



## Review Essay

### Redefining the History of Australia's Asianness



**John Fitzgerald.** *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia.* Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007. xiv + 289 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. Paper, AUD\$44.95; ISBN 978-0-868408-705.

**Regina Ganter.** *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia.* Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006. xv + 280 pages. Color and b/w photos and illustrations. Paper, AUD\$54.95; ISBN 1-920694-412.

**Daniel Oakman.** *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan.* Canberra, ACT: Pandanus Books, ANU, 2004. 323 pages. Endnotes, bibliography, index. Paper, AUD\$34.96; ISBN 1-74076-086-7.

**Anna Shnukal, Guy Ramsay and Yuriko Nagata, eds.** *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait.* Canberra, ACT: Pandanus Books, ANU, 2004. 330 pages. Index, bibliography. Paper, AUD\$55.00; ISBN 1-74076-089-1.

**Peta Stephenson.** *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story.* Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007, 250 pages. Notes, bibliography, interviews, index, b/w images. Paper, AUD\$39.95; ISBN 978-0-868408-36-1.

**Gwenda Tavan.** *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia.* Carlton, VIC: Scribe Publications, 2005. vi + 298 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. Paper, AUD\$32.95; ISBN 1-920769-46-3.

SINCE the end of the twentieth century there has been a growing interest in and self-reflective analysis of the history of white Australia's relations with its Asian and Indigenous neighbors. Given the necessary time lag in publishing, one could say that the group of books under review here represents the harvest of that preoccupation with the problematic of Australia's national identity. It is therefore perhaps somewhat ironic—and fortuitous—that these books appeared while Australia was in the grip of a long decade of conservative politics. Their appearance, in that sense, has been important in “holding the line” but, more positively, in challenging the political status quo of the times. Now, with the demise of the Howard regime,<sup>1</sup> these publications can be seen to provide the basis for a new historiographical and social beginning.

It is, I think, valid to begin a review such as this in political partisan terms since implicitly and explicitly these books in different ways have been caught up in, or have intentionally been fired off in the context of, a politically laden debate over Australia's history and national identity. Australia's “history wars,” as the issue has been referred to, have been waged, in Ann Curthoys' words, over the “persistence of the structures and mentality of colonialism” (CURTHOYS 2000, 34). In addressing the history of white Australia's relationship with Asia and Asians, each of these books separately, and together as a group, challenge the “white fortress” perspective of traditional Australian history. More importantly, in mining a rich oral heritage, new methodological approaches have begun to return agency and subject status to those who were once only seen, if at all, as objects within a European history.

This selection is by no means intended as an exclusive list; rather, it is intended to be representative of a growing field—and also happens to be a group of books that has stimulated often fiery discussions about Australia's “true history” that have raged recently in my own undergraduate classroom. These books are indeed about Australia, and about Australian history; but they also concern what one discussion has defined as the “pathology” in the Australian nationalist psyche (NICOLACOPOULOS and VASSILOCOPOULOS 2004) which has been agitated by the conservative political turn of the last decade. They also address the history of history writing in Australia, and the relationship of that historiography to national identity formation. They need to be read, therefore, in the context of how they are situated at the intersection of two on-going, contentious Australian political debates. These can be summarized as, firstly, the debates concerning “national reconciliation,” which involved issues of Native title, (Indigenous rights to traditional lands), Indigenous representation (Indigenous rights as citizens), and the “Stolen

generations" (recognition of past practices of child removal included in what some have labelled the perpetration of "cultural genocide" by white Australia (MOSES 2004). Secondly, they are a response to the political retreat from those hard won, if still tentative, political advances of the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of multiculturalism and engagement with Asia, which fell victim to "the war on terrorism," "illegal migration," and "un-Australian activities" under the populist nationalist politics of the conservative Howard government. These debates, in turn, reflect a deeper and older anxiety about the history of European invasion and dispossession, and of the exclusive possession both of Australian geography and historiography.

What is at issue here is a process of unpeeling the layers of a constructed past that has acted to salve the conscience of a colonial nation. Traditional historiography dressed up as "writing the story of the nation," like all nationalist histories, has been about constructing an "imagined political community" (ANDERSON 1983), one that is imagined as being primarily a white Anglo community. To construct such a collective memory of the past has required the excising of "the other" from membership of that imaginary community. The new history represented here aims at sweeping away this historical amnesia regarding Australia's colonialist origins to question its complacent assumptions of privilege and ownership. Explicitly or implicitly, what these books all posit—and their titles loudly proclaim—is the necessary recognition that Australia's indigenous and Asian history are integral to the Australian story. Each aims to unsettle the old certainties, to stir the suppressed paranoia about Australia's vulnerability in Asia and its historical moral dilemma concerning dispossession to help frame a culturally, intellectually, and morally more secure future.

To substantiate some of these generalizations one can perhaps best begin with John Fitzgerald's book, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia*. If one were to google the first three words of this title one would be immediately confronted by references to the exposé on the CIA's "war on drugs." It is in a similar mode of exposing a crime that Fitzgerald, a leading Australian Chinese Studies scholar, seeks to expose "a big white lie at the heart of Australian history: that different peoples have different national values and that these differences have justified discrimination of one kind or another in Australian history" (viii). It turns out of course, when we then turn to Peta Stephenson's *The Outsiders Within* that there is more than one such lie at the foundations of conventional Australian historiography. Stephenson's "disturbing exposé of the persistent, sometimes paranoid, efforts of successive white governments to police, marginalise and outlaw these [Indigenous and Southeast Asian] encounters" (publisher's blurb), reveals not just the legislative foundations of the historiographical construction of that lie, but more importantly, like Fitzgerald, begins to reveal the vibrant reality of an historical non-white Australia that it hid. Similarly, if more equivocally, Daniel Oakman's account of the history of the Colombo Plan, and Gwenda Tavan's (2005) account of the "White Australia policy" demonstrate other morally questionable bases upon which the Australian nation is founded. Both of these were, in Tavan's words, a "defensive response to a particular construction of Asia and the anxieties,

threats and promises that lay within the region” (278). More lies if you like. These four, here so briefly alluded to, demonstrate how inextricably linked the management of Australia’s internal and external relations have been. Thus, what is under review here is a history not just of the political and social structures of the nation, but no less the history of the construction of the historiographical superstructure which these gave rise to.

Fitzgerald’s book, to turn to it in detail, is an “internal” account of the Chinese community in Australia—of Chinese-Australians indeed (note here the hyphenated identity!). It is a study of an intellectually, culturally, and economically vibrant historical Asian community within the so-called “white nation” of Australia. The “lie” he refers to is multiple: the persistence of a discourse that portrays the Chinese as not compatible with Anglo-Saxon liberal culture; the myth that twentieth-century Australia was “pure white;” and the historical portrayal of the Chinese as absent, or as non-beings when they were in fact fully contributing members of an evolving Australian society. Moving beyond conventional accounts of Chinese on the goldfields, two thirds of the book opens up a history of Chinese cultural and political organizations and involvement in main stream “Australia.”

Fitzgerald succeeds in making his polemical point—that the Chinese shared, and shared in the making of, the fundamental values of “dinky-di” (“genuine” or “true”) Australians—because of his exemplary use of institutional and biographical resources, made possible in part by his own close involvement with collecting and organizing such personal data relevant to south-eastern Australia. It is not that the existence of a significant Chinese community in twentieth-century Australia, for instance, or the rhetoric of anti-Chinese sentiment in the nineteenth century, has been unknown or not referred to in the past. What differentiates Fitzgerald’s contribution is that he hammers his evidence into a substantial rewriting of the Australian historical template. Indeed this could be said about each of the books under review: what is new is not only their digging up of new “facts,” but the extent to which each attempts to use the newly recovered empirical data to rewrite aspects of Australian history.

Gwenda Tavan’s book, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, links to Fitzgerald’s in offering a fresh look at the structure that ensured both that Chinese-Australians remained a small minority and that they were effectively rubbed out of white Australian consciousness. Tavan’s is the latest examination of the legislative basis restricting Asian immigration and the rhetoric upon which this was based. The “White Australia policy” has long spooked Australia’s Asian neighbors and, as the publisher’s blurb suggests, it has been a policy that has been “at the heart of Australian life since federation.” What sets this book apart from other accounts is, once again, the thorough investigation of the archive it gives evidence of, and the way this has been evidently driven by new perspectives which have uncovered or accentuated aspects that previous accounts have elided. If the entire world now knows that the first policy initiative of the new Australian federation was to prohibit non-Caucasian immigration into Australia—which as we now know gave rise to Fitzgerald’s “big white lie” that they never existed—Tavan’s book shocks

in its detailed account of the almost three decades of political and bureaucratic foot-dragging needed post-World War Two for the racist principles that the policy unequivocally entailed to be removed.

The point of the evocative title—that its demise was a reluctant one—is to draw attention to how increasingly anachronistic Australia's position was in a rapidly changing international environment. In the end, the process of dismantling this policy of racial discrimination became a matter of careful negotiation with a resistant local public in front of an increasingly critical world. Tavan emphasizes that the blame for this cannot be laid solely at the feet of politicians: "The process [of dismantling the policy was] implemented by public officials in a gradual, sometimes secretive, often ad hoc manner [reflecting] the politically sensitive nature of the White Australia issue.... Government officials assumed that radical shifts in policy would precipitate a strong domestic backlash" (235). Was this, then, a case of timid politicians versus a redneck population? In her conclusion Tavan feels obliged to address the accusation that there may have been a secret "deal" done between reforming officials and these civil society elites to hoodwink and cajole a population still far from convinced that abolition was a good thing. The primary support for the policy's abandonment came from a small but vocal and articulate elite group of intellectuals within Australian society (some within the bureaucracy) who, for reasons of principle or education, humanitarian or cosmopolitan sensitivities, urged reform. But this last question gains its significance, as Tavan suggests, in the light of the "Hanson phenomenon"<sup>2</sup> that occurred a bare two decades later, when "the people" again voiced their opposition to accepting Asia (and indeed Indigenous rights), and when once again this became a subject of populist manipulation and, in the eyes of many, something that was supported only by "politically correct" and elite circles.

Gwenda Tavan's is a dispassionate and thoroughly documented book even though, as she reported in an interview (D'CRUZ 2005), the writing was in part motivated by personal experience as the child of Italian migrants. Her account is scrupulously empirical as she plots in the course of ten chapters the piecemeal, hesitant, and often backtracking process of dismantling the policy. The study is based on a meticulous scrutiny of the bureaucratic archives, (the Departments of Immigration, External Affairs, Prime Minister and Cabinet, and others), the archives of key officials and organizations, and specialist press and media records of the day. It is, nevertheless, a book that keeps us spellbound. As can be expected, it comes with a complete bibliography on the history of the "White Australia policy." This demonstrates that the policy was protested against, at the time quite vigorously, and students wanting to retrace the trajectory of the WAP will find this guide to the published record very useful.

But despite the value of her contribution, there is perhaps one aspect of the book that readers need to guard themselves against: to not allow the impression to form that Australia *was* white. What Tavan articulates is the construction and decline of a dominant discourse, which also shaped the historiographical portrayal of Australia that it *was* so. The "White Australia policy" did not keep Australia

white, but it attempted to ensure that a particular element maintained control of its cultural, social, political, and demographic definition. Tavan's account underscores the key point made by Humphrey McQUEEN (1975) in his analysis of Australian federation years ago: these white policies represented the "deal" that underpinned the social contract drawn up between Australia's social classes.

Daniel Oakman's *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* forms the inevitable companion to Tavan's book, dovetailing neatly into her history of Australia's reluctant engagement with the world around it. According to Oakman, Australia's involvement in the Colombo Plan, the plan to support (and guide) the development of the new nations, "reached into almost every aspect of Australian foreign policy...[and] encouraged officials and politicians to define an Australian approach to the Cold War and the challenges of decolonisation" (3). Amongst his aims Oakman declares that his motivation was to write a chapter of Australia's history that told "the story of how an insular society, deeply scarred by the turbulence of war, chose to face its regional future." Indeed. As long as this is not intended to legitimate some special pleading. What Australia effectively experienced was the loss in 1942 of the comfort zone provided for it by European imperialism in Asia.

Oakman recognizes that the war in Asia finally forced Australia to engage with its region to all intents and purposes for the first time. Again, by making effective use of biographical and bureaucratic sources, Oakman successfully uncovers the complex and often personalized motivations that underpinned the policy and its practice. In the process he is able to plot an emerging sense of Australian national "maturity" as an international player. Echoing Tavan's characterization of policy change as a "long, slow" process, Oakman clearly reveals a similar undercurrent of anxiety in national policy-making that remains, as Oakman emphasizes:

Full of quasi-imperial intent, the Colombo Plan was a defensive response...[a] cautious and conditional opening [of Australia's northern front that] embodied a much broader tension of postwar Australian life: the reservation of Australia's political, economic and military sovereignty meant engaging with the region and reconceptualising its regional identity.... That tension is still with us. (278)

If immigration policy was intended to protect the community within, the Colombo Plan clearly formed part of a "forward defence" to protect Australia from without. While not an Australian invention, because of Australia's geographic location it played a central role in defining the terms of this vehicle for the West's engagement with the "new world," including Asia. In the context of the Cold War it was conceived of as an ideological counteroffensive against the supposed materialist appeal of communism amongst what were rather imperiously regarded as "the new Asians" by offering access to Western knowledge and technological advances. In the context of Australia's postwar view of the world, it simultaneously allowed her to play with "the big guys" in managing the new world. This meant keeping Asia at bay in two senses: undermining the threat of a virulent communism in its neighborhood, and attempting to appease Asian leaders who found Australia's closed door offensive and racist.

Although the collusion of these two fundamental Australian policies in dealing with the world is apparent, the historians themselves do not linger on this. It is no doubt a good thing that we have a thorough analysis of each in a separate book but a subsequent generation of publications will need to draw these closer together. In this regard Tavan's book is perhaps more successful in more clearly demonstrating the interplay between the Department of External Affairs, the Department of Immigration, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in plotting the push and pull of policy change. On the other hand, Oakman makes good use of the fine tradition in political history in using biographies of the "big men" of the nation's history. This is, however, nicely balanced here by his attention to the "Colombo Plan experience," the experience of the (mainly) men from developing nations who did at least benefit from the opportunity. In stepping out of the bureaucratic office and into the lived experience, Oakman's book also shares something of the "new history writing" in introducing "Asians" into this Australian story. Oakman thus also begins to chart another history—the history not just of this encounter between White Australians and Asians, but that of the "Asian elites" who took advantage of this experience whatever its ambiguous motivations. Whether allowing a trickle of "respectable Asians" through the door (for instance to study) contributed to the decline of the racist policy however is a moot point that Oakman gives little credence to. No doubt it did confirm the view of Tavan's elite who, in any case, already saw the policy for what it was.

With the dam breached, so to speak, there is now if not a torrent then at least a decent trickle of studies aimed at rescuing the "Asian other" from the obscurity of traditional Australian history. Apart from a growing number of community-commissioned and individually-authored books, memoirs, and oral histories supporting and inspiring this scholarly reconstruction, what is important is the gradual proliferation of what might be termed "key anchor books" that will peg down a now incontrovertible reality. In this sense I consider Fitzgerald's book exemplary because it effectively seals the question about metropolitan urban (south eastern) Australian multicultural history of the early twentieth century, from which there can now be no retreat. Again the bracketed addition in the previous sentence is worth emphasizing since, in briefly looking at the next two volumes, it should be noted that more work has been done on the (more obvious) presence of Asia in northern Australia than on its presence in the urban, "metropolitan" southeast. The "glorious tradition" of Australia's national history celebrates this element, the civilizational and progressive driver of the nation and from whence brave pioneers spread out into the hinterland. Far from the center, the "denizens of the north" had generally been excluded as agents who, when addressed, tended to be the objects of its paranoia and target of its legislative enactments. Focusing on the north, the following group of books can be seen as gradually circling the main prize which Fitzgerald has begun to prod.

Australia's northern boundary, it becomes clear, has always been the vulnerable border of White Australia: that is to say, the dominant site of White Australia's other. In the north, established dynasties of prominent Chinese families have

ensured, however, that their history has not been forgotten, at least locally and these stories are now beginning to see the light of publication (see, for instance, YEE 2006). Peta Stephenson's *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* is also largely set in the north and she draws on this tradition of oral memory not only for "the facts" but also for creating history. This is defiantly not "another history of white legislative practice," she emphasizes, perhaps with an eye on Tavan. Rather, "It is about the refusal of the law's victims to be victimised" (5). Moreover, and just as importantly, it is a book that aims to break down the traditional corralling of its subjects into the boxes labelled "Indigenous" and "Asian." It thus aims to define a new platform within an Australian history: the history of the interaction between Asians and Indigenous Australians. This thrusts to center stage, as she says, those victims of the law who refused to be victimized, and reconstitutes Anglo-Australia's "others" as subjective agents who were bonded in a mutual defence against white legislation. On the other hand, this is not an exclusive history, and it is clearly intended as an inclusive move:

I wanted to show not only how outsiders within have been written outside the national story but how they have written themselves back in. The history of Indigenous-Asian cross-cultural encounter in Australia is worth narrating because of its intrinsic value. It reveals a collective experience at once uniquely shaped by geography, culture and environment and at the same time representative...[of]...highly localised histories [that] also belong to the history of modernity at large. (209–210)

Stephenson does not "prove" this last assertion and this is a history that has yet to be written, but she goes a long way towards framing the first. In introducing the hitherto unmentionable in Australia's past, the book suggests a trajectory for a postcolonial engagement with Australia's colonial condition. What is at issue here is the revealing of some of the multiple layers that constituted colonial culture in Australia and which could come to constitute a genuinely postcolonial Australia. Stephenson is concerned to point to the very modern present, to Australia's rich, if still largely neglected, multi-ethnic heritage, including (as one must in Australia) its relevance to its sporting heroes. For those who would still want to place "Indigenous" and "multicultural" issues in separate boxes, Stephenson provides the final argument.

Stephenson's book opens the door to what has been very sensitive territory, traditionally well guarded at both its Caucasian and Indigenous gateways. Hers is not the first to explore it (that credit should perhaps go to the group gathered together by EDWARDS and SHEN 2003). But here again the important point is the way this book is concerned with redrawing Australian history. Stephenson develops her theme against the background of the wider, better known moments in the story of nation building. She situates the importance of the Indonesia-Aboriginal history, the Chinese- and Filipino-Aboriginal story, and the Japanese-Aboriginal story in the context of the traditional history of northern Australian settlement, Australian federation, World War Two, and the arrival of the Howard government



in 1996. How far Australian scholarship will (be able to) precede down this trail remains to be seen but the reality has now been established: not only did the Asian and Indigenous other exist within white society, there was an intimate, triangular interaction which, under colonial circumstances, can be seen to have been comparable to that throughout Imperial Asia.

Stephenson's book introduces consideration of the next two titles, Regina Ganter's *Mixed Relations* and Anna Schnukal, Guy Ramsay, and Yuriko Nagata's *Navigating Boundaries*. Both extend the theme of Asian settlement in Australia and further drive the recognition that the separate history of northern Australia must be incorporated into the history of the nation, and explicitly emphasize the social importance of the intercultural relations between Indigenous and Asian Australians. Ganter's book, (with contributions from Julia Martinez and Gary Lee) to some extent follows the earlier publication of *North of Capricorn: The Untold History of Australia's North* by the pioneer historian of contact history, Henry REYNOLDS (2003). A similarly large scale publication for a general readership, the appearance of both represents the "arrival" of a general acceptance of the north as historically a multi-ethnic settlement. Could it be that this may lead to "the North" becoming separated from the history of "true Australia," for it to become in a new sense, the "other Australia"? As suggested above, parochialism must be resisted. Rather, a history of the North is only now catching up with a history of "Australia," and may well hold up lessons to southern history writing. Significantly, the appearance of the North's once suppressed history now resonates with today's southern experience of a global exchange of people and cultures. What is needed is a similar reconstruction of the history of the "metropolitan South."

Inevitably Ganter's book follows a similar trajectory to those of Stephenson and Reynolds in using oral histories to supplement the limited nature of official "white" sources. The book draws on almost one hundred interviews conducted over a decade and backed by a large number of intimate and descriptive photographs. Based on a long gestation period of academic research, Ganter presents a robust and proud history of the North. It bypasses Reynold's more didactical tone, as well as avoiding the more academic framing of Stephenson's discussion, and, despite its more conventional title, it is no less provocative. The title signals in the first place Ganter's long term concern (as she indicates in her introduction) with the significance of Asian and Indigenous relations in the social and historical make-up of the North. Less obviously, perhaps, in employing the term "contact," the word that has traditionally been limited to introduce the Aboriginal content of white history, here it now comes to stand for a totally different relationship. The first section of the book, as will become mandatory for any history of Australia from now on, is devoted to Indigenous Australian connections to Southeast Asia, specifically to Indonesia, before introducing the first Aboriginal and Asian stories in the broader account of settlement. The heart of the book then recounts the "rise and fall" of the "polyethnic north" based on an extensive inclusion of autobiographical accounts. While perhaps a term, "polyethnic" jars—in what other national context is it used?—and clearly an alternative word, "multicultural," has been so emptied

of meaning and significance by politicized rhetoric and academic critique that it, at least, had to be avoided.

Ganter's book highlights what each of the other volumes under review also manifests: the significance of the contribution of oral history in a field so bereft of "formal" history. There will, however, come a point when methodological boundaries will inevitably need to be re-established. Ganter's extensive use of "stories" contributes to making the book the important contribution to the history of the North that it is, but it leaves one waiting for the next generation of books in which this significant material is more thoroughly infused into the historical analysis. This is not a comment in praise of past historiographical practice, nor a criticism of current developments in history writing, it is merely to reiterate what this group of books suggest: that Australian history is in the throws of a significant reappraisal and whose new themes and approaches will ultimately coalesce to construct more inclusive, theoretically informed and globally relevant historical accounts of the nation.

The question of historiographical and methodological boundary setting is given concrete meaning when we turn to the last volume in this selection. In *Navigating Boundaries*, editors Shnukal, Ramsay, and Nagata literally navigate the porous boundary lines between northern Australia—or might that be imperial Australia?—and Asia. In different ways, the north has traditionally represented "a boundary" that has helped define "fortress Australia," that other island in an Asian sea. But as Battersby notes in an introductory essay to this volume, these northern projections into Asian waters were the stuff of exhilarating as well as paranoid visions of Australia's place in Asia that saw them as the staging post for dominating Southeast Asia, and the bridgeheads needing to be defended. This ambiguity remains.

*Navigating Boundaries* is a significant contribution to a new historiography in drawing these islands *into* the orbit of "Australia." Its subjects are Asians (Chinese, Filipinos, Malays, Japanese, Sri Lankans) and indigenous Torres Strait Islanders. As with the other volumes reviewed, these "newcomers to an Australian historiography" are directly represented by their "voices," included in the last chapter of the book. Again this is no mere appendix: these lives provide essential meaning to the book's aim of "navigating boundaries" and showing how boundaries were navigated in the creation of what constitutes *ailan pasin* or "island custom." While not a monograph, the various essays contributed by its editors effectively weld the various case studies into a solidly unified account. Amongst these, it should be noted, is an excellent chapter by Ganter that defines the project of her later book. This concludes with a celebration of "hybridity, mixed relations and shared histories" that "undermine the very idea of cultural purity that props up Anglo-Celtic claims to cultural dominance...[and] call into question dominant modes of Australian history" (241). That lesson is what each of these books under review wonderfully demonstrates.

That the question of Australian identity needs to be addressed historically—and that history and historians are in the trenches over this—stands to reason. What

is at stake here is a reconstruction from the ground up of Australia's historical identity within the Asian region, and a challenge to an unquestioned moral claim of white Australia to the continent and a place in Asia. Implicitly and explicitly this group of books questions, rewrites, subverts, or supplements the history that generations of Australians (and their neighbors) have grown up with. The parenthetical addition here is worth emphasizing since it has been the hubris of conventional white Anglo-Australian history writing and national politics that remains embedded in the consciousness of Australia's neighbors. This becomes evident in responses from the region whenever there is a sporting disagreement, an update in military or strategic projections, retaliation for incursions into claimed national waters, or even in responses to Australia's heavy-handed and patently self-interested regional aid programs. Thus, the contribution these books may make is not only to a reorientation in Australians' self-understanding of their country's history, but also to those of its neighbors.

Each of these books, then, set out to challenge, expose, investigate, and thus lay the basis for, new approaches. But to do so successfully in the longer term is to do more than uncover new evidence in the archive, or to write revised empirical histories. Ideally, what is also needed is a new set of paradigms as well as new boundaries. Thus, while the books reviewed here are significant in correcting the record, the next phase is to move beyond the incorporation of their conclusions to a restyling of the "mainstream": it is not solely a matter of including Asian and Indigenous agency, it is a recognition that good social history of Australia could not be written without reference to them. This is of course already also happening and one could cite, amongst others, in the present context, Raelene FRANCES (2007) or Tony ROBERTS's excellent first volume of *A History of the Gulf Country to 1900* (2005) as demonstrating how the new insights into Australia's Asian (and Indigenous) history have begun to seep into the rewriting of Australian history more generally.

While residents of Australia can thrill to the challenge these books send out to our conservative elders, I am less sanguine that they will reveal their value to a "foreign" readership. Ultimately each is still too heavily embedded, albeit critically, in its national history, and probably, in intent, directed at a national readership. Fitzgerald's incursion as an Asianist and Chinese scholar into Anglo-Australian history represents an important departure in this regard. This kind of challenge to a nationalist historiography from outside—outside the conventional boundaries of the discipline—holds out the best promise for the future. And this is becoming evident. In regard to this one might point to the "incursions" of more universal concerns in the contributions of Dirk MOSES (2004) and Warwick ANDERSON (2002) as indications of a developing trend towards dismantling the once-exclusive Australian control of Australian history.

Although none of the authors reviewed here seek, then, to frame their preoccupation in terms of global or theoretical constructs *per se*, most do signal at least a motivation that derives from influences outside the conventional limits of Australian historiography such as the contemporary interest in issues of transnational,

transcultural, and global interactions. Key terms such as “white,” “frontier,” “boundaries,” “outsiders,” “diaspora,” and the use of hyphenated identities, although not newly minted, all suggest that new paradigms are at work here. They signal the new directions which have come to challenge the constraints of traditional national history writing that have dominated Australian and much conventional history writing in general.

A final word could perhaps be said about the publishers. As suggested above, each of the books reviewed reflect the endeavor of their authors, but no less of their publishers, to make their books count—to educate. While it is true that the two leading writers on the history of “contact” (European and Indigenous relations), Henry Reynolds and Bain Attwood these days appear in print with larger publishers, in particular Allen & Unwin, the Australian market is small, and even smaller when it comes to books that challenge the status quo. It is not by chance then that the books discussed here come out of small publishing houses outside the “commercial” arena. “Niche publishers” is perhaps the best description of this new breed of publishing houses and committed editors who have dedicated themselves to “new writing” on critical national cultural issues. Although there have been some notable casualties within the rarefied atmosphere of university presses, the University of New South Wales Press, Pandanus Books (the press of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University), and the University of Western Australia Press have persisted with a dedicated focus on non-metropolitan—Indigenous, Asia-Pacific, and Regional Australia—issues for which they should be congratulated and supported.

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#### NOTES

1. Prime Minister John Howard was elected in 1996 and led a Liberal Party (conservative) government till November 2007. Replacing a Labor Party government led by Paul Keating, the Howard government sidelined the previous government’s initiatives in engagement with Asia, reconciliation with Indigenous Australians, and moves toward an Australian republic.

2. The “Hanson phenomenon” or “Hansonism” (named after Pauline Hanson, the one-time leader of the One Nation party) was a term that appeared around the mid-1990s to describe the rather sudden outburst of distinctly racist, white nationalist criticism of Asian immigration—often termed “Asian invasion”—and the proportion of welfare funds spent on Indigenous Australians. Interpreted as a protest against globalization and the erosion of “old values,” it coincided with and contributed to the conservative turn in Australian politics and the withdrawal from a pro-active foreign policy engagement with Asia.

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