“Border Barbarisms”, Albury 1902: Greeks and the Ambiguity of Whiteness

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Abstract

This article focuses on the surfacing of ambiguous racial attitudes towards Greeks during the immediate post-federation period. It investigates how Greeks were located within the contested politics of whiteness and argues that the ways that Greeks were racialised within the delamination of Australian racial imaginings was linked to broader British preoccupations with Greece and Greek people. Such preoccupations divergently racialised Greeks as either a virtuous Christian peoples with alluring civilisational qualities or a degenerate race. Through an examination of articulations raised in the press and federal parliament, the racial ambiguity levelled against Greek people will expose discursive intersections between whiteness, philhellenism, and migrancy. The article will then examine two border incidents that occurred in Albury during 1902. Each incident prevented newly arrived Greeks from crossing the colonial-cum-interstate border between Victoria and New South Wales and became heated flash points in the initial implementation of the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901). They expose an unexamined account of how Greek people were located within the hardening politics of immigration restriction, and provide us with a localised delineation of how whiteness was, in some ways, connected to a British fascination with Greece

On 9 May 1902, twenty-six Greeks were prevented from crossing the colonial-cum-interstate border at Albury, a border town which acted as a major transport link between Victoria and New South Wales.¹ The group had supposedly ‘left the classic land’, lived in Mexico for a few years, returned to Europe, and decided to leave for Australia.² They had purchased tickets bound for Sydney and intended to join Greek settlers who had established themselves in the New South Wales oyster industry.³ Some children in the group became ill during the long sea voyage, prompting the newcomers to disembark in Port Melbourne and complete the remainder of their journey overland by train.⁴ Unlike the substantial number of non-European peoples who were refused entry for failing the dictation test that year, their entry into Victoria was not prohibited nor questioned.⁵ However, upon arrival in Albury, where travellers were required to change trains, they were questioned by a New South Wales customs official. Believing that the newcomers were a group of undesirable vagrants, the customs officer judged them as ‘very dark and unable to speak English’ and did not allow them to cross the border into New South Wales.⁶ The incident was widely publicised. Newspapers across the country reported on the civilisational attributes, racial trajectory, and finical merit of the newcomers, while serious concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the newly legislated *Immigration Restriction Act*.⁷

¹ William Alan Bayley, *Border City: History of Albury, New South Wales*, (Albury, 1954).

² *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel*, 16 May 1902, 2. The author would like to acknowledge that historical newspapers have been accessed via Trove <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>.

³ On early Greek settlers and the oyster industry, see, Charles Price, *South Europeans in Australia*, (Melbourne, 1964), 167.

⁴ ‘Immigrants stopped at Albury’, *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 17 May 1902, 4.

⁵ Six hundred and eighteen people failed the test in 1902, see, Barry York, *Immigration Restriction, 1901 – 1957*, (Canberra, 1992), cited in, David Dutton, *One of Us?: A century of Australian Citizenship*, (Sydney, 2002), 36.

⁶ *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 17 May 1902, 4.

⁷ *Age*, 13 May 1902, 5; *Argus*, 13 May 1902, 6; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1902, 5; *Evening News*, 13 May 1902, 3; *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 17 May 1902, 4; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 13 May 1902, 2; *Telegraph*, 13 May 1902, 5.

The border incident at Albury provides us with an early example of how Greeks were ambiguously assessed within the racist and class based operations of immigration restriction during the immediate post-federation period. This was a period, as Jane Carey and Claire McLisky note, when assertions of whiteness became central to the processes of Australian nation-building.⁸ How Greeks in Australia were assessed within the discursive and legislative operations of whiteness, however, has been left largely unexplained in Australian histories of migration and race-making. In Greek-Australian history, for example, an emphasis on assimilation has frequently led to an uncritical analysis of race, and an absent analysis of whiteness.⁹ To be sure, some investigations have discussed moments of anti-Greek sentiment but on the whole racialised moments of hostility and xenophobia have predominantly been presented as unfortunate chapters in the otherwise successful story of first-wave Greek migrants' ability to assimilate into the Australian mainstream.¹⁰ The successes of early Greek food proprietary and restaurant ownership, for example, have become prevalent sub-plots in the broader narrative of migrant contribution in Australian society.¹¹ While such evaluations have importantly contributed to our understanding of the early Greek-Australian experience, the predominant emphasis on assimilation in Greek-Australian history has avoided discussing

⁸ Jane Carey and Claire McLisky, *Creating White Australia*, (Sydney, 2009), xvi

⁹ The following works, for example, do not critically engage with race or whiteness in their respective analysis', Charles Archibald Price, *Greeks in Australia*, (Canberra, 1975); and Anastasios Tamis, *The Greeks in Australia*, (Melbourne, 2005).

¹⁰ Exceptions to this trend include, John Yiannakis, "Kalgoorlie alchemy: Xenophobia, patriotism and the 1916 anti-Greek riots", *Early Days: Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 11, 2, (1996), 199-211, and Andonis Piperoglou, "Greeks or Turks, "White" or "Asiatic": Historicising Castellorizian Racial-Consciousness, 1916–1920", *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 40, 4, (2016), 387-402.

¹¹ See, Brian Murphy, *The Other Australia: Experiences of Migration*, (Melbourne, 1993), 50, and Geoffrey Blainey, *Black Kettle and Full Moon: Daily life in a Vanished Australia*, (Melbourne, 2004), 308 and 404-405.

the specificities, implications and interrelationship that notions of Greekness had with the contested politics of race.

In an effort to remedy this silence within the historiography, this article hopes to recast early Greek-Australian history as part of the history of Australian race-making. It seeks to elucidate how racialised ideas about Greece, and Greek people, featured in the delimitation of Australian racial boundaries. When it came to deciphering what types of peoples were to be included in the new nation, as the Albury border incident reveals, the status of Greek migrants was far from stable or permanent. On one level, their dark appearance, apparent destitution, and inability to speak English posed an anomaly to racialised politics of immigration in the newly federated nation. On another level, because they had originated from ‘the classic land’, as a correspondent from the *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* noted, the newcomers were ancestrally tied to the romantic allure of Hellenic antiquity – a powerful allure, which along with Greek Orthodox identifications, set a small but visible populace of early Greek settlers apart in the delimitation of Australian racial thought.¹² The emergence and operations of this racial ambiguity is at the heart of this article. Drawing off a well-established scholarship which delves into the divergent racialisation of Greece, and Greek people, I intend to historically contextualise how early Greek settlers were relegated to a “white-non-white” or “white but not white enough” racial status in Australia.¹³ First, I will suggest that the ambiguous racialisation of Greek people within Australian racial imaginings can be located within a broader history of

¹² *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel*, 16 May 1902, 2; 878 people were recorded to have been born in Greece in 1901 Census, the vast majority were male and lived in Victoria and New South Wales. See, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2014, “Table 8.7 Population, Sex, and Country of Birth, states and territories, 1901 Census”, data cube: Excel Spreadsheet, cat. no. 3105.0.65.001, accessed 6 October 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012014?OpenDocument>

¹³ Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, *Indigenous sovereignty and the being of the occupier: manifesto for a white Australian philosophy of origins*, (Melbourne, 2004), 91-94.

British philhellenist and colonialist preoccupations with Greece. Second, I will explore how these preoccupations subtly influenced the minds of some federal parliamentarians who argued for the legislative creation of a racially homogenous white-nation. Finally, I will return to the border incident at Albury in an effort to uncover the ramifications of the racial ambiguity. Here we will see that despite ambiguities over the acceptability of Greek people, the Greek newcomers – who identified as Christian and arrived with economic capital and aspirational intentions to permanently settle – were sympathetically viewed within the exclusionist operations of Australian immigration restriction.

Over the past few decades, a burgeoning historical scholarship on whiteness has explored the pervasive reach of race in colonial encounters and indigenous dispossession, and made important interventions into transnational history. It has exposed the invented nature of cross-border solidarities with whiteness by examining how settler-colonial societies claimed, appropriated, and ultimately defended the superior status of the white race across the globe.¹⁴ A central goal of this literature has been to render whiteness visible, to recognise it as a racial construct and to have it located both within and outside the processes of nation-building. Moreover, an extensive body of scholarship has investigated the indefiniteness of whiteness and its impact on the ability of various migrant groups to partake in the exclusionist politics of labour.¹⁵ This article keeps in mind the violent, exclusionary, and often colour-based racism of Indigenous dispossession, South Pacific Islander removal, and Asian exclusion as it teases out

¹⁴ Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, Katherine Ellinghaus (eds.), *Re-orienting whiteness transnational perspectives on the history of an identity*, (New York: 2009), 149-164.

¹⁵ Among the works I have found most useful are, Yiorgos Anagnostou, *Contours of white ethnicity: Popular ethnography and the making of usable pasts in Greek America*, (Athens OH, 2009), Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America*, (Chicago, 2004), Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color*, (Cambridge, MA, 1999); David Roediger, *Working toward whiteness: How America's immigrants became white: The strange journey from Ellis Island to the suburbs*, (Cambridge, MA, 2006); and Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and ethnicity in the early Syrian American diaspora*, (Berkeley, 2009).

how ideas about Greece, and Greek people themselves, negotiated a racial system through which the idea of a “white man’s country” was enforced. It seeks to explore how philhellenism, whiteness, and migrancy interacted in Australian racial imaginings. In doing so, I hope to destabilise the uniformity of Greek-Australian migration history and introduce a nuanced interpretation to the whitening process of non-Anglo European settlement. Such convalescing, will allow us to historically conceptualise how ideas about Greece, and Greek people, co-contributed to specifically Australian assertions of whiteness.

Before I begin to re-historicise early Greek settlement through the lens of whiteness, it is important to note the particularity that Greece holds in western, and by settler-colonial extension, Australian thought. As Maria Koundoura argues, an idea of Greece has functioned as the ‘axial’ point around which binary distinctions central to occidental fantasies of superiority have been staged. The foundational contribution that hellenism held in the western imagination, Koundoura asserts, often played a key role in the construction of colonialist distinctions like ‘Oriental/European, ancient/modern, [and] civilized/barbaric’.¹⁶ These binary distinctions, I claim here, are firmly tied to Australian assertions of whiteness, in which authoritative articulations of Europeanness, modernity, and civility were made. In acknowledging the generative role of hellenism in colonialist thought, we can begin to grasp at how contrasting and overlapping identifications like white, Greek, European, and Australian intersected. In this sense we can reconsider how whiteness in Australia, was in some ways, understood in relation to the cultural and intellectual legacy of ancient Greece. Conceiving whiteness under this light allows us to better historicise the uneven and contested nature of its operations, while uncovering the emergence of a particularly Australian form of hellenism.

¹⁶ Maria Koundoura, *The Greek Idea: the formation of national and transnational identities*, (New York, 2007). 7. For a discussion of these binary distinctions within a contemporary context see, Anna Carastathis, “Is Hellenism an Orientalism? Reflections on the boundaries of ‘Europe’ in an age of austerity”, *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, 10/1, (2014), 1-7.

Greekness at Federation

Greekness played a foundational role in British settler-colonial identity. It is perhaps not surprising that one of the first ways Australian colonists generated an understanding of Greek racial classification came from the British philhellenic movement. As Thomas Gallant notes, the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) touched a chord with Western Europe and Northern America.¹⁷ Imbued with a feeling of Christian humanitarianism and a burgeoning sense of neoclassicism, men like romantic poet Lord Byron, a leading figure of the British philhellenic movement, found a noble cause in the Greek struggle against the Ottoman Empire. In 1826, after Byron's death, his views on Greece, and the Greek people, were printed in the Sydney-based newspaper the *Australian*. 'The cause of Greece', the article read,

naturally excites our sympathies ... from it we have derived our knowledge, and under the guiding hand of wisdom, did modern Europe make its first tottering and feeble steps towards civilisation ... her people are Christians contending against the Turks ... We must not forget, though we speak of Greece and the Greeks, that there is no distinct country and no distinct peoples ... there is the wiley money-making Greeks of the islands, the intriguing, debased, and corrupt Greek on the towns of the continent, and there is the hardy Greek peasant, whose good qualities are the redeeming virtue of the whole population ... those who are now contending for freedom, are a mixed race of various tribes of men.¹⁸

Certainly, as Michael Herzfeld argues, modern Europe was understood in European intellectual circles as a civilisational derivative of ancient Greece. The supposed racial mixture of Greeks, however, reflected a set of contrasting assessments that the British held towards modern Greek

¹⁷ Thomas Gallant, *The Edinburgh history of the Greeks, 1768 to 1913: the long nineteenth century*, (Edinburgh, 2015), 89.

¹⁸ 'Lord Byron and Greece', *Australian*, 21 June 1826, 4.

people. As Gallant notes in his investigation on British colonial rule on the Ionian Islands, notions of Greek racial degeneration often preoccupied the minds of British colonialists.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that between 1890 and 1940, 42 per cent of Greeks in Australia had arrived from one of three islands – the Ionian Islands of Kythera and Ithaca, and the Dodecanese islands of Castellorizo.²⁰ Between 1815 and 1864, the Ionian Islands were part of the British colonial protectorate called the United States of the Ionian Islands. The Islands acted as a strategic location for the British in the Mediterranean, ensuring a safe passage to the ports of the Ottoman Empire, and onwards to the imperial centres of India, Ceylon, and the Australasian and Pacific colonies.²¹ From the moment of the Protectorate's inception, however, the British were confronted with how to rule over a "white, Christian, indigenous culture".²² In a similar vein to Byron's assessment, two contrasting views dominated the minds of British officials. On one hand, the islanders were linked to the reverence of hellenic antiquity, on whose lofty foundations modern Europe was supposedly built. Ionians were therefore categorised as respectable Europeans who possessed moral virtue and noble independence of mind.²³ On the other hand, their cultural distinctiveness was constructed as questionably European and racially degenerate. Their traditions and moral character traits prompted some Colonial Office appointees to label them as superstitious, dirty, violent, duplicitous, and immoral.²⁴ A correspondent from the *London Review*, whose article was republished in March 1864 in the *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, noted, for example,

¹⁹ Thomas, *Experiencing dominion: culture, identity and power in the British Mediterranean*, (Indiana, 2002), 15-55.

²⁰ Nicholas Doumanis, 'Greeks in Australia', in Richard Clogg, *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, (St Anthony's, 1999), 60.

²¹ On British colonial administrators on the Ionian Islands see, Maria Paschalidi, "Constructing Ionian identities: the Ionian Islands in British official discourses; 1815-1864", PhD thesis, (University College London, 2010).

²² Gallant, *Experiencing dominion*, xi.

²³ Maria Paschalidi, "Constructing Ionian identities", 38.

²⁴ Gallant, *Experiencing dominion*, 30-33.

that “as for the Ionians being descendants of the Greeks, they are no more so than we are the sons of ancient Britons.”²⁵ By federation, as Greeks grew into a visible concentration of non-Anglo settlers, such contrasting assessments would begin to emerge in specifically Australian operations of race.

Originally, the small populace of early Greek settlers in Sydney and Melbourne were primarily understood in religious terms. The vast majority belonged to the Orthodox Church – a form of Christianity that played a prominent role in European, Near Eastern, Slavic, and some African cultures.²⁶ On 23 January 1901, only twenty-two days after the six Australian self-governing British colonies federated, Queen Victoria died. Having reigned over the British Empire for more than sixty years, her passing was particularly felt in Australia where a period of national mourning ensued and numerous services were held in honour of her reign.²⁷ In Melbourne and Sydney, Greek Orthodox adherents attended memorial services devoted to her memory.²⁸ In Melbourne, the Greek Orthodox Church, *Evangelismos*, was still under construction and Rev. Athanasios Kantopoulos, conducted a service in a schoolroom of the Unitarian Church, in Eastern Hill.²⁹ In Sydney, Rev. Seraphim Phocas, led a service at *Ayia Trias* in Surry Hills.³⁰ Each religious leader swung a thurible of incense in front of a large portrait of the deceased monarch and a coffin was draped in black and adorned with symbols of immortality. In addition, each religious leader acknowledged the role Britain had played in the making of the modern Greek nation. In a culture that was heavily infused with a sense of Christian moral superiority, each service effectively linked Greek membership in the Christian

²⁵ *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 4 March 1864, 3.

²⁶ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An introduction to its history, doctrine, and spiritual culture*, (Oxford, 2010).

²⁷ Gavin Souter, *Lion & Kangaroo: the initiation of Australia*, (Sydney, 2012), 51-52.

²⁸ On the establishment of each Church, see, Nicholas Doumanis, ‘Greeks in Australia’, 61.

²⁹ *Age*, 4 February 1901, 5.

³⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1901, 8.

fold and British imperial domain to the loss that the new Commonwealth was experiencing. For the most part, in a country that identified as a populace of faithful displaced Britons, the Orthodox services appeared to be warmly received. The bulk of reports on each service, for example, appeared to endorse Greeks as respectable pro-British Christian settlers, exposing the compatibility, even confluence, of Greek Orthodoxy in the host nation.

The performative rituals of Greek Orthodoxy were, however, viewed through a somewhat ominous lens by some members of Melburnian society. Only a few days after the mournful service in Melbourne, the illustrated magazine *Punch* noted that the Greek Orthodox tradition of clerical backing responses and chants had “a marked resemblance” to the chanting of “Australian blacks at corroborees”.³¹ An observation that was supposedly “frequently noticed”.³² Such a comparison implied the arrival of a critical, and racially inflected, understanding of Greekness. Indeed, the positioning of Greek Orthodoxy as culturally akin to the ceremonial practices of “Australian blacks” indicated that Greeks, perhaps for the first time in the youthful nation’s history, were starting to be evaluated within the exclusionary operations of Australian racial hierarchies.

From the moment of colonial intrusion, as Tracey Banivanua Mar argues, British law, writings and social practice extended the term ‘black race’ to include indigenous peoples. This practice masked the diversity of their pre-existing identities in favour of a homogenising category that served the political and economic demands of settler-colonialism. Indigenous

³¹ *Punch*, 7 February 1901, 9; Clerical backing response and chants concerns the monophonic liturgical music of the Orthodox Ecclesiastical tradition. See, Diane Touliatos-Miles, “The status of Byzantine Music through the twenty-first century”, in Karsten Fledelius (ed.), *Byzantium: Identity, Image, Influence*, (Copenhagen: The University of Copenhagen, 1996), 449-63; ‘Corroboree’ has passed into English as a word for indigenous ceremonies and entertainments involving singing, dancing, and social effervescence more generally. It is regarded as a vague term that lumps together scared and non-scared in an undifferentiated way. See, Michael Parsons, “The tourist corroboree in South Australia to 1911”, *Aboriginal History*, 21, (1997), 46-69.

³² *Punch*, 7 February 1901, 9.

peoples were thus made into a regressive ‘black race’. More specifically, the construction of colonial ideas about the ‘black race’ was linked to oppositional and defensive notions of whiteness. Being white, Banivanua Mar asserts, was deployed in relation to what it was not, more often than in relation to what it was.³³ As such, the supposed similarity shared between Greek settlers and Australian blacks marked an important step in the racialisation of Greeks. To compare Greek religious customs, in the form of liturgical chanting, to the traditional practices of indigenous peoples was to distance Greek settlers from a respectable Christian status and abstrusely insinuate that Greeks were a people who held traditions that were backward. Although rather rudimentary, the complexity of this racial ambiguity become increasingly perceptible, especially as the country sought to define the criteria of national inclusion and exclusion across the legislative and administrative fiats of government.

The Fear of Racial Degeneration

During the first parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia two legislative enactments were passed in response to fears of racial degeneration. The first was the *Pacific Island Labourers’ Act* (1901), which was designed to expel South Pacific Islanders who had been brought to labour in the sugar cane fields of north Queensland.³⁴ The second was the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901), which was a keystone of the Commonwealth’s administrative apparatus for controlling the entry of people and focused on barring non-whites from settling. The method thought to best achieve the goal was the “literacy test”. The test

³³ Tracey Banivanua-Mar, “Reading the Shadows of Whiteness: A Case of Racial Clarity on Queensland’s Colonial Borderlands, 1880–1900”, in Leigh Boucher et al (eds.), *Re-orienting whiteness transnational perspectives on the history of an identity*, (New York, 2009), 149–164.

³⁴ On South Sea Islander labour in Queensland, see Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Violence and colonial dialogue: the Australian-Pacific indentured labor trade*, (Honolulu, 2007).

required applicants to write out, at dictation, a prescribed passage of fifty words in “any European language”. Misleadingly constructed as a “dictation test”, it was framed to give the Commonwealth maximum flexibility in ensuring non-Europeans would fail.³⁵ “The two things go hand in hand”, advised the Liberal Attorney General, Alfred Deakin. They were “the necessary complement of a single policy – the policy of securing a “White Australia”.”³⁶ Dressed in a series of deleterious arguments, legislators, like Deakin, positioned non-Europeans as dangerously inferior and incompatible with the characteristics of white men. Indeed, racial unity was perceived as a necessary condition for the successful foundation of the new nation and, for some parliamentarians, the supposed racial degeneration that had been experienced in Greece provided an apt example of why racial intermixing should be avoided.

During a second reading of the Immigration Restriction Bill, Prime Minister Edmond Barton quoted a passage from *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, by Professor Charles Pearson. If Australia wanted to “belong to the Aryan races and the Christian faith; to the letters and arts ... inherited from the best times of the past” before it was “elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside” by the “black and yellow races” then exclusion of non-whites was necessary.³⁷ As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have argued, Pearson’s prediction became famous around the world for its “novel” yet “disturbing” thesis.³⁸ It challenged Anglo-Saxon triumphalism and predicted a future in which supposedly inferior races would overtake the

³⁵ On the transnational evolution of the dictation test, see, Marilyn Lake, ‘White Man’s Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 34/122, (2003), 346-363, and Marilyn Lake, ‘From Mississippi to Melbourne via Natal: the invention of the literacy test as a technology of racial exclusion’, in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, (Canberra, 2005), 217.

³⁶ Commonwealth, Parliamentary Debates (CPD), House, 12 September 1901, 4806.

³⁷ CPD, House, 7 August 1901, 3503.

³⁸ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*, (Cambridge, 2008), 87.

supposed racial unity of “white men’s countries” around the globe.³⁹ The fear of racial degeneration through interaction with supposedly subordinate non-European peoples was a matter to be taken seriously.

Only ten pages before the quotation that Prime Minister Barton read to his parliamentary peers, Pearson contextualised the seriousness of his prediction by providing a historical example that was relevant to contemporary debates about the racial character of modern Greeks. “There is no perceptible trace”, Pearson wrote, “of ancient Greek or Roman blood in Asia Minor or in Turkey in Europe. The Turk – himself a barbarian – has destroyed or driven out or dressed all higher races he came across”.⁴⁰ What then followed was a direct comment on the racial character of Greeks. “The Greece that has been restored”, he wrote, “represents a very small portion of the country in which Greeks were superior by numbers, or by social influence and commercial activity”.⁴¹ Pearson’s historical understanding of modern Greece was in keeping with the romantic language of the British philhellenic movement, which assumed that the institution of the modern Greek nation was a glorious restoration of ancient Greece. His claim, however, that modern Greeks only represented a diluted portion of ancient Greeks hinted at the ambiguous way Greek people had been racialised by European intellectual circles. Indeed, from the Enlightenment onwards, an expansive body of work grew across Europe in a tireless attempt to understand the racial trajectory of Greeks.⁴² Today scholars are generally in consensus that two differing racial theories emerged.⁴³

³⁹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 89.

⁴⁰ Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, (London, 1913), 73.

⁴¹ Pearson, *National Life and Character*, 73.

⁴² See, Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, ideology, and the making of modern Greece*, (New York, 1986), 77.

⁴³ Margaret Alexiou, “Modern Greek Studies in the West: Between the Classics and the Orient”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 4, 1, (1986), 3-15.

The first is linked to Pearson's claim that modern Greeks held a "portion", albeit a small one, of biological lineage with their ancient forbears. Such a view was linked to a popular intellectual endeavour which attempted to prove that modern Greeks held an uninterrupted stream of racial and cultural continuity from the ancient era to the present day. Powerfully propagated by philhellenists and Greek nationalist thinkers, this racial assessment romantically regarded the making of the institution of modern Greece as an attempt to locate and restore the moral, intellectual and political heritage of not only ancient Greece but Europe itself. As Herzfeld notes, this assessment accorded Greece an unmatched 'generative' role in relation to the rest of Europe.⁴⁴ In other words, the idea of Greece was understood across intellectual circles as the cultural exemplar of Europe. As Pearson's words suggest, the range of this intellectual endeavour, which equated the legacy of Hellenic antiquity with high cultural achievement and distinction, had far-reaching implications.

The second racial trajectory that was given significant intellectual attention was linked to Pearson's assertion of Greek racial depletion. This assessment positioned modern Greeks as racial degenerates, having little, if any, resemblance to the people who lived during the ancient Greek era. This racial theory located Greece outside, or on the outer periphery, of Europe. Racial lineage with Hellenic antiquity, it was claimed, could not have possibly survived successive cultural interactions during the Byzantine era and the country's populations were entirely non-Greek in racial origin.⁴⁵ As Pearson declared, the "higher" racial purity of Greeks had been almost entirely "destroyed or driven out" by barbarous Turks. Essentially, due to centuries of Ottoman rule, the racial characteristics of a people who were supposedly numerically, socially and economically "superior" in the ancient era, had slipped away due to

⁴⁴ Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, 11.

⁴⁵ Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, 77.

unrestrained interaction with supposedly barbaric peoples.⁴⁶ Exactly what impact this historical example had on Prime Minister Barton and his views on the *Immigration Restriction Bill* is difficult to locate with absolute precision. It would be reasonable to deduce that the Prime Minister, who is recorded to have had a lasting love of the classics and was well versed in Pearson's racial prediction, would have wanted to make sure that Australia did not emulate the supposed racial decline that had been experienced by the Greeks of old.⁴⁷

As a form of intellectual reasoning, legislators in support of the deportation of South Sea Islanders from Queensland also used the notion of Greek civilisational decline when debating the particulars of *Pacific Islanders Labourers' Bill*. "If you bring the white man into contact with the black", declared the protectionist and Liberal Member of Melbourne Ports, Samuel Mauger, "you get superior and inferior races living on the same soil and that co-existence is demoralising to both". "The civilisation of the white man", he added, "is a civilisation dependent upon free white labour, and when that element of stability is removed it will collapse like those of Greece and Rome".⁴⁸ Mauger was quoting from *National life from the Standpoint of Science* a book written by an English racial theorist and eugenicist, Karl Pearson. His argument accorded with a series of claims which connected loss of wages, conditions of labour, and standard of living to the mixing of subordinate racial types with superior racial types. It was also in sync with another line of argument, which suggested that the preservation of civilisational development, in the form of economic, technological, social, political and moral progress, would be compromised if non-Europeans interacted with Europeans. Such thinking positioned the racial intermixing of Australian labour within an overarching historical framework of civilisational degeneration. In order to prevent

⁴⁶ Pearson, *National Life and Character*, 73.

⁴⁷ At the University of Sydney Barton learnt Greek and specialised in classical literature. See, Geoffrey Bolton, *Edmund Barton*, (Sydney, 2000), 9 and 27.

⁴⁸ CPD, Senate, 5 November 1901, 8307.

civilisational decline, like that which had been experienced in Greece, non-Europeans, like South Sea Islander labourers, had to be excluded.

However, as the concluding debates of the *Immigration Restriction Bill* suggest, exactly how Greeks were included within this racial discourse was contentious. If we examine the particulars for administering the dictation test, for example, the virtuous European character of Greeks can be located. The Hellenic languages of “GreacoTurkish, Greek Ancient and Greek Modern”, for instance, were listed as appropriate languages in which to administer the test.⁴⁹ The designation of these languages as European languages suggests legislators were willing to assert a positive valuation towards the linguistic eminence of Greek. Such an affirmative stance towards Greek languages also hinted, at least through linguistic distinction, that Greeks, as Europeans, were to be accepted.

Initially, however, Barton wished for the test to be administered solely in English. Many fellow legislators voiced concern that it would act as a deterrent to non-English speaking immigration from Europe, illiterate British migrants, non-European subjects of the empire and also potentially damage British relations with countries like Japan. Dugald Thomson, the member for North Sydney, for example, asked if Barton meant to “exclude Scandinavians, Germans and French”, while William McMillan, acting leader of the Free Trade opposition, advocated for the administration of the test in any European language. He argued it was against the nation’s interests to put it “in opposition to all those elements of European greatness and European virility”.⁵⁰ With further emphasis, he added, the idea that “every German, Frenchman, or other person of a civilised country” would be debarred unless they spoke the English language “like asking a man to swim before he gets into the water”.⁵¹ Barton’s response

⁴⁹ CPD, Senate, 5 December 1901, 8307.

⁵⁰ CPD, House, 6 September 1901, 4629.

⁵¹ CPD, House, 6 September 1901, 4629.

was cautious. He stated the government would “discriminate” between “desirable civilised immigrants” and immigrants whose presence was “baneful ... in the present, and may be much more so in the future”.⁵² His statement was reassuring, as it dispelled any fears that Europeans, like Greeks, might be excluded while it also satisfied fears that equality between white men would not be jeopardized.

In December 1901, the final particulars of the *Immigration Restriction Bill* were discussed. Once it was understood that no genuine English literacy test was being proposed, the Labour Party and some free-traders condemned it as hypocritical. The South Australian member and leader of the opposition in the Senate Josiah Symon, for example, urged direct exclusion. He believed that it was proper, from an international standpoint, to explicitly state the racial intentions of the exclusionary legislation. He questioned why Australia “must put one thing on the statute-book, and do another thing by ... administration”. If “we really mean absolutely to keep out Asiatics”, he claimed, “we should declare that plainly on the face of our statute”.⁵³ Symon was referring to the fact that the dictation test, which stipulated the use of any European language, including, as we have seen, the use of three Greek languages, was not explicit enough in its intentions to bar non-European immigration. Symon congratulated the Government on “their frankness” that the Bill “intended to impose prohibition by reason of race and colour”, but he could not understand why the racial intentions of the policy were “dissimulated” when Asian powers like the “Japanese Government were perfectly alive” to the intention of the Commonwealth.⁵⁴ As David Dutton notes, some parliamentarians had much admiration for the “marvellous and magnificent strides” Japan had made by the turn of the century in the path of western civilisational progress.⁵⁵

⁵² CPD, House, 7 August 1901, 3504-3505.

⁵³ CPD, Senate, 5 December 1901, 8317.

⁵⁴ CPD, Senate, 5 December 1901, 8317.

⁵⁵ Dutton, *One of Us?*, 26.

In a bold statement, Senator Symon informed his fellow Senators that the inclusion of certain nationalities, like Greeks, was a flaw in the policy. His statement indicated that the particular inclusion of Greeks, as Europeans, should be questioned. He proclaimed:

[We] pride ourselves upon the fact that the English are a superior race. The Japanese say “Very well then, let your test be in the English language.” But they complain that they are placed on an inferior platform to the lower European races. They are placed below the Turks and below the Greeks. Greek gipsies may be favoured with admission into Australia whilst Japanese are excluded.⁵⁶

Clearly, Symon did not regard all European nationalities as desirable or equal. Particularly perplexed that “Greek gipsies” had been permitted entrance, his argument suggested that Japanese people were racially superior when compared to people from countries that sat on the continental border between Europe and Asia. In demarcating a racial space for Greeks that was lower than that of Japanese people, Senator Symons insinuated that the entrance of Greeks should be prohibited. Although his statement was not explicitly set within the broader theorisation of Greek racial discontinuity, his words fractured the characterisation of European nationalities into a canonised hierarchy of races and opened up the question of whether Greeks had the capacity to participate in the polity.

While some legislators, like William McMillan, considered “every German, Frenchman, or other person of a civilised country” as desirable, exactly which “other” peoples were acceptable in the ever increasing number of nations that made up modern Europe was contestable. Although the early legislative debates on racial exclusion only fleetingly referred to Greece, or Greek people, it is clear that historical understandings of Greek racial degeneration had subtly influenced the minds of some parliamentarians. In arguing their case for upholding Australia as a racially unified white man’s country, Prime Minister Barton and Samuel Mauger, for example, were keen to make sure that the racial intermixing and decline

⁵⁶ Dutton, *One of Us?*, 28.

that had supposedly degenerated the ancient Greek world would not be repeated in Australia. Despite these fleeting associations with Greek racial degeneration, Greek languages were satisfactorily included in the list of European languages which could be used to apply the dictation test, while Greek people, as European nationals, were to be permitted entrance. Yet, as Senator Symons specified, although the category of European included Greeks they were not necessarily desirable. As the incident at the Albury border crossing reveals, it did not take long for Greeks to be questioned within the administrative upholding of the *Immigration Restriction Act*. The premise of Greek racial continuity with the ancient era would play an important role in how these newcomers were perceived.

The Premise of Racial Continuity

When the Greek contingent were prevented from crossing the colonial-cum-interstate border crossing at Albury, a succession of sympathetic reports hinted at the premise of Greek racial continuity with the classical era. The *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel*, for example, evaluated the incident in a sorrowful tone. In an article titled “Border Barbarisms” the treatment of the newcomers was discussed within the historical framework of Hellenic antiquity. A “student of history would smile, or maybe weep”, the newspaper informed its readers,

at the irony of the situation. Here were the descendants of a race whose civilisation goes back for thousands of years – natives of a country once the intellectual centre of the world, which had produced Plato and Aristotle over twenty centuries before Australia was discovered – denied admission to a State scarcely yet out of its cradle.⁵⁷

As the passage revealed, the Greek arrivals were racially connected to the romanticised intellectual splendours of ancient Greece. By identifying the newcomers as a distinct race and

⁵⁷ *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel*, 16 May 1902, 2.

subsequently linking their experience at the border within a broad trans-historical understanding of exemplary civilisational lineage, it appeared a degree of gratitude and debt was owed to them. In its succinctness, the language used by the local correspondent insinuated that the newcomers had access to the intellectual legacy of ancient Greece. As the incredulous irony of tone further implied, their denied admission was historically unjust as their civilisational lineage was one that greatly surpassed the youthfulness of the Australian nation.

Such racial reasoning was not limited to the border controversy but part of a much broader pattern of racial thinking which categorised Greeks as a peoples who had experienced a seamless biological continuity from antiquity to the present. As the article in the *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* indicates, the sweeping historical premise of seamless racial continuity appeared to be entrenched in some Australian journalistic circles. The cultural primacy bestowed to Hellenic antiquity meant that Greeks, as a people belonging to a supposedly distinct race originating from the triumphs of classicism, represented an absolute moral position within the making of racial categories in Australia. Protected under this racialised perception, the Greek newcomers were therefore singled out as desirable racial inclusions.

Despite such a positive assertion made on behalf of newcomers, an already established Greek settler from Albury, Mr. Sarrof, thought it necessary to voice his concerns. When interviewed by a correspondent from *Evening News*, Sarrof declared that he was perplexed that his kinsfolk had been

treated like barbarians – like savages, or gipsy vagabonds, despite the fact that they were in reality Christians arriving in a Christian country – which seems to have forgotten what the Greeks did for England and the civilisation of the Anglo-Saxon when Greece was a mighty Empire.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Evening News*, 13 May 1902, 3.

He noted that the newcomers were in possession of Greek passports and anticipated that if they were not allowed to proceed onwards towards Sydney then a “big row” might ensue.⁵⁹ In representing his kinsfolk, Sarrof, like the correspondent from Wodonga, made use of the powerful foundational identity narrative of Greek racial continuity. He positioned the newcomers not just as respectable Christians and the racial inheritors of Hellenic antiquity but also simultaneously positioned ancient Greece as a cultural and political archetype of Anglo-Saxon civilisation. In doing so, he presented Greeks as active participants in the making of Australian political and cultural life. Such a discourse of Anglo-Saxon civilisational beginnings attempted to reverse the New South Wales Customs Officials’ restrictive decision and sought to subvert the devaluation of the Greeks as vagrants, as a people who were rendered unworthy and incapable of participation in the new nation.

The *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, a newspaper from a northern rivers region in New South Wales, an area where Greeks were settling in increasing numbers, also commented on the controversy. “Great indignation”, the author informed the newspapers readers, was expressed by the “Albury members of the Greek Church”. Although the party was willing to pay £5 a night for accommodation, it was noted, “no one would receive them, and they were forced to spend a bitterly cold night under the bridge at Wodonga”.⁶⁰ The premise of racial continuity was then adopted in another article. Writing about the incident through the gaze of an ancient Greek analogy it was noted that:

it took three hundred Spartans to hold the famous Pass against the Persians, but one Customs House officer held the pass at Albury... And the Greeks had to sleep under a bridge, just as Xerxes sailors did at the Hellespont though a few fathoms under the surface and not even their wrath could keep them warm as they reflected with indignity... For the immigrants who will probably embark on the oyster business, had already £2000 on to Sydney and if this isn’t a sign of respectability ‘ask a policeman’ and you will get an answer to suit the occasion...Greek

⁵⁹ *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 17 May 1902, 4.

⁶⁰ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 17 May 1902, 5.

has doubtless met Greek and together they have cursed the country that would so dishonour the strain that was led by Alexander.⁶¹

Clearly the use of classical analogies revealed a degree of creative licence had been employed by the correspondent. Nonetheless, the central implication of the article was clear. The newcomers were respectable and the high eminence of their racial “strain” should have meant that their movement would not be restricted.⁶²

However, if their revered racial lineage did not provide substantial evidence of their distinction as worthy settlers then their possession of funds, and desire to partake in the New South Wales oyster industry, did. The mentioning of the oyster industry was particularly telling as it implied that the newcomers were connected with already established Greek settlers. As Charles Price’s investigations illuminates, Kytheran Ionian settlers during this period had prospered from the cultivation of oysters in New South Wales. This aquaculture business endeavour was lucrative and contributed to the chain-migration patterns of Kytherans across that state and southern Queensland.⁶³

When the honorary Greek Consul in Sydney, Markos Maniakis, received news of the border incident, he instantly complained to the New South Wales Customs authorities.⁶⁴ When the Chief Collector of Customs in Sydney, Nicholas Lockyer, received Maniakis’ complaint, he advised his junior custom officer to allow them to enter New South Wales. On 13 May the controversy was resolved. The newcomers were allowed to board an express train bound for Sydney. A few weeks after their departure, however, another group of Greek arrivals were prevented from crossing the colonial-cum-interstate border. The *Argus* covered the incident

⁶¹ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 17 May 1902, 4.

⁶² *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 17 May 1902, 4.

⁶³ Charles Price, *South Europeans in Australia*, 167.

⁶⁴ *The Brisbane Courier*, 13 May 1902, 5. Markos Maniakis was born on Zakynthos, an Ionian Island, and arrived in New South Wales in 1885. See, Hugh Gilchrist, ‘The Greek Connection in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Afstraliotes Hellenes. Greeks in Australia*, A Kapardis and A Tamis, (eds.), (Melbourne, 1988), 1-11.

sympathetically. In an article titled, “Official Inhumanity”, it was reported that thirty-eight newcomers had arrived.⁶⁵ Although they were unable to speak English their respectability was noted in economic terms. They possessed a bank draft of £43000, £700 in gold, and owned a truck full of clothing and other goods. They decided to contact Markos Maniakis but they did not receive a reply. There is no record in the press of the second border controversy being situated within the discursive premise of Greek racial continuity. Perhaps such a racial assertion was already apparent.

What was recorded, however, was the insinuation by Commonwealth legislators that the implementation of the *Immigration Restriction Act* was failing in its design. The Labour member for Barrier, Josiah Thomas, read the article from the *Argus* out to his parliamentary colleagues. Curious as to “why these people were allowed to land in Melbourne”, he questioned Alfred Deakin on the implementation of the Act.⁶⁶ He wanted to know if federal customs officials in Melbourne were correct in permitting the newcomers entry and requested that Deakin “do all in his power to prevent a repetition of [such] barbarity”.⁶⁷ Deakin replied that the Commonwealth had subjected the newcomers to “a very severe test”. Deakin had in fact double-checked the character of the new arrivals. He sent “a second special officer” from the department of External Affairs to examine them. “This gentleman”, he asserted, “was satisfied that they were what they reported to be; hard-working agriculturalists”. Thomas then asked under whose jurisdiction the Customs Official was acting under. Deakin replied he was a Commonwealth officer but in this particular case the officer was acting for the New South Wales government. Thomas replied that the “working of the Immigration Restriction Act” and the “education test applied under it” were “unsatisfactory”. He believed “it would have been

⁶⁵ *Argus*, 4 June 1902, 6.

⁶⁶ CPD, House, 5 June 1902, 13352.

⁶⁷ CPD, House, 5 June 1902, 13352.

better for the government to have adopted a colour test”, as was proposed by Labour members when the particulars of the legislation were debated.⁶⁸ Deakin denied “the Act was failing in its purpose” and directed “the member’s attention to the fact that not a single coloured alien” had entered the Commonwealth.⁶⁹

In order to resolve the border controversy Deakin wrote to the New South Wales Premier John See and informed him that he thought the situation was “pitiable”. How could such a situation have evolved, he asked, when the Greek arrivals possessed “plenty of money” and were willing to contribute to the nation’s agricultural production?⁷⁰ Deakin instructed the External Affairs Secretary Atlee Hunt, to write to the New South Wales Customs Official in Albury to ascertain exactly how much money they had in their possession.⁷¹ It was noted that they had “four hundred and seventy pounds” in their possession.⁷² Despite the pressure from the Commonwealth authorities, however, the New South Wales Customs Official did not allow the newcomers to cross the state border.⁷³

The quarrel between the State government and Federal government was summarised by the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*. The provisions of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, it was reported, had been adhered to. The newcomers had come “properly accredited and with sufficient capital to ensure” they could engage in “agricultural pursuits” and not be “treated as the nomadic paupers”. “It is the curious effect of Federation”, the newspaper concluded, that

⁶⁸ CPD, House, 5 June 1902, 13516.

⁶⁹ CPD, House, 5 June 1902, 13516.

⁷⁰ Telegram from Acting Prime Minister to New South Wales Premier, 9 June 1902, Greeks at Wodonga, NAA, A9/A1902/9/1.

⁷¹ Telegram from Atlee Hunt to M. J. D’Arcy, Greeks at Wodonga, 10 June 1902, National Archives of Australia (NAA), A9/A1902/9/1.

⁷² Telegram from M. J. D’Arcy to Atlee Hunt, Greeks at Wodonga, 10 June 1902, NAA, A9/A1902/9/1.

⁷³ Telegram from Acting Prime Minister to New South Wales Premier, 12 June 1902 and Telegram from Acting Premier to Acting Prime Minister, 20 June 1902, Greeks at Wodonga, NAA, A9/A1902/9/1,

the newcomers “should have to satisfy each State as they reach it and this does not savour much of a union”.⁷⁴ It appeared the border controversy revealed the ineffectiveness of Commonwealth immigration law. Two of the Greek newcomers travelled back to Melbourne in an effort to resolve the matter. Accompanied by the honorary Greek Consul in Melbourne, Robert Curtain, they had an interview with Deakin. The meeting resulted in Deakin officially directing customs officials at Albury not to interfere with the Greeks’ intentions. A week later they proceeded on to Sydney.

The acceptability of Greeks was thus confirmed. When Deakin, for example, noted that “not a single coloured alien” had entered the Commonwealth since the implementation of the *Immigration Restriction Act* he revealed that the Greek newcomers were desirable on the basis of race. As each border incident indicated, however, the acceptability of Greeks was questioned. In holding significant discretion in the administration of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, the New South Wales customs official restricted the mobility of Greek arrivals based on their inability to speak English and dark appearance. Although his discretion as a federal customs official was circumscribed by increasingly explicit instructions issued by External Affairs, his restrictive decision spurred newspaper correspondents to publish racial claims in support of the newcomers’ plight. An empowering racial perception had thus emerged. By way of trans-imperial philhellenic rhetoric, this perception was based on assertive preoccupations that Britain colonists had with the civilisational attributes of ancient Greece. Greeks, like those who were stopped at the interstate border, could be positioned as the racial inheritors of Hellenic antiquity, while ancient Greece could be discursively located as the cultural and political archetype of White Australia. Such racial positioning seemed to suggest

⁷⁴ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 14 July 1902, 2.

that potential Greek settlers were considered active participants in the making of Australian political and cultural life.

Nonetheless, the perception of Greek racial degeneration was a powerful one. The idea that Greeks did not represent the splendours of antiquity because of excessive interaction with racially inferior peoples, like Turks, and that this interaction gravely depleted the superiority of their racial status, appeared to subtly influence the intellectual and civilisational reasoning which argued for racial expulsion and exclusion in the new Commonwealth. How this perception of Greek racial denigration impacted on the inclusion of Greeks was, however, more blurred. The linguistic eminence of the Greek language and inclusion of the Greek nationals into the category of Europeans appeared to imply that Greeks were welcome inclusions. As Deakin asserted, the Greek newcomers were “hard-working agriculturalists”.⁷⁵ According to his authoritative view, Greeks could be, and should be, accepted as potential contributors to the racialised economy of labour which sought to dispossess indigenous people, deport South Pacific Islanders, and bar Asian people. Over the ensuing years, however, the ambiguous relationship that Greeks had with the politics of whiteness would transform, particularly as people from the Mediterranean region were re-racialised within the global politics of whiteness. The question of whether Greeks could satisfactorily participate in Australian society became a topic of public debate within an Anglo-centric polity that was particularly obsessed with race and, in many ways, fascinated by Greece. Exactly how this debate manifested and impacted on the formation of Greek migrant subjectivities is however a question yet to be explored within historical investigations into Australian race-making.

⁷⁵ CPD, House, 5 June 1902, 13516.