

The History Council of NSW is pleased to award the



• MAX KELLY MEDAL •

for

2010

to

Ms Agnieszka Sobocinska

*'The language of scars': POWs' bodies and the overturning
of the colonial order'*

The judges agree that this is an historical essay of excellence, making a significant and important contribution to existing Australian historical scholarship. Theoretically sophisticated, well-written, and carefully structured, it draws out the complexity of power relations that contributed to the construction and deconstruction of Anglo-Australian imperialism in 'the East'. The author has drawn on a wide and impressive range of primary sources, all of which have been carefully read and utilized, including travel-writing, novels, POW narratives, and contemporary media reports, to examine the corporeal experience of colonial order prior to and following the Second World War in Pacific Asia. The essay carefully describes and analyses the implications of the ways in which Japanese colonial power was inscribed onto the (white) bodies of the POWs through physical punishment and threat, including the withdrawal of rations and the imposition of compulsory labour, as colonial power relations were inverted during the Pacific War. The author shows that the corporeal afflictions of imprisonment were devastating to both the POWs and to many Australians back home, and that racism was a major response to internment. The media's focus upon the physical power of captors was an important representational strategy used to rehabilitate the representations of POWs, and would powerfully influence popular understandings of the experiences of those men and women held captive by the Japanese military.

The judges were impressed by the author's deft and articulate use of complex theoretical concepts, and the thoughtful development of important insights in existing historical scholarship, to provide an historical narrative illuminating this well-traversed terrain in an original and exciting way. The essay has successfully integrated insights from postcolonial and feminist/gender scholarship to provide a challenging and provocative re-assessment of POW history and in doing deepens our understanding of the history of Australia's relations with other countries and peoples in the Asia-Pacific generally.

Awarded 3 September 2010

By:



historycouncilnsw



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2010 Judges' Report

Six entries were received for this year's Max Kelly Medal. The authors addressed an interesting range of subjects and the standard of presentation was generally very good.

The judges also highly commend the following entrants:

'Wounded memory of Hazara refugees from Afghanistan: Remembering and forgetting persecution.'
by Denise Phillips

An extremely well-written and methodologically sophisticated essay, this work provides a sensitive and thoughtful working through of the issues of memories of horrific violence, with reference to the history of Afghani Hazara refugees in Australia. Drawing upon a wide range of sources including Afghani sources and giving a close and engaged reading of Ricoeur, the author argues that memory is unavoidably situated within the context of the present, and the notion of a full or unaffected memory of past atrocities that might be retrieved by oral historians is a chimera. This essay makes an undoubted contribution to the scholarship of oral historiography and to the history of Australian refugees.

“We want a Protector”: Epistolary Agency of Flinders Island, 1846’
by Leonie Stevens

This is an original, engaged, and engaging narrative essay restoring a forgotten or unacknowledged history of early Indigenous activism, in colonial Tasmania. Using a range of contemporary and little-known primary sources produced by Aboriginal Tasmanians, the author argues that the corpus of letters sent by seven Aboriginal writers from Wybalenna settlement, including one woman, represents the development of an articulate political strategy by Indigenous people in this early period – “epistolary activism”. The essay, which displays a real passion for the sources, makes an important contribution to historical scholarship regarding Indigenous peoples and colonization.

Judges' Report prepared by
Prof Victoria Haskins and Dr Tanya Evans
3 September 2010