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Invaders, Illegals and Aliens: Imagining Exclusion in a 'White Australia'

C. Elder

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Abstract

In the run up to the 2001 Australian Federal election John Howard launched his campaign with the pulpit thumping, vote winning cry of: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' (28 October 2001). One hundred years earlier Australian federal parliamentarians had debated the form of the Immigration Restriction Act. One aspect of their discussion went: Mauger: ... [the Australian people] are determined that Australia shall be kept free from alien invasion and contamination. Glynn: It is a question of colour, it is not a question of whether a man is an alien or not. Mauger: It is a question of coloured labour. Watson: ... the question is whether we would desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into any of these races to which we object (Cth of Aust 1901a: 4631–3).

Invaders, Illegals and Aliens:¹ Imagining Exclusion in a 'White Australia'

catriona elder

In the run up to the 2001 Australian Federal election John Howard launched his campaign with the pulpit thumping, vote winning cry of: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' (28 October 2001). One hundred years earlier Australian federal parliamentarians had debated the form of the *Immigration Restriction Act*. One aspect of their discussion went:

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Mauger: It is a question of coloured labour.

Watson: ... the question is whether we would desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into any of these races to which we object (Cth of Aust 1901a: 4631–3).

Ghassan Hage argues that the three Howard governments, from 1996–2003, have seen the re-centring of an old form of paranoid nationalism (2003: 4). The discussants in the 1901 parliament are in the process of producing this form of nationalism. In 2001, Howard argued that it was the 'illegal' status of the people on Australian borders that forced him to refuse them entry. One hundred years earlier, the parliamentarians seem to suggest that it is the aliens' 'colour' and fear (of interracial sexual desire) that underpins their convictions on the need for exclusion.

This article explores the raced and gendered aspects of boundary crossing in the (post)colonial nation of Australia. In particular it focuses on the raced and gendered representations of unauthorised immigration. In doing so it focuses on what Teresa Goddu has called the dream world of national myth disrupted by the nightmares of history (1997: 10). The article analyses the ways in which the sometimes violent, sometimes self-congratulatory rhetoric that accompanies representations of unauthorised acts of boundary crossing exposes the sore that is colonisation — the original unauthorised boundary crossing. Drawing on a variety of representations of ‘aliens’ and (sexual) desire over the last 100 years this article traces both changes to and similarities between representations over this long period. It will analyse the different ways in which ‘alien’ men’s and ‘alien’ women’s bodies are represented in images of border crossing. It will explore the history of the ambivalence that is built into the drive to regulate the Australian border. The article focuses on the way understandings of legal or illegal crossings have been and continue to be (re)produced in terms of gender as well as sexual pleasures and dangers. In doing this it will challenge the idea that fear of invasion is premised on an unambiguous xenophobia, arguing instead that an ambivalence underpins relationships with outsiders; an ambivalence that encompasses both pleasure and loathing.

The article draws on an eclectic range of stories of border crossing in an attempt to analyse the multiple ways in which exclusion and inclusion are imagined. The stories are obviously those that have somehow been recorded (in law, in fiction, in the media). They also reflect iconic images of border crossing — Chinese men, Mrs Petrov, Vietnamese ‘boat people’ — in a variety of anxious decades — 1880s, 1950s, 1970s, 2000s. These are anxious decades because they are moments when the ‘nightmare’ overwhelms the ‘dream’. Moments where the level, type, or approach to immigration, and often also the state of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, are being negotiated, complicated or challenged. The examples analysed help demonstrate the relationship between Australian colonialism, gender and immigration.

The theory underpinning the argument draws on work by scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Ghassan Hage, Jennifer Rutherford and Joseph Pugliese who explore the ambivalence, anxiety and violence that often underpin representations of border control. Using their ideas this article will suggest that even at times of the most strident calls for the exclusion of ‘aliens’ — especially ‘coloured’ aliens, traces of other ideas — assimilation and desire for the excluded people — are discursively represented. For example, a plantation owner may want cheap labour, an Indian prince might be welcomed as an exotic aristocrat or a Black jazz musician may be admitted to bring new and exciting music to our shores. Barely spoken, but ever-present desires for the excluded people inform the idea of a ‘white Australia’. These complex and changeable desires for the alien inform understandings of border crossing.

The fantasy of a clearly bounded and inviolable national space has underpinned many of the ideas that white Australians carry with them of what it means to be ‘Australian’. The continually reinforced (though perpetually challenged) belief is that the nation is a singular and coherent space out to the furthestmost boundaries of the sea (Barnard in Drake-Brockman nd). The fantasy of the coherence of the white Australian nation/state needs to be especially emphatic in the face of sovereign Indigenous peoples. As Patrick Wolfe (1994) explains, the British colonial project in Australia was imagined as settler colonialism. That is, it was organised in terms of British settlers (who later became Australian-British subjects and then Australian citizens) who colonised the Australian continent with the intention of owning, occupying and working the land (Wolfe 1994). (This contrasts with other types of colonial projects where the colonisers imagine that the land will be owned by them but worked by Indigenous people for the coloniser’s profit (Wolfe 1994).) In the Australian vision of ‘settler colonialism’ the Indigenous peoples’ prior occupation and ongoing presence directly challenges the settler fantasy. So Indigenous peoples need to be eliminated both literally and metaphorically from the space of the nation.

Yet ‘White Australia’ is produced in terms of a triangulated relationship between white Australians, an internal Indigenous Other and an

external non-white Other (Perera 1995, Elder 1998). James Donald argues the ‘fictional unity’ of the nation is created by ‘differentiating it from other cultures, ... [and] by marking its boundaries’ (1993: 167). The unity is always a fiction ‘of course, because the “us” on the inside is itself always differentiated’ (167). The fictional ‘us’ in white Australia was defined in terms of this internal and external Other and these Others were imagined in terms of race. As Patricia Grimshaw explains the push for federation emerged from a: ‘[c]oncern for preserving a white society, and for fostering white motherhood, [these] were key motives serving to integrate colonies within which otherwise so much contestation was evident between classes and people of differing religious persuasions and geographical areas’ (1994: 191). So for example the Hon William McMillan said in the new Federal parliament in 1901: ‘Australia must be kept pure for the British race who have begun to inhabit it’ (Cth of Aust 1901a: 4626). Helen Irving extends this argument by noting that in the discussions around Federation:

Australia it was thought needed to be *white* — not merely as an outcome of coordinated immigration policy — but as a type of culture ... a “white” population was metaphorical as well as racial. It could only be achieved, its proponents believed, through creating the pre-conditions for a common national identity and through fulfilling a common “destiny” (2002: 20).

From the 19th century onwards the idea of the Australian nation hinges on a disavowal of the non-white Indigenous peoples who not only occupy the continent but through their Indigeneity challenge white Australians’ claims for this ‘native’ status. In this relationship Australian-Britons are both ‘aliens’ and ‘invaders’.

This uncomfortable relationship between Indigenous peoples and Australian-Britons is also informed by the relationship between Australian-Britons and non-Indigenous, non-white immigrants.² The discursive logic of ‘white Australia’ is, as the historical quotes above suggest, to disavow the illegality and alien status of Australian-Britons. In many ways this works through the displacement of this dis-ease onto an external Other. The discourse of white Australian national identity has long been underpinned by a belief that this continental space,

which is set aside for the 'British race' (and later for immigrants who fulfil stringent citizenship requirements), is surrounded by, and so dogged by, millions of people who want to come to or invade it. Images of an inviolable white Australia continually menaced by others, and fiercely defended have circulated over the last 100 years and more. Take for example the dozens and dozens of well-known cartoons published in magazines such as the *Boomerang* and *Bulletin* that depict 'dangerous' Chinese men who desire white Australia and white women, and who plan to takeover both. The mentality that underpinned the original cartoons can still be found in contemporary images. For example, in 1999 the *Sunday Telegraph* ran a headline 'Invaded' when a rusty old ship with approximately 80 Chinese unauthorised entrants ran aground at Scotts Head Beach on the north coast of New South Wales (Gora 1999: 1). As John Howard's election slogan and the *Sunday Telegraph*'s language demonstrate the crudest beliefs about exclusion can still be found in contemporary discourse. Yet as I will demonstrate in more detail the feelings of fear, panic and violence that often accompany understandings of 'aliens' at the border in Australia are part of a more complex discourse that also includes a desire for 'alien' bodies. For at some place in white people's psyches we know we are 'aliens' too.³

In the fantasy of a 'white Australia' the physical borders of Australia are often imagined as the places in the nation where the policy of exclusion fails, where 'leakages' take place, where invasion is possible (see, for example, Edmund Barton, Cth of Aust 1901a: 3498). In particular there are areas — named 'zones of flux' by Ross Gibson (1994: 668) — where the clarity of inside/out are harder to imagine. These zones can be the sea, long isolated parts of the coast, ports, airports, poor inner city suburbs or 'ethnic' neighbourhoods. Temporal boundaries also exist. The idea of going to 'a place that time forgot' or to a 'timeless' place is a powerful metaphor used to signify crossing a boundary between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australia. Still in post-1901 Australian history the most obvious sites that evoke and erase the fantasised idea of an impregnable national boundary is the coast. And even more specifically the fixation on securing boundaries and proving

the integrity of a unified nation is most obvious in imaginings of the north and north-west of Australia. So for example, the changes in 2001 to the *Migration Act* and the increased naval surveillance of the northern waters of Australia demonstrate the fixation on northern coastal border crossings as the spaces where the Other is imagined as entering the nation, either literally or imaginatively.⁴

So by this logic borders are often represented as places where the idea of an essential 'white Australia' was challenged and where 'counter-narratives' of the nation might emerge (Bhabha 1990: 300). However, to argue that the liminal spaces of borders are unruly and unstable is not to say that they are anarchic and out of control. It is also not to say that there are not particular pleasures available in the imagining of unauthorised border crossings. Russ Castronovo argues the uncertain space of borders and their crossings can often operate 'as the sutures of national cohesion, offer[ing] an imaginative topos for the articulation of "transcendent" ideals of racial supremacy and political unity' (1997: 202). Castronovo's contention is that hegemonic governments can use border spaces to 'reframe and manage rebellion so that its power [is] not antagonistic' (204). In this sense the leakiness of the nation is not contradictory but part of the imagining of the nation. As Homi Bhabha writes:

[the idea of the nation is] an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress (1990a: 1).

So we can look at border spaces to see how ideas of unruliness can be re-imagined and managed in ways that seek to reinforce ideas of a 'white Australia'.

What underpins the long history of imaginings of border crossing and boundary transgression of 'white Australia' is an ambivalence. Homi Bhabha in analysing the ambivalence of the nation explores the contradiction between the 'nation's modernity' and its dependence on 'atavistic apologues' (1990b: 293). He quotes Partha Chatterjee:

Nationalism ... seeks to represent itself in the image of the Enlightenment and fails to do so. For Enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in the real world as the truly universal it would in fact destroy itself (1990b: 293).

Homi Bhabha argues that uncertainty is what characterises the centre, the West, or in this case the nation (1990b: 303–4). He suggests this uncertainty results from the haunting of the colonial power by an excluded or marginal group(s). So though ‘white Australia’ is premised on a total exclusion of ‘aliens’ and ‘undesirables’, what happens is a continual (representational) re-enactment of the possible entry of the excluded followed by a violent disavowal of the possibility of entry. The excluded people are never completely expelled from the imaginary of the West or the coloniser because of the ambivalent feelings of simultaneous desire and repulsion for the marginal or excluded people (Bhabha 1994: 132).

As this article’s opening quote from the 1901 Federal Parliament suggests this ambivalent desire is often represented in and through images of inter racial sexual relations. The notion of a white body and a non-white body together is both erotically charged, and represents an assimilative imperative (see Anderson 1993–4) but also marks a boundary that is not to be crossed. However, though this coupling is emphatically stated to be what must be stopped, it is the repetition of its (im)possibility that occupies a central place in many stories of ‘white Australia’. More than this ‘alien’ male and ‘alien’ female bodies are understood differently. To use The Honourable Mr Watson’s heteronormative fantasy of border crossings as a model: male bodies that exist as potential threats to our ‘sisters’ are more dangerous than female bodies are for our ‘brothers’.

Though fantasies and ‘forbidden’ wishes for the sexualised aliens were organised by different protocols than the everyday knowledge of policy and law, they are still produced from the same repertoire of discourses. Desires — even illicit ones — are part of socially produced discourses, rather than individual or socially disconnected fantasies. Robert Young (1995), extending on Bhabha, makes the point that fantasy

is not a maverick unregulated set of unspeakable feelings and images. Rather it is ordered by the same discourses that order the law, government policy, the school curriculum, published fiction.

This 'desire for the other' is always underpinned by fear. The fear of 'too many', 'too much', a 'flood' that will 'swamp' white people puts a brake on this desire. As Joseph Pugliese (1995) argues 'the other face' is often 'a site of desire', but this desire for 'the other face' is soon after counteracted by the 'designation of difference underwritten by the insuperable category of "race"' (241). The wish to include the Other is often followed with a violent refusal or negation of the original desire. Ghassan Hage in his book *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003) notes that this violent refusal can be a national project as much as an individual one:

At the border we do things that we might not like to see being done inside our society ... At the border, the protection of hope sometimes unleashes aggression, hatred and mistrust (31).

This ambivalence — the process of desiring the 'Other' and then violently disavowing this desire — occurs continually in narratives of 'white Australia'.

In her book *The Gauche Intruder* (2000), Jennifer Rutherford uses a psychoanalytic approach to explore this violent disavowal through what she calls the good neighbour fantasy in Australia. She argues that one of the persistent stories of Australian identity is one of Australia as the exemplary nation. Rutherford writes that this story and the fantasies of 'the good' (we do) that accompany it:

provide a camouflage for aggression at both a national and local level: an aggression directed both to an external and an internal Other ... whether it be the accompaniment to a state orchestrated genocide or a privately enacted scenario, the good, as camouflage, as point of identification, as authorisation, provides a fantasmatic frame for the enactment and consolidation of white Australian culture at the singular and collective level (10).

Rutherford suggests that this desire to good often manifests itself as the fantasy of Australia as a 'good and neighbourly nation' (12). She then draws our attention to a paradox where 'the manifestation of

aggression is visible at the very moment we set out to do good' (10). Though each of these writers takes a different approach to the exploration of national identity, they all engage with the disavowed or repressed violence that informs the nationalist story of the nation.

I begin by exploring ambivalence and the border as it manifests in discussions in the Federal parliament in 1901 when the soon to be enacted *Immigration Restriction Act* was on the table. The production of a 'white Australia' has been a subject of discussion for decades in Australia. It is, quite rightly, seen as a founding discourse for the nation and a point of reference in many discussions that have taken place since about what Australia should be.

The evolution of the 1901 parliamentary discussion about a 'white Australia' began with colonial government policies and laws implemented from about the mid- to late-19th century and designed to keep Chinese migrants and non-white contract workers out of the country (Markus 1994: 112, 114). The first federal parliament inherited this desire for exclusion. Prime Minister Barton noted the issue of a 'white Australia' as 'one of the most important matters with regard to the future of Australia' (Cth of Aust 1901a: 3497). The historical idea of a 'white Australia' has been repeated so often, so forcefully and so clearly that it is almost a truism:

... [the Australian people] are determined that Australia shall be kept free from alien invasion and contamination (Cth of Aust 1901c: 4631–3).

The main piece of legislation that underpinned the discourse of a 'white Australia' was the *Immigration Restriction Act*. By the time of Federation the colonial governments' original focus on the restriction of Chinese immigrants had expanded to include labourers from the Pacific Islands and Japan. Though these particular groups were singled out for notice, time and time again in the debates that surrounded the passage of the Immigration Restriction Bill, the rhetoric of racism was broad. A not uncommon cry in the parliament of 1901 was: 'We want to exclude absolutely every kind of coloured immigrant' (Cook H, Cth of Aust 1901b: 4640).

In 1901 the main issue for debate in a parliament almost entirely in favour of a ‘white Australia’ was *how* to exclude the immigrants Australian-Britons did not want.⁵ The final choice of an indirect method of exclusion was a response to British government disquiet with a policy of direct exclusion. As the British parliament had to approve all pieces of Australian legislation before they were passed in the Australian parliament their comments were not without weight. On the issue of direct exclusion the British government protested firstly that it was un-British to have a race-based policy. Secondly the British government was unhappy with a direct exclusion of all ‘coloured immigrants’ because citizen subjects of the Empire, especially people from India, Ceylon and Bengal would be unable to enter Australia (Chesterman & Galligan 1997: 103–9). In the minds of the British government this made a mockery of the British ideal of the ‘family of the empire’. In more practical terms the reason for the threat of refusal from the British government to approve a piece of Australian legislation that explicitly excluded an entire nation on the grounds of race was because Britain’s close economic ties with Japan and China could be jeopardised. These were ties that all states, except Queensland, did not share.

Though the Australian government’s decision to exclude ‘coloured immigrants’ — directly or indirectly — was emphatic it was actually a moment of ambivalence. The British government argued that Australia, as a leading ‘civilised’ nation, had certain standards to uphold in terms of justice and equality. Some members of the Australian parliament were not insensible to the contradiction in their decision to exclude immigrants on the basis of ‘colour’. As one parliamentarian put it:

... the question is whether we are to subordinate our undoubted desire to prevent coloured immigrants from coming to Australia to the exigencies of Empire (Glynn P, Cth of Aust 1901b: 4643).

Coupled together here is the desire to exclude ‘coloured immigrants’ and the desire to fulfil the moral requirements of being part of the Empire (to be the ‘good neighbour’). The ideas held by most of the parliamentarians meant they believed that what separated them (Australian-Britons) from the people they wanted to exclude (‘coloured immigrants’)

was that they should know better than to do such a thing. As William McMillan said to the parliament:

Everyone of us ... must feel, especially belonging as we do to the race which has been more broad minded, more cosmopolitan and more adventurous than any other race the world has known, that in attempting to shut out any human beings from our shores and from the privileges of British freedom, we are doing a very extreme act. It was once our boast that if the negro [sic] set his foot on our shores from that moment he was free (Cth of Aust 1901b: 4626–7).

The excluded people were the group who Australian-Britons needed to include in the idea of their nation if they were to think of themselves as superior; if they were to think of themselves as good. They desired the excluded group. Even as the discussion moves inevitably towards exclusion, even as ‘every coloured man’ is being vilified the bodies of ‘coloured’ men — the ex ‘negro’ slave, the Indian prince or Indian cricket player — surface in the text as desirable others. For as Chatterjee has explained ‘the universal ideal needs its Other’. And so, the adoption of legislation that indirectly rather than directly restricted immigration meant that the policy of exclusion contained within it the possibility for entry of groups designated as Other or as ‘undesirable’. Though the idea of a polarisation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was powerful, even in this moment of strident racialised nationalism there are challenges, fissures and contradictions (Young 1995: 179). The need for Australian-Britons at Federation to so emphatically declare their democratic right to protect Australia ‘provide[s] a camouflage for ... an aggression directed both to an external and internal Other’ (Rutherford 2000: 10) — so the external Other who will replicate our invasion and the internal Other who challenges the legitimacy of our belonging.

So far this article has focused on a general anxiety about border crossing and the aggression and ambivalence that underpins ideas of maintaining a white Australia. As suggested earlier one of the ways in which the anxiety and pleasures of border crossings were enunciated and represented was through images of gendered and sexualised bodies. In discourses that depend on an (often) undeclared hetero-

normativity these bodies are represented in terms of a heterosexual imperative and an understanding of men's bodies as threatening women's bodies as vulnerable.

One of the key tropes deployed to represent the danger of border crossing is the image of the white woman. The white woman is represented both as that which must be most carefully protected but also as the weak point in the maintenance of white Australia. For example the 19th century cartoon that depicts the colony of Queensland as a young fair-haired woman being defended by a white man in a tam o' shanter, with a large and fierce dog on a leash, from a cowering Chinese man, draws on the idea of white women as vulnerable and needing to a strong male protector. In another cartoon also representing the danger of Chinese men to the nation, two white women are featured sitting at the door of an opium den, already rendered lost by their inability or refusal to decline the untoward advances of opium sellers. Here the white women are the weak point in the nation, they represent the point of 'entry' of undesirable men (and their 'alien' cultures) into the nation. In both these cartoons the non-white male body is a site of a fantasised aggressive danger, even though it is this body that is usually violated rather than pursuing violence.

A third and strikingly evocative example of this double positioning of white women as both in danger and the danger is provided in an (unpublished) story by writer Henrietta Drake-Brockman called 'The Tiger's Tooth'. This story written in the late 1920s is a fantasy about sexual transgression. As I suggested earlier, though the story is a fantasy it can still be understood as driven by the same everyday logic and rules that inform more mundane representations of 'white Australia', such as government policies and legal remedies (Young 1995: 168). This story illustrates well ideas of white women as the weak link in the discourse of 'white Australia' and the violence meted out to the non-white male bode if it dares to desire 'our sister'.

'The Tiger's Tooth' (Drake-Brockman, [n.d.]) is about a young woman, Sheila, who is on a cruise ship holiday up the North-West coast to Singapore.⁶ Sheila is identified early in Drake-Brockman's story as

‘very shy, bottled up’ and untouched by the ‘sensuous beauty of the Timor Sea’ (2). However by the time she reaches Broome, Sheila has been touched by her changed environment. Broome gives Sheila and her fellow tourists a ‘foretaste of exotic pleasures yet to come in Java and Singapore’ (6). However even with this promise of the exotic Sheila remains ‘bottled up’. It is only on the return trip south, when Sheila buys a 200 year old tiger’s tooth that has intrigued her since she first saw it on the northward leg of the journey, that things really change. From the moment Sheila clasps the tiger’s tooth necklace around her neck she signifies sexuality — she becomes ‘what the talkie blurbs call — alluring’ (3–4). Sheila’s sexual appeal is linked to the jungle: her walk is noted as no longer ‘the loose swinging stride of an Australian girl ... a whiff of the jungle came stealing along the deck’ (4). Here a parallel is drawn between this woman travelling in the north-west and a notion of the primitive (Torgovnick 1990: ch 3).

When Sheila starts to wear the tiger’s tooth she purchased in Broome it sets off a complex, inter-racial sexual drama between these characters. The sexual and racial boundaries that had been carefully maintained on the northward leg of the journey are now crossed. A Bengali sailor on the ship becomes fascinated by Sheila. He starts to follow her around and finally breaks into her cabin one night:

[Sheila] awakened to see a yellow face close to her head. Two black eyes were devouring her ... eyes she had seen in her dreams ... The cabin receded ... in the dark recesses of the jungle she lay at his mercy ... (14).

This passage of transgressive inter-racial sexual desire — figured here as a sexually aggressive Other devouring a (now) passive white woman — is quickly and violently contained. The momentarily pleasurable experience of representing the desire of and the desire for the Other — a border crossing — is followed by a playing out of a vision of that Other as evil. In the passages that follow Sheila’s awakening the tiger’s tooth is ripped off her neck as she sleepwalks on the ship’s deck in the thrall of the Bengali sailor. Watching the Bengali sailor is the Malay crew member who stabs the Bengali man, cuts his hands off and throws his body overboard. The Malay crew member then commits

suicide by cutting off his own head. Finally a white man, who has admired Sheila, quickly declares his intention to marry her (15–7).

The fantasy of the alien Other, the Orientalised Bengali crew member, and the sexualised, transgressive white woman, who threatens the white nation, can be indulged in this border space but it is then contained in a scene of gothic violence. The denial of Sheila's desire for the Bengali sailor (a 'white woman's' desire for a 'coloured' man) is staged through an extremely violent exclusion of the 'other face'. To use Pugliese's idea again: texts that locate the 'other face as a site of desire' immediately follow this by the designation of them as racially different:

'Race' will effectively objectify the other and reduce it to the unmotivated blankness of a racial difference emptied of desire and inhabited only by primitives, animals and deaf-mutes (1995: 241).

In 'The Tiger's Tooth' the Bengali and the Malay sailors are both chopped up and consigned to the ocean, nothing more than signifiers of a sub-human 'raced' category. As the ship returns to the Fremantle port the Bengali sailor, who Sheila dreamed about, is dead and the sexualised alluring woman who played with the possibility of desire for the Other is bound in marriage to an Australian-Briton.

The representatives of transgressive desires are excluded from the nation — left outside, beyond the boundaries of the nation. The 'alien' male crew members are literally thrown overboard. The 'good' Malay sailor masochistically sacrificing himself for the 'memsahib'. The dangerous white woman, whose sexual desires include 'coloured' men, is figuratively thrown overboard with the tiger's tooth, leaving a less threatening Sheila (the 'white Australian' everywoman) her desire appropriately directed at white man and procreation for a 'white Australia'.

In imagining a 'white Australia' there is an ambivalent and aggressive pleasure in representing white women as both desirable to Other men and then representing the violent end of that desire. There is a pleasure in representing the leakiness of the border — for this is how Australian-Britons invade Australia, but this is accompanied by a violent repulsion at the knowledge of who else might cross 'our' borders.

A repulsion that is to this day affected through aggression directed at the bodies (of men in particular) who approach the border from the north.

Non-white women — Other women — are also part of the set of representations that make up the discourse of ‘white Australia’. There are certain pleasures and anxieties in imagining these border crossings. I now want to look at a range of representations of ‘alien’ women who appear at Australia’s borders. I will analyse these representations in terms of the ambivalence and aggression they invoke as challenges to a ‘white Australia’.

The next series of representations I analyse come from the 1950s. This decade was one where the ‘white Australia’ policy had to be re-presented to the world and to the nation. The horror of the Holocaust made blatant and crude racism more difficult to present as good government policy. Though there were few extravagant changes to the legislation that underpinned the ‘white Australia’ policy the large-scale immigration program that began in this decade made the policy of migrant inclusion and exclusion and the idea of well monitored and strong borders important.

I begin by considering a quite well-known photographic image of Soviet citizen Evdokia Petrov in April 1954. Photographed at Sydney’s Mascot airport the image shows Petrov being gripped by two Soviet ‘couriers’ — one on each side — as she is hustled on to a plane. The faces of the two male Soviets are implacable, the face of Mrs Petrov, whose husband had decided to defect to Australia, is anguished. Her head is tilted back and she appears to be slumped in the arms of the ‘couriers’. Her face has become a long-standing signifier of vulnerability at the border. Here the danger is communism and the pleasure is to be had in saving this woman from having to face its perils. The continual recycling of this image, along with the accompanying piece of trivia that Mrs Petrov lost her shoe in the scuffle, thus increasing her vulnerability, works to cement an image of the generosity and goodness of Australia. Including the enemy ‘alien’ in the nation is an anxiety-inducing project. The status of Mrs Petrov as Soviet citizen but also a

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Evdokia Petrov at Sydney airport April 1954
(image courtesy of National Archives of Australia)

potential (white/Australian) citizen and her rescue at the airport in Darwin (where she finally agreed to defect along with her husband) signifies the fantasy of a good 'white Australia'. The violence needed to maintain the border is not 'ours' but 'theirs'. Though both 'Mr' and 'Mrs' Petrov defected it is the image of the vulnerable woman who stands as the long term signifier of border crossing in Australia. Here the foreign female body is dragged to the edge of the Australian border and then rescued and awarded citizenship by the good nation. This takes place in a decade when Indigenous peoples struggled to have their citizenship demands heard. Mrs Petrov was saved from crossing the border back into the totalitarian USSR in an era when Indigenous peoples were deprived of civil rights in Australia. The point is not that Stalinist Russia or Australian Indigenous policies are (or are not) equivalent but that the aggressive defence of Mrs Petrov is one of many aggressive acts of 'good' that camouflage the violence required to maintain white Australians' belief in themselves as the rightful occupiers of Australia.

An even more complex discourse of border crossing and inclusion was the arrival of Japanese people in Australia after World War Two. In many ways in the 1950s the Soviet Union was a recent 'enemy', whereas Japanese people have long appeared in 'white Australian' narratives as undesirable 'aliens' as well as more recent military enemies. However, the Australian military occupation of Japan after the 1939–45 war led to a series of 'unauthorised' relationships between Australian military personnel and Japanese women. Though for many years the Australian military and the federal government discouraged any type of personal relationships in 1952 Immigration Minister Harold Holt finally granted entry applications to a number of Japanese women who had married Australian men (mostly servicemen) thus allowing them to come to Australia (Tamura 2002: 129).

There was a high level of press coverage of the first brides coming to Australia. For example Julie Easton notes that the first Japanese war bride to arrive in Western Australia was 'tracked' by the media once the boat she was travelling on neared the Australian mainland. Reports

were made on the couple's whereabouts as they approached Perth (Easton 1995: 24). The representations of the Japanese women on their arrival reinforced both their dependence on their husband (for example photographs show them with their husband, who is often in his military uniform) and their attractiveness (which reinforces ideas of the women as petite, dainty, shy, gentle (Easton 1995: 24)). Later media reports focus on the women in domestic and family situations where they are cemented in as part of the everyday female world of the private sphere. As Easton notes in her work on the Japanese brides assimilation is one of the key issues in the thinking about the arrival of the women. Assimilation was a broad and popular policy in the 1950s that applied to Indigenous peoples as well as immigrants. An ambivalence that underpinned assimilation — a desire to 'absorb' the Other and a fear that it might be 'whiteness' that disappeared — haunted the policy. Again the triangulated relationship between internal and external Other informs the idea of 'white Australia'. The same careful monitoring of the Japanese brides and their entry into 'white Australia' is played out in the monitoring, via protection legislation, of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' potential sexual and marital relationships. The Australian (or its state legislatures) state decides who will remain alien and who will be naturalised.

Another group of Japanese people were in the news at the same time as the Japanese war brides made their way to Australia. These were the small group of children living in southern Japan who had been fathered by Australian servicemen during the military occupation of Japan. These men did not intend to bring their children or the mother of their child to Australia. However, from the mid-1950s, when publicity about the poverty of these children raised their profile until the early 1960s, a small but committed and vocal group of supporters continually petitioned the federal government to provide financial support for these children and to consider allowing them to migrate to Australia for adoption. The government position is adamant from the beginning. As Minister Alexander Downer explained in 1960:

In effect a bid for the children is a bid for the mothers and by the time the whole operation were carried out, quite a small colony of Japanese migrants would be coming into this country. I say without hesitation and qualification that as long as I am Minister, that will not happen (29 March 1960).

The Menzies government did not change its mind on the immigration of Japanese-Australian children, but in 1962 it finally agreed to provide financial support as a result of ongoing pressure from Church, the general public and charities. The change of mind is represented in terms of winning some measure of ‘good’ opinion from Australians and the region. So A B McFarlane, a high level public servant, notes that ‘Australia’s interests’ might be served ‘by [the] goodwill gesture [of] giving some financial support that improves public opinion at home and gives the opportunity for “prestige” to be accrued’ (27 January 1959). Here McFarlane fantasises about Australia as the ‘good and neighbourly nation’ (Rutherford 2000: 12). The possible down side of this ‘goodwill’ McFarlane goes on to note is that ‘such a gift could be taken as an admission of collective Australian guilt for this particular problem and other social problems ... in Japan’ (27 January 1959). When the Cabinet finally agrees to financial support it is very grudging.⁷ It was noted that any assistance given by any Australian body should be undertaken on the understanding that ‘no ... assumption of liability by the Australian government in the matter was to be countenanced’ (Cabinet Decision 1962). It was also stipulated by Cabinet that the money was not specifically for children with Australian fathers but for general charitable use. So the fantasy of goodness is accompanied by an aggression that reinforces ‘white Australia’.

Yet the money was not enough — the general public would not let go of the idea of the children coming to Australia en masse. For many people the fantasy involved the (patriarchal) Australian state (often imagined quite explicitly in the person of Robert Menzies) stepping-in in place of the missing Australian fathers and taking patrician responsibility for all the children (see Grimshaw et al 1994: ch 12). The fantasy was that the federal government would bring the children to

Australia and then 'distribute' them to loving families or into state run institutions. There is a pleasure to be had in imagining the border crossing of Australian children (even 'our half-breeds' (Kennedy to McCusker 14 January 1960)⁸) into Australia.

The number of Japanese children, and their mothers, who were being discussed as potential immigrants was small. No mothers or their children had expressed an interest in coming to Australia and the Australian government estimated that the number of children with Australian fathers was under a hundred. So the vehemence with which the government seeks to exclude the women does not quite accord with the 'danger' they pose. The popular representations of the Japanese mothers who will accompany their children are in terms of their maternal or caring role (and also perhaps as domestic servants who will look after their children after they are placed in Australian households) and as such they seem to pose no danger to 'white Australia'. The government image is of the women as danger. They are represented as a potential conduit through which more Japanese migration will take place. The Japanese women married to Australian men are not represented as a danger because they are contracted in marriage to men who, first, remove them from the Japanese world and ensconce them in the Australian suburbs and second are their 'masters'. The unmarried Japanese women are dangerous because they have already crossed the Australian border (through their unauthorised sexual encounters with the Australian soldiers) and they now need to be (metaphorically) expelled from the nation through the adamant governmental refusal to entertain the possibility of their arrival.

Twenty years later as the Vietnam War drew to a close another set of media representations were produced as another group of Asian women crossed Australian borders. As thousands of South Vietnamese citizens had been displaced during the Vietnam War, the federal government began to offer places for these refugees in Australia. There was a marked rise in anti-Asian sentiment. The 1970s was also a period of intense activism for Indigenous peoples in Australia. The changes and challenges that were taking place around land rights and civil rights

disrupted the dominant idea of the unchallenged sovereignty of ‘white Australia’. These internal and external threats had to be managed in a nation now committed, at least on paper, to multiculturalism and self-determination.

As with the earlier episode of Japanese brides coming to Australia the ‘panic’ about Vietnamese immigration was managed in the media through the domestication of Vietnamese immigrants. Adrian Carton (1994) has pointed out that the arrival times of Vietnamese migrants was gendered — in the initial years of immigration it was mostly Vietnamese men who came to Australia — and this caused a ‘panic’. Though the arrival of almost all of the Vietnamese refugees, and soon to be citizens, was authorised by the government (and took place in an orderly way via air travel) the overwhelming image of Vietnamese arrivals was as unregulated loads of ‘boat people’. The combination of Vietnamese men arriving and stories of boats arriving from the north drew on the ghost of the powerful historical myth of ‘hordes’ of Asian men desiring to invade Australia and fuelled the fear.

The representation of the eradication of this fearful presence could no longer be undertaken with a story of a beheading and violent expulsion. The domestication of this fear was undertaken in the media through the over-representation of Vietnamese women as the new arrivals (Carton 1994). As with the episode of Japanese women’s border crossing the fear felt by many Australians about the arrival of the Vietnamese women in Australia was assuaged through representations of them as unthreatening — at home, at the hairdressers — and also in the care of (and in many ways monitored by) (white) Australian men and families. As Carton argues:

In orientalising Vietnamese immigrant women into ideals of feminine “Asianness” not only were the boundaries of “Australianness” redrawn but the images of these immigrants provided the avenue to the type of society in which they held currency (80).

The media images work to reproduce the notion of Australia as the ‘good neighbour’ (Rutherford 2000) — a nation that welcomes those who need assistance and brings them in to the heart of the nation. The

Vietnamese women are welcomed across the border, first, because represented as passive and docile 'Asian' women they are not seen to pose a danger and second because their presence in the nation assuages the racist fear of a troubling group of single Vietnamese men in Australia.

In January 1979 a very different type of 'boat person' arrived in Australia. An 18 year old Ukrainian woman by the name of Lillian Gasinskaya was working on a Soviet cruise ship berthed in Sydney, when she jumped into Sydney Harbour, swam to shore, wearing only her swimming costume, seeking political asylum. Gasinskaya was dubbed the 'red bikini girl' by the press and achieved some notoriety in her bid for 'freedom'. The news images of Gasinskaya show her in a similar set of unthreatening poses as the Vietnamese women — getting a hair cut, buying clothes. But the ubiquitous image — relayed to newspapers all round the nation — is of Gasinskaya in her bikini. In one 'bikini' photo waist deep in water, hair wet, she faces the camera, face composed, calm and photogenic. In another she sits on a swing, eating an ice cream, half-smiling and looking away from the camera. Though at the same time other immigrants were arriving in Australia illegally in boats and put into detention Gasinskaya was quickly granted residency by the federal government. The combination of cold war politics and beauty sealed Gasinskaya's fate. As with Mrs Petrov she is on the receiving end of Australia's 'good neighbour' actions. As with the Vietnamese women she is represented in terms of her domesticity but also as sexual and sexually available. Photographs of Gasinskaya in bikinis, shorts and clinging skirts present her as a slightly exotic Other available for white Australian men rather than as a sexual object for non-white men. In a world where the last vestiges of the race based immigration policy were being dismantled the welcome for Gasinskaya mutes the aggression directed at many unauthorised and authorised Asian arrivals and Indigenous peoples.



Lillian Gasinskaya at Balmoral Beach January 1979
(photographer Graeme Fletcher, image courtesy of Newscorp Ltd)

In December 2001 another woman, this time a Canadian model named Brendalee Doel, made it to the news as an unauthorised entrant to Australia. Doel was working in Australia with the incorrect visa. She was questioned by immigration officials and then detained in Villawood Detention Centre before being deported from the country. Like the 'red bikini girl' what makes the story of Doel interesting and what makes it possible to represent her as a desirable 'A-list' party goer from the 'best country in the world' rather than an 'other wom[a]n who can hardly speak english' (Thorne 2001: 3) is her gender and ethnicity. The whiteness of this 'illegal' immigrant makes it possible to represent her time as detainee and deportee as ludicrous. The media reporting implies there is a sense of injustice about her deportation, which is suggested was the result of a 'technical hitch' (3).

The *Sun Herald* article that reports on the indignities suffered by Doel quotes her as outlining the conditions in which she was kept — quarters that were overcrowded, dirty and filled with women who did not speak English. Though Doel does suggest that no-one should have to live in such conditions she is truly amazed that a (white) Canadian should have to. Given that thousands of potential refugees live in these conditions for years in Australia it is interesting that it is a white woman suffering this indignity that is brought to our attention. To paraphrase the 1901 parliamentarian Watson — we do not want our sisters or those we would marry being kept in conditions that are 'dirty and overcrowded ... [and] stink' (3). The representation of Doel in the *Sun Herald's* media story juxtaposes a large photograph of her distressed and crying after she has been released from Villawood and a small inset photograph of her in one of her most successful advertisements. The image of a long-haired blonde woman, hands before her in a pose of supplication, crying and obviously distressed, so different from the sexual image of her in the advertisement, works to reinforce the notion that detention centres are no place for a white lady. As with the wayward Sheila, the red bikini girl and Mrs Petrov, here is someone to be rescued.

In the years that surrounded the detention of Doel a debate has raged in Australia about the border control, refugees, detention and race-based exclusion. These debates took place within the context of



Brendalee Doel at Sydney Airport December 2001
(photograph courtesy of Peter Barnes)

heated discussions about the past treatment of Indigenous peoples and reconciliation. Though the two issues are seldom linked in popular debate, this article has made some effort to trace the historical links between the two.

Using Bhabha's idea of nation and ambivalence (the inherent ambivalence contained within the idea of nation) as well as his more specific psychoanalytic exploration of ambivalence as part of the (post)colonial relationship this article has explored the ways in which the simultaneous anxieties and desires about border-crossing women represent the never-ending white anxiety about, and desire to belong to, this place. The 'founding' legislation of 'white Australia' — the *Immigration Restriction Act* — carries within it this ambivalence. The discussions around the passing of the legislation deploy both modern notions of democracy, citizenship and equality as well as pre-modern notions of clannishness, insularity and geography. This ambivalence manifests itself in the legislation in a paradoxical emphatic refusal to welcome the Other, alongside a mechanism that allows their entry. This anxiety about external aliens, invaders and illegals mimics and masks another anxiety that emerges through white Australians' refusal to acknowledge their alien and invader status. Shadowing the representation of the external Other are stories of white (governmental) techniques to control and displace Indigenous peoples and delegitimise their claims of sovereignty and belonging.

'White Australia' can be understood in terms of triangulated relationship where 'white Australians' imagine ourselves sitting at the apex, monitoring a relationship between ourselves and an internal Other and also an external Other. The mastery of the position masquerades an anxiety and an ambivalence that often manifests in violence directed at those who are seen as the source of this dis-ease (Dyer 1997).⁹ A people's campaign called 'Boat People', where Australians were encouraged to display a non-copyright image that showed a large 19th century sailing boat in full sail with the words 'Boat People' along the bottom, starkly points out the contradictions and anxieties that are inherent in the logic of the discourse of 'white Australia'. In a nation that continually seeks unity there is a long history of narratives that seek to reinforce this idea.

Yet, these narratives hold within them the ambivalence that is inherent in the national story. An ambivalence that draws on discourses of the modern nation state as multicultural and self-determining, yet also depends on atavistic stories that hold within them the hoary tales of invasion, dispossession and exclusion. These twinned aspects of white Australian national practice produce a system that carefully enunciates what is a legitimate and an illegitimate entry of the Other to the nation. Illegal entry is often violently curtailed. Yet any calls from Indigenous peoples for a recognition of other, earlier, illegal entries are mocked as un-Australian, divisive and against the spirit of reconciliation. The longevity of exclusionary entry legislation, first framed as the *Immigration Restriction Act*, and the present debates over unauthorised immigration to Australia signal the ongoing ‘double movement of containment and resistance’ (Hall 1981: 228) that continues to take place on Australia’s borders.

Notes

- 1 A quick browse through Phillip Ruddock’s recent media releases will show that ‘illegals’ is a common shorthand used in the press release titles to refer to unauthorised entrants to Australia who are waiting for their claims for refugee status to be determined.
- 2 There are of course relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-white, non-Indigenous people. In many ways these relationships have been disavowed in the creation of ‘white Australia’.
- 3 There is a desire around Indigeneity as well. The white Australian’s fear of not belonging to this space and the need to overcome this alienation has manifested itself in myriad ways — from a desire for Indigenous spiritual systems, Indigenous land, Indigenous art, and Indigenous peoples.
- 4 Cf the arrival of refugees after the Vietnam war. The popular representation of arrival was of ‘boat people’ arriving unannounced on the northern coast. The reality was that most refugees arrived at Sydney or Melbourne airport. See Carton 1994.
- 5 The debate on this issue was long and strongly divided. The point of contention was most often couched in terms of should Australia do what Britain wants (indirect exclusion) or what Australia wants (direct exclusion).

Many parliamentarians wanted to exclude immigrants from Australia by means of a direct ban similar to the earlier colonial legislation. A direct ban would legislate that all people from a list of countries or areas may not enter Australia. In the end the federal 'white Australia' policy was based on legislation that indirectly denied entry to Australia of 'coloured immigrants'. This compromise was seen as allowing the Australian government the power to choose to admit or refuse admission to the groups most Australian-Britons did not want in the country (Markus 1994: 115).

- 6 This short story was apparently published in 1931, though I have been unable to find a published version. All further references are to the unpublished manuscript.
- 7 In 1962, the federal government agreed to allocate £10 000 for the support of orphans generally in Japan. Then in 1968, \$40 000 was allocated to continue this work.
- 8 In many ways it is the children's Australianness and a sense of the benefits for any child of the healthy Australian atmosphere that inspires the desire to have them come to Australia. The children are continually represented as 'Australian' or 'more Australian than foreign' or as 'half-Australians'. One writer argues: 'The kids in question are more Australian in my book than some of the chaps I work with some of whom have been naturalised.' So the Japanese-Australian children are imagined in opposition to the 'naturalised' or 'new Australian'.
- 9 It needs to be remembered that white people's anxiety about their vulnerability is not the same as white people being vulnerable.

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