

## Contention 7.2

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Since its inception, *Contention*'s objective has been to illuminate our understanding of activism and political behavior across a full variety of contexts and settings. By examining political behavior across multiple geographical and social sites, we can explore unique opportunities to expand the horizon of our theoretical frameworks, test the generalizability and applicability of our claims, and gain a stronger grasp of how different structural arrangements and historical trajectories might shape political action.

It is in this spirit that we welcomed Ben Hightower's and Scott East's proposal for a special issue focusing on activism in the Australian context. Research on political action has paid less attention to Australia than the country deserves. Australia – the conventional narrative goes – is the *lucky country*. Due to a convergence of factors, including its relative geographical isolation, abundant natural resources and links to Britain and other major western forces, the country has prospered and accumulated wealth. Yet, down under, amidst the senses of exceptionality and exceptionalism there is much more dissent and conflict than it appears at first.

In the introduction to the special issue, "More than Luck: Australian Protest in a Social Movement Society" Hightower and East question the narrative of such a 'lucky' country. Instantiated as the shorthand for a critique of a predatory elite void of ideas, this label has paradoxically become a celebratory device of Australia's relative success on the world stage. This success has come at expense of the many people who do not share in their country's apparent luck, fostering distorted views of social justice and affecting the solidity of the legal institutions tasked with defending human rights. This special issue, Hightower and East argue, shed scholarly lights on some of the alternative narratives and voices ignored in the mainstream discourse. We manifestly agree with their sentiment. While Australia may not deserve the moniker of the 'lucky country,' we are very lucky indeed to have such an excellent series of contributions engaging with this important understudied area of the world.

In the issue's second contribution, "'Welcome to Country'" and "'Acknowledgment of Country': (Re)Conciliatory Protest," Alessandro Pelizzon and Jade Kennedy examine the two Australian practices of "Welcome to Country" and "Acknowledgement of Country". The two ceremonies are commonly enacted at the beginning of public events for acknowledging the colonial history of Australia, and rituals inhabit a complex social space. They might be actively emptied of meanings as their social implications are ignored. They may even be accompanied by a sense of tokenism by indigenous and Aboriginal people. At the same time, they provide an opportunity for 'subtle protest', aimed at subverting hegemonic discourses and recognizing the claims of indigenous people and make explicit the failings of the colonial experience.

That contention over land, and over claims to places and spaces are still objects of dissent in Australia. These contentious processes are made explicit in the issue's third contribution: Danielle Brady's analysis of the protest action against the Roe Highway development: "Space, Place, and Agency in the Roe 8 Highway Protest, Western Australia". At the center of Brady's analysis is the notion that the campaigns to save the Beeliiar Wetlands from the Roe Highway development provide individuals involved with the opportunity to express

dissenting or novel understandings of space, and claim the right to different practices and arrangements compared to those imposed by the state.

The fourth piece in this issue, “The Multiple Modes of Protesting Live Exports in Australia,” by Jane Mummery and Debbie Rodan, further investigates the protest landscape in Australia by surveying the different modes of protest against the live export industry in Australia. Mummery and Rodan discuss the way in which protest give voice to the public sphere, shape its values and alter the order of social priorities in a variety of forms: ranging from online petitions to protest marches and fully mobilized social movements.

The fifth contribution to this issue, Rob Garbutt’s “Creating Space for Protest and Possibility: Nimbin, Australia, from 1973” explores the development of countercultural practices and their role in protest, through an investigation of the community conference at the Nimbin Aquarius Festival. Drawing on wide range of sources, including interviews, archival materials and presentations, Garbutt demonstrates how the conference has served as a persistent space through which countercultures have sprouted around shared social issues, and solidify in communities aimed at innovation and change.

Finally, in the last article of this special issue, “Pranks in Contentious Politics” Hightower and East interview the legendary Australian satirist and activist Simon Hunt, demonstrating the importance of listening to and learning from activist knowledge. Hunt acquired fame by developing the character of ‘Pauline Pantsdown,’ a parody of Pauline Hanson (a highly influential hard-right Australian senator, and leader of the country’s One Nation Party). The interview serves as an excellent example of how small-scale activism, playful repertoires of contention, and satirical characterizations of people and events can trigger mechanisms of social critique and change.

Above all, this issue reflects *Contention*’s commitment to publish pathbreaking research across disciplines, spanning the full range of social and political contention in diverse settings. We are always open to calls for special issues, and would particularly encourage proposals which challenge conventional hierarchies or approach a topic from a new angle, or in a new setting.