

WHO WILL I BECOME? THE MULTIPLE FORMATIONS OF AUSTRALIAN WHITENESS

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The body of this essay reproduces a talk presented at a forum, 'A Treaty for All of Us',¹ held in mid-2001, before the conflagrations of September 11 and related events shifted, perhaps permanently, the terms of domestic political debate. It was a time of some optimism: in 1998 Senator Brian Harradine had 'blinked' on amendments to native title legislation in response to the *Wik* decision, hoping to avert a 'race election'.² Few would have credited that Australia's most obvious race election since 1901 was yet to come, or that, like the election of a hundred years earlier, and almost as openly, it would centre on barring entry to a group of non-white people. A seemingly marginal event, the arrival of a few hundred asylum seekers, served as an occasion to powerfully concentrate the sovereign authority of the state and consolidate a national identity reaffirmed as Anglo-Australian, thus completing a shift in the landscape of race relations that had been signalled since 1996 (Perera & Pugliese 1997).

As I revisit my talk four years later, the sovereignty of Anglo-Australia has been reaffirmed and reinforced not only domestically, through the effective overturning of the *Wik* judgment and other related moves against Indigenous sovereignty, but also by new forms of self-assertion throughout the region. These developments bear out Aileen Moreton-Robinson's critical insight about how the Australian state's appropriation of Aboriginal sovereignty grounds and enables its hegemonic moves in the surrounding region (Moreton-Robinson 2004). This process also works reciprocally: the triumphant performance of Australian sovereignty abroad through set pieces such as the boarding of the *Tampa* (Rajaram 2003; Perera forthcoming) and the heightened

emphasis on national security in turn license and reinforce an uncompromising stance on internal issues of Indigenous self-determination, now cast as divisive and a potential threat to the security and stability of the state.

In 2005 talk of a treaty has all but disappeared from mainstream public debate. Reconciliation as a guiding principle for relations between coloniser and colonised has been replaced by the doctrine of mutual obligation, and some Indigenous communities must contract how often children wash their faces before having access to basic services. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has been summarily abolished and an unelected and largely impotent advisory body put in its place. The violence of colonisation—either on the frontier or in missions where the ways of whiteness were inculcated into the children of the Stolen Generations—has been denied and discredited in the minds of many because of an intensive campaign by the whitewashing school of history. Buoyed by some successes in the first bout of 'the history wars', the purveyors of whitewash now turn their attention to the white Australia policy. The quaint proposition being put forward is that the white Australia policy was really a form of 'civic patriotism' in defence of an independent egalitarian democracy and that 'Australia is not, and never has been, a racist country' (Windschuttle 2004: 5).

As federation emerges as a new site for the whitewashing of Australian history, Shankaran Krishna's discussion of the drive for racial purity in newly independent South Asian states offers some insight into the moment of federated Australia's separation from the mother country:

The story of what once happened in Europe constitutes the knowledge that empowers state elites as they attempt to fashion their nations in the image of what

are considered successful nation states ... Both the past and the future become an imitative and thankless quest to prove that supremely unworthy maxim: 'We are as good as ...' Premised on this narrative of what once happened 'out there,' post colonial elites attempt to remake the recalcitrant clay of plural civilizations into lean, hypermasculine, and disciplined nation-states. I consider postcolonial anxiety to be this attempt at replicating historical originals that are ersatz to begin with (2000: xix).

The newly independent Australian state not only attempted to replicate the ersatz racial purity of Europe through its policies for elimination, by a barrage of means, of the Indigenous population, its first pieces of legislation in the new federal parliament were the Immigration Restriction Act, targeting non-white migration, and the Pacific Islands Laborers Act, designed to end the presence of Melanesian labour in the cane fields. Further Acts prevented non-European residents functioning as citizens (Reynolds 2003: xi). In *North of Capricorn*, Henry Reynolds argues that these Acts of parliament were intended not only to keep out further non-white arrivals but to 'legislatively choke ... to death' an 'existing, dynamic and successful multi-racial society in the northern towns' (xi).

In the terms of David Goldberg's distinction between racial states and racist states (2002: 2), the constitution of the racially exclusionary state, 'White Australia,' was an occasion where whiteness was manifested as a palpable, material and eminently quantifiable category against which those to be excluded were measured, rather than one that functioned as an implicit structuring presence. The state and the bodies of its citizens were explicitly constructed in and through their relation to whiteness, establishing a hierarchy of belonging and entitlement. It is important to note that the definition and measure of Australian whiteness was, from the outset, derived and asserted in relation to its *multiple racial others*, rather than to a single reference point. Spatial as well as racial hierarchies came into play in positioning the subjects of the nation against its asymmetrical non-white others, indigenes and aliens.

Australian whiteness in its constitutive as well as its ongoing formations then is

established by complex maneuvers and machinations that do not operate in a binary register of black and white, but through defining a range of categories of difference and otherness against the yardstick of whiteness. This is evidenced, for example, in the debates relating to the presence of different groups of non-white labour in Australia at the time of federation. Tracking the arrival of the earliest group of indentured labourers from what is now Sri Lanka in Bundaberg and Mackay in 1882 reveals a cluster of interactions in a deeply racialised, polychromatic landscape marked by the dispossession of Aboriginal people from the land, the increasing opposition to the use of 'blackbirded' Melanesian labour on the cane plantations and hostility towards Chinese miners on the gold fields (Weerasooriya 1988). The following comment by the member for Mackay indicates the way in which existing racial and class categories were reworked in attempts to position the new arrivals:

The Cingalese who recently arrived do not appear charmed with the vastness of the prospect set before them. ... They do not consider that 20 pounds a year affords much margin for profit. The extravagance of some of these Asiatics is positively appalling ... The question ... is whether or not the importation of Coolies will injure the white inhabitants. The cry of Queensland for the white men does not seem unreasonable when read by the light of recent events. The Coolie, it would seem, is not a simple child of nature. He has received an education. The few that have come in contact with the tradesmen of Mackay have rather astonished these worthies. There is great fluency in English and a competent knowledge of mental arithmetic. This is dangerous. They will not and cannot be circumscribed in the nature of their employment. The class of Cingalese who have honoured us with their presence have souls above Chinese labour. In fact they appear to be intelligent, well trained artisans. ... We cannot have that class of men (Weerasooriya: 144).

The passage suggests the anxious and intricate calibrations at work on the precise degrees of 'danger' and 'injury' posed by specific raced and classed groups to 'the white inhabitants'. The 'Cingalese' (in fact an ethnically mixed groups of workers from the then Crown Colony of Ceylon) are inserted into a racialised scale of desirability for non-white labour that includes Aboriginal and Islander peoples

as well as Chinese, Kanak and Indian workers. The scale works downwards from the so-called 'simple child of nature' as a series of racial types—the *noble savage*, the *lazy native*, the *wily Asiatic*, the *luxurious oriental*—jostle and collide, and are worked and reworked in exchange with the specific fears and desires of white Australian nationalism in the years leading up to federation.

Australian whiteness studies as it has been constituted to date has little to say about these complex histories of racial formation. A recent issue of the journal *Borderlands*, dedicated to the topic of whiteness studies, for example, focused exclusively on relationships between Indigenous and Anglo-Australians, passing over the interlocking racial and ethnic hierarchies and multiple spatialities that structure and produce Australian whiteness (Riggs 2004). While the issue contained many fine essays, its omissions indicate the extent of the conceptualising, theorising and historicising work that remains to be done in the unpacking of Australian whiteness.

The paper below, which retains its spoken tone, was an attempt to articulate the role that non-white migrant stories and itineraries can play in reopening a seemingly known and familiar national history, denaturalising its assumptions and disclosing its underlying formations. I contribute the paper to this inaugural issue of the journal of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association in the spirit of David Goldberg's reminder of the role of whiteness studies:

The salient point ... is not the self-absorption of whiteness in its own demise, as is so much the case with whiteness studies, but the undoing of states of racial being and forms of governmentality in their global profusion. The aim is to deroutinize and desystematize interlocking worlds of race historically produced and the racially figured exclusions and derogations they entail (Goldberg 2002: 264).

Who Will I Become? Sydney, May 2001

James Baldwin, a writer whose profound understanding of whiteness I don't think we have yet learned fully to appreciate, once said that when it comes to matters of

race and power, our ignorance is 'not merely phenomenal, but sacred, and sacredly maintained' (Baldwin 1971). In the sense in which Baldwin uses it here I take sacred ignorance to mean an ignorance that is enshrined, sanctioned, blessed, endorsed, affirmed, even required, by the institutions of a society—institutions like schools, media, government, the church and, of course, the constitution.

In this federation centenary year we might remember the role of the 1901 parliament and constitution in consolidating sacred ignorance. Whereas some, including Prime Minister Howard, have argued that the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples was transferred to the Australian state at federation, thus wiping out any legal and political claim by Indigenous peoples to a treaty, this strikes me as, to say the least, a bizarre argument. It is a strange act of conferring sovereignty and citizenship in a democratic nation that works to erase people's most basic rights, as happened to Indigenous people in the decades that followed 1901. As Geoff Clarke succinctly puts it: 'How can it ... be said that Aborigines gave up any sovereign rights we had to the parliaments and the courts through the formation of the Constitution in 1901' when Indigenous people 'were excluded from the discussions leading up to the establishment of the 1901 constitution?' And when indeed, 'the only reference to Aborigines in the 1901 constitution was to exclude them?' (Clarke 2000).

Some of you may remember the government sponsored TV commercials in the lead-up to the centenary of federation that celebrated the first Aboriginal cricket team to tour England in 1868. Tapping into popular mythologies of a nation of fun-loving good sports, the commercial asks: 'What kind of a country would have a national cricket team before it had a national parliament?' I want to ask in return: 'What kind of a country would represent as a "national team" people whose representatives played no role in the formation of that national parliament?' Certainly, a team of Indigenous cricketers from Victoria, captained by a white man, did tour England and play at Lords in 1868. But to represent the players of 1868 as a 'national team', and that team as the natural precursor to the achievement of self-government, is a wild travesty of the

power relations that characterised the formation of the Australian state. None of the Indigenous team members, nor their descendants, would play any role as national subjects, *except by their exclusion*, in the process that culminated in the making of a federated state, 'Australia', in 1901. The year after the England tour the establishment of the 'Aborigines' Protection Board' marked a new era of systematised control over Indigenous peoples, and a series of legislative moves between 1877 and 1905 effectively excluded them from the rights and privileges of citizenship in the newly constituted state (Booth & Tatz 2000: 40–2). This kind of sacred ignorance of our institutions and history underpins and enables a wider ignorance in our society that is continually and actively reproduced. As in the example of these commercials, we are all implicated in the processes by which sacred ignorance is reproduced.

I do not exempt myself from this process. To tell you a little about my own sacred ignorance: I am a Tamil woman from Sri Lanka. Some of you may know about the ongoing civil war in that country for almost twenty years. Although I grew up in the hills, in the part of the country that is not being fought over, my family is from Jaffna in the north. When I listen to the radio or open the newspapers the place names that flash out at me are names from the stories told by my mother, those stories to grow up on, as Maxine Hong Kingston (1989: 5) describes them, that will shape everything we ever come to learn. I still find it very hard to comprehend that the places of my mother's stories are part of an actual war zone. It is difficult to describe the sense of dislocation experienced when a landscape that is an intimate part of your consciousness, your memory and being, is suddenly re-presented to you, in a largely indifferent public arena, as a war zone.

But this is something I didn't understand about Australia when I came here: that many of the places I have driven through, or casually hear about, are names in a war zone. And that they are places and names of a people's imagination and being from which they have been violently displaced. When I came here I knew that Australia, like Sri Lanka, had been part of the British Empire, and that it was trying to forge a new cultural identity. I was even, I

confess, quite taken with films like *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli* that I had seen before I came here, films which seemed to examine the relationship of Anglo-Australians with British colonialism. But I don't think that before my migration I ever understood in anything other than a superficial sense, or that I once thought seriously about, the internal and ongoing colonisation of Indigenous Australians by the settlers and migrants to this country. And I didn't understand that as someone who migrated here what I was doing was consenting to, and literally *signing on to*, a system of colonisation. Not even my own experience of colonisation, on multiple levels, had alerted me to this.

I had to educate myself, and allow myself to be educated (or perhaps edu-ma-cated, as Ruby Langford Ginibi says, 1994: 52–3), to the responsibilities I had taken on by applying for a migrant visa to Australia. I can date the moment when my passage from sacred ignorance first began. It was in the mid-1980s, soon after I started working, at what was then called the Ethnic Affairs Commission in Sydney (before the present blissful dispensation when, presumably, the problem of ethnicity has been relegated to history, and we're all happy communities together).

Roberta Sykes had recently returned to Australia after completing her PhD at Harvard. She came to the Commission one day and talked about the need for non-Anglo migrants and Indigenous people to reach a treaty of understanding with one another. In this treaty, she suggested, non-Anglo migrants needed to acknowledge the racist arrangements they had entered into with the Australian state. Hearing Roberta Sykes speak about a treaty was the first time I consciously understood what I had consented to by the act of migration; and I also realised the need to act on the responsibilities laid on me by this understanding.

I'd like to introduce two questions I'll keep coming back to, questions posed in the United States by Julie Quiroz-Martínez: *Who will I become when I am naturalized? And how does what I become feed racism in the country I have come to?*

Here are some meanings for *naturalize* from the *Doubleday Dictionary*:

Naturalize:

1. to confer the rights and privileges of citizenship upon, as an alien;
2. to adopt ... into the common use of a country or area;
4. to make natural;
5. to become as if native; adapt.

For us in Australia there is an enormous, irreconcilable, slippage between the first meaning, *to confer the rights and privileges of citizenship upon, as an alien*, and the final meaning, *to become as if native*. In Australia for the first sixty years of the hundred years of federation that some of us are celebrating this year, the citizen usurped the place of the native, and the native, by definition, could not be a citizen.

Who will I become, when I become naturalised? On one level this question recognises the exclusions and obstacles that operate for non-Anglo migrants and refugees around the process of gaining access to citizenship and its privileges. Before and since federation, through the various stages of the white Australia policy and through to the present, for many non-Anglo migrants and refugees the issues around which politicisation first occurs in Australia are immigration policy and access. In practice, and in the experience of many of us, the white Australia policy is not a bogey of the past. Since 1996 a series of measures have come into play to curtail the access of non-white arrivals, and most recently of asylum seekers, to Australia (Perera & Pugliese 1997). The policy of mandatory detention of certain categories of arrivals and asylum seekers is predicated on racist assumptions that resonate deeply with the history of white Australia. The racialised genealogy of the Australian prison, to employ a term used by Angela Davis, includes a number of forms of immigration control, quarantine and confinement for non-Anglo migrants (Davis 1998). The mandatory detention of asylum seekers belongs on this continuum of racialised punishment, which also includes the different forms of racialised incarceration of Indigenous people (Perera 2001).

Who do I become when I become naturalised? For non-Anglo migrants and refugees, however, our struggles around access to citizenship and residency rights cannot obscure the central question that

inheres in the problematic term 'naturalised'. It seems to me that in our struggles for access to the institutions of citizenship non-Anglo Australians have a clear choice about the *forms* of citizenship we assume, in the sense both of something taken on and of something taken for granted, within the narrative of Australian nationhood.

At one of the recent Deakin lectures to celebrate the centenary of federation I heard Robert Manne, a child of World War II Jewish refugees, chart, as I have just done, a non-Anglo Australian's itinerary, or what he called a personal journey, of his slow emergence from this country's sacred ignorance about Indigenous peoples. In many ways it was a moving and illuminating account. But much as I respect the recent work Professor Manne has produced in this area, I must differ from the final position he reaches in his argument: that whereas the Australian state's history of dispossession of Indigenous peoples is a stark story of injustice and dispossession, for migrants and refugees it is a different story:

Concerning the country which had offered my parents refuge and where I was born and which I loved, I had now two main thoughts, not one. For the immigrants to this country—from Britain and Ireland, from Europe, the Middle East and Asia—Australia had always been and still remained, despite the problems at the age of globalisation, one of the most attractive societies in human history—well-governed, liberal, law-drenched, tolerant, civil, democratic, spacious, prosperous, egalitarian in its ethos and so on. However for its Indigenous inhabitants, from the arrival of the British until the 1960s or beyond—it has been a site of real tragedy—of dispossession, loss of land, culture and language; of murder, disease and demoralization; of incarceration on missions and reserves, of racial condescension and contempt (Manne 2001).

'Neither column in this moral ledger', Manne concludes, 'will cancel the other out' (Manne 2001).

There are a number of points on which I want to complicate this account. Unlike Manne, I would argue that the experience of 'immigrants to this country' cannot be collectivised into a category that includes 'Britain and Ireland ... Europe, the Middle East and Asia' because the positioning of

these groups is constitutively and continually unequal, and provides asymmetrical access to the institutions of citizenship and civility. All non-Indigenous people in Australia, I have already said, are implicated in the dispossession of its original inhabitants, and bear the responsibility of working to end that dispossession. The binary categorisation of 'migrants' and 'indigenes', however, is inadequate because it ignores both the foundational violence of colonisation and federation and the complex ways in which processes of racialisation have constituted categories such as 'whites', 'blacks', 'natives', 'aliens' and 'citizens' ever since. Rather than conceptualising national history as a ledger book with entries on the debit and credit side for 'indigenes' and 'migrants', I suggest that a more complicated form of accounting needs to be made. I propose a somewhat different form of reckoning to Manne's: one in which our national history cannot be entered in symmetrical columns of good and bad, but where both perceived successes and failures are interdependent, and indeed inconceivable, without one another. In this reckoning the foundational moment of the Australian state, like some of its formative legislative acts, is conceptualised around a series of interlocking exclusions and restrictions directed against the racial others of the nation. These exclusions and restrictions put in place certain ongoing hierarchical relations of whiteness and Australian-ness. It is crucial to acknowledge these processes of racialisation and understand how they operate if we are serious about rethinking race relations in this country.

In her own Deakin lecture on federation, Marcia Langton noted that in 1901 'the background to the apparently parliamentary manner of the conventions was a world of violence, racist violence' (Langton 2001). This climate, which excluded Indigenous people from the conventions, was simultaneously one in which 'Alfred Deakin judged that the strongest motive for Federation was the desire that 'we should be one people and remain one people, without the admixture of other races' (Langton 2001). One of the foundational pieces of legislation of the new Australian parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act, the so-called white Australia policy. This legislation was a response to the perceived threat of Asian hordes from without, but what is

perhaps less well understood is that it also was a response to the strong Asian presence *already* in the northern states.

This presence testifies to well established histories of prior contact between Indigenous peoples and their neighbours in Asian and Pacific societies. Learning more about these histories is one way of decentring the foundational claims of Anglo-Australia and complicating the binary black/white view of Australian history. Histories of contact between Indigenous and Asian peoples often long predated British arrival. As the historian Regina Ganter has described: 'The centuries-old contact of the northern coast, from Western Australia across Arnhem Land and into the Gulf of Carpentaria, with the trepang fishers of Sulawesi ... contests the way in which the time frame of Australian history takes the British presence as its cornerstone' (1999: i-ii). These forms of contact continued into the early years of colonisation, even as new forms of relations came into being.

The first arrivals from what is now Sri Lanka took place in 1882, when an ethnically mixed group of men (a few accompanied by their wives) were recruited to work as labourers in Bundaberg, Thursday Island, and later in Broome. White Australia's moves to contain and manage interactions between Indigenous peoples and other non-white populations within its racialised framework can be tracked through a series of legislative moves at state and Commonwealth levels—for example, in the debates accompanying the attempts to remove non-white labour from the sugar cane industry in Queensland and the pearling industry in Western Australia (the latter attempt was unsuccessful and pearling remained at least partially exempt from the white Australia policy). Similarly, a key piece of legislation, the *Queensland Aboriginal Protection Act and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act of 1897* carries inscribed even within its title, as Ganter has noted, 'a concern over Chinese-Aboriginal contact' (i). In a fascinating account of the attempt to implement the white Australia policy in the pearling industry in Broome, John Bayley describes the category crisis created for the racial bureaucracy in the years after federation by the presence of Asians in Australia: 'Most of the crew working on the luggers were coloured, but were they

aliens? Some had been in Australia prior to Federation, a few had been born in Australia, some were the offspring of the oldest inhabitants of all, the Australian Aborigines' (119).

The official 'concern' to prevent interconnection and 'contact' between Indigenous peoples and Asians in Australia needs to be understood as anything other than a set of bloodless debates around trade and economic issues from the distant past. I would like to read you an extract from the narrative of Ollie Smith who as a young woman growing up in the John of God Orphanage in Broome believed she had been abandoned by her father, a pearl diver from Kupang. Smith uncovered her story only when she gained access to her welfare files that 'held more secrets than I could have imagined' (Yu 1999: 66).

Sarah Yu describes how Ollie Smith's father, Wella Kalle 'was arrested and fined twenty pounds for cohabiting with Rita Smith, Ollie's "half-caste" mother.' Ollie's mother Rita was herself the daughter of an Aboriginal mother, Dora, whose husband was also deported for 'cohabiting', while Dora and their three children were institutionalised at Beagle Bay Mission. Following the same process for Rita's husband as for her father,

the Native Affairs Department chose to make an example of Kalle to the Broome community, particularly to the "half-caste" women of Broome. ... Despite professing departmental duty of care for the Broome native population, little concern was shown for the fate of Rita and her child, whom Kalle had accommodated and had been fully supporting. Kalle was deported to Kupang in December 1951. After Ollie was born in 1951, Rita was left "high and dry" as a local Welfare district officer had predicted, and eventually, Ollie, at the age of three, was placed in a Broome orphanage. At six Ollie became a ward of the State under the Child Welfare Act 1947-1956 because she was not a "native-in-law."

In 1995, after many inquiries, Ollie received a letter from her father and met him in Kupang. He told Ollie how he used to meet Rita in the back lane of her granny's house. ... He had loved her mother, and would have had more children if he had been able to stay (66-7).

The repeated institutionalisation of three generations of women, Dora, Rita and Ollie, and the repeated deportations of Ollie's father and grandfather, demonstrate the systemic connections and intersections between immigration policies and the racialised control and surveillance of the Indigenous population. Such a series of interconnected moves and policies was central to the production of the racialised subjects of the Australian state. This is not to suggest interchangeable processes of racialisation for Indigenous and other non-white peoples; on the contrary. But what is indicated here is the *interlocking* nature of the processes by which Australia's racialised others were constituted. The *different* ways in which these groups are racialised interlock to reinforce the power relations of white Australia, and the hierarchies of whiteness by which those relations were and are maintained.

Non-Anglo migrant histories that fail to recognise and unpack these hierarchies and their interdependence are in danger of simply reinscribing them. If non-Anglo and Asian-Australian histories have remained, as I suggested earlier, largely invisible in the master narrative of Australian history, a number of attempts have been made in recent years to uncover narratives of Asians in Australia. These histories are valuable in combating conventional histories of multiculturalism which place 'Asian migration' as a phenomenon of the 1970s, wiping out a range of older connections. But for non-Anglo and Asian-Australians, accessing these largely unfamiliar histories also raises a number of questions about *how* we chose to remember our place against and in relation to other narratives of the nation. Can our re-remembering or piecing together of histories sometimes serve the creation of a new national history, in which racist exclusion finally gives way to acceptance, a triumphalist narrative of progress in which non-Anglo histories are *naturalised* into some shiny mosaic of multiculturalism? In such a narrative the processes of racialisation and the racialised hierarchies that sustained and sustain dominant relations of power can only remain largely untouched.

Who will I become when I become naturalised? And how does what I become feed racism in the country I have come to? Instead of serving a triumphalist vision

of Australian history, in which multicultural stories become ultimately self-annihilating narratives of assimilation, I'd like to end by asking about the possibilities of cross-cultural histories of Indigenous and non-Anglo Australians and their ability to complicate, undermine and decentre the dominant narratives and authority of whiteness in Anglo-Australia. Such histories, especially between Asian-Australians and Indigenous peoples can both predate and overlap those of Anglo-Australia, providing different webs of connection and cross-cultural interaction, as well as different models of contracts, treaties and agreements between variously positioned groups.

One such attempt I have discussed elsewhere (Perera 2000) is Bruce Pascoe's novel *Ruby-eyed Coucal* (1996) where a legal challenge is mounted 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. By writing a counter-history of international and regional relations prior to the imposition of *terra nullius*, Pascoe challenges the foundational authority of 'Australia' and its erasure of Aboriginal ownership of the land. Instead, he posits a pre-existing mesh of complex and sophisticated kinship, cultural and trade exchanges and treaties between the places we now know as West Papua, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the northern coast of Arnhem Land. Pascoe's novel thereby produces different models of how the sovereignty of the original inhabitants was recognised and treated with by regional states prior to 1788. It also reconfigures the space of Australia, not as an island entire of itself, but as made up of different cultural and national spaces which share histories and borders with other regional peoples and societies. In this way the text remakes time-lines, reshapes boundaries and redraws maps of affiliation and exchange. Such narratives think Australian history through other spatio-temporalities and, to draw on a term used by Marcia Langton (1995), suggest less 'toxic' possibilities for new forms of cultural relations in Australia, forms that complicate the dominant black-and-white view of history (Perera & Pugliese 1998).

Narratives like Pascoe's novel or the historical research of Ganter and Reynolds are important because they suggest some

different directions and models for discussions of both Indigenous sovereignty and multiracial histories. If these sound like far-fetched or utopian contributions to the treaty debate, we might remind ourselves of the long years spent by Eddie Mabo in what many would have seen at the time as research highly unlikely to challenge the foundational principle of *terra nullius*.

In the space this forum has allowed me I have tried to reflect on some directions for non-Anglo-, and in particular Asian-Australian migrants and refugees, to think through processes of citizenship and naturalisation in Australia, and to ask how the narratives we produce can acknowledge the responsibilities we bear in the process of colonisation. Such narratives, it seems to me, are indispensable in any genuine discussion of a treaty for all of us: that is, a discussion that enables different voices and multiple positionalities to be articulated as part of the process leading to the acknowledgment of Indigenous sovereignty.

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Notes

¹ The Centenary Forum, 'A Treaty for All of Us' was held at the University of Technology, Sydney, on 31 May 2001. The other two forum speakers were Professor Marcia Langton and Justice Elizabeth Evatt. The forum chair was Professor Larissa Behrendt.

² On the threat of a 'race election' in 1998 see Pearson (2003) and *ATSIC News* (1998).