Created Communities: Caboolture Historical Village

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Following Zygmunt Bauman's provocation that times of physical and ideological insecurity lead to an appeal to the ideals of community, this paper considers the way in which history and community are reconstructed at the Caboolture Historical Village, an open-air museum north of Brisbane. The village privileges the region's pioneer past and the period evoked is rural, late nineteenth century, largely excluding any references to Caboolture's modern, urban history. An analysis of the site reveals that the version of community on display is narrowly constructed around the ideals of hard work, individualism, and piety, and reveals an emphasis on technological progress and innovation to the exclusion of the lives of the people whose lives are ostensibly commemorated. This paper contends that this idealised construction of an homogeneous, unified past that excludes problematic figures such as aborigines and migrants serves a conservative fantasy of the "good old days" where issues were black and white, community consensus was assumed, and external threats were easily identified and repelled. It argues that in a postmodern world of cosmopolitanism, international migration, and global terror, places like the Caboolture Historical Village increase their appeal in an uncertain world.

Keywords

Community; communities; community history; history; commemoration; museums; nostalgia; tradition; mythologies

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[1] In 2011 there were 84 registered historical societies listed on the Federation of Australian Historical Societies website, ranging from popular tourist sites such as the Jondaryan Woolshed, to small, local groups focusing on a single town or suburb. These groups are the legacy of the explosion of folk history in the 1970s and 1980s—a trend coinciding with the apparent decline in many people's ties to their local community (Davison 198)—and while it might be debatable as to how many of them remain viable, they stand as testimony to the importance that people place on the preservation of their local heritage. One group that does not appear on the list, although it is exemplary, is the Caboolture Historical Society, an incorporated organisation established in 1959 to preserve the local heritage and later to run the Caboolture Historical Village. This village is one of about nine major heritage reconstructions in Australia, and with over 70 buildings, it is one of the largest. In this article I examine the Caboolture Historical Village against this background of the impulse to preserve, asking how the exhibit reconstructs its version of the past, and offer a suggestion as to one of the motivating forces behind the impetus to collect and reconstruct.

[2] It is my contention that heritage reconstructions—whether they are large villages or tiny folk museums—are about building the image of community, one based in the simpler, "purer" values of a more "innocent" time. Bryan Turner states that an important element of nostalgia is characterised by "a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty," particularly "in terms of a collapse of values which once provided the unity of human relations, knowledge and personal experience" (150). He continues that this nostalgic mood is associated with the impact of industrialisation, urbanisation, and capitalism (152). In this context heritage reconstruction and commemoration can be seen as an enthusiasm for an originary time when cultural values were widely shared and issues were seen as black and white, and this provides the impetus to create or recreate idealised versions of this past centred on the defining image of the pioneer.

[3] This paper is based on an observational study of the site, conducted in late 2010, which included an analysis of the site itself, together with readings of promotional material and on-site explanatory texts, which were examined for evidence of the ideological constructions behind the exhibits. This study is an initial investigation into what will be a larger project that looks at a number of similar sites in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, as well as heritage festivals and other events, and which I hope to pursue in the coming years.

Altitude: An e-journal of emerging humanities work   3
Volume 10
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Caboolture Historical Village

[4] The Caboolture Historical Village is about an hour's drive north of Brisbane and sits on four hectares of land donated by the Caboolture Shire Council in 1979. It boasts over 70 buildings laid out in what is described as "village style." Most of the buildings are open for display, housing a significant collection of memorabilia. The village was established when the old Caboolture Shire Council chambers were relocated to the site to become the first permanent exhibit. Over the years additional buildings were added, some purpose-built, such as the "100-year-old pub" built in 1988 and the 1930s-style garage that houses the collection of historic vehicles, while approximately half the buildings on the site are historically significant structures that have been relocated from Caboolture, or places elsewhere in the shire, such as Bribie Island, Morayfield, or Elimbah (Morris). Many of these buildings have been restored as well as relocated, and some, such as the Riverview Private Hospital and the School House, were in an advanced state of disrepair when "rescued," and have been extensively rebuilt. Even the pride of the village, the 1883 Shire Council Chambers, required a new roof and floor before it could be opened to the public (Morris 36). These restored buildings house a number of significant collections, including typewriters, radiograms, historical vehicles, and gemstones, and many of the houses and shops are furnished with appropriate paraphernalia.

[5] One striking thing about the village is the way in which it combines all its displays into a compressed, ahistorical mass we could call simply "history" or maybe "the olden days." The buildings on the site come from a variety of periods—from early colonial to relatively recently—but are laid out in a stereotypical, although historically inaccurate, village arrangement. For a start, commercial buildings outnumber the residential ones by a factor of about three to one, and while the buildings line well-kept gravel streets, they lack any reference to their original orientation or physical context, and displays of horse-drawn vehicles sit side by side with old cars and military equipment. This point is most clearly seen in the obligatory general store, where household items from groceries to domestic flame-throwers, are displayed together with little regard for their age. While few of the items are labelled, the oldest material seems to date from before the turn of the previous century, but other items are at least as recent as the 1960s. This point is underlined almost comically in the "radio shack," where a collection of wireless sets, radiograms, and phonographs is joined by a couple of CRT computer monitors, coyly hiding under the table, presumably awaiting their placement in the collection. This is collecting posing as historical reconstruction, and the buildings are no less "collected" than the rows of axes in the "Axeman's Hall of Fame."

[6] The Australian committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites adopted its own charter for the conservation of places of historical and cultural significance in 1979: a policy that has become known as the "Burra Charter" (Jane Lennon and Assoc. 19). It clearly states that the scientific, historic, cultural, and aesthetic values of a building are greater if it remains in situ, and that relocation should only be considered if it is the only way to save a building from demolition. Several of the buildings at Caboolture have been rescued in this way: the Old Shire Council Chambers and the Riverview Private Hospital were relocated before their existing sites were redeveloped. This is probably the case with several other buildings, although one wonders whether some of the generous donations to the Society have been an easy way for owners to rid themselves of inconvenient heritage-listed buildings that stand in the way of development. In any case, while the historical village is pleasant and picturesque, much of the historical and cultural values of the buildings has been lost in removing them from their original locations. In some cases, the process of relocation and renovation has completely changed the purpose of the building: the barber's shop, with its display of period equipment, was actually an estate agent and auctioneer's office; Zanow's maintenance shed until recently housed the Light Horse Museum; and the old Caboolture Lutheran Church now houses a collection of typewriters. It is also interesting to note that the restoration of many of the buildings—some of which, the schoolhouse for example, were acquired in an advanced state of dereliction (see Morris 49)—has removed any historical patina that might contribute to an understanding of these buildings' journeys through time (see DeSilvey).

[7] In spite of some incongruous items in several of the displays, the village's focus is clearly on the early years of white settlement in the district, and especially on the valorised place of the pioneer:
The Village is a pleasant reminder to older generations and a joyful encouragement to younger folk to learn of how life went on in those Pioneer Days. The past and present are linked, and how those links are made is a very interesting history. (Morris 2)

Rural Gerrymander

[8] Unsurprisingly, there is an almost complete absence of aboriginal history on the site. A mural in the reconstructed slab hut is the only reference on the entire site to the indigenous inhabitants of the Caboolture region, despite the name "Kabultur" coming from the Yugarabul language of the Kabi people, and meaning "place of the carpet snake." History at the village starts with white settlement and is the story of technological progress and how it makes it easier and more efficient to exploit the natural landscape for its resources. As well as the elision of aboriginal history, there is little interest in the region's recent, urban history: "history," in this case, means nineteenth century history. It is over

twenty years since Tony Bennett, writing on heritage policy, referred to the "rural gerrymander": a "disproportionate concentration on the lives of pioneers, settlers, explorers, goldmining communities and rural industries in the nineteenth century at the expense of twentieth-century urban history" (21). More recent academic work on rurality includes special issues of the *Australian Humanities Review* (45 2008) and the *Cultural Studies Review* (16.1 2010) which cover in a variety of ways the growing interest that cultural studies has in the rural and the historical, and drawing together work done previously in cultural history, cultural geography, and media studies. This work interrogates our assumptions about rural history, and questions the received ideas about the rural and the regional and the way they are used in contemporary political discourse. Overwhelmingly, Australia's heritage reconstructions are rural: places such as the Miles Historical Village in Queensland, the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement in Victoria, and the Griffith Pioneer Park in New South Wales celebrate a generic Australian history that is largely undated, but based in an idealised pre-modern, rural setting. Even The Rocks redevelopment in the centre of Sydney's CBD is more about "experiencing various national firsts including the first church, village, fortified position, and Sydney's oldest homes" (Waitt 836), than it is about the founding of a city. The rural gerrymander is obvious in areas as diverse as film, school curricula, and tourism advertising: think of the recent efforts of Tourism Australia with the "Where the Bloody Hell are You?" campaign, which almost exclusively featured rural or wilderness images, and the "Walkabout" effort directed by Baz Luhrmann, with its essentialised, mystic-outback message.

The Pioneer

[9] Linda Young takes the rural gerrymander a step further, discussing the hold that the image of the pioneer has on the national consciousness. To a young country in search of heroes, the "moral priority of 'firstness'" (333) was a powerful image, and could accrue easily to explorers, surveyors, settlers, or even businessmen. As Graeme Davison points out, the focus on priority was important to "communities still striving to establish a sense of legitimacy in newly settled land" (200). Prior to the First World War, and in the absence of military heroes, the cult of the pioneer helped to distract from some unpalatable historical facts, including the treatment of aborigines and the taint of the convict past. This image of the deserving nation-builder held a central position in the national consciousness, supported by the nationalistic poetry of Lawson and Patterson, and the fearless paintings of McCubbin (see Hirst), until it was superseded by the defining image of the ANZAC. Even then, there tended to be a blurring between the image of the pioneer and the heroism of the ANZAC (Hirst 334). The legacy of this period remains in the names of the historical villages and museums that explicitly evoke the term "pioneer" and in the countless local history publications that outline the history of the

town or suburb with reference to the pioneering families. In my own locale in Brisbane's western suburbs, a suburb (Sinnamon Park), a main road, an historical precinct, and a retirement village are named for the pioneer farming family that owned most of the land in the area. This sort of commemoration is repeated in towns and suburbs across the country.

[10] Notwithstanding Bennett's and Young's analysis, there is another reason why Australia's pioneering past has such a hold on the national consciousness. Hirst makes the point that the pioneer myth is very exclusive: it applies to the pastoralists, but not necessarily to those they employed; it certainly excludes the aborigines whose help was central to the survival of the new settlements. The myth elides references to the legal and economic controversies that surrounded the practice of squatting, and nowhere is it suggested that bank managers and rapacious businessmen might have been obstacles as well as bushfire, flood, and drought. In other words, the pioneers were heroic figures who battled the elements in order to build the nation for the benefit of later generations. Their guiding principles were the values that have become the hallmarks of political conservatism: reverence for the past, individual enterprise, and a classless view of society (316).

[11] Many people find comfort and security in what they see as universal values, especially in a time of insecurity, where issues such as global terrorism, climate change, and transforming cultural mores confront people daily. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott argue that "today we live in a climate of heightened risk awareness coupled with nostalgia for an imagined past in which children played safely throughout a carefree innocent childhood" (87), and in writing about tourism advertising in Japan, Millie Creighton describes how "images of a symbolically mediated past agrarian existence have come to represent not just the ideal of community but also the good life, wholesomeness, and the moral values of Japan" (242). Gilbert Caluya's investigation of belonging and security in post-Hansonite Australia looks at the media panic around ethnic home invasions and concludes that "these feelings of displacement coincide with nostalgia for a perceived lost ontological security attached to 'family values'" (5). Together with Hirst's above-mentioned assertion that the myth of pioneering bears the hallmarks of political conservatism, it is little wonder that a focus on "family values" as well as a mobilisation of the discourses of border security and a suspicion of Otherness should be a characteristic of Australian political discourse since the time of the Howard government.

[12] As I explain below, there is not much by way of "family values" on display at the Caboolture Historical Village, but behind the displays and collections there is an ideology of progress and control of nature that places the pioneer squarely in the centre of the nostalgic regime:

> The Caboolture Historical Village is helping to preserve the stories of our pioneers from settlement to now. Through a remarkable range of exhibits the Village provides an insight into their homes, workplaces and community lives. It also increasingly focuses on the often ingenious contribution they made to creating a better future for themselves and ultimately us.

> It's interesting just to walk around. The village is made up of more than 70 buildings, with streets, gardens and a train station, which means it really creates an authentic sense of our past. (Promotional flier)

[13] This focus on technological progress is interesting in the context of the Society's stated aims of preserving the stories of the pioneers. While undoubtedly evoking a rural community, this is a community based on the engine. There are extensive displays of old farm machinery, including tractors, trucks, bailing machines, and so on. The village boasts a miniature steam train that takes visitors for rides around one corner of the site, and the memorabilia collection includes examples of old chain-saws, typewriters, and wirelesses. There is a working party-line telephone, linked between two old PMG phone boxes, and a working blacksmith, cooper, and woodworking shed. While the underlying industry is agricultural, there is little at the site to commemorate or explain the significance of that industry. Visitors could come away from the village with little idea of what the primary industry actually was. In place of a description of the agriculture of the district was a focus on the supporting industries. As well as the fact that mechanical apparatuses tend to survive better than other material, the industrial focus is at least partly due to the fact that the village shares the site with the Antique Machinery Restoration Society of Queensland, as well as a number of other independent organisations, such as the Caboolture and District Woodcrafters club, and pottery and gem clubs.

Community

[14] But for my purposes what is most interesting is the way in which the village lives up to its stated aim of providing insights in the community lives of the pioneers. Davison points out that local history is often a way in which community is sustained and celebrated: sometimes as a persistent ideal surviving in face of homogenisation; sometimes rewritten in pluralistic ways; other times mythologised (209). Nevertheless, "in the eyes of its own historian every locality seems to be distinctive, a last bastion of community values that have disappeared elsewhere" (210). In discussing community, I am aware that I risk falling into a common assumption about the study of rurality. As Carter et al warn:

Altitude: An e-journal of emerging humanities work 8
Volume 10
2012
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> Studies of rural Australia (and studies of the rural elsewhere) have often been
> constrained within and by a more homogenous concept of "community". Such
> a conception is cognate with representations of rural communities as self-
> contained, and relatively isolated or remote from larger regional, national and
> international networks and markets. (30)

It is one of the goals of this paper to critique the sorts of assumptions about community that the Caboolture Historical Village embodies.

[15] I have argued elsewhere that "community" is one of the main discourses mobilised in the building of structures of authenticity (Gunders), and it remains an important way of adding value and meaning to a variety of objects. Zygmunt Bauman describes the word "community" as one of those rare terms with almost no negative connotations. It is a place of warmth, comfort, and security, where people are friendly and supportive. We don't have "bad communities"—people fall into "bad company" and "society" can be dark and sinister, but "community" is always good. Especially in times of stress, insecurity, or danger, community is an escape and a defence. But the irony is that this quest for the perfect community is a search for the unobtainable: it is either an unrecoverable past, or an idealised future:

> In short, "community" stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably,
> available to us—but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope
> to repossess. Raymond Williams, the thoughtful analyst of our shared
> condition, observed caustically that the remarkable thing about community is
> that "it always has been." We may add: or that it is always in the future. (3)

Community, which Bauman describes as an image of both security and freedom, can offer most of us only one of these goals: we can have security from the dangerous forces outside only by giving up some, or most, of our freedoms. We can have freedom, but only by sacrificing most of what distinguishes the community.

[16] In order to define more clearly what he is talking about, Bauman draws on the work of German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, and his distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Tönnies' most famous book was first published in 1887 and there is much in it that we might criticise, but his distinction is worth revisiting. Gemeinschaft is an arrangement based on the ideal of the medieval, feudal family, and has at its heart the essentialised relationship between mother and child; one based on affection and mutual support. Next there is the relationship between married couples, which may be subject to distortion—domination of the weaker member by the stronger, for instance—but in its ideal is an image of mutual affirmation. Finally, there is the relationship between siblings, which is

characterised by a habitual and collective defence of the family from outsiders. In Tönnies' view, these fundamental relationships provide the model for all the roles in the close-knit feudal community, including servants, slaves, visitors, and so on. This is a community that has grown organically from the family, and retains the loyalty and sense of agreement that characterises the family. On the other hand, Gesellschaft—usually translated as "society" or "civil society"—is typified as a contingent and individualistic relationship which Tönnies associated with the rise of the merchant class, and the change from bartering surplus produce for necessities, to the accumulation of wealth for its own sake.

When Bauman mobilises the theme of community as the lost or unattainable ideal to which we cling in times of insecurity, it is Gemeinschaft to which he refers. And this community is seen clearly in the way we construct our version of heritage:

> For those who share a common heritage there is a sense of belonging and a structured self-identity; heritage provides the security of known roots and a shared past. Heritage can be an important component of national identity as well. (Kearsley and Middleton 25)

[17] Versions of community grow around fan and other special interest groups, with the commonality of the shared object providing the focus and excuse for the community. And of course many people will feel that they are members of a "real community," but often those groups to which we belong fall far short of the ideal to which they aspire, and it is possible that constant appeals to community are there to mask its absence. In historical reconstruction the image of community is usually presented as being homogeneous, orderly, and sanitised. If there are dangers or conflicts, they are to do with the elements or a clearly demarcated other, such as aborigines or the British troopers, rather than oppositional voices from inside the community. Kearsley and Middleton point out that heritage is "what we want to keep and hand on to future generations" (23) and that we continue both "to define and to create heritage" (23). Similarly, Michael Evans, one-time deputy director of Sovereign Hill Outdoor Museum, concedes the point:

> Like all forms of history—oral transmission, written or filmed accounts—re-creations do not present an unmodified, unideological history. History is a metaphorical representation of the past. Its form re-presents the literal meaning of its content through the kind of reductions and integrations necessitated by that form. (142)

[18] Of course, the construction of a heritage community can be open to overt or unconscious political bias. Ashton and Cornwall document well the ideological battleground that heritage has become in Australia in the past forty years, and Kate Darian-Smith points out that some historians retain an ambivalence about what they see as tourist operators creating a "theme-park" version of Australian history (93).

[19] But these objections aside, the version of community on display at the Caboolture Historical Village is curious. The region's history of sugar cane and cotton growing is almost completely absent, and beyond the replica hotel and the old Anglican church—both serving the themed wedding market—there is no portrayal of any social life. Life, if we are to believe the material presentation, was based around hard work, commerce, and industrial progress. The domestic buildings are sparsely furnished, reflecting what we could assume are stern, perhaps protestant, views on recreation. One building is set apart as showing a higher quality of lifestyle and boasted a piano in the front room, but even here most of the furnishings were utilitarian. Wives and children are almost completely absent: the furnishings imply a light feminine touch in the form of modest ornamentation, and some of the houses contain cots or simple toys, but there is little sense of what this family life might have been like. Where community is portrayed at all, it is in a formal, organised sense: The CWA and the Freemasons both have exhibits, the former displaying some examples of linen and lacework, but again mostly concerned with the official history of the Associations: lists of presidents and treasurers. The exemplary village school room contained little information about curriculum or school life, other than a list of rules for female teachers that forbade most forms of socialisation, especially where gentlemen were concerned.

[20] Nowhere do we meet the heroic individuals who built these properties. Some of their names survive in the official designations of Zanow's shed, Moody's kitchen, or Hammond's house, but the displays and the Society's publications reveal little about the people whose names are commemorated. *Caboolture Historical Village: History Restored* is far more forthcoming with the names of present-day committee members and officials. The community thus revealed is not only white, it is largely Anglo: If the Caboolture area had a history of migrant settlement, the village is silent on the matter. By glossing over any suggestion of dissent or opposition the village creates a community that seems remarkably coherent. No bludgers, trouble-makers, or avaricious bank managers here, just honest, hard-working—albeit anonymous—men and their largely invisible wives and families. The reconstruction has created an image of Gemeinschaft.

Tradition

[21] An essential component of the discourse of community is the theme of tradition, those beliefs and practices that cement the community through ritual and repetition. Tradition provides the link with the past, and what renders the past both accessible and valuable. This link is not lost on the developers of the village:

> Call it what you like, Pioneer Vintage History, it is all to do with history. To deny the past is to deny the present for both are linked to the human spirit in what can be called "The Unbreakable Chain of Life."

> A natural desire born in people to want to go back. (Morris 2)

[22] Ignoring the implied essentialism as well as the idiosyncratic grammar, this quotation underlines the importance of tradition in the construction of community. Some of the village collections literalise this "unbreakable chain." The typewriter collection is a chronological display from the earliest mechanical printing machines to very early programmable word processors; the "radio shack" has old wireless sets, radiograms, gramophones, record-players, and early transistor radios on display. These exhibits do more than simply allow a nostalgic recollection, they demonstrate the continuity of purpose that links these objects with the absent, but implied, iPod. The same thing can be said of the collection of historical farming equipment and old cars. Without this tradition, the village would struggle to generate its relevance.

[23] My reference to nostalgia here is not an accident. It is useful to remember that the term "nostalgia" literally means "a yearning for home," which in its modern usage comes to refer to "a longing for an imagined and unattainable past" (Blunt 720). Christina Hodge underlines the constructed nature of nostalgia by referring to it as "an emotional engagement in a present-past and longing for a future defined through the past" (120). It is more than just a fond recollection, but an active selection of remembering and forgetting: we "re-create, but do not recover, the past" (131). Alison Blunt's recent work done on productive nostalgia in relation to Eurasian identities in India, and Zala Volčič's on the re-creation of a shared cultural memory in the former Yugoslavia point to the valuable work that can be done on this theme. While this sort of investigation is outside the scope of the present paper, I hope to return to these themes later in the research.

[24] The emphasis on re-creation in these works echoes Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the invented tradition. While he accepts that there are traditions that have grown organically as refined, ancient practices, Hobsbawm's main concern is with those invented traditions whose origins are to a greater or lesser degree still visible:

> "Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (Hobsbawm 1)

[25] Hobsbawm, and the contributors to his book, provide many examples of invented traditions, from the pseudo-Gothic styling of the nineteenth century British Parliament building to the ornate costumes of judges and barristers, but the classic example is surely the association of particular tartans with Scottish Highland clans: a tradition that is assumed by many to be ancient, but in fact derives from a visit to Scotland by King George IV in 1822 and Sir Walter Scott's accompanying heritage-building pageantry (Zuelow 34). Hobsbawm suggests that constructed traditions fall into three types: those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion; those establishing or legitimising institutions; and those whose main purpose was the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour (Hobsbawm 9). While his focus was on those constructions that defined a national tradition and identity, we can still see elements in the structuring of traditions at a local level, especially the third point: the importance of hard work and a suspicion of idleness are values that are clearly presented at the village. As well as the absence of recreational material that I mentioned above, this is seen in the working blacksmith's workshop. This replica building was constructed with old materials and contains a working forge that is used for repairing machinery around the village. Its main purpose however is to provide live demonstrations for school groups and other visitors to the site: a worthwhile undertaking, given that probably few people have had the opportunity to see a working blacksmith. Nevertheless, the smithy is unquestionably an heroic figure, with roots in the mythology of many cultures, but perhaps best described in Longfellow's familiar poem "The Village Blacksmith," with its themes of honest labour, independence, productivity, and the equating of hard work with godliness. The forge is emblematic of the traditional values that the Caboolture Historical Village promotes. As well as this, a wood-working shop and occasional wool spinning demonstrations, while they lack the moral certitude of the smithy, still reinforce the importance of work over the frivolity of recreation. And when an Australian Prime Minister can say in 2011 that "we respect the

Altitude: An e-journal of emerging humanities work 13
Volume 10
2012
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efforts of the brickie and look with a jaundiced eye at the lifestyle of the socialite" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), it is clear that the traditional values of hard work and self-discipline are not buried in some quaint historical village in Caboolture.

[26] A community can mean many things, but at its heart, it is a project that has to be made to exist. In the absence of Gemeinschaft, people strive to create—or recreate—the image of the community they crave. In this way, the image of a community is constructed, drawing on the values and beliefs of the dominant group, and threatening expulsion to anyone who does not subscribe to the dominant ideology. The Caboolture Historical Village is only one example of this type of constructed, imagined, community, and other examples are dotted around the country in museums and community halls. And they will continue to prosper wherever the image of Gemeinschaft is needed to reassure people seeking safety in an insecure world.

Acknowledgements

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