

Occasional Address
Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, Saturday 27 May, 11.00am

Professor Joy Damousi
Professor of History, SHAPS, University of Melbourne

Congratulations to each of you for what you have achieved today.

You have all reached a significant milestone as this occasion marks a turning point in your professional lives.

You have reached the pinnacle of your academic study to date.

You will always remember receiving your PhD as this is a new marker in time. What does it represent?

It is a moment of transition as you all now move to become the leaders in your fields of research.

Your supervisors here at the University have trained you in your respective areas to do just that. Your initiative, your passion and above all, your leadership in your research field will be transformative. In asking the big questions each of you will take your fields into new directions – into aspects, dimensions and areas of your discipline that don't even exist yet in 2017.

It is a moment, too, which brings you into the international community of scholars in a new way. This is an important marker as you become the next generation of leading academics, setting new agendas across the globe.

The future is mercurial. You can never precisely know what form it will take. But we do know that it will bring great excitement and many possibilities which are about to come your way. It is the beginning of the next stage of your academic journey. And each of you will have a different one, so there are no models, or prescriptions of how best to handle the next step. And in this fast, ever- - changing world no- - one will have all the ready answers for you.

I completed my PhD in 1987 – exactly 30 years ago.

Doing a PhD was not in the life script I was handed growing up in a migrant family where I knew no English until I went to school. My parents were illiterate in English and semi- - literate in their native Greek when they arrived from Europe after the Second World War. The war had interrupted their schooling, so the extent of their education was only a few years at primary school. They had never heard of a PhD until I left Melbourne to enroll at the ANU in Canberra to begin my doctorate in 1984. I mention this part of my own journey coming from this particular background because it is a profound reminder of the transformative power of education. We should never lose sight of this capacity of education to re- - write our life script. We are all the beneficiaries of what education has to offer and the unexpected

directions to which it can lead us. We have the power to impart this to others and it is incumbent on us to do just that whenever and wherever we can.

It set me on my own particular path that has led me here today. You will all have had your own journey of how you got here and the challenges you have all faced in doing so.

What advice then would I give my younger self, three decades on?

First, take opportunities when they come. Be flexible and open to new possibilities and never take them for granted.

Sometimes other people see qualities in you that you don't often identify in yourself. I remember as a relatively junior academic I was invited to edit a prestigious journal. It was definitely not on my radar at that time to do this but I took it up and it was a great experience and fantastic learning curve. There is never a perfect time to do such things because a perfect time never comes. There are just opportunities that arise at particular moments, and these may not ever come your way again. Make the opportunities happen and be proactive about positioning yourself in the best way to take advantage of what becomes available.

Second, always work with the best people and leaders in your field.

I have been blessed with working with the leading scholars in my area of history both nationally and internationally. Why does this matter? It improves the standard of your work and makes you push the boundaries of excellence. One of my mentors at Yale University who I met in 1999 after he read the manuscript of my second book and recommended it for publication to Cambridge University Press, has ever since been a model for insisting on setting the bar high. One of the key lessons I have learnt from him is the idea that near enough is good enough is anathema to pioneering scholars. It should be to all of you.

Third, Mentor others

We all have mentors over the course of our careers and we know how crucial they all are to our progress. Become one. Become a great one. Take mentoring seriously. One of the great privileges of my career has been the opportunity it has given me to mentor early career women. As part of my Laureate Fellowship I run an Australia wide mentoring programme across the humanities and the social sciences to support, assist and promote women academics. To date, 130 women have undertaken this programme. I see a programme such as this one as a vital part of my leadership role as a senior academic: to nurture the next generation of women scholars.

And finally: Give back.

In my current research on the history of child refugees, I have formed a partnership with my old primary school, then known as George Street Primary, now Fitzroy Primary. This school has a long history of taking in migrant children. When my two sisters and I attended it from the early 1960s through to the early 1970s the student body came from all parts of Europe in the huge post-war influx of migrants and refugees into Australia that arrived after 1945. At present, it has a high enrolment of children from migrant backgrounds from African heritage, also fleeing the trauma of war, many of them refugees. My colleagues and I are putting together several programmes for the school. One is creating a fully fledged music programme which is currently absent from the school curriculum, to enhance children's learning opportunities and to encourage the involvement of their families into the school community. Another is to provide history materials for teachers, for them to tell the story of

immigration to this country in a way that welcomes, embraces and celebrates refugee children.

We will all find ways of giving back to the community and society through our research: the best scholars are at the forefront of doing so.

Today, you have earned a special gift: the privilege of generating and disseminating knowledge in your respective field. With it comes a great responsibility to contribute to society and to mentor others, and above all, to transform the future.

Congratulations once again.

I wish you all the very best in your endeavors.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

Today we are fortunate to have as guest speaker one of Australia's most noted academic historians, Joy Damousi.

Joy is Professor of History in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at this University, and author of numerous books which include:

*[The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia](#)
[Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-war Australia](#), and
[Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840-1940](#).*

*With Professor Philip Dwyer from the University of Newcastle, Joy is also the general editor of a ground-breaking multi-volume series titled *Cambridge World History of Violence*, to be published in 2018.*

As well as being a distinguished researcher, Joy has played important leadership roles at this University, including as Pro-Vice Chancellor Research, and helping to form the School of Historical Studies within the Faculty of Arts, becoming its inaugural Head of school.

Joy is a holder of the prestigious Australian Research Council's Kathleen Fitzpatrick Laureate Fellowship. Holders of this Fellowship play an ambassadorial role to promote women in research, alongside their own research programs.

As Laureate Fellow, Joy is also conducting a major historical investigation into child refugees and Australian internationalism from 1920 to the present day.

It is a great pleasure to invite her to address us today. Please welcome Professor Joy Damousi.