Let me start with a scenario. What would happen if the Prime Minister of Iceland, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia? This would be a meeting between two heads of state in which the starkest of differences would be evident in terms of gender and sexuality, not to ignore also the differences in cultural, religious, political and ethnic backgrounds.

Regarded as one of the most powerful women in the world according to Forbes magazine, Sigurðardóttir became Iceland’s head of government on 1 February 2009 on the wake of the ‘great financial crisis’ that hit her country hard. She is the first female Prime Minister of Iceland, although there has been a female President in the past, and this is no coincidence perhaps as Iceland is usually at the very top of all of the international indices that evaluate the health of a nation’s gender equality. Apart from Finland, Iceland pretty much out-performs all countries in the world in terms of its performance in equalising the differences between male and female opportunity, education, political participation and health.

According to the World Economic Forum annual report, which measures equity in the areas of politics, education, employment and health, Iceland remains the country that has the greatest equality between men and women. Indeed, Nordic nations are at the top of the list of 134 countries, with Norway in second place and Finland third.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is usually found in the bottom 10 countries in terms of gender equality. One stark comparison would be the presence of women in parliament and government with Iceland having high representation in contrast to Saudi Arabia.

But, having said that, changes have been happening in Saudi Arabia. In September 2011, the King brought in the ability for women having the right to vote, ‘to run in future municipal elections and to be appointed to the all-male influential advisory Shura Council.’ Although a long way from the kind of emancipation of women that has now generally been accepted as normative in the international arena of the twenty first century, ‘These initiatives are considered to be major advancements for the rights of women in a conservative society such as the Saudi society’. And it is worthwhile to note that Saudi women do have the opportunity of education and many feel that while they may be physically and politically invisible, they are active in constructing, maintaining and sustaining Saudi society. Understanding gender issues across such different
cultural contexts is complex warranting careful analysis given that dominant ideas about gender equality are frequently framed through a Western lens.

Furthermore the stark difference in the meeting between the heads of Iceland and Saudi Arabia would be exacerbated entirely by a further difference that would be highly noteworthy. Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir is also a lesbian, and married her female partner in 2010 when same sex marriage was fully legalised in Iceland. By contrast, being a lesbian in Saudi Arabia is illegal. Homosexual men face the death penalty. This example underscores the interconnections between gender, sexuality and culture. It also highlights the complexity of gender equality across cultures, which can be seen at the very heart of cultural and social issues in a society.

As the Catalan philosopher and human rights theorist Raimundo Pannikar has argued so eloquently, ‘cultural translations are more delicate than heart transplants.’ Thus, to search for common ground or space in which to enter into dialogue and conversation, which is at the heart of a cosmopolitan and active convivial democratic commitment, requires an attempt to connect the specific to the universal experience. As Edward Said observed about this dilemma, ‘Universality means taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others.’

This meeting I suspect would therefore be a remarkable one (if it actually ever occurred) as it brings to the foreground crucial tensions around the ways in which gender and sexuality are negotiated, regulated and governed across a multiculture world. It underlines cultural diversity and difference and the kinds of challenges that exist in terms of different values, customs and ideas about intimacy and love, particularly if we then connect these things to citizenship and identity. As Jonathan Ong writes cogently about our present times, ‘Processes of globalization – the increasing awareness of a world ‘where there are no “others”’ (Giddens, 1991: 27) – seem to necessitate a new kind of identity politics for a world marked by complex interdependencies and everyday encounters of difference.’

Responding to the paradoxical forces of globalization is a demanding but crucial endeavour. The changing landscape of culture and society across the world is so rapid and so complex that the need to clarify what is happening is imperative and urgent. We know that the effects of globalisation are uneven and deeply contradictory. Economic, social, cultural and political interdependence and mutuality are certainly key features of the twenty first century, but so are parochialism, atavism, fundamentalism, essentialism, poverty and exclusionary notions of belonging. We know that according to world indicators across a range of issues that endemic inequalities exist that cut across markers of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, age and so on. Moreover, the postcolonial environment of the twenty first century is witness to the aftermath of centuries of Western colonisation affecting every part of the planet.

And as we face this complex global arena, it is apparent that it is characterised by a revolution in communication and knowledge as well as the centrality of violence in public life, a leftover of the militarisation of the twentieth century. Following several centuries of European Enlightenment thought dominating the way things are done and conceived; where the production of knowledge has been predicated on Western Enlightenment values and principles such as individualism, progress, science and rationality to the exclusion of other ways of knowing; the world is becoming re-imagined through the re-ascension of Non-Western ways of thinking.
This leads inexorably to new and reflexive ways of thinking about what it means to co-habit the planet, particularly how to get along with others who are radically different. Understanding how to get along in a world of cultural and social diversity is now ubiquitous to the human condition. Flowing out of this are questions about human identity and how it is constructed. The opportunities, challenges and inevitability of rubbing shoulders with difference are now so extant that we need to develop new languages and disciplines for not just coping with these things, but to negotiate and understand them fully. As Edward Said remarked about human culture: ‘Survival is about the connections between things.’

As a response to this global arena of complexity, my interest as a cultural studies and human rights scholar is on the effects of changing notions of citizenship. I am concerned with cultural citizenship, where broader questions of how citizens come to belong or not belong, are included or excluded, visible or invisible in society, occurs through markers of difference that form the citizen’s identity as a subject and as a person. I think it is important to open up the meaning of multiculture to include the full range of markers that define what being human means, to go further than racial or ethnic markers alone to understand culture as a multiplicity that also includes gender, sexuality, age, religion and so on.

Citizenship as a consequence has become an increasingly important conceptual framework for cultural and political theory and practice. Implicit in the question of who/what is a citizen is the role of the public sphere (where citizens are constructed through the media, education, law and, medicine for example) and I would argue that there is a powerful interconnection between civil society and the public sphere with implications for how intimacy is managed, regulated and negotiated. There is a sense that in any consideration of what citizenship means it is necessary to examine what is embedded in the relations between the state and citizen, and between citizens. What are the dynamics of the conditions necessary to enable mutuality in these relations, where co-habitation is not only peaceful, respectful, convivial and dialogic, but consonant with creativity and openness.

The formulation and construction of citizenship is a central concern according to cultural theorists because it brings up the ways in which people are subjected to determining social, cultural and political mechanisms. These technologies of subjection are bound up in the relations of state and civil society, the public sphere and notions of private/public. There is no unitary notion of citizenship as people respond to and are determined by technologies of subjection in a variety of ways.

For someone who is marginalised because of gender, sexuality, age, race, religion, disability, ethnicity and class (and everyone is marginalised by society at some point in their life – although not equally), the concept of citizenship becomes a core site of tension in contemporary society. This is where subjectivity and the state meet, where the contest and project of identity is played out. Hence, citizenship is a cultural, political and social site of embedded meaning and representation. The feminist scholar Ruth Lister has made an apt point in relation to her analysis of gender in culture and society when she argued that citizenship is always about exclusion since contests of identity are always about who can be represented and who has the power to represent. In a largely patriarchal and hetero-normatively dominated global framework, there are, as we know, profound exclusionary practices against women that have only begun to be questioned, debated and rejected over the last century.

As a cultural studies scholar responding to
globalisation, I am therefore keen to clarify what is at stake in the formation of citizens, and my concern is about the question of intimacy and citizenship, where the intersection of the state and the person becomes evident in terms of how gender and sexuality are managed, regulated and imagined. As we know, gender is a key organizing principle of society. Gender inequality between men and women is still the prevalent norm of power relations.

Following these considerations, in this paper I want to re-think the concept of cosmopolitanism as a means of illuminating how we might consider gender and sexuality as social issues that are indicative of inclusive, multicultural and democratic values. The idea of cosmopolitanism has gained an increasingly robust and important place in contemporary debates about how to respond to difference, and engage at the crossroads of distinctive epistemologies and ontologies. I want to argue that there is a very cogent connection between cosmopolitanism and questions of justice and equality in relation to gender and sexuality. Cosmopolitanism is in this sense a space for critique, creativity, border and boundary crossings, involving the possibilities of transformation through exchange and encounter with otherness.

The paper is in four parts. First, I want to consider the concept of cosmopolitanism and in this regard I draw on some of the key thinkers who have contributed to the discourse as a way of understanding, interpreting and responding to the effects of globalisation. I want to suggest that we now live in an age that is characterised by a default to banal cosmopolitanism. That is, where more people now live in highly conurban and urban contexts than in rural areas, and that the effects of an international networked society has brought about a global village where encounters with difference are mundane, convivial and routine. The cosmopolitan possibilities of openness, generosity towards the other and mutuality have never been so present. But what I want to suggest is that what is required is an activated cosmopolitan ethic and commitment that goes beyond elite academic circles or highly urbanised demographics, to a meta and reflexive cosmopolitan understanding that is brought about through activating convivial multicultural democracy and citizenship.

Second, I want to bring in the question of the relationship between gender and sexuality, to argue that these intertwining markers of human identity are mutually implicated. To do this, my focus will be on recent and current debates around the world in terms of same-sex marriage, or what is referred to in many places now as marriage equality. A new era of gender and sexuality rights has begun to take shape. I am interested to gauge whether there is a link between multicultural societies which value social and cultural diversity, and evidence of gender equality and respect for same-sex relationships.

Third, I want to discuss Australia as a particular case study of how a multicultural society has been developed and the consequential effects, if there are any, on questions of gender equality and marriage equality legitimated through legal, political and social forms. The case study is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis, but to simply highlight an example of a nation that is considered to be a compelling litmus test for globalisation. Finally, I want to bring the discussion to a conclusion by making some observations about the value of understanding the effects of globalisation through the idea of a cosmopolitan ethic. I want to make the argument that there are ineluctable connections between gender equality, sexuality and cosmopolitan perspectives and thought.
I. From Apartheid to Conviviality

My thinking on what I want to refer to as reflexive cosmopolitanism derives from a discussion I once had with Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Tutu talked about his philosophy which was based on the insight that one person’s diminishment is our collective diminishment. His view was that we become human beings through our relationship with others; we cannot become human alone. In this regard he referred to the African word ‘Ubuntu’ which means that human beings become human through others.

Human society, he argued, only comes about in this equation and it is something that happens in everyday life through connection and relationship. He also made an important point about South Africa where the policy of apartheid had well and truly entrenched the racialisation of human relations over several decades creating profound inequality. He said that the only way forward towards reconciliation had to be through an ethical commitment to activating human rights. I interpret this to mean implicitly activating a multicultural convivial democracy where people learn to live and respect difference through reflecting on the condition of being human.

This is my understanding of cosmopolitan conviviality. That it is about learning to negotiate difference with respect, to live with the tension between the universal and particular, to live with cultural diversity, which is at the heart of a cosmopolitan ethic.

Tutu is one of the most admired, courageous and controversial contemporary human rights and peace activists and cosmopolitan thinkers in the world, someone who has been radical, innovative and holistic in his approach to questions of justice, reconciliation, ending poverty, freedom, conflict resolution and challenging all forms of oppression. His life and work are exemplary in the way that they illustrate how aspirations for human rights and peace are not merely empty rhetoric and ‘loose talk’, endless inscriptions on parchment or agitations in legislation. His thorough commitment and successful drive to ending the apartheid regime has been followed by an equal commitment and drive to end entrenched meta-racism in all societies.

But what remains also fascinating about Tutu, is that he has consistently demonstrated a unique capacity as a black South African Christian and theologian to connect his experience of apartheid as a racially inhumane demarcation of legitimacy and power with what he perceives as other forms of apartheid. Tutu has thus been as outspoken about what he has termed an ‘apartheid of homosexuality’ as he was about South Africa’s shameful apartheid policies based on race. His insight into the connection between apartheid based on race with an apartheid based on sexuality is profound. The capacity to link different forms of oppression, even if they are historically distinctive and contextually dependent, is to my mind a fundamental characteristic feature of the cosmopolitan, that is, someone who values the human project. Tutu embodies the very yearning of the cosmopolitan commitment through a deliberative and active attention to the various and complex questions of human diversity.
II. Cosmopolitanism, Gender and Sexuality

It goes without saying that there is a very extensive literature on cosmopolitanism, a concept that is widely regarded by a number of thinkers such as Paul Gilroy, Martha Nussbaum, Anthony Appiah, Ulrich Beck, Diana Neaga and others as a way of going further than multiculturalism and extending the idea of multiculture into a specific approach of living with difference, coming to terms with co-habitation and negotiating power relations in a world of multicultures. Indian thinker Ashis Nandy has also made the point that the idea is resilient as a way of approaching cultural diversity since it is an idea that is not just Western, but also derives from the non-West, from people such a Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas K Gandhi and Aung San Syu Kyi for example, that it is an idea that is universal. My purpose in this paper is not to rehearse all the theoretical debates extant on cosmopolitanism as this is now a well and truly well trodden field. Suffice to say I think the concept has usefulness in understanding the general conditions that face humanity in an age where human rights language, values and principles, questions of equality and social justice are core concerns about co-existence.

Yet what is puzzling is that given the concept of cosmopolitanism is fundamentally about difference and the problem of diversity and identity, there has been little scholarly work done on the presence of gender and sexuality issues as features of cosmopolitanism. According to Stivens, this is ‘all the more remarkable,’ because ‘feminisms have engaged both theoretically and practically with many of the besetting difficulties within the cosmopolitanism debates – “universalism, ethnocentricity, neo-imperialism.”’

Stivens argues that this may be the case due to ‘a long-term disdain in political thought for what is deemed the “private”, “domestic” or “intimate”, the main focus of women’s democratisation movements.’ This argument can well be extrapolated to include the elision of sexuality as an intrinsic element in any discussion about multicultural conviviality and cosmopolitanism. Sexuality is where we are most human and vulnerable, where intimacy intersects with the public sphere. A failure to value sexual identity is a failure to value our humanity. As Amnesty International states, ‘sexual identity is a fundamental dimension of being human.’ As Tutu asks, ‘How can you be fully human unless we act sexually?’ It is therefore a crucial area to examine in relation to any question of multicultural conviviality. What I wish to do is look at the intersection between gender equality and gay and lesbian equality specifically.

It is well established that the social movements for women’s rights and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people’s rights have been mutually dependent. While much of the literature on multicultural conviviality and cosmopolitanism has indeed focussed more on the intersections of race and culture, my argument is that gender and sexuality are fundamental features of the multiculture world. My position is that we need to think more about our global multiculture including the full range of human diversity, whether this is about race, gender, disability, religion and so on. As Diana Neaga states, ‘The core of cosmopolitanism is fundamentally with the principle of respecting diversity.’

As a theoretical lens into this discussion on cosmopolitanism, which I see as a way of understanding the qualities of active conviviality I refer to the work of Jonathan Corpus Ong. In distilling the various views on cosmopolitanism, he offers a theoretical framework that I think is
useful in examining and qualifying the degree of convivial health in a society. He argues that there are four ways of understanding cosmopolitan theory. First, there is Closed Cosmopolitanism. This he defines as, ‘the identity performance when individuals reject the ideal of openness and fall back on the comforts of the similar and the predictable, separating ‘self’ from ‘other’. While the basic idea of cosmopolitanism is premised on permissibility, closed cosmopolitanism is premised on impenetrability.’

This is where a culture or society retreats from engagement with globalisation or diversity, or where there is a negotiation from a hard form of nationalism or cultural or religious essentialism and point of view. This is a society that is traditional, tribal, regulating the possibility of openness entirely, actively excluding the ‘other.’

Ong writes of the second kind that, ‘Instrumental cosmopolitanism is an important category because it captures a rather selfish expression of the cosmopolitan “openness to others”. While it is not its absence, as with closed cosmopolitanism, instrumental cosmopolitanism makes use of one’s knowledge of the world to promote oneself. In other words, it uses otherness for the sake of the self and to further delineate self from other.’

This is akin to the kind of multiculturalism that is basically predicated on a marketplace of social and cultural identities. This is where the ‘other’ is consumed, deployed, commodified, managed and regulated through, as Michel Foucault would put it, an ensemble of institutions.

The third kind Ong refers to as Banal Cosmopolitanism. This is akin to the approach that Anthony Appiah argues for in much of his work. That is, through everyday convivial encounters and exchanges, through rubbing shoulders with others who are different in terms of age, class, sexuality, gender, race and religion, for example, there is the potential and possibility, perhaps even an inevitability that people learn to live with difference, not always in an easy manner, but through a range of ethical and relational attitudes. Unexpected results can come from this form of cosmopolitanism. In a sense, it could be argued that the timeline between African slavery in the United States to the present day with a black American President is evidence of banal cosmopolitanism at work. Through processes of inter-marriage, emancipation, civil rights movements and explicit political inclusion, the United States could be viewed as an example of complex iterations of cosmopolitan efforts that have been messy and unpredictable, producing unexpected moments such as Barack Obama.

This is where hybridity or Homi Bhaba’s ‘third space’ is a form of ordinary, everyday, cosmopolitanism where marriage across cultures or nations produces new forms of familiarity and new ways of living with difference (not necessarily agreeable of course). Ong writes: ‘Repeated encounters with difference in the banality of daily life, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, have the potential to transform the way we deal with others over time. Using the example of the increasing presence of “openly gay” people in social life and in the media over the past 30 years, he relates that the mere presence of the Other makes it ‘harder to deny these people their respect and their concern’ (Appiah, 2006: 77).

The final conception of cosmopolitanism that Ong refers to is Transcendental Cosmopolitanism. This is where the critical distance between self and Other is resolved. In Transcendental Cosmopolitanism, the engagement with the Other is an acknowledgement, recognition and acceptance of that relationship. In fact, where the Other is seen as necessary. This frame of Ong’s is similar to the way human rights can also be conceptualised. As Boutros Boutros-Ghali writes, ‘Indeed, human rights, viewed at
the universal level, bring us face-to-face with the most challenging dialectical conflict ever: between ‘identity’ and ‘otherness’, between the ‘myself’ and ‘others.’ They teach us in a direct, straightforward manner that we are at the same time identical and different.”¹³ These four ways of thinking about cosmopolitanism can be useful in how we consider the ways differences and diversity is negotiated.

III. Homophobia as an indicator of gender inequality

As I suggested above, sexuality is a core site for social, cultural and political exclusion. If we look at the situation of sexual orientation, which includes people who are identified as gay and lesbian, in terms of law, 76 countries still criminalise and persecute people on the basis of their sexual orientation. Of these, seven countries actually punish lesbian and gay people with death. As the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) report, ‘On a global scale, the nations doing something positive for gay rights are dwarfed by those behaving negatively. While 75 countries will imprison you if you are gay, only 53 have anti-discrimination laws that apply to sexuality. Only 26 countries recognise same-sex unions.’¹⁴

In many parts of the world, admitting to being gay is very much a matter of life and death. In African countries such as Uganda and Zimbabwe, there have been recent attempts through parliament to legislate the death penalty for gay people. It is reported by ILGA that ‘More than 50 per cent of African states have taken action to criminalise homosexuality and religious homophobia is rife. The picture is not much brighter in Asia, where 23 countries have made being gay a crime. Latin America and the Caribbean are also home to many governments with a similar outlook. In Jamaica, sex with another man is described in the statute book as an “abominable crime”.’¹⁵

Amidst this very problematic situation for people who are gay or lesbian, there has also been a dramatic change worldwide over the last decade and more in relation to the institutionalisation and acceptance of same sex marriage. Since 2001 when The Netherlands became the first state to fully legalise same sex marriage (or institutionalise marriage equality) there are now 11 countries including Denmark, South Africa, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Canada that also provide full legal status to same-sex marriages. There are also a number of cities such as Mexico City and New York that recognise marriage equality.

Civil unions, which are an alternative form of recognising same sex relationships (but far less substantive symbolically than same sex marriage) also exist in a number of countries and jurisdictions. A number of other countries are in the process of instituting marriage equality such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and France (See appendix 1). In other words, there are significant changes to how sexual orientation, as a human right, and within the province of equal rights struggles, are being considered across the world, though in uneven ways. Although not within the scope of this paper, these changes are also taking place in countries where there are also strong religious/faith societies such as Spain and Portugal that are predominantly Catholic.

For the purposes of the present discussion, I want to refer to a recent and very interesting study by two scholars, Judit Takács and Ivett Szalma who have examined the relationship between homophobia and same sex partnerships across
Europe. This is the first time such a study has been undertaken to find out whether same sex marriage was connected to both gender equality and multicultural convivial democracies more broadly, and the effects on homophobia. Their concern was about the recognition of structural connections between groups who are marginalised and oppressed, in this case lesbian women and gay men, and questions of gender equality, democratic and inclusive policies.

As they write, ‘This recognition is reflected by the European Parliament’s resolution of 2006 on homophobia calling on the member states of the European Union to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are protected from homophobic hate speech and violence and that same-sex partners enjoy the same respect, dignity and protection as the rest of society. The resolution defines homophobia as an “irrational fear of and aversion to homosexuality and to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people based on prejudice” (European Parliament, 2006), comparing it to racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and sexism, and strongly condemns any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.’

What is compelling about their research is that it reconfirmed previous studies that exclusionary and negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women are frequently associated with traditional views and values about the roles of women in society. ‘In this context, social acceptance or rejection of gays and lesbians were seen to be rooted in a broader gender belief system focusing on the appropriate, and usually not at all overlapping, paths of women and men in society.’

They also were able to reconfirm much of the literature that shows clear links between homophobia and racism and how these attitudes are connected to views on immigrants, refugees and others. ‘In the examined 26 [European] societies more than 70 per cent of the not at all xenophobic and only 47 per cent of the very xenophobic respondents agreed that gay men and lesbians should be able to live their own life freely as gays and lesbians.’

But what was even more interesting and thought-provoking about their study, is the effect of the institutionalisation of same-sex marriage on homophobic attitudes. Their results showed that there is ‘a clear message for policy makers especially in those countries where equal treatment of lesbian and gay citizens has not yet been achieved in this field: there is no point to sit back and wait until society will slowly “mature” by itself, and homophobia would not prevail any longer – the maturation process can most probably be sped up by introducing and using legal institutions providing equal rights for all. Providing institutional frameworks for same-sex relationships... conveys a societal judgment that committed intimate relationships with people of the same sex are not inferior to heterosexual relationships and that the participants in a same-sex relationship are not less deserving of society’s recognition than are heterosexual couples. In our
view, this is a way to end the perpetuation of the stigma historically attached to homosexuality.’

Across the world the ramifications of the state’s recognition of intimate or sexual citizenship is having a profound impact on the ways we now conceive of questions of gender equality and active convivial democracies. In the United States, the recent adoption of full support for same-sex marriage by the Democrats signalled an enormous cultural shift in the American context. ‘This is a major turning point in the history of American civil rights’ said New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, an independent whose city is in one of six states that allow same-sex marriage. Neera Tanden from the Center for American Progress described the president’s expression of support as ‘another large step toward realizing this country’s promise of equality.’ In 2012 Barack Obama courageously articulated in his campaign for re-election that marriage equality was a matter of basic human rights. This is a radical departure, fundamentally questioning the hetero-normative, heterosexist and patriarchal dominance of entrenched regimes of gender and sexuality organising principles that have existed for centuries unchallenged until now. Obama’s views on marriage equality are also resonant with those of recently elected Socialist French President, Francois Hollande, and Conservative UK Prime Minister, David Cameron.

IV. Australia: A Brief Case Study

In this final section of the paper, I use Australia as a case study to briefly examine the intersection of race, gender, sexuality and struggles for marriage equality, to see whether Australia is an active multicultural convivial democracy. I am following Patience & Jacques observation that ‘The number of languages, religious and cultural traditions, forms of social pluralism, demographic complexity and gender relations that Australia’s multiculturalism encompasses makes it one of the most interesting experiments in globalization from below that the world has yet seen. In a sense Australia can be regarded as a test case in the construction of global citizenship.’

Today, one in four of Australia’s 22 million people were born overseas, 44 per cent were born overseas or have a parent who was and four million speak a language other than English. There are over 260 languages spoken and people identify with more than 270 ancestries. In a sense Australian society is characterised by its everyday experience of multiculture, although it is also evident that much of the public sphere is constituted by a white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian monoculture, the result of being a settler colonial society.

Australia’s public sphere over the past hundred and fourteen years has been driven by two contradictory imperatives. First, following the Second World War, Australia modelled and benchmarked its core institutions consonant with the establishment of international human rights treaties, declaration, values and language. The entrenchment of a rights consciousness in Australia demonstrated the hallmarks of a rational, modern and civilised society. Through much of the latter part of the twentieth century, Australia prided itself as a beacon of human rights law and practice. The other contradictory imperative that emerged, and which complemented the human rights framework, was the entrenchment of the notions that Australia was a tolerant, fair and just society. Indeed, through political rhetoric, national celebrations and the creation of modern
traditions, these notions became mythologised and rationalised as Australia formed the content of its consciousness.

These imperatives have characterised Australia’s development of its public sphere. With the demise of the White Australia Policy in the 1960s, which followed in a direct response to the waves of migration from non-Anglo European nations and increasingly from Asia, Australia became a nation in which there existed two dominant forms of belonging. The first was based on the maintenance of the mono-cultural traditions of the core institutions.

The second form of belonging that occurred cohered around the everyday experience of the multicultural, where the everyday exchange and interaction of cultural diversity was evident. Waves of migration from the outset of the formation of the Australian state have demonstrated this cultural diversity. Unacknowledged in the architecture of the public sphere is the fact that Aboriginal society itself was and is characterised by the experience of diverse peoples, communities and cultures. There was and is no monolithic Aboriginality. In relation to the remarkable demographic changes of the second part of the twentieth century, Australian society became explicitly a national home of substantive, lived and expressed cultural diversity. This form of belonging was recognised to some extent within the public sphere through the adoption of multiculturalism as a policy in the early 1970s.

However, the dominance of mono-cultural ideology within the Australian political system was unable to alter the epistemological basis of the core institutions sufficiently enough so that by the end of the century multiculturalism became a suspect and diminished position. Although the national imaginary had changed irrevocably, the project of modernity conspired with the establishment of mono-cultural borders, fixing the parameters of the public sphere.

Traditions in Australia that focussed on memorialising a range of extensive militaristic engagements for Britain, the Empire and then the United States and the ‘free world’; nationalist jingoism such as ‘We will decide who will come here’ in relation to managing a continuing influx of refugees from Asia and the Middle East; the Government’s long term resistance (until 2007) of the notion of endorsing an apology to Indigenous Australians for the effects of colonialism; and the legislation to entrench heterosexual marriage in 2004 based on fixing marriage as only between a male and female, were all signs of a retreat from the reality of cultural diversity. At the launch of the book, *The Conservative*, in 2005, the Prime Minister, John Howard, was able to rationalise that he was a ‘profound opponent of changing the social context in which we live.’ For Howard, the viability of the conservative social context was through the maintenance of borders – physical, psychological, political, cultural – framed through specific values based on a mono-cultural public sphere. The rationalisation of these borders was significantly legitimated simultaneously with British Enlightenment discourse on tolerance, a just society and ‘a fair go for all.’

Within all this, the maintenance of a heterosexual, heterosexist and patriarchal view of gender and sexuality was highly regulated through cultural as well as political management. Former Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2006) actively intervened, with opposition support, to ensure that Parliament enshrined a traditional form of marriage. Thus, the Marriage Amendment Act 2004 was passed by Parliament to insert a definition of marriage into the Marriage Act of 1961. This prescribed that marriage was ‘the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life’. This followed Howard’s belief that ‘Traditional marriage is one
of the bedrock institutions of our society.’

This maintenance of gender and sexuality boundaries and borders has become a key site of human rights and political debates in contemporary Australian society.

Ien Ang has observed in relation to the maintenance of what she describes as white fortress Australia in both the public sphere and culture: ‘what will undoubtedly heat up is the negotiation and contestation of the very meaning of the “Australian way of life,” as its condition of existence become increasingly intertwined with the rest of the world’. The debate over what constitutes Australian values has become a fault-line in contemporary Australian culture and society. Events such as September 11, the Cronulla ‘Race’ Riots in 2005, the ‘war on terror’ and marriage equality have brought Australian values powerfully into the purview of politicians and media commentators.

For the duration of the Howard Government, a deliberate focus was placed on proscribing values that are related to a values sensibility for Australia. In 2006, this culminated in the release of a discussion paper, Australian Citizenship: Much more than a ceremony, which outlined the basic tenets of what Australian values were and meant. At the heart of this paper, it was suggested that these values included: ‘our respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, support for democracy, our commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women, the spirit of the fair go, of mutual respect and compassion for those in need.’

Against this political rhetoric, gender in Australia has been a defining organising principle in the formation of its national mythology and history. Australia mainstream society developed hard masculinist approach to its identity and ethos. As a penal colony modern Australia was constructed as a laboratory of British Enlightenment values that forged a traditional, patriarchal and individualistic society. So, in some respects gender equality has been subsumed by these characteristics even though Australia was also one of the earliest places that gave women the vote, second only to New Zealand.

Australia can be characterised as a nation where convivial democracy is under stress. For example, although Australia now has a female head of parliament as well as a head of state, recent political debates, nominally referred to in the media as ‘gender wars’ have been aggressively framed around questions of misogyny and sexism, where gender oppression has been tested in the public sphere quite powerfully.

Although there is overwhelming public support for same sex marriage a recent vote in parliament in 2012, based on a conscience vote by the ruling Labor Party, rather than on the notion of marriage equality being a human right, failed to be passed into legislation. Although the national, ruling Labor Party has endorsed support for marriage equality as a policy platform, without the support of marriage equality as an unequivocal human right by the Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the vote in parliament was set to fail. The interesting and puzzling approach of Gillard has confounded many advocates for gender equality and marriage equality since Prime Minister Gillard is an atheist, in a heterosexual de facto (unmarried) relationship and long time supporter of homosexual rights since her student days. However, Gillard has remarked on many occasions that, ‘I think for our culture, for our heritage, the Marriage Act and marriage being between a man and a woman has a special status,’ and should not be revoked.

This is a country in which social movements for women’s rights provided the ground and inspiration for the Indigenous movement and the gay and lesbian movement. The largest gay and lesbian parade and festival in the world takes place
in Sydney every year, despite the fact that research shows widespread everyday lived experience of homophobia in schools, institutions and in many walks of life. The social and cultural diversity that is such a feature of Australian society is still dominated by white, heterosexist, patriarchal and largely masculinist values, enduring fear of the other and holding racist views.

Former Australian High Court Judge Michael Kirby, who is gay himself, writes of an urgent need to end what he sees as sexual apartheid amongst Commonwealth nations, of which Australia is a part. He writes:

The whole world knows that the Commonwealth of Nations has a problem securing action on the legal issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is a specific Commonwealth problem, let there be no mistake. Of about 80 countries that still criminalise same-sex, adult, private, consensual conduct, more than half (41) are members of the Commonwealth. Given that there are 54 Commonwealth countries, that means three-quarters of them still impose criminal penalties on gay people. The fact that such laws exist leads to stigma, discrimination, violence and an awful lot of personal misery.

Until 1966, Australia observed the “White Australia” policy. This totally excluded non-Caucasian immigration. We were specially frightened of the Asian “yellow peril”. We even imposed constitutional restrictions on our Aboriginal people, partly repaired by a referendum in 1967. Until 1992, Australians did not recognise the claim by indigenous peoples to legal recognition of their traditional lands. However, that logjam was dislodged. In my lifetime I have witnessed a major change for the better. It came about by quiet persuasion, good example and a bit of international pressure.

So it will be with sexual orientation. It forces a kind of sexual apartheid. It divides people into strict categories. It ignores their basic natures (sexuality not racial). It imposes harsh legal restrictions. It makes them second-class citizens. It denies them full entitlement as human beings in fundamental matters such as love, sex and identity.  

It appears that Australia is yet to become a fully cosmopolitan nation. It has moved away from the closed cosmopolitan society that was represented in the White Australia Policy in the 1960s, but in so doing it has embraced an instrumentalist approach to the lived reality of being a multiculture. I would argue that Australia is experiencing cosmopolitan growth quietly, unevenly and by and large peacefully, the type that is banal, ordinary and based in the kind of transformations that occur through surprising, paradoxical, unexpected, unpredictable and often challenging ways. There are some, however, who represent a call for full engagement as a cosmopolitan and open society such as Michael Kirby, human rights advocates, feminists, Indigenous activists, writers, film directors and others.

V. Conclusion

This paper has examined four key questions. How do cultures co-exist and meet each other in the globalised world? In other words, what are the conditions for a convivial cosmopolitanism?
Second, how is marriage equality a significant issue? What does it reveal? Third, are there connections between multicultural convivial democracy, gender equality and marriage equality? And finally, how does Australia provide a litmus test that offers insights into these questions?

At the start of this paper I imagined a scenario where King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is meeting with Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, the Prime Minister of Iceland. And I wondered as I wrote about such a meeting, where in the world might it take place? Clearly if Australia is an experiment in the creation of a cosmopolitan society – from the ground up – it is as yet an unfinished project. It seems to me that cosmopolitanism is not an unconscious event that arises to reshape the values and being of a people and a society; that there has to be conscious and self-reflexive efforts for a cosmopolitan ethic to succeed. In the example given earlier about the effects of the institutionalisation of same sex marriage across Europe, it was very noteworthy that homophobia, as one example in the continuum of interrelated issues of gender, sexuality and culture, is less present in those societies in which same sex marriage had been adopted. I wonder whether multicultural convivial democracies, and Australia may be regarded as one, need to be active in their approach to conviviality, to take the lead, like Iceland, Norway, New Zealand, Spain and South Africa, to end homophobia by embracing substantive equality across gender and sexuality issues. I have no doubt that marriage equality will eventuate in Australia within the next decade. Same sex marriage is as I stated at the beginning of this paper, a litmus test for the presence of a robust cosmopolitanism. But if Australia is to be regarded as a “test case” in terms of where we can observe a fully realised cosmopolitan commitment, it has so far performed with less success than it should. There is a long way to go to resolve fundamental issues of race, gender and sexuality at the heart of its polity and social and cultural imaginary.

The United Nations Annual Assembly in 2012 was recently attended by the Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard with her partner Tim Mathieson. In a first, Mathieson attended the function held for wives and partners of the visiting leaders. The first male to ever attend such a function. Such a convivial moment, an apparently ordinary moment, was reported widely in the Australian media. It highlights the anomalous and contradictory nature of Australian society.

Appendix

Same-Sex Marriage Legal:
Netherlands 2001
Belgium 2003
Canada 2003–05 (provincially in 2003, nationally in 2005)
Massachusetts (US) 2004
Spain 2005
South Africa 2006
California (US) 2007–08 (now pending)
Norway 2009
Sweden 2009
Connecticut (US) 2009
Iowa (US) 2009
Vermont (US) 2009
Washington DC (US) 2009
Coquille Indian Tribe (US) 2009
Mexico City (Mex) 2010
Portugal 2010
Iceland 2010
Argentina 2010
New Hampshire (US) 2010
New York state (US) 2011
Quintana Roo (Mexico) 2011
Denmark 2012

Places where same-sex marriages are recognised but not performed:
Israel 2006
Rhode Island (US) 2007
California (US) 2007
Maryland (US) 2010
Mexico (all states) 2010
Tasmania (Aus) 2010
Queensland (Aus) 2011
Uruguay 2012

Places where same-sex marriages are imminent:
New Zealand
Scotland
Washington State (USA)
France
United Kingdom
Finland
Nepal
Slovenia
Paraguay

Notes
14 Emily Dugan, ‘More than 70 countries make being gay a crime,’ The Independent, 1 August 2010.
15 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 358.
18 Ibid., p. 360.
19 Ibid., p. 367.
20 Ibid., p. 375.
21 ‘Same-sex couples should be able to marry: Barack Obama,’ Times of India, 10 May 2012.
23 Quoted in Wilson, Tim. 2007. ‘Nothing Radical about equal opportunities for all citizens,’ The Australian. 7 March.
26 For a full account of these riots see: Baden Offord, Erika Kerruish, Rob Garbutt, Adele Wessell and Kirsten Pavlovic, 2013. Inside Enlightenment Australia (London: Anthem Press).
27 A number of recent polls in 2012 show support in the Australian electorate for marriage equality at around 62% or above.