Introduction

THE COMING TOGETHER of diverse peoples in a defined geographical space implies the prior navigation of geopolitical or physical boundaries and the subsequent navigation of social and cultural boundaries. To move from place to place is necessarily to navigate the boundaries between places, an experience that is invariably stimulating and ultimately enriching for its participants, producing cooperation and conflict in the forging of a new identity. New spatial borders, social values, economic interactions and political positionings are claimed, challenged and negotiated to produce new, if also transient equilibria. What has come to be known as 'multiculturalism' is now the norm of Australian contemporary urban society. Although this is viewed as a recent innovation, even a historical aberration, in fact, Australia's cultural pluralism has many antecedents in the nation's pre-colonial and colonial period, its 'polyethnic past'. One example is Torres Strait in north-eastern Australia, a region uniquely positioned at the confluence of the Australian continent, South-East Asia and the Pacific. Here, as in other 19th-century northern centres, the convergence of Australian Indigenous people, Asian and other 'Coloured' immigrants and European colonists created a polyethnic society, whose members have, through time, forged the social and familial connections that underlie the claim of their descendants to be a single people. Thursday Island, the regional commercial centre, was predominantly an Asian town from its inception until its wartime evacuation in 1942. For three generations, the majority of its population was born in Asia or was of Asian descent. Our book examines facets of the complex history of Asian Torres Strait, which continues to evolve and influence the present.

In the context of Torres Strait, 'boundary' is a salient, multifaceted concept. On one hand, it refers to artificially imposed maritime borders of geopolitical origin; more metaphorically, it refers to actual and perceived social and cultural divisions among ethnic groups. Both concepts are examined in the following chapters. For the Islanders of Torres Strait, South-East Asia and the

Pacific, however, the notion of the shifting sea as a boundary is alien, the inverse of the European terrestrially focused perception. The boundaries of their sea territories are marked by naturally occurring, fixed and prominent land masses, such as reefs and rocks. Their surrounding territorial seas are not boundaries, i.e., constraining features of their environment, which serve to separate them from their island and mainland neighbours, but rather maritime highways, which connect them with others for reasons of trade and ritual. Thus, for the diverse peoples who came to inhabit Torres Strait, the sea emphasised connection through trade, navigation and kinship.[1] We wish to emphasise this 'cross-cultural difference in constructions of the sea',[2] which is crucial to an understanding of subsequent historical events in Torres Strait. We also stress the cultural affinities among the sea-oriented peoples of the small-scale, resource-poor islands of Torres Strait, Asia and the Pacific. These affinities enabled them — indeed, predisposed them — to find common ground, which predated their shared experiences of labour in the fisheries, life in a remote British colonial town under the White Australia Policy and pervasive prejudice expressed through administrative and legislative control. Subsistence farmers and fisherfolk on their islands of origin, they also shared a similar maritime physical environment and marine practices, tropical climate and seasons, flora and fauna, and modes of life, including longstanding, accepted protocols for establishing trading relationships. Their world views, too, coincided, resonating in similar myths based on the significance of the sea for the founding and sustenance of their societies. Social values emphasised the principles of mutuality and reciprocity; kinship and sharing underlay all significant social relationships. Trade was a necessity for all of these peoples and it was the sea that made possible their navigation to a wider world.

These cultural traits, combined with the strategic geographical position of Torres Strait, which today shares a northern border with two separate nation-states, proved immensely conducive to the development of the region as a vital maritime trading centre during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this time, Asian migrants flocked to the region to forge new connections and contentions with Islanders and European colonists alike.

Academic Scholarship

Ann Curthoys, among others, has noted the 'parallels in discourse, policy and practice' between Indigenous Australians and Asians during the first half of the 20th century, which 'continued to be rarely spoken together'.[3] Academic historiographical and anthropological paradigms and the relative lack of available documentation have meant that, until recently, most scholarship of

Torres Strait has focused on Indigenous and colonial histories, relegating the numerically significant Asian presence to the margins.

Two 1970s theses by Armstrong, on 19th-century Japanese immigration to Queensland, and Evans, on the polyethnic society of pre-World War I Thursday Island, were exceptions, as was Chase's article on Aboriginal-Asian relations on Cape York.[4] The Japanese contribution to the pearl-shell and pearl-culture industries has now been extensively documented by Bach, Armstrong, Sissons, Ohshima, Ganter and Haig;[5] the impact of internment during World War II by Nagata;[6] and the musical contribution by Hayward and Konishi.[7] Kehoe-Forutan's PhD thesis deals in part with the contemporary experience of Thursday Islanders of Asian heritage;[8] and other scholars, inside and outside the academy, have begun to document aspects of Asian immigrant community experience in Torres Strait: Gatbonton, Ileto and Perdon for the Filipinos; Staples and O'Shea and Manderson for the Indonesians; and Swan, Sparkes and Weerasooria for the Sri Lankans.[9]

More than two decades ago, historian Hank Nelson called for a detailed study of Torres Strait 'from 1850 with its apparent extremes of frontier violence, conflict and alliance between different races and economic interests in pearling and trading, and government shifts between neglect and heavy paternalism', which would reveal much about racial 'behaviour, attitudes and legislation' in Australia.[10] Since then, Nelson's concerns have been addressed by the book-length studies of Ohshima, Beckett, Singe, Sharp, Ganter, Mullins and Osborne and in many theses and journal articles.[11] No one, however, has attempted the nuanced and comprehensive examination of the five major Asian diasporic communities of Torres Strait — Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Indonesian and Sri Lankan — and their interrelationships, which is the subject of this volume.

Our book addresses this gap in scholarship, illustrating the richness of the Asian experience in Torres Strait and its influence on local social and cultural values, micro-economies and positionings from multiple viewpoints. It highlights the interconnections and contentions among the Asian groups and between them and local Indigenous and European people; more specifically, how ethnic community boundaries were — and continue to be — 'navigated' in Torres Strait. By examining community boundaries, which 'raise questions of power as broadly construed, differentially distributed, and socially constructed',[12] we hope to demonstrate the impact on ethnic relations of government policies of social control, the effects of which continue to the present. Our book is also a celebration of members of past communities who, despite many difficulties, successfully navigated physical and cultural boundaries to make successful lives for themselves and their families in Torres Strait.

Navigating Boundaries

An appreciation of the Asian experience in Torres Strait and the geopolitical and socio-cultural boundaries navigated by each individual and community requires an understanding of the broader historical context. In Chapter One, Paul Battersby discusses the notion of 'boundary' as a legally constituted geopolitical border, examining the location and legitimacy of Australia's present-day maritime border with its closest northern neighbours, East Timor, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Battersby portrays the border as historically problematic, not least because of the failure of all attempts to impose cultural uniformity on people within surrounding nation-states. This is clearly illustrated by A. R. Wallace's proposed geographical division between Australasia and the western Indonesian archipelago, known as the Wallace Line. Battersby argues that this demarcation of divergence in the biological composition of human, animal and plant species indigenous to these respective regions is neither congruent with geopolitical reality in the mid-19th century nor with the significant social interaction and cultural exchange between northern Australia and the Malay world at that time. While Federation in 1901 brought stricter demarcation of 'Australian' political and cultural space, global economic forces, entrenched traditions of Malay mariners and the vastness of the Australian coastline worked against the total closure of the Commonwealth's northern borders. Battersby demonstrates how the porousness of this imposed boundary has increased over time: in the second half of the 19th century, an ever-increasing number of Asians came to work in northern Australian maritime and agricultural industries and, at the same time, European Australians increasingly ventured into South-East Asia as tourists, business travellers and mining entrepreneurs. He contends that the social and cultural importance of these exchanges was masked by the ideology of White Australia and is only now coming to light at a time when nation-statehood itself faces an uncertain future.

In Chapter Two, Anna Shnukal and Guy Ramsay present an overview of Torres Strait Islander/Asian/European interaction. The chapter briefly documents the historical periods during which the Asian diaspora flourished and then declined: from first contact to the pearling boom; subsequent Asianisation of Thursday Island, the regional centre; Federation and its legislative impact; World War II and its immediate aftermath; and postwar decline. The chapter provides for those unfamiliar with the region a broader framework within which to situate the succeeding chapters, in which different interpretations of 'boundary' come to the fore.

Chapters Three to Seven of this book draw on extensive archival documentation and a widely dispersed body of existing sources, including local oral narratives, to document the histories and experiences of people from the five major Asian communities that came to define the Asian diaspora in the Torres Strait: Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese and Sri Lankan. Each chapter illustrates to varying degrees what Clifford has defined as 'the main features of diaspora: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host … country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship'.[13] It is here that the notion of 'boundary' as a socio-cultural division emerges. Group members clarify inter-group differences by emphasising 'the characteristics of one's group as a whole',[14] which then 'become[s] a pragmatic basis for the formation of interest groups and networks, social resources for pursuing individual and communal utilities'.[15]

Guy Ramsay examines the Chinese community of Thursday and nearby islands, documenting the reasons for the arrival of the Chinese, their contributions to and connections with the local community and the broader Chinese diaspora, and their observance of culture and traditions. Through Ramsay's chapter, the dynamic of communal boundary-marking by the Chinese, as exemplified by Chinese business practices, can be measured against the government-propagated discourses of exclusion and threat, evidenced by legislation that curtailed rights of naturalisation, restricted family reunion and forbade Chinese contact with Indigenous women. Ramsay's chapter also portrays the continual presence on Thursday Island of a Chinese community, whose members, while greatly diminished in size by the 1942 evacuation, have successfully mediated ethnic and local identities, but who today face the dual challenges of Native Title and regional autonomy.

Whereas the majority of settlers from insular South-East Asia made their homes on Thursday Island, Torres Strait's commercial heart, some individuals and families settled on other islands. Anna Shnukal examines three little-known, independently established Filipino and Malay communities: the Filipino community on Ngarupai (Horn Island), c. 1889–1942; and the Malay communities on Badu (Mulgrave Island), c. 1890–c.1906, and Port Lihou, 1939–42. Shnukal gives an overview of the rise and fall of each community, celebrating the ways in which members of marginalised Asian groups, through their navigation of inter-group and interpersonal connections, subverted the constrictions placed on them by the dominant European minority and created new 'place-based' identities predicated on ethnic origin, kinship, custom and the multiple connections of daily life.

Reynaldo C. Ileto's chapter complements Shnukal's study of the Filipino Horn Island community by focusing on the experience of the Filipino entrepreneur, Heriberto Zarcal, who arrived on Thursday Island in 1892. Although in many ways an atypical immigrant, Zarcal's story exhibits almost all the features of members of the early 'Filipino-Australian' diaspora: successful involvement in the maritime industries, commercial and social integration into the local community, naturalisation, and continued links with events in the homeland. His story underlines the fluidity of boundaries for members of a diasporic community, where local endeavour frequently intertwines with connections with one's homeland. Ileto's chapter reconstructs Zarcal's highly successful career as a merchant, dealer in pearls and owner of a large fleet of pearling vessels. It probes the implications of the racist diatribe against his naturalisation as a British subject in 1897 and documents the material support he offered to the Philippine revolutionary forces, whose representative in Australia he later became.

The Japanese presence in Torres Strait has been the most widely studied. Scholars have generally emphasised a 'sojourner' community, which dominated the pearl-shelling industry until World War II and continued its involvement in the region's pearl-culture industry until the 1970s. In this book, Yuriko Nagata, who has previously documented the experiences of internment, repatriation and return to prewar Australian communities, traces the continuity of their presence, giving the concept of 'Japanese Thursday Islanders' its full historical integrity. The chapter not only synthesises a widely dispersed body of information and evidence published in Australia and Japan, but examines Japanese integration into the diverse local community of Torres Strait through intermarriage with Torres Strait Islanders, Malays, Chinese and Europeans. The contribution of Japanese women who worked and lived on the island is for the first time integrated into the historiography of the Japanese community, which has hitherto been almost exclusively male-based.

In the final chapter of this section, Stanley Sparkes and Anna Shnukal draw on newspaper accounts, archival records and family histories to document the personal and business lives of the Sri Lankan community. The first 'Cingalese' (as Ceylonese — Sri Lankans — were then called) arrived in Torres Strait independently in the 1870s, but a distinctive community was not created until the importation of 25 indentured Sri Lankans in 1882. Those first settlers became watermen (boatmen) and sailors, living in a recognised 'Cingalese quarter' in Thursday Island on Victoria Parade. Some of them became small businessmen: boarding-house keepers, billiard-room proprietors, shopkeepers, boat-owners, gem and curio hawkers and fishermen. They were joined in the

1890s by a 'second wave' of immigrants, part of a move by Sri Lankan professional jewellers to seek outlets for the gem trade in South-East Asian ports. The authors assess the commercial, religious, social and cultural contributions made by the Sri Lankans to the wider community and demonstrate how the foundations were laid for the most prominent business enterprises established by Charles, De Silva, Mendis, Mowlis and Saranealis.

These chapters deal with specific communities, yet they illustrate the emergence of implicit and explicit socio-cultural boundaries and their navigation by individuals and families. This is so among Asian groups and with other resident groups. These boundaries are porous to a degree, yet they also underpin imbalances in power relations. Indeed, the social, economic and political jurisdictions of cultural groups in Torres Strait were substantially 'enframed' by the exercising of colonial power and authority. Thus, Whites governed paternalistically over the Indigenous people of the region — their experience of paternalism continued into the 1980s — and hegemonically over the Asian 'visitor'. These constraints were formalised in legislation such as the various Queensland Aboriginal Protection Acts and the Commonwealth policies of White Australia, as well as marine industry regulations and indenture agreements. Local, state and Commonwealth policies also directly or indirectly affected every aspect of community life in Torres Strait, as the following chapters demonstrate.

Two government officials between them shared extraordinary power over the lives of the inhabitants of the strait. The first was the Government Resident, the supreme government representative in the region; the second was the local Protector of Aboriginals. There could at times be friction between the two, but during the colonial period it was the Government Resident who prevailed. After the Resident's death, the Protector became more powerful, as the Torres Strait Islanders became subject to the restrictions of the Aboriginal Protection Acts.

Jeremy Hodes' Chapter Eight explores the paternalistic 'rule' exercised by the first and most influential Government Resident, Hon. John Douglas, a former premier of Queensland, who served in Torres Strait from 1885–1904. It exposes what we today would perceive as contradictions in the man who, on the one hand, feared the effects of large-scale Chinese and Japanese immigration on the Britishness of Australian society — as premier in 1877, Douglas was instrumental in preventing Chinese from entering Queensland — and yet who numbered Chinese and Japanese individuals among his friends; a man who was benevolent towards and admiring of Torres Strait and Pacific Islanders and yet a strong supporter of the White Australia Policy. We must view Douglas, arguably

the most influential figure in Torres Strait colonial history, who would never have considered himself a racist, in the context of his time. His dislike of the Japanese presence evolved into acceptance, powerless as he was to end their dominance of the Torres Strait fisheries. Hodes' chapter portrays the rhetoric of the White Australia Policy in collision with reality, and is a fascinating account of how the Asian communities in general, and the Japanese in particular, were seen through the eyes of the chief government representative in the region during the early years of the White Australia Policy.

Regina Ganter's Chapter Nine focuses on the exercise of authority by the second-most important government powerbroker, the Protector of Aboriginals, whose authority reached its height during the inter-war years. In her chapter, Ganter reveals how government officials sought to prevent contact between Asian and Indigenous people, making evident the discursive sentiment that underpinned their actions. At a time when a growing community of 'Coloured' people blurred the boundaries between Asian, Indigenous and White populations, Ganter documents the story of a 'mixed-race' family in Torres Strait, whose life was strongly imprinted by the efforts of bureaucrats to manage and contain 'pernicious associations' with the Indigenous population. Her chapter demonstrates the profound impact that Asian contact had on Aboriginal policy and the resistance offered by Coloured communities to the paternalistic grip of the Department of Native Affairs.

Despite the administrative and legislative obstructions put in place by colonial authorities, a blurring of cultural boundaries at the social level in Torres Strait becomes more evident through time.

> In the multi-racial society that existed on Thursday Island in the pre-World War I period, the various ethnic groups were faced with an interactional dilemma. On the one hand they were attempting to retain their own transplanted or indigenous cultures in a new environment, while at the same time trying to maintain or improve their status in the developing community. On the other hand, it was necessary to have a certain degree of ethnic group interrelationships in order to sustain the society as a working entity. Competition and exclusiveness amongst the different nationalities was therefore tempered by a forced interdependence.[16]

As more stories emerge about the ways in which Asian and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families subverted the intentions of racially based legislation and racist officials to navigate increasingly meaningless borders, we can trace their success in new hybrid cultural forms. Bhabha has stated that '[i]t

is at the level of the interstices that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated'.[17] Cultural exchange, which accompanied socio-cultural integration, has profoundly influenced the development of *ailan pasin* ('island custom'), a fusion of Indigenous, Pacific and Asian elements. Anna Shnukal's Chapter 10 adduces a range of Asian influences on Torres Strait contemporary cultural expression: in ethnic identity, cuisine, intoxicating substances, plants, gardening techniques, clothing, architecture, religion, funeral and burial practices, and reflected by vocabulary borrowed from Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia, Japanese and Chinese into Torres Strait languages.

The significant contribution made by immigrant Asian groups to the music and performance culture of Torres Strait is the subject of Karl Neuenfeldt's Chapter 11. Using excerpts from the *Torres Straits Pilot*, Neuenfeldt documents how, along with other cultural artefacts and practices, migrants from Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia brought their music and musicianship with them to the region. Neuenfeldt argues that the rich musical culture of Torres Strait Islanders today is the result of these diverse Asian musical influences combining with the equally diverse music of the Melanesian, Polynesian, Aboriginal and European peoples of Torres Strait. His chapter examines some of the musical traces of Asia found in particular songs of the Torres Strait repertoire, songs that are remembered and sung primarily by the older generation, who grew up in Torres Strait before World War II. Neuenfeldt also demonstrates how recent recordings are reintroducing the songs to Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait and those who have migrated to the Australian mainland.

The final chapter of the book provides a more personal insight into the Asian experience in Torres Strait. Proffering a multiplicity of viewpoints, local voices narrate individual stories of Torres Strait people of Asian ancestry. Their stories complement the academic insights of the preceding chapters, enabling this book to provide a unique, comprehensive interpretation of the cultural dynamics of this significant and enduring site of Asian engagement in Australian history and society.

Footnotes

1   Torres Strait Islanders, indeed, did not consider the colonially constructed geographical boundary particularly salient until the proposed border change with Papua New Guinea in the 1970s threatened their unity. This political minefield, with its profound implications for the division of a unified people, was settled by a treaty in 1978 and the establishment of a Protected Zone, which allowed continuity of traditional connections with friends and family.

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Thursday Island Harbour, 1900.
Courtesy of John Oxley Library, Brisbane (Item No. 14338).