Australia's future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world¹²

Some early media was positive, with *The Australian* proclaiming it was 'not another talkfest'.¹³ The Prime Minister's low-obligation/high-hope statement that the Summit 'is a chance to "shake the tree" and see what ideas fall to the ground'¹⁴ suggested a new permission for wide ranging discussion about issues which had seemed forbidden territory — at least under the previous government.

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¹¹ If the resounding election defeat, including the former PM's loss of his own seat of Bennelong in Sydney, can be read to suggest this.

¹² 'Summit Topics' accessed on 18 May, 2008 at <<http://www.australia2020.gov.au/topics/index.cfm>>

¹³ *The Australian*, 2020 summit not just another talkfest, 4 February, 2008, accessed on 13 May, 2008 at <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23153777-16741,00.html>>

¹⁴ *ibid*

1.4 Community Consultation

New ideas about community consultation and community engagement have been emerging in Australia and internationally¹⁵ and the Summit seems to be a bold example of this. According to the Australian Public Service Commission, 'Canadians have been leaders in cultivating relationships with stakeholders (mainly, the public) to better determine what services they want and need and how effectively (or otherwise) the government is delivering these.'¹⁶ There have now been two national conferences on Dialogue and Deliberation, in Canada in 2005 and 2007.¹⁷

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies a three-level model of citizen engagement in government policy-making. The first two are information and consultation, but the third level is 'active participation — a relationship based on partnership with government, where citizens engage in defining policy content and process'.¹⁸ The State of Service Report 2006-07 notes that this is a 'difficult challenge' but that such active participation 'has the potential to address some of the more complex, intractable issues — sometimes referred to as "wicked" problems — facing Australia, for example, in the areas of public health, or natural resource management'.¹⁹

1.5 Before the Summit

As I explained, the immediate impetus for me to nominate was a phone call from a former colleague at Women's Legal Service suggesting that I do. She stressed how important it would be to ensure that issues for women and domestic violence were on the agenda and my long years in the sector and position in academia might mean I had a chance to be selected into the Communities and Families Stream. Put that way I investigated the website and discovered that nominees did not submit a curriculum vitae, but rather had to 'briefly set out [their] experience relevant to the particular working group' they had selected and provide a 100 word 'supporting statement' as to why they should participate as a delegate at the Summit. Brevity is not my strong suit and it took a surprisingly long time to reduce my first missive to 100 words!

In the experience box I emphasised my background at the Women's Legal Service working with women subjected to violence in the home and advised that I was now an academic teaching and researching in this area. My supporting statement endeavoured to link the themes of that stream:

I believe that domestic and family violence are profoundly linked to the social exclusion of a significant minority of women in Australia. These insidious forms of violence deeply affect children and create barriers to employment and full participation in community life for

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¹⁵ See, for example, UK House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee's report, *Choice, Voice and Public Services*, March, 2005

¹⁶ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report*, 2004–05, Australian Government, p 53

¹⁷ See the website for the Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation at <http://www.c2d2.ca>

¹⁸ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report*, 2006–07, Australian Government, p 252

¹⁹ Australian Public Service Commission, 2006–07, above, p 272. Both issues mentioned here were amongst the topics for discussion at the 2020 Summit.

women, as well as causing physical and psychological harm and contributing to homelessness and poverty.

I have worked on enhancing the legal system for women, particularly in family law, domestic violence and child protection, all my professional life. My fifteen years in community legal centres has provided me with a broad understanding of the community sector in Australia.

There are two main reasons why I chose these words. Firstly, always a lawyer, I stuck to the rules with exactly 100 words and tried to be strategic, including key words and possible emerging themes for the stream identified on the website and in the media. Secondly, this issue is my passion. It is what I saw in my client work at Women's Legal Service and before in private practice in 1980's. Domestic violence has an impact on women long after they have separated from a violent partner. It affects their self-confidence and ability to take up opportunities, in employment, education and other life chances — by stealing away permission to succeed and enjoy. I teach my family law students about domestic violence not just in terms of its importance in children's cases, but also in relation to its adverse impact on the economic consequences of relationship breakdown for women who have lived with violent partners.

A website was established for participants and this gave us access to the public submissions and space for on-line discussion. We were all asked to put up 100 words on our idea for our stream and 100 words about something we had changed our minds about in the last 10 years. I tried to read what I could of the website — but the time frame was very short — and many of us had squeezed the Summit into very full lives. In the three weeks I had between the announcement of participants and attendance, the middle week was committed to attending and speaking at the National Family Law Conference²⁰ in Adelaide. My paper was about the intersection of family violence and the new shared parenting regime created under amendments to the *Family Law Act 1975* (C'th) which commenced in July 2006.²¹ This is the issue I shared with co-summiteers in my 100 words.

After consulting with a range of colleagues and friends it became clear that problems for women and children with the new family law legislation was the specific issue I should emphasise so, from my hotel room in Adelaide, suffused by days (or daze) of family law and its practitioners (including social workers and social scientists), I added this to the website:

It is critical to ensure that future family law policy takes careful account of the immediate and long term consequences of domestic and family violence and child abuse. Early research suggests that the new shared parenting legislative regime and the prescriptive requirements for 'advisers' may be leading to agreements and court orders which place children in dangerous and / or stressful post separation living arrangements, particularly where there is or has been violence — but even more broadly. The adverse financial impact of these reforms and the forthcoming child support changes on women and mothers will require policy attention when they are better understood.

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²⁰ A biennial event organised by the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia

²¹ *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006*

2.0 WHY DID I CHOOSE THE NEW SHARED PARENTING REGIME AS MY ISSUE?²²

2.1 *The Joint Custody Inquiry*

In 2003 the Howard government announced (yet another) Inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation. The central term of reference was:

... whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent, and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be rebutted.²³

At the time key Australian researchers acknowledged that 'little [was] known about parents who opt for shared care of their children, how these arrangements are structured, and how well they work.'²⁴ Research in other countries also suggests that there is 'a lack of long-term follow-up studies to match children's adjustment with specific arrangements post-separation within the context of family violence'²⁵. There are no easy solutions for families who separate, particularly where there is violence, abuse or issues of social disadvantage. The various States of the USA have witnessed a kaleidoscope of regimes being introduced, amended and repealed from explicit statements that there is no presumption in favour of any form of custody arrangement to requirements that the court must give reasons if joint custody is not ordered.²⁶

2.2 *The New Australian Model*

The ultimate outcome of the Inquiry has been a range of sweeping changes to the family law system. I believe that, as a package, they pose a risk to women and children who have lived with

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²² I have drawn this section of the article largely from the paper I presented in Adelaide: Zoe Rathus, 'Do Family Lawyers Fear Family Violence as Much as their Clients? Keeping family violence on the agenda in the new world of shared parenting' Conference Paper, 13th National Family Law Conference, *Families: Broken Blended and Mended*, Adelaide, April, 2008.

²³ Terms of Reference, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs at <<http://wopared.parl.net/house/committee/fca/childcustody/index.htm>> The complete term of reference was: 'given that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration, what other factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their parent post separation, in particular whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent, and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be rebutted.'

²⁴ Smyth B, Caruana C and Ferro A, 'Some whens, hows and whys of shared care: What separated parents who spend equal time with their children say about parenting', Conference Paper presented at the *Australian Social Policy Conference*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, 2003 at p i

²⁵ Jaffe P, Crooks C and Bala N, *Making Appropriate Parenting Arrangements in Family Violence Cases: Applying the literature to identify promising practices*, Family, Children and Youth Section Research Report, Department of Justice, Canada, 2005 at p viii, accessed on 31 January, 2008 at <<http://www.canada-justice.net/en/ps/pad/reports/2005-FCY-3/index.html>>

²⁶ Dwyer J, 'A Taxonomy of Children's Existing Rights in State Decision Making about their Relationships' (2003) 11 *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, 845 at pp 911-912. In the USA the term 'joint custody' has different meanings in different places, including what we would call equal shared parental responsibility as well as shared parenting time.

violent partners and fathers because they militate against finding safe and stable post-separation arrangements.

Some of the features are:

- (almost) mandatory mediations through the newly established Family Relationship Centres:
    - o with a 'script'²⁷ requiring family dispute resolution practitioners (as well as family lawyers and other important role players) to discuss equal time shared parenting with newly separated parents; and
    - o no lawyers allowed
- Australian academic, Rachael Field, has written extensively about mediation for women who are negotiating with a violent former partner. She argues for a legal advocate to be present in these cases to facilitate both good process and outcomes. The mandatory exclusion of lawyers from FRC's is therefore concerning.²⁸
- two potentially competing legislative aims reflected in both the objects clause and the section setting out the 'primary considerations' for determining what is in the best interests of children²⁹:
    - o the benefit to children of both of their parents having a meaningful involvement in their lives; and
    - o protecting children from physical or psychological harm from abuse, neglect or family violence.
  - a rebuttable presumption that equal shared parental responsibility³⁰ is in the best interests of children
  - a legislative pathway whereby the application of the presumption by judicial officers leads to specifically favoured 'physical custody' outcomes
  - a 'friendly parent' provision³¹ which renders relevant the willingness of a parent to facilitate contact with the other parent. I argue this has the potential to silence a protective parent from raising their concerns about the other parent's abuse³²

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²⁷ See s63DA. There is an implied acknowledgement in the legislative package that shared care can be problematic in families where there has been violence, but there is no presumption against it in those cases.

²⁸ See: Field Rachael, 'A Feminist Model of Mediation that centralises the role of lawyers as advocates for participants who are victims of domestic violence' (2004) 20 *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 65 ; Field Rachael and Crowe Jonathan 'The Construction of Rationality in Australian Family Dispute Resolution: A Feminist Analysis' (2007) 27 *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 97. An interesting study undertaken recently in North Carolina showed that when lawyers were involved in mediation processes this tends to 'decrease the number of women who feel constrained to agree to joint custody'. Reynolds S, Harris C and Peebles R 'Back to the Future: An Empirical Study of Child Custody Outcomes', [2007] 85 *California Law Review*, 1629 at 1670.

²⁹ See s60B(1) and s60CC(2).

³⁰ In Australia this means the major long term decision-making powers and responsibilities — what used to be called 'guardianship'.

³¹ Section 60CC(3)(c)

³² I discussed these types of provisions in some detail in Rathus Zoe 'Shifting the Gaze: Will past violence be silenced by a further shift of the gaze to the future under the new family law system?' (2007) 21 *Australian Journal of Family Law*, 87

2.3 Some Emerging Concerns

Early research about the changes suggests that shared physical caring could be occurring at times when it is not necessarily beneficial for the children involved. McIntosh and Long have found that there was a significant increase in children in a substantially shared care arrangement in the post reform cases they examined.³³ Of the children in their study who entered the system, 28% were in a substantially shared care³⁴ at the beginning and 46% left in this kind of arrangement.³⁵ The concerning feature of this study is that '... a significant proportion of children emerged from Court under conditions that meant substantially shared care between their parents posed a psychological strain upon them'. The researchers suggest that 'caution' should be exercised in the 'current climate'³⁶.

Of further concern is an emerging analysis of shared parenting arrangements in other countries.³⁷ Although different studies show different outcomes there are suggestions that:

- joint physical custody arrangements are sometimes used by high-conflict families to 'resolve' disputes; and
- dual residence arrangements are the least durable or stable — with mother residence being the most.

Regarding the second point, this will have adverse financial consequences for women and children if the property settlement was based on shared care. Further, there is some research which suggests that parents do not even always adjust the child support arrangements to reflect reality when the children's living arrangements are fluid or change. These were the thoughts in my mind as I headed to the Summit — but I knew it would be difficult to outline such complex issues and put forward BIG idea solutions to such a specific issue at this a broad-ranging gathering. I was right!

3.0 THE AUSTRALIAN 2020 SUMMIT

3.1 Public Submissions

In line with ideas of community consultation, the government invited public submissions and 8,800 submissions were received before the Summit commenced despite the short time frame³⁸.

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³³ McIntosh J and Long C, *The Child Responsive Program, operating within the Less Adversarial Trial: A follow up study of parent and child outcomes: Report to the Family Court of Australia*, July 2007, accessed at http://www.familycourt.gov.au/presence/resources/file/eb00174f35b4753/CRP_Follow_up_Report_2007.pdf

³⁴ Five nights per fortnight or more

³⁵ McIntosh and Long, at 9

³⁶ McIntosh and Long, at 18

³⁷ Smyth B and Moloney L 'Changes in Post-separation Parenting over Time: A brief review' (2008) 14(1) *Journal of Family Studies*

³⁸ *Australia 2020 Summit Final Report*, p 1, accessed on 31 May, 2008 at http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/final_report/2020_summit_report_full.pdf

Submissions can still be lodged. Nearing the Summit, the organisers posted interim strategic overviews of the public submissions received for each stream.

Interestingly problems with the family law system made it into the list of key issues in the Communities and Families Stream interim strategic overview whereas violence against women did not. Some of the key issues were:

- Concerns about the family law system
- Family and work life balance
- Issues for the community sector, including the costs of public liability insurance and the recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers in the sector
- Homelessness
- The need for a 'new child protection framework' with the Commonwealth taking a 'more active role'
- Difficulties faced by carers
- Support for people with disabilities and their families
- The aging society

3.2 Arrival at the Summit — 18 April, 2008

When we registered at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet we were issued with our hanging labels — our keys to entering the Summit. The lanyard colours represented your stream. The Families and Communities stream had a light blue lanyard and we all slowly learned the colours of the different streams. It became a starting point for many conversations as you looked at someone's label and said 'So you must be in the Rural Stream (purple as I recall). The label simply had your name, that you were a participant (as opposed to a facilitator, scribe etc) and your stream. It had no other information about you — again contributing to the equalitarian ambience of the event.

We also received a quite comprehensive *Program* full of useful information. I got almost no chance to read the contents until well after the Summit — but it has proved very useful in unpacking and analysing the weekend. The background information summarised the public submissions and other ideas from the various Summit meetings held around Australia. There was also a Communiqué from the Youth Summit and a Feedback Report from the Schools' Summit.

After registering, most participants proceeded to a reception at the National Portrait Gallery, at Old Parliament House. This was really the first opportunity for many of us to start to meet the other 999 summiteers and get a taste of the forthcoming event. I have been to many conferences but I do not think I have ever seen people so determined to mix and mingle. It seemed that people felt that this is what you were there to do. Because of the diversity selected, almost no-one knew many others well. You could not flock with, or even find, lots of birds of your feather. Also, the conversations were different. They started from the colour of the lanyard and moved to ideas and issues — not what do you do, where do you work?

3. 3 Day One: The Opening

We were welcomed to country by Mathilda House, a traditional custodian of the land of the Canberra region. But before her welcome commenced, we all experienced one of the most memorable moments of the Summit. After she came on to the stage and placed her speech on the lectern, she looked up to see a room full of summiteers still standing after the arrival of the Prime Minister. She paused and said: "Am I supposed to say you can all sit down?" and started to laugh — with open arms and heart. And so we all laughed. And then clapped and sat down. The tears were already bubbling.

'I'd like to welcome you all here to our land. To the 2020 Summit.' She then spoke in her own language for a short time, afterwards explaining the meaning of some of her words: 'we are walking on a path.' There is 'the sun and its shining' and there is the 'laughter of the children'.³⁹

She was followed by Sana Nakata, a young Torres Strait Islander woman who described her personal history as growing up 'between two Australias — one was a story of dispossession, the other was a story of the dispossessors'. And Sana shared with us her generous vision for the future:

The Australia I imagine for 2020 is one that allows all our stories to be heard in a different kind of conversation. Present not only in our national debates and policy making but also in our sense of humour, our theatre, films and literature, our schools and university halls, around our barbeques and our yum cha tables.⁴⁰

Finally we heard from Professor Michael Wesley, Director the Griffith Asia Institute.⁴¹ His speech traversed a range of issues confronting Australia with insight and warmth, was a talking point at the Summit and has been commended since. He described how Australia was a continent which 'calls forth from its original inhabitants and more recent settlers a spirit of determination, ingenuity and pragmatism.' The living generations 'are the creators, the inheritors, the beneficiaries, the custodians, of a remarkable era of prosperity, peace and innovation. Yet this very success creates challenges we did not foresee, and there are millions who do not share its benefits. The world we have inherited is remarkable, but fragile. ... That world is passing. The English-speaking powers and their close allies must now negotiate with Asia's giants to manage the big issues. The rules governing how we act and what we can achieve in the world will be less familiar to us. *Old certainties no longer apply*'. This last comment became a mantra throughout his presentation and defined his, and perhaps the Summit's, central theme.

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³⁹ I accessed this presentation from the Summit website video streaming facility at <http://australia2020.viostream.com/streaming/opening.aspx>

⁴⁰ I accessed her precise words from the Summit website video streaming facility at <http://australia2020.viostream.com/streaming/opening.aspx>

⁴¹ Wesley Michael *Summit Opening Plenary*, 19 April, Great Hall, Parliament House. The whole address is available at <<http://www.griffith.edu.au/business/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/2020-Plenary12.pdf>>

3.4 The Strengthening Communities, Supporting Families and Social Inclusion Stream : Who Were We?

Our Stream co-chairs were the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for Housing and the Status of Women and Tim Costello AO, chief executive of World Vision Australia. Early on Tanya Plibersek spoke of connectedness and the importance of interconnectedness in the community for its members became an underlying theme.

Although every stream was diverse in its selected participants, perhaps our group was the most varied in terms of background, passion, interests and commitment to issues we wanted to 'put on the table'. We were derived from voluntary groups, community organisations, schools, academia and countless other places across Australia. The participants worked in education; health; with refugees and migrants; on violence against women; child protection and safety; men as perpetrators and victims of abuse; in prisons; on work / life balance; with people addicted to alcohol, drugs and other harmful substances; and in Indigenous communities. We brought knowledge, skills and desire for change across many issues and concerns and about many different groups and communities in Australian society. Many of the faiths of the world were also represented — noticeably at least Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism.⁴² This diversity brought great depth and richness to our discussions but made our early brainstorming very difficult because we could have discussed nearly everything on the agenda at the whole Summit!

3.5 Facilitation Process

A number of organisations provided facilitators pro bono — and everyone I spoke to commended their hard work and diligence. Each team employed its own process. Our lead facilitator was Hal Bisset AM, originally a teacher who has worked in a research advocacy organisation about housing and has expertise working in and advising the non-government sector. The team were professional and dedicated in an eclectic and passionate group of people. All the streams really only had four sessions — (A) Saturday 10.30am to 12.30pm, (B) 1.30pm to 3.30pm, (C) 4.00pm to 5.00pm and (D) Sunday 10.30am to 12.30pm. As can be imagined, it was a very difficult process to imagine and then manage. In simple form our process was:

- (A) brain storming of some of the biggest challenges and issues we believed faced Australia;

During lunch the facilitators turned all of this into six 'priority themes' which became our framework.

- (B) After lunch we were told we could work on three of the themes. You had to start with one and then move on to two more — always building on what those before had started. Someone from each group always stayed behind with the facilitator to explain the decisions / outcomes to the next comers.

During afternoon tea these ideas were summarised under the headings of the six themes.

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⁴² A special Summit of 50 Jewish leaders was held on 14 April because the 2020 Summit took place during Passover.

- (C) In the last session on Saturday we had to vote on the ideas which had emerged. We were given one sticker to use under each of the themes. A range of diverse ideas / concerns had always been noted.

Overnight, from all reports, the facilitators from all streams worked for hours trying to encapsulate the discussions of Day One in a way which would assist with the final session on Sunday.

- (D) Create the 'House'.⁴³ This was to be our BIG ideas.

The 'House' was a pro-forma of how to structure the ideas which were to be presented. It was to contain 'Ambitions and Goals', 'Priority Themes' and 'Top Ideas'. We were just given those headings and had to fill in the rest.

The Sunday morning became an impassioned debate in which we initially nearly discarded all the work from Saturday but then found ways to re-think and repackage ideas, dispose of confused concepts, argue through to some clear consensus on a range of important matters which had been central to the conversation and agree to put up some ideas on which there was not total consensus.

At a community feedback session organised by the *Griffith Review*, a participant in the Security Stream⁴⁴ reminded us all that perhaps the summitters had not had time for the well documented stages of group dynamics to take their course: forming, storming, norming and performing.⁴⁵ I am inclined to agree with this. However, I also think that the event envisaged had to happen over a weekend. One can argue that more preparatory time and a little more time together would have assisted the group dynamic — but it may not have meant a 'better' outcome.

3.6 The Youth Summit Briefing

At the beginning we received a brief report back from the Youth Summiteer who had been selected as the delegate from the Youth Summit to our stream, Samah (Sam) Hadid. Sam is a 20 year old Muslim woman from New South Wales with a degree in communications, more study underway and a range of community projects, including her own non-profit community magazine.⁴⁶ They had four big ideas from the same stream:

- reform of funding models (shifting the emphasis from crisis management to early intervention and prevention)
- national migrant and refugees settlement strategy
- paid parental leave
- safe relationships education

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⁴³ I don't know why it was called this, but it was a term used throughout the streams.

⁴⁴ Redlich Garry 'Stepping Forward from the Summit', *Griffith Review*, Public Seminar at the State Library of Queensland, 7 May, 2008, personal notes.

⁴⁵ A concise explanation of this concept developed in 1965 by Bruce Tuckman can be found at <http://www.chimaeraconsulting.com/tuckman.htm>

⁴⁶ *Profiles of the 11 delegates elected to attend the Australia 2020 Summit*, accessed on 20 May, 2008 at http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/youth_summit_11delegates.rtf

There are some interesting synergies with and contrasts to what emerged in our conversations and decisions and some of these are identified in the discussion below. It is notable that specific reference was made to the idea that 'children should have more opportunities to spend time with their fathers'.⁴⁷ Although, from the context, I think this referred to intact families, it is still notable that it was fathers rather than mothers who rated a special mention.

3.7 The Reports

After the closure of the Summit, as we left, we were all handed an *Interim Report* which was posted on the internet quite quickly. The unfortunate shame is that what the *Interim Report* really contains is the discussions and decisions as they stood at the end of Saturday. It seems that no-one accurately predicted the polite but firm 'coups' of Sunday where most streams seriously re-worked their package, having slept on and processed ideas and talked with many from their stream and others at the various gatherings on offer on Saturday night. All Streams made critical and passionately debated changes on the Sunday morning and the final outcomes are subtly, and sometimes significantly, different. I believe that this led to some of the early disquiet reported amongst summiteers after the event. *The Australian* reported on 23 April, 2008 that 'some participants [are] saying they cannot recognise the "big ideas" attributed to them'.⁴⁸ This was a time when the pace of things and the determination to get information out to the public quickly reaped a negative, if unintended, consequence.

Until 31 May the best reflection of what we decided was contained in a document which was posted to the website, perhaps in early May, under the heading: 'The *Australia 2020* Summit — The Record'. These are powerpoint summaries of the Sunday sessions.⁴⁹ I have used the information from these slides to discuss our final outcomes and have drawn on the Interim Report, my notes and a hand out we were given by the facilitators on Sunday morning to explain how we got there.

On 31 May, just as this article was going to press, the government posted the *Final Report* on the website. It is 399 pages long and provides a comprehensive account of the discussions. It has not been possible for me to digest its richness, but I have included some aspects to illuminate the discussion.

3.8 What We Decided

We finally decided on a statement about how we would like to envisage Australia in 2020.

By 2020, Australia is known throughout the world for its diverse, compassionate, fair and respectful society.

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⁴⁷ *Australia 2020 Summit Final Report*, p 174, accessed on 31 May, 2008 at http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/final_report/2020_summit_report_full.pdf

⁴⁸ Salusinsky J, 'Bright ideas fade under controversy' *The Australian*, 23 April, 2008.

⁴⁹ *Australia 2020 Summit — Sunday Plenary Stream Report*, accessed on 20 May, 2008 at http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/plenary_stream_report_medres.ppt

By 2020, every Australian:

- is valued by, and participating in, society
- has meaningful access to education, work, health, housing, justice, care and life opportunities
- has a safe, healthy and supported childhood that allows them to fulfil their potential

By 2020, Australian society

- embraces and celebrates indigenous people
- focuses on long-term prevention and is experiencing the benefits of a return on social investment
- regards social inclusion as equal and integral to a buoyant economy and a healthy environment

There were many connections between the ideas of the different streams, but one of the BIG ideas of the Governance Stream was to develop a Charter of Rights for all Australians. They also proposed that there be a preamble to the Constitution which would 'recognise first peoples' custodianship'. Perhaps the ambition statement of the Communities and Families Stream could contribute to the thinking about words for such a preamble if it were to be written.

In the end we had to stay broad — to make broad statements about approaches, rather than giving specific examples. Particular areas argued for by their champions gave way to directional ideas for policy. This may prove to be either a strength or a weakness — or both. It relieves the government of having to spend money on named projects or initiatives with the 'Summit' blessing. However, it also provides a basis for the government to alter course in some areas of service delivery and provide new kinds of services and innovative approaches. It may not always be possible to even identify an invisible role the Summit may play in policy making and service delivery.

3.8.1 Making social inclusion a national priority

This heading provided the genesis for a number our BIG ideas including:

- The development of a Charter of Human Rights;
- A National Action Plan on Social Inclusion; and
- A National Development Index underpinned by specific measurable indicators of social inclusion⁵⁰

We looked towards big statements of the philosophy of a nation. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 'should reflect economic analysis of the return on investment produced by improving social inclusion.'⁵¹ We also proposed the idea of a National Development Index (NDI) that would measure progress against social inclusion, as well as economic and environmental indicators. The United Nations employs this system when measuring the per capita prosperity of

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⁵⁰ *Final Report*, p 173

⁵¹ *Interim Report*, p 23

a nation. Michael Wesley commented in his opening address that Australia is 3rd on the UN NDI. He then provided further data and remarked:

... we've become richer but at the cost of higher inequality. Australia's overall prosperity makes the pockets of absolute poverty and degradation among our population particularly inexcusable.⁵²

Our concept was that a domestic NDI may provide a different way to measure the success or otherwise of the programs and policies. It seemed to fit with the Health's stream's out-of-the-box idea of a 'wellness footprint'.⁵³

On 15 May, 2008, the Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh, hosted a *Queensland 2020: Ideas to Action forum*⁵⁴ and there some of the Queenslanders from each stream, including the youth summiteers, had a chance to meet and consider how to bring our ideas to our state. One of the ideas to emerge on that day was to nominate, create or appoint 'diversity champions'. In the way of these gatherings the idea arose towards the end with no chance to develop it but its intent is clear. The community could benefit if leaders from different areas of public life, business, sport, the arts etc could be leaders in valuing diversity and demonstrating this in practical ways. It could also be an innovative way to give public space to the idea of social inclusion.⁵⁵ The *Final Report* notes that one of the ideas under this heading was that 'government has to model encouragement of diversity'.⁵⁶

3.8.2 Creating a common understanding about the society that we want and value

This really collapsed into the first priority area but was born out of recurring discussions around the need for shared values. The importance of messages conveyed by people in the public eye and the role of the media were also consistent themes. Legislating for same-sex civil unions received significant support and is recorded as one of the "cost neutral" ideas in the *Final Report*.⁵⁷

3.8.3 Establishing a new framework for leadership and governance to achieve social inclusion

There was considerable discussion about the community sector in our stream — with concern for issues such as recruitment and retention of staff, barriers for volunteers and the need for enhanced leave conditions particularly around parenting and carer leave.

We eventually suggested that National Coordinating Body for the Community Sector be established to create a new way of working with government at all levels.

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⁵² Wesley Michael *Summit Opening Plenary*, 19 April, Great Hall, Parliament House, p 6; accessed on 28 May, 2008 at <<http://www.griffith.edu.au/business/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/2020-Plenary12.pdf>>

⁵³ Australia 2020 Summit — Sunday Plenary Stream Report, accessed on 20 May, 2008 at http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/plenary_stream_report_medres.ppt

⁵⁴ There had also been a preparatory *Queensland 2020 Forum* on 13 April.

⁵⁵ On 21 May, 2008 the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister attended the first meeting of the Australian Social Inclusion Board. See http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/inclusion_board.htm

⁵⁶ *Final Report*, p 183

⁵⁷ *Final Report*, p 173

3.8.4 Building and strengthening local communities

On 16 April at an address to the Sydney Institute Annual Dinner, the Prime Minister spoke of his 'proposal for Australia in the year 2020 which is to create universal, high quality, affordable Parent and Child Centres for all 0-5 year old Australian children. ... These Parent and Child Centres will bring together maternal and child health, long day care and preschool into one stop shops for parents with young kids'⁵⁸.

This idea took hold at the Summit and summiteers were obviously interested, but these one-stop-shops morphed into 'hubs' which were to offer an astonishing array of services. They were discussed under nearly every theme. A quick scan of the *Final Report* revealed that the suggested services included at least employment, primary health, pharmacy, housing, early childhood, income support, legal advice and older persons. There was also a suggestion that they should be 'moved out of the physical space and into an online space'⁵⁹.

In the Sunday session the hubs drew vigorous debate and it became clear that there were 100 ideas in the room of what they would do! Now that I have the benefit of the *Final Report* it is obvious that there were many different ideas about the role of the hubs expressed throughout Saturday and a number of groups were disturbed about this and discussed it. Eventually the hubs were 'out' as our facilitator said firmly — and correctly. It is politely recorded in the Final Report:

Although the idea of hubs generated broad support across the two days, there was no agreement reached on what these would look like in practice. The stream decided therefore not to include hubs in their final list of ideas, reflecting that disagreement.

It was the scrubbing of the hubs that allowed us to name another of our BIG ideas which was really to bring about a paradigm shift in the emphasis of services from crisis intervention to early invention and prevention⁶⁰. This would include ideas like working with vulnerable families to improve prospects for their children in terms of education, health, safety and emotional security. It might also relate to drug, alcohol and substance abuse and a range of other social issues.

It jelled nicely with the Youth Summit which stated:

Our vision is to create safe environments for and in our families and communities. This will be achieved through policies founded on prevention and early intervention rather than simply short-term policies.⁶¹

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⁵⁸ Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, 'Australia 2020 — Setting our Nation's Sights for the Future', *Address to the Sydney Institute Annual Dinner 2008*, Sydney.

⁵⁹ *Final Report*, p 177. Frankly, I do not see why this would be any better than the current plethora of online information about services.

⁶⁰ *Final Report*, p 173

⁶¹ *Program*, p 60

3.8.5 Supporting and empowering families

Work / Life Balance. Under this theme we discussed the importance of work flexibility to allow people to 'balance work and family obligations'.⁶² The Youth Summit called for leave which would 'provide parents and children with the time necessary to form a close and enduring bond and which facilitates gender balance within the family.' It was to extend to biological mothers and fathers, adoptive parents, same sex parents and other legal guardians.⁶³

Getting 'women' on the butchers' paper. What I find fascinating, and somewhat concerning, was that it seemed difficult in our stream to get the word 'women' on to a piece of butchers' paper. The *Final Report* notes an early discussion about a community sector workforce retention strategy which proposed considering issues specific to women who make up the majority of the workforce in that sector.⁶⁴ But generally it was words like 'parent' and 'gender' which got there in terms of many issues. It seems to be that discussions about women often lost their specificity by the time the ideas had been refined for the butchers' paper. Broader headings, of significant legitimacy, and which had the support of many, were often favoured. It felt non-socially inclusive, or perhaps even socially exclusive, to keep on asking for the word 'women' to be noted specifically — but a few of us did just that some of the time.

Family Violence. It was hard as a participant to follow the development of the family violence ideas, however, it was raised by a number of summiteers and received support to continue through the process. It is captured in a 'top idea' heading under the Stronger Families Theme in the *Final Report*. The idea was to 'create a national violence prevention plan that will enable consistency across [the] nation. The plan will also acknowledge impacts on children, rather than focussing only on women'.⁶⁵ Not exactly a victory for women at the Summit and not really a new idea but initiatives to deal with family violence and violence against women must continue to be restated and renewed.

On 26 May, 2008, the Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, our government co-chair, announced the members of her National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children. Its membership is knowledgeable, experienced and committed. The purpose of the Council is to assist with the development and implementation of the Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children*, which aims to reduce domestic violence and sexual assault.⁶⁶ I suspect that this initiative was well under way by the time of the Summit but its members can feel sure that they have Summit endorsement.

The Youth summiteers seemed to have managed to be more political and overtly feminist about dealing with domestic violence, explaining that there is a 'superficial understanding of domestic violence' in the community. Although there is:

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⁶² *Interim Report*, p 24

⁶³ *Program, 'Youth Summit Communiqué'*, p 71

⁶⁴ *Final Report*, p 179

⁶⁵ *Final Report*, p 187

⁶⁶ Media release, website of the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP: http://www.tanyaplibersek.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/tanyaplibersek.nsf/content/nat_council_violence_26may08.htm

... broad acceptance that physical violence within intimate relationships is not acceptable, recognition of psychological abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and other controlling behaviour is less prevalent. Also the gendered nature of DV has long been glossed over. If change is to be made the issue of gender dynamics and issues of male power need to be confronted.⁶⁷

These young summiteers saw the need for a National Domestic Violence Primary Prevention Initiative with a national peer education strategy and media campaign.

Family Law. The issues which eventually got recorded in respect of family law are, sadly, rather incoherent and represent a disparate variety of views with no chance to consolidate. It is arguable that buried in the discussion are concerns that women are unable to safely raise abuse in family law proceedings without being considered a fabricator of allegations. There were also worries about the shared parenting regime but I could never find the space to argue through my concerns explained earlier, formulate an agreed idea and get it recorded on that all important butchers' paper.

3.8.6 Reducing disadvantage and poverty

Issues around re-settlement processes for migrants and refugees were raised throughout our discussions feature in the Final Report. However, they did not gain enough traction to get into our Big Ideas. It is interesting, therefore that they made it into the four ideas of the Youth Summit and this must say something about the changing demography and attitudes of young Australians.

4.0 CONCLUSION

I know this narrative of my journey contains a critique and a number of concerns and cautions, but, as I felt when I found my name in the list, I am still proud and honoured to have been a participant. It has given me a new way to read and hear about Australia. Not because I ask — Did that idea come from the Summit? That is too simplistic. But because I have stronger sense of what matters to Australians in 2008 and how they think about those things — and I am generally optimistic. The role of the Summit, in my opinion, was to give the government something to examine and use to mould ideas and solutions. As the Prime Minister said in opening:

There are no right and wrong answers when it comes to a discussion among people of good mind and good will.⁶⁸

The *Final Report* is a raw document of ideas and discussions — the tree was truly shaken but it will take years to discover what has fallen to the ground — and what grows. It is a rich source of knowledge, ideas and sparks of brilliance shaped by the years of commitment and

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⁶⁷ *Program, 'Youth Summit Communiqué'*, p 71

⁶⁸ *Final Report*, p 3

passion the summiteers brought. In Michael Wesley's perfectly chosen words, we summiteers were there:

... because we want to give something back. Not because this is our country, but because we are our country's.⁶⁹ ●

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⁶⁹ Wesley Michael *Summit Opening Plenary*, 19 April, Great Hall, Parliament House, p 4, accessed on 31 May, 2008 at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/business/griffith-asia-institute/pdf/2020-Plenary12.pdf>