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This paper attempts to explore a central, if strangely neglected, question in Australian history, namely, how the Federation's ideal of 'White Australia' and its perception of Asia as the alien other have in the last two decades come to be discarded and replaced by the notion of the 'multicultural' society and Australia as integrally part of Asia and prospectively a 'Eurasian' nation.

Though this change represents the transformation of what for three generations had been the absolute orthodoxy of national existence, historians have made little effort to account for this transmogrification. Perhaps most contemporary scholars feel so antipathetic to 'White Australia' that the abolition of racial discrimination and Asia-phobia is seen as natural, inevitable and long overdue. Perhaps at this level many share the view of one of my students who, when asked about the question, declared that by abandoning 'White Australia' Australians had at last been able to purge themselves of their guilty consciences. But such an ahistorical approach to the subject will not do, for those who eagerly espoused 'White Australia' did so on racial principles which, they believed, were also moral principles. The major treatments of the subject, whether approving or disapproving, have demonstrated that the authors of Australia's racially-discriminating policy advanced moral arguments, among others, to justify their position.[1] Indeed, it should be borne in mind that the same kinds of public figures, namely academics, clergymen, creative artists and social reformers who, acting as the conscience of the nation, have since 1945 been in the forefront of the struggle to overturn 'White Australia', were at the time of its adoption to be found defending the moral character of 'White Australia'. There can be no plausible Whig history of progress which can link that past with this present. There are no heroes who from the beginning of 'White Australia' fought against great odds and so brought us to this point, unless possibly they are members of the International Workers of the World (IWW) or the Australian Communist Party, and it would be a brave soul indeed who argued that case. The common clues to a historical question are missing. Without any great disturbance to the social and cultural fabric, and within a relatively short period of time, Australian ideas of Asia and of race and, as a consequence, of Australia itself, have undergone a remarkable metamorphosis.

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1 Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1923); Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); A.T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion, 1896–1923* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964); Charles Price, *The Great White Walls are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836–1888* (Canberra: Australian Institute of International Affairs in association with Australian National University Press, 1974); Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850–1907* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979).

Charles Henry Pearson, the end of empire and 'White Australia'

The departure point for this study is Charles Henry Pearson's *National Life and Character: A Forecast* which was published one hundred years ago just as the cause of 'White Australia' was gaining momentum and which both anticipated the end of European empires and provided an insight into the new forces bringing about a racially exclusive view of society and the 'White Australia' policy. In 1871 Pearson, an Anglo-Australian intellectual, resigned his Chair in Modern History at King's College in the University of London and migrated to Australia where he became a leading figure in the political and cultural life of the colony of Victoria. *National Life and Character*, which he wrote at the end of his public career, was a wide ranging investigation of tendencies in modern social thought based on his colonial experience. The work, in both the kind of issues canvassed and the level of analysis achieved, was not unlike Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and it made an impact in English-speaking countries, eliciting responses from such eminent personages as W.E. Gladstone, Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Adams.[2] His most notable prediction, which for the time was almost unthinkable and attracted most attention, was that Asian, African and South American people would in due time free themselves from European domination and compel their former imperial masters to accept them as powers to be reckoned with in the international community. As he put it:

> The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European; when Chinamen and the nations of Hindostan, the States of Central and South America, by that time predominantly Indian, and it may be African nations of the Congo and the Zambesi...are represented by fleets in the European seas, invited to international conferences, and welcomed as allies in the quarrels of the civilised world...We were struggling among ourselves for supremacy in a world which we thought of as destined to belong to the Aryan races and to the Christian faith...We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile, and thought of as bound always to administer to our needs.[3]

Pearson was, like de Tocqueville, a European intellectual aristocrat reflecting on the future from the vantage point of lessons learnt in the New World but, unlike his French precursor, Pearson had become part of that world and did to a large extent identify himself with its democratic homogeneity, state socialism and race patriotism. He had come to see the Australian colonies as the pioneers of the modern and the embodiment of the future. 'Nevertheless, it is', he wrote, 'surely safe to say, that political experiments which half a dozen self-governing British communities are instinctively adopting, deserve attention as an indication of what we may expect in the future'.[4] While this product of mid-nineteenth century English liberalism could, like de Tocqueville, ponder the coming order of things with a certain detachment, it is clear also that he had in Victoria surrendered much of his elitist, cosmopolitan and individualist beliefs and associated himself with the new movements and sensibilities appearing in Australian political culture. Thus after predicting the rise of the 'coloured' races he had to admit that, 'Yet in some of us the feeling of caste is

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[2] John Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy: The Life of Charles Henry Pearson, 1830–1894, Oxford Don and Australian Radical* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968), pp.231–2.

[3] Charles Henry Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1894), 2nd edn, pp.89–90.

[4] Pearson, *National Life and Character*, p.19.

so strong that we are not sorry to think that we shall have passed away before that day arrives'.[5]

Pearson gave little attention to the implications of the emergence of independent Asian, African and South American states for Australia and its immigration policy. His view would seem to have been that these states would be restricted to their natural habitat, the tropical regions spreading north and south from the equator, and that the Europeans would retain their position in the temperate zone. Since climate would determine the geopolitical division of the races, Australia was a marginal case. For him the Australians were 'guarding the last part of the world, in which the higher races can live and increase freely, for the higher civilisation'. And in this context, 'The fear of Chinese immigration which the Australian democracy cherishes, and which Englishmen at home find it hard to understand, is, in fact, the instinct of self-preservation, quickened by experience'.[6] Pearson, as a product of a classical not a national education, considered that the failure of the Australians to so guard national existence would be a loss to 'the whole civilised world'. The cause of British Australia was the cause of what A.J. Toynbee was later to call 'the West'. It was therefore his conclusion that 'whatever extends the influence of those races that have taken their faith from Palestine, their laws of beauty from Greece, and their civil law from Rome, ought to be a matter of rejoicing to Russian, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Frenchman alike'.[7]

Yet at the same time Pearson was justifying the Australian actions against the Chinese as a defence of 'the White Race' and Western values, he was also describing the growth of an intense social bonding which was stirring powerful feelings of 'patriotism' or nationalism. Though he did not himself make the connection, this new 'race patriotism' might, more than any other factor, explain why the British Australians had become so greatly sensitive towards and irrationally fearful of the Chinese, and why within three years of the publication of *National Life and Character*, the colonial premiers agreed to enact legislation barring the entry of all 'coloured' people into the country. Pearson claimed that, in contrast to earlier times when people had a first loyalty to a city or tribe or liege lord or dynastic family, 'Patriotism' was

> ...now the feeling that binds together people who are of the same race [in this usage, common at the time, meaning 'nation'], or who at least inhabit the same country, so that they shall try to preserve the body politic...It enjoins the sacrifice of property, liberty, or life for the attainment of these objects. It favours the existence of whatever is peculiar and local; of a distinctive literature, manners, dress, and character. When it conceives the common country to be weak, it tries to discard every foreign element as dangerous...

Furthermore, he added that 'it is essential to the perpetuity of this sentiment that the nation should be homogeneous'.[8] In qualifying 'of the same race' with 'or who at least inhabit the same country', it is probable that Pearson was attempting to account for the phenomenon of the Australian colonists who, though part of the British 'race', also shared a peculiar sense of social solidarity and identity. Because of their proximity to Asia, this led them in defence of a White British Australia to oppose all 'coloured' migration and even to threaten a break with the Mother Country should the Imperial authorities attempt to block these aspirations.

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5   Pearson, *National Life and Character*, p.90.
6   Pearson, *National Life and Character*, p.17.
7   Pearson, *National Life and Character*, pp.14–15, 17.
8   Pearson, *National Life and Character*, pp.197–9 and 200.

The establishing of 'White Australia' and the fear of Japan

'White Australia', as Pearson had forecast, became a foundation policy of the Federal union, a fundamental principle of national life. The social trauma created by rapid modernisation at the end of the nineteenth century caused the mass democracy to seek security in a homogeneous community of interchangeable and indistinguishable individuals. And race became the badge of all that was familiar and the barrier against all that was foreign. When an individual Chinese was able to assimilate himself completely into British Australia, he could be accepted, even popular. Mei Quong Tart, a wealthy Sydney merchant, had grown up in a European family and become a Christian. He was nationalised in 1871 and in 1899 volunteered to fight for Queen and Empire in the Boer War. He was much in demand on festive occasions to sing Scottish airs and he was, according to the native-born Scotsman George Reid, 'the only man living who has got the true original Gaelic accent'. On his death in 1903 the Mayor of Ashfield had the flag on the Town Hall lowered to half-mast and forty of his fellow Masons and many other notables attended the funeral.[9] Tart was being honoured for having rid himself, or so it seemed to White Australians, of all marks of his Chinese culture and taken on a persona which made him one with the British colonists. But Tart's case was highly unusual. In general skin colour difference was an absolute impediment to inclusion.

Those colonists who were most disturbed by the modernising of society and looked to a collectivist spirit to make them whole were the most fervent advocates of 'White Australia'. The Labor party which came into being simultaneously with the movement for racial exclusion made 'The Maintenance of White Australia' the first plank on its 'fighting' and 'General Platform'.[10] William Lane, the socialist visionary, declared that the colonists' effort to oust the Chinese was 'more than a social or national movement...it is a true racial struggle'. Lane envisaged Australia being engaged in a conflict which was at once racial and moral. The Chinese were grossly sensual and given to unspeakable vices. To protect the purity of the White race it was necessary not only to prevent more Chinese from entering the colonies but also to evict those who were already polluting Australia. In the conclusion to his novel 'White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of A.D. 1908', after the Europeans in Queensland had vanquished the race enemy in a bitter civil war, they sent the surviving Chinese north 'like great droves of cattle' and expelled them from the country 'as fast as fear could drive and ships could carry'.[11]

In the debate, however, over the 1901 Immigration Restriction Bill which became the basis for the enforcement of the 'White Australia' policy, all sides of the Parliament defended the principle in racial terms. J.C. Watson, the first national leader of the Labor party, declared that 'the objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people with the white people of Australia...lies in the main in the possibility and probability of racial contamination'. The Protectionist Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, and his Attorney-General, Alfred Deakin, put essentially the same view. Citing Pearson's *National Life and Character*, Barton warned that unless the Commonwealth kept out all 'coloured' people, Australia would eventually be overwhelmed by immigrants 'of an inferior race', and he did

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[9] Mrs Quong Tart (comp. and ed.), *The Life of Quong Tart, or, How a Foreigner Succeeded in a British Community* (Sydney: W.M. Maclardy, 1911), especially pp.5–17, 25–45 and 84–91.

[10] This was also the case on the West Coast of the United States. Alexander P. Saxton in *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), especially chapters 6 and 7, shows that it was opposition to the Chinese which brought into being the Workingmen's Party, its prime objective being the halting of all Chinese immigration.

[11] *Boomerang* (27 April and 5 May 1888).

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not think that 'the doctrine of the equality of man was really ever intended to include racial equality'. Deakin, a former colleague of Pearson, also addressed the issues in the language of his friend's thesis: 'We here find ourselves touching the profoundest instinct of individual or nation—the instinct of self-preservation—for it is nothing less than the national manhood, the national character, and the national future that are at stake'.[12] Asia became the spectre haunting the Australian imagination. In 1908 Deakin, then prime minister, drawing once again on Pearson highlighted national anxieties about Asia and the menace of the 'Yellow Peril' to 'White Australia'. Replying to Richard Jebb who had sent him a paper on Asian immigration, Deakin declared that there was 'nothing worthy of recollection prior to it except Pearson's splendid volume on National Character when the first note of alarm was sounded'. And he informed Jebb that Australians were looking forward to welcoming the visit of America's 'Great White Fleet' to their shores first and foremost 'because of our distrust of the Yellow races in the North Pacific and our recognition of the *entente cordiale* spreading among all white men who realise the Yellow Peril to Caucasian civilization, creeds and politics'.[13]

By the time of the inauguration of the Commonwealth the heightened awareness of Asia had produced a settled consensus that Australia should be a homogeneous white British nation and that the strictest measures should be taken to protect society against the inter-mixture of 'coloured' peoples. The policy of 'White Australia' was, as W.K. Hancock expressed it in *Australia*, 'the indispensable condition of every other Australian policy',[14] and so it remained until the end of the 1960s.

Until World War II, Australians perceived Japan as the chief and almost only source of Asian threat to the national ideal. The Western empires in the region, the United States in the Philippines, the French in Indochina, the British in Malaya, the Dutch in the East Indies, and the Portuguese in Timor, secured the immediate near North. China was in a chronic state of internal disorder, subject to Western influence and humiliated by Japan. Though Australians mentioned frequently and with some apprehension the prospect of 'the awaken-ing of China' it was not regarded as a threat. On the other hand Japan's modernisation and its military domination of the Western Pacific made it a power to be reckoned with. Japan was the first non-European state to achieve what Pearson had predicted. It was the first such state to be 'invited to international conferences, and welcomed as allies in the quarrels of the civilised world'. Following Japan's defeat of Russia, the first victory of an Asian nation over a European one, all Australians' fears about Asia and the 'Yellow Peril' came to be focused on that country. Australian leaders felt that Japan might take advantage of its new status and capability in a time of European division to demand concessions over 'White Australia'. Deakin in writing of Australia's 'distrust of the Yellow races in the North Pacific' had Japan specifically in mind.

During World War I there was great concern about how Japan, even as Britain's ally, would act and there were good grounds for Australian suspicion. The frequent visits of Japanese naval squadrons were a vivid reminder of the reality of the 'Yellow Peril'. Commenting on one such visit to Sydney in 1916, W.E. Boote, the editor of the *Australian Worker*, wrote his brother: 'Great fêting of visiting Japanese in town. Crowds of them are in the streets. Australians will never mix with them. One look at these Japanese...is enough to spoil the blend', and he confessed that he would 'sooner have the Kaiser here than the

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[12] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter *CPD*), session 1901–02, IV, p.4633, 6 September 1907 and p.5233, 26 September 1907; III, p.3503, 7 August 1901; and IV, p.4804, 12 September 1901.

[13] Letter, Deakin to Jebb, 4 June 1908, Deakin-Jebb Correspondence, National Library of Australia 339/1/19A-B.

[14] W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (London: E. Benn, 1930), p.66.

Mikado'.[15] At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 the Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, in opposing Japan's wish to include a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant was acknowledging these fears which he fully shared.

Japan's success during World War II in seizing the West's colonial possessions nevertheless came as a great shock. The British Empire's victory in World War I had helped to repair Australia's confidence in the ability of Britain and the other Western powers to act as a *cordon sanitaire* between Japan and Australia and to provide a guarantee against 'the swarming hordes of Asia'. Australia happily accepted British assurances that the Singapore base was impregnable. Thus when the Japanese rapidly overran the Philippines, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, Portuguese Timor and, most of all, British Malaya, and Japanese naval and military forces arrived on the Commonwealth's own frontiers, it was clear to the Curtin Labor government that Australia had been mistaken in placing their trust in the European empires.

Yet this shock did not cause them to undertake a thorough reappraisal of the given assumptions. They did not read the signs of the times aright. They did not grasp that the Japanese routing of the Europeans would have radical consequences for the future of Asia. Rather, they expected that after Japan's surrender the old order would be restored and, accordingly, Dr. H.V. Evatt, Australia's masterful External Affairs Minister, sought to counteract the evident weakness of the European colonies by establishing Australian bases in the archipelagoes to its North and Northeast, in the Dutch East Indies, Portuguese Timor and French New Caledonia. Through such a strategy Australia would be able more directly to use the European possessions against a resurgent Japan. To meet the problem Evatt proposed 'the formation of a great Southwest Pacific zone of security against aggression' in which Australia 'would act with such colonial powers as Holland, France and Portugal, as well as with the United States and Great Britain'.[16]

When, however, following the end of the war it became clear that anti-colonial movements stimulated by the Japanese were bent on shaking off imperial shackles and that the European powers would not be able to suppress them, the Australian government pursued policies aimed at producing pro-Western regimes in the newly-independent Asian nations and at keeping the former European metropolitans associated with their former colonies. The Chifley Labor government recognised that the anti-colonial movement, immediately evident in the Indonesian struggle against the Dutch, presaged a new and unpredictable regional environment. 'South East Asia is so full of explosive possibilities...', John Burton, an official of the External Affairs Department, wrote Evatt in October 1945,

> ...that only fairly drastic remedies applied will now have any hope of successfully resolving the situation by meeting the legitimate demands of the native peoples whilst at the same time preserving some order and stability by permitting the return of the previous administration, experienced and skilled in handling these peoples.[17]

Evatt speaking on the independence movement in the East Indies in November 1946 likewise declared that '[o]ur idea is that Dutch sovereignty should not be terminated, but that the people of Indonesia should obtain a substantial measure of self-government'.[18] Australia approved wholeheartedly the Dutch–Indonesian Linggadjati Agreement of March 1947

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[15] M.E. Lloyd (ed.), *Sidelights on Two Referendums, 1916–1917* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1952), p.43.

[16] *Daily Telegraph* (18 August 1943).

[17] Cable, Burton to Evatt, 14 October 1945 in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937–49* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989) VIII (hereafter *DAFP*), p.500.

[18] *CPD*, H. of R. 189, p.339, 15 November 1946.

which embodied these principles, and which provided for an Indonesian federation within a Netherlands–Indonesian union that controlled foreign, defence and even some aspects of economic policy. It was only the Dutch attempt to impose their will on the Indonesians in violation of the spirit of the Linggadjati that caused the Australians to begin espousing the Indonesian cause in the United Nations. The Australians realised that the Indonesians could not be coerced into submission, that that was no way to achieve a stable Southeast Asia. Even so their efforts were directed to obtaining a peace along the lines of the March 1947 agreement and one which would keep the Dutch associated with the Indonesians. Indeed Australia, even as it was pressing for Indonesian self-government, was seeking Dutch cooperation in fulfilling its post-war plans for forward defence against a dangerous Asia. On the eve of the signing of the Linggadjati Agreement, Burton had asked the Netherlands government to allow Australia to establish a military base in Dutch New Guinea and to administer Dutch Timor.[19] In the aftermath of World War II, Evatt spoke of Australia's sense of loneliness as the trustee for British civilisation in the South Pacific, and the Chifley government endeavoured to persuade the United States to join with Britain and Australia in a mutual defence scheme for the region. But through the late 1940s all the Labor government's efforts in this direction were in vain.

Australia's conditional support for Asian independence movements did not, however, herald a softening of the 'White Australia' policy. Indeed, in the immediate uncertainties of the post-war era Australia's attitude towards Asian immigration tended to harden. Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, looked towards boosting the nation's population in order to ensure 'Australia's security, economic stability and destiny as a major Pacific power'. In justifying his ambitious aim of attracting 70,000 new migrants annually, he spoke the language of 'Populate or Perish' which had been the rhetoric of the 'Yellow Peril' doctrine since the 1890s. The Japanese downward thrust into the South Pacific 'when Australia faced its gravest peril' was held up as a warning. 'Armies recruited from the teeming millions of Japanese threatened to overrun our cities and broad hinterland. They were so many. We were so few.' It was Australia's duty, he said, employing Pearson's word, to 'guard' against new armed conflicts.[20] This new program, because of the urgency of the task, proposed to offer assistance to migrants from Continental Europe as well as the United Kingdom, though it was hoped that there would be only one 'foreigner' for every ten Britons, and that the 'foreigners' would be quickly assimilated into a White British Australia. At the same time Calwell applied the 'White Australia' policy more rigorously and inhumanely than ever before, denying Filipinos, Indonesians and Japanese the right to live with their Australian spouses in Australia.

Calwell proudly announced that 'so long as the Labor party remains in power, there will be no watering down of the White Australia policy'.[21] At the San Francisco Conference which drew up the Charter for the United Nations, Evatt was as assiduous as Hughes had been in 1919 in striving to prevent the international organisation from being able to interfere with matters of domestic jurisdiction, especially a state's control over immigration policy. This was essential for without such a specific exclusion he feared that

> ...it would be possible for an Asiatic Power to object to our migration Policy and if it could be shown that a threat to peace had arisen the Security Council could proceed to recommend a settlement involving change in our Migration Policy as a condition necessary to remove the threat to peace.[22]

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[19] Margaret George, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press in association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1980), p.74.

[20] *CPD*, H. of R. 189, pp.502–3, 22 November 1946.

[21] *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 March 1949).

[22] Cable, Frank Forde and Evatt to Chifley, 18 May 1945, *DAFP*, p.169.

The Western presence in Cold War Asia and the maintenance of a homogeneous British Australia

During the 1950s and 1960s these concerns about external interference in Australia's immigration policy took palpable form as a movement against racism, inspired by international revulsion against Nazi Germany and Third World resentment against European arrogance, gathered pace. Australians, as never before, were exposed to world opinion, and politicians, diplomats, academics, business people and trade unionists at meetings of the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and the Commonwealth of Nations and in many other international forums encountered the hostility of the emerging nations, most notably the Asian nations, to the 'White Australia' policy. Indeed, even at home some public figures, mainly academics and church leaders, in various degrees influenced by the international critique of racism, began to agitate for a modification of Australia's colour bar, and at the end of the 1950s an Immigration Reform Group was formed with the modest aim of persuading the Commonwealth to admit 1,500 non-European immigrants annually.[23] And the authorities did make some concession to these pressures. R.G. Menzies' Liberal–Country Party government administered the restrictive policy somewhat more humanely and flexibly than their predecessors, especially in the categories of family reunion and political refugees. They also allowed non-Europeans who had been resident in Australia for fifteen years to apply for naturalisation, and admitted some 'distinguished and highly qualified non-Europeans for indefinite stay'. Furthermore in 1958, the government revised the 1901 Act, removing the dictation test, which as a method of exclusion had proved to be an embarrassment, and left the decision over entry solely to the discretion of the minister.

But despite these modifications, the fundamentals of the 1901 policy remained in place and both sides of parliament, supported by a substantial national consensus, still openly avowed their allegiance to the established view. The parliamentary debate over the new Act was notable for its lack of interest in the issue of Asian migration. The Labor opposition's criticism of the government was not directed towards their policy on Asian migration but rather at their failure to preserve the British character of the country. It attacked the government for allowing too many non-British Europeans into the migration program. Evatt told Menzies that Australia 'will be and must be primarily a British community'. Clyde Cameron, who was to become minister for immigration in Whitlam's second Labor government, similarly affirmed Labor's belief 'in keeping Australia British', true to 'the British tradition of freedom and equality under the law'.[24] A British White Australia was necessary to preserve the core of Australia's political culture, which was a British inheritance.

During the early years of the next decade, as a result of the growing influence of the newly-independent Asian and African nations, the campaign against racism gathered added momentum. South Africa, because of its apartheid policy, was forced to resign from the Commonwealth of Nations, and the UN adopted a 'Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination'. While Australia joined in denouncing South Africa's racial laws and gave its unqualified approval to the UN Declaration it was nevertheless unable to silence the critics of its 'restrictive' immigration policy. The American and Canadian governments' decisions to remove race bias from their immigration laws placed further pressure upon Australia.[25] Moreover, Australia's increased involvement in Asia—its

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[23] Immigration Reform Group, *Immigration: Control or Colour Bar? The Background to White Australia and a Proposal for Change* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962), edited by Kenneth Rivett.

[24] *CPD*, H. of R. 18, p.115, 27 February 1958 and H. of R. 21, pp.1256–7, 16 September 1958.

[25] In 1964 the Democratic Party platform promised 'to eliminate discrimination based upon race and place of origin' from America's immigration law, and in the following year, after the Democrats'

dependence on Japan as a market for its primary exports and its military commitments in Southeast Asia—heightened its sensitivity to the issue.

Consequently, after Harold Holt succeeded Menzies as Prime Minister in early 1966, the Australian government initiated a substantial review of immigration policy and introduced two major reforms in the administration of existing policy. First, they put non-European residents on the same basis as Europeans for the purpose of the qualifying period for citizenship and, secondly and more importantly, applications from non-Europeans were to be considered on the grounds of 'their ability to integrate readily' and their possession of attributes and skills 'positively useful to Australia'. Hubert Opperman, the Minister for Immigration, conceded that as a result of the reforms 'the number of non-Europeans settling in Australia would be somewhat greater than previously'. The parliamentary debate which ensued—though it was not strictly a debate since both sides agreed on the reforms—had a rather different tone from that of the 1950s. On this occasion the chief speakers for all parties either made no mention of 'White Australia' or disavowed the phrase as a proper description of Australia's immigration policy. The Labor and Country party members were proud to say that the term had been expunged from their respective organisations' platforms. Furthermore, while there were very few references to British Australia nearly every speech touched on Australia's relations with Asia.[26] Holt summed up the matter when he declared in introducing his new government's policy statement that it was

> Australia's increasing involvement in Asian developments, the rapid growth of our trade with Asian countries, our participation on a larger scale in an increasing number of aid projects in the area, the considerable number of Asian students...receiving education in Australia, the expansion of our military effort, the scale of diplomatic contact, and the growth of tourism to and from the countries of Asia which made it desirable for Australia to review its immigration procedures.[27]

Yet both government and opposition stressed that these reforms were not a deviation from or a rejection of past policy. As the prime minister expressed it Australia's 'basic policy has been firmly established since the beginning of our Federation'. It had community support, and all that the government had in mind was to administer the policy 'with a spirit of humanity and with good sense'.[28] The minister for immigration assured the house that 'the basic aim of preserving a homogeneous population will be maintained'.[29] The foundation policy was not now defined overtly in racist terms but in those for which, in a sense, race had served as a crude shorthand, namely a homogeneous society. In the 1966 debate nearly all speakers emphasised this point—some alluding to the need to avoid 'Little Rocks' in Australia. Settlers had to be assimilated. They had to 'fit in'. They had to be absorbable. Since this objective assumed an essentially mono-cultural, if not an absolutely monochrome, society, it meant that Australians still viewed their nation as a community,

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victory in the election, Congress passed an Act which abolished the existing national and racial quotas and went far towards fulfilling the party's pledge. See Lawrence Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity and the Civic Culture* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), p.233.

[26] It should, however, be noted that all the measures favouring British migrants were not affected by the changes, and the Department of Immigration in a briefing document for the minister in 1965 laid it down that British migration 'has been and will remain a cornerstone of Australia's rapid population building', that 'the British connection has the first interest of the government'. Cited by R.T. Appleyard, 'Post-War British Immigration' in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1988), p.100.

[27] *CPD*, H. of R. 50, p.34, 8 March 1966.

[28] *CPD*, H. of R. 50, p.34, 8 March 1966.

[29] *CPD*, H. of R. 50, p.69, 9 March 1966.

sharing one heritage of language, law, religion and mores, that is, a predominantly White British Australia. Insofar as there was change and colour was separated from culture they were, figuratively speaking, contemplating the possibility of having more Quong Tarts in their midst. Bill Snedden, Minister for Immigration in 1968, anticipating an alternative that was beginning to creep up on the country, asserted that the new immigration policy was 'certainly not a policy which is directed towards the creation of a multi-racial society'.[30] *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* Australia even down to the end of the 1960s held to Pearson's view that the arrival of the Asian, African and South American states on the international stage need have no deleterious consequences for Australia's national ideal.

Why was this so? Why did Australians believe that they could with a few cosmetic measures avert the international community's critical gaze from their immigration policy and escape being treated, like South Africa, as a pariah nation? Why did they not understand the necessity of a more radical change if they wished to avoid giving offence to the newly emerging nations? In answer it has to be allowed that this racially conditioned Australian policy was deeply rooted in the Federation's history and that the very generation which was being challenged from outside had been brought up in that tradition knowing no alternative. Thus the forces for change had to overcome powerful domestic resistance. Similarly, Australians could with some plausibility believe that they would not have to face the fate of South Africa since the major criticisms were directed not at a pattern of discrimination against Asians and Africans within the country but at the rules governing the admission of settlers into the country. These arguments, however, do not in themselves seem adequate to account for why Australians in the 1950s and 1960s did not take more seriously the hostility to the 'White Australia' policy, especially from Asia.

Another factor which would appear to be more important in explaining why Australia felt able to resist the pressures for change was the protection afforded Australia by a formidable Western presence in the region. In these two decades the contraction of European empires was more than matched by the expansion of Western influence in Asia and the Pacific as the 'Free World' sought to contain communism and the Sino–Soviet bloc. Consequently, Australia as a partner of the United States and United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, France was more secure than at any time in its history. Australians could implicitly believe that this partnership, institutionalised through ANZUS, ANZAM and SEATO, provided them with a stronger defence against alien Asia and gave them a more certain guarantee for their British tradition than in any previous period.

R.G. Casey, External Affairs Minister for most of the 1950s, in reflecting on Australian foreign policy towards the end of his stint in office, warned of how World War II had 'demonstrated our new weakness', the threat from Asia to Australian survival. He noted that Australia could not have held out for long 'as a lone outpost of democracy in the Pacific if Britain and then America had been defeated'. Through its history Australia had not been able to rely on its own strength, 'but principally on combined efforts with our friends'. In the post-war years 'Even without the threat of Communist expansion from the north, our position as a lightly-populated country on the edge of Asia and possessing a high standard of living and a selective immigration policy, would create problems enough'. The only answer was for Australians to take 'our place in a team'. And this Western team in Asia would enable Australia to keep its homogeneous society and British character.[31] So secure was Australia in these years that while mouthing all the standard slogans of the Western alliance about the threat of Communist imperialism and the danger of 'falling dominoes', it spent

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[30] Cited in Kenneth Rivett (ed.), *Australia and the Non-White Migrant* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1975), p.31.

[31] R.G. Casey, *Friends and Neighbours: Australia and the World* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1954), pp.3, 10, 20.

two or three times less per capita than its great power protectors, the United States and the United Kingdom, on defence.

Indonesia remained the only unpredictable element in the immediate environment, unpredictable both as to where it stood in the East–West conflict and as to how the Western allies would behave should Australia find itself on unfriendly terms with its nearest neighbour. This did arouse a certain degree of concern over whether Indonesia might be a regional problem that Australia might have to contend with alone. Accordingly, just as in World War I, the Commonwealth government, fearing it might be left to fend for itself against Japan, had arranged for the appointment of a lecturer in Japanese at the University of Sydney in order to have an expert available to train military officers in Japanese language, to translate intercepted Japanese cables and advise the authorities generally on Japan.[32] So in the 1950s with the possibility of conflict with Indonesia in view, the Commonwealth offered funds for the establishment of Departments of Indonesian Studies in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra which could be used not only to teach undergraduates but also 'the Services and persons needing limited courses'.[33] As in the case of Japan, the support for the study of Indonesian language and culture followed from the perception of Asia as a threat. Nevertheless, the Indonesia problem was always manageable. Indonesia, unlike Japan, was no match militarily for Australia, and while the United States and Britain could not be depended upon to prevent Indonesia from acquiring West New Guinea, it was reasonable to expect that they would help Australia resist any attack on its home territory. As long as Britain and, even more pertinently, America were committed to protecting Western interests in Southeast Asia, Australia could comfortably assume that its status as a Western nation and its immigration policy which confirmed this status were not in jeopardy.

The 'multicultural' society and Australia as a part of Asia

By the end of the 1960s, however, the commitment of Australia's 'Great and Powerful Friends' to the region was in the process of rapid dissolution. Britain, giving up its imperial pretensions, withdrew from East of Suez and sought a new future for itself in the European Community. America, after failing in Vietnam, retreated from Asia. The Nixon Doctrine stipulated that the United States would never again become militarily involved in a land war in Asia and would expect its Asian/Pacific allies to take upon themselves the main burden of their defence. Asia was being left alone to be itself with all its own diversity and complexity, cooperation and conflict. As America pulled out of Indochina and Britain retired from Malaysia it became very quickly apparent that Australia had only one path to the future and that was to be found in accommodation to Asia.

For those conservatives who had identified themselves completely with the Western allies and Western cause in the region, there were at first some recriminations and regrets. A number of cabinet ministers talked in language which suggested Australia had been betrayed. The Minister for Air, Peter Howson, after learning of President Johnson's post-Tet decision in April 1968 to scale down the war in Vietnam and to open unconditional negotiations with the enemy, recognised that the United States was admitting defeat and

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[32] Minute, G.F. Pearce, Minister of Defence to Brigadier-General Hubert Foster, 24 April 1916, Australian Archives (hereafter AA, A3688, file 488/R1/55; letter, T. Trumble, Acting Secretary of Defence to Warden and Registrar, University of Sydney, 7 May 1917, University of Sydney Archives, G3/13.

[33] Letter, confidential, Ronald Mendelsohn, Prime Minister's Department to William J. Weeden, Director of Commonwealth Office of Education, 26 January 1955, AA, A1361/1 file 49/5/4 Part 1. I am indebted to Peter Phelps for this latter reference.

would inevitably retreat from Asia. And he confided to his diary, 'To my mind, it's the first step of the Americans moving out of South-east Asia and that within a few years—three or four possibly—there'll be no white faces on the Asian mainland...from now on, and to a much greater extent, we shall be isolated and on our own'.[34] Australian disillusionment with its putative Western patrons had a long history dating back to before World War I. But in contrast to the expectations of Deakin, Fisher, Hughes, Curtin and Evatt, Australian leaders in the 1970s had no hope that what had happened could be reversed, that at some future time Britain and America would return. This time the Western retreat from Asia was final. Australia's loneliness as a Western power in the region was permanent. Australians had only one possible 'home' now and that was Australia, Australia in Asia.

Accepting this geopolitical reality Australian leaders wasted little time lamenting the loss of the past as they began to face up to the future. It was widely recognised as Malcolm Fraser, the Minister for Defence, declared that Australia was 'entering a new era'.[35] All the growing ties to Asia which Holt had listed were seen in a new light and given a new meaning. And with this new perception of Australia's singular relationship with Asia there came a new willingness to rethink Australia's definition of itself and to remake its immigration policy. Speaking in Singapore in January 1971 Prime Minister John Gorton affirmed what three years earlier his Minister for Immigration had denied. Gorton told his fellow Asians

> I think if we build up gradually inside Australia a proportion of people who are not of white skin, then as that is gradually done, so there will be a complete lack of consciousness of difference between the races. And if this can be done as I think it can, then that may provide the world with the first truly multi-racial society with no tensions of any kind possible between any of the races within it. At any rate, this is our ideal.[36]

This was the first occasion on which a prime minister or, for that matter, any cabinet minister, had named 'multi-racialism' as the Australian ideal. Even so it would appear that Gorton's idea of a 'multi-racial society' was one in which the migrants, selected regardless of race, integrated into the existing European culture or remained a minority culture inside a predominantly British Australia. In the same speech he praised Singapore for its achievement in creating a 'multi-racial society' and he said

> ...you are 90 per cent Chinese or 85 per cent Chinese and therefore Singapore is homogeneous as we will keep Australia homogeneous, that nevertheless enables you to say you are a multi-racial society. Well, we are moving a little bit that way.[37]

Both the Whitlam Labor government which came to office in December 1972 and the succeeding Fraser Liberal–Country party government set aside the orthodoxies of the past and accepted the finality of Australia's new geopolitical circumstances. Both governments recognised that Australia's future lay with an Asia freed from Western control, that Australia could no longer treat its Asian neighbours as the front line for defending 'White Australia'. They understood that they had to deal with Asia on its own terms. Whitlam, for example, at the Institute of Political Affairs Summer School in 1973 made the keynote of his address the need to foster 'new forms of regional cooperation', and by this he meant not the development of ANZUS or SEATO but the cultivation of direct relations with Asian nations, both individually and collectively.[38]

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[34] Peter Howson, *The Howson Diaries: The Life of Politics* (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking Press, 1984), p.415, entry for 2 April 1968.

[35] *CPD*, H. of R. 66, pp.232, 10 March 1970.

[36] Cited in Rivett, *Australia and the Non-White Migrant*, p.32.

[37] Cited in Rivett, *Australia and the Non-White Migrant*, p.31.

[38] *Australian Foreign Affairs Record* 44 (January 1973), pp.33–4.

Surprisingly, despite all the earlier predictions that a Vietcong triumph in Vietnam and a Western retreat from Asia would bring China and communism to Australia's doorstep and that as a result Asia would become an ever present danger to Australia's survival, when these feared events came to pass Australian leaders surveyed the new picture with equanimity rather than anxiety. Even Fraser's apprehensions were more directed towards Russian interference in the region than to possible troubles generated from within Asia itself. It is true that the balance of power in the region at the end of the Vietnam war favoured Australia's benign view of its new position. The coming to power of an anti-communist military regime in Indonesia preoccupied with domestic stability and development, the formation of ASEAN which was fearful of China and hostile to Vietnam, the antagonisms between Russia and China and between Vietnam and China, all these elements combined to create an Asia which was so divided in itself that Australia on the southern rim could not feel menaced. Nevertheless, given Australia's earlier perception of Asia it is remarkable that Australia moved so speedily and positively—and without any reference to the balance of power—to seek 'enmeshment' with its neighbourhood. It was perhaps symbolic of this revolutionary change that Fraser, who had been a senior minister in the Liberal–Country party governments which had made ANZUS and SEATO the basis of their foreign policy and had gone 'all the way with LBJ' in Vietnam should have made his first overseas trip as Prime Minister not to London or Washington but to Beijing and Tokyo, the capitals of Australia's old enemies, where he sought new allies and new alliances.

Accepting the imperative of having to live with this new Asia, the Whitlam and Fraser governments embraced without reservation the notion of Australia as a 'multicultural' and 'multiracial' society and pursued an immigration policy committed to the 'avoidance of discrimination on any grounds of race, colour of skin or nationality'.[39] Whitlam publicly repudiated the 'White Australia' policy, and the government was as good as its word. In all migrant categories, covering occupational needs, family reunions and humanitarian asylum, the government applied a colour-blind approach. The criteria against which would-be migrants were judged became much more open. Preference for British or European settlers was abolished, and assisted passages became available to all on an equal basis. Al Grassby, Whitlam's first minister for immigration, could claim with some justification that 'every relic of past ethnic or racial discrimination' had been eliminated. And the Fraser government accepted the new policy without demur. Indeed, since the Whitlam government had reduced the overall target it was not until the Fraser government came to office that the full effects of these changes in principle were evident. From 1975 to 1984 Australia took in 90,000 Indochinese refugees and something like 100,000 other Asians and Pacific Islanders, and as a result the percentage of the non-European born in the population increased from 0.5 in 1947 to 2.5 in 1984. Under the Hawke government in the 1980s Asian migrants came to represent more than a third of the total intake. If Asian migration were to continue at that rate the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs estimated that Asians or, at least, those of Asian descent would by the year 2030 become approximately 10–15 per cent of the Australian population.[40]

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[39] Cited by W.D. Borrie, 'Changes in Immigration Since 1972' in Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, p.111; it is worth noting that already by 1968 community leaders, on behalf of the non-British Europeans who had migrated to Australia since the end of World War II, were articulating the concept of 'multiculturalism' and urging its adoption, but that it was not until after the disappearance of the Western presence in the region and the opening of the doors to Asian migration on a non-discriminatory basis that the Commonwealth government took up the notion and made it the key distinguishing definition of contemporary Australia.

[40] Cited in Nancy Viviani, 'Australia's Future in Asia: People, Politics and Culture', *Australian Cultural History* (July 1992), p.107.

During the 1980s Australia made what Foreign Affairs Minister Gareth Evans called 'constructive engagement with Asia' the centrepiece of its foreign policy. The Commonwealth government for the first time in the nation's history commissioned a series of reports into relations with Asia and by implication into Australia's future. The reports covered nearly every aspect of the relationship, the Dibb report on defence, the Garnaut report on trade and investment, the Ingleson report on Asian language and culture in higher education and the Fitzgerald report on immigration. They all stressed the importance of Asia in Australia's future and the need to develop a cooperative spirit in dealing with the region. There were, however, some differences between the first three reports and the FitzGerald report on the meaning of this new relationship with Asia for Australia's own identity.

The Dibb report, carrying through the general spirit of the 1976 strategic review, argued that 'independence and self-reliance' should be the basis of defence planning. It considered that Australia faced no foreseeable threat from the region—the more distant Asian powers being preoccupied with their own problems and more immediate neighbours in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific having neither capacity nor motive. As an essential part of the new approach it recommended that Australia should 'thus seek to cooperate with South-east Asian and South Pacific friends' in the development of their defence capability, and in particular with Indonesia 'the most important neighbour', by 'promoting a sense of community'. Defence was not to be thought of as being constructed against Asia but in association with immediate neighbours for the purpose of collective security.[41]

The Garnaut report focused primarily on what it called the Northeast Asian ascendancy, Japan, China, South Korea and Taiwan, the engines driving the economic growth in the whole region. For Garnaut, Australia's future prosperity and independence depended on seizing the opportunities afforded by the rapid rate of development in these four economies. These countries were 'more deeply complementary to Australia in their resource endowments and in the commodity composition of their trade than any other economies on earth', and this complementarity extended beyond trade to include people and capital for Australia's own development needs. Moreover, just as the Dibb report urged openness and mutuality in Australia's defence relations with Southeast Asia so too the Garnaut report favoured a liberal non-discriminating trade policy and supported training in Asian languages and cultures as an integral part of a scheme for fostering the economic ties.[42]

The report of 'Asia in Australian Higher Education', which was sponsored by the Asian Studies Council and of which John Ingleson was the research director, advanced the most dramatic claims for the changes which had overtaken Australia since the 1970s. Australia was linked to Asia through geopolitics, trade, investment and migration 'in a way profoundly different from any other country'. Because of this if Australians were 'to manage their future as part of the Asian region' knowledge of Asian languages and culture had to be widespread through the country. And in the grandest claim of all leading up to its proposal for radical changes in the course structures of the universities' humanities and social science faculties, the report asserted that the teaching about Asia was 'part of the Australianisation of curricula in higher education...Asian studies is the obverse of the coin to Australian studies'. It seemed to be saying that Chinese and Japanese languages as opposed to French

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[41] Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities, March 1986* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986), pp.33–7, 44, 48, 58.

[42] Ross Garnaut, *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989), especially pp.1–6.

and German were natural parts of an Australian education and suggesting that to be Australian one had also to be Asian.[43]

Only the FitzGerald report on immigration entered a cautious note into the general chorus of enthusiasm celebrating Australia's new future with Asia. It approved whole-heartedly the end of 'White Australia' and the adoption of a non-discriminatory immigration policy. Furthermore, because the 1958 legislation was still imbued with 'the mood and flavour of the 1901 Act', the report recommended the adoption of a model Bill which would symbolise the break with the past and reflect 'a more positive and forward-looking approach to immigration policy and administration'. It found no justification for the fears of those who believed that the rising percentage of Asians in the immigration program would have disruptive social consequences, and it happily accepted that Australia in the twenty-first century would be very different from the 1940s. There was in the report nothing but praise for the new immigration policy which was creating 'a racially diverse but harmonious community, a cosmopolitan Australia'.

Nevertheless, in discussing what Australia should expect of its migrants the report emphasised the harmonious community, not the cosmopolitan diversity. The abandonment of forced assimilation did not necessarily entail the abandonment of a 'Commitment to Australia', a phrase used as the sub-title for the report. Its comments on 'multiculturalism' were ambivalent or critical. 'Multiculturalism' was 'one part of what Australia is about and therefore only one part of what immigration is about'. And again, 'the sad irony is that this first real effort in recent times to bring immigration into the mainstream without forced assimilation has tended to assist in keeping it out'. The conclusion was that it was 'the Australian identity that matters most in Australia. And if the Government will affirm that strongly, multiculturalism might seem less divisive or threatening'. What then was the national identity which should be offered to incoming settlers? On this question the report disowned any attempt to suggest 'a prescription of core values'. They were 'too disputed' and 'too much in flux'. But almost simultaneously, indeed on the very same page, the report provided such a prescription: 'The commitment to Western liberal values is fundamental. So also are ideas about equality, about the individual in relation to society and about the right to challenge authority'.[44]

FitzGerald's reservations about 'multiculturalism' as a response to the question about Australia's future addressed a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning and use of the term. From 1973, when Grassby gave the first unqualified endorsement to the 'multicultural' society,[45] there was much confusion about how it was to be understood, whether on the one hand, in reaction to a past of British Australian arrogance and ignorance, it was intended to represent a positive tolerance of the diverse minority cultures, or whether on the other it stood for an Australia in which all cultures, including the British, were in every respect equal and therefore, following the demise of 'White Australia', was being put forward as a new idea of the nation. Grassby's main point seemed to be that 'old Australians', especially in the light of the changed relations with Asia, should learn to accept and appreciate the cultures which the non-British migrant groups, those commonly referred to as ethnic minorities, had brought to Australia and made a part of Australia. Under the Fraser government the term was broadened to include Australians of all cultural backgrounds, whether, as the government's Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs stated, 'they are

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[43] 'Asia in Australian Higher Education', submitted to the Asian Studies Council (January 1989), pp.13, 33–7.

[44] Stephen FitzGerald, *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), especially pp.4–12, 111–12.

[45] A.J. Grassby, 'A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future' (Canberra: Department of Immigration Reference Paper, 1973).

Aboriginals, or trace their roots to the British Isles, continental Europe, Asia, Africa, the Pacific nations or the Americas or regard themselves simply as Australian'.[46] It was as though the Council was suggesting that this was the essence of 'Our Developing Nationhood'. The Minister for Immigration, Michael McKellar, appeared to give some official recognition to this view when he stated that 'the concept of multiculturalism does embrace all cultures in a nation' and 'the Aboriginal people are an integral part of the Australian multicultural society'.[47] If this were the new defining national idea then all that held Australians together was mutual tolerance of their differences and the goodwill of each culture towards all others.

Though the movement for 'multiculturalism' predated the end of 'White Australia' its success in the 1970s and 1980s was accompanied by the arrival of significant numbers of Asian migrants which gave rise to the Blainey and Howard questioning of the implications for social cohesion.[48] All governments, however, rejected the notion that Asian migrants represented such a problem and insisted that 'multiculturalism' was not at odds with national unity. Grassby had said that all migrants who came to Australia would, in accordance with the Labor party's platform, have to be able 'to integrate here successfully'. Likewise the Fraser government, even as it took unity in diversity as its watchword and pursued the goal of 'a cohesive, united, multicultural nation', also claimed to be 'cognizant of the sentiments, the common values and the aspects of life in Australia that, irrespective of our ethnic backgrounds, we treasure and want to preserve'.[49] The language was as awkward as the problem itself. What it was into which all 'ethnic' groups should integrate or what 'the common values' were with which all Australians should identify remained unclear and elusive.

Succeeding governments made different and sometimes conflicting stabs at an answer. Whitlam and Grassby did at one brief moment, during the celebration of the 119th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade 'little rebellion',[50] seem to hint that a unifying Australian myth, 'a new nationalism' to replace that of British Australia, might be found in the 'Legend of the Nineties', the Bush legend most graphically depicted in Russel Ward's *Australian Legend*.[51] But except for Peter Weir's films of 'Breaker Morant' and 'Gallipoli', such a suggestion gained little support and made little impression. The old radical national tradition evaporated almost as quickly as that of 'British race patriotism' of which it was a derivative, if dissident, element. The Fraser government for its part did vaguely put forward 'democracy' and 'democratic principles' as the core values holding the nation together. But somehow this too was unsatisfactory. It was not specifically Australian and was so general as to be meaningless.

In 1989 the Hawke government, perhaps responding to the concerns of both the ethnic communities and the FitzGerald report, produced a *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing Our Future* which at one and the same time attempted to define 'multiculturalism' and, by also setting its limits, to lay down the essentials of national unity—those structures, principles and values which hold the nation together. 'Multi-

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[46] Cited from *Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, Multiculturalism for all Australians: Our Developing Nationhood* (Canberra, 1982), in Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, p.130.

[47] *CPD*, H. of R. 115, p.1105, 13 September 1979.

[48] For similar, though better considered, American concerns, see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: Norton, 1992).

[49] *CPD*, H. of R. 88, p.638, 20 March 1974; *CPD*, H. of R. 109, pp.2727–32, 30 May 1978.

[50] 'Speeches by Prime Minister the Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., and the Hon. A.J. Grassby, M.H.R., at Ballarat, 3 December 1973' (Canberra, 1973).

[51] Russel Ward, *Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958).

culturalism' as a policy, that is, as an idea to which the nation was dedicated, meant the right of all Australians, 'within carefully defined limits', to express and share their individual cultural heritages and to enjoy equal rights to social justice and economic opportunity. The limits which were given equal importance required that all Australians should have an 'overriding and unifying commitment to Australia'. And this commitment involved the acceptance of 'the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes'. Here was the most specific statement yet which related the diversity of 'multiculturalism' to the unity of the nation. And it is noteworthy that this official pronouncement followed the FitzGerald report and subordinated 'multicultural' rights to the commitment to the nation.

The 'multicultural' agenda paper, however, unlike the FitzGerald report, did not equivocate either about the national norms or their source. Indeed, in this paper the source was not a general Western tradition but more precisely a British heritage. In the prime minister's foreword he asserted that the migrants from 140 countries who comprised the 'multicultural' society were drawn to Australia by its 'British heritage and institutions'. The concluding section on a 'Better Australia' amplified this point when it claimed that 'The customs and institutions which we recognise as Australian today are largely British and Irish in origin'. While it allowed that 'the institutional structure transplanted to Australia was often modified, sometimes dramatically, to reflect our own history and circumstances'—this presumably is what was meant by an earlier reference in the paper to Australia's distinctive 'culture'—nevertheless 'our British heritage' remained 'extremely important to us' as 'a potent source of unity and loyalty'.[52] Such a formulation of social cohesion would seem to mean that since British culture was the foundation of the national culture it was privileged and therefore all other cultures had to accept its primacy.

Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant in their authoritative survey of *Australia's Foreign Relations In the World of the 1990s*,[53] which faced up to the implications of enmeshment with Asia, embodied more fully the contradictory tendencies inherent in the debate over national identity. On the one hand in dealing with Australia's Asian future they declared that 'it is simply no longer an option for Australia to see itself first and foremost as a transplanted European nation'. Australians, in struggling for 200 years against the reality of their geography, had considered themselves to be an 'Anglophone and Anglophile outpost'. The 1987 Beazley Defence White Paper, which gave effect to the Dibb report, marked 'a conceptual watershed in Australian foreign policy' which liberated Australian foreign policy and, by extension, it might be thought, Australia itself from dependence on the British connection. On the other hand, however, when they dealt directly with Australia's relations with Britain, they accepted that the British inheritance affected every aspect of Australian life and culture: 'Britain's influence on Australia has been so extensive...the ties of history, kinship and culture...so pervasive that the relationship seems to exist independent of governments and their policies'. Furthermore, when they treated the issue of human rights as part of Australia's diplomacy in Asia they maintained that Australia must be true to itself and represent these values abroad. Yet in trying to establish the origin of these Australian values at one point they were represented as deriving from universal principles inscribed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, at another they were a legacy from Australia's Western tradition and again at another they were attributed to a purely Australian experience of the persecuted, the convicts at Botany Bay and diggers at Eureka,

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[52] *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing our Future* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989), pp.v, vii, 1–2, 50–2.

[53] Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations In the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991).

strengthened by the influx of new migrants. Apart from this latter reference 'multi-culturalism' hardly entered into their discussion of the new Australia.[54]

It is clear that while new national and international circumstances, especially the end of 'White Australia' and the changing perceptions of Asia, have led to the abandonment of the ideal of a homogeneous British 'White Australia', all attempts to redefine the contemporary nation have been ad hoc and confused and have failed to produce a satisfactory substitute. One alternative would seem to suggest that Australia is a 'multicultural' society, a nation of nations. A second, which can be seen as a particular application of the first, employing a geopolitical determinism, exhorts Australia to reject the notion of a transplanted European or British outpost and to embrace a bi-racial or Eurasian future. And a third urges that the essence of the nation is to be found in a modified British heritage. The first two stress the discontinuity between the past and the present. They either take for granted the com-monalities which enable people of diverse cultural backgrounds to cooperate in a relatively peaceful manner or they attribute them to supposed universal principles, such as democracy. The third, by contrast, maintains that the common core of national life, represented by parliamentary government, a common law legal system and the English language—which all communities, aboriginal, old and new settlers alike, accept—derives from a particular tradition, a monolithic and timeless British tradition modified to suit Australian conditions. Neither approach, however, convinces. The former refuses to recognise what is patently evident, namely that the shared language, institutions and values are a British legacy: indeed 'multiculturalism' insofar as it ignores the special status of the British tradition runs the risk of becoming a policy of 'repressive tolerance', to use a phrase coined by Herbert Marcuse for other purposes in the 1960s, namely, a policy which persuades migrants from non-British cultures to give their allegiance freely to their country on the basis of a false assurance that all cultures are equal. The latter, on the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of a British tradition, mistakenly explains its influence in a simple, linear fashion. That is, it assumes that there was a unified, unchanging British culture which was brought in one colonial fell swoop to Australia and subsequently and systematically transformed by Australian experience. Similarly, it overlooks the fact that present-day Australia is the product not only of the modification of a British heritage but also of Australia's own distinct ideals, most notably 'White Australia'.

This debate over national identity requires a better sense of history. While there has been an adaptive continuity of language, legal system and political structures, the ideas giving meaning to the British legacy have undergone considerable change. In the era of mass nationalism which gave rise to 'White Australia', a relatively liberal and open definition of the British subject and British Empire was replaced by a racially closed one. In this new era which lasted into the 1960s Australians for the most part thought of themselves as British race patriots. Indeed, Australians forming a democratic settler society on the fringe of alien Asia were more affected by this new nationalism than the British themselves. Race and culture were one, and language, law, and parliamentary government were seen as the fruit of British genius, as belonging exclusively to those of British stock. Even the monarchy became more than the head of a honorific, hierarchical and constitutional order and was reinvented as the symbol of the British people and their world-wide Empire. In the post-imperial age, however, when most developed countries have come to accept the permanence of change and no longer feel the same need for an intense social identity, Australians also have abandoned nationalism's myths and have become more relaxed about diversity and difference both at home and abroad. The view of the British inheritance, as found in the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, stresses not culture or race but institutions and principles. These latter, even though they require, along with the English language, some understanding of a

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54 Evans and Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations*, pp.16–20, 29–30, 33–5, 42, 285 and 327–30.

British constitutional and political tradition for their full exercise, can be shared by citizens of all ethnic origins. The harmony of the commonwealth is no longer dependent upon racial uniformity and cultural conformity; the essentials of community while demanding a first loyalty are not all encompassing. The end of 'White Australia' and the changed perceptions of Asia, the most dramatic marks of the new Australia, can only be understood properly in the context of a new history, perhaps one which allows a republic to mean more than the absence of monarchy and sees the core values of the contemporary nation as a modernised version of the Western philosophical tradition of civic republicanism[55] filtered through Anglo-Australian experience.

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[55] For some recent works exploring the historical uses of this concept see Gisela Bock *et al.* (eds), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Peter Riesenberg, *Citizenship in the Western Tradition* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); and Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Republicanism: The Career of a Concept', *American Historical Review*, 79 (June 1992), pp.11–38.