

New Cultural Scripts: Exploring the Dialogue Between Indigenous and 'Asian' Australians

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In her recent article, 'An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous' historian Ann Curthoys points to the binary logic that underscores the present separation and bifurcation of contemporary debates on 'the Indigenous' and 'the multicultural':

In Australia there have been for a long time two distinct yet connected public and intellectual debates concerning the significance of descent, belonging and culture. One revolves around the cleavage between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and especially the status of indigenous claims deriving from a history of colonisation. ... The other debate ... is about cultural diversity, ethnic politics, and immigration policy.¹

This split or separation between discourses of race — assigned to Indigenous peoples — and those of migrancy and ethnicity is apparent in much public and intellectual debate. Anne Brewster, for instance, contends that Aboriginal identity is defined by race, and 'the other minority constituency managed by the discourse of nationality in Australia — the "multicultural"—is defined by ethnicity'.² Not only does such a conceptualisation contribute to the demarcation of 'Aboriginal' issues from 'migrant' ones, it overlooks that many migrant communities are also racially 'marked', and differ from the Anglo-Australian majority both racially and ethnically.

The bifurcation of Aboriginal and migrant/diasporic discourses is also evident in the clearly differentiated departments of government that have been established, at both federal and state levels, for the development and implementation of policies relating to multicultural Australia on the one hand and Aboriginal Australia on the other.³ Debates on reconciliation and Native Title centre largely on a dialogue between 'black' and 'white' Australians, and discussion on multiculturalism, immigration and asylum seekers rarely includes any consideration of Aboriginal issues, centring instead on 'Anglos' and 'ethnics'.

The partitioning of 'the Indigene' and 'the immigrant' in dominant Australian ideologies and policies is also evident in the university environment. Courses are often divided between those pertaining to 'Indigenous Studies' and 'Multicultural Studies' so that the relationship between these fields of inquiry remains vastly under-theorised. Ghassan Hage believes that such an academic division of labour is the result of the white governmental tendency to treat 'White-Aboriginal' and 'Anglo-Ethnic' relations as mutually exclusive spheres: 'the Whites relating to Aboriginal people appear as totally unaffected by multiculturalism, while the "Anglos" relating to the "ethnics" appear as if they have no Aboriginal question about which to worry'.⁴ Academic conferences tend also to divorce discussion on Indigenous issues from that pertaining to migrancy and multiculturalism by focusing their attention on one issue or the other. Conferences that examine both

Indigenous and migrant identities often divide and separate sessions thematically, thereby further hindering the development of a wider, triangulated view that accounts for the intersections between these issues.

This article challenges the separation of Indigenous and migrant discourses and communities through an exploration of the cross-cultural partnerships and alliances between Indigenous and South-East Asian peoples within Australia. The first part of the article examines the historical links forged between Aboriginal communities and Asian seafarers and sojourners in the colonies of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (the states in which most contact occurred). Asians were by no means the only non-white migrants to Australia in the colonial period. South Sea Island or 'Kanaka' peoples, Indians and Afghans were among some of the other non-European migrant communities forced to Australia as indentured labourers or lured by the prospect of accumulating wealth. But Chinese and other migrants from the various regions of Asia formed the largest non-European constituency and, indeed, the desire to keep them 'at bay' was a critical catalyst in the unification of the separate colonies into a federated Australia.⁵ The Asian presence is also particularly important in any study of Australian race relations because, as I attempt to indicate, much of the legislation directed towards Indigenous peoples was a response to it. Thus Aboriginal policies, especially in the north and west of the country, cannot be understood in isolation as black-white issues.⁶

Through an examination of various plays, novels, poems, the visual arts and other cultural production, as well as intellectual and political debates centring on these partnerships, the second part of this paper outlines the 'complex conflicts and points of solidarity'⁷ that structure contemporary relations between Aboriginal and Asian-Australians. I argue that the dialogue between Indigenous and Asian communities challenges the prevalent black-white partitioning of race relations in Australia, and undermines the continuing 'cleavage of the "immigrant" and the "Indigenous" in contemporary paradigms of reconciliation'.⁸ The third part of the paper argues for a new imagining of nation that neither separates nor entirely equates Indigenous and Asian peoples and discourses.

Aboriginal/Asian Unions in the Colonial Era

Curthoys contends that public debates about Aborigines, on the one hand, and Chinese migration on the other rarely met or converged in the colonial period. She maintains that 'the two debates were entirely separate, parallel and analogous' and that no 'common racial ideology covering both situations was articulated'.⁹ In the following, I show that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the colonies of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, these two racial minorities were most certainly discussed together, largely in terms of labour and sexual partnerships. I argue that the common racial ideology underpinning discussion of these communities was that Indigenous and Asian peoples must be separated at all costs. The following analysis shows that this racial orthodoxy (which rested on a desire to maintain white racial and geographical dominance and economic supremacy) was manifested in legislation directed against Indigenous and Asian peoples.

The numerous pieces of discriminatory and restrictive legislation designed to prevent any Indigenous union with Asians is a clear indication of the level of anxiety such engagements produced in the white imaginary. The strident attempts of state and federal governments to keep Aborigines and Asians apart were justified in terms of protecting Indigenes but, in reality, they worked to restrict or prohibit Asian economic endeavours, thereby protecting the material interests of white colonists. In Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, various administrative attempts to deport Asian men and remove Indigenous women and their children to reserves also sought to guarantee white dominance in racial and spatial terms. The particular form or shape of the cross-cultural unions between Indigenous and Asian peoples depended on a range of variables including the time and place in which these alliances occurred, how far these 'groups' were from the centres of white colonial power, and the particular labour industries that predominated. However, in virtually all cases, colonists sought to guarantee their assumed racial superiority and unequivocal rights to the land and its resources through the introduction of discriminatory and restrictive legislation designed to keep these communities apart.

Underpinning governmental debates and parliamentary discussion on Indigenous/Asian labour and sexual unions was white colonial anxiety about an ability to maintain sole possession of the country and its resources. I argue that Indigenous/Asian alliances challenged white racial, spatial and economic dominance in at least five ways. First, Indigenous people who worked for Asian pearlers, trepangers and Chinese businessmen (largely for food and other commodities) were able to survive independently of colonial authorities, and thus ceased to act as a ready supply of cheap labour for white economic endeavours. In other words, white settlers could no longer enslave Indigenous peoples as an exploitable natural resource. Second, through the employment of Indigenous workers, Chinese and Asian businesses were able to prosper, thereby undermining colonial assumptions that whites were the only ones entitled to the spoils of empire. Third, through their cohabitation and inter-marriage with Asian men, Indigenous women added to the 'coloured' population. Some government officials even believed there was a greater risk of atavism in so-called 'half-caste' Aboriginal children of non-European descent, than those born of Aboriginal/white unions.¹⁰ Fourth, Asian men who were settled with their Indigenous partners and families might attempt to use this as a rationale to remain in Australia as permanent residents. Fifth, the sexual access of white men to Indigenous women was threatened by the women's intimate relationships with Asian men.

The implementation in Queensland in 1897 of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* was ostensibly introduced to protect Aboriginal people from being exploited by the Chinese. The Chinese were widely accused of using opium and alcohol to seduce Aboriginal women and girls, and were regularly charged with 'harbouring blacks for immoral purposes'.¹¹ Anti-miscegenationist sentiment resulted in the removal of Aboriginal-Asian children. According to Regina Ganter, as a matter of policy (not of legislation), Aboriginal-Asian children were especially targeted for removal as neglected children.¹² The growth of the Australian-born 'coloured' population that was neither strictly Asian, nor strictly Indigenous (nor 'white' enough to escape comment), became a semi-

official category for non-white Australians who were not necessarily subject to any particular set of legislation. 'Coloured' people threatened absolute distinctions between black and white and existed legally in the interstices between protective legislation extended over Indigenous Australians, and restrictive legislation extended over Asians as an administrative and ethical problem.¹³

Beyond debauching Aboriginal women, the Chinese were also indicted for using opium to keep Aboriginal workers in their employ. The 1897 Act was thus also introduced in an effort to 'protect' Aboriginal labourers from being exploited by Chinese and Asian men. Despite the rhetoric about Aborigines being lured to moral and physical destruction by opium, the real concern of white colonists was to prevent Aborigines from being attracted to Chinese, rather than white employers, or rendered less efficient by opium addiction.¹⁴

The pearling industry in the Northern Territory and the northern coast of Western Australia relied heavily upon indentured Asian and local Aboriginal labour for its development and success.¹⁵ The industry was so dependent on Asian indentured workers that certificates of exemption from the dictation test were granted to Asians employed by master pearlers, though Asians were barred from ownership of boats, businesses or land, and from naturalisation.¹⁶ The presence of Chinese and other peoples from the various regions of Asia in Australia's north and along the Kimberley coast had a significant impact on state and federal legislation 'designed to keep Asians and Aboriginal people apart'.¹⁷ Asian crews who worked the Australian coastline traded with local Aborigines, and sexual liaisons often developed between Asian men and Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women were sometimes offered to the visitors, establishing the initial links with the foreign men and bringing back goods and food that the Aborigines wanted.¹⁸ The presence of luggers with Asian crews enabled Aboriginal people living in the bush to secure necessary rations without having to associate with white authorities, or to work for white colonists.¹⁹ In other words, Indigenous people were able to maintain a degree of autonomy and independence in their lives, and could thus evade both working for harsh station managers and dealings with the police.

In Broome, contact between Asians and Aborigines was to be restricted in order to prevent Asian crews from employing Aborigines, and thereby creating 'unfair competition for the European pearlers and pastoralists'.²⁰ Legislation ostensibly introduced to 'protect' Aborigines had the effect of restricting Asian economic enterprises. White colonists were opposed to Asian foreigners having any access to resources 'rightfully' belonging to them. Government officials also made attempts to separate Asian men and Aboriginal women because of increases in venereal disease and leprosy. But, as in Queensland, perhaps the most compelling reason for white opposition to Aboriginal/Asian contact was the fear of an increase in the 'coloured' population in Australia.²¹ Based on the recommendations of Dr Walter Roth (a former Protector from Queensland who helped facilitate the introduction of its 1897 Act), the Western Australian government introduced the *Aborigines Act* of 1905. Like the Queensland Act before it, the Western Australian legislation was also introduced to prevent sexual contact and labour agreements between Aboriginal and Asian peoples, to remove their progeny to institutions, and to incarcerate Aborigines on reserves.

In 1911 the commonwealth government took over the administration of the Northern Territory from the South Australian government. The federal administration first targeted the Aboriginal population with the introduction of the *Aboriginals Ordinance* of 1911. The commonwealth government aimed to establish an essentially white population in Darwin by separating Aboriginal women from Asian men; it sought to curtail the employment of Aborigines by Asians, and to guarantee that Aborigines were kept available as workers for the white elite. The federal government also sought to implement the 'White Australia' policy in its attempt to deport the existing Asian population. Darwin's population at this time was predominantly Asian, and many refused to leave. Filipino pearler Antonio Cubillo was the spokesperson for local Asian residents who had been in Australia since before federation and were already settled with Indigenous partners and children.²² Based on these relationships Antonio successfully argued for their right to stay, and the administrator, John Gilruth, eventually granted them some land (known as Police Paddock) away from the centre of town.²³ As we will see in the following section, Antonio's fight to stay with Lily, a local Larrakia woman, is the subject of a play written by their great-grandson Gary Lee.

Research focusing on the experiences of Aboriginal and Asian communities has helped elucidate the similarities in their exclusion and marginalisation from white colonial society, but it is important that our search for the commonalities does not obscure the differences between these communities. Asian sojourners and settlers were simultaneously victimised by, and implicated in the colonising mission. Makassan trepang fishers and Chinese sojourners and settlers came to exploit Australia's rich natural resources and, in Athol Chase's terms, were 'resource raiders rather than colonists'.²⁴ But, like their white counterparts, Asian sojourners were also pioneers, or 'invaders', who shared the Anglo-Celtic ambition of exploiting Aboriginal waters, land and labour for personal profit.²⁵ The divergent histories and experiences of Asian populations in Australia however also include those who had no choice in the journeys they made because they were indentured labourers.²⁶ Chinese and other peoples from the various regions of Asia are implicated in the colonisation of this country, but they were simultaneously exploited by and marginalised from the wider Anglo-Australian citizenry.

Aboriginal/Asian Unions in the Contemporary Era

Despite the many restrictions Aboriginal and Asian communities faced, the close links established in the Kimberley and elsewhere in the northern and western parts of Australia continued, to which family genealogies are testimony. In Broome for example, Sarah Yu argues that one only has to glance over a class role list from the local school with names like Bin, Suliman, Bin Rashid, Hajinor, Yu, Fong and Lee to comprehend the shared Aboriginal and Asian history of that area.²⁷ Jimmy Chi, the creator of a number of Aboriginal musicals; Peter Yu, formerly of the Kimberley Land Council; Kevin Fong, President of the Broome Shire Council; Elsta Foy, Broome Council Member; the band 'The Pilgrim Brothers' and other Aboriginal-Asians from Broome and elsewhere are further examples of the 'vitality of the Aboriginal-Asian heritage'²⁸ of Australia.

But the relationships between Indigenous and Asian peoples were not always characterised by mutual dependence, obligation and trust. As we have seen, Asian

sojourners and settlers were not only victims of colonisation, they were also agents of it. The ambiguous and complex nature of Aboriginal/Asian relationships in the colonial and postcolonial eras has been depicted in recent plays, novels, poetry and other cultural production by Indigenous and Asian-Australians. In some accounts Indigenous and Asian peoples are depicted as sharing a common sense of alienation from white Australian society, but in others, Asians are clearly aligned with the colonisers or invaders of this nation.

Theatre

In his musicals 'Bran Nue Dae' (1990) and 'Corrugation Road' (1996), Jimmy Chi created what Suvendrini Perera has called 'new cultural scripts for Australia'.²⁹ Including such performers as Maroochy Barambah, Ernie Dingo and John Moore, this production was written in Broome Kriol — a language that combines Chinese loanwords with Malay and Aboriginal terms.

Other plays have highlighted the legislative obstacles outlined above that Aboriginal and Asian peoples have had to endure in their attempts to marry or form relationships with each other. Darwin-based writer Gary Lee, a Larrakia man with Japanese, Chinese and Filipino lineage wrote the play 'Keep Him My Heart: A Larrakia-Filipino Love Story' (1993) based on his great-grandparents' successful fight with authorities to remain together.³⁰ In the play 'Conversations with Charlie' (1996), Binh Duy Ta also explores the 'fraught yet potentially productive relationship between Asians and Aboriginals'.³¹ In this play the language of desire between these disenfranchised groups is embodied through the portrayal of the sexual attraction between the Aboriginal woman and the newly arrived Vietnamese-Australian man.³² A more recent production that investigates cross-cultural alliances between Indigenous people and Vietnamese migrants is 'Black and Tran' (2001), a live theatre performance featuring Hung Le and Ningali Lawford. This is a satirical comedy that addresses the issue of racial discrimination by ridiculing the stereotypes of Aboriginal and Vietnamese cultures. Set in a pub, the satire and irony in this production even extend to the title, which is a pun on the popular drink 'black and tan', a mix of black stout and amber lager.

Literature

Singapore-born novelist Simone Lazaroo and Indigenous writers Melissa Lucashenko, Alexis Wright, Bruce Pascoe and Eric Willmot have also explored the interconnections between Aboriginal and Asian peoples in their recent novels. Through the introduction of an Aboriginal-Asian character with Nyul-Nyul, Japanese and Indonesian ancestry, Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* (2000) makes these connections explicit.³³ This novel portrays a close friendship between the Aboriginal-Asian and Eurasian female characters, but the differences in their socio-economic positions prevent them from ever being true equals.³⁴ Lucashenko's *Hard Yards* (1999) portrays an Aboriginal-Asian character named Paul Ah Sung who is of Aboriginal and Chinese descent.³⁵ Commenting on the parallels in the way Aboriginal and Chinese communities are ostracised by white Australian society, one protagonist notes that even though the Chinese are 'loaded ... they still copped it, same as Murries'.³⁶ Aboriginal and Chinese communities can share a

similar sense of ostracisation from the wider Anglo-Australian citizenry, but the obvious disparity in their socio-economic levels is portrayed through one of the character's descriptions of Chinese people as 'loaded' and 'dripp[ing] gold'.³⁷

Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997) also depicts varying relationships between the Indigenous and Asian protagonists. Wright portrays a close and long-term relationship between the Chinese character Pilot Ah King and his Aboriginal wife May Sugar. Again we see their shared sense of exclusion from white society with Pilot commenting to May that white people 'Don't let no dirt or dirty people like you or me inside [their big houses]'.³⁸ But despite his lengthy association with Indigenous people, Pilot remains sceptical of some of their practices, especially when it comes to the local 'medicine man'.³⁹ *Ruby-Eyed Coucal* (1996) by Bruce Pascoe imagines the possibility of 'mounting a legal challenge to the principle of terra nullius based on ancient trade and cultural links between China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the peoples of Arnhem land'.⁴⁰ The polyethnic characters in Pascoe's novel not only challenge the concept of Australia as an isolated and singular entity until its 'discovery' by the British but, by arguing that other nations such as China had already recognised the sovereignty of Aboriginal Australia, show that the British violated the sovereign rights of the original custodians of this nation. Despite its description of the close links between Aboriginal and Asian peoples, the book's portrayal of the Indonesian occupation of Papua New Guinea locates Indonesian peoples as ruthless and violent invaders.

Willmot's *Below the Line* (1991) also imagines Indonesian peoples as violent invaders, this time of Australia. His novel exhibits anxiety about the rate of immigration from Asia and serves as a paranoid projection of the implications of an unchecked increase in the number of Asians admitted to the country. Beginning in the 1970s when 'Vietnamese refugees began to descend on its northern shores',⁴¹ and followed by two successive 'waves of refugees [that] were engineered by Indonesia', Australia was invaded in 'an insidious and unrecognisable way'.⁴² Australia's security is also threatened by Asia in 'Asian Invasion', a poem by Noonagah poet Graeme Dixon (1990). In his comparison of the colonisation of this country with the 'invasion/initiated/by the [Japanese] financial scholar',⁴³ Dixon reminds us that for Indigenous people, 'oppression is oppression/No matter the shape of the eye'.⁴⁴

In Murri poet Lionel Fogarty's 'Mad Souls' (1998), people of Asian descent or heritage are also positioned alongside Anglo-Australians as unwelcome invaders and migrants. By clearly aligning Anglo-Celtic and Asian-Australians as intruders, Fogarty's poem presents, as Perera suggests, an unambiguous rebuke 'to any vision of many-coloured hands linking across Australia'⁴⁵: 'I am the moody Murri/don't like Aussies/don't like Asians. /You'd love to meet me/I'll tell you/go live where you come from. /I am the Murri black/here forever'.⁴⁶ Fogarty's poem clearly emphasises his status as a descendant of the Indigenous custodians of this country, re-presenting himself and his people as the autochthonous 'hosts' of the nation. Fogarty's words provide a powerful reminder that except for the Indigenous people, we are all visitors to this country. In Chinese-Australian poet Ouyang Yu's understanding that this land does not belong to him or them (meaning Anglo-Celtic Australians), his poem 'Alien' (1995) highlights the way Anglo- and Asian-

Australian peoples are non-Indigenous to this land: 'I stand on this land/ that does not belong to me/ that does not belong to them either'.⁴⁷

Visual Arts

Chinese-Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping regularly shows his paintings that have been inspired by the Aboriginal people he has met on his journeys through the country (as well as taking his work, photos, slides and videos back to show the communities). His pieces have been exhibited from Beijing and Taiwan to Darwin, the Museum of Chinese Australian History and the National Gallery of Victoria.⁴⁸ His work has been shown recently as part of the multimedia exhibition 'The Lie of the Land' in Melbourne 2001. At the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in February 2002, Zhou showed his paintings at the 'From China to Arnhem Land and Beyond' exhibition. Zhou has also worked closely with Walmajirri artist Jimmy Pike, whose work has been exhibited in France, Germany, the UK, Japan and China. In 1996 Zhou and Pike held a joint exhibition in Zhou's home town, Hefei, and in 1999 'Through the Eyes of Two Cultures', another collaborative exhibition (including their paintings of each other) was held at the National Gallery of China, further demonstrating the spiritual dynamism of an encounter 'between two ancient, sophisticated visual traditions'.⁴⁹

Other artistic projects between Aboriginal and Asian communities include the 'Lost & Found' exhibitions that were co-partnered by the Immigration Museum and the Koorie Heritage trust in Melbourne 2001. This project was based on an exploration of dislocation from ancestral lands and the practicing of cultural expressions in a new world — a common theme for newly arrived Australians and those Indigenous people removed from their homelands. According to the curators of the exhibition:

Many Indigenous artists were shocked by the personal accounts of war, genocide and family fragmentation experienced by migrant families ... Many of the artists from migrant backgrounds, often for the first time, heard stories of the First Australians, stories never told in history books, stories of loss, sadness and celebration.⁵⁰

In recognition of the ancient history of migration and trade between the people of Makassar and the Yolngu people of the Northern Territory and Crocodile Islands, the 'Milingimbi-Makassar Exchange Program' was initiated. This project sought to build upon these historical ties, and re-establish links between the two communities through a series of artistic exchanges. Six artists from Milingimbi undertook a four-week residency in Makassar, and a reciprocal visit from Makassan artists to Milingimbi followed. Those involved in the program represented a diverse range of artistic disciplines and included painters, dancers, basket weavers, musicians, story-tellers and ceremonial practitioners. The project also included an exhibition and a documentary on the shared history of the Makassan trade from each perspective, providing a model for the re-establishment of cultural relations that have existed for thousands of years.⁵¹

Conferences and Publications

Recent conferences, colloquiums, workshops and publications have also focused on exploring the relationships between Indigenous and culturally diverse migrant peoples. The colloquium 'Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Chinese Encounters from Federation to Reconciliation' at the Australian National University in 2000 sought to uncover the significant and multifarious but, to date, largely invisible human encounters, spiritual exchanges and cultural traffic between Indigenous peoples and Asian sojourners and settlers.⁵² The colloquium proceedings, edited by Shen Yuan-fang and Penny Edwards, remain one of the very few detailed and comprehensive studies of cross-cultural relationships between Aboriginal and Asian diasporic communities in Australia. Regina Ganter's edited text *Mixed Relations* and Christine Choo, Pat Dudgeon and Hannah McGlade's co-edited *Reconciling Identities* centre on Indigenous/Asian engagements, using oral histories and archival evidence to re-claim the hitherto largely unexplored alliances and partnerships between Indigenous and non-white migrant communities. Rosemary van den Berg's recent *Nyoongar People of Australia: Perspectives on Racism and Multiculturalism* (2002)⁵³ provides an important contribution to writing on Australian race relations, one that undermines the usual black/white and settler/migrant dichotomies.

Other workshops and conferences attempting to undermine the simplistic black/white binary in dominant renderings of Australian historiography include the 'Double Edged 2000' conference held at the University of Technology, Sydney. This conference sought to explore ways forward for dialogue between those engaged in Aboriginal Studies and Multicultural Studies, and aimed to counter the way these areas of inquiry are predominantly seen as mutually exclusive fields of research. The 2000 UTS postgraduate Winter School 'Subaltern, Indigenous and Multicultural Histories' was designed to promote discussion about the relationship between analyses emerging from postcolonial writing and those being generated by various decolonising processes in Australia and the Pacific. A selection of the papers from the Double Edged 2000 conference and the postgraduate winter school was published in a special edition of the UTS Review in 2001. The papers in this collection emanated from two distinct sources, but they explored a number of overlapping themes and are demonstrative of the increasing salience of theories and debates on cross-cultural dialogues. The 2002 postgraduate Winter School 'Race, Culture and Whiteness' at the University of Queensland brought together a number of theorists including Ien Ang who has written extensively on the ways in which notions of Asianness are constructed in Australian society; Ghassan Hage, a prominent scholar in the field of multiculturalism and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Geonpul Aboriginal theorist who has published widely in the fields of whiteness and Aboriginality.

A New National Script?

The pre-invasion, colonial and contemporary cross-cultural relationships and exchanges between Indigenous and Asian-Australian communities point to a need for the re-imagining of dominant narratives of nation. Perera has labelled the recent emergence of cross-cultural production between these communities 'new cultural

scripts'. The enduring partnerships and alliances between Indigenous and Asian diasporic peoples reinforce the need for a new national script that moves beyond black/white and settler/migrant dichotomies.

That these cross-cultural relationships have been deleted from the stories or narratives of nation Anglo-Celtic Australians typically rehearse is clear by the almost total lack of awareness that they predate white invasion and colonisation. Mudrooroo suggests that 'even when Australia was Indigenous Australia there is enough evidence in our traditions to suggest that our land was never the isolated continent as established in the Master texts'.⁵⁴ Trading and sexual partnerships between Indigenous communities and Asian seafarers have existed on this continent for centuries. Each year between 1,000 and 2,000 men from the island of Makassar travelled to the north coast of 'Australia' for trepang or *bêche-de-mer*. The Makassans recognised the sovereignty of northern Aboriginal peoples, and made no attempt to indoctrinate Indigenes with their religious beliefs, or to take possession of the land. Admitting these stories into the collective imaginary would necessitate acknowledging that, unlike the Makassans, British people refused to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty. These cross-cultural relationships also destabilise accepted narratives or orthodoxies of nation because they force 'us' to reconsider our typical conception that places Indigenous peoples on this continent first, with the British assuming an autochthonous relationship to Asian migrants. Asian émigrés were negotiating complex relationships with Indigenous peoples long before 'we' arrived. Acknowledging this historical fact would undermine white claims that we 'discovered' this land.

The reliance on black/white and settler/migrant dichotomies in dominant Australian orthodoxies of nation is problematic for other reasons. The partitioning of 'the Indigenous' and 'the immigrant' in Anglo-Australian ideologies and policies leaves the question of Aboriginal/migrant relations virtually unexplored, thus inhibiting the emancipatory potential of such alliances. The continuing cleavage of 'the immigrant' and 'the Indigenous' in contemporary paradigms of reconciliation provides little space for discussion on the potential role and contribution of migrant Australians to the reconciliation process. This is compounded by the fact that the discourse of multiculturalism pays scant attention to the continuing legacy of colonisation in Australia. I have thus argued against the quarantining of Indigenous and (Asian) migrant communities and discourses in dominant narratives of nation, but nor do I recommend an unproblematic equation between them. As Curthoys has suggested, debates on 'the Indigenous' and 'the multicultural' 'can neither be conceptualised together nor maintained as fully distinct'.⁵⁵

An example of the equation between Indigenous and diasporic identities is shown by literary and cultural critics Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O Longley in the introduction to their edited text *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*.⁵⁶ They contend that 'the outsiders, the marginalised [are] Aborigines and those migrants who have come from places other than England or Ireland'.⁵⁷ Gunew and Longley use Aborigines and (European) migrants as interchangeable examples of 'Otherness' or exclusion. This over-emphasis on the experiences that Aboriginal and migrant communities share is made at the expense of recognising the many differences between them that stem from their divergent historical experiences and vastly dissimilar connections to the land.

This attempt to incorporate the Indigenous within the multicultural, or to subsume race within ethnicity, is also evident in the governmental or political sphere. The 1982 policy statement 'Multiculturalism for All Australians' argued for the inclusion of Aborigines as a part of multicultural Australia.⁵⁸ More recently, the appointment of Philip Ruddock as the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs is a clear indication of the Howard Coalition government's grouping of Indigenous and migrant communities together as non-Anglo-Celtic 'Others'. The government's redefinition of the nation away from multiculturalism and more in terms of 'cultural diversity' has also tended to mask the important distinctions between and within Indigenous and migrant communities. Government rhetoric stresses the rich and varied ethnic and cultural plurality of contemporary Australian society, thereby assuming a power-free coexistence between all Australians that fails to address the unique claims of Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

What is needed then, is a new national narrative that neither separates nor artificially equates Indigenous and migrant communities and discourses. By looking at these debates in conjunction with one another, a clearer understanding emerges of the related histories of struggle of oppressed and excluded minorities against the homogenising tendencies of nationalist imaginaries. In registering the connections between a wide range of subaltern minorities, the fostering of common platforms for future struggles can be initiated and promoted. But these interconnections should not be made at the expense of recognising where, and why, Indigenous and diasporic forms of diversity differ from each other: 'differ in their histories, differ in the challenges, to politics and policy, that they pose; and differ in the kinds of urgency that attach to them in particular historical circumstances'.⁵⁹ My intention has not been to privilege or prioritise one set of differences, those between white and black Australians over those between ethnic minorities and the Anglo-Celtic majority, but to suggest that these two forms of diversity share many similarities as well as numerous distinctions.

Ongoing research into the positioning of migrant or diasporic communities in relation to Indigenous peoples could assist in undermining the central conflict of black versus white that presently occupies reconciliation debates. A new Aboriginal/migrant cross-cultural dialogue would necessitate, however, an understanding on the part of immigrants of their responsibility and implication in the ongoing colonisation of Indigenous Australia. After all, both the presence of diasporic communities in Australia and the possibility of migration are already predicated on colonial violence and invasion. The ambiguous nature of Aboriginal/migrant relationships is perhaps best summed up by Lucashenko: 'As targets of enormous racism themselves, other [people] of colour in Australia share an affinity with indigenous [people]; as non-indigenous people, however, they too are our dispossessioners and must come to terms with their own colonial role'.⁶⁰

We live in an increasingly modernising and globalised world where national borders are becoming more permeable. But merchandise, capital and information are not the only commodities to cross national boundaries. Migrant and diasporic communities are also moving between nation states for a range of reasons that includes the prospect of greater study and employment opportunities, a better

standard of living, family reunion and the chance to escape political and religious persecution. The need for a new national script that promotes greater understanding of the incorporation of migrants within, rather than after the history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is thus of paramount importance. Regardless of the racism and other difficulties migrant communities have encountered in Australia, all immigrants remain the beneficiaries of the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. My insistence that more recent migrant communities recognise their complicity in the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples does not, of course, take the onus of Anglo-Celtic or settler Australians to understand and acknowledge our role in the colonisation of Aboriginal Australia. It does, however, problematise the ‘polarising binary of indigenous and white race relations’⁶¹ that presently characterises debates on reconciliation. The recognition that all migrants, past and present, are implicated in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous Australians is also important in undermining the black/white binary of Australian historiography.

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- 2 Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations: Post-Colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, p 79.
- 3 Tony Bennett and David Carter, 'Programs of Cultural Diversity', in Tony Bennett and David Carter (eds), *Culture in Australia: Policies, Publics and Programs*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p 254.
- 4 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988, p 24.
- 5 Penny Edwards and Shen Yuan-fang, *Lost in the Whitewash: Executive Summary*, <http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/whitewash/concept.html> (11 October 2000).
- 6 Regina Ganter, 'Living an Immoral Life — "Coloured" Women and the Paternalistic State', *Hecate*, vol 24, no 1, 1998, p 13.
- 7 Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, 'Detoxifying Australia?', *Migrant Action*, vol 20, no 2, 1998, p 13.
- 8 Edwards and Shen, op cit.
- 9 Curthoys, op cit, p 24. In her PhD thesis 'Race and Ethnicity: A Study of the Response of the British Colonists to Aborigines, Chinese and Non-British Europeans in New South Wales, 1856–1881', Curthoys looked in vain for connections between public debates about Aborigines and the Chinese. Despite analysing various cultural , production including texts, newspapers and magazines, Curthoys could only locate two examples where Aboriginal and Chinese peoples were discussed together. See Curthoys, op cit, pp 22–5.
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