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## Broken Narratives:

Reflections on the history of Australia's Asian connections,  
1880s to the present

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### Abstract

When the former Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced the White Paper on 'Australia in the Asian Century' in September 2011 she spoke of a new Asia and a changed region<sup>1</sup>). She twice observed: 'We have not been here before'<sup>2</sup>). This paper will address the often-repeated idea that for Australians 'Asia' is always new. For over a century Australians have constructed 'unprecedented Asia' as a challenge so unique that a knowledge of the historical interactions with Asia, of the global flows that have long connected Australia to Asia, are hardly worth examining. Such matters might intrigue antiquarians but have no place, according to this argument, among those seeking to connect Australia to the 'Asian Century'. This paper will examine the origins and implications of this 'broken narrative' both for the practice of Australian Studies and for an understanding of Australian history.

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- 1) I appreciate research and editorial support from Dr Greg Watters in the writing of this article. Australian Government, 'Australia in the Asian Century White Paper', *Australia in the Asian Century*, (September 2011), <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/133850/20130914-0122/asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/white-paper.html>, accessed 14 November 2013.
- 2) Daniel Flitton, 'Australia's Fortune Cookie?' *Sydney Morning Herald*, National, (6 December 2012), <http://www.smh.com.au/national/australias-fortune-cookie-20121205-2avj8.html>, accessed 14 November 2013.

This paper will argue that the idea of an Australian nation was shaped through the late nineteenth century and beyond by the rise of Asia. Yet the stories we tell about Australia, the dominant narratives of our national life, continue to exclude or marginalise the explanatory power of the Asian context in the making of Australian beliefs and practices. The first and most obvious point to make is that for much of their European history Australians regarded generic 'Asia' as a potential threat to their survival. Asia was not understood to be part of the making of Australia, but was identified as the force most likely to destroy or undo the nation. If there is a persistent Asia-related narrative in Australia, it related to the role Asia would play in compromising or eliminating the nation. By definition, the act of building the Australian nation, its institutions and values, was understood to be, in varying degrees, a way of securing the nation against Asia. In a world where 'more Asian' meant 'less Australian', many of the stories we told about Australia performed the important task of building the nation psychologically and culturally to withstand Asia, the force most frequently credited with the power to silence Australian voices, stories and historical narratives<sup>3</sup>).

Stories are vital to the creation and legitimisation of nations. To be effective and enduring they need to explain connections, particularly perhaps the connection between past and present, between imagined national origins and the life of the nation now. The creative process of connecting a people both to a place and a shared past plays a powerful role in confirming possession and belonging. It serves the need to discover and explain what makes a people different from others, their particularity, while also revealing distinctive features in both their relationship to the past and to the territories they occupy. For some societies, Britain and Japan are good but not the only examples, distinction and authority are vested in a form of divine rule in which Monarch or Emperor are seen to embody the spirit of the people. These institutions affirm centuries of continuity and serve as a symbol of cohesion and common purpose – especially so perhaps in periods of conflict and division. The 'spirit of the people' will also be expressed in other ways. Shakespeare serves as a telling example of the power of language and literature in confirming the peculiar genius of the Elizabethan age and, by extension, the genius of the English people ever since. The Monarch brought governance, while the bard made the people speak through literature.

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3) For further studies on the evolution of Australian concepts of Asia see: Walker, *Anxious Nation*; David Black and Sachiko Sone, (eds.), *An Enduring Friendship: Western Australia and Japan – Past present and Future*, (Perth, The Westerly Centre, University of Western Australia, 2009); Walker and Sobocinska (eds.), *Australia's Asia*; John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia*, (Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2007); David Goldsworthy and Peter Edwards (eds.), *Facing North: A century of Australian Engagement with Asia 1970s to 2000 (Vol.2)*, (Melbourne, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with Melbourne University Press, 2003); Regina Ganter and Julia Martinez. *Mixed relations: narratives of Asian/Aboriginal contact in North Australia*. (Perth, UWA Publishing, 2006); Lachlan Strahan, *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sean Brawley, *The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America, 1919–1978*. (Sydney, UNSW Press, 1995)

In the Australian colonies both the monarch and the bard played an important role in confirming the connection between the colonists and the mother country, although for settlers of Irish origin the monarchy generated more resentment than respect. In any event, the connection to Britain, vital though it was in legitimising the colonising mission and affirming the power and reach of the British Empire, did not answer the need for specifically Australian accounts of how and why the colonists had come to settle in Australia and, more to the point, their experiences in so doing<sup>4</sup>). What kind of land had they come to and how were they to make it theirs<sup>5</sup>)? Making it theirs, necessarily involved others. The creation of Anglo-Celtic Australia required the relegation of Aboriginal cultures to a primitive past where, at best, they attracted an antiquarian interest, but they were given no place in the making of modern Australia<sup>6</sup>). And increasingly through the late nineteenth century, making it theirs, meant keeping Australia safe from Asia. In the evolution of an Australian story there were two dominant and mutually reinforcing narratives. Both were at the forefront of national rhetoric when the colonies came together as a federation on 1 January 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia and both had significant implications for Asia's place in the Australian imaginary.

The first narrative affirmed that the new Commonwealth was committed to racial homogeneity. In the words of a popular commemorative poem, the Australian people belonged to 'one dear blood'<sup>7</sup>). While blood ties connected them to Britain, they also ensured both a rhetorical and an actual separation from peoples and cultures deemed to be both racially different and a threat to cohesion. The mixing of blood, scientifically known as miscegenation, was greeted with particular abhorrence. Miscegenated populations were considered unstable, directionless and altogether inferior to racially pure communities<sup>8</sup>). Only a racially homogenous community was considered capable of generating – and sustaining – the national purpose that was so critical to a fragile and yet to be tested federation.

Australia was the first new nation of the twentieth century and while its birth was heralded as a new dawn by many, its future was far from assured. The population was small and far removed

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4) John Hirst, 'Federation: Destiny and Identity', *Parliament of Australia*, (November 2001), [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/Research\\_and\\_Education/pops/~//link.aspx?\\_id=8D6A81550F0F4F22A6CBE7691B59BB98&\\_z=z](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Research_and_Education/pops/~//link.aspx?_id=8D6A81550F0F4F22A6CBE7691B59BB98&_z=z), accessed 17 November 2013

5) For a review of the position of Australia within the British Empire at the time of Federation see; John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation, the Making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000.

6) The relationships between White Australia and Aboriginal peoples during the Nineteenth Century are explored in Henry Reynolds, *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience 1788–1939*, (Melbourne, Cassel, 1972)

7) William Gay 'One Dear Blood' in Walter Murdoch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1918)

8) see Raphael Cilento, '1933 Jacksonian Lecture: Some Medical Aspects of Racial Resistance', *Medical Journal of Australia*, (14 October 1933), pp.501–511.

from the United Kingdom. The taint of convict origins still led some to question the moral character and resolve of the Australian people. Moreover, the institution-building and developmental tasks presented by a new continent were very considerable. Were the Australian people equipped to meet the challenges of nation-building? In this setting, the idea – or ideal – of Australia as a community which placed a special emphasis on racial purity as a guarantee of national vigour and cohesion was particularly compelling. If race patriotism was a powerful rallying cry, it also set the nation apart by erecting barriers to the entry of people it deemed either unsuitable or inferior which, as it happened, was most of the world. According to the rhetoric and the practice of the new Federation, the outside world was dangerously polluting and compromised. Australia would be a stronger place, it was argued, if freed from the compromising entanglements of other nations and particularly Asia<sup>9)</sup>.

These arguments were sometimes pushed further by those who regarded the British Empire itself as dangerously mixed, a polyglot empire. Some maintained that Australia should set itself the goal of becoming a racially unified republic free from the compromises of empire. The labour movement activist, William Lane, and the influential nationalist publication, the *Boomerang*, pushed such views unrelentingly in the 1880s and 1890s as debates about what kind of federation Australia would create intensified<sup>10)</sup>. The idea of a purer, whiter Australia was expressed more broadly in the slogan commonly invoked to describe Australia down to the Second World War namely, that Australia was 98% British. In other words, Australia was deemed more British than Britain itself. Proponents of this view believed that Australia's special distinction lay in it being an unmixed population removed from the racial and cultural contamination of others<sup>11)</sup>.

The insistence upon racial homogeneity as the proper scientific foundation for the newly created Commonwealth was strengthened and justified by the contention that the Australian continent itself had been set aside as part of some larger Providential design. According to this view, Australia had been preserved as a pristine setting for the development of the 'higher races'<sup>12)</sup>. This fruitful collaboration between science and providence gave the settlement project its sense of sacred mission. In settling 'their' continent the Australian people were led to understand that they were answerable to a higher purpose than the mere mechanics of settlement. Theirs was a higher calling than anything encompassed by the mean struggles involving vote-winning and the exercise of power that occupied their politicians except when they too, rising to the occasion as statesmen, addressed Aus-

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9) for an early history of the rationale and mechanisms of Australia's immigration restriction policies see: Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967.

10) David Walker, 'Survivalist Anxieties, Australian Responses to Asia, 1890 to the Present', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol.33 No.120, (2002) pp.319–330.

11) H A Fitzhenry, 'Australia Must Remain White, No.4; Ethical Aspects', *The Argus*, 28 January 1944, pg.2.

12) Charles H Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, Macmillan, London, 1893.

tralia's sacred mission<sup>13</sup>). In the lead up to Federation and beyond, Australians were frequently reminded, in the language of the day, that they had been entrusted with 'a continent for a nation'<sup>14</sup>). Racial homogeneity and the 'continent' became key markers of the new nation.

It was particularly the case in the first half of the twentieth century, that the map of the continent, the most explicit of all the representations of the nation as a defined space and place emerged as the dominant image of the nation. The great bulk of this imagery depicted the continent as a discrete landmass unconnected to the surrounding region. The map reinforced a message of disconnection, while also emphasising size/space, geographic distinctiveness and geo-political separation. The Australian continent was typically pictured as absolutely unique, a landmass entire unto itself.

During Federation celebrations dozens of large map forms, many of them electrically illuminated, appeared across Australia on major buildings<sup>15</sup>). These were among the most dramatic representations of the idea of a 'continent for a nation'. By the 1920s the map had appeared on the first issue of Commonwealth stamps and the first coins<sup>16</sup>). It adorned government publications and had become the dominant logo of Australian manufacturing. The map was a centrepiece for national, vice-regal and royal events<sup>17</sup>). A favourite device was the 'living map' comprising thousands of school children outlining the continent and often dressed in white in support of the White Australia ideal<sup>18</sup>). Successive Australian governments, civic bodies, businesses, advertising agencies, newspapers and ordinary citizens reproduced the map form. By the 1920s the map as a means of instilling Australian difference had become a national obsession. A bemused British journalist writing in 1926 observed:

. . . you find a map of Australia on the bath mat. You next observe it lurking under your thumb as you grasp your tooth tumbler. It is also on the door knobs, is woven into the carpets. Descending to breakfast you find it stamped upon the lift boy, and a minute later it peeps beneath your eggs and bacon. Even the ashes of your cigarette rest upon the body of Australia<sup>19</sup>).

The map of the continent referenced national enclosure, self-sufficiency and pride in being Australian. It marked a form of defiant separation from the world. The iconic deployment of the Australian outline in most promotional and political contexts down to the 1950s has treated it as a graphic

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13) Willard, p.119.

14) Attributed to the first Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Edmund Barton, 'The Coming Commonwealth', *The Brisbane Courier*, 21 January 1897, p.2.

15) 'The Illuminations', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1901, p.14.

16) Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo*. (Sydney, Xoom Publishing, 2012,) p.380.

17) 'Living Map of Australia', *Advertiser*, 25 February 1954, p.11.

18) 'Physical Culture in State Schools: An Inspiring Spectacle', *Kyneton Guardian*, 7 December 1916, p.4.

19) 'Friendly Critics', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January, 1926, p.12.

mark, emblem, or logo that brands Australia as psychologically, culturally and politically distinct. The often repeated motif of the map confirms/naturalises the logic of a separate Australia, the last continent. It reinforced notions of special destiny and racial superiority. The attempt to disconnect Australia from Asia was rehearsed in the parliamentary debates that resulted in the Northern Territory passing from South Australian control to the Commonwealth in 1911, a decisive redrawing of the map. By this act the final closure of the continent was said to have been achieved and the Federation ideal of 'a continent for a nation' finally realized<sup>20</sup>.

The separateness of the Australian continent had already been underlined by its remarkable flora and fauna. From the beginnings of European settlement, the kangaroo, the koala and the wattle spoke persuasively of perplexing and often idiosyncratic difference. There was much that was strange and unexpected in this land. This was a continent in which the rules of creation appeared to have been broken or disturbed. In a continent abounding in oddities, there was nothing odder than the duck-billed platypus which, as one of only two egg-laying mammal in the world (the other being the Australian echidna) innocently broke all the rules of biology. Then there was the kookaburra, commonly referred to as the laughing jackass, whose penetrating laugh suggested mockery rather more than good humour. Here was a bird that knew this continent was the home of the unexpected. It seemed natural and appropriate to see this as both a new world and a world apart governed by a different set of natural laws<sup>21</sup>.

Australian difference also has considerable appeal to Australian Studies programs in Asia, although I readily admit that I have not conducted a systematic examination of how Australia is referenced through the region. Of the centres I have seen in China, flora, fauna and the map are prominent. The well-established Australian Studies Centre at Renmin University in Beijing is the proud owner of a kangaroo suit which bounds to life for their annual Australian Culture Week<sup>22</sup>. Until recently, the website of the Australian Studies Centre at Peking University featured a kangaroo hopping across the map of Australia holding the Australian flag. The identifying symbols of distinctive Australia clearly help mark and market Australia as different, but in doing so can reinforce messages that have lost much of their currency in contemporary Australia with the notable exception of tourist venues.

The separation and peculiarity of the Australian continent also appeared to find support in the char-

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20) see speech by Alfred Deakin, 'Federal Parliament' 12 October 1910', *Western Mail (Perth)*, 22 October 1910, p.18.

21) See Melissa Harper and Richard White, *Symbols of Australia*, (Sydney, UNSW Press, 2010); Souter detailed the history of the use of flora and fauna as national symbols in *Lion and Kangaroo*, pp.334–385; Libby Robin, 'Nationalising Nature: Wattle Days in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol.26, No.73, 2002, pp.13–26.

22) Australian Studies Centre, Renmin University 'Review of Australian Studies Centre in 2005', *School of Foreign Languages, Renmin University*, (2007), <http://fl.ruc.edu.cn/en/101076/21935.html>, Accessed 24 November 2012.

acter of the indigenous population. Well into the twentieth century they were depicted as a primitive people, a remnant surviving from the 'stone age'. Some doubted that they could reasonably be described as part of the human species. However described, their condition reinforced the impression of the Australian continent as a museum of oddities found nowhere else<sup>23</sup>). Among other characterisations, Australia was deemed to be a continent that time had forgotten.

The story of Australia's continental exceptionalism was well-suited to the nation-building narratives that sought to turn diverse populations drawn from all parts of the United Kingdom into a singular 'people'. It was not so much their origins that mattered as the shared experience of settling a new continent. The floods, droughts and bushfires that were so important to pioneering histories reinforced the story of Australia's particularity and the special qualities needed to survive or, in the vernacular, to make a go of it. The emergence of a new people demanded histories that explained what made them different from others and a literature that addressed what were considered national themes, not least the identifying features of the 'national character'<sup>24</sup>). In explaining difference, there was no more powerful influence than the continent itself. Stories were told of a people made in the image of a dry, hard continent. In the telling of these stories it was not so much the elaborations and refinements of civilisation that attracted notice but the primal contest between 'man' and nature. Life was a contest, an unforgiving battle, a fight. In this world the representative figure was male and doing battle was his natural condition<sup>25</sup>).

The idea of a continent apart was progressively reinforced across the nineteenth century by the view that Australia was largely free of the diseases that afflicted the outer world. When compared to Europe, Australia was considered free of the decadent excesses and pretensions of the old world. Australians were considered a youthful, practical people, full of vital energies<sup>26</sup>). If Australia was set apart from diseased Europe, it was also removed, though for some not sufficiently removed, from an allegedly diseased Asia. In 1881/82 when Sydney experienced an outbreak of smallpox the disease was quickly blamed upon the Chinese and, without supporting evidence, given a Chinese origin<sup>27</sup>). Chinese arriving in the colony of New South Wales were not only put into quarantine, itself an institution that emphasised separation from the outer world, they also had their clothes burnt to underline the distinction between diseased Asia and a 'clean', disease-free Australia<sup>28</sup>). While the

23) Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2002), pp.181–215.

24) David Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity*, (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1976).

25) Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1958).

26) Richard White, 'Sun, sand and syphilis: Australian soldiers and the orient' in D Walker, A Vickers and J Horne (eds), *Australian Perceptions of Asia: Australian Cultural History*, special edition of *Australian Cultural History*, No.9, 1990, pp.57–9.

27) Greg Watters, 'Contaminated by China', in Walker and Sobocinska (eds) *Australia's Asia*, pp.27–49.

28) Greg Watters, 'The SS Ocean; Dealing with Boat People in the 1880s' *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 33, no 120, (2002), pp.331–43.



Australian continent was not without its dangers and hardships, these were commonly represented as character-building in a way that could never be the case with smallpox or leprosy. These were sinister afflictions which, if unchecked, would destroy the nation. The idea of diseased Asia also fitted comfortably within the broader narrative of an outside world that was at once menacing and invasive and supposedly determined to enter Australia. It was not simply a matter of naming and recognising the danger but of mobilising popular resistance to it. Australians were encouraged to measure the depth of their patriotism by their determination to resist the incursions of the outside world<sup>29</sup>).

The often-repeated identification of 'Asian' disease as a threat to the well-being of the Australian population reinforced a fluid and readily deployed body of images that saw Asia as alien and invasive. I have examined a number of these themes in *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850–1939*<sup>30</sup>). The book examines the growing recognition of Australia's geographical connection to Asia through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the logic of proximity – and the countervailing 'nation-building' impulses of separation and cultural differentiation. In late nineteenth century invasion narratives, the Australian continent was figured as open and undefended, a largely empty space vulnerable to penetration and incursion<sup>31</sup>). In extensive debates on climate and settlement, the tropical north was commonly viewed as unsuited to European settlement and therefore more 'Asian' than it was (white) Australian. These regions were at once ambiguously situated and a problematic zone for white settlement, a place and a space others to the north might claim<sup>32</sup>). While interpreting the meaning of the invasion narrative is not altogether straightforward, several observations can be made about the cultural logic of the invasion story. Its first purpose was to modernise and update the image of Asia for late nineteenth century audiences. In broad terms, collective Asia was not seen as a geo-political threat to Australia before the 1880s. There were certainly threats, but they were largely seen in terms of increases in the numbers of inferior and culturally alien settlers. This was seen primarily as a problem specific to the Chinese and while they were routinely depicted as a nuisance and a pest, not unlike the rabbit plague, the Chinese themselves were often regarded as passive and submissive<sup>33</sup>). The 'Chinaman' was the very image of pathetic docility<sup>34</sup>). In creating a narrative of invasion, inferior and submissive people were recon-

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29) Raphael Cilento, *Australia's Racial Heritage: A Brief Insight*, (Melbourne, Australian League of Rights, 1971).

30) David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1999.

31) For Example: Sketcher (William Lane) 'White or Yellow? A story of the Race War of 1908', *Boomerang*, 18 February 1888 to 5 May 1888.

32) David Walker, 'Taking the Heat', in Walker, *Anxious Nation*.

33) 'Ferret', 'Chinese Question' (letter), *Launceston Examiner*, 24 July 1900, pg.2.

34) Marilyn Lake, 'Equality and Exclusion: The Racial Constitution of Colonial Liberalism', *Thesis Eleven*, Vol.95, no.1, (2008), pp.20–32.

figured as an enemy with territorial designs upon Australia. A rather diffuse cultural threat was turned into an active geo-political menace which in turn demanded a much more determined, focused and explicitly Australian resistance<sup>35</sup>). The invasion story presented a new narrative of an encircled continent fighting for its survival. As the plots of these invasion stories unfold, it is the depth and determination of active resistance that would create the conditions for an ongoing Australian nation. This added another and important layer to the multi-layered story of a defining fight for survival in a new and difficult continent.

Invasion stories 'mapped' the continent as a separate, distinctive and vulnerable landmass surrounded by aggressive outsiders. This was the preferred image of the continent. The hostile response to other modes of mapping the continent became apparent in the 1920s when the geographer, Griffith Taylor, mapped Australia onto Asia by using homoclines, regions of similar climate, to show that Townsville, Brisbane and Sydney were linked climatically (and perhaps physiologically and psychologically) to Calcutta, Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively<sup>36</sup>). The flowing lines of Taylor's maps emphasized the connection to Asia at a time when popular representations of the map form – which enclosed the nation as a distinct island continent – were at their peak.

However, while academic geographers like Taylor sought to connect Australia to comparable regions, there was no appetite for such talk in the popular press. The boisterous nationalist and conspicuously Australian writer, Randolph Bedford, spent a life time explaining that the Australian climate bore no relation to tropical or subtropical Asia. Their heat was enervating whereas Australia's was invigorating<sup>37</sup>). In a similar manner attempts to draw a connection between Australian deserts and similar conditions elsewhere in the world were dismissed as both unfounded and unpatriotic. To describe large sections of the Australian continent as desert was seen as both a denial of Australian possibilities for growth and national importance, it also suggested to many commentators an unwanted connection to an orientalist imagery of sheiks, oases, camels and Bedouin tribes. Through the late nineteenth century there was a powerful resistance to any suggestion that deserts in Australia were a geographical fact. The preferred view was that settlement and the cultivation of the land would turn 'our' deserts into productive agricultural land<sup>38</sup>). The common explanation was that rain followed the plough. This way of thinking also implied that Australian deserts had been wrongly named. They were not really deserts at all. Australia and Australians were different.

Yet these acts of differentiation and the rhetorical and administrative insistence on cultural and racial separation from the region helped fashion a nation that by the 1930s was widely criticized as

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35) For example: Kenneth Mackay, *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia*, (London, 1895).

36) Griffith Taylor, *Environment and Race: A study of the Evolution, Migration, Settlement and Status of the Races of Man*, (London Oxford University Press, 1927).

37) Randolph Bedford, *Explorations in Civilisation*, (Sydney, Sid Day Publishing, 1914).

38) Randolph Bedford, *Nought to Thirty Three*, (Sydney, Currawong Publishing, 1944).

insular, narrow and dangerously unaware of its Pacific location<sup>39</sup>). Growing calls for 'Pacific consciousness', 'neighbourly sentiment', 'enmeshment', 'engagement' and 'Asia-literacy' from the 1930s point to the fitful emergence of both a new national imaginary and a new economy in which connection and receptivity to the region are considered as important to national 'survival' as disconnection and resistance to the 'flow of Asia' was a century earlier<sup>40</sup>). The changing character of survivalist rhetoric over the last 150 years at once informs and helps reconfigure how the nation imagines the political, cultural, diplomatic and economic implications of openness and closure.

While the calls for neighbourly connection to Asia and appeals to a shared Pacific/Asian destiny have been common since the 1930s and have gained some traction among the educated elite, narratives of 'engagement' have proved particularly difficult to naturalise as Australian stories. While Australians have been readily acknowledged as considerable travellers when it comes to the continental imaginaries, the dominant motifs have been of invasion, intrusion and violation.

While it oversimplifies the lines of division within the nation to propose a populist tradition of continental distinctiveness and separation, an insistence upon the nation as unique and different, as opposed to readings that emphasise a cosmopolitan tradition of transnational connection and cultural exchange, it remains true that telling a story of national difference exerts a stronger 'Australian' appeal. If Australian can be thought of as a 'product' to be 'badged', difference and Australian distinctiveness is easier to 'sell' than cultural interdependence, transcultural exchange and similarity. Moreover, the narrative of the encircled island continent has proven to be a remarkably resilient one<sup>41</sup>). In the 1990s, when there was so much discussion of engagement with Asia and Asia-literacy, Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party showed that the invasion story continued to be a powerful marker of Australian difference as opposed to the cosmopolitan effusions of intellectual elites calling for closer ties with Asia<sup>42</sup>). For all the growing evidence of Australia benefiting from 'the rise of Asia' the counter-narrative of this being unAustralian and a sell-out remains strong. Of all the many issues at play in the often rancorous debate about how Australia should respond to boat people arriving on our northern shores from Indonesia, the supposed violation of our borders and the threat of invasive Asia are persistent themes in the popular media<sup>43</sup>).

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39) 'Interest in World Affairs: Australia's Share should be Greater', *Courier-Mail*, 16 August 1934, pg.15.

40) David Walker, 'Pacific Citizens', in Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.210–27.

41) Catriona Ross, 'Prolonged Symptoms of Cultural Anxiety: The Persistence of Narratives of Asian Invasion in Multi-cultural Australia', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Vol.5, (2006), pp.86–99.

42) Timothy Kendall, 'Using the Past to Serve the Present: Renewing Australia's Invasion Anxieties' in Charles Ferrall, Paul Miller and Kerren Smith (eds.) *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination*, (Wellington (NZ), Victoria University Press, 2005), pp.110–130.

43) Jack Waterford, 'Yet More Wars We Can't Win', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/yet-more-wars-we-cant-win-20130924-2uceh.html>, accessed 16 November 2013

Acts of differentiation are also very evident in the ongoing attempt to redraw the map of Australia to ensure that the continent is marked off from the ambiguous zones, island and territorial waters that create an unhelpful confusion about where Australia ends and the outside world begins. Immediately following the attacks of September 11 2001 many Australians feared that the unauthorised arrival of asylum seekers was, in some way, a realisation of the long anticipated Asiatic invasion. In response, the conservative Howard Government declared that a large area of territorial water and numerous off-shore islands were to be excised from Australia's migration zone. Asylum seekers arriving at these dubious parts of the nation could no longer claim the protection of Australian law and, through forced removal to other Pacific nations, were to be kept quarantined from the Australian people<sup>44</sup>). Even the term 'excision' seemed 'to imply a surgical procedure, like cutting cancerous sores from the healthy geo-political body of the nation'<sup>45</sup>). Australia's map was redrawn to create a fortress impenetrable to invasive Asia.

The further point that needs to be made about populist and elite representations of Asia, and critical to the notion of 'broken narratives' is that 'Asia' was commonly framed in both discourses as determining the future of the Australian nation. This was a point the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard was so keen to emphasise in introducing the White Paper inquiry into Australia's place in the Asian Century. When the White Paper appeared, there was barely a reference to the long history of Australia's engagements with and connections to Asia. It could be argued that part of the rhetorical strategy in postponing Asia in this way, of assigning it to the future, is to secure the idea of the Australian nation as a separate creation, still largely untouched by Asia. It certainly has the effect of placing Asia outside of Australian history which, when viewed in these terms, remains a story of continental particularity. So long as Asia can be thought of as 'out there', past associations and connections can be passed over as unimportant or of strictly antiquarian interest. As we note in the introduction to *Australia's Asia*, the histories that connect the Australian people to their continent do not readily accommodate or welcome an Asia that might appear to compromise the Australian character and content of that history: better to excise Asia from the past and defer it until the future<sup>46</sup>).

The added difficulty in telling a connected Asia story embedded in the nation's past relates to what nations find usable in the past. Where Gallipoli, for example, can be used and re-used as a way of telling stories about national character and the spirit of the nation, there is much that is awkward,

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44) Jane Perlez, 'Deep Fears behind Australia's Immigration Policy', *New York Times*, (6 May 2002), <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/08/world/deep-fears-behind-australia-s-immigration-policy.html?src=pm>, accessed 14 November 2013.

45) Ruth Balint, 'Epilogue: The Yellow Sea', in D Walker and A Sobocinska (eds) *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, (Perth, UWA Publishing, 2012), p.359.

46) David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, 'Introduction: Australia's Asia' in Walker and Sobocinska (eds) *Australia's Asia*, pp.1–23.

prejudiced and sensitive in the Australian response to Asia. Where Australians are enjoined not to forget Gallipoli and the First World War, least of all over the next two years when many ceremonies will mark the centenary of the Gallipoli landing, the white Australia of that era with its attachment to racial homogeneity and 'one dear blood' does not lend itself to national story telling and celebration; especially so as Australia seeks to position itself as a nation poised to benefit from the Asian Century. Nonetheless, it is hardly possible to form an adequate understanding of Australia's development as a nation without recognising the formative role that our proximity to Asia has played in shaping how Australians have come to understand and respond to their place in the world and to the limits and possibilities facing the settlement, carrying capacity, development and defence of the continent.

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