'Hoops' and 'Bridges': Muslims and the 'Australian Way of Life'

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Introduction

Transnational migration, increasing cultural diversity, minority ethnic segregation and the display of ethno-cultural difference in the public sphere are concerns that often engender fear and anxiety among citizens. As such this diversity appears to represent a formidable challenge to the nation state that 'vigorously[1]' asserts its sovereignty to maintain peace and security.[2] Such assertion of authority occurs through border control that often involves restrictive and discriminatory immigration policies that scrutinise and criminalise asylum seekers and forced migrants, and sets quotas and eligibility criteria for citizenship.[3] Such criteria and measures often reinforce special requirements such as linguistic skills and knowledge of the nation. In everyday life the state's response can give rise to practices of surveillance among co-citizens who question national belonging, are suspicious of multiple allegiance, and value demonstrations and proofs of loyalty from migrants, ethnic minorities and ethno-religious groups. This is especially the case for Muslims who are often expected to exhibit 'cultural conformity and exclusive

loyalty[4'] to the nation, or risk being seen as the enemy within or subordinate citizens.[5]

Contemporary literature on inclusive citizenship rejects such notions of cultural assimilation, national solidarity and exclusive loyalty. Within this literature, adult democratic citizens are identified as those who refrain from trading freedom and autonomy for security and protection from the nation-state, do not accept legal distinctions between the 'good' and 'bad citizen', express dissent, are not cowed down by fear, show care and support to co-citizens, experience dignity and honour, and value social connection and interdependence that goes beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.[6] The failure to follow such a course would engender subordinate citizens or 'second class citizens[7']' in the truest sense.

We argue, however, that everyday cultural practices, grassroots initiatives by community leaders, rearticulate who is a good citizen by actively reconstituting a perceived normative 'Australian way of life'. Such 'cosmopolitanism from below[8']' is important in understanding inclusive citizenship because it provides the potential to facilitate openness to Islam as a religion and Muslims as an ethno-religious group. This chapter demonstrates that such practices that value interdependence and disrupt fixed assumptions of the 'good citizen' are hopeful moments that can inspire what Fox and Miller-Idriss refer to as experiences of 'collective effervescence'.[9] This chapter draws on the Levinasian concept of ethical responsibility to think about how such temporal moments of bridge-building among members in positions of leadership in the local community in suburban Melbourne, Australia, can produce a multicultural future that values ethno-religious difference.

Muslims Australians, Inclusive Citizenship and the Multicultural Future

With the retreat of multicultural policies and the increased intervention by the state that privileges an assimilationist discourse, regulates practices of minority groups, undermines religious freedom and engages in discriminatory practices directed mainly towards Muslims, the access to inclusive citizenship and basic human rights in Australia is being undermined.[10] Practices that stem from negative public perceptions of Islam and prevalent stereotypes that

pathologise Muslims, perhaps more overtly since September 11, demonstrate that Muslim Australians still do not enjoy the full rights of citizenship; they are identified as victims of a 'lesser citizenship'.[11] Although the literature demonstrates that Muslims increasingly challenge these views in everyday life, such practices may be viewed as 'multiculturalism gone mad[12]' if Islam is to be seen as compatible with multicultural values and a core Anglo culture in Australia.[13]

On the other hand, negotiation that involves shared responsibility can be more effective to alleviate what Hage refers to as the continuous trauma and intimidation of misrecognition in everyday life experienced by second- and third- generation Muslims, as well as 'assimilation fatigue[14]' experienced by new settlers who desire to be recognised and accepted as good citizens. This chapter demonstrates that a multicultural future that involves intercultural negotiation in ways that show openness to Islam and Muslims can unsettle dominant understandings that privilege the acquisition of Australian values. Such practices of negotiation are significant because they accept rather than undermine the political will, self-determination and courage of Muslims and therefore contribute to more inclusive views of citizenship.[15]

Such negotiation and engagement, between formal government, informal agencies and citizens, that involve risk, informality as well as personal responsibility, have the capacity to produce a civic space that can quell fear and anxiety in the local community, promote mutual respect and demonstrate support to Muslim residents.[16] This is particularly pertinent given that recent research on local governance and intercultural understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians has underlined the need for grassroots initiatives to foster engagement and interethnic understanding and promote multiculturalism through everyday practices in Australian suburbia.[17] Such insights demonstrate that often non-government organisations are active in building relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, but Muslim organisations assume much of the responsibility in building social relations with the broader community and risk 'overload and burnout'.[18] This chapter explores this issue of 'bridge building' between Muslims and non-Muslims by drawing on Levinasian ethics.

Intercultural Relations in Local Places

Levinas's work is relevant in understanding the negotiation of ethno-religious difference in local places because he focuses on the communicative dimension of ethical responsibility and the relationship between embodied subjects who are socially interdependent by virtue of their shared human or corporeal vulnerability.[19] This vulnerability arises because we come into being through the address of the Other, an address that we cannot control, avert or avoid, and perhaps is often against our will. It is an address by the 'face' that makes our existence precarious and disturbs the 'affective, immediate, pre-reflective enjoyment of the world[20]' that lies at the heart of our subjectivity. The vulnerability and the suffering of the 'face' exercises an ethical authority in its role as both a supplicant and a master. In other words, the face makes moral claims and demands that cannot be refused and stimulates an endless obligation to deal with fundamental injustices within society. Levinas argues that such an obligation creates a tension between fear of survival or self preservation and anxiety about hurting the other.[21]

Contemporary literature on citizenship has argued for the application of Levinasian ethics in a concrete way, but there is little empirical work that engages with his philosophy because infinite and spontaneous responsibility seems impossible and irreconcilable with a pragmatic ethics that aims to scale up a dyadic notion of ethical responsibility.[22] To overcome these constraints, Butler draws on Levinas's conceptualisation of ethical responsibility to argue that personal interactions between the Self and Other are not individual interactions, but are mediated by language and occur within a social context where familiar norms are reiterated and often 'sedimented'.[23] Butler argues that although these norms condition social behaviour, the contingency of these norms means that there are moments when the subject has the capacity to demonstrate agency, intelligibility and responsibility.[24] Such responsibility does not arise from moral authority that depends on autonomy and self-reflexivity, but from a politics of humility and ethics that arises from fear for the Other, rather than fear for the Self.[25]

Such responsibility is important because it values social connection and interdependence and has the potential to displace

the fear and anxiety that comes with encountering difference.[26] In other words, the generic post-structural story which focuses on the politics of cultural Othering and conceptualises subject formation in terms of closure and exclusion is inadequate in understanding the negotiation of difference; it cannot explain temporal and performative moments that are pre-reflective but demonstrate empathy, responsiveness, attentiveness, as well as infinite and spontaneous responsibility that we extend to people within the nation and the wider world by virtue of our common humanity.[27] People who engage in such practices can be identified as 'bridge builders'.[28] Rather than restricting the term to educators as Nagel and Staheli do in their research on British Arab activists, we employ a broader understanding of bridge building to think about it in terms of everyday practices within the sphere of local governance that disrupt normative understandings of the 'Australian way of life' that regulates who is a 'good citizen'.[29] Such practices are important because they have the potential to be scaled up to a collective and shared responsibility that welcomes ethno-religious difference.

Methodology

This chapter draws on fieldwork that constitutes part of an Australian Research Council project that focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of local government policies in promoting intercultural understanding and social inclusion in France, the United Kingdom and Australia. The chapter reports and discusses data collected from participants within the City of Whittlesea in Melbourne.

A Case Study Approach: The City of Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea, with a population of 132 000, is a suburban municipality approximately 20 kilometres north of Melbourne.[30] The present boundaries were constituted in 1988, and today the City of Whittlesea is one of the fastest growing municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne, and the third most culturally diverse area in Victoria. It has an ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse population, with one third of the population born overseas, and almost half of the residents of a non-English speaking background. Within this municipality recent arrivals are from the Horn of Africa (that is, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti), Lebanon, Turkey,

Macedonia, Egypt, Afghanistan and Iraq. The percentage of persons practising Islam is above the national average, settlers from Iraq constitute the fastest growing migrant community, and the percentage change of persons speaking Arabic for the inter-censal period 2001–2006 was 38.9 per cent, suggesting a strong Arab-Muslim presence.[31] Given the increasing ethno-religious diversity, local council has been proactive in developing strategies and initiating programs to promote respect and harmony among residents, as well as meet specific needs of Arabic-speaking migrants and African Humanitarian entrants.[32] The City is an active member of the Standing Committee on Local Government and Cultural Diversity and works with members of the Victorian Multicultural Commission to provide greater social inclusion among new and emerging communities

Data Collection

This chapter reports and analyses the results from thirteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with community leaders conducted between October and December 2008 in the City of Whittlesea. Representatives from ethno-specific/cultural groups, multicultural community support groups, migrant/refugee support groups, youth support groups, charitable/faith affiliated groups, religious institutions, educational institutions and the media were interviewed (Table 1).

Table 1: Types of Community Groups/Institutions

Community groups/institutions	No.
Ethno-specific/cultural	2
Multicultural community support	2
Migrant/refugee support	1
Youth support	2
Charitable/faith affiliated	1
Religious	3
Educational	1
Media	1
Total	**13**

The aim of the interviews was to gain an understanding of attitudes towards multiculturalism and perceptions of Muslims, as well as to explore effective partnerships between local council and non-governmental organisations that would build on the results obtained from general household surveys. Although this research draws on interviews with community leaders rather than 'ordinary' people, we don't see it as part of an 'elite discourse[33]' because it brings together a range of voices that reflect everyday assumptions of living and/or working in Australian suburbia.

These in-depth interviews have provided us with an insight into diverse meanings of the 'Australian way of life' because responses are not regulated by the interviewer and participants have the opportunity to tell stories rather than respond with brief answers as in the case of household surveys. Such stories have been explored using discourse and narrative analysis to understand the dominant as well as diverse meanings of the 'Australian way of life'. Fox and Miller-Idriss argue that discourse and narrative analysis involves research skills that shed light and tease out the processes through which a normative order is constituted and taken for granted as 'common-sense'.[34] Following from this understanding we conceptualise the telling of these stories as discursive acts that do not simply describe that way of life but actively constitute it and bring it into existence.[35]

Talking About the 'Australian Way of Life'

The community leaders chosen for this project represented a very broad segment of the Australian society and were, therefore, well placed to reflect on what being 'Australian' means and what the cherished 'Australian way of life' implies and engenders. Their insights into the presence of Muslim co-citizens in local spaces are indicative of a much wider construction of Muslim individuals as a highly mediatised and racialised group that in most cases do not easily fit within the 'Australian way of life' narrative. More critically, however, is the assumption that Islam as a religion may not possess the qualities to integrate within a multicultural setting that is predicated on the secular values of liberal democratic traditions. As the following thematic excerpts show, the juxtaposition of Islam and Muslims to Christian Western ethics is presented simplistically as evidence that

there is little hope for Muslim migrants to be fully integrated into Western polities. It is only through a deeper analysis, however, that spontaneous moments of ethical responsibility emerge when such cultural assumptions are contested.

'Taken-for-granted Assumptions' About Islam and the 'Australian Way of Life'

Listening to community leaders who are volunteers, public servants, elected members and organisational representatives it is evident that the 'Australian way of life' is regulated by norms that privilege core cultural values and an Anglo-Celtic heritage. Such 'taken-for-granted assumptions[36]' mean that the visibility of Islam in the public realm evident in ordinary everyday rituals engenders anxiety as is evident in the following excerpts:

> Patricia: They are very devout, extremely devout. I think the majority of Australians keep their religion quite close to their chest, whereas the Muslims their religion is more overt. It permeates their whole lives, in terms of it permeates, where they can go, what they can do, like swimming, mixing with mixed groups; it permeates the clothes that they wear; the prayer times that they have, so that when they go into a work, they have to find a workplace that is prepared to allow them to change their work hours so that they can fast with their family when it's dark, and all those sort of things. It takes a big commitment from [them] to be able to live and practice their religion in our way of life, because basically we are a Christian country that operates very much on the Western world.

> Nancy: I'm of Greek Orthodox persuasion, well that's what I've been raised. For me it's not necessarily a way of life, it's part of my cultural heritage. Whereas with a lot of the people who I know who follow the Islamic faith, it becomes a way of life, rather than just guidance, if you like, you know. It dictates the way that they approach their everyday living.

Patricia, a community leader from an educational institution and Nancy, a leader of a multicultural community support group as well as a local councillor, aim to value cultural diversity, but in practice find it hard to appreciate a cultural heritage that is not Christian. The outcome is that they emphasise the oppressive nature of Islam, a faith that demands religiosity and regulates everyday living. Patricia, for example, underlines the centrality of a Judaeo-Christian ethos, values and traditions to the 'Australian way of life', and visualises Australia as a Christian country. Nancy, on the other hand, highlights the centrality of Christianity to an Australian cultural heritage. The effect is that Muslims are visualised as un-Australian rather than 'good citizens' because they engage in 'traditional practices' that contest the core cultural values and ways of life associated with an Anglo-Celtic heritage, a heritage that is often invoked and underlined within politics and the media.[37]

Such stories that scrutinise Muslims and focus on the oppressive nature of Islam as a religion are a source of anxiety and fear among the broader community. This is evident when Patricia later underlines that the increasing visibility of Muslims would make them a powerful force, and provide them with a stronger political voice in the future, as compared to Christians whose numbers are waning. In fact, several participants drew on arguments related to limited resources and environmental impacts, gender relations and the status of women, change to a free and open lifestyle, threats to peace and inter-ethnic harmony and divided loyalty, to justify why the entry of Muslim immigrants should be curbed. In the following excerpt, Donald, a Christian leader who engages in interfaith gathering expresses his anxiety:

> Donald: If there was a war in Australia and Islam people of those beliefs come and fight in Australia, who would they fight for? Like the people that have got dual citizenship, would they fight for Australia, or would they fight for the country that is invading say. I find that really hard to reconcile. If the crunch came who would they have allegiance to.

Donald visualises Islam as a religion that engenders 'soft segregation', that is, segregation of hearts and minds that involves little loyalty to Australia.[38] Such 'emotional and spiritual segregation[39]' engenders suspicion of Islam as a military and cultural threat, and this is problematic because it impedes deep or critical multiculturalism that questions core values and normative assumptions, and recognises that citizens have a right to follow a way of life of their choice.[40] Connolly argues that such deep multidimensional pluralism incorporates hospitality and generosity and is preferable to shallow secular diversity that assumes it is possible to 'bracket your faith[41]' in the public sphere, or cultural relativism that supports the practices and norms of the dominant culture. The following section demonstrates that everyday practices that contest assumptions about the incompatibility of Islam with a normative 'Australian way of life' are acts of such hospitality and generosity with the potential to unsettle ideas of who is a 'good citizen'.

Contesting Assumptions About the Incompatibility of Islam with the 'Australian Way of Life'

Mustafa, a leader of an Arab-Australian community group, is aware of feelings of alienation and insecurity that are a result of continuous scrutiny that identify him and his friends as un-Australian. He negotiates such feelings not by marking non-Muslims, but by underlining how the Quran teaches him how to live with difference.

> Mustafa: Islam is a way of life, how [you] can actually communicate your values and interpret it in daily life, and also how can you deal with the others, the people who are different from your religion. There are [a] set of values put there by Islam, showing that the Muslim must respect the others' values and religions, the difference, this is coming from the Quran text.
>
> I guess the basis is your relationship with the others actually, you need to understand the others' values and thoughts, and also introduce yourself in a very appropriate way, not actually hurting the others. Ah this is [sic] the principles, but are the people actually committed to those

principles, it depends. I can't actually be judgemental about specific individual[s].

Mustafa speaks of his way of life quite differently compared to Patricia, Nancy and Donald. For Mustafa, Islam is definitely a way of life, but it is a way of life that does not regulate his behaviour but leads to anxiety about hurting the other, and it is in this way that religion contributes to his spirituality. Such spirituality has a lot to contribute to an 'Australian way of life' because it provides a space to think clearly and critically, show respect for others and express opinions without being judgemental. Such an understanding of Muslim spirituality underlines that religious rituals and daily life or the social domain of Islam is attentive to human relations in ways that foster the principles of respect, humility and responsibility towards others; but unfortunately emotional experiences of prejudice, racism and Islamophobia make the adherence to such principles very difficult.[42] Ramadan argues that for Western Muslims the *jihad* or struggle for 'responsible, active and intelligent citizenship' is less about narrow community interests, self pity, defensiveness and the position of Otherness, and instead involves developing the capacity to listen and exchange ideas with fellow citizens.[43] In speaking about Islam as a way of life and valuing social connection and interdependence despite ethno-religious differences, Mustafa demonstrates that the norms that regulate the 'Australian way of life' and marginalise him are temporally contingent.

Heather, a member of a Christian-affiliated charitable organisation and Donald, a member of a Christian institution, underline that although the expectation within the broader community is that Muslim migrants will assimilate, as community leaders they feel obligated to break down cultural stereotypes that mark Muslims as un-Australian.

Heather: We're almost making people [Muslims] jump through hoops to be like us, which in some way actually takes away the difference. I'm just not sure where the line is drawn about what people should and shouldn't have to do.

Donald: Sometimes we don't think that we have to start first. Otherwise the bridge will never be built. You see to build a bridge you need two columns, because if I build a bridge and I go into the middle, but you didn't build yours, when I reach the middle, battaboom, I go into the water as well.

In using the trope of the 'hoop' and the 'bridge', Heather and Donald recognise that the 'Australian way of life' is actively reconstituted by accepting the discomfort of unfamiliar practices. They argue, however, that such an 'Australian way of life' does not provide greater freedom for migrants, if it places new demands and expectations of social behaviour. In making these statements they emphasise the importance of everyday practices within the sphere of local governance in providing the rights to the city and the nation for all citizens. Such acceptance has tangible outcomes when false assumptions of gender relations, the status of women and English language skills symbolised by the *hijab* are contested.

Heather: I might you know accompany a Muslim woman somewhere, you know Centrelink, you know, wherever, and automatically the person who we're talking to would talk to me, and I go 'No actually you need to speak to my client, who can speak better English than I can. Don't make those assumptions that because she is wearing a *hijab* she can't speak English'.

In this excerpt, Heather challenges the western gaze of Islam that sees the *hijab* as a signifier of patriarchy and illiberal practices that mark Muslim women as passive, oppressed, and lacking English language and communication and skills. There is extensive literature that demonstrates such stereotypes evident in the work of Coene and Longman, Kabir, Aly and Walker, Ho, Abu-Lughod and Abood.[44] In fact such a 'reductive interpretation[45]' does not appreciate the *hijab* as the sign of freedom or agency, moral commitment, family honour, community belonging, courage, assertive independence or cultural defiance against the oppressive practices of western racism.[46] Such

independence, courage, and feelings of belonging prompt Sabiha, a member of an Arabic-speaking women's group to say:

> Sabiha: We are Arabic group, why, once a month, why don't we invite other groups to our group? Chinese group, Turkish group, I am sure there's more than 40 groups in Whittlesea, I don't see why we don't invite other groups, and each group can get dressed in their national dress and do their own cooking, so we get to know each other. We don't know much about Chinese. Maybe many people think that all Muslims are terrorists, or all Christians are somewhere in the Lala land, but if you can get all those communities together once a month, once every three months, I think that would work towards one community.

In this excerpt Sabiha confidently argues for small projects that engage people from different ethnic backgrounds in a common endeavour that contests fixed assumptions about Muslim women and their way of life. Sabiha and her friends are not looking for what Abood identifies as salvation from oppression[47], but opportunities for affective engagement that unsettle prevalent stereotypes and engender a sense of joy. Abood argues that the challenges of grass-roots activism among Arab-Australian women is therefore not only about unsettling such assumptions about oppression, but also about exchanging 'ideas, support and resources' with Indigenous and non-English speaking women who also experience marginalisation.[48] Such projects are crucial for cross-cultural interaction, but community leaders like Lionel from a Christian charitable organisation underline that the emphasis of local government policies is over-whelmingly on cultural integration and measurable outcomes, rather than activities that enable people to 'actually rub shoulders' and break down stereotypes:

> Lionel: We don't measure the right stuff. We tend to mea-sure dollars in terms of what services, or what resources are we giving for the dollars we spend. Whereas sometimes a simple, almost seemingly irrelevant thing that happens is culturally very important, like a barbecue that happens in

the park. People say 'oh that's a waste of resources; the government is having a barbecue'. Sometimes that becomes a real connection point for, it becomes a real sort of spiritual connection that's a bond, like a strong bond between people, that has ramifications somewhere else, but how do you measure it?

Lionel emphasises the importance of local governance that incorporates grassroots initiatives and affective engagement in seemingly inconsequential social activities rather than just workshops, community forums, consultations and training programs that are more 'safe' but unintentionally segregate groups based on their language, religion or ethnicity. Healey argues that such experimentation, failure and 'redundancy in resource use' are positive qualities because they result in creative energy and spiritual benefits that engender feelings of wonder, awe, enjoyment and pleasure.[49] When such feelings are embodied in relational encounters the 'Australian way of life' is actively reconstituted in ways that welcome ethno-religious difference.

Conclusion

The starting point of this chapter was that the increased scrutiny of Muslim citizens in the West is weakening intercultural relations and social connectedness at the local level, and that such outcomes can be presented as threatening to the 'Australian way of life', however that is defined. The emphasis on localised encounters within the sphere of local governance is a reflection of the importance of grassroots movements in shaping public discourse on ethno-religious diversity and social inclusion, and underlines the relevance of multiculturalism as a policy. However, with the recent backlash against state-sponsored multiculturalism in liberal nation states, issues of ethno-religious diversity and the ability to foster intercultural engagement have been identified as major challenges for cities in the twenty-first century.[50] Although the policy of multiculturalism may have been seen as a 'utopian fantasy[51]', it nevertheless focused on producing a more inclusive society and encouraged public debate on cultural pluralism. Today, in the absence of such a policy in several nation states, the lived experience of multiculturalism and

opportunities for cross-cultural encounter, have the potential to enable citizens to move beyond prejudice and conflict and unsettle normative understandings of inclusive citizenship.[52]

The stories discussed in this chapter have demonstrated prevalent practices within the sphere of local governance, a sphere that brings together volunteers, public servants, elected members and organisational representatives who underline their commitment to valuing ethno-religious diversity. This chapter has shown that despite this commitment, such valuing is often very difficult and this is evident during temporal moments when power is unconsciously exercised to regulate and legitimise a normative 'Australian way of life'. The effects are the subordination and exclusion of Muslim as 'good' citizens. Such constraining practices within the sphere of local governance that emphasise the incompatibility of Islam with the 'Australian way of life' engender feelings of fear, anxiety and suspicion among non-Muslims and feelings of alienation among Muslims. Enabling practices, on the other hand, are practices that incorporate a passion for intercultural engagement, avoid arrogance and superiority, and accept feelings of discomfort in everyday life. Such engagement enables us to see fellow citizens as subjects with feelings rather than marginalised objects worthy of our scrutiny. This is evident when non-Muslims accept that the 'Australian way of life' is diverse through 'speech act[s][53]' that welcome unfamiliar practices, and when Muslims assert that the spirituality and values of Islam develop the capacity to listen and exchange ideas with others. The research outlined in this chapter is therefore timely and relevant in understanding intercultural negotiation within the sphere of local governance. Such insights can unsettle responses of radicalism among Muslims that are often driven by experiences of discriminatory practices as noted by Hasan[54], and feelings of anxiety, fear and mistrust among the broader community of a transnational Islamic presence that resists encompassment and assimilation as underlined by Hage.[55]

This chapter has shown that 'good' citizens are not leaders who support a normative 'Australian way of life', but those who make spontaneous statements, or engage in grounded material practices that in unobtrusive ways address the obligation to deal with fundamental injustices in society. Although questions have been raised

about how such practices can be scaled up in recent research by Valentine[56], this chapter demonstrates that the virtue of responsibility can be dispensed through collective action by community leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, who respect difference. Rather than seeing them as elite leaders or 'noisy minorities[57]' who fail to represent a diversity of voices, this chapter visualises leaders as 'bridge builders' who reconstitute the 'Australian way of life' through moments of openness. Such an openness lies at the core of Levinas's thinking of ethical responsibility as well as Muslim spirituality, and empowers us as citizens with rights to the city, the nation and a social world that is 'intimate, non-violent and caring'.[58] Such connections that are embodied and lived are expressions of ongoing practices that enable us to imagine such a world: a world where we can begin to see each other as caring co-citizens.

Notes

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24   Butler, *Precarious Life*.

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