

## **Nonreligion in Australia: An overview**

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### **Introduction**

Nonreligion started entering the Australian consciousness from around the mid-2000s, becoming a highly salient topic from around the mid-2010s. Australia's current Prime Minister is a Pentecostal. Of Australia's past six Prime Ministers, five have been Christian, and one was an atheist. 30.1% of the Australian population identified as nonreligious on the 2016 Census.

There is some research on nonreligion in Australia, but much of it is in its early stages. We begin with an overview of Australian Census statistics, demonstrating the rapid recent rise of nonreligion as a dominant identity marker in Australia. There are a wealth of other surveys that might provide information about nonreligion, that have largely not been analysed. Perhaps the most promising work on conceptualising nonreligion comes from the Gen Z study (Singleton et al 2018 & 2019). They differentiate nonreligious youth into: "this worldly" (23%), "indifferent" (15%), and SBNR (18%). There has also been significant work on nonreligion in education and some promising work on nonreligion and environment, with smaller discussions in law, migration, and health.

### **Section 1: Review of surveys**

#### **1A: The Australian Census**

Data from the Australian Census demonstrates Australians who are more likely to have no religion are men, people in their twenties, and people born in Australia (rather than overseas).

#### **Australian Census: Historical changes in those with no religion**

1911 1947 1966 1991 2006 2011 2016

0.2 0.3 0.8 12.9 18.7 22.3 30.1

Percentage of Australian population with no religion

Source: Bouma and Halafoff 2017: 131

#### **Australian Census 2016: No religion by Place of birth**

Australians who were born in Australia are more likely to have no religion (33.8%) than Australians born overseas (27.1%). This reflects the high levels of religiosity among migrants from South-East and Southern Asia, the Middle East, Southern Europe, and Africa.

The state with the most people who are not religious is Tasmania. In contrast, New South Wales has the lowest percentage of those with no religion. These differences are probably largely a reflection of the different migration patterns in those states.

#### **Australian Census 2016: No religion by State of residence**

Tasmania	38.2%
Australian Capital Territory	36.8%
South Australia	36.0%
Western Australia	33.0%
Victoria	32.1%
Queensland	29.7%
Northern Territory	29.7%
New South Wales	25.5%

Total	30.1%
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Source: ABS 2019

### **Australian Census 2016: No religion by age group**

10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Total
32.2%	40.4%	34.9%	29.7%	25.8%	22.0%	14.1%	30.1%

### **Australian Census 2016: No religion by gender**

men: 32.1%, women: 28.1%

#### **Notes:**

- 2016 was the first year that ‘No religion’ was put on top of the list of tick box responses on the Census, following the ABS’s review of the question.
- The 2016 Census was the first time that ‘No Religion’ has been recorded as the single largest religious group
- Media responses to the 2016 Census were mixed: some articles depict Australians as ‘godless’; some celebrate the rise of ‘reasonable’ nonreligion; some emphasize that Christianity is still the biggest group in Australia; and others argue that ‘No religion’ might be obscuring the SBNR population.
- Two campaigns received media attention prior to the 2016 Census. Firstly, a (small) scare campaign lobbying people to tick a Christian religion rather than ‘No religion’ on the Census, due to fears about the supposed ‘Islamisation of Australia’; secondly, a campaign by the Atheist Foundation of Australia requesting that people mark ‘No religion’ as appropriate (rather than entering ‘hyper-real’ religions such as ‘Jedi’), in order to accurately gauge the number of Australians that consider themselves nonreligious.

### **1B: Other surveys that have data about religion in Australia**

- **“Young Australians’ perspectives on religions and non-religious worldviews” (‘Gen Z study’) [Rasmussen et al. – see as Singleton et al. 2018 and Singleton et al. 2019 in Annotated Bibliography below]**
  - Australian Research Council-funded. Nationally representative telephone survey of 1200 people aged 13-18.
  - 56% can be described as “not religious”: “Being a ‘religious none’ does not mean a person has no faith or spirituality: they simply do not see themselves as belonging to a religious tradition or organisation” (Singleton et al. 2019: 3).
  - The not religious include: “this worldly” (23%), “indifferent” (15%), and SBNR (18%).
  - A March 2018 press release summarizing the research can be found [here](#)
  - Some publications are in the Bibliography; a full list can be found [here](#)
- **Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA)**
  - Annual survey using a representative sample drawn from the electoral roll (n~1200); AuSSA is the Australian component of the International Social Survey Project (ISSP).
  - **2018 theme was ‘Religion’** – final data to be released publicly late 2019. This is the fourth time AuSSA has focused on religion (previously 1991, 1998 and 2008).
  - Preliminary 2018 results can be found [here](#) and earlier publications [here](#)

- From Singleton (2015: 240): “Religious identity was determined via the question: ‘**Do you have a religion?**’ with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. Of those surveyed, 43% had no religious identity, while 55% identified as having a religion” in 2009.
- **‘Faith and Belief in Australia’ [McCrindle Research 2017]**
  - National survey of 1,024 Australians + focus groups with 26 non-Christians. A full report can be found [here](#)
  - Commissioned by various Christian groups.
  - *“Almost one in three Australians (32%) now do not identify with a religion”.*
  - *“Almost one in two (49%) non-religious Australians prefer a scientific and rational, ‘evidence-based’, approach to life. Almost one in five (18%) think religion is a crutch for the weak to lean on. Males are almost twice as likely as females to believe that religion is a crutch for the weak to lean on (22% cf. 13%). One in seven non-religious Australians (14%) believe that religions and spirituality are outdated and traditional approaches to life.”*
- **Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey**
  - Annual longitudinal survey “about economic and personal well-being, labour market dynamics and family life” about over 17,000 people (link [here](#)). HILDA asks for *religious affiliation, frequency of attendance, and importance of religion*. This information was collected in 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2014 (Bernardelli et al. 2019).
  - The religion questions in HILDA don’t appear to have been analysed.
- **Australian Election Study**
  - Nationally representative survey coinciding with Federal Elections since 1987; 2016 n=2818 participants.
  - The 2016 questionnaire asked, *‘What is your religion or faith?’* (with ‘No religion’ an option), and *‘Apart from weddings, funerals and baptisms, about how often do you attend religious services?’*
- **Australian Community Survey [ACS] 2016 [National Church Life Survey]**
  - Random survey of 1258 Australian adults. The ACS has been conducted in 1998, 2002, 2009, and 2016 in addition to the five-yearly National Church Life Surveys.
  - A summary of the findings can be found [here](#)
  - *40% neutral/unsure about whether religion is good for society; 61% said that religious faith or spirituality was of little or no importance to them in making life decisions; and 47% never attend religious services outside of special occasions.*
  - From Bouma & Halafoff (2017: 137): “responses to this survey revealed three patterns of religion among Australians - *Nones, SBNR (Spiritual, but not religious) and Religious and Spiritual*”.
- **Spirit of Gen Y study [Mason et al. 2007 – see in Annotated Bibliography below]**
  - 2005 telephone survey with 1619 respondents (1219 in Gen Y (born between 1981 to 1995), 400 in 25-59 y.o. control group) + 91 interviews
  - Spirituality types: *‘Traditional (Christian)’ 46%; ‘New Age’ 17%; ‘Secular’ 28%; ‘Other’ 9%;*
  - An ‘unofficial summary’ blog post can be found [here](#)

The AuSSA result with 43% not religious and the ACS 61% result is much higher than the 31% on the Census. This suggests there might be some sort of “cultural expectation” bias happening in the Census. The Census is large-scale and formal. Perhaps people are putting down a religion because they think they are expected to have one. Whereas on other surveys that are less formal, perhaps they are reporting whether religion is important to them or not.

## **Section 2: Annotated bibliography**

This section focuses on studies that provide an overview of religious diversity and the place of nonreligion in Australia.

### **1987-2009: Various Authors**

Australian academic monographs on religion from the 1980s and 1990s typically do not discuss nonreligion, with the exception of the concept of ‘secularisation’. The earliest books – for example, Kaldor (1987), Black (1991), Bouma (1992), and Kaldor et al. (1994) – tend to focus on Christianity/church attendance.

#### **Bouma, Gary. (2006). *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Port Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.**

Perhaps the best-known sociological text about religion in Australia. Bouma argues that ‘secularisation’ does not fully explain the characteristics in Australia, where religion is not disappearing but is changing: “the return of the religious and spiritual is not merely a return to times past ... For Australia, this postmodernity is also secular and post-Christendom” (xiii). Beyond discussing secularisation, Bouma barely discusses nonreligion. His description of religion in Australia as ‘a shy hope in the heart’ reflects the tendency for Australians to consider religion as a largely private matter.

#### **Mason, Michael, Singleton, Andrew & Webber, Ruth. (2007). *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People’s Spirituality in a Changing Australia*. Mulgrave Vic Australia: John Garratt Publishing.**

This book draws on the findings of the ‘Spirit of Generation Y’ 2005 survey (see above). 28% of participants are ‘Secular’, with this group further divided into ‘The Nonreligious’ (10% overall), the Ex-religious (4%), and the Undecided (14%). “Most of these Secular Gen Ys have an ambivalent attitude towards religion and spirituality; it simply does not have any importance in their daily lives”.

#### **Frame, Tom. (2009) *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia***

Frame is an Anglican bishop, and this book addresses the phenomenon/experience of unbelief in Australia from Frame’s perspective, rather than drawing on empirical data. Frame’s argument is that, whether recognised or not, most Australians are unbelievers, which he defines as “an inability to believe in God” (p. 22).

#### **Stevenson, Deborah, Dunn, Kevin, Possamai, Adam & Piracha, Awais. (2010). “Religious belief across ‘post-secular’ Sydney: The multiple trends in (de)secularisation”, *Australian Geographer* 41(3): 323–50. doi: 10.1080/00049182.2010.498039.**

Draws on Census data to provide an empirical snapshot of Australia’s religious diversity focussing on Sydney. “The decrease in Christianity in some areas of the city [Sydney] has been matched by an increase in non-Christian faiths, while in other areas there has been little change ... The findings point to the need for further research on the microgeographies of religious belief and non-belief and community relations, and the on links between religious communities and civil society” (p. 323). Stevenson et al. draw on Bouma (2006) and Frame (2009) to apply

concepts such as quiet religiosity, disinterest, and complex religious/nonreligious encounters to draw a picture of Australia's non/religious diversity in city spaces. *Unlike most of the other texts described in this report, Stevenson et al.'s article fundamentally incorporates elements of geography, space, and place (i.e. one the project axes).*

**Bouma, Gary D., Douglas Ezzy, Anna Halafoff, and Adam Possamai. (2015). "Sociology of Religion in Australia." In *Sociologies of Religion: National Traditions*, edited by Anthony Blasi and Guiseppa Giordan, 377–403. Netherlands: Brill.**

Bouma et al. (392) argue that as Australia "is becoming more of (1) a post-Christian country, (2) a non-Christian one, and (3) a 'religious none' one", more attention must be paid to the country's increasing religious and nonreligious diversity". This suggests an emerging interest in nonreligion in Australia can be traced to around the early/mid-2010s.

**Stanley, Timothy (Ed.) (2015). *Religion after Secularization in Australia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.**

This edited collection partially demonstrates the emerging interest in nonreligion, with multiple index entries for atheism, secularisation and secular associations (groups), and various social issues that are likely to see religious/nonreligious collaboration and conflict, such as abortion, homosexuality and marriage equality, religious education debates, and government funding of faith-based social services. There is a common thread throughout the chapters focusing on the intersection of religion and law, including chapters by Paul Babie and Kathleen McPhillips exploring contemporary sociolegal issues and anti-discrimination legislation. *However, rather than explicitly acknowledging the role of nonreligion in Australia (including as an increasingly salient identity marker), this book is more concerned with the processes of how secularisation plays out in the public and private spheres.*

**Singleton, Andrew. (2015). "Are religious 'nones' secular? The case of the nones in Australia", *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 36 (2): 239-243.**

**doi: 10.1080/13617672.2015.1055928.**

"The aim of this study is to identify the extent to which religious nones are secular" (240).

Drawing on 2009 AuSSA results, Singleton argues that "census data on those with no religious affiliation can be interpreted with confidence as meaning no religion writ large" (242). This paper is an example of the continued use of 'secularisation' as the dominant frame through which nonreligion in Australia is investigated.

**Cox, James L. & Possamai, Adam. (Eds.) (2016). *Religion and Non-Religion Among Australian Aboriginal Peoples*. Oxon: Routledge.**

Focuses on the nonreligion of Australian Aborigines. Between the Censuses of 2006 and 2011, "there was a close to 41 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders in the 'No Religion' category" [3]).

**Mackay, Hugh. 2016. *Beyond Belief*. Sydney Australia: Macmillan.**

Pitched as a more 'popular'-style text, this book clearly demonstrates a growing (academic and public) interest in shifts away from formal religion in Australia. It includes a chapter about the spiritual but not religious (SBNR), which is rare in texts about Australia.

**Bouma, Gary & Halafoff, Anna. (2017). "Australia's changing religious profile - Rising nones and Pentecostals, declining British Protestants in superdiversity: Views from the 2016 census", *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 30(2), 129-143. doi: 10.1558/jasr.34826.**

Discussion of the 2016 Census results, including the rising numbers of nonreligious in Australia. Argues that young Nones in Australia “are *awash, but not adrift in a sea of diversity*. Superdiversity, of all kinds—cultural, religious, non-religious, gender and sexuality, and multispecies—is an everyday part of their lived reality, be they non-religious or religious, and for the most part they seem to be respectful of it”.

**Singleton, Andrew, Halafoff, Anna, Bouma, Gary D, & Rasmussen, Mary Lou. (2018). “New research shows Australian teens have complex views on religion and spirituality”, *The Conversation*, 18 September 2018. [www.theconversation.com/new-research-shows-australian-teens-have-complex-views-on-religion-and-spirituality-103233](http://www.theconversation.com/new-research-shows-australian-teens-have-complex-views-on-religion-and-spirituality-103233).**

The study identified “six different ‘types’: this-worldly, indifferent, spiritual but not religious, seekers, nominally religious, and religiously committed. 56% of teens fell between the three ‘nonreligious’ categories (this-worldly, indifferent, and spiritual but not religious)”. “Our data show they are genuinely open to diversity in other people. While only a minority follow a faith with strong conviction, as a whole they are not anti-religious”.

### **Section 3: Research Areas**

#### **Law**

The legal regulation of the relationship between religious groups and ‘secular’ society has recently become a point of political tension in Australia. In this debate, conservative Christians have framed “secularism” as a threat to religious freedom. As mainstream Christianity has lost its cultural dominance, the conservative elements of some religious groups have increasingly felt themselves under attack by ‘secular’ forces. This is reflected in the most recent 2018 Federal Government Religious Freedom Review led by former Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, “examining whether Australian law adequately protects the human right to freedom of religion” (Australian Government 2019a).

A key concern of this religious freedom debate is the desire of some religious groups to be allowed to discriminate against LGTBIQ+ people in schools, hospitals, and social welfare organisations that are substantially government funded, but managed by religious groups. Poulos (2019:1) argues that the increasing concern with ‘religious freedom’ creates a discourse “of religious freedom which marginalises the needs of both those who suffer discrimination because of their religion and those who suffer discrimination as a result of the religious beliefs of others.”

Poulos’ (2018) paper addresses some of the major areas where religious and nonreligious actors come into contact/conflict in Australia: law, politics, and ethical debates, and the regulation of these debates. She examines church responses to the Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012. Poulos emphasises the power (im)balances inherent in these processes and relationships, and the attempts by various Australian churches to establish their hegemony in the face of declining power and relevance in Australian public life. This paper is an illustration of the complex implications that Australia’s non/religious diversity has for sensitive personal/political issues.

From the perspective of ‘nonreligion’ this raises significant issues about the negotiation of difference and the role of government regulation and law in facilitating religious-nonreligious interaction (Poulos 2018, Ezzy 2018). Draft legislation currently being debated in the Australian parliament privileges religious freedom as something that overrides all other rights (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Simon Rice (2020) notes that this proposed legislation is perhaps unique in the world because: “It doesn’t merely protect a person from being discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, it allows a person to actively discriminate on the basis of their religious

beliefs.” The desire of some religious people to have the right to discriminate in this way perhaps reflects, at least in part, their discomfort at an increasingly non-religious Australian culture in which religious traditions, organisations, and individuals are losing some of their previously taken-for-granted privileges.

Australia is one of very few countries in the world without a Bill of Rights. There have been proposals for one. Three states have a Bill of Rights.

Religion remains institutionalised in various aspects of Australian government and legal practice, although there have been some changes. State and Federal Parliaments in Australia are opened with a prayer, with most using The Lord’s Prayer. There have been various unsuccessful moves to abolish this practice at the Federal and state levels. Australians appearing in court are given the option of swearing an oath or making a declaration (which omits reference to religion). The citizenship pledge, similarly, may be made with or without reference to God.

Laws relating to abortion and euthanasia/assisted dying have generated significant debate about the relative rights and responsibilities of religious and nonreligious people. Religious objections to these laws are increasingly framed in terms of secular arguments about freedom of speech and other rights. Abortion was decriminalised in New South Wales in September 2019 (the final Australian state to do so). Conservative opposition included concerns about mandatory referral by doctors with a conscientious objection to abortion (McGowan 2019; see also Howe & Le Mire 2019). Most states enforce ‘safety zones’, banning anti-abortion protests within 150m of clinics. Arguing that the legislation impinged on their freedom of speech, two anti-abortion activists recently lost a High Court challenge (Byrne 2019). The state of Victoria recently became the first jurisdiction in Australia to legalise assisted dying.

Significant issues about the authority of ‘secular’ government over religious organisations have been raised by the legal response to the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017; see Cahill & Wilkinson 2017. In particular, the Children Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 (passed Victorian Parliament September 2019), makes it mandatory for religious leaders to report child abuse even if the crime is heard during confessional (see also Guerzoni 2017). Some church leaders have indicated they will not obey this law.

Somewhat intriguingly, a draft of a proposed Religious Discrimination Bill (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2019: 7) defines religious belief or activity to include the absence of religious belief or activity:

“religious belief or activity means:

- (a) holding a religious belief; or
- (b) engaging in lawful religious activity; or
- (c) not holding a religious belief; or
- (d) not engaging in, or refusing to engage in, lawful religious activity.”

## **Health**

There has been little research on the place of nonreligion in health care. In the literature on health care there is a consideration of ‘cultural safety’ for health care practitioners (McCarthy 2005, Usher et al. 2017), which refers to respectful engagement with religious practices in health care, and this is increasingly inclusive of how to negotiate the religion/nonreligion relationship. Ezzy’s (forthcoming) textbook chapter on religious diversity in Australia explicitly discusses the practices health care practitioners might use to negotiate the religious and nonreligious practices and beliefs of patients in the context of health care.

Many anti-abortion groups in Australia are officially nonreligious even though they have a strongly religious membership and philosophy (Howes & Le Mire 2019). Howe and Le Mire (2019) argue conscientious objection to abortion referral in Australia can and

should be defended on nonreligious grounds. “With regard to military service and euthanasia, legislators have been at pains to regulate for the protection of conscience. By contrast, in the case of abortion, the reforms in Victoria, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory containing significant incursions on the conscience rights of medical practitioners seem out of step. ... Anti-abortion groups, and those claiming conscientious objections to abortion, have responded to this reframing by defining their objections as nonreligious ... our argument is that the societal benefits that accrue from taking a pluralistic and pragmatic approach to freedom of conscience are so significant that they justify its legislative protection, and fit within a secularized society” (111-112).

Again, a key issue is the negotiation of religious/nonreligious interactions in service provision. Approximately one third to one half of health care provision in Australia is managed by religious organisations (predominantly Christian), and mainly funded by the government. For example, the evangelical Christian organisation Teen Challenge Tasmania won approval to establish a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, despite opposition that it offered “a faith-based program rather than a medical model of rehabilitation” (Howard 2019). While religious rehabilitation and health care tends to be open to anyone, regardless of their religious/nonreligious affiliation, the debate tends to focus on the nature of the service provision (will abortion be offered), and the characteristics of the workers (can LGBTIQ+ employees be discriminated against).

## **Education**

There has been significant research on nonreligion in education in Australia, mostly as part of a broader debate about the place of religious education in schools (Maddox 2011; 2014; 2015; Halafoff 2015; Halafoff and Lam 2015; Halafoff, Arweck, and Boisvert 2015; Singleton et al. 2018; Singleton et al. 2019; Halafoff, Lam, and Bouma 2019). Anna Halafoff (2015) argues that Australian policy-makers and educators need to incorporate nonreligion into how religious (and nonreligious worldview) education is delivered. This paper argues that shifting how non/religion is taught in Australian schools potentially has important implications for the safety and wellbeing of the population at large. This argument is elaborated in Halafoff, Lam and Bouma (2019) with a consideration for preventing violent extremism. This is consistent with the findings from the Gen Z study by Singleton et al. (2019:15): “These findings lead us to recommend that there be more education about diverse worldviews and religions included in the Australian Curriculum, across national and state levels, to increase both religious literacy and understanding among Australia’s diverse religious and non-religious population and help boost tolerance of religious minorities.”

The arguments about the place of education about religious and nonreligious worldviews in schools has contributed to developments in the national curriculum that are moving toward a more inclusive approach to religious diversity, with the national Australian Curriculum containing some limited content on diverse religions and nonreligious worldviews. It is difficult to know to what extent these are being implemented. Victoria’s is the only state curriculum to include two dedicated sections on diverse worldviews and religions in Humanities and Ethical Capability (Halafoff et al 2019). Final secondary school years offer subjects to do with religion, philosophy, and ethics across the country (e.g. ‘Studies of Religion’ [NSW]; ‘Religion and Ethics’ [Qld]).

There is some academic discussion of the Australian Federal Government’s provision of funding for chaplains in government-funded schools (Beck 2018, Jones 2019). Chaplains are mostly Christians: “The NSCP supports the wellbeing of students and school communities through the provision of pastoral care services and strategies delivered by chaplains” (Australian Government 2019b). The National School Chaplaincy Program [NSCP] raises issues about the place of religion in a putative nonreligious educational context: “A chaplain may be good for the school’s dwindling finances, good for politicians and a bridge between the community and the school, but they are foremost a religious representative in a secular

institution that is supposed to be without religious persuasion (Jones 2019: 201). In order to avoid a Federal law preventing the Government funding religion, the Federal Government provides the funding for the chaplains to the State Governments, who do not have this constraint. Beck (2018) describes some tensions surrounding the NSCP program when nonreligious people apply for positions as chaplains. In other words, the primarily religious nature of the Chaplaincy program sits oddly in the nonreligious context of most Australia publicly funded schools.

## **Migration**

There has been little research on the relationship between nonreligion and migration in Australia. Historically, changes in “Australia’s religious profile has been a function of migration” (Bouma & Halafoff 2017: 133). However, the rise of nonreligion in Australia is not primarily a function of migration. Australians who were born overseas are more likely to be religious than those born in Australia. Although, there are some migrant communities who are mostly not religious – such as the Chinese.

Nixon (2018) discusses atheist and nonreligious asylum seekers in Australia and elsewhere in the world. He makes the point that it is possible to seek asylum on the grounds of persecution due to nonreligion, but that it is rare, and that the current system often fails people who make claims on the basis of nonreligion.

Similar to education, healthcare, and social welfare services, in Australia there are a substantial portion of multicultural/refugee support services that are religiously-aligned, such as Anglicare and the Salvation Army. There has been no research on the experience of nonreligious migrants accessing these services.

## **Environment**

Some research has been conducted exploring the links between nonreligion and environment, although the analysis of nonreligion is more implicit rather than explicit. Literature about the environment in Australia has more often focused on environmental politics, protest, and the Greens movement. The environment features prominently within Australia’s cultural imaginary, with the landscape’s ‘harshness’ associated with resilience and masculinity, alongside a “distinctive colonial heritage that still infuses contemporary society” (Head 2016: 14).

Various authors have explored how encounters with landscape spark experiences of awe, enchantment, and spirituality. This is often in association with notions of ‘wilderness’. Ashley (2007) explores ‘wilderness spirituality’, examining the language used by experts and members of the public to describe Tasmanian landscapes. McDonald et al. (2009) focus on the ‘peak experiences’ of people visiting Victorian National Parks. Like Ashley, McGregor (2004) investigates language use, and argues that ‘spirituality’ is not a dominant discourse used about the Australian environment, particularly as it can be seen as running counter to more ‘rational’ approaches such as emphasising sustainable development. *Deep Blue* is an edited collection by Australian academics Sylvie Shaw and Andrew Francis (2014) that includes some chapters reflecting on the relationship of water to what it is to be human with an explicit and implicit consideration of spiritual themes, some of which are inclusive of nonreligion.

Experiences of the transcendence are shaped by contexts of environmental politics and conflict. Trigger and Mulcock (2005) explore contested and shared constructions of forests as ‘spiritually significant places’. Cianchi (2015) investigates the ways that radical environmentalists relate emotionally with the landscapes and species that they defend. Banham (2019) explores how people experience a sense of wonder and the ‘bigger-than-human’ through experiences with/in forests. Ezzy (2004) explores the relationship

between his ‘mystical’ experiences in Tasmanian wilderness and Levinasian conception of obligation to the ‘other-than-human’.

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